In the Line of Fire: Sex(uality) and Gender Ideology in Brazil

NICOLAS WASSER. ISADORA LINS FRANÇA

The so-called gender ideology was a decisive tool for Jair Bolsonaro and his followers during the Brazilian presidential elections in 2018. By mobilizing gender and sexuality as a moral discourse to dispute power in the country, enemies could be both efficiently crafted and violently attacked in the name of the nation, of Christianity and of traditional values such as the heterosexual nuclear family. By now, Brazil’s far right government has completed its first year in office. Its aggressive gender and sexuality politics, however, still resemble the election campaign. The president exhibits a (mostly intended) bumbling management of ecological disasters, unemployment, increased armed violence, and the deep crisis of public and social institutions. Similarly, Damares Alves, evangelical pastor and head of the Ministry of Women, Family, and Human Rights, opts for ideological rhetoric and conservative politics instead of progressive strategies for the protection and empowerment of women, LGBT and other discriminated or historically disadvantaged groups. Alves became known soon after the inauguration of the new government, when she declared in a video that “the new age has begun, and now boys wear blue and girls wear pink” (Alves 2019). Out of a yearning for an ostensibly lost traditional gender order, Alves not only orchestrates both religious and secular voices that criminalize abortion – an illegal practice in Brazil as in most Latin American countries. Also, her Ministry supports national psychological associations that defend the ‘cure’ of LGBT people and advocate for sexual abstinence in order to prevent undesired pregnancy and sexual transmitted infections among teenagers.

Since the beginning of the Bolsonaro government, Brazil has witnessed the dismantling of administrative structures aimed at promoting public policies for LGTBs and women, amidst a paternalistic state authoritarian discourse that defends and promotes a rather narrow view of the family. It follows the implementation of austerity and neoliberal politics, where universal services are seen as prejudicial to public accounts, transferring to families – and women – the obligation to do care work. These destructive policies accompany governmental statements of evident symbolic weight that postulate the non-recognition of LGBT as subjects of rights. They attack defenders of gender equality precisely in the fields aimed at confronting violence against women and LGBT and the promotion of the rights and autonomy of these populations. The field of culture has become a prominent target, since federal and state powers started to intervene in the circulation of movies and books with content that touch LGBT issues. Furthermore, education has turned into a similarly attacked field (Facchini/Rodrigues 2018), because schools and universities are suspected to be the production sites of gender ideology and communism.