



Olavo de Carvalho and the rise of the Far Right

Olavo de Carvalho e a ascensão da extrema-direita

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Abstract: This article analyses Olavo de Carvalho's pathway and reflects on his role in advancing the Far-Right in Brazil. To this end, it discusses his trajectory and his strategies for spreading his positions, with an emphasis on the website *Mídia sem Máscaras (MSM)* (*Media without masks*). A proposed "cultural war" and the denunciation of the supposed "Gramsci-ist" influence are central elements of this process. Finally, the article approaches the relationship between Olavo de Carvalho and the Bolsonaro family and their influence within the current Brazilian government.

Keywords: Olavo de Carvalho. Far-Right. *Mídia sem Máscaras*. Bolsonarism. Cultural War.

Resumo: O artigo propõe analisar a trajetória de Olavo de Carvalho e refletir sobre seu papel no avanço da extrema-direita no Brasil. Para isto, aborda sua trajetória e as estratégias que utilizou para projetar publicamente suas posições, com destaque para o sítio eletrônico *Mídia sem Máscaras (MSM)*. A proposição de uma "guerra cultural" e a denúncia da suposta influência "gramscista" são elementos centrais deste processo. Finalmente, o artigo aborda a relação entre Olavo de Carvalho e a família Bolsonaro, assim como sua influência no atual governo brasileiro.

Palavras-Chave: Olavo de Carvalho. Extrema-Direita. *Mídia sem Máscaras*. Bolsonarismo. Guerra Cultural.

Submitted on: 30/1/2021. Revised on: 16/5/2021. Accepted on: 21/6/2021.

Introduction

Olavo de Carvalho has been nationally known since the late 1990s, having been a columnist for several high circulation newspapers and magazines. Until the election of Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018, however, academic studies on Carvalho's political, ideological, and cultural influence and the impacts of his work, which already had an impressive circulation, were relatively rare.¹ After the election and inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro, his visibility and influence became much greater, giving rise to a considerable volume of reports dealing with his influence within the federal government and his wide circle

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¹ The principal exception is Patschiki's Master's dissertation, defender in 2012, addressing the website *Mídia sem Máscaras (MSM)* and its importance for the projection of Olavo de Carvalho. The MSM is understood as the main private apparatus of hegemony used by Carvalho to publicly assert himself. Patschiki already categorised Carvalho as a fascist intellectual and understood that his perspective was to constitute a network of instruments that would underpin a fascist offensive.

of followers. In this context, it is imperative to understand the role played by Carvalho and how he projected himself as an intellectual with significant influence on politicians and Far-Right movements.

It is understandable that few researchers have been interested in investigating Carvalho's work. He is a self-declared philosopher who claims he dropped out of college because he had nothing to learn, who systematically uses insults and profanity as an argumentative resource, who has a habit of criminally prosecuting his critics,² who has a controversial pathway as a mystic and astrologer, who has been admitted to a psychiatric clinic, who has distanced himself from most of his former followers, who hunts bears as a pastime and who is noted for his extreme positions such as the refusal to admit human influence on climate change, not to mention absurd statements such as that “[...] Pepsi Cola is using cells from aborted fetuses as a sweetener in soft drinks” (CARVALHO, 2018a See note in the bibliography). In fact, it would be useless and fruitless to structure research to investigate “his intellectual contribution to Brazilian social thinking”, given the evident primarism of its manifestations. Even so, his broad influence justifies an attempt to understand how Carvalho publicly projected himself as an intellectual and how he built the instruments that supported this projection.

His outstanding role in the dissemination of a reactionary vision and his relationship with the Bolsonaro family has led to the expansion of critical investigations into his pathway, based on the recognition that “[...] his ideas must be taken seriously and this means that people interested in understanding the advance of radical rights should read his books [...]” (BIANCHI, 2018, not paginated), although not in order to refute his bizarre ideas, but to “[...] study and interpret the mechanisms by which these ideas were disseminated [...]” (BIANCHI, 2018, not paginated), that is, “[...] to understand why this mountain of errors seems consistent with its audience” (BIANCHI, 2018, not paginated). His ideas resonate because they provide simple answers to the fears of a petty bourgeoisie in crisis. As Bianchi points out that for this petty bourgeoisie, “Olavo de Carvalho presents a simple explanation for the fall: Marxists, feminists and gays have provoked the crisis of Christian civilization and pushed society to the abyss” (BIANCHI, 2018, not paginated). As Antonio Gramsci pointed out a century ago, “[...] there is in every country a stratum of the population - the petty and middle bourgeoisie - which considers it possible to solve these gigantic problems with machine guns and pistols. It is this stratum that feeds fascism, that provides its forces” (GRAMSCI, 2004, p. 46-47). To reach this audience, Carvalho used a variety of tools, using high circulation media and, principally, developing his own private hegemonic apparatus.

Gramscian reflection is fundamental to our analysis, especially regarding the categories of intellectualism, hegemony, and the private apparatus of hegemony. As Bianchi correctly identifies, it is precisely Gramsci's understanding of the intellectual as an organiser that allows Carvalho to be identified as a relevant intellectual, despite the “mountain of errors” present in his works. Gramsci distinguishes intellectuals into two groups: traditional intellectuals, who uncritically reproduce disconnected fragments from past ideologies, and organic intellectuals, who are aware of their role and act organically, linked to one of the fundamental social classes and placing themselves at their service. For an organic intellectual linked to the dominant class, what is relevant is not the originality of their theories, but their ability to

² In 2018, Carvalho began legal proceedings against his own daughter, Heloísa de Carvalho, in retaliation to the publication of an open letter in which she explained her break from her father (BRUZZA, 2018).

concretely influence the process of domination, acting as: “[...] ‘representatives’ of the dominant group for the exercise of the subordinating functions of social hegemony and political government” (GRAMSCI, 2001b, p. 21). The historian Virgínia Fontes highlights the role of organic intellectuals linked to the ruling class, as organisers of domination, through the “[...] organisation (collective production) of worldviews, social consciousness, and ‘ways of being’ appropriate to the interests of the bourgeois world (hegemony)” (FONTES, 2006, p. 211).

This brings us to the core of Gramsci’s analysis, hegemony, understood by him as, “[...] a combination of strength and consensus, which balance each other in a variety of ways, without force overpowering consensus, but, on the contrary, trying to make the force seem to be supported by the majority consensus, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion – newspapers and associations” (GRAMSCI, 2001b, p. 95). Hegemony would be produced by the dominant group within civil society, “[...] that is, the set of bodies commonly designated as ‘private’ (GRAMSCI, 2001a, p. 20). These organisations are precisely the Private Apparatus of Hegemony, tools constructed by the different classes to systematise their worldview and make it the social majority, that is, hegemonic. From this perspective, the process of development in Western states has made civil society, “[...] a very complex structure, resistant to catastrophic outbursts” (GRAMSCI, 2001b, p. 73), because beyond the repressive functions performed in the context of political society there is the building of a robust chain of fortresses and bunkers – precisely the Private Apparatus of Hegemony. Newspapers, associations, and the most varied organisational forms constructed by organic intellectuals linked to the dominant class, fulfil this role of reinforcing domination, in the same way that the apparatus built by intellectuals linked to the working class focus on contesting domination. As we will discuss below, Carvalho constructed distinct organisational forms – from the blog *Mídia Sem Máscaras* to the Philosophy Course – that can clearly be considered the Private Apparatus of Hegemony.

From astrologer to organic intellectual: the trajectory of Olavo de Carvalho

Born in 1947, Carvalho claims that he had a brief stint in the Brazilian Communist Party in the 1960s and that he dropped out of his philosophy course due to its poor quality (CARVALHO, 2016, not paginated). He began writing for major newspapers in 1967 and dedicated himself to astrology, writing books and founding the Jupiter School. Heloísa de Carvalho, the eldest of Olavo de Carvalho’s eight children, who publicly split from her father in 2017, records that, “[...] in 1980, the astrology school already had 140 students and Olavo had a busy routine of classes and conferences” (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 29). Years later, Carvalho still maintained that, “[...] astrology is a mandatory element, that is why anyone who has not studied it, has not studied anything, [and] is illiterate, [an] idiot” (CARVALHO, 2000, not paginated).

The 1980s are marked by controversies and obscure periods. According to his daughter, “[...] around 1982, he joined the Tradition sect, which derived from the practices of the spiritual leader Idris Shah [...]”, and “[...] in 1984, Olavo de Carvalho converted to Islam, more precisely, he became part of a tariqa, which is an esoteric Sufi sect [...]” (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 40). From then on, according to his daughter, he was called Sidi Mohammad Ibrahim and “[...] maintained a polygamous relationship with his three wives” (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 46). In 1985, he decided to open his own tariqa and corresponded with Martin Lings, a Sufi leader in London, receiving guidance from him on financial contributions, the singing

of the shahada, the witness of Muslim faith, and on the way in which women were initiated into the tariqa, to which the answer was that “The woman is initiated by the man during the act of sex – without interference from a contraceptive device” (TEITELBAUM, 2020, p. 129). However, according to Heloísa de Carvalho, a few months later, “[...] the sect had already disintegrated” (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 46). It was at this time that Carvalho began to face problems with the law: “Because of his obscure activities, Olavo became involved with judicial and police issues, one of them related to the Tradition sect and the other to the tariqa” (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 62).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, he taught courses and lectures on astrology, happiness and philosophy and published more than a dozen books, which “[...] achieved a certain expression and helped to consolidate his position as a political columnist on the Right. ” (PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 32). During this period, he published some works projecting himself as a conservative intellectual, in particular, *The New Age and the Cultural Revolution: Fritjof Capra and Antonio Gramsci* (CARVALHO, 1994), *The garden of afflictions: from Epicurus to Caesar’s resurrection: an essay on materialism and civil religion* (1995), and *The collective imbecile: Brazilian intellectual updates* (1996) (*O imbecil coletivo*), published by UniverCidade and which had a wide circulation, with six editions in just eight months (*O IMBECIL...*, 2021). These three works lay the foundations for the position that Carvalho took and has maintained since then, with an emphasis on the conspiracy theory he develops around Gramscianism, as we will discuss in the next section.

Costa and Ghirotto point out that one result of the release of *The Collective Imbecile* was that it opened spaces in the mainstream press for Carvalho:

When *The Collective Imbecile* was released, Olavo had already published ten books (from Aristotle to astrology), but they all went unnoticed. With *The Collective Imbecile*, he gained a certain reputation as a polemicist and joined the pantheon of ‘Right-Wing’ writers. He collaborated with the magazines *Bravo!*, *República*, *Primeira Leia* and *Época*, and had a column in the *O Globo* newspaper, from which he was fired in 2005, the year he moved to the United States as a correspondent for *Jornal do Comércio* (COSTA; GHIROTTI, 2018, p. 51).

UniverCidade played a prominent role in Carvalho’s public projection. Owned by Ronald Levinsohn, protagonist of one of the biggest scandals during the Brazilian dictatorship³, this university centre in Rio de Janeiro offered to publish *The Collective Imbecile* and gave space to the philosophy courses taught by Salgado between 1997 and 2001. Between 1999 and 2001, Carvalho became director of *Editora da UniverCidade*. UniverCidade was discredited in 2014 after numerous allegations of fraudulent management.

In 1998, Carvalho launched his personal website, and soon after, to raise donations for its maintenance, he created the Brazilian Institute of Humanities. It was in this context that he became a columnist for some of the largest circulation newspapers in the country, such as *O Globo*, *Zero Hora*, *Folha de São Paulo* and *Jornal da Tarde*, and several magazines. This public

³ According to an open letter written by L. Garcia “Ronald Levinsohn, the owner of the long-standing financial conglomerate Delfin, was responsible for one of the largest financial scandals that the dictatorship failed to hide” (GARCIA, 2001, not paginated). The scandal became public following a denouncement by the economist and journalist José Carlos de Assis in the *Folha de São Paulo*, in which Levinsohn used land officially valued at CR\$ 9 billion to settle a debt of CR\$ 70 billion between the Delfin group and the Banco Nacional de Habitação. The context of the denouncement and its unfolding are reported in Assis (2021).

projection stimulated him to a bolder initiative, which would be decisive in imposing himself as an intellectual reference point for the Far-Right: the creation of the *Mídia sem Máscara* (MSM) website.

Fighting Gramscianism and Cultural War

According to Bianchi and Mussi (2020), the 1980s marked the advance of a movement to condemn Gramscian thought in other parts of the world, such as France (with an emphasis on the work of Alain de Benoist, founder of the French New Right), the United States and Latin America. This movement took on different characteristics, from traditionalist Catholicism, in Argentina, to the proposition that the Right should start to organise itself in a way analogous to that which Gramsci proposed to the communists, in France. Bianchi and Mussi point out that although Carvalho maintains that he had been talking of P.T. Gramscianism since 1987, it was with the publication of “*A nova era e a Revolução Cultural*” (CARVALHO, 2014 [1994]) that he began to define “Gramsci as having the diabolical imagination that interpreted and gave a sense of evil” (BIANCHI; MUSSI, 2020, not paginated). For José Luciano Queiroz, “[...] the book is quite weak and superficial in its so-called analysis of Gramscian theory” (QUEIROZ, 2020, p. 231), which dispenses with direct quotes and is reduced to “[...] only 41 pages in which Carvalho dissects the theory of the ‘cultural revolution’” (QUEIROZ, 2020, p. 231). Bianchi and Mussi also state that:

In Carvalho's peculiar version, hegemony is the apparent negation of politics: “no politics, no revolutionary preaching”. Hegemony acts at a pre-political level, with the purpose of “carrying out a 180-degree turn in the common-sense worldview, changing moral sentiments, base reactions and the sense of proportion”. This is what is unforgivable in Gramsci and makes him the number one enemy of the conservative right: establishing worldviews as a disputed field, putting at risk the values of Western-Christian civilization (BIANCHI; MUSSI, 2020, not paginated).

Since then, denunciation the supposed Gramscian strategy has occupied a large part of Carvalho's writings, to the point that Gramsci's name appears “[...] 318 times if we count the four most influential works published by the author” (PUGLIA, 2018, p. 42). Gramscianism is presented as a highly contagious virus, with “[...] a sneaky and manipulative character, destined to make other classes accept communist rule without being aware of the process” (PUGLIA, 2018, p. 48).

Despite the weakness of Carvalho's analysis and his numerous factual errors, it is noticeable that he incorporated Gramsci's reflection on the importance of organisation (which is linked to the concepts of hegemony, the Private Apparatus of Hegemony and organic intellectualism), which is proved by the meticulous way that Carvalho built his own positions (or his own Private Apparatus of Hegemony) following the forming of the MSM. This does not imply, however, that Olavism has built a form of Gramscianism with inverted values, as was proposed in Henry Bugalho's liberal critique (2020), for whom “[...] what Olavo does is a kind of Olavist Gramscianism. He uses the same tactics and the same principles that he attributes to his opponents, based on factoids and conceptual distortions, to convince his disciples, using the tactics and principles developed by Lenin, Gramsci or Trotsky” (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 11-12). In this critique, Bugalho (2020) fails to demonstrate that Gramsci proposed political action based on factoids and distortions, and therefore his proposition that Olavism is Gramscianism with inverted values is untenable and arbitrary.

For Carvalho, the Gramscian strategy consists of the intension of imposing “[...] psychological dominance of the masses [...]” (PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 46) through “[...] conscience painkillers” (PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 47). The concept of a sneaky and cunning communism is recurrent in Brazilian history. In the 1930s, communism was associated with conspiracy and foreign infiltration in major journalistic campaigns (SILVA, 2001). In the context of the Cold War, different political strands fought for the primacy of anti-communism, with emphasis on the integralists, who promoted extreme conspiracy theories and accusations of communist infiltration (CALIL, 2005; FLACH, 2003). Carvalho updated this same discursive line in a post-Cold War context, highlighting the characterisation of Gramsci as a strategist for a revolution disguised by dissimulating techniques and which would therefore would not even be noticed by many: “If Lenin was the theorist of the coup d’état, he [Gramsci] was the strategist of the psychological revolution that must precede and smooth the path of the coup d’état. [...] The Gramscian revolution is to the Leninist revolution as seduction is to rape” (CARVALHO, 2014 [1994]). Gramsci is presented, through remarkably aggressive vocabulary, as “[...] prophet of imbecility, the guide of hordes of imbeciles for whom the truth is the lie and the lie the truth” (CARVALHO, 2014 [1994]). Gramscianism would be the inspiration for an imperceptible dissemination, capable of eroding the Christian and moral foundations of society and thus paving the way for the communist revolution. For this, it promoted a “cultural war”⁴, marked by the promotion of abortion, homosexuality, and sexual freedom.

Mídia sem Máscara (MSM)

Launched in 2002, for more than a decade the MSM website was the main instrument for disseminating Carvalho’s ideas, functioning as a “[...] powerful instrument to organisationally and ideologically unify the fascist promoting Right” (PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 146). Patschiki’s research indicates that the site created by Carvalho was “[...] financed by Livraria Cultura advertising, by donations through the NGO Instituto Brasileiro de Humanidades, and allegedly by the Commercial Association of São Paulo (ACSP)” (PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 146). Carvalho rebutted Patschiki’s research, qualifying it, curiously, as “[...] a conspiracy theory [...]” (CARVALHO, 2013, not paginated) and argued that the website was a modest personal initiative: “It was a home-grown product, created entirely by me, my wife Roxane and my daughter Maria Inês, with a zero budget” (CARVALHO, 2013, not paginated).

Despite claiming a zero budget, Carvalho repeatedly complained about the lack of support, pleading for more funding, even stating in dramatic tones that the bourgeoisie “[...] is the most defenceless class there is [...]” (CARVALHO, 2009, not paginated) and that “[...] the famous ‘ideological apparatus of the bourgeoisie’ of which the Marxists speak never existed” (CARVALHO, 2009, not paginated). So, he stood as the protector of the ruling classes against the attacks of Marxism, presenting himself in a quixotic role: “In Brazil, just me and two or three friends, isolated and penniless, have been trying to confront the monster” (CARVALHO, 2010 apud PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 178). This narrative is very similar to that developed by the leader of Brazilian historical fascism, the integralist National Chief, Plínio Salgado, who repeatedly complained about the absence of help from the bourgeoisie, as when he stated, in 1964, that “[...] the bourgeoisie does not help us, while the communists have more than ten weekly newspapers... This indifference of those who should be the first to help us makes me very bitter” (SALGADO, 1964 apud CALIL, 2005, p. 301).

⁴ We use the expression, “cultural war” to understand an ideological construction of the New Right, according to Silva (2018).

MSM presented itself as a sort of press observer, aimed at propagating the peculiar thesis that the main Brazilian press were either communists or infiltrated by communists. Between 2002 and 2005, Carvalho contradictorily reconciled this criticism as a columnist of these same media vehicles, which allowed him to become nationally known. When, in 2005, he was fired from newspapers linked to the Globo group of organisations Carvalho moved to the US (Richmond, Virginia), obtaining an EB-1 visa, granted “[...] to foreigners with extraordinary abilities” (PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 151). According to his daughter, problems in court led to Carvalho’s self-exile: “He was willing to live cursing people, as he does, without worrying about being sued” (A FILHA..., 2020).

During his move to the United States, Carvalho strengthened his ties with the São Paulo Trade Association (ACSP):

Carvalho already had enough links to maintain his militancy, guaranteed mainly by the São Paulo Trade Association. With the foundation of the MSM, he radicalised his previous political practices, starting to aggregate and refine projects of a chauvinist and fascist nature, openly militating for parties and organisations of a new type, which would not only stand against a possible rise of the left, but against any democratising opening allowed by the bourgeoisie (PATSHIKI, 2012, p. 169).

The ACSP, which brings together small and medium-sized companies in the trade and services sector, started to support Carvalho’s activities, including giving him a regular column in the *Diário do Comércio* newspaper, which continued until 2016: “Excluded from the circle of decent people, I found one last shelter in the *Diário do Comércio*” (CARVALHO, 2010). ACSP also made possible the publication of several books gathering articles initially published in the newspaper, under the general title *Cartas de um Terran ao Planeta Terra*. In the introduction of the first of these books, ACSP president Guilherme Afif Domingos⁵ expressed a political stance in line with the Olavist perspective, stating that “[...] what is seen in Brazil is the almost overwhelming predominance, both in the media and in the university environment, of a single current of thought” (AFIF DOMINGOS, 2007, p. 3).

MSM allowed Carvalho to assert himself as an intellectual for the far right. Although the site brought together many columnists, “[...] the ideological uniformity gives strength to the site and reiterates a political position” (BARJA, 2009, p. 157). One of the most recurrent themes is the criticism of the Foro de São Paulo (an organisation created in 1990 bringing together parties of the Latin American reformist left). Omitting the moderate nature of the organisation, Carvalho always presented it as the “[...] strategic coordination of the communist movement in Latin America” (CARVALHO, 2008, not paginated). To combat it, it promoted the foundation of the Forum of Brazil, which brought together 28 entities to propagate anti-communism, the defence of property, Judeo-Christian morality, and classical

⁵ Afif Domingos is one of the main leaders of the Brazilian petty bourgeoisie, having been part of the ACSP leadership since 1976. At the same time, he developed a political career, starting with the Social Democratic Party (PDS), linked to the military dictatorship, and passing to the Liberal Party (PL), Party the Liberal Front (PFL), and Democrats (DEM). He is currently linked to the Social Democratic Party (PSD). He was Chief Minister of the Micro and Small Business Secretariat under the Dilma Rousseff government between May 2013 and October 2015 and has been Special Advisor to the Minister of Economy, Paulo Guedes, since the beginning of the Bolsonaro government (GUILHERME, 2021).

education, with an emphasis on entities linked to extreme Right-Wing military groups (Cf: PATSCHIKI, 2012, p. 294).

At this time, Carvalho was characterised by an aggressive style and a language permeated by profanities. The violence of his attacks on opponents is usually ameliorated by a pretended humorous angle. This extreme aggressiveness is part of the construction of a supposedly authentic character, in a performance very similar to the one staged by Jair Bolsonaro during the 2018 election campaign and in his government. Carvalho states that “[...] swear words express only the humble refusal of any feigned solemnity [...]” (CARVALHO, 2015, not paginated) and is justified in “[...] situations in which a delicate response would suggest complicity with the intolerable” (CARVALHO, 2015, not paginated). Using this resource allows Carvalho to block political debate. Using innuendos with a sexual or eschatological connotation to ridicule his opponents or claiming that people on the left are essentially genocidal, he maintains that: “[...] if you respond politely, you will be giving dignity to these ideas. [...] fuck education! Go take it up your ass, you son of a bitch!” (CARVALHO, 2010 apud PATSCHIKI, 2012, p. 331). This aggressiveness is exacerbated by his followers, boosting groups and pages with names like “Oba! A commune has died!” and “Communists caricatured”.

Despite its high profile, MSM was taken off the air in 2017 by a former employee who billed Carvalho for amounts supposedly owed for services provided, this took place with support from some of the main MSM activists. Carvalho treats the episode as blackmail, claiming that he was charged “[...] an absurd bill of 42 thousand reais, with no plausible reason and without a single proof of expenses” (CARVALHO, 2018b, not paginated). Subsequently, his followers developed a public campaign for the site to be reactivated (ABDO, 2018). The amounts involved and services listed contradict the statement that the site was a modest family business.

The building of other APHs

Living in the United States, Carvalho created other tools to reinforce the spread of his ideology. In 2006, he started the weekly radio show True Outspoke, and in 2010 he created The Inter-American Institute for Philosophy, Government and Social Thought, to translate his texts into English and Spanish and strengthen ties with extreme Right-Wing leaders in the United States (such as Justice Tom Parker and Paul Gottfried), and in Latin America (Roberto Micheletti, Alejandro Peña-Exclusa).

In 2009, his followers founded the Olavo de Carvalho Institute in Curitiba, which has since maintained the Online Philosophy Course (COF) in which he taught, a “[...] Philosophical Studies Orientation Programme with weekly classes at the cost of R\$ 60.00 per month, in addition to another 22 separate courses yielding R\$ 400, on topics related to philosophy, sociology, psychology, literature, history, esoterism and ‘cultural war’ (SEMINÁRIO..., 2021). According to Heloísa de Carvalho and Bugalho,

[...] the COF has various functions: the first of them is to consolidate Olavo as a conservative intellectual, thus opening the doors to ideas that have been suppressed by decades of leftist cultural dominance, secondly it is an escape valve for Olavo through which he can insult any philosopher, teacher, artist or intellectual on the course with whom he decides to disagree (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 78).

It is curious that even in an openly critical work, Heloísa reiterates her father's hypothesis about the supposed decades of leftist cultural dominance. The COF was undeniably an important tool for his intellectual profile, but its importance is not restricted to this aspect, as it also constituted a space for the intellectual training of followers who shared and have spread Carvalho's political perspective.

Journalist Denis Bergierman, who attended the courses, points out that despite Carvalho's claim to be legitimate as an intellectual, the general perspective is one of denying the complexity of the world in favour of simplistic and reassuring explanations:

Almost all Olavo's work is an attempt to deny the complexity of the world. Behind their structurally sophisticated texts, there are very simple ideas. He wants to go back in time, to a world he can comprehend; where there are only two sexes (and don't even start on gender), Newton is enough (without the uncertainties and heresies of relativity and quantum physics), worrying about the weather it is a matter for Saint Peter and everyone who is not good is bad, and vice versa. A Christian world, of classical culture, under the command of someone who seems to be in charge – even better if that someone is very authoritarian (BERGIERMAN, 2019, not paginated).

Carvalho's support network also included the publishers *É Realizações* and *Vide*. The first was formed in a cultural space in which courses by Olavo de Carvalho had been held since 1995, they became a publisher in 2000 to provide editorial support for his distance learning courses, essentially publishing works by Carvalho and Right-Wing authors, which was interrupted due to a disagreement between its owner and Carvalho (Cf: PATSCHIKI, 2012, p. 160). *Vide Editora*, in turn, was formed by the conservative Democratic Surveillance movement (VIDE), "[...] with the clear purpose of entering the cultural war, explicitly on the 'right' side of the fight, with a view to subsidising Right-Wing militancy, both liberal and conservative" (ESCORSIM, 2018, not paged). VIDE held several events in partnership with the Freedom and Democracy Foundation (of the Democrats party), in which Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez participated (Cf: PATSCHIKI, 2012, p. 164), later appointed by Carvalho to the Ministry of Education.

Anti-communism and the fascist perspective

Anti-communism is the general thrust of Carvalho's intellectual construction and is based on an extraordinary conceptual expansion of the field of the Left and of communism. In his effort to put anti-communism at the centre of the political debate in a post-Cold War context, Carvalho states that the communists created 'political correct' to stir-up conflicts, such as ethnic conflicts fomented around racial quotas, aiming to "[...] make public opinion today accept the Marxist theses of class struggle and the complete suppression of the conservative opposition as signs of moderation and democratic tolerance" (CARVALHO, 2002a, not paginated).

The broadening of the concept of the Left has been essential for making the communist threat appear imminent, and it even incorporates the PSDB (the Brazilian Social Democracy Party): "The national media has already taken this farce of labelling the 'tucanato' (relating to the Brazilian Social Democracy Party) 'Right', a trick invented by the 'Left'". (CARVALHO, 2002b, not paginated), adding that "FHC made more advances in the communist revolution in Brazil than João Goulart himself" (CARVALHO, 2002b, not paginated). With this line of argument, he delegitimised most of his opponents who were part of the conservative camp, especially

those linked to conservative liberalism. This reinforced the primacy of his extremist positions within the Right. Following this logic, the transformation of the PT into a moderate and reformist party, which governed in alliance with conservative parties and implemented a liberal economic programme, was also merely a Gramscian disguise.

However unrealistic and arbitrary these propositions are, they offer a simplistic - and allegedly intellectual - explanation for justifying the most extreme anti-communism. His book 'O mínimo que você precisa saber para não ser idiota' (The least you need to know not to be an idiot), published in 2013, sold more than 200,000 copies, proving the growth of Carvalho's influence and projection, which would be affirmed even more intensely between 2015 and 2016, in the context of the street demonstrations in defence of the removal of President Dilma Rousseff, "[...] when the slogan 'Olavo is right' was erected in the demonstrations of the impeachment of former President Dilma" (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 90) .

This was possible because it offered an explanation adequate to satisfy the needs of large social groups and because Carvalho was supported by an extensive chain of private hegemonic apparatus, built from the point at which he created MSM until the present day. At the beginning of June 2021, Carvalho had 574,364 followers on Facebook and 1.03 million subscribers to his YouTube account, in addition to having an electronic website, a blog and the physical and digital structure that maintained his courses.⁶

But does Olavism constitute fascism? Benjamin R. Teitelbaum does not even consider this a possibility and places Olavo de Carvalho alongside Steve Bannon and Alexander Dugin as traditionalists, he cites Olavo's interest in the work of René Guenon and his passage through Sufism, and concludes that, "Olavo's critique of society Brazilian is essentially a critique of its materialism" (TEITELBAUM, 2020, p. 231), in an obstinate search for deep Brazil. Criticism of materialism and the discourse in defence of the deep Brazil were also constant discursive marks in the work of Plínio Salgado, leader of the most important historical fascist movement in Brazil, which alerts us to the fact that there is no incompatibility between the evocation of a traditional past and the fascist perspective. Despite the relevant analysis that he carried out, Teitelbaum (2020) classifies these authors based on the self-representation they disseminate, and this leads him to accept Carvalho's qualification as a traditionalist, which seems insufficient to us.

What qualifies a movement as fascist? There are countless definitions and debates, but we understand that both the indiscriminate use of the concept and the excessive restriction to the historical context of its original emergence should be avoided. Thus, we understand that a fascist movement is characterised by the linking of three aspects: a set of reactionary ideological propositions, a petty bourgeois social base, and the perspective of the militant regimentation of these supporters to form a 'shock troop'. As Olavism is not exactly a movement, but instead provides the ideological base for the Bolsonarist movement, it is especially important to assess its ideology and to consider that, as we have already mentioned, the main audience for which its arguments are intended is the petty bourgeoisie. The numerous ideological components of fascism include, anti-communism, political anti-liberalism, chauvinism, anti-system and anti-party discourse, the creation of social enemies,

⁶ These are the following addresses: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/carvalho.olavo>; YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/olavodeca>; Site Eletrônico: <https://olavodecarvalhofb.wordpress.com>; Blog: <https://blogdoolavo.com/>; Cursos: <https://www.seminariodefisofia.org/>.

an elitist vision, anti-intellectualism, militarism, armamentism, and leader worship (Cf. proposed in CALIL, 2005, 147). So, there is a clear identification between the Olavist ideology and these ideological elements, for which, as already indicated by Patschiki, Olavism is located within the ideological universe of fascism.

Olavo de Carvalho and the Bolsonaro family

Carvalho's personal relationship with the members of the Bolsonaro family began six years before Bolsonaro's election, "[...] when Flávio, enthusiastic about Professor Olavo's literary production, went to Virginia to award him the Tiradentes Medal, an honour bestowed by the government of Rio de Janeiro to personalities who have provided services to the state" (COSTA; GHIROTTI, 2018, p. 46). According to Teitelbaum (2020), Carvalho and Jair Bolsonaro "[...] shared the same contempt for the media and universities [...]" (TEITELBAUM, 2020, p. 119) and identified with each other immediately, maintaining frequent contact since 2014, through "[...] online chats, in which they gossiped about politics and culture" (TEITELBAUM, 2020, p. 119). Eduardo Bolsonaro's statement in a SBT program – "Olavo is the father of us all" (BOLSONARO apud CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 25) summarises his relevance, and agrees that "[...] maybe Olavo is not exactly Bolsonaro's guru, but he is certainly the guru of Bolsonarism (CARVALHO; BUGALHO, 2020, p. 116).

Marcelo Badaró Mattos indicates that resorting to Olavo de Carvalho permitted "[...] Bolsonarism to be endowed with a 'philosophy', in the sense of a more articulated and total vision, which gives meaning to its political action" (MATTOS, 2020, p. 172). More than that, it was the Olavist ideology that allowed the Bolsonaro regime to intervene in the demonstrations against the government of Dilma Rousseff in 2015 and 2016, disputing its direction and its meaning with liberal-conservative sectors and constituting itself as an electoral alternative. In this sense, Bianchi summarises Carvalho's contribution to the unification of different Right-Wing groups very well: "The strongly anti-communist discourse, the criminalisation of social movements, climate denial, the questioning of human rights and attacks on women, the black population and the LGBT community are a common denominator of this worldview" (BIANCHI, 2018, not paginated).

It was one of Olavo de Carvalho's students, Filipe Martins, who put the Bolsonaro clan in contact with Steve Bannon, the so-called fake news wizard, mentor of an international network that brings together various Far-Right movements. During the 2018 election campaign, "[...] one of his duties was to put the campaign in contact with Steve Bannon" (COSTA; GHIROTTI, 2018, p. 47). Teitelbaum (2020, p. 150) reported that at a dinner hosted by Bannon, Carvalho expressed his strategy for aligning the Judeo-Christian West against the Chinese threat and his concerns about the splitting of the Bolsonaro government into distinct groups, not all fully aligned with this strategy. Months later, in July 2019, Olavo de Carvalho attended a dinner at the residence of Brazilian ambassador Sérgio Amaral, which was attended by Jair Bolsonaro, Paulo Guedes and Steve Bannon.

With Bolsonaro in government, there were numerous disputes between various groups, with an emphasis on the Olavists, ultraliberals and the military. In the vocabulary propagated by the main media outlets, the Olavists constitute the ideological wing of the government – a completely inadequate designation - which has made it possible to hide the ideological underpinnings of other themes. In the government's original structure, Carvalho directly appointed two ministers. The first was Ernesto Araújo, appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs,

who's role was focused on defending a foreign policy of unconditional subordination to the United States, and in particular to Donald Trump, denouncing globalism, understood to be a strategy for communist domination, and an obsession with the criticism and provocation of China, especially in the context of the Pandemic, having called Covid-19 a 'communavirus', a supposed creation of the communists for world domination (ZARUR, 2021). Araújo was dismissed on March 29, 2021, having become increasingly belligerent towards the National Congress and the Judiciary. Araújo's positions were reinforced by the work of Filipe Martins, Adjunct Advisor for International Affairs until June 2020, and Chief Advisor for International Affairs from June 2020 to May 2021. Martins, who as a member of the government also criticised globalism, was dismissed in April 2021, against a background of the negative repercussions of his racist gestures in the National Congress.

The second ministry occupied by a Carvalho nominee was the Ministry of Education, which is explained its deep hatred of universities as part of its Cultural War: "The Brazilian university is made up of people like that. They only think about hegemony, funding and dropping names. The university has killed cultural life in Brazil" (CARVALHO, 2019, not paginated). His attacks on universities were in the name of valuing Deep Brazil. Teitelbaum reports that Carvalho proposed an opposition between simple people and intellectuals: "The people of Brazil – the poor people, the simple people... They understand things much better than intellectuals. The Brazilian people have a kind of reality instinct" (CARVALHO, 2019⁷ apud TEITELBAUM, 2020, p. 227). The minister appointed by Carvalho, Ricardo Vélez Rodriguez, had a tumultuous administration, which became dysfunctional due to conflicts between the military and Olavists. His resignation followed Carvalho's public criticism. His replacement, Abraham Weintraub, another Olavist appointee, led an aggressive policy of derailing federal universities, cutting funding and scholarships for graduate programmes and applying a systematic policy of intervention in universities, nominating minority candidates as Rectors. He was dismissed in June 2020, after openly attacking the STF.

In addition to the Ministries of Education and Foreign Affairs, Carvalho had other followers appointed to the government, such as Adolfo Sachsida, Secretary of Economic Policy; and Ricardo Alvim, Special Secretary of Culture until January 2021, when he was dismissed after delivering a speech paraphrasing Nazi propaganda minister Josep Goebbels. During this episode, Carvalho sought to distance himself from this statement, having posted that "[...] Ricardo Alvim is perhaps not in the right frame of mind" (RICARDO..., 2020). Within the National Congress, his most prominent follower is Bia Kicis (PSL/DF), current president of the Constitution and Justice Commission. The Olavist caucus also includes deputies Paulo Martins (PSL/PR), Marcel von Hatten (NOVO/RS) and Carla Zambeli (PSL/SP) (FELLET, 2019).

Throughout the first two years of the Bolsonaro government, Carvalho has defended further radicalisation, supporting the subversion of democratic institutions, with explicit attacks on other authorities and criticism of supposedly moderate groups, especially the military. This position is echoed in statements by the president's sons, and in many cases the president himself, in recurrent attacks on other institutions and threats to impose an institutional breakup. In the context of the Pandemic, the radically denialist position taken by the

⁷ The conversation took place in 2019 and was reported by Teitelbaum (2020), in his work, "Guerra pela eternidade: o retorno do tradicionalismo e a ascensão da direita populista" (War for eternity: the return of traditionalism and the rise of the populist right).

Bolsonaro government (CALIL, 2021) has been strongly defended by Carvalho, reinforcing his ideological identification with the Bolsonaro clan.

This ideology did not prevent Carvalho from making further criticisms of the government, mostly attacking the government's military wing, and demanding greater radicalisation. These criticisms are cyclical and do not mean that Carvalho was breaking away from the government. On the contrary, they defend the strengthening of an extremist perspective, while allowing Carvalho to maintain his self-promoted image of autonomy. The most notorious of these criticisms occurred in June 2020, when, in the context of a court conviction resulting from a lawsuit filed by Caetano Veloso, Carvalho accused Bolsonaro of omission, stated that the president was not his friend and concluded with a threat: "Continue inactive, remain cowardly and I will overthrow this shit of your government, a government advised by cowardly or sold out generals" (FERRARO, 2020, not paged). In May 2021, after a new court conviction relating to the same action, Carvalho "[...] stated that President Jair Bolsonaro should resign from office if he is unable to 'defend the freedom of his most faithful friends'" (OLAVO, 2021, not paginated). The demand for the president to directly intervene to support him, and his criticism of the actions of his perceived enemies within the government, may be surprising but they do not express any real split. This is clear when one observes his demonstrations of support over the following days. Furthermore, Carvalho's criticisms must be explained in the context of the dispute for space within the government. A clear example occurred in June 2020 when, just one day after he accused the Bolsonaro government of "inoperancy and cowardice" (APÓS..., 2020), it expanded the powers of the Olavist Filipe Martins, moving him to the position Chief Adviser for International Affairs, with more powers and autonomy.

Even allowing for government restructurings, Olavism has remained decisive in defining the direction of the Bolsonaro government. The political scientist Vinícius do Valle points to the government's political orientation and the configuration of "Bolsonarism" as a movement with a fascist character based on the appropriation of

[...] two conspiracy theories, part of the vision disseminated by Olavo de Carvalho and that serve as a reference: The first is the theory of Leftist hegemony in the world, which postulates that the values of the Left have spread throughout society and by institutions and dominate the planet. [...] The second theory is that of globalism, which denounces a global elite that controls the world based on its (own) values (VALLE, 2021, p. 6).

As can be seen, both refer directly to Carvalho's key areas of concern, which led him to appoint the two ministers of education and a minister of foreign affairs. Even if not able to rely on these ministries anymore, the resonance of these conspiracy theories continues to be omnipresent in the actions and statements of the Bolsonaroists.

The Bolsonaro government is the result of a set of processes, and the political and ideological construction structured around Carvalho is an inseparable part of this process. Antonio Gramsci demonstrated that the Right is constantly reinventing and reorganising itself responding to the transformations of capitalism. Although Olavo de Carvalho has systematically discredited this Italian communist, he has understood one of the central elements of Gramsci's reflection: the great importance of setting up a network of organisations (or Private Hegemony Apparatus) that function as bunkers in the war of 'positions'. Over the

last few years, Carvalho has acted by operating this network, and based on it he has effectively reinforced the ideological and political advances of the Far Right.

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