

Conservative Narratives about Women's Suffrage in Brazil Between 1933 and 1937: Nuances Regarding the Idea of Emancipation through the Right to Vote

Narrativas Conservadoras sobre o Sufrágio Feminino no Brasil entre 1933 e 1937: Nuances sobre a Ideia de Conquista da Emancipação pelo Direito ao Voto

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to better understand opinions about the enfranchisement of women at the period immediately after the Electoral Code of 1932 until the beginning of the Estado Novo (from 1933 until 1937). It endeavours to show how different to a so-called democratic progress of the 1930s women's suffrage was, through the analysis of the history of other countries and sources of the time (female, Catholic and alternative newspapers). It demonstrates, instead, the existence of movement in the construction of a narrative that puts the vote (and women's emancipation) aside to adopt a type of persuasion aiming to maintain the *status quo*, used by both the Catholic Church and political powers.

Keywords: female enfranchisement; feminism; 1932 electoral code; Vargas era; anarchism; Catholic Church; electoral authoritarianism.

Resumo

O objetivo do artigo é entender os ideários sobre sufrágio feminino no período imediatamente posterior à implementação do Código Eleitoral de 1932 até o início do Estado Novo (de 1933 a 1937). Este trabalho se distancia da visão que enxerga o voto feminino meramente como um progresso democrático dos anos 1930, através da análise da história de outros países e de revistas da época (revistas femininas, jornais católicos e anarquistas). Demonstra, ao contrário, a existência de um movimento de construção de narrativa que deixa o voto (e a emancipação das mulheres) de lado para assumir uma forma de persuasão com a finalidade de conservar o *status quo*, tanto pela Igreja Católica quanto pelos poderes políticos.

Palavras-chave: sufrágio feminino; feminismo; código eleitoral de 1932; era Vargas; anarquismo; Igreja Católica; autoritarismo eleitoral.

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Traditionally, democratic theory indicates free, fair, and competitive elections as a prerequisite for representative regimes to take on democratic contours (Dahl, 1971; Schumpeter, 1961). There is a prevailing consensus that universal suffrage is central in the democratisation of a country, claiming that the broad extension of the right to vote is fundamental for transitioning towards democracy, which played a part “[...] in several broad historical transformations” (Dahl, 1971, p. 33; Rokkan, 1961). Consequently, suffrage is, often, perceived by historiography as the culmination of one of the steps towards women’s emancipation, representing the apex of a linear progress, and therefore, considered the second step towards citizenships after that of the inclusion of women in formal education.

Although the history of Brazilian feminism has been told in different ways, female suffrage, in the 1930s, is considered the final milestone of the *first wave* of feminism in Brazil (Pinto, 2003; Duarte, 2019). And, until today, the female vote is seen by Brazilian historiography as merely a victory of the women that had been fighting for women’s emancipation, and more strictly speaking for their political rights.

Recently, however, scholars have proposed a different way of understanding this process in relation to women’s rights. This alternative analysis endeavours to emphasise the complexity of the historical circumstances surrounding female suffrage in Brazil. In other countries, research has demonstrated that female suffrage, apart from being a cause of concern for institutional powers, also became a dear topic for the Catholic Church (Rubio-Marín, 2014), already evidenced by research in Brazil (Araujo, 2003; Carvalho, 2011; Karawejczyk; Maia, 2016). Another important fact to remember is that the decade when female enfranchisement is achieved is one more example of the authoritarian and violent periods of Brazilian (and World) history. It could be argued, then, that the inclusion of the female vote may be interpreted differently and defended by reasoning that is not necessarily “progressive”. The vote can be seen not as a tool of women’s emancipation, but, as a part in the maintenance of political leverage and the *status quo*, and the moralisation of the elections.

The Electoral Code of 1932 (Código Eleitoral de 1932) is, generally, given credit for being responsible for a series of institutional innovations, such as, the *secret ballot*, *mandatory voting*, *proportional representation*, and the creation of the *Electoral Justice* mechanism, and for being one of the most important laws in the history of elections in Brazil (Nicolau, 2019). Particularly noteworthy is the struggle for women's rights (Teles, 1993). More recent research, however, has focused on the complexity behind its implementation, questioning the interests of the Interim Government (Governo Provisório) in power since the Revolution of 1930 (Silva; Silva, 2015; Ricci, 2019a; Zulini; Ricci, 2020).

It is important to bear in mind that, under authoritarian governments, election reforms that rewrite electoral rules do not necessarily mean a “[...] real interest of those governing to make the regime more open or participatory” (Gandhi, 2009, *apud* Zulini; Ricci 2020, p.602). By connecting democracy to elections, “we are in danger of forgetting that the modern history of representative elections is a tale of authoritarian manipulations as much as it is a saga of democratic triumphs”, in other words, elections “have been an instrument of authoritarian control as well as a means of democratic governance” (Schedler, 2002, p. 36).

Periodicals from three different profiles were selected: women's magazines, Catholic newspapers and Anarchist newspapers published during the Vargas Era, specifically between 1933 and 1937, when after the Electoral Code, three elections took place.² The aim was to bring together historical sources that confirm the impression that the inclusion of the vote for women was not only a conquering of a right, but an instrument for disputing political leverage. I endeavour, therefore, to demonstrate the existence of a continuous negotiation between actors that wanted to take ownership of the female vote to defend their own ideals, normally in favour of maintaining the conservative hegemony.

The research was carried out in the Brazilian National Library's Periodicals Archive³, in the Canto Libertário collection⁴ and the Edgard Leuenroth Archive⁵. To optimise the search for material, the research was carried out by way of selected keywords.⁶ Then, qualitative analysis of each finding was carried out, to distinguish the texts that were really about the issues pertinent to the research at hand⁷, excluding false positives, that is, texts that, although included the selected keywords, deviated from the scope of the research.⁸ The following table shows a summary of the type of periodical consulted and their respective names:

Table 1 – Type and location of periodical

Type of periodical	Location	Name
Women's magazines	MT	<i>A Violeta: Orgam do Gremio Litterario "Julia Lopes"</i>
	RJ	<i>Jornal das Moças</i>
	RJ	<i>Vida Domestica</i>
Catholic	MT	<i>A Cruz</i>
	RJ	<i>A Ordem</i>
	PE	<i>Maria</i>
"Canto Libertário": Anarchist or Left-wing perspective	PR	<i>A Barricada</i>
	SP	<i>A Lanterna</i>
	RJ	<i>Jornal do Povo</i>
	SP	<i>A Plebe</i>

Source: Researcher's elaboration.

The first section concerns magazines that claimed to be dedicated to feminine topics. Women's magazines were chosen because they represent "[...] a privileged *locus* of the discussion of the role of women in republican society" (Freire, 2009, p. 26).

² In May 1933, July 1934, and November 1935; the Electoral Code also went through a reform in 1935.

³ The Periodical Archive of the National Library is available at: <http://bndigital.bn.gov.br/hemeroteca-digital/>.

⁴ The collection was originally organised by the Social Culture Centre of São Paulo (Centro de Cultura Social de São Paulo). Now it is housed in the Periodical Archive of São Paulo's State University (Universidade Estadual de São Paulo - UNESP).

⁵ During the research carried out in the Canto Libertário collection, a gap in the editions of the newspaper *A Plebe* was identified. The editions were later found in the Edgard Leuenroth Archive.

⁶ "Suffrage", "feminine vote", "feminism", "feminine", "maternity", "divorce". In the Edgard Leuenroth Archive, the search for keywords was a little different. It was necessary to download each edition and search for the keywords in each PDF that was generated.

⁷ Here the focus was on the keywords "suffrage" and "female vote" but other texts that included the other keywords were included.

⁸ For example, articles were not considered if they were about different types of suffrage, such as religious suffrage. Also, it became necessary to exclude from our research universe a series of short stories published at the time. Although these stories contained the keywords, due to the level of irony or even the organisation of the publication (a series of editions), a more profound study would be necessary that would go beyond the scope of this research.

Although they were about “female” matters, these magazines were not always created, organised, or written by women, innumerably, they were owned by men.⁹ The magazines *Vida Domestica* and *Jornal das Moças* were focused on the domestic familial universe (Freire, 2009). The influence of *Jornal das Moças* was so great at the time that the magazine determined “social, familial and religious behaviour, reinforcing the idealised or expected role of the society concerning the role of women, [...] remodelling or maintaining her in the norms desired by the state, society and media” (Soares; Silva, 2013, p.2). While *A Violeta: Organ do Gremio Litterario “Julia Lopes”* was included to broaden the understanding of material from the period written by – lettered – women and to also leave the Rio de Janeiro-São Paulo axis.

The second profile refers to the publications produced by sectors of the Catholic Church. The inclusion of these publications is due precisely to the convergence of interests of certain social groups in Brazil surrounding female enfranchisement. In this way, the purpose of bringing Catholic periodicals to the centre of analysis is to think about the consonance between diverse interest that make up the institutions of power at the time. The Church positioned itself in favour of groups that reaffirmed conservative and normative values concerning the condition of women (Ostos, 2012), it also sought to enter the wheels of power amid the threat of the process of modernisation and the discourse of the renovation of the country, that included criticisms to the dogmatic foundations of the religion and pushed for the separation of the church from the state (Ribeiro, 2013). That said, newspapers became an important tool of the Church’s political-institutional reinsertion strategy encouraged by the hope of recouping space lost since the Proclamation of the Republic. The beginning of the 20th Century is a phase of organisation and articulation of the Catholic press (Lustoso *apud* Marin, 2018; Ribas, 2011).

The third and last segment analysed encompasses the periodicals of an “alternative” political orientation, mainly from an anarchist perspective. At the beginning of the 20th Century, anarchism spread throughout Brazil by means of the organisation of rallies, popular uprisings and by way of the publication of newspapers and books. In general, anarchism – movements, ideas, anarchist groups – has been an overlooked topic in political theory as a whole (Brancaleone, 2020). Specifically concerning the history of elections and of female suffrage in Brazil, the anarchist experiences have been minimised thanks to a traditional focus on institutional politics, which tend to reduce the complexity presented by other movements and groups regarding feminism and the process of female emancipation, whilst also prioritising certain conceptions and visions. Analysing publications with this profile is pertinent because it provides a contrast to conservative sources in that they do not instrumentalise the vote but lay bare the conservative use of it.

To later examine the periodicals, we will first problematize the Brazilian experience through a comparative perspective, opening the way to contrast the narrative regarding female suffrage as a democratic victory with the alternative hypothesis of a political strategy of the political elites and the Catholic Church. Subsequently, we will concentrate on the analysis of the findings.

⁹For example, the magazine *Vida Domestica* was owned by Jesus Gonçalves Fidalgo, and *Jornal das Moças* was owned by Álvaro Menezes.

The Broadening of Women's Political Rights and Female Suffrage

In Brazil, female suffrage entered the agenda of the Constituent Assembly of 1891, but was not approved. In 1910, the Feminine Republican Party (Partido Republicano Feminino – PRF) was created, founded by Leolinda Daltro and Gilka Machado. The organisation's main goal was to involve women all over Brazil in the struggle for women's rights and for the extension of all constitutional provisions, such as the right to register to vote and access to apply for civil servant positions (Karawejczyk, 2019). In 1916, a female enfranchisement law was requested, the following year, a bill that would allow women above the age of 21 to vote was presented (Karawejczyk, 2019).

In 1920, Bertha Lutz founded the Intellectual Emancipation of Women League (Liga pela Emancipação Intelectual da Mulher – LEIM), later renamed the Brazilian Federation of Feminine Progress (Federação Brasileira pelo Progresso Feminino - FBPF). Lutz was a woman from the Brazilian elite, that returned to Brazil, after having studied in France, with the intention to forge ahead with women's issues, mainly suffrage. Federal state affiliates of the FBPF popped up, including in Rio Grande do Norte, where a commission of women connected to the FBPF started to pressure the governor Augusto de Medeiros (1924 to 1927), and then in 1927 women were granted the right to register to vote in that state. That same year, a petition containing two thousand signatures was presented to the Federal State (Pinto, 2003). In addition, in the same year, 17 women were able to vote, and Julia Alves Barbosa was elected local councillor in Natal.

After the women's vote was approved in Rio Grande do Norte, Senator Justo Chermont's project presented in 1919 was voted on once again, with 34 senators voting for, 15 against and seven unsure about the subject, which indicated a movement towards the approval of the bill (Karawejczyk, 2019). After a period of political upheaval in the country, which culminated in the Revolution of 1930, the Interim Government headed by Getúlio Vargas committed itself to instituting the new Electoral Code and a new Constitution envisioning the restoration of the country's political life. In 1932, female suffrage is approved, supposedly putting an end to the struggle (Pinto, 2003).

In the history of the inclusion of the women's vote in the Brazilian electoral process what prevails is a narrative of the women's rights movement where the "conquering" of the vote is considered the apex of the *first wave* of feminism (Duarte, 2019; Pinto, 2003). For part of historiography, however, it is not simply a stage in the process of democratisation, achieved through the incorporation of new political subjects, but a complex and unsettled political conjuncture. Therefore, instead of female suffrage being seen as a linear and progressive process, some authors have drawn attention to the complexities involved in the inclusion of women in election processes around the world.

In Europe, as Rubio-Marín analyses, suffrage would in fact be a response to "the dynamics at play in the creation of modern states and the definition of male and female citizenship in the republican and liberal traditions of citizenship" (Rubio-Marín, 2014, p. 6). According to the author, in Europe, these predominant political conceptions at the time had similar effects: the separation of the public and private spheres and the relegation of women to the domestic space (Rubio-Marín, 2014).

Through the analysis of the inclusion of women in elections in three European countries – Spain (Aguado, 2012), Portugal (Amaral; Anjinho, 2012) and Italy (Mancini, 2012) -, three common aspects become apparent: society's resistance to female suffrage; the birth of suffrage conditioned to conservative morals; and the strategic use of the female vote by interested actors of civil society, mainly the Church, or authoritarian governments, to broaden the conservative electorate or legitimise the authoritarian regime in power at the time.

Concerning the resistance towards female suffrage, in Spain the first two proposals to include women in the electoral process (1877 and 1907/08) were not approved, even though these proposals determined that women would only be able to vote with official authorisation (Aguado, 2012). In Portugal, despite the republican elite in power during the First Republic (1911-1926) being renowned for being sympathetic to women's issues, in 1912, after a proposal that included part of women in elections being approved, the members of parliament started a debate about the issue, and, in 1913, there was an amendment that explicitly excluded women voters (Amaral; Anjinho, 2012). Whilst Italy was one of the countries where women lost political rights with the modernisation of the state.

With regards to the influence of conservative morals, women were restricted to the private sphere, and to the *wife-mother-housewife* role, in all three countries analysed. For example, in 1878 in Italy, Anna Maria Mozzoni founded the Promoting Women's Interests League (Lega Promotrice degli Interessi Femminili). Although Mozzoni saw suffrage as an autonomous goal to be pursued in the name of women's equality and natural rights, by the end of the 19th century, it is apparent that the bourgeois feminist movement had become a moderate, "maternalistic" feminism, demanding their recognition as citizens "not in the name of some abstract natural right, or because they were equal to men in the conventional sense, but because, as mothers, they were indispensable to the social order" (De Grazia, 1992 *apud* Mancini, 2012, p. 378).

The third aspect covers the strategic use of the women's vote by some actors that were interested in broadening the conservative electorate or in legitimising the authoritarian regime in power at the time. The Catholic Church ended up supporting suffrage because it believed that the conservative vote of women could help curb liberalism and the proletariat struggle, and help defend traditional family values; for Rubio-Marín, the result was the emergence of a "Christian feminism" (Rubio-Marín, 2014, p.11) A similar example was the creation of Catholic associations in Spain that promoted female suffrage (Aguado, 2012, p. 290). In Italy, even with the presence of opinions against women voting due (again) to the concern about its threat to the traditional family, female suffrage was even endorsed by the Pope (Mancini, 2012).

Women's right to vote was not just defended by conservative segments of civil society, but also by the authoritarian regimes. It is notable that, in most cases, the process towards female suffrage was dominated by strategic factors, and not by women's emancipation based on the ideals of freedom, justice and equality. In Spain, it was during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship that women above the age of 25 could be elected as local councillors, as decreed in 1924, in the Municipal Statute. As the vote was seen as "familial" and attributed to the "head of the household", the right to vote was extended to single women and widows. Married women were not included so to

avoid family disagreements (Aguado, 2012). Despite the changes, no election took place during the dictatorship. In Italy, after three years of the dictatorial regime, Mussolini declared his support for the women's vote, affirming that there would be no "catastrophic consequences, as some misogynists argue" and that it would be beneficial because women would bring "their fundamental virtues of balance, equilibrium and prudence" (Mancini, 2012, p. 380). In Portugal, all three electoral bills in favour of female suffrage (1931, 1947 and 1969) were sanctioned during an authoritarian regime (between 1926 and 1974).

For the researchers the aim behind the measures in favour of suffrage was to broaden the social base of the dictatorships through female support and, to cultivate the image of modernity following the example of other European countries regarding granting rights to women, creating a form of "politicization without citizenship" (Aguado, 2012; Mancini, 2012, p. 380).

The analysis of different paths to female suffrage in Europe demonstrates the complexities regarding the inclusion of women in the political-institutional process, which have also been touched upon by researchers in the case of Brazil. During the period of the consolidation of women's suffrage, Brazilian society was very conservative, and women were restricted to the traditional *wife-mother-housewife* role (Rago, 1985; Maluf; Mott, 1998; Westhrop, 2022). Even with the existence of suffrage movements and feminists at that time, women's rights – which included the right to vote – and the emancipation of women were a challenging terrain. Like the other countries analysed, there was no substantial support for the inclusion of women in the political-institutional process in Brazil. Between 1891 and 1917 – or in other words, for 26 years – the issue of the female vote was not touched upon in the Brazilian parliament, and more than 15 years went by until it was sanctioned in 1932.

Besides the little support and the connection between the female vote and the traditional and conservative roles attributed to women, another point that is revealed is the conservative tendency tied to the defence of changes in election legislation, from both the influence of the Church and by the powers at be themselves – mainly in relation to the moralisation of the process and the inclusion of women in the political process precisely during an authoritarian regime.

The Catholic Church had lost important space with the Proclamation of the Republic and the Constitution of 1891, when Brazil became a secular country. Until then, elections were held in churches, always followed by mass. The Proclamation of the Republic had created a vacuum of power, not only inside the state, but also within the Church itself, which had lost its "leader", first the king, and later the emperor (Fausto, 2007, p. 362). The way the Church dealt with this change was by avoiding conflict with the new liberal order, simultaneously taking advantage of its new "autonomy" provided by the very distancing from the political powers (Fausto, 2007). Faced with the upheavals and uncertainties of the 1920s, the Church offered to help the liberal oligarchy through the constant campaign that "it is through the 'rights' of the majority that the Catholic feelings of the Brazilian people should translate into legislation and State practice" (Fausto, 2007, p. 346). It was exactly between 1930 and 1945 that a window of opportunity opened for the Church to redefine its role, inaugurating a "new Christianity", or in other words, "the option of the Church to use mediation of political society (of the state), with its coercive apparatus, as a way to exercise their hegemony in civil society" (Fausto, 2007, p. 339).

One of the tools used by the Church in the next decade was the Catholic Electoral League (Liga Eleitoral Católica – LEC), a national civil association founded in 1932 by Cardinal Sebastião Leme. The LEC was a nonpartisan organisation, a pressure group dedicated to encouraging the Catholic population to support and vote for candidates that defended the Church's social doctrine in the elections of 1933 and 1934. In the first elections, the Church showed approval for suffrage, as the women's vote was a fundamental part of their strategy to find support for the laws about family and school education, and the end to the secular state in the Constitution (Beozzo, 1984 apud Primolan, 2007; Fausto, 2007).

This issue can be illustrated through the recent research about different locations in Brazil (Araujo, 2003; Carvalho, 2011; Karawejczyk; Maia, 2016). In the same way as the European experiences, the arguments supporting suffrage were full of conservative elements. The women that took part in the survey analysed by Rita de Cássia Barbosa de Araujo (2003), for example, defend that the women's vote would not impact the functions of a housewife or mother, ratifying their commitment to the Church and morality, now weakened by secularism. Even if they supported the female vote, these women continued to adhere to conservative and Catholic points of view.

There are indications of the involvement of women in the LEC that demonstrates, in itself, the involvement and influence of the Church in women's issues at the time. The LEC strived to register as many Catholic voters as possible. In Bauru (São Paulo state), for example, home visits were organised. The town was divided into sectors, each one under the responsibility of a woman, in these visits the LEC's goals were explained, and the female voters were invited to register to the League (Primolan, 2007). For Primolan (2007, p. 7), the campaign was based on “[...] urging women to overcome the prejudice about their new role and showing the importance of the participation of women in the elections to defend their family, religion and the country.” Even after the 1933 elections, the middle-class women were still organised, “struggling above all for the moralisation of customs, for the strengthening of the family and for the spreading of Catholic ethical principles and values” (Araujo, 2003, p. 144).

According to researchers (Araujo, 2003; Carvalho, 2011; Karawejczyk; Maia, 2016), the rapprochement of the Catholic Church with the women's cause was not limited to registering women to vote. Like in Spain, in 1923, another association was created in São Paulo – the League of Catholic Women (Liga das Senhoras Católicas) (Karawejczyk; Maia, 2016, p. 92). This association was part of a Catholic feminist movement, a *Catholic feminism* (Karawejczyk; Maia, 2016; Karawejczyk, 2019). With this movement of Catholic women and the closeness of Bertha Lutz with protestant figures¹⁰, the women's movement in Brazil began to face some difficulties (Karawejczyk; Maia, 2016). To overcome obstacles, such as the Catholic Church's criticisms of the FBPF, at the end of the 1920s, Bertha Lutz decided to incorporate argumentation that would humour the Catholic Church, that growingly appeared to be an important ally for the inclusion of the female vote in the national political agenda (Karawejczyk; Maia, 2016).

¹⁰ Mainly Carrie Chapman Catt, one of the most important figures of the women's rights movement in the United States of America.

It was not just the Catholic Church that saw suffrage through a conservative lens. Conservatism was also present within the Brazilian State and in the political-institutional strategies of the time. As we have seen, the Electoral Code of 1932 is considered, for some authors, as Brazil's most important electoral law, having a great influence on the history of elections in the country (Ricci, 2019a). It is regarded, largely, as a step towards the moralisation of the election process due to the reduction of fraud and the inclusion of subjects that until then had been excluded from this political ritual (Sadek, 2017).

Recently, the notion of electoral acts as democratic milestones has been called into question by historiography. Although there is a tendency to evaluate the reforms and new electoral rules as democratic process, little do we actually know about the motives behind the formulation of the measures included in the Code (Ricci, 2019a). We can question what caused the politicians to organize such an innovative code for the time, investigating what was really at play; "[...] if the agenda was already set, it was crucial then to understand why the revolutionaries¹¹ embark on a reformist wave and why the proposals succeeded in the way that they did" (Ricci, 2019a, p. 19).

It is important to remember that the historical and political context surrounding the Electoral Code was that of great "instability" (Ricci, 2019a, p. 19; Lopes, 2019, p. 25). In historiography, in general, this period is usually separated into before and after the Estado Novo, a dictatorial regime, without elections, which carried out censorship and political repression, mainly towards anarchists, communists and trade unions. The previous government, however, between 1930 and 1937, was also arbitrary. With the National Security Act (Lei de Segurança Nacional), approved by Congress in April 1935, the Constitution practically ceased to exist. The government, led by the head of the Executive, managed to approve legislation of an exceptional character that authorised the closure of political organisations and the arrest of opposition members of parliament (Gomes, 1980).

The Electoral Code was precisely a mechanism found by the government to try and legitimate itself in power amid this political instability. For Paolo Ricci (2019b), regimes like that of Brazil's at the time – authoritarian and, at the same time, representative – can be classified as a type of *competitive authoritarianism*. Reform was carried out, but the political elites retained their power, and it was the government on duty that established the rules of the political game to be set in motion (Gomes, 1980; Ricci, 2019b).

Like in the case of other analysed countries, female suffrage was achieved during a government with authoritarian characteristics. So, what were the advantages of the government to propose the Electoral Code and support suffrage? What seems evident is that the reasons behind the support for female suffrage and the impact generated by it are more complex than a simple "victory" of the women's rights movements. The female vote constitutes a part in the maintenance of conservative narratives during an authoritarian moment, including by institutions like the Catholic Church. This analysis does not intend to invalidate an idea, substitute one for another, but to intends to understand the historical process a little more deeply (Hemmings, 2005). A key maybe would be to understand the context through the voices of those who lived these transformations.

¹¹ N.T.: The name "revolutionaries" refers to those who were involved in the political upheaval in 1930 and were involved in the creation of the Interim Government.

Visions about the Women's Vote in Brazil after Adopting Female Suffrage

To understand the opinions about the female vote of the actors that experienced this process, we will, in this section, analyse how the selected periodicals, the women's magazines, the Catholic newspapers, and the newspapers critical of the political system, mainly anarchist, approached the topic.

What were the opinions about women voting between 1933 and 1937? Most texts analysed that supported the vote for women were from a Catholic perspective or understood the vote as an instrument of subservience, or in other words, as a foundation for maintaining the *status quo* of certain groups in power – particularly the Church. What becomes clear is not merely that the Catholic press and, even the women's magazines, were conservative; our study shows a movement towards the construction of a narrative that puts the right to vote (and the emancipation of women) aside to adopt a means of persuasion – in favour of morality, for example.

The women's magazines from Rio de Janeiro would appear to be fruitful spaces for the women's vote. Although, the focus was about the family and domestic universe, there were columns about fashion, beauty, and culture. They still, however, emphasized the role of women as the carers of their homes, husbands, and children (Soares; Silva, 2013, p. 2; Maluf; Mott, 1998). *A Violeta* was a space for spreading the work and ideals of the FBPF (Costa, 2013). In a magazine with this profile, we would expect to find more texts about the elections that happened in this period. All said, little was found in the women's magazines about the vote for women.

Through the analysis of the literature, we would assume that the Catholic newspapers would be a space to influence and attract new voters. We found articles that backed the vote provided that it was in accordance with Catholic doctrine, mainly in 1933, but also from 1934 and 1937. The newspaper that touched on this topic the most was *A Cruz* (MT).

In the anarchist periodicals we found texts that were against women voting, due to the anarchist criticism of the political order and instruments of power, like the vote and conventional political representation, and also the involvement of the Catholic Church. These texts were published in 1933, 1934 and 1935.

In the table below, we present the typologies of the different opinions about the women's vote at the time.

Table 2 - Representations of the women's vote in analysed periodicals

Type of representation*	Description	No. of articles	%
3.1. Women's vote as a catholic duty	Articles backing the women's vote providing that it follow Catholic doctrine (help with registering women, recommendation of candidates, orientation about how to behave during elections)	13	33,3
3.2. Women's vote as subservience	Articles that approach the women's vote as a political instrument, or that criticise suffrage as a whole (and the women's vote in particular) as a political instrument.	16	41
3.3. Other	Articles that do not fit in the previous representations, such as news about the Constituent Assembly and radio news.	10	25,6
Total		39	100

Source: Elaborated through the research carried out in the Periodical Archive of the National Library, the Canto Libertário collection and the Edgard Leuenroth Archive, between September 2020 and December 2021.

* 29 articles were not considered or used in the analysis because they did not have a direct relation with the research, generally because they dealt with the vote or with suffrage without mentioning the specific issue of women.

Among the arguments in favour of women's voting rights, three aspects found in the Catholic newspapers and the women's magazines were frequent: the social role of the women should not be affected; women would make up an electorate with morals committed to social agendas; and women had a duty to Catholicism. Therefore, women voting was welcome if it did not go against their social duties¹², or in other words, her obligations as a *wife-mother-housewife*.

In *A Violeta* we can find the motivations and aims of the FBPF, whose mission, in general terms, was to "coordinate and guide women's efforts to elevate themselves culturally and make them more efficient in their social activities, whether it be in the domestic or public, intellectual, and political life" (Seção [...], 1934, p. 12). Besides the insertion of women in the political sphere, having political rights would be a way to protect working women and the well-being of their children, as well as helping women to "make their participation in public affairs effective" (Seção [...], 1934, p. 12). Regarding the vote, one of the organisation's goals was "to guarantee women the political rights that our Constitution grants them and prepare them for the intelligent use of these rights" (Seção [...], 1934, p. 12). And, with the inclusion of women in the election process it was now her responsibility to "register as a voter to defend herself, **her home** and to improve the living conditions of all Brazilians [...], through the institution of prudent laws" (Seção [...], 1934, p. 12, our emphasis).

Similar perspectives appear in the Catholic periodicals. It is possible to find texts that sing the praise of women's competence: "Women's capacity, intellectuality, and culture, it cannot be denied, can be seen through History and during the modern times. Their brains with great intellectual vision have shone in science, literature and **in politics**" (O voto [...], 1933, p. 42, our emphasis). Despite now supporting female suffrage, the social role of women was still seen from a conservative perspective. Women were historically belittled through a biological perspective, but, when it was about safeguarding conservative political interests, the Catholic press began to speak highly of their innate intelligence, further manipulating the models of morality, with the women's vote having a moral function. It would be through their "moral character" that women could "freely develop their capacity in favour of the political interests of the people" (O voto [...], 1933, p. 42). Their duty as wives and mothers did not prevent women from having influence outside of the domestic and family environment, and these issues would be taken to the political sphere.

According to the vision of the Church, registering women to vote would be crucial because their vote was a route towards moral and civil progress in the country, at a time when women held a certain position of prestige and Brazil needed restructuring – not just socially, but also morally. This was something important to incorporate, being that this structuring could only be reached through the family, which was represented by expressions like the "unrelenting sanctuary of the conscience", "serene temple" (O voto [...], 1933, p. 42) or "cornerstone of society"

¹² "If women cry and sing at the same time as men, when the Nation is humiliated or extolled, she, like her father, husband or brother, has the right to choose the leaders, from the local councils to the higher position of the President of the Republic, and, she can even be voted for, provided that by doing these activities she is not going against her social duties" (O espirito [...], 1934).

(Irradiando [...], 1934, p. 1). It would be exactly through the women's vote that this "serene" environment could contribute to the construction of another, more "free, orderly, and happy", nation (Liga [...], 1933b, p. 2), which was not made up of a "barbaric, anarchic, tumultuous clan submissive to all passions and vicissitudes" (Liga [...], 1933b, p. 2). Therefore, the women's vote would be a tool for the maintenance of catholic order and morals, in a country terrorized by "libertarian outbreaks" that threatened the traditional family.

The mention of important personalities, like members of parliament and prominent figures like Cardinal Leme, was also used as a resource to express approval of women voting, that began to be characterized as the "will of God". It would be the moment for women to voice themselves in relation to the "great problems of Brazil" and work "in favour of the great ideals of the family and the Nation. It is a duty to defend the sacred principles of the Church, of Morality, and of Society, as our Cardinal Leme rightly said. **To the ballot box, then, fellow countrywomen, it is God's will!**" (O voto [...], 1933, p. 43, our emphasis).

Appealing to authority is also present through the LEC. Moreover, most of the mentions about the women's vote were related to this organisation. Although it was not a political party, it was through the bulletins and texts of the League that the readers received orientations about how, or how not, to vote. For the LEC, the Catholic voter should not vote for candidates that were contrary to catholic beliefs, that included atheists, secularists and the anticlerical, "enemies of our Nation", "divorcists", whose strength was enough to destroy the family, not forgetting the communists and socialists, that were ready to cause "subversion and social anarchy" (Irradiando [...], 1934, p. 1).

The LEC considered that most voters were catholic, and, therefore, the secret ballot and female suffrage would only help to broaden the voice of the Catholic electorate and the influence of the Church (Irradiando [...], 1934, p. 1), that needed to "get into the institutions [that would be] enshrined in the national charter, or in other words the new Political Constitution of Brazil" (Liga [...], 1933a, p. 1).

It is interesting to observe the Church's rhetoric in relation to the changes in opinion about women's right to vote. If, before, the Church preached for keeping women in the home, in the private sphere, now it emphasised that, in order to take part in the elections, she did not need to abandon her home, "it was enough for her to leave it twice: once to register and once on the day of the elections" (A Liga [...], 1933a, p. 1).

Although the vote had not been a request of the Church, "lots of people think that the women's vote was a victory of the Catholics [...] The Catholics did not petition for it. We believe that the idea came from parties that are quite unconcerned with religious issues" (A Liga [...], 1933a, p. 1), now, that the law had been passed, it became women's duty in the "saving of today's society" (A Liga [...], 1933a, p. 1). The notion of duty (and not so much that of a right) is emphasised in the "felicitous" phrase of "one of the great champions of Catholic work in Rio", Cecilia Luiza Rangel Pedrosa: "In giving us the **right** to vote, they created for us the **duty** to vote" (A Liga [...], 1933a, p. 1, our emphasis).

As expected, in the anarchist periodicals, we can find narratives that criticise the vote for women, due to the anarchist criticism of the political system in force, including representative mechanisms. It is also in these publications that we find opinions about female suffrage that meet with the conceptions defended in more recent literature. It is

argued that the female electorate was a strategic tool used by reactionary groups, like the Church, and the recognition that female suffrage had been included in an authoritarian context. Another interesting factor is that, in these periodicals, the opinions of (anarchist) women about the women's vote and women's political rights are published.

Texts published under the name of Maria Lacerda de Moura, including articles about political rights and women's right to vote are recurring, particularly between 1933 and 1935¹³. In 1933, the author criticises the political system, Brazilian legislation, and the influence of the Church, describing the failure of the political, state, religious and educational institutions of the country and demonstrating her disbelief in relation to women's right to vote. For her, voting was not a natural human necessity, but a weapon of "social vampirism" and "the public confession of subservience" (*A política [...]*, 1933, p. 1). Parliamentarism was a circus, and there was a "theatricality of governments, of politics, of the armed forces, of bureaucracy of patronage – to complicate life blinding the credulous, in order to exploit all of humankind" (*A política [...]*, 1933, p. 1).

Amid the failure of the political system, the political energy of women was being "discovered" by reactionary groups, now "sympathetic to the meddling¹⁴ of women in State business" (*Direitos [...]*, 1933, p. 2). In other words, the female electorate would be used as a strategic tool by these reactionary groups. In this way, in petitioning for the vote the women were registering "in the ranks of the reactionaries of all centuries" (*Direitos [...]*, 1933, p. 2).

Just before the elections of November 1935, in October, an article entitled "The feminists... one more exploiter in the bourgeois skirts vs trousers match appears in field mining for votes" was published in the *Jornal do Povo* (*As feministas [...]*, 1934, p. 6), which mainly criticises the feminists involved in the FBPF, but also criticises female suffrage: "They have given women the "right to vote"! But only the blind do not see that this "right to vote" is a "blag"; for the author, these "feminists" were mining for votes merely in the name of "bourgeois madams", concluding that:

The working woman has serious demands, alongside her brothers that fight against misery and against oppression. The working woman does not divide her world into skirts and trousers: but divides it into masters and slaves. And she fights for the freedom of the latter, which also means her own freedom. (*As feministas [...]*, 1934, p. 6)

The anarchist newspapers also weave interesting criticisms of the role of the Church in the election process and all Brazilian institutional politics in the 1930s, arguing that women being able to vote was incapable of contributing to women's emancipation and to more gender equality. Women's suffrage would be a "setback", supported by subservience to Catholicism. As the articles found demonstrate anarchists did not advocate the vote as a redeeming mediation but saw it as a representative model that would make individuals delegate their potential to abstract authorities. If the women were "openminded" and "were enlightened spirits, free from catholic, dusty

¹³ Already in 1935 there was an increase in the repression of newspapers, social movements and activists against the regime (Gomes, 1980).

¹⁴ In this section, Maria Lacerda de Moura could, to some extent, seem to be conservative when using the word "meddling", insinuating that the place of women was still in the home, not in the public space. However, based on the passages analysed it was possible to certify that conservatism was still deep rooted in the women as a whole due to the imposing of the culture of the time on the female condition and, so, women were co-opted by reactionary and conservative powers and politicians.

and mouldy, preconceptions”, there would be no problem, “they, however, obey more the imperatives of the priests, of the pope, of the church, than of the imperatives of reason, of logic, of freedom, of freedom of belief and of free thought. And right there is the danger” (Sermões [...], 1933, p. 1).

Suffrage would be a “paradox” and was considered a “progression-recession”. If, on one hand, steps were made in the direction of “modern demands of making the sexes more equal through the concessions of common rights for men and women”, on the other hand, women’s suffrage would be “a manna fallen from the sky in favour of the priesthood and the Catholic Church, an unexpected reinforcement of the reactionary forces that tend towards the past, when they desire to retrace the course of history to see re-established all of the shameful acts characteristic of past regimes” (Sermões [...], 1933, p. 1). Women would “build up the clerical ranks that fight to take religious education to schools, to establish the Catholic Church as the State’s religion, the official religion, and to make them decree the new Constitution in the name of the Catholic trinity, an incoherent and absurd trinity” (Sermões [...], 1933, p. 1).

Furthermore, in 1935, during the revision of the Electoral Code of 1932, the *A Plebe* newspaper reiterates the idea of the women’s vote as a political strategy of the church:

Women, unfortunately, acquired the right to vote, not due to their knowledge, but as a weapon of clerical politics. It was an evil that will become good, because, dragged into the struggle, it will not be long before they see the abyss at their feet. (A questão [...], 1935, p. 2, our emphasis)

Maria Lacerda de Moura is another who criticises the political aims of the Catholic Church and its influence on the State; for her, the female vote would be a “major disaster”, putting the country in the hands of Cardinal Sebastião Leme, “one of many that name Mussolini – ‘the man of Providence’” (Direitos [...], 1933, p. 2).

The authoritarian context was also repeatedly remembered by the anarchists, through the criticism of the tyrannical character of the regime and the figure of the dictator. Maria Lacerda de Moura makes use of the Greek philosopher Aristoteles to emphasise the demagogic character that was present in the use of the women’s vote by the government and by dictators, seen as a way to win over the masses: “So Pisistratus did in Athens, Theagenes in Megara, Denys in Syracuse. So did Mussolini.” (A política [...], 1933, p. 1).

So, the promise of new rights would be empty words of demagogues turned tyrants: “When the mask that attracts the human flock falls, the dictator leaps onto the political ring, with his two hands full: in one, a “manganelo”¹⁵; and in the other, castor oil...” (A política [...], 1933, p. 1). Later, “the dictatorial and tyrannical governments pair up admirably with the petulance of the pharisees of the Church, in the common aim of dominating and enslaving our consciences” (Direitos [...], 1933, p. 2).

Final Considerations

The fall of the census barriers to vote and the extension of the right to vote to all adult men, and after, to women, appear as crucial moments in a country’s evolution towards democracy. However, part of recent literature about the history of female

¹⁵N.T.: “Manganelo” is probably from the Italian “manganello” – truncheon – maybe alluding to the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

suffrage around the world shows the complexity of the different contexts where the right to vote was conceded to women. In both the European experiences analysed and Brazil, female suffrage was instituted in conservative and authoritarian contexts in which the influence of the Catholic Church was significant.

According to the analysed sources, as well as the reiteration of conservative arguments in relation to the role of women, the influence of other segments, like the Catholic Church, is also evident. Both in liberal and Catholic perspectives, the criticism of suffrage gives way to the defence of a determined conception of the women's vote. It is evident, through the analysis of Catholic newspapers and through the contrast with Anarchist publications, that the Catholic Church, that sought to regain the space lost during the First Republic, made use of the vote in a determined way. The Church, as a result, rode the wave in the hope to create a conservative electorate with Catholic moral values.

As we saw in the analysis the opinion of the Church changed. If before it preached for the conservation of the role of women in the home, in the private sphere, now it emphasised that, to take part in the elections women did not have to abandon their homes. The sources demonstrate the movement of the construction of a narrative that puts the vote (and emancipation) aside in order to take the route of a narrative of persuasion with the aim to conserve the status quo, using a moralist and conservative rhetoric about the role of women. For anarchists, this was not limited to the Catholic Church, but included the authoritarian governments in power at the time.

The sources analysed reiterate the complexity of the historical process of female suffrage, highlighting the limits and insufficiencies of the prevailing historical narrative about women's rights and feminism, based on the *wave's* metaphor. In analysing the suffrage experiences in three European countries and the Brazilian case, it was possible to verify how this process was plural, not merely a victory for women that struggled for the emancipation of women, and more specifically, for political rights, revealing how the use of historical narratives based on the *wave* metaphor could actually be simplifying the complexities regarding the struggle, the discussion, the agenda and the actors involved.

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