



**“CHRIST AND THE BRAZILIAN REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS”:
RELIGION, POLITICS, HUMAN RIGHTS**

**“CRISTO E O PROCESSO REVOLUCIONÁRIO BRASILEIRO”:
RELIGIÃO, POLÍTICA, DIREITOS HUMANOS**

<i>Recebido em:</i>	03/06/2022
<i>Aprovado em:</i>	18/10/2022

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the first findings of a research project in Human Rights & Religion. It discusses the main historical sources available and their potential legal, social and political impact. This is a memory & truth project that focus on the history of religious leaders who were arrested and persecuted for their opinions and analyses their struggle for human liberation and democracy. Most of them were accused under anti-communist legislation, because of their theological concerns about social justice. In this short article we will investigate a few outcomes and findings about the 1962 Brazilian North-eastern Conference whose title was shocking to both political and ecclesiastical authorities of the time: “Christ and the Brazilian revolutionary process” – a conference that reshaped the borders between

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human rights and religion in the 1960s, by changing the understanding of church and society relations in Latin America.

Keywords: Human Rights; Religion; Military Dictatorship; Memory & Truth.

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta os primeiros resultados do projeto de pesquisa Direitos Humanos e Religião. O texto discute as diferentes fontes históricas disponíveis e seu potencial impacto político, social e jurídico. Trata-se de um projeto de pesquisa em memória e verdade cujo foco é a história de líderes religiosos que foram presos e perseguidos por suas opiniões, e que analisa suas lutas por libertação e democracia. A maior parte destas lideranças foi presa, acusada através do uso de legislação anticomunista, devido à suas posições teológicas sobre justiça social. Neste curto artigo, investigaremos alguns resultados e descobertas sobre a Conferência do Nordeste de 1962, cujo título foi chocante para as autoridades políticas e eclesiásticas da época: “Cristo e o processo revolucionário brasileiro” – uma conferência que reconfigurou as fronteiras entre direitos humanos e religião na década de 1960, transformando as compreensões das relações entre igreja e sociedade na América Latina.

Palavras-chave: Direitos Humanos; Religião; Ditadura Militar; Memória e Verdade.

Introduction

This paper outlines the first results of the *Human Rights & Religion* research project, which is currently funded by the Brunel Institute of Communities and Societies.³ Human

³ This project is “Human Rights & Religion: the legacy of the Brazilian 1962 North-Eastern Conference for public theology and democracy,” funded by the ICS 2022 Bid (£ 7,200).



rights and religion have recently been portrayed as opposing discourses. This is because there is a tendency in the global north to understand human rights as a bundle of expectations for fulfilment – sometimes in open conflict with religious values. However, although this is not a recent conflict, it has been developed mostly with focus on western societies. In the larger part of the world, human rights and religion have often been on the same side, producing a discourse to denounce violence and violation of human dignity.

We have seen this conflict just too recently in the divisive overruling of the United States Supreme Court decision on *Roe v. Wade*, but also elsewhere in the global north and south, where religious discourse has been presented as raising different and opposing expectations to those granted by human rights. Nevertheless, both religion and human rights share a long history in Natural Law concepts and Theology, before been recently understood as conflicting languages.⁴ On the one hand, religious discourse has been presented as raising different and opposing expectations to those granted by human rights.⁵ On the other, human rights have been criticized for their compatibility and acceptance of social & economic inequality.⁶ This project tells the story of religious leaders who were arrested and persecuted for their opinions, and of their struggle for human liberation and democracy.

In 2022, Brazilian protestant minorities celebrate the 60th anniversary of the 1962 North-eastern Conference whose title was shocking to both political and ecclesiastical authorities: “Christ and the Brazilian revolutionary process.”⁷ The focus of the Pilot project that originated this paper, is to facilitate the writing of a grant proposal that will put together

⁴ MOYN, Samuel, **Christian Human Rights**, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.

⁵ WILLIAMS, Rowan, **Human Rights and Religious Faith**, disponível em: <<http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2370/human-rights-and-religious-faith>>. acesso em: 8 fev. 2022.

⁶ DOUZINAS, Costas, **The end of human rights: critical legal thought at the turn of the century**, Oxford; Portland, Or.: Hart Pub., 2000.

⁷ BRAUN, Julia, **Os evangélicos que se reuniram há 60 anos no Nordeste para discutir revolução social - BBC News Brasil**, BBC Brasil, disponível em: <<https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-62273483>>. acesso em: 27 jul. 2022.



an original digital archive of video-interviews with those – then young – activists of religious and student organisations who were directly involved in the 1962 Conference. This project aims to advance scholarship and develop new research methods to investigate the tensions between human rights & religion on a global scale. This project will begin investigating the outcomes of a religious Conference that reshaped the borders between human rights and religion in the 1960s, by changing the understanding of church and society relations in Latin America.

In this paper, we are going to look specifically at one attempt to bridge those different expectations that happened 60 years ago in Latin America. The 1962 North-eastern Conference organised by the (now extinct) Brazilian Evangelical Confederation (CEB), who shares its title with our paper, was an attempt to bridge the gaps that existed then between Religion & Society, in their own words. How should Protestant and Evangelical church leaders respond to the brutal social inequality of their country? How should they engage themselves, from their faith and theology, to respond to a society where lots of people had no education, and could not read – not even read the bible, properly? Those were among the sincere and serious questions raised by members of those social groups who participated in that conference.⁸

But, in the context of the Cold War, raising such questions could be dangerous, especially in Latin America. Many of the religious leaders involved in the organisation of the 1962 conference were persecuted. Some were forcibly removed from their churches. Seminars and theological Colleges who promoted those views or raised those issues were closed by Protestant and Evangelical church denominations. And most of them were put under surveillance, investigated, arrested and tortured by the Military Dictatorship that took over their country in 1964, under anti-communist and national security legislation. A famous

⁸ FILHO, José Bittencourt, **Cristo e o Processo Revolucionário Brasileiro**, Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Mauad Editora Ltda, 2013.



Catholic bishop of the time summarized the challenges those interviewed in the research project faced in the 1960s: “Every time I help the poor, they call me a saint. But every time I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.”⁹

In this paper we will discuss the role of memory building in minority groups in updating liberal conceptions of human rights. We aim to contribute to recent historical debates on global conflict by observing how religion and human rights overlap in issues of conflict, trauma, and morality. Religion and morality will be taken as overlapping categories here: moral discourse can be part of religious practices and traditions, and religious discourse can be simply moral – without necessary institutional implications. To develop these arguments further, we will be looking into an historical research that has been developed in the last 20 years, focusing on memory & truth issues.

First, we are going to look into the recent moral and political foundations of Human Rights. Then we are going to discuss different possibilities of analysis to the object of this research: an original digital archive-in-the-making, composed of 17 video-interviews with religious leaders who were directly involved in the 1962 Conference and were later persecuted. These video interviews have been recorded in digital format since 2005, but have never been available for research or for the public in general. We have both been part of these interviewing projects, and hope that, with the support of the Institute of Communities and Societies we will be able to find funding to turn all this video material into a researchable and public archive in Brunel. And finally, we will discuss methodological challenges to deal with this vast material.

⁹ Dom Hélder Câmara - Memórias da ditadura, disponível em: <https://memoriasdaditadura.org.br/biografias-da-resistencia/dom-helder-camara/>. acesso em: 27 jul. 2022.



We are now going to briefly look to the moral and political origins of human rights in its current standing, to investigate if and how religion and human rights can connect with each other.

Human Rights: its moral and political foundations¹⁰

The Ukraine crises in 2022 reveals something disturbing about the relation between Human Rights and soft power in Western and Global South countries. The critique of liberal notions of Human Rights as being compatible with brutal social inequality and military interventions disguised as “humanitarian” is still valid today.¹¹ However, it should not shade the central role Human Rights have played in the moral discourse of national and international conflicts. When countries like the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK) or Brazil elected politicians and adopted policies that opposed basic human rights, they lost the moral grounds on which Jimmy Carter (a “born again Christian”),¹² defeated the Soviet Union. How are we to avoid such mistakes? Is there anything we could learn from recent history that would help us now?

As you probably know, Human rights are not only legal. They are also moral. What we call human rights is an astounding political claim, a universal claim, that every single person in the world is uniquely valuable. When the idea of human rights was first formulated in modern terms, it was revolutionary.¹³ This idea fuelled wars – the enlightened revolutions, as they were called: the French Revolution, the American Revolution (which included a brutal

¹⁰ This part of the paper was originally presented in the Global Conflict panel, by Marcus De Matos, as part of the Brunel Research Festival 2022: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/global-conflict-insights-from-brunel-experts-tickets-328268077657> <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/2022/Christ-and-the-Brazilian-Revolutionary-Process-religion-politics-and-human-rights>

¹¹ DOUZINAS, Costas, **The End of Human Rights: Critical Thought at the Turn of the Century**, [s.l.]: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2000, p. 1–23.

¹² GASPARI, Elio, Carter, Si!, **The New York Times**, 1978.

¹³ HUNT, Lynn, **A Invenção dos Direitos Humanos**, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2009.



civil war fought about the right of some people to have other people as their property) – and perhaps the Glorious revolution, in the United Kingdom, could also be listed here. After all, the Bill of Rights of 1689 which grants us here some fundamental freedoms, emerged from it.

But when we talk about human rights today, we are not the first to say that we have two more recent foundations to consider here.¹⁴ First, there is a United Nations declaration by the end of the World War II, in which a few important things were outlawed, internationally. After the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 was proclaimed, it became illegal for any state to persecute minorities of any kind in racial, cultural, religious or political terms. The impact of these document was massive, and it tuned the persecution of minorities into a crime: genocide. A powerful word. And, as a consequence, many of the ideas that fuelled the countries of the Axis Alliance during the great war were taken out of the public sphere – especially racial and nationalist claims of superiority. Democracies were now understood not only as the rule of the majority: a true democracy, was a government of the majority that did not oppress any minority.

However, human rights also have another recent foundation. If 1948 was its first 20th century foundation, the year of 1968 was perhaps a second foundation for it. And here we are talking about the emergence of a Human Rights global movement, an international collaboration between individuals, non-governmental organizations and social movements, that shaped an international civil society movement revolving around the idea of Human Rights. In the 1960s and the 1970s, there was civil unrest in many parts of the world. What happened there was perhaps an awakening: several minorities and interests' groups realized that, although they were not necessarily being exterminated by the state, they were, nevertheless, being treated as non-humans. Or as second-class citizens. We are talking about

¹⁴ MOYN, Samuel, **The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History**, Cambridge, Mass: Havard University Press, 2010.



segregation, racial and gender discrimination, political and religious persecution. These people were being denied their freedom and basic rights. They were denied human rights. This was a powerful discourse. It connected people globally. In the USA, this human rights discourse turned the Civil Rights Movement into a beacon. In South Africa, it fuelled the anti-apartheid struggle and it ignited many liberation and anti-colonial movements worldwide.

But, as you know, when something is a success like this, it doesn't take long before it becomes a propaganda tool of some politician, or a bureaucratic heartless policy for certain state actors. During the 1980s, several international conflicts of that time revolved around human rights. The most significant perhaps was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of the Soviet Union. North Americans usually boast of about winning the Cold War by successfully producing more weapons than their communist adversaries. However, from a Latin American perspective, it seems pretty clear that it was not the weapons, but the human rights discourse adopted by the Carter administration in the USA that caused the collapse of that regime. And we know that because although it was aimed at the Soviets and their allies, it also hit the dictatorships supported by the USA pretty bad.¹⁵ When the international doctrine that raised Latin American military dictatorships against the communists was over, their leaders were left alone with what they were previously provided with: abundance of weapons that would eventually fall in the wrong hands, and technologies for illegal tap wiring, censorship, torture, and disappearance of bodies – many of which would later undermine the rule of law in their countries. And they were also left with angry crowds and civil societies movements all around them. They eventually fell, together with the Soviet Union they supposedly opposed.

The 1990s brought in a different approach. Human Rights, now branded by the winners of the Cold War, was a discourse that became embedded in diplomatic parties and

¹⁵ GASPARI, Elio, Carter, Si!, *The New York Times*.



military interventions – sometimes pretending to be humanitarian wars.¹⁶ This is what we entered the 21st century with. You know the discourse we are talking about. It goes more or less like this: *if you are not a democratic country, we will bomb you, destroy your army, invade your territory, and fiercely impose democracy upon you.* We have seen this over and over since then. We could mention here the more recent invasion of Iraq, Afghanistan and the terrible civil war in Syria as tragic examples of what happens when human rights are used as an excuse for military interventions. Or when people believe they can export democracy and human rights using armies and bombs, instead of schools and books.

Coming home now. To our current situation in the United Kingdom and Brazil. What is the relevance of this human rights history to the global conflicts we now see around us? Our hypothesis here is that this demoralization of human rights discourse, or better put, the dismissal of a kind of neoliberal human rights discourse that we now see, has potentially given the floor back to those who had lost it before. Those political groups whose ideas have been defeated in 1945, and their discourses that have been excluded from the public sphere after 1968, have silently crept back and taken the stage. Racism, sexism, religious persecution, hate speech, things that liberal democracies were supposed to have overcome, they are all here now. The very things that democratic countries condemned in countries they opposed during the last decades, are now here. Very close to us. This has been felt in society as whole, but specially by minorities – including religious groups, and particularly in the Global South.¹⁷

But we have a clue on why the dismissal of Human Rights has taken its impressive and expressive tolls in the 21st century. Our hypothesis is that one of the reasons why human rights were demoralized in our (neo)liberal democracies is their incompatibility with

¹⁶ DOUZINAS, Costas, **O fim dos direitos humanos**, São Leopoldo: Unisinos, 2009.

¹⁷ DE MATOS, Marcus V. A. B, When the Rooster Insists on Crowing: Church, State, and Human Rights in Contemporary Brazil, **Journal of Latin American Theology**, Volume 15, v. 15, n. 1, p. 98-120, 2020.



permanent social inequality and deep structural racism. Human rights are not compatible with those things. If all people are really human, how can you treat them like things? Or treat them worse than animals? Are we people really all human, and all equally valuable for being so? Or is our individual value determined by our moral, political, social and cultural choices? Those are hard questions that challenge our conceptions of human rights. We believe that looking at what these guys, theologians and religious leaders were saying in the recent past about these issues, might be a way to learn what went wrong in the history of human rights and the individual moral ethics we now profess.

And we will turn now to these issues, briefly explaining how our most recent research project may help finding answers. In this project that we will discuss, we are currently tracing back the criticism of religious leaders who opposed social inequality and economic iniquity and were persecuted for their ideas in Brazil. They were mostly Protestant and Evangelical minorities who were arrested and tortured for preaching what they believe was the gospel. But they were actually accused of communism before being excommunicated and arrested.

To die the past with the colours of the present: memory building as human rights¹⁸

The research project we are currently developing, “Human Rights & Religion: the legacy of the Brazilian 1962 North-Eastern Conference for public theology and democracy” is based on a long-time research effort. The focus of the project, the 1962 Brazilian Evangelical Conference is, according to Raimundo Barreto’s interview to BBC Brazil, one of

¹⁸ This part of the paper was developed in an academic event sharing this same title, on June 11th 2022. This was jointly organized by the authors, in discussion with Raimundo Cesar Barreto Jr. (Princeton Theological Seminary). See it here: <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/2022/Christ-and-the-Brazilian-Revolutionary-Process-religion-politics-and-human-rights>



the most prolific discussions on the relation between religion and society, church and state – that ever happened. Nevertheless, it was mostly erased from the memory of Brazilian Protestantism and those Evangelical communities who supported it: “We have never seen, before or after that conference, Brazilian Protestants so engaged in debating their social reality and so conscious of the need to participate in building their own reality.”¹⁹ But our current research efforts to turn this material into a researchable archive and raise memory and truth concerns from it, are only possible because of previous research – to which we should now turn to.

In 2010-2011, the Institute for the Study of Religion (ISER) developed a research project called “Youth, Politics and Religion: intergenerational dialogues”²⁰. This was a project that aimed at memory building and focused on Evangelical and Protestant youth leaders political and social engagement in the 1960s and 1970s. This project also had a previous version in 2005-2006, when seven (7) video interviews were recorded. In 2007, its first (and so far, only) video output was released: the short documentary “Christ and the Brazilian revolutionary process,”²¹ based on the video interview of Brazilian sociologist and former Evangelical pastor, Waldo Cesar. The documentary made use of Waldo’s interview, videos produced by Brazilian Federal media agency “Agência Nacional,” and 1962 newspapers available at Biblioteca Nacional.

¹⁹ BRAUN, *Os evangélicos que se reuniram há 60 anos no Nordeste para discutir revolução social* - BBC News Brasil.

²⁰ The research project “Juventude, política e religião: diálogos intergeracionais” was developed by ISER in 2010.

²¹ DE MATOS, Marcus V A B; PEREIRA, Thiago de Almeida, *Cristo e o Processo Revolucionário Brasileiro*, Brazil: ISER - Instituto de Estudos da Religião, 2007. Available at:



(Fig. 1 – Documentary film cover. *Cristo e o Processo Revolucionário Brasileiro*, 2007).

What we would like to call attention to in the “Youth, Politics and Religion” project is its aim to go beyond academic interest in Brazilian Protestantism’ history, and to build up an interaction of this memory with contemporary Evangelical youth in Brazil. The first innovation of this project was to produce audio-visual content on the topic, intending to make it available for a broader audience – beyond books and academic papers. However, this bold objective limited its own development, due to high costs of film production and constant need to fundraise – which stopped the research several times between recordings. These financial hardship issues faced by researchers was overcome by meeting different research bids and finding support from many different funders. Its first version was “Intergenerational dialogues: Evangelicals, social memory and leadership-building,”²² jointly funded by Evangelical NGO World Vision, the Evangelical Progressive Movement (MEP), and Basileia.

A second stage of this research project came up when Youth Public Policies were on the spot in Brazil, to be implemented with funds assigned by the Brazilian federal government, and more progressive Evangelical youth leaders were joining the public debate.

²² “Diálogos Intergeracionais: evangélicos, memória social e formação de lideranças” (2005-2006).



This version was led by ISER, Rede FALE, and the Ecumenical Movement of Theology Students (MEET). It was funded by both the World Student Christian Federation (WCSF) – an association linked to the World Council of Churches, and the Lutheran Diaconia Foundation (FLD).

One of the results expected by this stage of the project (2010-2011) was to deliver a digital archive, partially edited, that could contribute to the Brazilian Memory and Truth Commission, installed in 2013 by Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff. This could have helped to elucidate many of the state crimes and political persecution suffered by religious leaders in Brazil during the 1964-1985 dictatorship. But this stage of the project was never finished: the researchers had to choose between investing money to deliver a few edited archive interviews to the Commission, or to finish recording their interviews – which they did, justifying it on the fact that many of the interviewed were already very old at the time, and they might not have another chance.

Nevertheless, the existence of this video recordings today opens up new possibilities of research and analysis. The second innovation of this *archive-on-the-making* material, gathered by these previous projects, is how these memories are relevant for ecclesiastical institutions and religious organisations that are now appparated from each other – institutionally and theologically. In bringing to memory the history of both Protestant and Evangelicals in Brazil as coming from a common source, these memories impact both conservative Evangelicals churches and progressive Ecumenical organisations.²³ These might lead to findings that could impact the identity and institutional history of these groups. One strand of this research is to precisely help finding these historical identities from narratives that were selectively erased from official and ecclesiastic history in Brazil. And memory building was clearly a focus of these previous research projects. In its first

²³ CARDOSO, Rodrigo, Os evangélicos e a ditadura militar, *IstoÉ*, 2011.



version (2005-2007), the research project proposed focus groups as a method for memory building. On its second version (2010-2011), the project proposed to select politically active Evangelical and Protestant youth leaders to watch the recordings and then engage themselves in the film editing processes: selecting which part of the filmed interviews they would want to see in a short film they would help produce about that “old” young leader from the past.



(Fig. 2 – Anivaldo Padilha gives interview about the struggle for democracy and the role of Churches in Latin America in 1960-1970s – by Priscila Vieira-Souza, 2010).

Another important feature of this project was the methodology used in filming the interviews. For each interview, a panel of specialists was gathered, with an emphasis on interdisciplinarity and religious diversity – considering both what religion or Christian



denomination they studied or belonged to, if any (most of the academics in the interviews had a religious affiliation). There was also an intergenerational dialogue in between the interviewers: some were PhD candidates, others were early career academics, readers, or professors. The interviews followed a thematic script, focusing on the extinct Brazilian Evangelical Confederation (CEB) and its 1962 national conference, that became known as The North-eastern Conference, with its most polemical title: “Christ and the Brazilian Revolutionary Process.” All those interviewed participated in the 1962 conference – either organising it, as speakers or just attending it. It is precisely in this way that we claim this project to be committed to memory building, and not just recounting the past.²⁴

In the next section we shall explore some methodological contradictions that might emerge in such project.

Human rights, Public Theology, Democracy: contextual memory building or anachronic political concerns?

In this section we are going to ask four methodological questions that have challenged our current research on these topics, and our understanding of these previous research efforts we have analysed here. And the first questions we need to raise concerns the concepts we are asking questions about when digging into these previously recorded videos. The first and second questions we need to ask here are: is it possible to search for “Public Theology” and “Human Rights” ideas in a 1962 event, when these concepts were not fully developed by then? Or is this an anachronic approach to events that took place decades before these notions even existed as such?

²⁴ SOUZA, Priscila Vieira e; DE MATOS, Marcus V. A. B., “Colorir o passado com o presente”: proposta de construção e apropriação de memória no projeto Juventude, política e religião: diálogos intergeracionais | Sociedade e Cultura.



In a paper discussing Church and Society Movements that predated the 1962 conference in Brazil and Latin America, Raimundo César Barreto Jr. addresses this issue. Barreto calls attention to the difficulties of looking for the roots of a Public Theology in Brazilian Protestantism, when Public Theology, as a field of research, or even as a term, was only first used in 1974, in the United States.²⁵ And we feel the same concerns are relevant when looking for notions of Human Rights in the 1962 conference. The most accepted academic approaches to Human Rights locate their contemporary origins in 1945, but also in 1968 – after these events took place.²⁶

But the answer to these questions might be already outlined in Barreto's own research, where he claims that it is possible to look for the roots of a public discourse that would help re-shape these concepts in ethical terms. The real challenge here would be to find common ethical grounds in discourse, where the theological elements of language could find a "common ground" with the discourse of other social groups in the public sphere.²⁷

The second question we need to address is a historical one but focusing on memory building and identity. When looking into these interviews and other sources from the 1960s to the 1980s, we learn that many of those religious and youth leaders who were persecuted for their opinions after their involvement with the Church and Society movement in CEB, and especially in the 1962 conference, had to find institutional positions outside "the institutional church,"²⁸ as Barreto phrases it. Most of them were excluded, excommunicated or persecuted by Church institutions and state agencies.²⁹ Some of them escaped repression by joining

²⁵ BARRETO, Raimundo, The Church and Society Movement and the Roots of Public Theology in Brazilian Protestantism, *International Journal of Public Theology*, v. 6, n. 1, p. 70–98, 2012, p. 70.

²⁶ MOYN, *The Last Utopia*.

²⁷ BARRETO JR, Raimundo César; DA ROSA, Wanderley P.; RIBEIRO, Oswaldo L., A Construção de um Discurso Batista para a defesa dos Direitos Humanos, *in: Religião e Sociedade (Pós) Secular*, Santo Andre (SP): Editora Unida/Editora Academia Cristã, 2014, p. 241.

²⁸ BARRETO, The Church and Society Movement and the Roots of Public Theology in Brazilian Protestantism, p. 72.

²⁹ ALVES, Rubem A. *Protestantismo e repressão*. 1. ed. 2. reimpressão. São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1982.



social movements, NGOs, Ecumenical movement organisations, or even political parties and freedom fighters. Others started new Churches. But then, whose history is this? Does it belong to the more progressive religious institutions and ecumenical organisations alone or is this also the history of Brazilian Protestant and Evangelicals – who now represent around 27% of Brazilian population?³⁰ And on top of this: how important is it to make this history known, for religious students, leaders and institutions?



(Fig. 3 – Reverend Davi Malta gives interview about Church & Society in Brazil in the 1960s – by Priscila Vieira-Souza, 2010).

To answer these questions, we need to focus on the kind of memory that can be appropriated in this research project. The narratives of those interviewed are intertwined in issues such as identity building and the institutional risk associated with these memories. Producing videos is particularly interesting here, as we have claimed before: it opens up the

³⁰ **O crescimento evangélico, a próxima eleição e o pastor no STF | Matheus Leitão**, VEJA, disponível em: <<https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/matheus-leitao/o-crescimento-evangelico-a-proxima-eleicao-e-o-pastor-no-stf/>>. acesso em: 31 jul. 2022.



technical possibility of challenging time limits, where the present can meet the past.³¹ This project reveals tensions between establishing the boundaries of the social group (Brazilian Protestant and Evangelicals) and their own contextual and historical dispute around writing Brazilian national memory.

The fact that the project's main outcome, so far, is a documentary film raises up questions of how building up this memory is, per se, an act of resistance. Cássio dos Santos Tomaim claims that every documentary or non-fiction film has this intrinsic characteristic of resistance against forgetting a given representation of the world.³² These films are capable of challenging how much history has been erased in building of what we now understand the past to be. Research projects like this one would be capable of building up the memory of those who were oppressed in history, by giving voice to their stories and using affection as a tool in the videos.³³ Therefore, this research project can also be understood as a claim for (and from) Protestant and Evangelical minorities to be seen as part of Brazilian history.

The growth of these groups into the largest minority of that country is recent, as it is their social visibility.³⁴ Their history is, in fact, full of hostilities with the Catholic majority – such as prohibitions to worship, architectural restrictions in building their temples, limitations to religious and official marriages and having no cemetery to bury their dead.³⁵ In 1962, while CEB was hosting the North-eastern conference in Recife (PE), joined by non-

³¹ VIEIRA SOUZA, Priscila; VINICIUS MATOS, Marcus, “Colorir o passado com o presente”: proposta de construção e apropriação de memória no projeto Juventude, política e religião: diálogos intergeracionais, **Sociedade e Cultura**, v. 16, n. 1, 2014, p. 173.

³² DOS SANTOS TOMAIM, Cassio, O documentário como chave para a nossa memória afetiva, **Intercom-Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação**, v. 32, n. 2, p. 53–69, 2009, p. 55.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 62–63.

³⁴ For a detailed discussion on the concept of visibility, as open up the possibility of politically establishing visibility – or a vision of history, see: DE MATOS, Marcus V. A. B., What does law “really” want? The current state of law and image theory, *in*: NEUENSCHWANDER MAGALHÃES, Juliana *et al* (Orgs.), **Black Mirror Law: o direito em tempos de neoliberalismo**, Rio de Janeiro: Faculdade Nacional de Direito da UFRJ, 2020, p. 114–147.

³⁵ VIEIRA SOUZA; VINICIUS MATOS, “Colorir o passado com o presente”, p. 175.



religious prestigious Brazilian intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre and Celso Furtado, something dreadful was happening to Protestant minorities in Minas Gerais: A Roman Catholic priest lead an attack against a Protestant local church. Guns were shot and stones were thrown against that minority religious group.³⁶

However, these minority claims to have participated in national history is itself an act of resistance: a non-official, underground claim, towards a progressive political position, which is not welcome among the country's elite, nor Church leadership. This is why we could follow Michael Pollak here: we are witnessing the emergence of a collective and underground memory.³⁷ These memories are not treated as individual memories though: they are part of a contextual and collective effort to recollect memories that were lost in a specific historical time frame.

This collective aspect of memory is present in the very way interviews were recorded: each person is interviewed by younger researchers, from different areas of knowledge and who share, to some degree, either a similar faith or a similar political position. This made possible to build common references between the interview panel and those interviewed – even if the group diversity was aimed at generating dissonance, to a certain degree. The studio designed for recording those interviews also helped the collective building of memory: the individual is in the centre of a group, composed of people from another generation. And here we should follow Halbwachs advice: if collective memory takes its strength and duration from a group of people, it is nevertheless the individuals that will remember it. From these common memories, each individual will remember different aspects: individual memory will be forged as a singular perspective over a collective memory.³⁸

³⁶ Católicos e protestantes em conflito em Minas, *ÚLTIMA HORA*, p. 5, 1962.

³⁷ POLLAK, Michael., Memória, esquecimento, silêncio., *Estudos Históricos*, v. 2, n. 3, p. 3–15, 1989.

³⁸ HALBWACHS, Maurice, *Memória Coletiva*, A, São Paulo: Centauro, 2006, p. 69.



In these video interviews we have at least three different kinds of memory building strategies that are bound together in searching for meaning. First, a notion that memory is the reconstruction of the past, and not its evocation. These research projects proposed not only to reconstruct memory, but also how it should be done, who should do it and for whom this memory should be addressed to. A second idea of memory building can be found in affirming that the present is the starting point of the reconstruction of memory, and not the past. Thirdly, again following Halbwachs, there is an understanding that memory is dynamic: it cannot be crystallised, and it will change according to the social groups that claim those memories.³⁹

Conclusion

The links between Human Rights and Religion are far broader than those usually considered academically – such as freedom of speech and conscience. Analysing these previous research efforts was crucial to define our own contemporary way to navigate into this material. It made clearer the “place” from where these memories “speak” to us today,⁴⁰ and its methods, limits and presuppositions. It is clear that what has been done in these previous research efforts, and what we intend to do in the future, is not a recollection of memories, but memory building. This strategy is dynamic and presents us the possibility of reappropriation of these lost memories to those who, perhaps, never thought of claiming and revendicating them – because they didn’t even know those memories existed, in the first place.⁴¹ Although the focus of these projects have been Protestant and Evangelical minorities,

³⁹ HALBWACHS, *Memória Coletiva*, A.

⁴⁰ RIBEIRO, Djamila, *Lugar de Fala*, 1. ed. São Paulo: Editora Jandaíra, 2019.

⁴¹ We have attempted an intergenerational dialogue with these memories in our current research project. It was live broadcasted on television: **Cristo e o processo revolucionário: 60 anos da Conferência do Nordeste**, São Paulo: ABJD & Brunel University London, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghBtKzSx2IA>



these memories are definitively part of the history of the victims of and those who struggled against, the Brazilian Military Dictatorship (1964-1985).

There is also a challenge here, to a few established identities. Official history claims that Protestant and Evangelical communities in Brazil and Latin America supported military coups and dictatorships in the recent past,⁴² but those will memories permanently challenge these assumptions. Although many of those who were interviewed turned to the Ecumenical movements and organisations, or to political and freedom fighter's groups during that time, their memory of resistance is also part of Protestant and Evangelical minorities history. Making these memories available can potentially create in new generations a feeling of belonging to that group – and might turn their current actions into an echo of that past. These memories might prove to these new generations that they do not need to affiliate themselves to a specific group to claim certain political positions: those positions were already available before, in the broader history of Protestantism and Evangelicalism.

Finally, the fact that the intergenerational dialogue proposed in this project is only made possible in the technical use of digital video, opens up other risks and possibilities of resistance. Is this just another claim for historical belonging in contemporary society? On the one hand there are risks: forgetting, distortion, restriction of memories. On the other, the potential of resisting, questioning, challenging official history and institutional memory. The novelty here is a question of time and scene where there is a meeting between past, present and future. Beyond our immediate consumption of the present, it might be possible to articulate new ways and original methods (possibly complementary to each other) to claim memory and challenge that which was intentionally forgotten.

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⁴² DE MATOS, Journal of Latin American Theology, p. 105.



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