Syncretism and Pluralism in the Configuration of Religious Diversity in Brazil

Paula Montero

Mecila:
Working
Paper
Series

Citation:

Montero, Paula (2018): "Syncretism and Pluralism in the Configuration of Religious Diversity in Brazil", *Mecila Working Paper Series*, No. 4, São Paulo: The Maria Sibylla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America.

Syncretism and Pluralism in the Configuration of Religious Diversity in Brazil

Paula Montero

Abstract

Using the Brazilian case as a reference we demonstrate that since the country's first republican constitution "religious diversity" was legally constructed as a form of allocating in the field of religion popular practices perceived as dangerous and or superstitious. My hypothesis is that this religious diversity does not at first signify pluralism, given that it was organized under the aegis of Catholicism, within the ideology of syncretism. Using the constitutional congress of 1988 as an important point of inflection in the form of treating differences, I argue that since this time, pluralism became instituted as the main legal and political organizer of differences and in particular of religious diversity. Associated to the decline of the hegemony of the Catholic Church, this principle, by defining religions as relative to each other, promotes competition among religious organizations for social influence and primacy in their relationship with the state. In this combative context, the "inter-religious dialogue" led by the Catholic Church was presented as a political strategy for the construction of civic unity; in the Pentecostal configuration this unity is pursued having in mind the establishment of a mass public culture, which is generically demarcated and recognized as evangelical, based on the proliferation of media technologies that produce large publics that guarantee occupation of territories of cities and administrative spaces of power.

About the Author

Paula Montero studied Social Sciences at the Université de Paris VIII, France. She is a full professor at the Department of Anthropology at the University of São Paulo Brazil, and held the position of President of the Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning (Cebrap) from 2008 to 2015. She was invited to Columbia University (1984) as Visiting Scholar of the Institute of Latin American Studies, and to the University of Chicago (1996) as a Tinker Visiting Professor. Her anthropological studies have focused on Afro-American traditions, stressing healing practices, witchcraft and possession. In recent years, she has focused on issues on intercultural relations and multiculturalism; she has published a book on Christian missions among the Amazonian Indians. At present she is studying new forms of religious organizations, and has published numerous articles on issues concerning their activities in the modern sphere.

Contents

1.   Introduction

The principle of *religious freedom* became naturalized in public discourse as a condition indispensable to peace. Its protection remains at the base of the concepts of emancipation, democracy and prosperity that guide contemporary liberal states. In Brazil, this principle was guaranteed in the first Republican Constitution of 1891 that established complete freedom of worship, particularly favoring Protestant organizations. Nearly one century later, the pluralist constitution of 1988 expanded this recognition to all religions. Even so, evangelical movements have protested legal controls over their cultural expressions – which appear in laws of silence and urban regulations, television broadcasting rules, etc. – and against privileges that they maintain that the state grants to the Catholic Church. Moreover, paradoxically, in name of this religious freedom, some Pentecostal evangelical movements began since then to impede, at times with violence, the religious expressions of Afro-Brazilian cults, and at the same time, in the name of freedom of worship, conduct religious acts in political spaces, in particular legislative chambers. In the past, the Catholic Church and republican powers criminalized "magic" "superstitions" and "shamanism", but did so in an ideological political situation in which the legal, cultural, academic and ecclesiastical elites did not recognize the particularly religious nature of these practices. The challenge appears to be to understand to what degree the right to religious freedom is still triggered by certain segments of the religious field to restrict the space of action of their competitors, in a historic-legal context of full legal recognition of autonomy for the creation and operation of any type of organization that considers itself religious, requiring only registration of the association in a public records office (Giumbelli 2017).

The defense of religious freedom when exercised under the aegis of pluralism, thus appears to have favored inter-religious disputes, above all those concerning sexual and racial minorities, transforming the particular format of state secularism. Evidently, it is important to recognize that the concept of religious freedom is historic. Thus, it is necessary to ask, as Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (2015) suggests; what exactly is being promoted in its name? In the Brazilian case, it appears to us that the diffuse understanding of that which can be conducted in the name of religious freedom depended directly on the various political and legal configurations of religious diversity based on the legal institution of the republican secular state. To understand the mutations that took place in these forms, we conduct a comparative analysis of two moments of legal inflection of Brazilian secularism – that of the legal separation between church and state with the declaration of the republic in 1889 and the pluralist version inaugurated in what is known as the "citizen" constitution enacted in 1988 after the dictatorship – by considering how each conceived, defined and organized religious differences.

In general, and Brazil is not an exception, legal protection for religious liberty has been accompanied in a particular and generally hierarchical manner of accommodating diversity. But the configurations of this hierarchy, its arrangements and even production of differences, vary historically. To understand the nature of these variations it is necessary to question, over the long term, the different mutations in the political and legal definition of that which "counts as religion" (Sullivan 2015: 7). Inspired by this perspective we begin with the hypothesis that the constitution of 1988 became a key temporal marker for a change of paradigm in the way that the Brazilian state and society came to deal with ethnic-religious differences.

As demonstrated in a previous study, Montero (2016), it can be affirmed that generally speaking, until the 1980s, the ruling paradigm for ordering religious differences was syncretism. The political ideology of syncretism produced and organized religious variety by including it hierarchically within the Catholic culture and Brazilian nationality. Since the constitution of 1988, which instituted the paradigm of pluralism, the idea of nation was less emphasized than that of citizenship, and in this configuration, religious differences – whose borders were increasingly clearly defined, becoming more orthodox – began to compete among each other for state resources and social influence.

I will present a comparative description between these two models of state secularism – the republican and the pluralist – to characterize in their broad lines how they define and organize differences, in particular religious differences. It is important to emphasize that in both cases this involves legal-political and social modes of allocation or nomination, which are simultaneously religious and secular, that is, modes of defining what "counts as religious" and what "counts as secular". The background of the debate is the very problem of secularism, or of modern secular governance, and how it contributes to strengthening religious identities and polarizing their frontiers. It is already well established in secularism studies that its conventional theses – the separation of church and state and the consequent state neutrality – are insufficient for explaining the changes in the reorganization of religious life in a given society. As Saba Mahmood (2016) observes, the secular political rationality is constituted by the paradox of simultaneously affirming the existence of state neutrality in relation to the religious and the need for the regulation of religion.

We thus see how, beginning with the first republican constitution that defined the separation between the state and church in Brazil, "religious diversity" was legally constructed as a form of allocation, in the field of religion, of popular practices then perceived to be dangerous and/or superstitious. My hypothesis is that this religious diversity did not signify, in a first moment, pluralism, given that it was organized under the aegis of Catholicism, within the ideology of syncretism.

2. The Republican Model of Religious Diversity

When considering the complexity of the *Padroado Real* system [Royal Patronage] which, on one hand, assured the authority of the Portuguese Crown over the Catholic Church in Portuguese territories, and on the other consented to the existence of countless Catholic philanthropic, cultural, and devotional associations under the relatively autonomous direction of laity, it can be affirmed that the republican declaration of legal separation of political and ecclesiastic powers, did not constitute the first seeds of a secular political culture in Brazilian society. In fact, in addition to anti-abolitionist and positivist movements, the involvement of priests and bishops in the administrative strategies of the crown, the guarantee conferred by the emperor of freedom of worship to Protestant immigrants, and the organization of the lay public in cultural and assistance activities without direct insertion in the state or ecclesiastic hierarchy, contributed to disseminating a model of state secularism *avant la lettre*, which preceded its legal institution by the republican constitution.

From a legal perspective, the imperial constitution of 1824 established Catholicism as the official religion of the state, although secularizing laws and ideologies were organized during the monarchic period (1822-1888). The rupture introduced by the Republican legal system, which officially separated church and state, placed on the agenda the dispute of power between the ecclesiastic apparatus of the Catholic Church and the state apparatus by the definition of their respective competencies and areas of influence such as control of civil registration of the population, of education, domestic life, healthcare, cemeteries, etc. (Montero 2012b). This dispute, which continues until today, particularly in relation to public education and the reproduction of families, is at the heart of the nation's self-representation of the principle of state secularity. The decree of legal separation of 1890 which extinguished the *Padroado* and consecrated freedom of worship, constituted an important break in the paradigm of the current relations between the state and the Catholic Church in Brazil: the official positions of the empire could only be held by Catholics, military recruiting and the population census were clerical tasks, the electoral laws divided voters by parish. Cemeteries, education and families were governed by the Church. Nevertheless, the legal separation did not mean an immediate and total divestment by ecclesiastical actors, in the efforts to maintain their influence on different cultural and political spheres in the country, or the abandonment by the state of attempts to appropriate religious symbols to legitimate its own power.

In legal affairs the republican constitution was inspired by the U.S. model of separation of powers. The Brazilian model explicitly repudiated the anticlerical and even atheist radicalism of the French system and emphasized the concept of "religious freedom" in detriment to the idea of "religious equality" which at the time was not the object of

attention of legislators and of the actors mobilized around the issue. In reality, the concept of "religious liberty" appeared to be a suitable political formula for responding to the aspirations of the Catholic Church which wanted to be free from the state tutelage imposed by the *Padroado Real* system. Moreover, this principle allowed inscribing Christian norms and values as elements at the foundation of the republican laws.

From a sociological perspective, the political principle of "religious freedom" collaborated in the institution of a legal framing that made possible the progressive consolidation of a socio-religious sphere that was relatively autonomous from the state apparatus that had been inaugurated by the political struggles of the late nineteenth century over freedom of education, female emancipation, the *Padroado* regime and slavery, among many others (Lavalle and Szwako 2015). In fact, the principle of "religious freedom" offered the ecclesiastical institutions, mainly Catholics, a legal-political instrument that would support the disputes for autonomy of the religious sphere in relation to the state powers and for the control of certain aspects of social life. In this way, the process of Romanization that began in the late nineteenth century can be understood as a process of construction of the very religious field as distinct from the state administration in which the religious function began to specialize and the formation of a body of well-trained religious specialists began to receive special attention by the part of ecclesiastical authorities (Miceli 1988). Removing itself formally from the structure of the state, the Catholic Church reordered its efforts towards its own reorganization as an autonomous institutional apparatus, stimulated the creation of civic associations, expanded its network of welfare and charitable activities and since the 1920's, mobilized society, organizing very popular Eucharist Congresses. In this process, Catholicism was progressively becoming a powerful communicative force that simultaneously helped to confer a Christian form to the civic-political imagination of the regime and to expand the ethos of secularism as a guarantee of religious autonomy. Despite the diversity of social actors who contributed to the debates about the secularity of the state, Masons, positivists, ultramontanists, lay people and ecclesiastics, it should be noted that the actors associated to the Catholic Church, an institution that was organized nationally and locally enrooted, performed a special role in this process of simultaneously producing a differentiation between the state and society and its mutual constitution. At the heart of this process distinctions began to be delineated in Brazilian society between private life (the place of the family and religion) and public life (the place of the economy and politics), with the secular and the religious constituting themselves mutually.

In this sense, it is possible to affirm that the republican model of Brazilian secularism resulted in part from a vigorous collaboration of the Catholic Church in the organization of a civil society that was active in the name of Catholicism and of the progress of

the nation. Nevertheless, it is important to question how this model, simultaneously regulated and produced differences in the religious field.

There is now consensus in the literature about this theme that the legal institution of the republican state preceded the experience of Brazilian society as an imagined national community. According to authors such as José Murilo de Carvalho (2002), the idea of nationality only began to be timidly experienced in practice with the War of Paraguay. According to the author, nearly all the popular movements of the time had clearly anti-republican characteristics (Carvalho 2002: 81). Meanwhile, the ecclesiastical hierarchies, which at the time of restoration in the 1920's and 1930's decided to invest in the more active presence of the Church in society and in the more effective collaboration with the government (Azzi 1977: 63), sought to develop, on both an ideological level as well as in political relations, close ties of unity between Catholicism and patriotism. The study by Sylvana de Brandão Aguiar (2009), for example, detailed the close collaboration between Catholic intellectuals and non-Catholics, active members of the Institutos Histórico Geográfico and the Academias de Letras, in the association of the Catholic tradition to an imaginary civic nation that was under formation. The idea "of a great Catholic nation" was a recurring narrative during the twentieth century, formulated and promoted by intellectuals and political elites of the Old Republic, but which persisted in a convincing manner until at least the 1970s. One of the components of this ideal, which ideologically guided the action of the Catholic Church in its relationship with religious and cultural differences, associated Catholicism to the progress of the nation. Catholic schools assumed responsibility for performatizing the affinity of Catholicism with progress and science, developing laboratories, technological and scientific equipment and training their students in Swedish gymnastics and in civic festivals (Aguiar 2009: 188). Even in the far corners of the territory, as in the case of the Salesian missionary activity in the beginning of the 1st Republic among the Bororo and among the people of Amazonas in the 1920's-1930's, they did so in the molds of patriotism and modernity. The Italian congregation, supported by state governors, proposed as an objective taking technical progress to the Indians, training them in gymnastics and in the rituals of nationality. Catholicism was thus explicitly used to cement the sense of national unity and to guarantee state sovereignty over a vast territory (Montero 2012).

To naturalize the connection between Catholicism and nation the Catholic schools also participated in patriotic festivals. Children attended military parades and pledging the flag ceremonies at barracks. In return, the public demonstrations of faith, such as the erection of Christ the Redeemer in 1931 and the Eucharist Congresses held in the 1920s and 1930s were presented as large and popular civic festivals. According to José Murilo de Carvalho (1990), in the competition between the Catholic Church and

the republican regime for the representation of the nation, the religious allegories, in particular those fomented by the cults to the Virgin Mary, got the upper hand.

The idea that the Catholic Church would be responsible for the moral imperative of the nation's progress implied the need to fight superstitions, idolatry and mysticism inherent to popular religions, including those of Catholicism. This fight was conducted in the name of science, in particular of medicine and psychiatry (Giumbellli 1997). This organization of differences at the interior of the Catholic nation was thus conducted at the expense of non-Catholics, communists, popular superstitions and heresies. Catholicism sought to be represented with sanctioning from the state, as the great and sole cement of the modern Brazilian soul. The major Catholic theme from the period was the idea of cohesion in the faith against its enemies: Protestantism and Spiritism (Azzi 1977: 85). But all the other religious variations were also seen either as threats to nationality or as imposters. In 1944, then father Agnelo Rossi portrayed Judaism in the newspaper *Jornal do Brasil* as an "international danger", mosques "as an affront to our customs" and the Eastern churches as a "problem for our nationality" (Azzi 1980: 64). The Protestants were also rejected as "not having a connection with our historic traditions", and of being incapable of offering "a factor of national unity" and "corruptors of the Brazilians" (Azzi 1980: 65). At the same time, the Spiritists were expelled to the non-religious field of crime and gross superstitions, because

> Spiritism was a movement that caused intellectual predisposition to madness [and that] caused confusion through religion and seeded sharp dissension within the Catholic unity, so the police must inspect this movement, closing all the doors to its greater development" (5ª. Conferencia Episcopal de 1941, in Belo Horizonte (Azzi 1980: 66)).

These examples, like many others, illustrate how, over the first half of the twentieth century, the popular magic-therapeutic practices and African possession dances were perceived by the Catholic Church as uncivilized and immoral customs. But, it is important to note that this vision of the Catholic world was shared by many representatives of the state. Indeed, doctors, jurists, police and lawyers among other state agents shared this same understanding, which made it difficult to conceive the popular magic-therapeutic practices of the Spiritists, the *macumba* sacrifices and the *batuque* dances as true religious rituals. Thus, although the first republican constitution had established a legal situation in which the state declared itself to be secular and neutral in relation to the diversity of opinions and religions, the "false religions", and the "superstitions" that led to madness and social anomia, perceived as dangerous and corrosives, were not placed among the elements that deserved state protection. To the contrary, they were criminalized and became the object of police persecution in name of morality and public health (Montero 2012b).

With this mode of demarking the frontiers between the religious and the non-religious, the Catholic Church, associated to the state in the project of establishing social order and disciplining the poor, can defend the repression of these practices in the name of public order without contradicting the principle of religious freedom. These conflicts reveal the difficulties inherent to the plan to incorporate differences into the construction of nationality. In the century that separates the institution of the first republican model from the pluralist Republican model of 1988, this aporia – which simultaneously affirms the equality of religions in relation to the state and the non-recognition of some practices as religious – sketched, in the religious field, at least one route for its overcoming: religious syncretism.

If until quite recently a consensus prevailed among Brazil's ruling classes that only Catholicism can be recognized as a religion, borrowing some of its more salient characteristics had from early on been a strategy of popular non-Christian leaders for attaining, if not social legitimacy, at least the guarantee of some state protection.

The Civil Code of 1916 did not establish a specific legal category for recognizing religious organizations that, along with other entities such as scientific and literary ones and those that work in public service, must register as private civil not-for-profit entities. Argentina had created the General Direction of the National Registrar of Cults to control worships, rites, sacred books, positions and theological autonomy of groups seeking recognition. But Brazil's Civil Code understood that religious liberty would be better guaranteed if there were no state mechanisms for controlling and monitoring these types of registrations. In this way, the legal recognition of the entities required only the presentation in a registrar's office of the by-laws that guide its operation (Giumbelli 2017). This lenient legal configuration gave margin to the operation of a large variety of organizational and ritual combinations that in practice left the distinction unclear between the entities that sought protection and legal immunities. Even so, the Catholic religion, as the naturalized referent of the religious, served as an implicit guide for less traditional forms of organization or those that were not numerically expressive, in their aspirations for recognition as specifically religious entities.

The great flexibility in the legal recognition of these associations combined with the ideology of syncretism favored, as an extensive literature has already shown (Ortiz 1978; Sanchis 1994; Negrão 1996; Giumbelli 1997, and Montero 2003), the modeling and re-arranging of a broad variety of popular practices based on a Catholic framework. This modeling, constructed over more than a half century of disputes, persecutions and alliances, was organized around some basic principles that mirrored the way that Catholicism served as a reference for the definition of that which can come to be recognized as religious. This included the standardization in manuals, books and other written publications of a more or less cohesive doctrinaire universe. It involved the

demagnification and re-ordering of practices of cure through the decline of traditional authority based on secrecy and a proposal for collectively sanctioned rituals. The idea was also introduced of belief through a concept of the divine that would include a break between the immanent and the transcendent, the assimilation of the idea of god and of charity. With their more or less developed adoption, these practices were being progressively accepted as religious.

It is interesting to note that although these resignifications have engendered new religions recognized as inferior in the hierarchy of religious legitimacy, such as low Spiritism, Candomblé, Umbanda and more recently, Santo Daime, these collectives were not constituted as religious minorities. This is partially explained by the fact that, in the institutional design of Brazilian secularism, the principle of "religious liberty" and "state neutrality" and the way that the religious entities were officially recognized, guaranteed that "religious belonging" did not become transformed into an official primary principle of citizenship for access to public positions, political identities and civil rights. In this legal political configuration, the state relinquished defining the scope of religion, its content and form of organization. On the other hand, the project of state secularity did not remove the influence of the majority religion on political life. To the contrary, in name of separation, it progressively imbued state measures with religious norms. Thus, in the 1930's, the Catholic Church reconquered old privileges: the new constitution of 1934, despite protests from the Spiritists, Protestants and Masons, restored civic recognition to religious marriage, reintroduced religious teaching in schools and provided public funding for Church projects (Ranquetat 2012: 68-69). This increasingly closer partnership with the state, reinforced in the constitution of 1946, favored the broad recognition of Catholicism as the "official religion" and facilitated the dissemination and adhesion of part of the educated elites to a public discourse of the Catholic Church against "false religions", "absurd beliefs", "superstitions", etc., a narrative whose discriminatory power lasted until the mid 1950's. In the following decades, the reduction of the number of clergy, the growth of Protestantism among the migrants to the large cities and the advance of political forces of social transformation of Marxist inspiration, favored the shift of focus from the action of the Catholic Church that came to distance itself from the state toward an increasingly more organized and critical engagement in the movements of civil society (Bruneau 1974; Della Cava 1975).

3.   The Pluralist Republican Model of Religious Diversity

This panorama of the assimilation of differences via Catholic hegemony and syncretism underwent deeper transformations in the 1980's. On one hand, the expansion of Neo-Pentecostal Protestantism among the lower and working classes was accompanied by an expressive incursion of religious organizations and their leaders in the state apparatus, in representative functions and in the communications media, in large part

favored by the partnership that they established with the military governments in the 1970's, and later, by the space and prerogatives that they conquered in the movement to draft the constitution of 1988. On the other hand, the new constitution raised ethnic, racial and religious pluralism into a political doctrine. In this new institutional design of Brazilian secularism a political transition can be perceived in which the concept of "religious equality" gained a new centrality in the political disputes, and often confronted the principle of "religious freedom" that had shaped the religious field in the previous period.

The literature about social movements has shown that the redemocratization process that began in the late 1980's favored significant changes in the forms of civil associations, stimulating an expressive increase in the desire to create new voluntary forms of civil organizations (Avritzer 2012). It is interesting to note that, according to data raised by Leonardo Avritzer, most of the organizations that were created since this period, at least in São Paulo, were the initiative of religious organizations. Although deeper studies are needed to understand how the religious characteristics of these associations influence representation and the forms of operation of civic life, it is possible to perceive the increasingly significant and diversified presence of religious actors in the public sphere, based on a democratic repertoire of collective action, such as the organization of petition drives, the convocation of marches and demonstrations, the turning to the courts, etc.

There is no doubt that the increase in density and quality of the participation of these religious associations in a non assistentialist form collaborates, in general, to the production of a political public culture, that gives less emphasis to the defense of a Christian nation than to the autonomy of social actors in relation to the state, and mainly a more egalitarian distribution of collective wealth. According to Avritzer, the voluntary associations that grew the most were those that were concerned with the insertion of the poor in politics. The religious associations, in general, were aimed at activities of self-help and organization of the urban poor to demand public goods (Avritzer 2012). The associations that belong to the Evangelical Social Action Network (RENAS),[1] which were committed to the doctrine of *misión integral* (integral mission), affirmed that they were engaged in promoting justice and the dignity of the poor through evangelization with social responsibility (Scheliga 2016: 142-143).

But it is important to indicate the new inflection that was produced in this period in the field of civic organizations. Authors such as M. da Glória Gohn (2013) observed

---

1 According to Scheliga (2016:128) the official data about RENAS published in 2013 indicate that the network, led by historic Protestants, such as Baptists and Presbyterians, affiliated 33 not-for-profit organizations, mostly those independent of churches and 24 other networks that each included at least ten organizations. The author thus estimates that this universe mobilized approximately 270 active organizations throughout Brazil.

that there was an important change in the nature of these forms of organization in the period after enactment of the Constitution of 1988. While the political movement of the 1970's was based on the understanding of the need to strengthen popular representation and organize the struggle against exclusion and inequality promoted by the state, the 1990's stimulated the emergence of new organizational networks that, as the case of the Evangelical Social Action Network created in 2003 demonstrates well, came to defend partnerships with the state in the administration of public policies. Eva Scheliga (2016:131-142), who observes the growing importance of this network for training evangelical agents engaged in social action, describes this *modus operandi* as a "networking" that is supported by three elements: investment in actions of advocacy in support of the rights of children and youth, promotion of political representation of Evangelicals in the National Councils for social policies, guarantee of rights and youth, and the organization of campaigns for mobilization in the streets, on televised shows, in campaigns to raise money for humanitarian causes, etc.

Thus, we see that the general context of these mutations also affected the forms of creating religious organizations. Thus, by instituting pluralism as a political principle, the Constitution of 1988 created the opportunity for a social experience of religions as being relative to each other, as institutions in competition for social influence and primacy in relation to the state. The new demands raised by the participatory regime promoted innovations in the forms of organization of the religious entities and in the style of their political action. For the purposes of this essay we can emphasize at least two novelties. One concerns the growing incorporation of religious agents, especially Protestants, in the spheres of government decision-making, such as forums, councils and chambers for interlocution with the state. The other refers to changes in the forms of action and mobilization of the public. The participation in events such as marches and campaigns, for example, came to be convoked in an ad hoc manner through digital networks, and the engagement of volunteers began to be organized sectorally around specific projects financed either by the state or by networks of private entrepreneurs, as took place in the Catholic projects, "Angels of the Streets" which is concerned with the homeless, "Planters of Joy" dedicated to hospital patients and to projects of the evangelical churches like "Exodus Brasil" (Gonçalves 2014) which works with homosexuals or like the "Projeto Raabe" (Teixeira 2018) which shelters women who are victims of domestic violence.

In terms of the forms of participation and mobilization, however, the way that these changes influence the organizations of Catholics and historic Protestants on one hand and the charismatic Catholics and Pentecostal Protestants on the other, was not exactly the same.

In the case of the Catholic Church it is known that the doctrine of "Liberation Theology" was one of the most important discursive matrixes in the promotion of the style of the popular movements of the 1970's. In a previous article (Montero et al. 2016) we demonstrated that, despite current changes in the organizational form of the civil and religious organizations, it can be seen that, in the case of the Catholic Church, the archetype subjacent to the recent forms of mobilization remain indebted to the standard developed by the movements of the 1970's. This model of mobilization can be characterized by at least three main priorities: the use of the organizational idea of human rights as a reference for organizing the diversity of collective experiences in a civil language of *rights*; the perception of the state as an *enemy* to be fought, which makes citizenship the exercise of resistance and politics a field of struggle against the state; the idea that civil society is constituted fundamentally by the organization of religious variety under a unifying banner of *ecumenicalism*, or more recently under the banner of *inter-religious dialogue,* understood as a political arrangement of Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist and other differences, among others that, united, represent to the Catholic Church and also to sectors of historic Protestants, the group of the collective will or of civil society.

Perhaps the very success of this model and its broad hegemony for nearly three decades explains why the Catholic Church has been slower than other religious organizations, mainly evangelicals, to adapt to new existing organizational models. In addition, it is necessary to observe that this form of circumscribing the civic universe that superimposes the political community to the community of creeds (or of ethnic particularities) clearly leaves out many other possibilities, in particular, the non-religious that have difficulty finding their place in this configuration. In the case of the historic Protestants, who since the mid 19th century sought to conduct interdenominational action in defense of civil marriage and female insertion in the workplace, they reached the 1960's in harmony with the rising social agenda, defending social justice in alliance with Catholic youth. The Catholic ecumenical project provided them an inspiration for overcoming the factionalism inherent to the tradition of Brazilian Protestant organizations, and aligned them with the Catholic hierarchy, against the military regime. More recently, organized in network and inspired by the theology of *misión integral* (integral mission), they are concerned, as we see, in investing in new resources and social technologies to train evangelical agents in social promotion and new methods of mobilization of Christians and non-Christians, as well as public opinion in general, around specific social causes considered to be priorities. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to the action of the Pentecostals, who aligned with the military regime and gave priority to engagement in parliamentary representation and in the media, this Protestant segment is presented as less exclusionary, more open to inter-religious dialogue and to collaboration with other segments of organized civil society (Scheliga 138-139).

Meanwhile, an important change can also be seen in the case of Pentecostal Protestant denominations, which until very recently were oriented to communicate only with the specific public of their followers.[2] Their leaders quickly conquered the abilities needed to mobilize, not only their followers, but, above all that portion of the population not necessarily engaged in the activities of their churches. Upon doing so they developed a combative language, not only against the state or in favor of civil rights, but towards a "defense of the Evangelical people"[3] when they are criticized by the media and for control of religious and moral diversity. An important portion of this Evangelical segment is opposed to the principle of religious diversity (and moral pluralism). It can be observed that when these segments mobilize they use different operative categories than those cited previously to characterize the standards of political imagination of the Catholics and historic Protestants, that is, the guiding idea of human rights, citizenship as a field of struggle or as an action that involves a partnership with the state and ecumenicalism and inter-religious dialogue as representation of civil society.

The literature about the Pentecostals, and in particular about the organizations of the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus [Universal Church of the Kingdom of God], indicate that its public visibility is produced and reproduced more saliently around a few central investments: in the growth of its political representation in Congress, in the intensive use of the media and in the development of a market of cultural goods, in particular gospel music, which became visible in in the multitudes of people who engage in the promotion of marches and other public spectacles (Cunha 2004;Machado,M.D 2006;Machado,C. 2013; Giumbelli 2013;Sant'Ana 2017). Dominion Theology, which expanded among these Evangelical segments in the 1990s, proposed a reading of evil personified in territorial demons who inhabit Catholic churches, Spiritist centers, Umbanda *terreiros*, as well as entire regions of social life. In this way, the main "political" action of these actors, who defend their right to the freedom to expand their message

2   One of the major questions that challenged scholars of Protestantism was that of the extreme dispersal of the religious organizations in various denominations. It became difficult to describe Protestant activity in unitary terms. From the perspective of practical politics, this dispersal constituted a great challenge. The efforts of some leaders to produce a common political practice across the internal divisions of the field had to confront the large variety of institutional forms of organization of these churches that varied among the Methodist Episcopal model – in which authority was focused in the bishops – and the Congregational Baptist model that gave greater autonomy to the churches, but also organized around a convention (which in 2015 gave rise to the Partido Republicano Brasileiro [Brazilian Republican Party]). The defense of autonomy of many churches combined with the idea of charisma that required from Pentecostals other arrangements that make possible united actions. The expansion of the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in the 1980's, and its strategy of investing heavily, along with the Igreja Internacional da Graça [International Grace of God Church] and the Igreja Renascer em Cristo [Reborn in Christ Church], in the mass entertainment industry, became an important element in the construction of a generic idea of "Evangelical" (Sant' Ana 2017:47-49).

3   This expression came to circulate in articles produced by the Rede Record, owned by Edir Macedo, at times of crises of legitimacy of the institution as in the episode of 1995, in which the Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus was portrayed as mercenary and unscrupulous on a telenovela by Brazil's largest TV network Globo (Scheliga 2010).

of salvation, is to promote the struggle against demons, in order to "take possession for God" of these social spaces marked by injustice, inequality and immorality through prayer, spiritual war and even physical force. Raquel Sant'Ana (2017) suggests that the willingness to participate inspired by this perspective sustains a political project whose main strategy is to dispute and guarantee the Christian conquest of the main spaces of power, whether in the entertainment industry, parliament, or even in the high positions of public administration.

In this new configuration of participation of the Neo-Pentecoastal religious entities in the public sphere, a situation is established which, paradoxically, in the name of "religious freedom", calls for a suppression of plurality of beliefs and opinions. These demands are quite evident in the violent actions of certain pastors against Umbanda and Candomblé *terreiros* and in the systematic struggle of Protestant (and Catholic) sectors against civil rights related to sexuality. It is interesting to observe here the functioning of a dual legal-political standard in the arguments presented by these religious actors.

In relation to religious pluralism, protected in this model by state neutrality in relation to the diversity of religions, the dispute takes place in the realm of social relations: in name of "true religion", some religious leaders want to limit the public expressions of worship that the state recognizes as religious. Curiously, Neo-Pentecoastal segments come to defend in parliament and other forums, arguments very similar to those that Catholic leaders had used in the previous period to justify not recognizing non-Catholic practices as religious. In reaction, the actors harmed, with the support of the agents of the judiciary, raise accusations of crimes of intolerance and racism to fight this type of violence (Bortoleto 2014).

In relation to the right of freedom of opinion, its restrictions have been constructed around the idea of public order, which although it has been removed from the constitution, is reintroduced in the political arguments of the actors: sexual rights would place at risk the moral order of the family. The tension here is expressed in relation to advances of secularism in the control of the domestic order.

In the first case, the secular and pluralist legal order has served as a more or less secure support for impeding the return of religious repression and persecution supported by the legal apparatus of the state – even because in this case it no longer has the support of the Catholic Church, which as we said, relates religious diversity via the Christian model to "inter-religious dialogue". In the second case, the frontier of the dispute is transferred to the legislature where a growing number of religious representatives have increasing power. In this arena, the scope of state neutrality, reiterated by the actors as a political principle, begins to be redefined in the name of guaranteeing public order,

implicitly understood here as a defense of the majority Christian moral order. In relation to this issue the Evangelical caucus in parliament has gained the expressive support of Catholic legislators.

4.   Conclusion

We can conclude that the secular model that regulated religious diversity until the 1970s gave privilege to Catholicism as the religion of the nation and favored the Catholic Church as the main partner in policies of administration of popular sovereignty and in the construction of nationality. In this configuration of Catholic hegemony, religious diversity, the inclusion of Protestants and Jews for example, was openly criticized by the ecclesiastic hierarchy as harmful to the nation, which was conceived to be naturally Christian, while other popular entities were not even recognized as religious. While pluralism was not established as a legal principle, the ideology (and practice) of religious syncretism served as a parameter in the dispute for social legitimacy (given that the legal mark does not distinguish the civil associations) of the different arrangements that sought recognition as religious.

Meanwhile, the model of pluralist secularism inaugurated with the Constitution of 1988, by inscribing differences in the sphere of rights, favored a movement of affirmation of religious borders and identities. At the same time, this new legal framework, by instituting the construction of citizenship (and no longer nationality) as a reference of political action, stimulated religious associations to incorporate the language of social promotion[4] and individual rights as a form of public action. It also encouraged the dispersal of religious activity to all fields of social life. The multiplication of social actions of all kinds, including welfare, training, entertainment, assistance and others, aimed at specific segments of the public (youth, women, the poor, the incarcerated, drug addicts, etc.), made this *modus operandi* routine in the entire spectrum, particularly the Christian portion, of religious entities.

It is difficult to anticipate what the effects of this dispersal will be on the configuration of Brazilian secularism. We can risk hypothesizing the idea that the forms of action of Catholic and historic Protestant religious collectives operate with the references of the strengthening of a public sphere understood as civil by means of the empowerment of collective actors narratively described as victims of injustice. Meanwhile, the modes of action of the Pentecostal entities, in particular the Neo-Pentecoastals, appear to

---

4   Scheliga (2010: 81-88) describes the process of professionalization of social assistance since the 1970's, in Brazil, which led to the distinction between the concept of "assistentialism" and the idea of "social promotion". Various NGOs, linked to the Catholic Church and/or ecumenical Protestants, became institutionalized in the period, projecting Christian concepts of charity and assistance in relation to the concept of the "social question" which came to guide the action of these organizations for two decades.

emphasize the public sphere, understood as a market, through the empowerment of individual actors who, self reconstructed by means of faith and trust, can overcome suffering and become masters of their own destiny.

Independently of the differences in the modes of action in the public sphere, it is necessary to emphasize that the recent model of multi-religious secularism operates to guarantee public ritual manifestations of all organizations that are legally recognized as religious, even if implicit hierarchies organize these modes of presentation. Meanwhile, the multiplication of Neo-Pentecoastal leaders in the media, and in particular in parliament, certainly challenges the implicit understanding of the distinction between religion and money on one hand, and religion and politics on the other, which prevails in the model of syncretic secularism. Perhaps by the way that they challenge these demarcations – using for example the pulpit to promote candidates or making donations in cash to electoral campaigns (practices, that are prohibited by current election laws) or even, multiplying the ways of asking for money from the faithful in their services – the Neo-Pentecoastal leaders have still not been able to earn social respectability, at least among the educated elites, Catholics and non-Catholics. It should be noted that Neo-Pentecoastal leaders are systematically absent from the inter-religious coalitions that, by organizing under Catholic leadership to promote big causes, revised the already relatively consecrated terms of distinction between the religious and the political – such as for example the inter-religious celebration for peace conducted in the Monastery of São Bento in 2015, which brought together representatives of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Spiritists, Afro-religions and the Presbyterian church.

Thus, it can be concluded that the *modus operandi* of the Neo-Pentecoastals in the context of religious pluralism on one hand, challenges the relatively well established understanding about the place of religion in public space as operated in the configuration of secularism in the previous model – which presupposes a type of distinction between the religious, the political and the market – and on the other, resists the inter-religious coalitions that confer stability to this long lasting configuration of secularism.

When operating at the heart of an inter-religious coalition, a positive general disposition is perceived in relation to the broadening of the possibilities for expansion of the religious in public and private life, as if a new consensus gradually came to be established among the ruling classes that religions in general, and not only Catholicism, can represent a positive instrument for social pacification in the competitive context of a plural society. This important role offered to the religious entities in the government of the populations is not exactly a novelty in the social history of the Brazilian secular state, in which for centuries Catechism was considered a central tool for "pacification", the name given to state policies to confront indigenous and African ethnic differences in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But, as we saw, an important portion of the

Neo-Pentecoastal segments have not been included in this inter-religious alignment. Nevertheless, it is still not possible to define the results of the impact of these new disputes over differentiation between the religious and the secular on the stability and current hegemonic configuration of Brazilian secularism.

5. Bibliography

Aguiar, Sylvana (2009): *Modernidade no Brasil, Igreja Católica, Identidade Nacional: práticas e estratégias intelectuais 1889-1930*, Recife: Universidade Federal de Pernambuco.

Avritzer, Leonardo (2012): "Sociedade civil e Estado no Brasil: da autonomia à interdependência política", in: *Opinião Pública* 18, 2, 383–398.

Azzi, Riolando (1977): "O início da Restauração Católica no Brasil: 1920-1930", in: *Síntese* 4, 10, 61–89.

(1980): "A Igreja Católica no Brasil durante o Estado Novo", in: *Síntese* 7, 19, 49–71.

Bortoleto, Milton (2014): *"Não viemos para fazer aliança": faces do conflito entre adeptos das religiões pentecostais e afro-brasileiras*, São Paulo: Universidade de São Paulo.

Bruneau, Thomas (1974): *Catolicismo Brasileiro em época de transição*, São Paulo: Edições Loyola.

Carvalho, José Murilo de (1990): *A formação das almas: o imaginário da República no Brasil*, São Paulo: Cia. das Letras.

(2002): *Cidadania no Brasil. O longo caminho,* 3a. ed., Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

Cunha, Magali do Nascimento (2004): *Vinho novo em odres velhos. Um olhar comunicacional sobre a explosão do gospel no cenário religioso evangélico no Brasil*, doctoral dissertation, Departamento de Comunicação, USP.

Della Cava, Ralph (1975): "Igreja e Estado no Brasil do século XX: sete monografias recentes sobre o catolicismo brasileiro, 1916/1964", in: *Revista Novos Estudos CEBRAP* 12, 5–52.

Giumbelli, Emerson (1997): *O cuidado dos mortos. Uma história da condenação e legitimação do Espiritismo*, Rio de Janeiro: Arquivo Nacional.

(2013): Cultura Pública: envangelicos y su presencia en la sociedad brasileña, in: *Revista Sociedad y Religión* 40, 23, 13–47.

(2017): "A vida jurídica das igrejas: observações sobre minorias religiosas em quatro países (Argentina, Brasil, México e Uruguai)", in: *Religião e Sociedade* 37, 2, 121–143.

Gohn, Maria da Glória (2013): "Sociedade civil no Brasil: movimentos sociais e ONGs", in: *Meta: Avaliação* 5, 14, 238–253.

Gonçalves, Alexandre Oviedo (2014): *Flexibilizando estéticas, restringindo sexualidades: disputas de agentes pela demarcação do religioso*, Master's thesis, Departamento de Antropologia, USP.

Lavalle, Adrian Gurza and Szwako, José (2015): "Sociedade civil, Estado e autonomia: argumentos, contra-argumentos e avanços no debate", in *Opinião Pública* 21, 1, 157–187.

Negrão, Lísias Nogueira (1996): *Entre a cruz e a encruzilhada. Formação do campo umbandista em São Paulo*, São Paulo: EDUSP.

Mahmood, Saba (2016): *Religious Difference in a Secular Age: A Minority Project*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Machado, Carly (2013): "É muita mistura: projetos religiosos, políticos, midiáticos, de saúde e segurança pública nas periferias do Rio de Janeiro", in: *Religião e Sociedade* 33, 13–36.

Machado, Maria das Dores (2006): *Política e Religião: a participação dos evangélicos nas eleições*, Rio de Janeiro: Ed. FGV.

Miceli, Sergio (1988): *Elites eclesiásticas brasileiras*, Rio de Janeiro: Bertrand Brasil.

Montero, Paula (2003): "O problema do sincretismo", in: *Teoria e Sociedade*, Special Issue, 112–119.

(2012a): *Selvagens, civilizados, autênticos. A produção das diferenças nas etnografias salesianas (1920-1970)*, São Paulo: EDUSP.

(2012b): "Multiculturalismo, identidades discursivas e espaço público", in: *Sociologia e Antropologia* 2, 4, 81–102.

(2016): "Secularism and Religion in the Public Sphere in Contemporary Brazil". In: Schmidt, Bettina and Engler, Steven (eds.), *Handbook of Contemporary Religions in Brazil,* Leiden: Brill, 379–394.

Montero, Paula; Brum, Asher, and Quintanilha, Rafael (2016): "Ritos católicos e ritos civis", in: *Mana* 22, 3, 705–735.

Ortiz, Renato (1978): *A morte branca do feiticeiro negro*, Petrópolis: Vozes.

Ranquetat Jr., Cesar Alberto (2012): *Laicidade à brasileira: um estudo sobre as controvérsias em torno da presença de símbolos religiosos na Esfera Pública*, doctoral dissertation, Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Antropologia Social, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

Sanchis, Pierre (1994): "Para não dizer que não falei de sincretismo", in: *Comunicações do ISER* 13, 45: 4–11.

Sant'Ana, Raquel (2017): *A nação cujo Deus é o Senhor: a imaginação de uma coletividade evangélica a partir da Marcha para Jesus*, doctoral dissertation, Departamento de Antropologia, Museu Nacional, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

Scheliga, Eva (2016): "Incidência política evangélica: Notas a partir da RENAS", in: Araújo, Melvina and Vital da Cunha, Christina (eds.), *Religião e Conflito*, Curitiba. Editora Prismas, 131-158.

Sullivan, Winnifred Fallers; Shakman Hurd, Elizabeth; Mahmood, Saba, and Danchin, Peter (eds.) (2015): *Politics of Religious Freedom*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Teixeira, Jacqueline Moraes (2018): *A conduta universal: governo de si e políticas de gênero na Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, doctoral dissertation, Departamento de Antropologia, USP.

Working Papers published since 2017:

1. Maria Sybilla Merian International Centre for Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences Conviviality-Inequality in Latin America (Mecila) (2017): "Conviviality in Unequal Societies: Perspectives from Latin America: Thematic Scope and Preliminary Research Programme".

2. Müller, Gesine (2018): "Conviviality in (Post)Colonial Societies: Caribbean Literature in the Nineteenth Century".

3. Adloff, Frank (2018): "Practices of Conviviality and the Social and Political Theory of Convivialism".

4. Montero, Paula (2018): "Syncretism and Pluralism in the Configuration of Religious Diversity in Brazil".

SPONSORED BY THE

Federal Ministry
of Education
and Research