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Subversive, Mother, Killjoy: Sexism against Dilma Rousseff and the Social Imaginary of Brazil's Rightward Turn

On August 31, 2016, Dilma Rousseff, Brazil's first female president and second consecutive president of the left-wing Worker's Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT), was removed from office following impeachment proceedings. Following her election in 2010, Rousseff's tenure saw intense social upheaval and political polarization—beginning with mass protests against cost-of-living increases in 2013 and subsequent movements against corruption, World Cup spending, and eventually protests for and against her removal. To impeachment supporters, Rousseff's removal represented success for Brazilian democracy—Rousseff was removed via legal procedures, without military intervention, and in the name of transparent governance. To opponents of impeachment (both affiliates of the PT and its left-wing critics), Rousseff's removal was a parliamentary coup. Rousseff was tried for malfeasance in office for delaying repayments to the central bank—a common budgeting maneuver done by her predecessors (although increasingly used by Rousseff during an economic downturn). Although she had never been accused of taking bribes, many key congressional players who impeached and removed her were under investigation at the time of her impeachment, and some have subsequently been convicted. Rousseff reiterated her argument with the slogan “impeachment without a high crime is a coup.” She repeated the phrase on television and in press conferences so often that her supportive audiences could finish the sentence at rallies.

On the one hand, the challenged legitimacy of Rousseff's removal is central to the question of whether some of the gains toward greater democratic government that Brazil has made in its postdictatorship (1985–) period have been wiped away. On the other hand, the technicalities of the case obscure the broader issue on which analysts on the left and the right agree: Brazil's political, social, and cultural rightward turn. Rousseff's impeachment was made possible by her slim margin of victory in 2014 alongside the most conservative congress elected since Brazil's military dictatorship (1964–85).

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PT Congresswoman Erika Cokay famously dubbed this congress the bovine, bullets, and Bible caucus, representing an alliance between agroindustrialists, law-and-order conservatives, and Evangelical Christian “pro-family” leaders, respectively. As anti-Rousseff street protests also emerged in early 2015, researchers conducting crowd surveys began to identify a social phenomenon called *antipetismo* (hatred of the PT). Protesters reported that their largest complaint was not around a particular issue but around the PT itself (see Telles 2015). As Rousseff was the PT’s president during this time, much of the conservative movement congealed by vilifying her, and the inevitable sexism that followed shaded the discursive and affective logics of Brazil’s rightward turn.

In addition to the rightward shift in Brazilian state and society, sexism was clearly woven through Rousseff’s tenure and her removal from office. Rousseff suffered the double binds and constraining factors of women in power. Both admirers and foes of her predecessor, Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva, regarded Rousseff as “Lula in a skirt” and expected her to be a placeholder until he could stand for election again (Chalhoub et al. 2017). Before her candidacy, Rousseff elected to get plastic surgery and have consultants work on her public image. She tried to inaugurate her title as *presidenta* (female gendered) instead of *presidente* (neutral/masculine gendered), but it didn’t catch on. In the mass protests that called for Rousseff’s impeachment and garnered media attention, it was not unusual to see Rousseff referred to as a *vagabunda comunista* (communist tramp), as a cow or a donkey, or with hashtags such as #tchauquerida (bye darling!) or #calabocadilma (shut up, Dilma!). Rousseff herself often complained, “I was described as *uma mulher dura* (a hard woman), and I always said that I was a tough woman in the midst of *homens meiguíssimos* (the most charming, docile men)” (GI 2016). The insults levied against Rousseff, and her own characterization of herself as a hard woman among soft men, point to skewed representations of Rousseff’s personality and leadership style.

Omar Encarnación argues that Rousseff confronted a “retro-macho” politics, an enduring legacy of Latin American big-man authoritarianism (2017, 82). Yet patriarchy also worked in more circuitous fashions. Phrases like *vagabunda comunista* drew from a deep cosmology of Brazilian moral codes stacked upon one another like palimpsests: inquisition ideals about moral and sinning persons, eugenic discourses on the racializing inferiority of the tropics, anticommunist theories of sexual subversion, and contemporary anxieties about criminality.¹ This lexicon offered competing ideas of

¹ See Stepan (1992), Borges (1993), Caldeira (2000), Caulfield (2000), and Cowan (2014).

femininity that could be opportunistically attached to evaluations of Rousseff across different situations. By describing her antagonists as charming/docile men, Rousseff satirized a style of wily masculinity that allowed opponents to maneuver toward self-serving and perhaps conspiratorial ends without judgment or consequence. Far from the macho figure normally contemplated by authoritarianism, charming/docile men suggest a different, insidious manifestation of patriarchal power. Dain Borges (1992) describes Latin American authoritarianism as equal parts Machiavellian, Rabelaisian, and bureaucratic. Opposing itself to the effervescence of charismatic populism, Latin American authoritarianism presents itself as stern and respectable, preferring to conduct its violence discreetly.

Impeachment analyses focus on the June 2013 mass protests as an inaugural event of political polarization and instability that ultimately ended in the August 2016 removal of Dilma Rousseff and the end of thirteen years of the PT government. Except, perhaps, when considering increasing Evangelical opposition to reproductive and sexual minority rights, most analyses see gender as secondary to Brazil's rightward shift or acknowledge sexism primarily as a personal affront that Rousseff had to suffer. This article intervenes in these dominant, interrelated narratives. First, it describes a longer rightward turn as (at least) coextensive with Rousseff's rise to power, and it assesses the abortion and same-sex marriage debates that emerged during Rousseff's first presidential campaign as part of this conservative shift. Second, it uses sexism against Rousseff as an analytic to understand Brazil's rightward turn. The argument here is not that sexism was the determining factor in Rousseff's removal but rather that sexism catalyzed deep conservative cosmologies that allowed a cultural space for Brazil's rightward turn. I consider sexism here as personal against Rousseff but also as pedagogic. Instances of sexism announced a political agenda and showed others how to enact that agenda.

Gender comportment has been viewed as one of the major factors in creating a well-ordered traditional Brazilian society. Traditional mores have their background in the legal protection of honor but today form more of a set of everyday discourses and practices rather than a juridical edict (Caulfield 2000). As president, Rousseff challenged traditional values in her presentation of female power, in her biographical legacy as a resister to the dictatorship, and also in her continuation of development policies to redistribute wealth in Brazil. For the conservative movement opposed to the PT coalition in power, sexism against Rousseff catalyzed multiple facets of traditionalism, all of which might be woven together promiscuously in a narrative of the Left as incompetent, corrupt, licentious, and communist all at once. Sexism becomes a tool for analysis because we are not examining Rousseff

but rather the public figure and media caricature she was made out to be. More than cataloging slights and double standards, interpreting the caricature offers a reading into conservative thought.

This article is part of a collective attempt to reconstruct the events of the very recent past in order to understand the ascendancy of conservative forces in Brazil's political system. It reads together a heterodox set of events, circulating aesthetics, and journalistic and editorial assessments, a zone described by anthropologists as public culture (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1988). My understanding of events is situated in ethnographic fieldwork with LGBT activists in São Paulo from 2011 to March 2013 in the first years of the Rousseff administration, through which I followed media events and public debates in print and broadcast journalism and through social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter. Soon after I left São Paulo, events and political discourses regarding Rousseff changed in the context of the June 2013 protests. Beginning in 2013, I followed journalistic and public intellectual analysis of the political situation leading to impeachment, through which debates about Brazil's conservative turn have proliferated. Is the conservative turn, for instance, the ascendance of the traditional Evangelical family, a resurgence of military-backed authoritarianism, or a return to the governance of neoliberal elites from which the PT government was only a temporary break? These are questions that many Brazilians on the left are still trying to answer.

The events that led to Rousseff's removal from office were multiple and represented a "play without an author, a kind of improvised theatre" (Santos and Guarnieri 2016, 490). And yet, overlapping conservative tropes lent this improvisation a consistent theme and direction. As crises unfold in real time, participants and witnesses become the first chroniclers, attempting to find narratives that make unprecedented events recognizable. Lauren Berlant (2017) calls these attempts "genre flailing," the frantic borrowing of previous codes that are made to make sense. As a contradictory bundle of unspoken expectations, explicit discourses of difference, and performative repetitions, gender is a mutable contact zone where genre flailings can find endless source material. Gender, and more specifically sexism, function here as both cultural objects and codes available for analysis (Scott 1986, Ahmed 2015). In the case of Rousseff's removal from office, actors borrowed different moral discourses that used her femininity as a weapon to prove her inadequacy for office. One source of this mutability, however, was that the docile, charming men who protagonized this improvised play were always permitted to flail upward, remixing tired cultural stereotypes into new compelling reasons for Rousseff's removal.

This article maps the genre flailings of Brazil's conservative turn by presenting three archetypes by which Rousseff was caricaturized—as subversive, mother, and killjoy. Rousseff's biography as a participant in the underground resistance to Brazil's military dictatorship became a flashpoint for contemporary debates on the legacy of the dictatorship and the shape of present democracy. Conservatives' over-the-top rhetoric branding of Rousseff as a subversive tapped into cultural narratives regarding sexual subversives that fueled and framed misogynist vitriol against her. The second section tracks overlapping and conflicting kinship metaphors that circulated during Rousseff's first election in 2010. Rousseff's election drew heavily on the success of PT social welfare programs like *Bolsa Família* (family allowance) that reached approximately 11 million families and contributed to considerable poverty reduction in Brazil. This ostensibly profamily policy came into conflict with a growing Evangelical base that also used the language of the family as proxy for opposing reproductive and LGBT rights. The Rousseff campaign's deliberately crafted maternal language was caught in the middle of this ideological struggle to define family politics. A third section examines impeachment, the question of evidence, and attendant discourses of competency and corruption. Rousseff defended herself by highlighting her democratic legitimacy and the speciousness of the charges against her. As her accusers joyfully celebrated her impeachment and studiously avoided the facts of the case, Rousseff's sober insistence on the rule of law figures her as a feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2010). It is the Right's capacity to turn all of Rousseff's defenders into killjoys, I argue, that structures the meta-debate about evidence and the resulting consequences for democratic legitimacy.

***Panelaços* and #*calaboca*: Changing symbolisms of misogyny and feminist dissent**

On the evening of March 8, 2015, International Women's Day, Rousseff addressed the Brazilian public about government measures to mitigate a deepening economic recession. Addressing Brazilian women, Rousseff relayed: "No one is better suited to profoundly feel the moment in which we currently live than a mother, a homemaker, a woman worker or a female executive" (*Folha de São Paulo* 2015). During her twelve-minute broadcast, protestors in at least twelve cities began banging pots and pans from their apartment balconies, performing a *panelaço*—pot-banging protests traditionally employed in South America to register dissatisfaction with the government. Calling the protests gourmet pot banging (*panelaço gourmet*), critics

on social media lambasted the fact that these protests appeared to take place in upper-middle-class neighborhoods of major Brazilian cities.² One popular political cartoon portrayed a rich, white woman in pearls leaving instructions for her black maid to clean the pots and then leave them out for the protest.³ Nevertheless, pot banging continued periodically throughout 2015 and 2016 when Rousseff or Lula appeared on national television. Alongside street protests, they consistently reinvigorated opposition to her presidency from a large, organized, and vocal part of the Brazilian population.

Using household items in what is recognized in Latin America as a traditional women's protest to call for the ouster of Brazil's first female president on International Women's Day (no less) shows how the popular movement opposing Rousseff wove together contradictory symbols of femininity. Since the 1971 "March of the Empty Pots and Pans" against Salvador Allende's socialist government in Chile, pot banging has symbolized an austere feminine morality that stood outside the express realm of politics. Pot banging emanates from the home and makes implicit reference to the lack of resources within the household (Baldez 2002). Demonstrating its malleability across the political spectrum, pot-banging protests reappeared in Chile against Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship, during the neoliberalism-induced 2001 fiscal meltdown in Argentina, and opposing the socialist Maduro government in Venezuela in 2014, among other instances. Pot banging evolved into a general display of popular sovereignty practiced by both women and men but still references disquiet in the household that serves as an analogy for unrest in the nation. But the sustained pot banging then directed at a female head of state transformed its symbolism. Brazilian pot banging was directed toward the television and specifically against the televised image of Rousseff or the sound of her voice. Their timing during Rousseff's televised speeches symbolically drowned out Rousseff's voice and silenced her (Damazio 2016).

The social meanings of *panelaços* against Rousseff were peculiar not only because of their target but also because of the transformed communicative and aesthetic associations of pot banging. The Chilean pot-banging protests against Pinochet, for instance, took place under a police state with strong censorship practices. Some of the first anti-Pinochet pot banging served as a means of communication as well as a protest, where citizens could advertise

² For social media examples describing gourmet pot banging, see <https://www.terra.com.br/noticias/brasil/politica/internautas-defendem-dilma-de-panelaco-gourmet,bca0d6e32befb410VgnVCM5000009ecceb0aRCRD.html>.

³ Image available at <http://carcara-ivab.blogspot.com/2015/03/panelaco-foi-panelinha.html>.

to one another their dissent from the safety and anonymity of their homes (see Dorfman 1986). Pot banging against Rousseff, however, was already organized online. The first protests used the popular encrypted social media platform Whatsapp and caught both the traditional media and the Rousseff government by surprise (Mendoza 2015). Their continued online presence tended to be more spectacular than communicative. Conservative magazine *Veja* published a very simple webpage where viewers could recreate their own *panelaço* from their browser by clicking a play button and hearing the sound of banging pots (2015). Pot banging thus lost its earlier function as a form of popular communication and entered a different media and urban landscape.

Pot banging shows how the symbolism of popular protest, domestic sovereignty, female empowerment, and democratic action figuratively transformed around the movement to remove Rousseff. My first experience with the *panelaços* occurred while I was walking in the early evening in May 2015 in the upper-middle-class neighborhood of Pompeia in São Paulo. I was not tapped into the social networks through which they were being coordinated, and the almost instantaneous pot banging and car honking surprised and overwhelmed me. There was no escaping the cacophony. Interpreted as a protest to silence Rousseff, pot banging can be compared to the popular conservative hashtag #calabocadilma (shut up, Dilma!). One marker of the anti-Dilma protests was that they wanted all dissenters to shut up. Anti-Rousseff protesters wore the national colors of green and yellow and harassed people on the street wearing red, associated with the Worker's Party. In short, they policed who did and did not belong to the nation. Part of the conservative *ressentiment* has been a class-based and racial backlash to the social integration of poor and working-class beneficiaries of PT development policies as well as the PT's human rights policies around gender and sexuality (Fortes 2016). PT presidents Lula (a populist union leader originally from the poor Northeast region whom philosopher and antiracist activist Sueli Carneiro has described as culturally "not black but not white"; in Chalhoub et al. 2017) and Rousseff (a white, middle-class, divorced mother and a militant jailed for her opposition to the dictatorship) came to be the primary targets of this backlash. Sexism against Rousseff became one of the primary ways to communicate that she, and by proxy her supporters, didn't belong to the nation.

Subversive youth

Consistent protests, federal corruption investigations, and an economic crisis created the cultural context for Rousseff's weakening popularity. Early into

her second term, the movement to impeach Rousseff emerged through a set of diverse talking points, as opposition to social welfare redistribution, fear of communism, misogynistic descriptions of the president, and fantasies around her punishment often appeared in right-wing protests against Rousseff's government (Santos 2017). Consider this description of Rousseff recorded by Aaron Ansell (2017): "She's totally corrupt. Totally dirty. Do you know that right here in Passerinho [in the state of Piauí], many people get *Bolsa Família* who don't need it? She's a dyke (*sapatona*). She's an assassin, a terrorist. The military men even put her in prison. She's a communist. I'll never vote for that dyke. You can throw her in jail." Drawing on linguistic anthropology, Ansell suggests that the combination of these derogatory and accusatory descriptions of Rousseff constitutes a "network of mutual validation," where the combination of terms creates an interrelation (between corruption, lesbianism, terrorism, and communism), generating its own form of logical sequence and veracity. Misogynistic descriptions depreciated her dignity, but they did more than this. Sexism formed cognitive and affective glue between accusations.

What Ansell calls the "network of mutual validation" between accusations relies on long-standing cosmologies of Brazilian conservative thought. Specifically, Rousseff's biography as a participant in the underground struggle against Brazil's military dictatorship has perturbed right-wing factions since she became a public figure. As a teenager, Rousseff participated in militant groups that engaged in various illegal acts of resistance. In 1970, she was arrested by the military regime and imprisoned for three years, during which time she described enduring physical torture and interrogation. After her release, Rousseff earned a degree in economics and entered local politics. In 2003, she joined Lula's administration as minister of energy, then became his chief of staff, and eventually emerged as his official pick to succeed him in office. As she became a well-known political figure, Rousseff was repeatedly queried about her past involvement in the underground resistance. Her experience as a political prisoner figured centrally in her administration, and in 2012, Brazil established a long-overdue truth commission to amass official records and testimonies of those imprisoned, tortured, and disappeared during the dictatorship.

Rousseff's participation in the underground resistance served as a flashpoint for ideological disputes between the Left and the Right. These disputes ultimately touched upon unresolved historical memory around the military dictatorship, but they also centered Rousseff's moral character as a continuing issue. During her 2010 presidential campaign, mainstream conservative magazines published biographies that highlighted Rousseff's participation in antidictatorship activities. In August 2010, *Época* magazine published

documents from Rousseff's police record in archives of the São Paulo Department of Political and Social Order (DOPS) with the provocative headline: "Dilma's Past: Unpublished Documents Show a History That She Doesn't Want to Remember." An adjoining article narrates Rousseff's entry into clandestine resistance groups using military court records, interviews with other antidictatorship activists, and a prepared response from the Rousseff campaign. The article ostensibly includes conflicting accounts, but it privileges the narrative of the military police files and presents Rousseff's activities within the narrative conventions that describe her as a subversive agent, reducing political resistance to youth rebellion and sexual license. Rousseff's antidictatorship activities are made to reflect a transitory lifestyle more than a political project. As the article recounts a young Rousseff attempting to evade police capture, she assumes aliases, uses fake documents, avoids her parents' house (because they don't know about her activities), teaches classes in Marxism, transports arms, and engineers secret encounters that the article boasts approximate the plots of spy movies. The Rousseff campaign, quoted in the updated article published online, responded with a rejoinder that the candidate never participated in armed struggle and was arrested on charges of subversion, a catchall category for any activity deemed dangerous to the military regime (Loyola, Silva, and Rocha 2010).

Portrayals of Rousseff as a subversive can be interpreted within the context of conservative imaginaries that have linked gender and sexual dissidence and youthful rebellion to political sedition. In particular, the military regime envisioned urban, middle-class youth as especially vulnerable to communist infiltration vis-à-vis sexual seduction and corruption. Women's liberation, pornography, and homosexuality were thus the targets of what Benjamin Cowan (2016) describes as countersubversive moralism or attempts to regulate gender roles and sexual behavior as a matter of national security. Although such anticommunist fervor might seem a relic, the language used to describe Rousseff in these biographical portrayals revives these tropes in very gendered terms. Thus, while Rousseff's participation in the underground resistance might be interpreted at first glance as placing Rousseff in the macho world of militancy (see Encarnación 2017), portrayals of Rousseff's past more often characterize her activism as a passionate, almost eroticized, youthful naïveté. Moreover, such portrayals of Rousseff's youthful subversion suggests that her past presents a permanent character flaw that makes her unfit for office.

Rousseff's past was presented as a character deficit in other arenas as well. In 2008, then-chief of staff Rousseff was called to testify at a routine Senate hearing. Before beginning his questions to Rousseff, Senator José

Agripino Maia referred to an interview where Rousseff described her experience of lying to military interrogators while imprisoned. Maia impugned that because Rousseff had lied while imprisoned, she might lie at the hearing. Rousseff's response was captured in a video that circulated virally on social media and late-night talk shows. Excerpts produced here show why it was so popular. Rousseff states:

Whatever comparison between the military dictatorship and the [current] Brazilian democracy can only emerge from one who does not value democracy. I was nineteen years old, I spent three years in jail, and I was barbarically tortured, Senator. And whoever told the truth to their interrogators compromised the life of others in the same situation. [The truth] delivered their death sentence. I am proud of lying, Senator, because lying under torture isn't easy. Now, in a democracy, one speaks the truth. In front of torture, only those with courage, with dignity, lie. [applause] . . . We are humans, we have pain, and the seduction, the temptation to speak and tell the truth is immense, Senator. The pain is unbearable. You, sir, cannot imagine how unbearable it is. And so, I am proud of lying, immensely proud, because I saved comrades from the same torture or death. I was not obligated to tell the truth to the dictatorship. I was on one side, and they were on another. . . . Democracy, which permits us to sit here today and to converse, bears no resemblance [to dictatorship]. Here, this is a democratic dialogue. The opposition [parties] can ask me questions, and I can respond, because we are in equality of human and material conditions. We are not in a dialogue between my neck and a noose, Senator.⁴

Rousseff's response is remarkable in many respects. She undermines Maia's logic by reinforcing the false comparisons between authoritarian and democratic regimes. Maia uses the logic of subversion to paint whatever activity Rousseff participated in as illegal regardless of the legitimacy of the regime. His erasure of the political context under which Rousseff was imprisoned typifies a posture of what was once called Brazil's "ashamed right wing"—who accept the dictatorship as part of the Brazilian past while they distance themselves from the regime (see Pierucci 1987). Rousseff refuses this selective memory, one that has been used to paint her as a capricious youth with many names and many husbands and, here, as a liar. Rousseff further associates the question of truth with the regime of democracy but

⁴ Video from this speech is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tiyez01fLRs&t=112s&ab_channel=drosinha.

also relates it to the capacity of bodies to flourish and to feel pain. In the video, she gestures to herself and her body when she describes both her pride at withholding information from the dictatorship and the price she paid for that resistance. Her tone here moves from anger to vulnerability, as she recounts the fragility of the human body and the seduction to tell the truth in the face of dire consequences. Rousseff recontextualizes the falsehoods that she offered to her inquisitors as exactly this kind of care—she sacrificed herself to protect her comrades.

Rousseff repeated the themes of care and memory at the inauguration of the Brazilian truth commissions in 2012. In an emotion-filled speech, a teary-eyed Rousseff declared that the commission would provide “a truth based in fact for those who had lost friends and relatives and continue to suffer as if their loved ones died again every day.”⁵ Rousseff’s slow speech was punctuated by breaks in her own voice, sips of water, and thunderous applause. Her insistence on protecting her comrades in life and their memory in death harkens to the role women have taken up more generally in remembering disappeared and assassinated relatives during South American dictatorships. As the next section elaborates, displays of care were a part of Rousseff’s public persona that extended in unexpected ways in the midst of cultural debates on gender and sexuality.

Mother (economic development and Brazil’s “culture” wars)

Rousseff’s 2010 presidential election was notable in several respects. First, she was both Brazil’s first female president and the first president democratically elected from the same party as her predecessor. This meant that, under Rousseff’s direction, the PT would continue social welfare programs like *Bolsa Familia* that were a cornerstone of Brazil’s economic expansion in the previous decade (Sader 2011). Second, debates over the legalization of abortion and same-sex marriage emerged as hotly contested issues during her presidential campaign. International journalists interpreted the controversies over abortion and same-sex marriage and the rise of Evangelical political influence as a Brazilian culture war (see Romero 2011). This ideological shift, however, was more complicated than the culture-war metaphor would suggest, as long-standing definitions of human rights and the family were being renegotiated in the political sphere during Rousseff’s presidency. In the 2010 election, Rousseff’s campaign positioned PT development policies like *Bolsa Familia* as a politics centered around the Brazilian family. In

⁵ Video from this speech is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VF9BTTs-oJA&ab_channel=Rumoahepta7.

a growing antisex policy, Evangelical leaders positioned abortion, drug use, homosexuality, and transgender expression as enemies of the traditional Brazilian family. The ideological struggle to define the family was complicated by an added layer of kinship metaphors that framed Lula's symbolic transfer of power to Rousseff. Her 2010 presidential campaign portrayed Rousseff in the style of the Latin American "*supermadre*" (supermom), articulating policy positions in terms of affective care (Chaney [1979] 2014; Schwint-Bayer 2006). Evangelical leaders, in contrast, demanded that Rousseff declare what she felt personally about abortion. The kinship metaphors used to articulate Rousseff's policy positions regarding social welfare and reproductive and sexual minority rights show the ideological struggle to define the Brazilian family.

Rousseff leveraged Lula's programmatic and personal popularity as a means to electoral victory. During his term, the PT had raised approximately 20 million Brazilians from poverty with a number of social welfare and infrastructure-building programs. At the center of these programs was *Bolsa Familia*, a conditional cash transfer that pays a family income for each child enrolled in school. *Bolsa Familia* is ostensibly a poverty reduction program, but it has effects that intersect with gender in crucial ways. As Rousseff herself would point out in presidential speeches, 93 percent of recipients of *Bolsa Familia* are women (Jalalzai and dos Santos 2015). Moreover, *Bolsa Familia* centers the (paradigmatically heteronormative) family as the target of economic redistribution and mandates normative activities (like attending school) as the condition for payment (see Lavergne and Beserra 2016). In these ways, *Bolsa Familia* emphasizes familial relations and domestic caregiving as the mechanism of economic advancement.

As *Bolsa Familia* proved an extremely popular program with the PT's working-class base, Lula used this program for Brazilian families to connect to the Brazilian nation as family. And nationalist appeals to the family are often gendered, as family not only metonymically stands in for the nation but a healthy family reproduces the nation (McClintock 1993). Brazilian populist leaders such as Getulio Vargas in the 1930s and Lula in the 2000s often positioned their charismatic leadership in terms of father figures (Wolfe 2010), not only in order to establish a relationship with the people but also to position their political family. But how would Rousseff be incorporated into this symbolic logic, as a mother to the political family? The 2010 election was awash with comparisons between Rousseff and Lula that represented the connections positively or negatively depending on their ideological orientation. Conservative weekly magazines, for instance, often portrayed Rousseff in the role of pupil to Lula's schoolteacher, emphasizing the former's inexperience in electoral politics. PT-allied newspaper *Carta Capital*, in con-

trast, portrayed Lula and Rousseff as sharing the stage at rallies, in the guise of partnership (Santos and Romualdo 2017). The dynastic overtures were important to the symbolic legitimacy of Rousseff's election. Rousseff was divorced; she didn't appear publicly with a husband and only occasionally made appearances with her adult daughter. She had no male family ties to Brazil's political class, a point that figures strongly in feminist analyses of her election (see Jalalzai 2016). Lula also entered the political class without the help of family connections. With no kinship claims to the political system, Lula and Rousseff used kinship metaphors to express their transfer of leadership, thereby constructing symbolic power around both of their public images. Consistent allusion to fictive kinship ties fostered a public rhetoric that allowed Rousseff to move into the figural space as caretaker of the nation that Lula had first crafted for himself.

Lula often used folksy family aphorisms to communicate to the Brazilian public. In a discourse analysis of Lula's speeches running up to the 2010 elections, Teresinha Pires (2011) demonstrates how then-president Lula praised Rousseff's role in the Program for Urban Growth (Programa de Aceleração do Crescimento, or PAC), using imagery that transformed her bureaucratic acumen into motherly care. In one speech (quoted by Pires), Lula declared:

The other day, in Rio de Janeiro, I said that Dilma was the mother of the PAC. Why is she the mother of PAC? Because PAC is only successful because this woman, certainly, has paid more attention to PAC than to her own daughter. . . . When you have a daughter or son who reaches 14, 15 years old, they don't want to think about parents. We are old-timers, unhip, with the wrong taste in music and clothes, even friends. They [adolescents] want freedom. But PAC doesn't want freedom, it wants control, auditing, accompaniment. Because without that it won't work as well as it does. (Pires 2011, 141–42; translation mine)

Lula describes the PAC program as an unwieldy adolescent, one in which Rousseff invests time in order to care for it. The unwieldiness also works as a metaphor for the Brazilian nation in development. The process of rapid industrialization in underdeveloped regions might appear haphazard, but Rousseff was portrayed as the working woman for the job. Here the rhetoric of maternal care intersperses with the functions of a bureaucrat (“control, auditing, and accompaniment”), another way Rousseff was often portrayed.

Somewhat paradoxically, the kinship rhetoric that Lula and Rousseff used to present Rousseff's motherly credentials and figuratively link her to Lula and the Brazilian people stood in contrast to growing political po-

larization around the family. Evangelical leaders opposed abortion, same-sex marriage, and marijuana legalization, in contrast to the record of the PT in supporting what it contended were human rights platforms advanced by the feminist and sexual minority constituencies in its delegation. During the election, Rousseff at first endeavored to present her feminist pro-development platform as a family politics around which she and Evangelicals might find common ground. As debates around abortion flared during the campaign's last months, Rousseff was forced to shift the policies that she defined as family politics. This Evangelical challenge to Rousseff's family credentials upset the image of maternal developmentalism that Rousseff had crafted. The abortion debates also rearticulated the ideological divide over gender and sexuality in Brazilian politics, with Brazil's first woman president as its increasingly reluctant arbiter.

Abortion arose as a topic in the 2010 presidential debates within a hardening Evangelical opposition to the PT's human rights agenda. A pamphlet reproduced in a study by Jair de Souza Ramos (2012) shows how Evangelicals urged their constituents to oppose the Lula government's Third National Human Rights Program (Programa Nacional de Direitos Humanos III, or PNDH-3). By "human rights," the pamphlet alleged, the PNDH-3 would permit "legalization of abortion up to the ninth month of pregnancy," "approval of marriage between people of the same sex," "liberation of the use of marijuana," "regularization of prostitution," "prohibition of the use of religious symbols," "adoption of children by homosexual persons," "censorship on the airwaves," and "the invasion of land and property, rural and urban."⁶ The linkage of these various issues as both "human rights" and "antifamily" demonstrates a congealing social conservative movement, strongly associated with Evangelical Christians, that was on the ascendance during Rousseff's first presidential campaign.

In the course of the presidential campaign, Rousseff released two public letters on the issue of abortion that revealed a transforming political stance. On August 23, 2010, the Rousseff campaign distributed a document titled *Carta ao povo de Deus* (letter to godly people), later republished in news sites across Brazil (*Folha de São Paulo* 2010a). Rousseff described what she argued was an interest in the well-being of Brazilian families that she shared with Evangelical communities. "The family is a bulwark [that ensures] a healthy society. The less structured family life is, the more chaotic society becomes." PT development programs like *Bolsa Família*, Rousseff con-

⁶ This refers to the Brazilian rural and urban landless movements *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (landless workers movement) and *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto* (homeless workers movement), which engage in an activist practice of occupying large-scale, absentee-owner lands.

tended, strengthened the cohesion of the Brazilian family. Rousseff noted the importance of churches of all denominations in this project of supporting family and society, but she drew a distinction between the private role of supporting families and the public function of the state to protect citizens' rights. Positioning her future government as a mediator, Rousseff stated that she would find "points of equilibrium on positions that involve ethical value and foundations [that are] often contradictory, such as abortion, family composition [i.e., adoption by LGBT parents] and affective [i.e., same-sex] unions." Rousseff's presentation as a mediator recapitulated Lula's earlier presentation of Rousseff as the stern mother providing discipline to irascible children, only this time the irascible children were not development projects but competing factions of a potential electoral coalition.

Rousseff's "Letter to Godly People" did not successfully woo Evangelical members of her electoral coalition, and by October, she was again preparing to release a message to the Brazilian public. On October 13, Rousseff met with a group of Evangelical pastors to get advice on the second letter, which would more directly address her positions on abortion, same-sex marriage, and religious freedom. Rousseff would also petition the pastors to spread the letter. Among her Evangelical allies, the letter was described as an attempt to curtail rumors that Rousseff was planning to legalize abortion once she entered office (Bonin 2010). On October 15, Rousseff published a second missive titled "Message from Dilma," articulating a six-point platform that contrasted starkly with her August letter (*Folha de São Paulo* 2010b). Rousseff declared that she, first, defended religious liberty; second, personally opposed abortion and defended the current laws banning the procedure; third, once in office would not take steps to propose new laws regarding abortion or other concerns surrounding family or free expression of religion; fourth, would revise the PNDH-3 human rights proposal in Congress so as not to conflict with family values; fifth, would exempt religious speech and action from proposed legislation banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity; and, finally, would continue to craft laws that focused on empowering families, such as existing PT programs like *Bolsa Família*. Rousseff's new rhetoric in the second letter signaled a policy realignment on gender and sexual freedoms (see also Caldwell 2017). As her support in Congress shrank, and she increasingly relied on Evangelical allies, so did her political appetite to take on issues of reproductive rights and sexual-minority representation, putting her squarely at odds with many of the social movements that had strong ties to the PT.

These ideological struggles to define the politics of the family came to shape much of Rousseff's policy around gender and sexuality. Her administration's capitulation to Evangelical politicians regarding reproductive and

sexual minority rights let down many of the feminist and LGBT activists who had supported her. Nevertheless, Rousseff also reframed PT economic development and social inclusion policies by highlighting the additional impact of development on poor women. Farida Jalalzai and Pedro G. dos Santos (2015) identify several policies that linked economic development and the empowerment of poor women. On March 8, 2012 (International Women's Day), Rousseff announced an executive order that designated women as the default owners of housing acquired through the low-interest loan program *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (my house, my life) in cases of divorce. On March 22, 2012, Rousseff announced a temporary executive order for a new program, *Rede Cegonha* (stork network), that would provide emergency infant care to poor and working mothers. A third program, *Brasil Carinhoso* (Brazil cares), solidified this the infant care initiative by providing spots in public child-care facilities for recipients of *Bolsa Família*. However, at the beginning of Rousseff's second administration in 2015, the government cut back on social welfare spending as a response to deepening budgetary shortfalls. The deployments of kinship surrounding Rousseff's election and presidency that mixed dynastic, populist, and profamily messaging offer a window into this tense ideological terrain.

President killjoy

On April 16, 2016, members of Brazil's lower chamber of Congress impeached Rousseff by a vote of 367 to 137. Some congresspersons brought their children to witness a "historic" day for Brazilian democracy. Proimpeachment members mimicked the colors and slogans of the anti-Rousseff protesters on the street, wearing the national colors green and yellow and chanting "*Tchau, querida!*" (Goodbye darling!). In debate, few of these members addressed the budgetary malfeasance charges against Rousseff. Joyfully swathed in family and nation, the exuberance of the anti-Rousseff bloc confirmed Rousseff's defenders' interpretation that impeachment was politically motivated and not legally justified. In the time between her impeachment (April 17) and her conviction (August 31), Rousseff gave high-profile speeches, including at the United Nations and Brazil's National Women's Conference; defended herself in a televised Brazilian Senate trial; and gave countless interviews to the national and international press. In these public appearances, Rousseff frequently addressed the same issues: the minutiae of the impeachment case, her handling of the economic crisis, "Operation Carwash" investigations into kickbacks and money laundering at the Brazilian national oil company Petrobras, and her personal honesty and fortitude. Her ongoing testimony shows how the question of evidence regard-

ing culpability was interwoven with the presentation of her character. Rousseff countered the conservative discourses that had portrayed her as sexually, politically, and ethically subversive with appeals to her competent management. Since her removal from office, Rousseff has described her impeachment and the subsequent imprisonment of Lula as “lawfare”—alleging that her opponents used constitutional and judicial mechanisms to achieve political ends rather than to apply the rule of law.⁷ Yet in the period before her removal, Rousseff defended herself by appealing to the rules of evidence. Presenting herself as a sober bureaucrat who plays by the rules among a cohort of enthused parliamentarians, Rousseff resembles Sara Ahmed’s figure of the feminist killjoy who becomes an obstacle to the enjoyment of the status quo (2010). The figure of the killjoy helps us understand Rousseff’s no-win situation in defending her conduct even as it was clear that the case against her was a pretext for her removal.

The impeachment presented a complicated constitutional case with many extraconstitutional factors, which can only be briefly summarized here. Rousseff was tried and removed from office for delaying payments to the central bank during her reelection campaign in 2014, which allowed for continued spending on social programs while making it appear on paper that the government was more solvent than it was. Supporters of her main challenger in that election, Aécio Neves, alleged that buoying government funding while running for reelection amounted to fraud, but this was only one of many legal challenges to the election that did not stand up in court. Upper-middle-class voters who had supported Neves continued to vent their frustration in the street, providing the backdrop for Rousseff’s deteriorating relationship with Congress. The gridlock between Congress and the president worsened the economic crisis, a posture Rousseff alleges was intentional. Eventually, the delayed payments reemerged as an impeachment charge. But there were technicalities. After her reelection, Rousseff could only be legally tried for actions taken under her current administration (beginning in 2015). In order for a presidential action to rise to an impeachable crime, the payments must have, first, violated the law; and, second, led to national instability. Rousseff argued that the charges her against did not meet these standards, that past administrations had conducted similar budgetary maneuvers, and that she had not enriched herself from the payment delays. But the most important argument against these charges was that they appeared to respond to the popular movement to remove Rousseff rather

⁷ For an example, see Rousseff (2018). For more on lawfare as a concept, see Comaroff and Comaroff (2006).

than to an actual action of malfeasance. Rousseff maintained that impeachment became both a convenient tool to fix systemic problems and a distraction to draw attention away from actual corruption and that Congress used impeachment essentially as a no-confidence vote in the Rousseff government.

Mass media coverage conflated impeachment with other ongoing events. First was the general unrest in the context of an economic crisis, regular street protest, and parliamentary gridlock. Second were the ongoing Operation Carwash federal investigations into bribery and money laundering at Petrobras, the state oil company. Operation Carwash has had several phases of its investigation, and it has arrested many high-profile politicians. Although Rousseff was minister of energy and a member of the Petrobras board during the time many of these corruption activities took place, she has not been implicated in any illegal activity. Narratives in support of impeachment nevertheless moved between these technically unrelated economic and political crises. Congresspersons tended to consider what Rousseff dismayingly called *o conjunto da obra* (the deed in its totality): that is, all of the factors affecting Rousseff's unpopularity rather than only the ones for which Rousseff should have been legally liable (Chalhoub et al. 2017). The cultural work that went into making Rousseff appear unfit for government drew on an additional set of conservative cultural assumptions about corruption and competency.

As I note above, the Right caricatured Rousseff as subversive, communist, lesbian, corrupt, and so on. "Corruption" is an important keyword that saturates Brazilian political discourse and has a moralist valence, much like "subversion." The old Brazilian adage, *rouba mas faz* (he steals, but he gets things done) encapsulates an attitude that all politicians are corrupt and little can be done about it. The political elite, however, have associated this status quo with a form of populist demagoguery, suggesting that corruption comes from tricking the populace to vote for things that sound good because they are too naive to understand the complicated, technocratic workings of good governance (Souza 2017). The moral discourse of corruption is marked by its contradistinction to competency, wherein corruption signals the lack of competency. *Competência* in Portuguese has a different connotation than its English cognate, where it can mean the *ability* to do something (i.e., capacity) as well as the recognized *permission* to do something (more akin to "jurisdiction" or "license" in English). Marilena Chauí (2014) describes Brazil's "ideology of competency" as a bureaucratic authoritarianism dressed up as managerial elitism, which has extended its particular brand of knowledge power across institutions, principally the university and the state. The rhetoric of *competência* creates an environment where intellectual

acumen appears to determine one's social merit, where perception of intellect is just a reflection on social status. If incompetence is not only the lack of proper expertise but overstepping one's social place, then corruption is not only a judgment about ethics but a judgment about belonging.

This competent/corrupt dyad has been weaponized against the PT and often merges seamlessly with the antipopulist animus against the working-class base. As this elite logic goes, the PT is corrupt because it purchases the votes of poor Brazilians through programs like *Bolsa Família*. High-profile corruption scandals like Operation Carwash and the *Mensalão* [big monthly payment] have involved multiple political parties but have been seen as emanating from the PT. (In the latter scandal, the Lula administration was caught paying members of Congress to vote for its social welfare reforms.) But the sense that Lula was irredeemably corrupt was heavily influenced by prejudice against him as a Northeasterner and labor leader without a formal education. The Southern middle class saw Lula as illegitimate because they could not contemplate how an uneducated man from the undeveloped Northeast had become president of Brazil nor how he was able to stay in power. They attributed his electoral victories to political clientalism, arguing that he had essentially bought poor people's votes through social welfare programs.

One irony of Rousseff's symbolic association with corruption and incompetence was that her rise to prominence was believed to be predicated on her image as an honest bureaucrat. Lula selected Rousseff as his successor because of her reputation as a no-nonsense administrator and because she had played no role in corruption scandals that had caught up other PT leaders. While not downplaying Rousseff's acumen, it is important to note how she fit the respectable white, middle-class mold that elite political leaders accepted as competent. Lula's team believed that Rousseff would be more accepted by Congress because she was perceived as more intellectual than Lula (Chalhoub et al. 2017, 55). But this is not what happened. As the conservative middle and upper classes grew increasingly frustrated with the PT, their belief in the party's illegitimacy (and thus corruption) grew. The logic of corruption transferred from Lula to Rousseff as its cultural markers were transformed. Lula was portrayed as folksy, while Rousseff was portrayed as high strung and erratic. Thus, when impeachment rested on the logic of the deed in its totality, part of this logic relied on Rousseff's characterization as a person.

On August 29, Rousseff addressed the Senate for a final defense of her presidency. The press had tabulated intended votes announced by senators, and it was expected that Rousseff would be removed from office. In her speech, Rousseff described the process of touring the country, to receive the affection of the Brazilian people but also to hear its criticisms and to admit

the inevitable mistakes. Her speech repeated the same points she had made at her public appearances during this time. Rousseff recounted the legitimacy of her 2014 reelection and its democratic mandate, her biography in the struggle against the dictatorship, her denunciations of the conservative forces that destabilized her government, and a reiteration that the charges against her were mere pretexts for her removal. Although she offered nothing in her defense that she hadn't already said repeatedly, Rousseff told her audience: "Don't expect from me the obsequious silence of cowards."

Rousseff's steadfast presentation as a bureaucrat presenting the facts might be read as a kind of killjoy performance. The killjoy impedes the enjoyment of others by failing to be in affective alignment; her inability to be happy spoils the happiness of others (Ahmed 2010, 65). When the killjoy points out a problem to others, people begin to treat her as the problem. At other times, killjoys and other disaffected subjects experience the force of going against hegemonic consensus as encountering institutional brick walls that only they can see (Ahmed 2012). Rousseff can be read as a killjoy in a few different ways. She was described as having a "lack of inclination to the political give-and-take (*toma-lá-dá-ca*) that is typical of political regimes where power is shared and fragmented" (Chalhoub et al. 2017, 56). Her refusal to conduct business as usual only increased under the political pressure to play along under Operation Carwash. Several aides to Rousseff, for instance, suggested that the impeachment charges were in retribution for her refusing to preemptively pardon key members of Congress from charges linked to the investigation (56). Rousseff's worsening political position was often attributed to her lacking the populist charisma that Lula possessed in keeping the PT coalition together, a charge associated with female politicians more generally and characteristic of double binds that female politicians face around expressiveness (Bordo 2018). But it was not her perceived incapacity to be personable that made her a killjoy. It was the fact that Rousseff continually returned to the fact that she shouldn't need to be charming to get the job done.

Reading Rousseff as a killjoy also reframes competing claims of evidence on the left and the right. Rousseff constantly maintained her innocence, that she did not steal or accept bribes, and that the charges against her were not impeachable offenses. If impeachment was really a pretense for the complex factors of Rousseff's ouster, however, the more she insisted on arguing the facts about impeachment, the more she exposed that her removal wasn't about the impeachment case. The more Rousseff proclaimed her own innocence, the more her innocence only served to impugn others' guilt. Ahmed suggests that the killjoy and other militant positions show how "positive and negative affects are distributed and how that distribution is pedagogic"

(2010, 162). Rousseff refused to play the game and thus exposed the game. Channeling Ahmed's logic, we might say that Rousseff's insistence on stopping the flow of business as usual helps us see how business usually flows in the first place. Ultimately, the figure of the feminist killjoy demonstrates the logic of Brazil's rightward turn, because defending Rousseff has turned her defenders into killjoys as well. Like Rousseff, the Left became stuck on the details of the case, the realpolitik of the forces, and the question of fairness. This "stuckness" proves the legitimacy of the Left's argument and the uselessness of being right.

Conclusion

After Rousseff's impeachment, Vice President Michel Temer from the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB) assumed office. From a realist political view, Rousseff's impeachment is a direct consequence of the PMDB leaving the PT alliance and forming a new coalition. Through impeachment, the PMDB gained the presidency, which it has never won by election. On the first day of his administration, Temer assembled an all-white, all-male cabinet. Meanwhile, a complicated case against Lula involving a condominium that his wife (now deceased) had put in an option to purchase landed the former president in jail. As the paper trail for conviction has been thin, Rousseff has called Lula's imprisonment the second phase of the coup. Tied up in court, Lula's imprisonment complicates the 2018 presidential elections, for which he is (at the time of this writing) the most popular candidate. In an election without Lula, many analysts predict that Congressman Jair Bolsonaro, who came to national notoriety through homophobic vitriol and who figures himself as a Brazilian Donald Trump, stands the best chance for election. Brazil's conservative turn moves forward in other ways as well. The conservative Congress passed a sweeping bill undoing workers' protections in place since the 1930s and was nearly successful with a similar measure on pension funds. There has been a flurry of proposals further limiting abortion access, repathologizing homosexuality, and removing references to gender in school curricula. And Temer's government has maintained an intermittent military occupation of many of Rio de Janeiro's favela neighborhoods. In March 2018, Marielle Franco, a black bisexual and leftist Rio city councilwoman who was an outspoken critic of the military occupation, was assassinated along with her driver in an unsolved murder case that has shook Brazil.

Alongside the confused removal of Honduran president Manuel Zelaya in 2009 and the twenty-four-hour impeachment of Paraguayan president Fernando Lugo in 2012, Rousseff's removal belongs to a new era of inde-

terminacy between democracy and antidemocratic practices in Latin America. The battle over terminology (impeachment or coup) itself presents new vocabularies and expectations for democracy in Latin America and elsewhere. Sexism within Rousseff's impeachment process offers an opportunity to examine how gender plays a key role in transforming these political categories. As the question of her tenure in office has linked issues of gender and sexuality to the consolidation of the Right, so too have these issues played an intertwined role in her impeachment. Sexism provided a framework to connect right-wing ideologies of corruption, subversion, and family values in the figure of Rousseff so as to distract from and confuse questions of popular sovereignty and the rule of law. As considered here, these conservative imaginaries have long histories. In an age of increasing democratic indeterminacy, they will mostly like have long futures as well.

Postscript

On September 29, 2018, massive feminist-led marches against then-presidential candidate Jair Bolsonaro were mounted across Brazil, using the hashtag #elenao (Not Him). Now elected, Bolsonaro embodies much of the right-wing cultural logic traced in this article. Making his congressional career through homophobic, racist, and misogynist publicity stunts, Bolsonaro famously dedicated his anti-Rousseff impeachment vote to Carlos Ustra, a military officer who pioneered the dictatorship's torture practices. In a sense, Bolsonaro's presidential victory clarifies the conservative trajectory that took place during Rousseff's presidency. Yet the feminist, queer/trans, black, and indigenous defiance of Bolsonaro also demonstrates a reaffirmed commitment to challenge the reactionary actions sure to come. "Not Him" might function as the antiauthoritarian, antipatriarchal corollary to the "Shut Up, Dilma!" protests against Rousseff. "Not Him" is a necessary rejection of the global rightward turn—not just against Bolsonaro but against all of his hyperbolically masculine authoritarian clones.

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