

## The place of media in the process of imaginary constructions of the “enemy” in Marco Feliciano case

### O lugar das mídias no processo de construção imaginária do “inimigo” no caso Marco Feliciano

### El lugar de los medios de comunicación en el proceso de construcción imaginaria del “enemigo” en el caso Marco Feliciano

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**Abstract** *Starting from the assertion that the media are components of social dynamics and interact with it, this article aims to identify, in socio-political phenomenon here called “Marco Feliciano case”, the place of the media in the process of the imaginary construction of the collective configuration of enemies. The exploratory and descriptive study is guided by the following problem: to what extent and how the Brazilian media participated in the process of collective imaginary construction the “enemy” in Marco Feliciano case in 2013?*

**Keywords:** Media; Social imagination; Religion; Politics; Marco Feliciano

**Resumo** *Partindo da assertiva de que as mídias são componentes da dinâmica social e com ela interagem, este trabalho busca identificar, no fenômeno sociopolítico aqui denominado como Marco Feliciano”, o lugar das mídias no processo de construção imaginária da configuração coletiva de inimigos. O estudo de caráter exploratório-descritivo se pautou pelo seguinte problema: em que medida e de que forma as mídias brasileiras participaram do processo de construção do imaginário coletivo do “inimigo” no caso Marco Feliciano, de 2013?*

**Palavras-chave:** Mídias; Imaginário social; Religião; Política; Marco Feliciano

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**Resumen** *A partir de la afirmación de que los medios de comunicación son componentes de la dinámica social y interactúan con él, este trabajo tiene como objetivo identificar, en el fenómeno sociopolítico aquí llamado de “caso Marco Feliciano”, el lugar de los medios de comunicación en la construcción imaginaria de la configuración colectiva de enemigos. El estudio exploratorio y descriptivo es guiado por el siguiente problema: ¿en qué medida y cómo los medios de comunicación brasileños participaron en el proceso de construcción del imaginario colectivo del “enemigo” en caso de Marco Feliciano en 2013?*

**Palabras-clave:** *Medios; Imaginario social; Religión; Política; Marco Feliciano*

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Date of submission: 15/08/2013

Date of acceptance: 30/09/2013

## Preliminaries

In the months of March and April 2013 it was possible to follow an episode without precedent in the Brazilian National Congress in the media, which potentialised the relationship between media, religion and politics in the social dynamics. On March 5 the Partido Socialista Cristão (PSC) [Christian Social Party] announced the indication of a member of its parliamentary group, the evangelical pastor and federal deputy Marco Feliciano (SP, São Paulo), as the president of the Comissão de Direitos Humanos e Minorias [Human Rights and Minority Commission] of the Câmara Federal [Federal Chamber] (CDHM). The reactions to Marco Feliciano's name of the groups that fight for Human Rights were immediate, with the allegation that the deputy was known in mediatic spaces due to his discriminative declarations with respect to black and homosexual people. The PSC defended itself by saying that they followed a protocol which gave them the right to indicate the presidency of this commission, a process which was within the formalities of democracy as they are established in the Brazilian Parliament. This is certainly a source of reflections, especially with respect to the reason why the defence of Human Rights is being used by the great parties as "cheap small change", as Renato Janine Ribeiro (2013) exposed it very well. In addition to this there is the fact that the indicated deputy and his party do not present a history of involvement with the cause of Human Rights which would qualify them for the post.

What drew the attention and is still doing it in this case is the "snowball" it provoked, which was based upon the reactions to the deputy's name and formed by public protests on the part of diverse segments of civil society, and it was followed by the creation of a parliamentary opposition front to Feliciano's election and the establishment of a religious war between evangelicals and activists of the lesbian, gay, bisexuals and transgender movement (LGBT) and of feminist movements and between evangelicals and non-Christians. And this snowball is the product of facts which present themselves beyond CDHM and expose it as one more element in the complex framework of the relationship between re-

ligion and society in Brazil. Among these factors there is the imaginary construction of the other as enemy, which is the object of this study.

On the basis of the assertion that the media are components of the social dynamics and interact in the socio-historical, cultural and political processes of the different societies, this work seeks to identify the place of the media in the process of imaginary construction of the collective enemy configuration, in this socio-political phenomenon, which is called “Marco Feliciano case” here. Therefore we refer to studies in the field of social imaginary anchored in Cornelius Castoriadis’ philosophy, in Gilbert Durand’s anthropology and in Michel Maffesoli’s sociology. These references are the basis of the exploratory-descriptive study we present here, which is guided by the following problem: to which extent and in which way did Brazilian media participate in the construction process of the collective imaginary in the Marco Feliciano case in 2013?

### **Social construction of the imaginary and communication**

“Imaginary” is comprehension which was born in philosophy, stimulated philosophers of different periods, historians, psychoanalysts, anthropologists, sociologists and has been seducing communication scholars. Human beings live by images, they live by a socially constructed imagination, which shapes and re-shapes their creeds, their language, their organisations, their laws and their attitudes towards the demands of life and towards the other. The human being is what he is by means of his interaction with the other.

It is in this aspect that the communication field is fertilised by the notions of imaginary. “To make common”, to communicate is to make common life possible. The human being needs the other: he is a social being. How can we think of social imagination without communication, exchanges, interchange of ideas, feelings, dreams and desires? How can we think of communicational processes which shape the social appropriations and representations without considering social imagination, collective imagination? How is it possible not to see the place of the media,

the discourses of which appropriate themselves of the socially constructed images and at the same time represent them. thus contributing to the process of construction and reconstruction, of creation and recreation of these same images and of other images?

To think of the relationship between imaginary and communication is to take a fertile field of study and research, after all, life in society is constructed through social interactions which produce culture related to daily habits, to the ways of communication, to the social laws, rules and conventions, to worldviews, to dreams and desires. The Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis denominates this collection of products of social interactions (figures/forms/images) “imaginary significations”, which form a coherent whole, the imaginary, that is to say that they are created and shared in order to give meaning and cohesion to the existence of a group. According to Castoriadis, it is only on the basis of these “imaginary significations” that we can speak of “something” (1995, p. 36).

This comprehension is opposed to another one, which ends up still predominating, in a certain common sense (inclusively in academic spaces), which opposes the imaginary to the real, to the true. Here we defend an inverse way, in which “nothing human must be strange” (DURAND, 2002, p. 40), and which considers the imaginary as a very concrete element, inserted in reality, like something which is beyond the individuals:

... the state of mind of a group, of a country, of a Nation-State, of a community, etc. The imaginary establishes links. It is social cement. Therefore, if the imaginary links, it unites in a same atmosphere, it cannot be individual (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 76).

Thus the imaginary is a component of the human existence as a significantly social experience, which confers sense upon collective life and is re-signified by it, thus it becomes an element in permanent construction. Imaginary is the collective elaboration of the collection of images which is formed by the human being, of all he seizes visually and in his experience of the world (CUNHA, 2011, p. 38). Therefore he

is socialised through communicational processes by means of which the human being interacts in an interpersonal and massive way, mediated or not.

It is in this comprehension of the relationship with the real and the ordinary that we conceive the symbolic perspective of the imaginary, related to the myths and archetypes. Gilbert Durand dedicated his studies on the basis of this notion, and he established what he denominated “anthropologic trajectory”. By delineating this trajectory, the anthropologist inspires himself in Carl Jung’s archetype studies (from the Greek *archétipos*, ‘impression/mark of the principle’) treated like “original image”, “prototype”, the first model or mark of something. In this sense, archetype is evidenced by the psychoanalyst like this:

The primordial image must incontestably be related to certain perceptible processes of nature which reproduce themselves continuously and are always active, but, on the other hand, it is also doubtless that it also concerns certain interior conditions of the life of the mind and of life in general (JUNG *apud* DURAND, 2002, p. 60).

Durand defends the “essential” importance of the archetypes, which constitute “the junction point between the imaginary and the rational processes” (2002, p. 61). This is why there are many archetypes: of the mother figure, of the brother, of the hero, of the lover, of the successful, of the old wise man, of the enemy, of good and evil, of the shadow, of the *anima* (soul), among others that are socially constructed during human history.

It is, in fact, that the archetypes are linked to images that are very differentiated by cultures and in which various schemes are intertwined. Thus we are in the presence of symbols in the narrow sense, symbols which assume more importance when they are rich in different meanings (DURAND, 2002, p. 62).

It is in this way that the imaginary creates significations which will constitute the social institutions (languages, family, laws, governments, religions). A constant instituting movement, which confers meaning on multiple social components, among them the individual and col-

lective identities. It is in the identity constitution that two notions, which motivate this study, are present: the other and the non-other, or the enemy.

### **Imaginary, identity, the notion of other and enemy**

Identity is a concept which was studied by different fields of knowledge, such as social psychology, psychoanalysis, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, with different approaches and emphases. One of the notions, which is narrowly related to the topic of this study, is the notion of identity as *representation* – as *image*. It is the meaning or the form which an individual or a social group attributes to himself, for himself and for the others and by means of which he recognises himself, recognises the other and establishes a relationship with the other.

Cornelius Castoriadis refers to this notion when he indicates the necessity of a society to answer questions which are fundamental for its full existence: “Who are we?”; “What do we want?” “What do we desire?” The answers to such questions designate the way in which the individuals and the social groups constitute themselves and the images they have of the world, of the objects and of the beings that compose this world as well as the image they make of themselves, of their needs, of their finalities, and of their values. It is from the answer to these enquiries that the idea of identity, which is being established, is woven.

In these approaches, a relevant element for the comprehension of identity is indicated: “the other”. Because the construction of the identity is also produced with reference to the others, to the way in which the others accept, admit and believe in the defined self-image, as well as with reference to the image the others construct about the individual. This process can provoke changes and transformations, during which the phenomenon of *negation* appears: the definition and redefinition of the self-image, as a basis on that which “one is not” or on that which “one should not do” – with one’s eyes turned towards the other.

Nicole Loraux (1990) contributes to this reflection by presenting an example taken from ancient Greece. It is the discourse in the Athenians’

process of identity construction. In the logic of the native Athenian, the “others”, Greeks or foreigners, serve as a contrast to the exaltation of the “same”: the Athenian “I” needs the others in order to affirm himself, on the basis of the opposition to what they define as the contrary of their identity: when the others are evoked, they are promptly “exiled to the frontiers of Greek identity”. The native discourse, which we find in the production of the Greek Athenian thinkers makes of the population of Athens the only authentic Greeks, the true citizens, on the basis of the rejection of the others, of the affirmation of their “not being”, or of their other as “non other”. In Loraux’s comprehension, a significant elucidation resides there: in a thought about the same, in an enunciation of the kind “only” we, among all the Greeks, we are not immigrants” reigns the movement, the principle of alterity, where we must situate ourselves, when we intend to reject the other.

In this same perspective are Bronislaw Bazko’s studies about social imagination. According to Baczko, to designate a collective identity is

to delimit one’s “territory” and one’s relationships with the environment and with the “others”; and it still corresponds to forming the images of the enemies and of the friends, rivals and allied, etc. The social imaginary elaborated and consolidated by a collectivity is one of the answers which this collectivity gives to its conflicts, divisions and real or potential violence. All the collectivities have their way of functioning, which are specific to this type of representations (1985, p. 309).

It is in this current of thought that we can identify the imaginary creation of the enemy, of the negation of the other, an archetype which derives from the archetypal opposition good-evil. According to Jung, the shadow archetype is related to the personal failure (“gaffe, faux pas”), which is attributed to the conscious personality as a fault; it is an image which “personifies all that the subject does not recognise in himself and that always disturbs him directly or indirectly, such as, for example, inferior character traits and other incompatible tendencies” (JUNG, 2002, p. 277). The thinker indicates that the human being also creates the figure of the collective shadow, a sum of all the inferior character traits; there-

fore we can think about the creation of the enemies. An outstanding example, in the field of religion, is the figure of the devil, about which Jung presents a socio-psychoanalytic explanation:

the shadow which, in this case, would go beyond the personal shadow and which therefore can be compared to a principle as that of evil. It is the colossal shadow projected by man, which our time had to experience in a choking way. [...] Evil is the necessary opposite of good; without it good would not exist. We cannot even prescind from the first (JUNG, 2002, p. 317).

Thus the mythological narratives, the legends, the fairy tales, the novels use imaginary expressions in which the image of the enemy and that of the devil and the diabolic are abundantly developed. It is like this that the figures of the villains appear, such as the witches, the step mothers (the woman's place is given broad reflection), of the genies, of the pirates, also associated with governors and other leaders. The historical and news narratives, constructed on the basis of the collective imaginaries and of the memory, which results from hegemonic processes, will also be permeated by these archetypical images. The assimilation and the propagation of this imaginary which guides the interpretation of reality, of the social groups' worldview, are due to the oral tradition and to the technical artefacts (mechanic and electronic manuals), what Maffesoli denominates "technologies of the imaginary":

The imaginary is fed by technologies [...] because the imaginary, as communion, is always communication. The internet is a technology of the interactivity which feeds and is fed by imaginaries. There is a rational, utilitarian aspect of the internet, but this only represents part of this phenomenon. The most important is the relationship, the circulation of signs, the established relationships. In the same way, television and advertising articulate the emotional and the technique. There is logic in this, because the logic of the image is always technical (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 80).

On this basis, it is possible to affirm that the media, as technologies of the imaginary and their agents participate in the social dynamics of

imaginary construction and in their creative process they are fed and feed the instituting processes of images of their audiences about themselves and about the other.

The creator, even in advertising, is only creator to the extent that he succeeds in seizing what circulates in society. He must correspond to an atmosphere. The creator gives shape to what exists in the minds, to what is there, to what exists in an informal or deformed way. Advertising and cinema, for example, deal with archetypes. This means that the creator must be in syntony with the experienced. The archetype only exists because it is rooted in social existence. Thus a schematic, manipulating view does not master the real, although it has part of truth. Ingenuity implies the capacity to be in syntony with the collective spirit. Therefore the technologies of the imaginary drink from imaginary wells in order to feed imaginaries (MAFFESOLI, 2001, p. 81).

And here we approach the object of this study: the construction of the enemy imaginary by the media, in what we call here, the Marco Feliciano case. In the episodes which potentialise the relationship between media, religion and politics during the months of March and April 2013, two groups were the protagonists and opponents: (1) Marco Feliciano and the Christian faithful, identified with him, as their representative in the National Congress, with a majority of evangelicals, but also Roman Catholics, and (2) the activists and sympathisers of the negro movement, LGBT and feminists, who felt affected by the deputy's declarations that were classified as racist and homophobic, which would disqualify him as the president of a commission of human rights, and the Christian faithful who were not identified with Marco Feliciano.

This process of imaginary construction is inserted in contexts and it is configured by factors, as we already indicated it in the introduction of this study, which go beyond the CDHM or religion and, among them, there is the place of the media, which we are going to describe in the following part.

## A stimulating element: Marco Feliciano's and his "soldiers" conservatism

One of the elements which stimulate the social imagination around the pastor and deputy Marco Feliciano as enemy were the declarations he himself did in religious sermons in churches and by means of social networks, publicly classified as racist, homophobic and intolerant from the religious point of view. The first declaration was posted on Twitter, on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2011, when the pastor already had the post of deputy and it generated an expressive number of reactions and denunciations on the social networks, but also the evangelical faithful's support, with significant coverage in the news media.



Figure 1. Pastor Marco Feliciano's post on Twitter.<sup>2</sup>

The second declaration was also posted on Twitter, when the deputy Marco Feliciano decided to answer a group of homosexuals who ques-

<sup>2</sup> African descend from an ancestry cursed by Noah. This is a fact. The motive of the curse is the polemic. Don't be irresponsible Twitters laughter / As far as the deputy Bossonoro is concerned, I do not know what he said. I speak for myself and I answer for myself and only for myself / All pagan nations seem to attract disgraces. The bible says: Blessed be the nation whose God is the Lord! The cure is in Christ! / The curse that Noah cast on his grandson, Canaan spills over on the African continent, hence the famine, pestilence, diseases, ethnic wars!

tioned his affirmations, on the same date, and it also generated again a great number of reactions on the social networks and the coverage of the media:

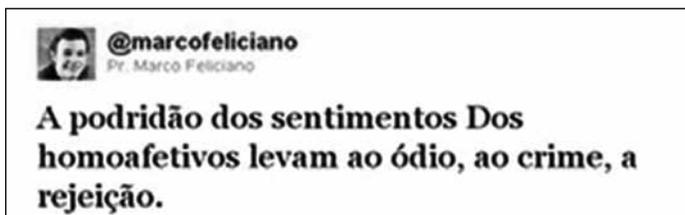


Figure 2. Pastor Marco Feliciano's post on Twitter.<sup>3</sup>

Because of the two declarations the deputy Marco Feliciano was put on trial for discrimination at the Supremo Tribunal Federal [Supreme Federal Court], he was absolved a few months later.

When the pastor's name was proposed for the presidency of the CDHM, opposition groups started propagating other articles, anterior to his period as a deputy, which contained polemic affirmations that revealed the formation of his thought. Two of them were widely published and debated on the social networks: one propagated on Youtube, in which Feliciano, in a sermon given during a service in 2005, in the city of Camboriú (SC – Federal State of Santa Catarina), uses as an example God's powerful action in the plane crash which killed all the integrants of the band Mamonas Assassinas, in 1996:

The plane was in the sky, region of the minister of God's judgment. There in Serra da Cantareira, [mountain range to the north of the city of São Paulo, in the State of São Paulo] instead of turning towards one side, the control column turned towards the other side. An angel put his finger on the control column and God instantaneously killed those who attempted to put obscene words into our children's mouths (YOUTUBE. Marcos Feliciano: "God killed the Mamonas Assassinas").

<sup>3</sup>The rottenness of the homosexuals' feelings leads to hatred, crime, rejection.

The other affirmation was done during the same sermon. The pastor Marco Feliciano cites another example and affirms that the Beatle John Lennon was killed with three close-range shots because he declared that the band was more famous than Jesus Christ. In the sermon, the pastor, applauded by the present crowd, condemns the musician and says:

I would have liked to be there when they discovered his body. I would have taken off the cloth and would have said: ‘pardon me, John, but this first shot is in the name of the Father. This one is in the name of the Son and this one in the name of the Holy Spirit. Nobody confronts God and survives in order to deride’ (YOUTUBE. Marcos Feliciano: “God killed John Lennon”)

In another polemic video, which started to circulate on the internet in April 2013, the deputy and pastor Feliciano affirms that the singers Caetano Veloso’s and Lady Gaga’s success is due to a pact with the devil, which, in the discourse, is associated with the *candomblé* [a religion based on African beliefs, which is particularly popular in Brazil].

Some years ago, a citizen, who was sitting on a small bench and who was giving a show with a viola, sang a song, called “Sozinho” [Lonely] and, within a week and half, he sold, 1 million copies. Then they asked Caetano Veloso, what his secret was. And he said: ‘My secret is Mãe Menininha do Patuá (sic). Before I sing, I take the song to her, who, possessed by the orixás [from Yoruba: orishas, minor gods or spirits of traditional Yoruba religion and its South American and Caribbean offshoots such as Santeria and Candomblé], says: you can record it, because I bless it’. Do not underestimate the devil, because he is powerful (YOUTUBE. Marcos Feliciano: Caetano Veloso, Mãe Menininha do Gantois [famous priestess of the Afro-Brazilian religion Candomblé] and Lady Gaga”).

Even with all these controversies around his image, the deputy made another affirmation which generated protests, after he had taken office as president of the CDHM, in a cult which was recorded on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2013. By commenting on a protest against him, which occurred outside the church, he affirmed: “All this demonstration occurs because, for the first time in this Brazil’s history, a pastor full with the Holy Spirit con-

quered the space which was dominated by Satan until yesterday” (YOUTUBE Marcos Feliciano-Passos-MG 2).

Historically spoken, the “evangelicals” image in Brazil was fundamentally constructed on the basis of the identity of two groups of non-catholic Christians: the protestants of different confessions, who came from the United States with missions, from the beginning of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century on and the Pentecostals, who came to Brazil in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, coming from that same country. This image always showed Brazil a Christian segment predominantly conservative, theologically speaking, marked by a biblical fundamentalism, a dualism, which separated the church from the “world”/society and anti-Catholicism (CUNHA, 2007).

Thus it is not out of the context that an evangelical pastor reproduces in his modern sermons and with strong emotional appeal a theological approach as antiquated as that which is the basis of the racist ideology, by means of the fundamentalist reading of the Genesis texts which contain the narrative of Noah’s descent. It is also contextually coherent that Feliciano guides his theological reflection by means of bases which justify the existence of a warrior and bellicose God, who has vindictive angels around him, who destroys Lennon or the Mamonas Assassinas, continuing what he already did with the African peoples, the heirs of Noah’s son and who, in this line, will certainly do to those who assume and proclaim homosexuality. It also corresponds to the profile of the evangelicals’ multiple identities that the religious leader reacts to whom expresses opposition to him or has a position which is different from his, classifying him as the devil’s agent and this is how he designated the anterior group of the Commission of Human Rights and celebrities such as the singer Caetano Veloso.

In order to understand Feliciano’s discursive components and the support he receives from various evangelical segments, we must consider the identity formation of this group, that, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in its diversity, has always been composed of currents that were ideologically and theologically conservative and fundamentalist (CUNHA, 2012). There is nothing new here. Many “marcos felicianos” existed and exist among the evangelicals.

What differentiates the moment around the Marco Feliciano case is the greater visibility given to the evangelical segment by the prominence the media gave to the deputy and to his speeches, by means of half a score of articles all over Brazil, thus interacting with the process of the construction of enemies.

Simultaneously to the wide coverage of the media of the case, including interview and debate programmes, the digital social networks were inflated with ardent contrary demonstrations not only to the deputy Marco Feliciano's speeches but also to his presence at the CDHM. It was on the social networks of the internet that the sentence, which popularised very quickly: "Feliciano does not represent me" and which was expressed in posters propagated in these spaces and also in the streets, in the many public protests in various parts of Brazil, especially scheduled



Figure 3. Photo-protest against the deputy Marco Feliciano. Source: Facebook.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I am evangelical I am a woman and above all I am human! And Marco Feliciano does not represent me / We are a family and Marco Feliciano does not represent us / I am black and white and Feliciano does not represent me / I am not from this planet, but if I were... Feliciano would not represent me! / I am God and Marco Feliciano does not represent me!

on Facebook and Twitter, many of them, with a humorous and ludic tone, which is proper to the Brazilian cultural way of protesting.

This strong opposition to the case, which the news media and the digital social networks made possible, was even more intensified with the demonstrations of support the deputy Feliciano received from well-known figures known as controversial, such as the deputy Jair Bolsonaro (PP-RJ) and the pastor Silas Malafaia.

The deputy Bolsonaro has a story of racist attitude and of conflict with social activists and militants of gay movements. Substitute of the CDHM, at the height of the polemics of the Marco Feliciano case, the deputy affirmed to journalists that he felt like the “brother” of the president of the commission. “As captain of the Army, I am one of Feliciano’s soldiers”, he declared, in articles propagated by the media and he added:

The agenda was different before, the agenda of a minority that had nothing to say. Today we represent the true minorities. I believe in Feliciano, with all my heart. So that it seems that he has been my brother for a long time. I do not feel any more this strange smell which was in here nor this weight on my back. Here, there was a commission directed against the human interests, against the children’s interests and against the family’s interests. Now this commission is on the right path Congratulations, Feliciano (“I AM one of Feliciano’s soldiers”, affirms the deputy Jair Bolsonaro *GI*, March 27<sup>th</sup> 2013).



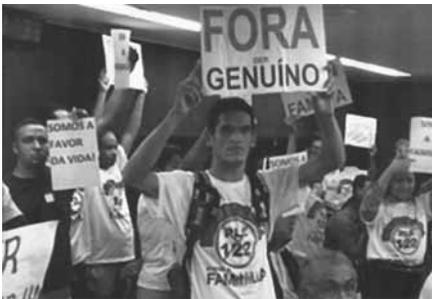
**Figure 4.** Public protests against the deputy Marco Feliciano.<sup>5</sup>

Sources: <http://agenciabrasil.abc.com.br>; <http://fotografia.folha.uol.com.br>

<sup>5</sup> Secular State is a conquest!!!! / No to the fundamentalist retrogression

In the field of the churches, the pastor Silas Malafaia, known through mediatic polemics since the presidential campaign of 2010, when he argued with Dilma Rousseff, whom he classified as the promoter of homosexuality and abortion, he joined the ranks of the deputy Feliciano and he became his defender and collaborator since the beginning of the controversy about the presidency of the CDHM.

These alliances produced effect on the quality of Marco Feliciano's discourse. The benefits provided by the approximation to more experienced leaders became evident in the changes in the deputy's discourse, such as "I only get out of the presidency of CDH as a dead man" into "I only get out of the presidency of the CDH if the deputies who are condemned by the mensalão trial [mensalão: big monthly payment, the biggest corruption case in Brazilian history], José Genoíno and João Paulo Cunha [guilty of vote-buying in Congress], both members of the PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores [Workers' Party], leave the Comissão de Constituição e Justiça [Committee on Constitution and Justice]". With this the deputy succeeded in gaining the sympathy of sectors of the opposition to the federal government and to the PT, that enhanced widely the coverage of the trial of the Superior Tribunal de Justiça [Superior Court of Justice], who, although they revealed that they did not support his name in the presidency of the CDHM, demanded "the head" of the sentenced politicians. From then on, pro-deputy Marco Feliciano demonstrators began to show themselves publicly.



**Figure 5.** Pro-Marco Feliciano demonstrators show themselves.<sup>6</sup>  
Source: Portal G1 ([www.g1.globo.com](http://www.g1.globo.com))

<sup>6</sup> Out Genuíno!

## **Enemies, a component of the evangelical imaginary**

Armies need enemies. The theology of a warrior and bellicose God was always present in the fundamentalist formation of the Brazilian evangelicals and it composed their imaginary and created the necessity of the identification of enemies to be combated. Historically, the Roman Catholic church was always identified as such and it was always combated not only in the symbolic field, but also in the physico-geographical field. In the same way, the Afro-Brazilian religions also occupy this space, especially in the imaginary of the Pentecostal groups (CUNHA, 2012).

Periodically, these “enemies”, restricted to the religious field, lose strength when they renew themselves, as it has been the case of the Catholic Church, since the 1960s, or when others appear, that bring greater threats. It is like this that the communists were interpreted during the period of the Cold War in the world and of the military dictatorship. There is also an imaginary imperative to update the fights, when the insistence in determined groups leads to an attrition of the war. During the process of the Brazilian re-democratisation in the 1980s, the space that was being conquered by the Partido dos Trabalhadores [Workers’ Party], that was interpreted as the real representative of the communist danger, was recognised as a threat and the evangelical campaigns against the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) reverberated in a religious way what was exhibited in the trenches of politics (BORGES, 2007).

With the weakening of the communist ideal in the 1990s and with the advent of the PT to national power with the support of the very evangelicals, the strength of the imaginary constructions of the United States intensely present in the news media opened space to the attention drawn to the Islamic threat and there was some space among evangelicals in Brazil for the discourses of the fight against Islam. Nonetheless, since this threat is quite distant from the Brazilian reality – such a dangerous enemy is not configured in this country –, the imperative to update the fights appears once more. Neither Catholicism, nor communism, nor Islamism. Who would configure himself as the new enemy? This time, an

enemy against religion and its principles, against the bible, against God, against Brazil and the families: homosexuality.

Marco Feliciano's declarations in the news media well express this bellicose spirit:

"It is such a rotten topic! Each time one speaks about sex between people of the same sex nobody wants to put his hand, because it is rotten. Therefore, a group of 2% of the population – the gays – succeeds in rising and oppressing a nation of 90% Christians, among Catholics and evangelicals, and even people who have no religion, but who care of the family's well-being, of the normal course of things" (Rede Brasil Atual, 1/3/2013).

"There is a dictatorship called [...] 'gayist'. They want to impose their lifestyle and their condition upon me. And they fight against my freedom of thought and of expression. They fight for their sexual freedom. But before their sexual freedom, which is secondary, my intellectual freedom must be allowed. My freedom of expression. I am able to think. If they take away my capacity to think, I do not live. I vegetate and die." (TRANSCRIPTION of Marco Feliciano's interview to Folha de São Paulo and UOL, Folha de São Paulo On-Line, April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2013).

Consequence of the election of enemies and of combating them is the discourse that there is a persecution on the part of whom is the opposite, promoted by the major enemy of God, Satan. This idea is clearly present in Feliciano's affirmations in the media, such as: "I die, but I do not abandon my faith"; "The situation is getting very strange dimensions. It is frightening, I feel persecuted like that Cuban woman. What is her name? Yoani Sánchez"; "If the question is to shout, there is a population who knows what a shout is. We (evangelicals) know what the power of our faith is".

The insistence of the news media in emphasising the war between Feliciano and the homosexuals, with the "enemy" side represented by a deputy, in the same condition than of the first, Jean Wyllys (PSOL/RJ), activist of the LGBT movement, only reinforced the reconstruction of the evangelical imaginary of the war against enemies and of the subsequent persecution. This generated various demonstrations of support to Feliciano among evangelicals of the most different segments and actions such as the

Convenção Geral das Assembleias de Deus [General Convention of the Assemblies of God] in Brazil (CGADB), held in Brasília in April 2013, that approved a motion of support to Feliciano, unanimously passed in symbolic vote. Feliciano thanked for the support and said that “there had never been a commission with so much prayer. The pastors are praying for my life and for the commission. We will win this battle” (CGADB approves motion of support to Marco Feliciano. CPAD News, April 10<sup>th</sup> 2013).

There is still an explosion of posts of support on the digital media, especially on the social networks, even an “Urgent Campaign Marco Feliciano president of Brazil”, the text says and there is a propagation of standardised comments: “I am a Christian, in favour of democracy, life and of the Brazilian family. Marco Feliciano represents me”.

Silas Malafaia’s declaration to Folha de São Paulo [newspaper of the city of São Paulo] about the repercussion of the case among the evangelicals and sympathisers well reflects this spirit: “I want to thank the gay movement. The more time they lose with Feliciano, the bigger the evangelical parliamentary group will be in 2014” (FELICIANO will receive the double number of votes in 2014, Silas Malafaia foresees. Folha de São Paulo On-Line, 7 abr. 2013).

### **Visibility war**

Part of the strategies in the framework of the politico-ideological disputes based upon the confrontation with the symbolically established enemies is to create a “war” in order to gain visibility, which commonly involves numbers and media exposure. This war was already explicit in the competition between the leaders of the Marcha para Jesus [March for Jesus], held in Rio de Janeiro and of the Parada do Orgulho Gay [Gay Pride Parade], held in São Paulo. The pastor Silas Malafaia manifested himself in the news media to ironically discourse against the large numbers of the Gay Parade propagated in reports (about one million), and he indicated that the Instituto Datafolha [polling institute of Folha de S. Paulo] estimated quite minor numbers, about 200,000. The leader of the Brasília Demonstration said in a provocative way at the end of his discourse

during the event: “I want to see the gay movement putting 30,000 people here in the middle of the week” or on Twitter:



Figure 6. Competition for numbers.<sup>7</sup>

Another strategy of the rhetoric which nourishes the construction of the enemy imaginary is to reinforce the idea of persecution with arguments such as “they want to silence us” or “they do not give us the same value they give them [the enemies]” or “look how many allied against us”. And this practice was widely identified in discourses of supporters of the Brasília Demonstration by means of blogs and of the social networks, alleging the small or almost inexistent coverage of the news media of the evangelicals’ event, differently from the wide coverage of the Gay Parade:



Figure 7. Persecution rhetoric.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>The sons of darkness die of envy of God’s people. Which is the social group that puts such a crowd on the streets on a weekday? / If it were a demonstration of gays the number would be 1MILLION people, we don’t need lies, we are satisfied with the truth. / The last gay demonstration in Brasília during the week was against homophobia. TOTAL OF PARTICIPANTS 3,000 PEOPLE, what do they want to say? Kkkk. (laughter)

<sup>8</sup>When the media militates Democracy ends. What this article does with the @PastorMalafaia is a crime! estadoa.

This dispute was given new outlines during the Pope Francisco's visit to Brazil, in July 2013. On the digital social networks the federal deputy and pastor Marco Feliciano and the pastor Silas Malafaia published criticisms of the predominant coverage on the TV screens, they denounced the disadvantageous way in which the evangelicals were treated, with a discourse which sets the evangelicals once more like competitors with advantage through the hegemony of the religious field.



Figure 8. Persecution rhetoric.<sup>9</sup>

co.br/noticias/nacio... See conversation / Read and comment the article by Reinaldo Azevedo. Evangelicals take the place but they are banished from the news programme / *Veja*. abril.com.br/blog/reinaldo/... [*Veja*: the largest newsweekly magazine published by Abril] / *Estadão* [the newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*] publishes that I said that homo-affective union is a crime. LIES! Read and comment eastdao.com.br/noticiasnacio....

<sup>9</sup> The PM – Polícia Militar [Military Police] is amnesia-stricken. They cannot count. The amnesia will disappear at the next evangelical event. The press will also be cured and will ask the PM. / Interesting > evangelical event the press asks the PM for the number of participants. At the pope's event [they ask] the organisers I must kkkkk (= laughter) / Read in Folha de S. Paulo what I already knew > datafolha contradicts the jmj [reference to the Jornada Mundial da Juventude- World Youth Day] at most 1, 2 million people at Copacabana. / The only country in the world, where the 3 last popes were, was Brazil. And it is we who are worried? Let me laugh a little bit kkkkkk / Look at our preoccupation > according to the IBGE – Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] in 2020, not we, the evangelicals, will be the majority in Brazil. How we are worried, let me kkkkkk (= laughter) Holiness for the evangelicals is the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing beyond. / Another joke > evangelicals with repression because of the Pope? Who is worried about whom? The Vatican with the growth of the evangelical Church.

These are illustrative frames which explain the dispute climate and the imaginary of enmities and persecution that compose the religious and mediatic fields.

### **Conclusive observations: a paradigm in the relationship media-religion**

The Marco Feliciano case can be considered a paradigm since it is the first time in history that the evangelicals in Brazil set themselves as a block organically articulated, with a defined thematic project: the defence of the family. The case extended over the year 2013 not only in the population's political demonstrations in the streets which marked the month of June 2013 in Brazil, but also in the religious marches organised by evangelicals all over Brazil, denominated March for Jesus (in May and in June, and in the *Marcha pela Família e pela Liberdade de Expressão* [March for the Family and for the Freedom of Expression], in Brasília, in June, in front of the Congresso Nacional [National Congress], led by pastor Silas Malafaia. Votes of legislative bills in the Congress relative to sexual rights have re-inflamed the disputes (AFTER protests, gay cure is temporarily laid aside, Senate in the media, July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2013).

It is a story which is still going on, without conclusive indicatives, the consequences of which must be followed and studied. As it was possible to describe by means of the exploratory study we present here, the media as imaginary technologies had intense interaction with the case, and they potencialised polarisations and imaginary reconstructions. The deputy Feliciano was interviewed by all the important newspapers and he already participated in the most varied entertainment programmes – from talk-shows to games. It is clear that the newspapers do not despise the dimension of the controversies related to the case, added to the attractive question of homosexuality, which deals with human imaginaries, emotions and passions and exhibits the celebrities' intimate life, such as the revelation of the singer's Daniela Mercury's sexual option, which came to the surface in the trail of this story, drinking from imaginary sources in order to nourish imaginaries, as Maffesoli indicates it. The so-

ciologist still emphasises that the media, as imaginary technologies, give shape to what exists in the minds. This is the identifiable phenomenon in the Marco Feliciano case.

All this represents transformations in the relationship between media and religion, with political effects. These transformations deserve to be monitored and clarified, when we consider the complexity of the social relationships, especially as far as religion is concerned; and they must be potentialised in election periods.

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