

## ARTICLE

## Evangelical Black Activism in Brazil - Political Liminality and Situational Configuration<sup>\*,\*\*</sup>

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Evangelical black activism exists in Brazil since the 1970s. Its current public reemergence, however, is still under-explored in the social sciences. Moreover, part of the specialized literature has recently characterized this activism as incomplete – since its actors are considered to be ‘rejecting African inheritances’ – and advocates that black and evangelical identities are incompatible. Differing from this perspective, this article shows how evangelicals participate in the public problematization of racism; it proposes to address this issue with a non-essentialist approach in three arguments: 01. evangelical black activism has reemerged publicly; 02. actors configure their religious and racial identities according to the problematic situations and public arenas in which they engage, which requires scholars to adopt a situated and relational approach to this form of activism; 03. the ways in which they reemerge and configure their identities are conditioned by the politically liminal situation of evangelical black actors and, consequently, by their need to acquire the status of a legitimate social movement and legitimate evangelicals. This article presents partial results of a research effort conducted between 2019 and 2021, in which qualitative research methods and techniques were used, such as direct and participant observation (in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Pernambuco), semi-directed interviews, document analysis, and social media monitoring.

**Keywords:** Black movement; evangelical black movement; evangelical political activism; public problem.

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<http://doi.org/10.1590/10.1590/1981-3821202300010002>

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\*This article carefully reviews and develops the argument initially presented in a paper awarded by the "Lélia Gonzalez Award for Scientific Manuscripts on Race and Politics", from Nexo Políticas Públicas, Brazilian Association of Political Science (ABCP) and the Instituto Ibirapitanga.

\*\*Funding: Coordination of Superior Level Staff Improvement (Capes); Brazilian Center of Analysis and Planning (Cebrap) and São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp).

**N**ever before in the history of this country have there been so many individuals who are self-declared evangelicals and blacks (pretos) or browns (pardos) simultaneously (both of which are henceforth grouped in the category 'blacks' (negros)). This, however, occurs in a moment marked by the convergence of different processes observed in recent decades: religious demographics are changing, 1/3 of the Brazilian population is already evangelical, and estimates suggest that this group may exceed quantitatively the Catholic population. Along with this growth in number, evangelicals have risen politically and occupied positions in legislatures and the media across the country. At the same time, racism and racial inequalities have been the subject of public debate, and the issue has been incorporated into the state's agenda; also, a process of political and cultural affirmation of all sectors of the Brazilian black population is underway.

The historical landscape of these processes involves a democracy in which the politicization of differences has acquired a public status. Since the 1980s, redemocratization in Brazil has opened spaces for new ways of life, new demands, and new political actors to become visible. In a recently industrialized country, social differentiation and the pluralization of civil society and political society gained visibility, and a contract on the grammar of rights was established. Brazil became more evangelical and blacker (from the point of view of racial affirmation) while it was also becoming more democratic and politicized. This is not irrelevant in the case of a country where skin color and religious affiliation are so important in the ordering of daily life, identity, and collective power arrangements. The question, then, is how to capture the interrelationships between these processes in an analysis of evangelical black activism, a research object that connects so many elements of social change in the country. Thus, my research question about this form of activism is: how do evangelical black actors participate in the public problematization of racism?

Conservative evangelical political activism has been expanding in Brazil (MARIANO, 2016). In addition to its capacity to leverage cultural patterns, based on the preaching of standards of morality and rules for individual conduct, its electoral expression is evident year after year. Pastoral and legislative leaders of the evangelical right have been studied at least since the 1980s, when they formed the evangelical bloc in the Constituent Assembly (1987-1988), and

supported the conservative candidate Collor de Mello in the 1989 general elections (MARIANO and PIERUCCI, 1992; PIERUCCI, 1989). Guided by corporatist interests and strong moral conservatism, this bloc has expanded in the last two decades. It has opposed bills designed to promote human rights, it has fought anti-discrimination policies against sexual minorities (MARIANO and GERARDI, 2019; PRANDI and SANTOS, 2017), endorsed pro-punishment discourses by the 'bullet bloc' (LACERDA, 2018; NOVELLO, 2018), and supported 'anti-state' economic liberalism (ALMEIDA, 2017a). The bloc's policy of allying with the right has also given it some prominence as it mobilized the evangelical identity to support the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff (PT) in 2016 (ALMEIDA, 2017b; PRANDI and CARNEIRO, 2017).

The diagnosis of this parliamentary dynamic is complemented by studies that characterize both the mobilization of churches as electoral machines and the infamous 'evangelical vote' as flexible and contextual. It is worth mentioning that the so-called 'evangelical vote' is conditioned, on the one hand, by the pastoral influence and, on the other, by the combination of moral values and class interests of the faithful voters (BARBOSA, 2016; LACERDA, 2017; PRANDI, SANTOS and BONATO, 2019; VALLE, 2018, 2013). The evangelical right is becoming increasingly radicalized politically and ideologically, and its participation has decisively bolstered the ultraconservative candidacy of Jair Bolsonaro by spreading moral panic over issues such as 'gender ideology', 'destruction of the traditional family', 'persecution of Christians', 'erotization and homosexualization of children' – an engagement seen in other presidential elections in Latin America in 2018 (ALMEIDA, 2020, 2019; MARIANO and GERARDI, 2019). Sacralizing religious freedom (MARIANO, 2006) and mobilizing the "'hetoric of loss' (CUNHA, 2020), right-wing evangelical leaders began to claim the prerogative of publicly distilling their convictions, despite expressing aversion to subaltern lifestyles and identities. The evangelical right's program and its political behavior, therefore, consist in a robust 'antipluralism' (MARIANO and GERARDI, 2019). As already noted, evangelicals and ultraconservative Catholics have acted in coordination and with common practices and emphases, replicating in Brazil a Christian right-wing coalition that resembles the American one (MARIANO, 2016) – the existence of such

a coalition certainly corroborates the reactivation of the right in Brazil (SINGER, 2022).

However, it is a mistake to believe that this program is always enunciated with outbursts of fanaticism. Skillfully dealing with republican manners, the evangelical right mobilizes constitutional normativity and the semantics of rights, while omitting, in the legal and parliamentary struggle, the religious arguments they use to justify their actions to its social bases (MACHADO and BURITY, 2014). While meeting the formal requirements of democracy, such religious actors have defended their particular ethical-political and moral positions by mobilizing 'universal' categories of Western ideals such as religious freedom, freedom of conscience, and freedom of expression. Indeed, the Brazilian model of religious pluralism, guaranteed by state laity, did not result in strong sociocultural secularization or privatization of religion; rather, it enabled interreligious competition to expand beyond the dispute for souls and into the public sphere, where actors compete for legal-political legitimacy and media and political-electoral power (MARIANO, 2011).

For these reasons, this form of activism has been accused not only of obstructing the course of democracy in the country, but also of spearheading the process in which the notions of pluralism and secularity – which have sustained Brazilian public life at least in the last three decades – are being redefined. Evangelical differentialism would be a vector of escalation in disputes over recognition and legitimacy in several public arenas dealing with rights that are subject to state regulation – in such context, the liberal principle of tolerance would be increasingly insufficient (MARIANO, 2016, 2011; MONTERO, 2020; MONTERO and SALES, 2020).

However, the academic inventory of evangelical political activism favors its conservative manifestation (which, for the sake of truth, is hegemonic), and its electoral engagement, putting aside progressive forms of evangelical activism, which are operating on the margins of party struggle, organized in the form of 'social movements'. It is worth noting that evangelicals' engagement in the promotion and safeguarding of social rights, whether by offering services or participating in public policy decision-making processes, has also attracted the attention of social scientists – particularly for their distance from the more clientelistic and conservative forms of engagement of the evangelical right (ABREU, 2021; BURITY, 2006; SCHELIGA,

2010). Even so, progressive evangelical activism, whose vitality comes from the intensity with which it opposes the evangelical right, has not been sufficiently examined in its attributes or conditions of possibilities, which contrasts with the recent context of evangelical politicization: within the national context, the recrudescence of political polarization and radicalization of the evangelical right has stimulated reactions from the left, including the (re)emergence of contradictory publics and forms of evangelical activism that proclaim themselves – and are recognized by their opponents – as ‘progressive’, such as ‘left-wing’, ‘feminist’, ‘LGBTQIA+’, ‘anti-fascist’, and ‘anti-racist’ groups (ALENCAR, 2019; CUNHA 2017; CUNHA 2021; MARIANO, 2016; MEDEIROS, 2022).

One of these activisms is precisely the collective, organized, and long-lasting anti-racist mobilization of black and brown evangelicals who intend to have an effect inside and outside the churches, fighting racism, demanding rights from the state, and joining groups from the traditional black movement. As we will see throughout the article, this evangelical black activism has been characterized by part of the recent literature as being marked by cultural gaps derived from a ‘rejection of African heritage’, a trait that would make black and evangelical identities incompatible (OLIVEIRA, 2021, 2017; REINA, 2017; SILVA, 2011a). Differing from this perspective, the results of my master's thesis indicate that: 01. evangelical black activism has reemerged publicly; 02. actors configure their religious and racial identities according to the problematic situations and public arenas in which they engage, which requires scholars to adopt a situated and relational approach to this form of activism; 03. the ways in which they reemerge and configure their identities are conditioned by the politically liminal situation of evangelical black actors and, consequently, by their need to acquire the status of a legitimate social movement and legitimate evangelicals.

This research was based on the theoretical contributions of a contemporary pragmatic/pragmatist current developed by authors linked to the Center for the Study of Social Movements<sup>1</sup>, such as Daniel Cefaï, Cédric Terzi, and Louis Queré, who return to the classic contributions of American pragmatism and the Chicago School

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<sup>1</sup>The Center is based at the École de Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales – Paris.

– rereading John Dewey, George Mead, William James, among others – to develop a ‘sociology of public problems’ (CEFAÏ, 2017; SALES, 2021).

This perspective requires observing and describing the ways in which concrete troubles that interrupt actors’ normal routines generate ‘problematic situations’<sup>2</sup>. To define together and solve such problematic situations, actors submit a particular trouble to collective processes of investigation, problematization, and publicization, during which ‘political/public communities’ are formed. Also, problematic situations engender ‘public arenas’<sup>3</sup>, i.e. social milieus/settings that, acting as ‘discussion forums’, engage institutions, symbols, discourses, practices, and various actors/agencies around a problem defined as ‘public’ (CEFAÏ, 2017; 2009).

Drawing on some of these theoretical instruments, I adopted an ethnographic approach to examine some public scenes and understand how actors are forged ‘during’ the processes in which racism is ‘publicly problematized’. In these scenes, actors employ different strategies of visibilization and legitimation, mobilizing frames, accounts, vocabularies of motives, collective emotions, and authentication devices to enunciate their political singularity (ARENDRT, 1989; BENFORD and SNOW, 2000; MEDEIROS, 2022; QUERÉ, 2019; SCOTT and LYMAN, 1968; MILLS, 2016). Identities are thus not understood as substances, but as situational and relational positions, as ‘identifications’, and so the processes of social interaction in public are observed as identificatory processes.

Equally, the notion of ‘public space’ underpinning this research denotes a ‘flow of discursive interactions’ (MONTERO, 2012). The public, therefore, is less a ‘space’ or a ‘sphere’ and much more an experience unfolding in time, a

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<sup>2</sup>Inspired by the pragmatism of John Dewey and the functionalist psychology of the Chicago School, Daniel Cefaï defines a problematic situation as a moment of crisis in the patterns of habituality/normality in which actors are integrated: “A *situation* becomes *problematic* when the customary reactions of an organism to the requests of its environment no longer provide the satisfaction of its needs and desires (...). The same happens when the routinized and standardized responses from a collectivity to its environment are poorly adjusted, inadequate, or insufficient: a *trouble* emerges from the *indeterminacy* of the situation that the members of a collectivity must circumscribe, contain, understand, control” (CEFAÏ, 2017, p.188, 189, free translation).

<sup>3</sup>On the public arena as a social setting generated around a problematic situation, Cefaï writes: “A public arena is an organized set of accommodations and competitions, negotiations and arrangements, protests and consent, promises and engagements, contracts and conventions, concessions and commitments, tensions and agreements more or less symbolized and ritualized, formalized, and codified, in which a *public interest* is at stake” (CEFAÏ, 2017, p.208, 209, free translation).

social process – hence it makes sense to speak of a ‘publicization’ pragmatics (CEFAÏ, 2017). In addition, we sought to operationalize religion not only as a ‘moral impulse for action’ – a driving value for rational actions, as postulated by Weber – but also as a publicly staged/practiced ‘discourse’ (MONTERO, 2016, 2012; MONTERO, SILVA and SALES, 2018). In doing so, this research avoids theological scrutiny and is thus able to primarily focus on the political mobilization of religious beliefs and values ‘in situ’, as a contextually configured action.

Therefore, from this pragmatic perspective, the sociological investigation of evangelical political activism requires reconstructing its political fights in concrete situations, in a situated and relational way. In my view, these fights depend firstly on having ‘visibility’ and ‘legitimacy’, two basic social goods and political assets without which actors cannot relevantly participate in public arenas and influence the formation of public problems. For this, actors must be seen, heard, and socially taken into consideration, recognized as valid participants. However, if we take a Cartesian plane in which the x-axis refers to visibility and the y-axis to legitimacy, evangelical black actors would be closer to the lower left. Thus, the evangelical left in general and its anti-racist factions in particular face two challenges: ‘to compete for public visibility’ with their right-wing brother-opponents and ‘to achieve the status’ of legitimate social movement and legitimate evangelicals, not to mention the dispute for the necessary ‘means of visibilization and legitimation’. As we will see next, evangelical black actors configure their identities in problematic situations and in public arenas, but the way in which they do so is conditioned by the need to be seen and legitimized either by the black movement or by the evangelical public in general.

Based on these theoretical premises, we seek to understand how black evangelical actors configure their racial and religious identities/identifications in processes of public problematization of racism, oriented by the need for legitimation and having before them historically ordered political opportunity structures and a horizon of expectations. To characterize the repertoire of actions of activist groups, I resorted to direct and participant observation in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Pernambuco. I followed these groups in Recife (PE), in 2019, in events such as the ‘Marcha da Consciência Negra’ (March of Black Consciousness), training circles in favelas, a meeting of the ‘Conselho Municipal de Políticas de Promoção da Igualdade Racial’ (Municipal Council for Policies for the Promotion of Racial Equality). In São

Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, I attended several religious services, organization and training meetings held at the 'Nossa Igreja Brasileira' (Our Brazilian Church) in Rio de Janeiro, at the Duque de Caxias campus of the 'Universidade Estadual do Rio de Janeiro' (State University of Rio de Janeiro, UERJ), at the 'Igreja Metodista da Luz' (Methodist Church of Luz) in São Paulo, at the 'Igreja Metodista do Belém' (Methodist Church of Belém) in São Paulo, at the 'Igreja Batista de Água Branca' (Baptist Church of Água Branca) in São Paulo, and other spaces such as social movement offices and public spaces. In 2020 and 2021, due to health restrictions, evangelical black activists followed the current trend of content live streaming on social media. I watched eighteen live streaming videos promoted by the channel 'Afrocrente'<sup>4</sup>, by Jackson Augusto, and three others promoted by the 'Movimento Negro Evangélico de São Paulo' (MNE/SP) (Evangelical Black Movement of São Paulo)<sup>5</sup>, all discussing black theology and the relations between racial identity and evangelical faith. Also in 2020, I participated in two black theology courses offered by a project coordinated by Pastor Marco Davi de Oliveira<sup>6</sup>, the 'Discipulado Justiça e Reconciliação' (DJR) (Discipleship Justice and Reconciliation): 'Afrocentric Reading of the Bible'<sup>7</sup> and 'Theologies and Racial Issues'<sup>8</sup>. Groups on social media and evangelical black personalities were also monitored (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Youtube) and, in order to track the categories that were activated and identify what the actors emphasized in their discourses, I analyzed materials produced by activists for themselves, for other evangelicals, and for society in general, such as bible-teaching booklets, official notes, books<sup>9</sup>, podcasts<sup>10</sup>, blogs<sup>11</sup> and opinion pages<sup>12</sup> in the mainstream press<sup>13</sup>.

To capture what meaning actors attributed to their actions, what they understood by certain categories, and how they evaluated their relations

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<sup>4</sup>Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/afrocrente/>>.

<sup>5</sup>Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/mnesaopaulo/>>.

<sup>6</sup>Marco David de Oliveira is a pastor, theologian, and evangelical black writer with a leadership role in the Brazilian evangelical black activism.

<sup>7</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/events/294795355062843/>>.

<sup>8</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/events/2735938603310576/>>.

<sup>9</sup>There is a literature produced by evangelical black activists, books discussing the challenges of racial equality in churches, as well as the so-called black theology: 'A religião mais negra do Brasil' and 'A Bíblia e as cotas', by pastor Marco Davi de Oliveira; 'Movimento Negro Evangélico: Um Mover do Espírito Santo', by Hernani Francisco da Silva; 'Teologia Negra: O Sopro Antirracista do Espírito', by Ronilso Pacheco.

<sup>10</sup>Podcast 'Afrocrentes Cast', presented by the young evangelical black activist Jackson Augusto. Available at <<https://open.spotify.com/show/5jGfrA6s5ISigZoF2HlzfS?si=6726bf6519a3452a>>.

<sup>11</sup>Available at <<https://noticias.uol.com.br/colunas/ronilso-pacheco/>>.

<sup>12</sup>Available at <<https://theintercept.com/equipe/jackson-augusto/>>.

<sup>13</sup>Available at <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/perifaconnection/>>.

with the black movement and the churches, I resorted to semi-structured interviews – in total, twenty-five evangelical black activists were interviewed at least once, in person or, due to the recent health crisis, by videoconference. The interviewees – diverse in age, gender, occupation, or denominational affiliation – were, in general, formal or informal leaders, old members of their group. Besides taking more responsibilities in organizing the groups of activism, they have a broader perspective, and, according to my assessment, express opinions representative of the average participant in the groups. The interviewees were part of different anti-racist evangelical groups – ‘Movimento Negro Evangélico’, ‘Cuxi’, ‘Pastoral da Negritude Rosa Parks da Igreja Batista em Coqueiral’ (Rosa Parks Blackness Pastoral of the Baptist Church in Coqueiral) (Pernambuco), ‘Pastoral da Negritude da Igreja Batista do Pinheiro’ (Blackness Pastoral of the Baptist Church of Pinheiro) (Paraíba), ‘Pastoral Afro da Diocese Meridional da Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil’ (Afro Pastoral of the Southern Diocese of the Anglican Episcopal Church of Brazil), ‘Discipulado Justiça e Reconciliação, Rede de Mulheres Negras Evangélicas’ (Network of Black Evangelical Women), ‘Coletivo Vozes Marias’ (Vozes Maria Collective), and they operated in different federation units (Rio Grande do Sul, Santa Catarina, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Bahia, Paraíba, Pernambuco), which is why, due to the sanitary quarantines, part of the interviews were conducted in person and part remotely.

Also, two public scenes with the greatest visibility and repercussion, in which evangelical black actors have participated, were selected and analyzed. Broad networks of activists were engaged in both scenes, situations in which actors intensely mobilized identities, affections, arguments, symbols, and resources. In these scenes, evangelical black actors acted with the black movement and other evangelicals and their churches; even better, their interaction revolved around troubles directly associated with the relationship between race and religion. As the reader will be able to confirm, the ‘disinvitation’ and the ‘Collins case’ episodes are situations in which actors are seeking to construct racism as a public problem. Given the coparticipation of different actors, these were the scenes that allowed for a better understanding of the relations that evangelical black actors maintained with the black movement and with other evangelicals.

## The public reemergence of evangelical black activism

As mentioned above, Brazil is becoming increasingly evangelical and black<sup>14</sup>, in a context of not only intense public problematization of racism but also, more recently, of fierce political polarization. This context has allowed evangelical black activism to become more visible and politically relevant. It is, of course, not a question of its 'emergence', nor is it a matter of 'growth' as John Burdick (2005) indicated in a relevant article. One cannot find a linear and expansive development as suggested by the term 'growth', but rather a five-decade trajectory marked by moments of visibilization, duration, and retraction. This 'accordion mechanism' (SANTOS, 1977, p. 58) relates to the fact that poorly institutionalized forms of activism rely on the outbreak of concrete troubles to gain the visibility necessary to initiate processes of inquiry, problematization, and, consequently, publicization. Therefore, I prefer to consider the current moment as one defining a 'public reemergence' of evangelical black activism.

Although for some authors evangelical black activism emerged during the redemocratization, in the 1980s (OLIVEIRA, 2017; REINA, 2017), while others see this form of activism as being 'newly created' (SILVA, 2011a), racism was already a concern in 1968, in the 'Credo Social Metodista' (Methodist Social Creed) (BRANCHINI, 2008). According to Trabuco (2015), the 'Comissão Nacional de Combate ao Racismo' (National Commission to Combat Racism) of the 'Igreja Metodista do Brasil' (Methodist Church of Brazil) dates to 1973, and it was institutionalized in the form of a 'pastoral' in 1985.

Since then, the number of evangelical black actors has multiplied by the dozens, with different organizational formats – ecclesiastical, paraecclesiastical, ecumenical, educational, cultural, and advocacy (BURDICK, 2005; MEDEIROS, 2022; SILVA, 2011b). The most recent group of organizations includes the 'Pastoral Rosa Parks da Igreja Batista do Coqueiral' (Pernambuco)<sup>15</sup>; 'Pastoral da Negritude da Igreja Batista do Pinheiro' (Paraíba)<sup>16</sup>; a group dedicated to racial issues in the 'Igreja Batista de Água Branca' (IBAB)<sup>17</sup>; the Cuxi Collective (Bahia)<sup>18</sup>;

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<sup>14</sup>Available at <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/01/cara-tipica-do-evangelico-brasileiro-e-feminina-e-negra-aponta-datafolha.shtml>>.

<sup>15</sup>Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/pastoralnegrituderosa/>>.

<sup>16</sup> Available at <<http://batistadopinheiro.blogspot.com/p/pastoral-da-negritude-ibp.html>>.

<sup>17</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/oficialibab/>>.

<sup>18</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/cuxicoletivonegroevangelico/>>.

'Ministério Metodista de Ações Afirmativas' (Methodist Ministry of Affirmative action (São Paulo)<sup>19</sup>; 'Discipulado Justiça e Conciliação' (São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro)<sup>20</sup>; the Zaurildas Collective (São Paulo)<sup>21</sup>; 'Nossa Igreja Brasileira' (Rio de Janeiro)<sup>22</sup>, in addition to national groups such as the 'Movimento Negro Evangélico' (Evangelical Black Movement, MNE)<sup>23</sup>; 'Pastoral Metodista de Combate ao Racismo' (Methodist Pastoral to Combat Racism)<sup>24</sup>; 'Rede de Mulheres Negras Evangélicas'<sup>25</sup>, among others.

These actors perform a broad 'repertoire' of actions (ALONSO, 2012), ranging from self-reproductive activities – with a community approach, aimed at socializing evangelical blacks – to the practice of direct public testimony with media repercussions (MEDEIROS, 2022). Using religious lexicon, beliefs, practices, and symbols, they organize virtual campaigns to raise racial awareness; they hold forums, seminars<sup>26</sup> and 'welcoming' meetings<sup>27</sup>; they conduct religious services for the 'Dia da Consciência Negra' (Day of Black Awareness)<sup>28</sup>; they organize vigils in squares and streets; they promote black theology courses<sup>29</sup>; they publish books<sup>30</sup> and bible-teaching booklets; they launch podcasts<sup>31</sup>; they express their opinions in the press<sup>32</sup>; they perform artistic interventions in the urban space<sup>33</sup>; they call for

<sup>19</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/metodista3re.afro/>>.

<sup>20</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/discipuladojr/>>.

<sup>21</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/zaurildas/>>.

<sup>22</sup>Available at <<https://nossaigrejabrasileira.com.br/>>.

<sup>23</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/mnebrasil/>>.

<sup>24</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/Combat-Pastoral-to-Racism-Church-Methodist-2%C2%BARE-965263573569476/>>.

<sup>25</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/negrasevangelicass/>>.

<sup>26</sup>Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/p/BxarjoeHdVG/>>.

<sup>27</sup>Available at <[https://www.instagram.com/p/BiGAd\\_dI0JS/](https://www.instagram.com/p/BiGAd_dI0JS/)>.

<sup>28</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/events/665882323940838/>>.

<sup>29</sup>Available at <<https://intersecoes.com/produto/curso-biblia-negritude-e-teologia-negra/>>.

<sup>30</sup>'A religião mais negra do Brasil' and 'A Bíblia e as cotas', by pastor Marco Davi de Oliveira; 'Movimento Negro Evangélico: Um Mover do Espírito Santo', by Hernani Francisco da Silva; 'Teologia Negra: O Sopro Antirracista do Espírito', by Ronilso Pacheco.

<sup>31</sup>Available at <<https://open.spotify.com/show/5jGfrA6s5ISigZoF2HlzfS>>.

<sup>32</sup>Press clippings: 01. Available at <<https://theintercept.com/equipe/jackson-augusto/>>; 02. Available at <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/perifaconnection/2020/04/a-juventude-negra-evangelica-tem-algo-a-afirmar-nao-somos-modinha.shtml>>; 03. Available at <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/perifaconnection/2020/06/manifesto-de-negras-e-negros-evangelicos.shtml>>; 04. Available at <<https://tab.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2020/09/21/teologia-negra-resgata-conceito-de-igreja-fe-e-familia-entre-evangelicos.htm>>; 05. Available at <<https://piaui.folha.uol.com.br/por-deus-contra-o-racismo-pela-legalizacao-do-aborto/>>; 06. Available at <<https://novosdialogos.com/especiais/manifesto-2020-rede-de-mulheres-negras-evangelicas-do-brasil/>>; 07. Available at <<https://quadronegro.blogfolha.uol.com.br/2020/01/09/a-igreja-branca-tem-que-acabar/>>.

<sup>33</sup>Available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K00cmc0SI3o>>.

protests against racism<sup>34</sup>, and they participate in social movement connecting organizations such as the 'Articulação Negra de Pernambuco' (ANEPE) (Black Coordination of Pernambuco) and the 'Coalizão Negra por Direitos' (Black Coalition for Rights)<sup>35</sup>.

It should also be noted that these evangelical black organizations oppose the protagonism of the evangelical right. They are linked to a political lineage that dates to the time when Protestant factions participated in the abolitionist, liberal, and republican causes<sup>36</sup> during the Second Empire (CARDOSO, 2009; MENDONÇA, 2003; SOBRINHO, 2019; SOUZA, 2005); a lineage that includes the ecumenical and openly left-wing activism of the 1950s and 1960s (BURITY, 1989; SILVA, 2010; TRABUCO, 2015) and progressive evangelical streams of the 1990s, such as the 'Movimento Evangélico Progressista' (MEP) (Progressive Evangelical Movement) and the 'Aliança Evangélica Brasileira' (Brazilian Evangelical Alliance) (FREESTON, 1999). Currently, they are also part of a progressive evangelical field composed of feminist, LGBTQIA+, and pro-democracy connecting organizations, such as the 'Frente de Evangélicos pelo Estado de Direito'<sup>37</sup> (Evangelical Front for the Rule of Law); 'Frente Evangélica pela Legalização do Aborto'<sup>38</sup> (Evangelical Front for the Legalization of Abortion); 'Evangélicas pela Igualdade de Gênero'<sup>39</sup> (Evangelical Women for Gender Equality); 'Vozes Marias Collective'<sup>40</sup>; 'Evangélicxs pela Diversidade'<sup>41</sup> (Evangelicals for Diversity), 'Cristãos Contra o Fascismo'<sup>42</sup> (Christians Against Fascism); 'Rede Fale' (Fale Network)<sup>43</sup>, among others (ALENCAR, 2019; CUNHA, 2021; MARIANO and SALES, 2019; MEDEIROS, 2022).

### **An anti-essentialist perspective - the identity realization of evangelical blacks**

The ways in which the relationship between the racial and religious identities of evangelical blacks was understood shifted over time. In the exploratory study 'O Negro Evangélico' (1985), carried out in historical Protestant churches,

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<sup>34</sup>Available at <<https://twitter.com/MidiaNINJA/status/1097170076560777222>>.

<sup>35</sup>Available at <<https://coalizaonegrapordireitos.org.br/sobre/>>.

<sup>36</sup>Pereira, Eduardo. 'A Religião cristã e suas relações com a escravidão'. Available at <<https://www2.senado.leg.br/bdsf/handle/id/221739>>.

<sup>37</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/frentedeevangelicos/>>.

<sup>38</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/frenteevangelicapelalegalizaodoaborto/>>.

<sup>39</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/mulhereseig/>>.

<sup>40</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/coletivovozesmarias/>>.

<sup>41</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/evangelicxs/>>.

<sup>42</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/cristaoscontraofascismo/>>.

<sup>43</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/redefale/>>.

Floriano and Novaes documented how the universal equality in Christ was valued and racism was recognized and condemned. In general, the prevailing perception was that churches had effective cultural mechanisms to curb racist practices so that they could do without explicitly affirmative measures and actions. The 'Igreja Metodista do Brasil' (Methodist Church of Brazil), in turn, organized 'reflection groups on the racial issue' and pastoral work to combat racism, and a relatively greater number of black people participated in high-ranking positions in this church, unlike other denominations, marked by the absence of any organized initiative against racism.

However, it was John Burdick's (1989) work that most contributed to the understanding of the intersection between racial identification and religious affiliation of evangelical black people. In an ethnographic work carried out at a church of the 'Assembléia de Deus' (Assembly of God Church) in the Baixada Fluminense (Rio de Janeiro), the American anthropologist noted the 'ambivalent meaning of race in Pentecostalism'. After verifying that black people participated more in Pentecostal churches than in the local Catholic community, he began to describe how racial tensions and political disputes in the church were transfigured into ritual languages of a religious nature; race is producing religion.

Burdick (2005, 2002, 1999) also noted the ambiguities of evangelical blacks' experiences, documenting how such religious socialization contributed to boosting the self-esteem of these individuals by exercising charisms in ritual functions, the sense of belonging to a community, and the recognition of their dignity and personal value 'before God'. Black Pentecostal women, for example, informed by principles of faith, relativized hegemonic patterns of female beauty and declared they were less shunned by suitors for dating and marriage compared to those in the extra-ecclesial world; moreover, men have managed to occupy positions within the presbyterate in their communities, in contrast to the experiences of being stigmatized and subordinated, which are perceived as more frequent in spaces outside the church. Burdick also noted that activists from the black movement tended to see black evangelicals as 'whitened', dominated, assimilated; these activists tended to disparage the religious identity of evangelical blacks as improper since it is considered a 'white' religion. Disagreeing with this perspective, Burdick (2005, 2002, 1999) advised the black movement to

approach evangelicals and their anti-racist initiatives; he even highlighted the value of evangelical identity as a relevant electoral cleavage that could be leveraged by the left and associated with the racial marker – the participation of evangelical black parliamentarians such as Benedita da Silva, Reginaldo Germano, among others, attests to that.

Despite the above-mentioned studies and a progressive spirit of evangelical black activism, part of the literature has recently characterized evangelical black activism as an opponent and competitor of Afro cults, with whom it would dispute legitimacy and recognition. This approach places evangelical black activism next to neo-Pentecostal megachurches, which are guided by competition in the religious market. According to Silva (2017), for example, the evangelical black movement is ‘denying Afro-Brazilian religiosities’ and questioning the ‘alleged contours of ‘our Brazilianness’; it basically “*aims to take away Afro-Brazilian religiosities’ strength – either potential or effective – to define black identities and fight for equality and social justice with the support of public recognition and the state*” (SILVA, 2017, p.115, emphasis added, free translation). The author asserts: “*It is preached, therefore, that is necessary to ‘deculturalize’ Brazil from the influence of these religiosities and depoliticize its field of action. As Edir Macedo states, it is necessary to expel the ‘Exu tradition’ that makes Brazil a ‘vast terreiro*” (SILVA, 2017, p.115, emphasis added, free translation).

However, this assertion has no empirical support. Activists in the evangelical black movement were never driven by “a project to ‘sponsor’ the ‘denial’ (or the ‘disparaging’) of Afro-Brazilian religions’ legitimacy as the only axis for building black identity” (SILVA, 2017, p. 83, free translation) or to ‘deprive’ them of their strength or even ‘to deculturalize Brazil’. Not only because there are indeed several axes around which ‘black identity’ is built in Brazil, but also because those in the evangelical black movement consistently recognize the value of Afro cults, to the point of defending the ‘terreiros’ that were targeted by religious intolerance and making the fight against the so-called ‘religious racism’ one of its top agendas<sup>44</sup>. As will be discussed next, there is significant collaboration between the black movement, Afro cults, and anti-racist evangelical groups. Definitely, evangelical

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<sup>44</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/movimentonegroevangelicorecife/photos/a.1941259662856386/2025173967798288>>.

black activism should not be treated/read in the same key as the 'Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus' (Universal Church of the Kingdom of God).

In the same vein, Oliveira (2017) argues that "the MNE purges the Protestant field of some symbols, all of which are usually expressive of African heritage in Brazil" (p.146, free translation). This would occur

"... because 01. the system does not allow for mediators, as in Catholicism and Afro-Brazilian religions; 02. they reject that 'candomblé' is good for thinking about black culture because it is only read as a religion, while Catholicism and the state do so in taking these two dimensions into consideration; and 03. the notion of 'African heritage' is radicalized to the point of being possible to consider Abrahamic religions (...) as having an African origin" (OLIVEIRA, 2017, p.146, free translation).

In this scheme, in order for evangelicals not to 'purge' such 'African heritage' and be whole in their racial affirmation processes, they cannot 'radicalize' the notion of African heritage and must recognize 'candomblé' as the model of 'black culture' and even admit particular theological components such as mediumistic entities, 'orixás', 'voduns' and 'iniquices' (Afro-Brazilian divinities). The author even treats as synonyms the "symbols of African heritage in Brazil", the "symbols of blackness", and "Afro-Brazilian religions" (OLIVEIRA, 2017, p. 149; 150, free translation). That is, for evangelicals to affirm themselves racially, they would basically have to adopt 'candomblé' as the parameter for 'blackness'.

The thesis affirming that evangelicals 'reject African heritage' was used to back hasty conclusions that it would be "impossible for black *crentes*<sup>45</sup> to claim their African cultural heritage" (REINA, 2017, p. 255, free translation), a "tendency within black evangelical Protestantism to not recognize and to oppose the historical need of Brazil and particularly of black populations to value African cultural and religious heritage" (REINA, 2017, p. 272, free translation) and, therefore, a "whitening of black Pentecostal believers" (REINA, 2017, p.261, 262, free translation).

Thus, by automatically linking racial identification to African/Afro-Brazilian symbolic-cultural references, scholars have adopted an essentialist perspective that also attributes meaning to the actions of evangelical black actors

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<sup>45</sup>TN: The word 'crente' is used in Brazil as a synonym for evangelical. However, it may have a negative connotation.

normatively and externally; these are actors whose actions have been judged as not sufficiently legitimate from a historical and cultural point of view. This approach has naturalized the use of African/Afro-Brazilian signs in processes of racial affirmation, losing sight of the mobilization of signs by actors, which is carried out based on their values and interests. It is worth mentioning that this use 01. is 'dosed' by the actors themselves as they see fit, obeying an authorial and reflective measure: it serves to present oneself, to style one's colloquial and political practices, to affirm the feeling of belonging together, and to idealize cultural legacies; 02. it is 'filtered' by evangelical religiosity: for example, to access the then fashionable notions of 'ancestry', evangelical activists do not adopt mediumistic communication or devotion to the 'orixás'; instead, they pray in cults and meetings to thank God for having 'preserved' their 'ancestors' to the present day and given them the strength to 'resist' for centuries. In other words, the actors create a measure and a filter to activate these signs to preserve and assert their religious and cultural singularity (MEDEIROS, 2022).

The literature so far has also left out the connection between the evangelicals and the contemporary manifestations of 'black culture', such as rap and hip-hop culture in general (NOVAES, 2003, 1999; PINHEIRO, 2007) and black gospel music (BURDICK, 2010; 2009; 2008). This connection indicates that evangelical black activists neither reject 'African heritage' nor restrict the bases of their racial affirmation to culturally neutral criteria restricted to color and phenotype (SELKA, 2005); rather, they produce themselves by articulating different cultural practices, also racialized, although not immediately Africanized. In engaging in racial affirmation processes, not necessarily correlated with ethnic affirmation processes (SANSONE, 2007), actors prioritize references that are historically closer to them and recognize racialized practices and symbols available in their daily lives – they are more likely to accept and value their kinky hair<sup>46</sup> than to learn the Yoruba language, for example.

Finally, it must be said that neither Reina (2017) nor Oliveira (2017) nor Silva (2017) offers a conceptual definition of what the supposedly 'rejected' 'African

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<sup>46</sup>Burdick (2002) had already indicated that the standards of female beauty in evangelical churches were relaxed in order to benefit black believers. Medeiros (2022) documents the activism of the Zaurildas Collective (São Paulo), which brings together evangelical black women in political actions for aesthetic affirmation, where hair and fashion occupy a significant position.

heritages' are. Because this category is automatically activated, without its conceptual definition and empirical precision, a proper investigation is precluded. It should be noted, however, that it has been known for a long time that there are evangelical black actors organized around references to 'African' or 'Afro-Brazilian' symbols, including, ironically, a so-called 'African Heritage Group' (BURDICK, 2005).

By critically engaging in a dialogue with this literature, we avoid assuming pre-discursivities, using particular signs automatically, and examining actors in an essentialist manner; we can finally study pragmatically how evangelical black actors configure their racial and religious identities/identifications according to the 'problematic situations and public arenas' in which they participate.

### **Configuring religious identity – the insertion of evangelical black activism in churches**

Evangelical black actors aim to have an effect on churches, promote anti-racist content, and 'deconstruct' what they call 'conservative discourse'. However, they face certain institutional obstacles, mainly pastors. Pastors have the power to allow or deny access to communities. Now, in the context of 'cultural wars' and strong political polarization in the country, the ideological vigilance of conservative clerics ends up disapproving of the anti-racist activism that, in Brazil, is promoted basically by 'leftist' individuals and groups.

A public scene emblematic of the ideological restrictions in this matter took place in 2019, on the occasion of the 'Congresso da Juventude Batista Brasileira' (JBB) (Brazilian Baptist Youth Congress), a section of the 'Convenção Batista Brasileira' (CBB) (Brazilian Baptist Convention). The event had planned to hold a debate titled 'Decolonizing the eye: does racism affect the church?'<sup>47</sup> Two speakers were invited: Fabíola Oliveira, an evangelical, Bachelor of Education, human rights activist, and coordinator at the 'Odarah Cultura e Missão', an afro-entrepreneurship organization; and Marco Davi de Oliveira, a pastor at the 'Nossa Igreja Brasileira', writer and founder and coordinator of the 'Movimento Negro Evangélico' (MNE) and of the 'Discipulado Justiça e Reconciliação' (DJR). They are both public figures in the progressive evangelical field.

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<sup>47</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/somosjbb/photos/a.695772647111345/2453573201331272/>>.

At one point, Eduardo Baldaci, until then an anonymous Brazilian Baptist pastor living in the United States, published a text on his Facebook page, criticizing the guests: "I am against racism, there is no doubt about that. Do you think the matter should be debated? Of course! But who are the people invited?"<sup>48</sup> The text also defines Fabíola as a "Christian of ecumenism between gospel and macumba"<sup>49</sup> – in reference to her work in favor of interreligious dialogue<sup>50</sup> – and labels Marco Davi as a 'socialist pastor', a 'liberal theologian'. The two guests are identified as 'PEOPLE OF THE INTEGRAL MISSION<sup>51</sup> OF THE CHURCH – THAT IS, PT<sup>52</sup> !'

The post itself only gathered half a dozen likes. The activist Fabíola, however, decided to reply with an 'Open Letter to Baptist Brazil', rejecting what she classified as 'defamatory attacks' and defending her ideological positions, activism, and evangelical identity<sup>53</sup>. It was not long before Marco and Fabíola were disinvited to the event. The withdrawal of the invitation was the trouble that generated a problematic situation that triggered an interactive, long process of confrontation, justification, and solidarity, during which activists began to discuss and call into question the disinvitation. The two activists did not hesitate to frame the disinvitation as an attempt to 'silence' them<sup>54</sup>, as 'fundamentalism', and 'racism'<sup>55</sup>. Marco even said that the disinvitation resulted from pressure from a specific group, the 'Coalizão Batista Conservadora' (Conservative Baptist Coalition),<sup>56</sup> on the Brazilian Baptist Convention. What follows is a dispute of 'frames'<sup>57</sup> (BENFORD and SNOW, 2000; CEFAÏ, 2009; GAMSON, 1992; MENDONÇA and SIMÕES, 2012;

<sup>48</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/eduardobaldaci/posts/10156496874627616>>.

<sup>49</sup>Macumba is a pejorative term commonly used to refer to Afro-Brazilian religions.

<sup>50</sup>Available at <[https://www.huffpostbrasil.com/2018/06/21/fabiola-oliveira-a-evangelica-que-pratica-uma-religiao-mais-inclusiva-e-menos-violenta\\_a\\_23465021/](https://www.huffpostbrasil.com/2018/06/21/fabiola-oliveira-a-evangelica-que-pratica-uma-religiao-mais-inclusiva-e-menos-violenta_a_23465021/)>.

<sup>51</sup>The theology of the integral mission is a Protestant theoretical tradition, of Latin American origin and contemporary to the liberation theology. Both emphasize, each in its own way, the values of 'social justice', overcoming poverty, etc.

<sup>52</sup>PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores) refers to the Workers' Party, the main left-wing party in Brazil.

<sup>53</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/fabiolaoliveiraa/posts/10156067621121326>>.

<sup>54</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/fabiolaoliveiraa/posts/10156074951831326>>.

<sup>55</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10219487040037553&set=p.10219487040037553&type=1&theater>>.

<sup>56</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10219487040037553&set=p.10219487040037553&type=1&theater>>.

<sup>57</sup>Framing refers to "interpretative frames that simplify and condense the 'exterior world', highlighting, coding, and selecting objects, situations, events, experiences, and sequences of actions. In resorting to the production of frames, social movements would reduce social complexity to levels that the common individual is capable of managing, signaling the injustice of a given situation, linking it to symbols, and presenting it as a problem that requires mobilization" (ALONSO, 2009, p.78, free translation).

TARROW, 2011), that is, different sides of the conflict were trying to define the situation according to their point of view, mobilizing different categories, adjectives, and narratives of victimization, on the one hand, and exemption, on the other.

The mobilization of the activists' institutional and personal networks created a conspicuous scandal that reached the press<sup>58</sup>; it is noteworthy that most of the coverage of this episode was marked by the fact that the Congress was held at the 'Igreja Batista Atitude' (Baptist Church Attitude) in Rio de Janeiro, where the first lady, Michelle Bolsonaro, regularly attends services. Moreover, several progressive evangelical organizations issued official statements condemning the disinvitation, framed as a case of 'institutional racism'<sup>59</sup>, 'religious intolerance'<sup>60</sup>, 'censorship'<sup>61</sup>, and 'racism'<sup>62</sup>. In the months following the controversy, these groups also promoted a series of events with the same title as the canceled debate, "Decolonizing the eye: does racism affect the church?" a way to redress and use the episode productively<sup>63</sup>.

Those who disinvited the guests minimized what had happened: the 'Juventude Batista Brasileira' (JBB) lamented the malaise, which occurred for 'reasons unrelated to the JBB', and proceeded with the event program, holding a conversation cycle about racism with other debaters<sup>64</sup>. Pastors linked to the CBB

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<sup>58</sup>Some of the articles that circulated in the Brazilian media were: 01. Available at <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/07/debate-sobre-racismo-em-igreja-frequentada-por-michelle-bolsonaro-e-cancelado.shtml>>; 02. Available at <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2019/07/debate-sobre-racismo-religioso-aumenta-dentro-de-igreja-e-opoe-evangelicos.shtml>>; 03. Available at <<https://www.otempo.com.br/politica/igreja-frequentada-por-michelle-bolsonaro-cancela-debate-sobre-racismo-1.2212027>>; 04. Available at <<https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/destaques/2019/07/congresso-de-jovens-da-igreja-batista-e-acusado-de-racismo/>>; 05. Available at <<http://www.justificando.com/2019/07/20/evento-antirracista-em-igreja-evangelica-de-michelle-bolsonaro-e-cancelado-sob-pretexto-de-comunismo/>>.

<sup>59</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/mnebrasil/photos/a.526158567554213/1311234755713253/?type=3&theater>>.

<sup>60</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/movimentonegroevangelicorj/photos/p.2355761487843390/2355761487843390/?type=1&theater>>.

<sup>61</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/conselhonacionaldeigrejas/photos/a.541077149579619/997820497238613/?type=3&theater>>.

<sup>62</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/frentedeevangelicos/photos/a.582657245230302/1257079154454771/?type=3&theater>>.

<sup>63</sup>Several groups held events of this nature: 01. Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/frentedeevangelicos/photos/p.1309518602544159/1309518602544159/?type=1&theater>>; 02. Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/events/460468751244333/>>; 03. Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/events/459389308335433/>>; 04. Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/events/979067739105274/>>; entre outros.

<sup>64</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/somosjbb/videos/638437883302030/>>.

were explicit about why they disinvited the original guests: "the issue with the debaters was their left-wing ideological bias," (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 2019) said Pastor Pedrão, known for having celebrated the marriage of Jair Bolsonaro<sup>65</sup>. The executive director of the CBB, pastor Sócrates Oliveira, mentioned the fact that he was himself a black man and recalled that the conversation cycle was maintained even without the presence of the disinvited guests<sup>66</sup>. At another time, he claimed that the criterion for inviting speakers to the event has always been to avoid 'people who are controversial on social media' (SANTOS, 2019)<sup>67</sup>.

The 'Coalizão Batista Conservadora', accused by pastor Marco Davi of acting behind the scenes to disinvite the guests, posted a note in their Facebook page expressing "full support for the CBB board of directors for their attitude of disinviting two speakers invited by the JBB without the board's knowledge, speakers who do not correspond to the thinking of the overwhelming majority of Brazilian Baptists" (free translation)<sup>68</sup>. Despite the Coalition's public support for CBB's attitude, one of its leaders, Pastor João Mury Aquino, claimed on social media that his group did not press for anyone to be disinvited. In the video he released, he criticizes the 'leftist movement' and recalls that such a 'movement' is in disagreement with the 'majority' of Brazilian Baptists<sup>69</sup>.

This dispute around frames, as an attempt to define the situation, demonstrates that the ideological political polarization in the country has penetrated people's everyday lives; it also shows that the agenda on human rights has been highly constrained by ideology and that 'minority' discourses by progressive leaders in the evangelical milieu have been proscribed. Although the guests Fabíola Oliveira and Baptist Pastor Marco David are considerably experienced in promoting racial equality, they are not welcome even to debate the issue, since they are not deemed competent to talk about it because they do not have

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<sup>65</sup>Available at <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2019/07/debate-sobre-racismo-religioso-aumenta-dentro-de-igrejas-e-opoe-evangelicos.shtml>>.

<sup>66</sup>Available at <[https://pleno.news/fe/igreja-cancela-palestrantes-em-debate-sobre-racismo.html?fbclid=IwAR1asjmHAqr-E17iHmKPppc54dSRTk\\_aEuCW4JjNHnF\\_WxXBtzy1juIkfA](https://pleno.news/fe/igreja-cancela-palestrantes-em-debate-sobre-racismo.html?fbclid=IwAR1asjmHAqr-E17iHmKPppc54dSRTk_aEuCW4JjNHnF_WxXBtzy1juIkfA)>.

<sup>67</sup>Available at <<https://www.redebrasilatual.com.br/destaques/2019/07/congresso-de-jovens-da-igreja-batista-e-acusado-de-racismo/>>.

<sup>68</sup> Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/coalizaobatistaconservadora/photos/a.1557678011161887/2253027451626936/?type=3&theater>>.

<sup>69</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/coalizaobatistaconservadora/videos/2581371125255836/>>.

the ideological inclination expected of a 'true evangelical' by CBB leaders. Since redemocratization – and particularly in recent years – defending human rights is practically an exclusively left-wing agenda.

The debate on race was also obstructed – to a lesser degree and because of other factors – in churches and evangelical organizations run by politically 'moderate' or progressive pastors. There are various reasons for that. First, because their moderation drives them to abstain from engaging with 'overly' politicized topics that can stimulate intrigue and vendettas in their churches; therefore, avoiding these topics means preserving some peace and ecclesial unity. Second, because, in being progressives, they already promote egalitarian values in their sermons and/or pro-human rights community activities, which they can do without catechetical assistance of brothers 'from outside' the church. Third, because a portion of the so-called 'progressives' does not consider racial equality a priority in their churches. There is a fourth reason for their resistance: several theological and political perspectives – either more or less liberal – are found within the 'progressive' and 'conservative' classifications. The fact that they take a 'progressive' stance on issues related to racial and economic inequalities does not necessarily mean that these pastors and believers address other topics in the same way, such as gender and sexual diversity, for example. With reservations about these agendas, 'progressive' evangelicals do not fail to reproduce discriminatory positions against sexual minorities. Therefore, once gender and sexuality become relevant markers in the activities of evangelical black activists, or in their bodies, these individuals are avoided.

This was mentioned in all interviews with activists of the MNE in Pernambuco (MNE/PE)<sup>70</sup>, where some of the activists declare to be LGBTQIA+.

As Madalena (2019)<sup>71</sup>, a MNE/PE activist, says:

“Now in 2019 we are facing a problem because we have assumed the position to welcome the LGBT population, considering that many members of the MNE are LGBT people. And then most churches, including

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<sup>70</sup>This account, as well as all the others cited in this text, is presented in more detail in my dissertation (MEDEIROS, 2022). To guarantee the anonymity required by my interlocutors, they are identified by pseudonyms.

<sup>71</sup>All accounts cited in this article were collected with the free and informed consent of the interviewees through a semi-directed interview that I applied. This account is an excerpt from an interview, face-to-face, recorded, with a duration of about two hours and a half, carried out between November 19-24, 2019, in Recife (Pernambuco), in field research. Both Madalena's account and those of Maria and João, also MNE/PE activists, were collected under the same research circumstances. The accounts by activists from other states in this text were collected in 2020, through videoconferencing, also recorded with a duration of about two hours and a half.

progressive ones, who are still struggling with this topic, they have not opened up to the issue of LGBT Christians. So, the fact that we're LGBT ended up closing us some doors. We are no longer invited to speak in certain places”.

Maria (2019), another MNE/PE activist, says something similar:

“Anyone who comes to ask if there are LGBT people in the MNE, we will say "yes, there are". Sometimes they say: “Maria, how is it, is there any gay in the MNE? And how do you allow it?” I say “well, and is it up to me to allow it?! I don't have to allow anything. The movement is social, it is of God”. That has already happened, I cut it off and they stopped. This closes doors and opens doors. For example, a church that knows we have LGBT people in the collegiate and in the internal structure of the movement and such, may not want us to give a lecture... In the social movement, doors tend to be more open, not completely open, of course”.

Maria's account shows that evangelical interlocutors of the MNE/PE have a diffuse expectation that the group would prohibit LGBTQIA+ people from participating in the movement. Madalena's account, on the other hand, indicates that the group had already penetrated some spaces, such as politically progressive churches, but eventually lost access to these spaces because they publicly adopted the decision to keep LGBTQIA+ activists on staff. They simply stopped being invited.

My investigation found that such a position taken by the MNE/PE contradicts the ‘modus operandi’ of progressive evangelical groups who usually avoid disagreements and conflicts at any cost and thus address social injustices mildly, in addition to ranking them.

This is what Maria (2019) reports:

“I realize that there is an attempt on the part of the progressive evangelical sectors of taking the softening methodological stance [of affirming] that Jesus is love, meekness, etc. But he brought the sword. There are things you can't treat lightly. The agenda on sexuality: Some LGBT people have even opened up to the group and such and were concerned about the group's image, and we were concerned about the safety of these people because they constantly represent us etc. and they could suffer direct attacks. So, there was this concern about embracing or not embracing, but we move around all spaces, and people are LGBT and that's it. We even decided that regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity people can participate in the collegiate normally, it is in our internal rules, we think we should ideally make all these decisions collectively”.

It is worth mentioning that the interviewees are not saying that mentioning gender and sexuality is restricted in their church activities (such as lectures or conversation circles), which would mean censoring a specific topic. What is at stake is something prior to that: the mere presence and participation of MNE/PE LGBTQIA+ people in churches is disapproved, possibly because the presence of non-heteronormative bodies is itself perceived as a problem.

Therefore, even the share of evangelicals that are considered progressive are ranking demands for equality and reproducing homophobic schemes of perception, which contributes to undermining the grassroots mobilization of some activist groups, including anti-racist groups. In addition to the human rights agenda being blocked, this ranking of demands indicates that there are ethical-political limitations in some portions of the 'progressive' evangelical field; it also suggests that the 'softening' strategies to which Maria referred are not working. Careful to avoid certain controversies, part of this field has systematically circumvented the agenda on LGBTQIA+ rights to avoid the political attrition associated with the main taboo among evangelicals. In the case in question, to avoid being rejected by certain progressives, the MNE/PE would have to exclude or hide its non-heterosexual or transgender anti-racist activists.

It is noteworthy that fighting against anti-discrimination policies designed to protect the LGBTQIA+ community is at the center of the agenda of conservative evangelical activists (MARIANO, 2016). These leaders and activists create a moral panic related to 'threats to the traditional family', 'gender ideology', 'erotization of children' and the 'imposition' of same-sex marriage as a rite in churches – a collection of fake news and exaggerations that are widely mobilized, especially in electoral contexts (MARIANO and GERARDI, 2019).

In sum, the disinvitation scene shows that the political-ideological polarization and radicalization of the evangelical right has made it more difficult for evangelical black activists to penetrate the churches; this context has also required them to configure their religious identity in a specific fashion so they achieve the status of legitimate and reliable evangelicals.

## Configuring the anti-racist identity – the evangelical black activists' relationship with the black movement

Evangelical black activism has always been the object of mistrust and even hostility to the traditional black movement. John Burdick (2005, 2002) noted that a considerable share of the black movement activists regarded black evangelicals as 'dominated' and devoid of racial consciousness since they were seen as believers of the 'oppressor's religion'. This perception was captured in the accounts collected in the field:

"At first, they were suspicious. "Evangelical black movement? What are you talking about? You don't recognize the black movement?" There are many questions like this. At first, we had to explain who we were because the name "evangelical" carries a weight. We try to re-signify this name. But with time..." (João, 2019, MNE/PE).

"There are people who resent us to some degree because they say we are a novelty. "Really, evangelical? It's a novelty" (Madalena, 2019, MNE/PE). "Some sectors of the black movement have reservations about us because we profess the evangelical Christian faith, they say our religion is the oppressor's religion" (Joana, 2020, MNE/RJ).

Gertrudes Maria (2020), an MNE activist in Paraíba, also says:

"We mark our participation as an evangelical black movement. Since some people who are part of the MNE also participate in these other social movements, I realize that there are certain suspicions ("how come you are evangelicals and did not vote for Bolsonaro?"), because there is still a homogeneous view about what it means to be an evangelical, but despite this, we have been able to participate and collaborate in the political action and break with these stereotypes, for example, the Movimento Mulheres Negras [Black Women Movement] and the Movimento Negro Unificado [Unified Black Movement] invite the MNE to sign letters of condemnation and such".

Perhaps that is why most evangelical black groups have, at most, loose ties to the black movement.

As told by Paula (2020), an MNE activist in São Paulo: "With the secular black movement, we have no relations. We need to coordinate with them. However, we have Adriana Vasconcellos' contact, an aspiring candidate for São Paulo City Council. We had a welcoming meeting with her and black women only, and we made a live video with her. It has been a relationship marked by exchanges and mutual help".

And Juliana (2020), an MNE activist in Bahia: “We still don't have a relationship with a black movement organization, we basically interact with other local groups of MNE spread across Brazil. Here there is an evangelical black collective called Cuxi, we have a relationship, it is basically formed by black Christian women”.

The political insertion of evangelical black actors into the black movement, however, does not depend only on the intentions and affections of each party but is affected by local political opportunity structures. An example is the way in which the MNE/PE succeeded in legitimizing itself as it participated in the public problematization prompted by an event associated with religious intolerance – or, in the activists' terms, ‘religious racism’.

In February 2018, Michelle Collins, a right-wing evangelical councilwoman, published on her Facebook page, named ‘Missionary Michele Collins’, the following message: “Intercession night in Recife, praying for Pernambuco and Brazil, at the Orla de Boa Viagem, pleading and breaking every curse from Iemanjá<sup>72</sup> that was cast against our land in the name of Jesus. Brazil belongs to the Lord Jesus. Those who agree and believe say amen” (O GLOBO, 2018). In response to the publication, several letters of condemnation<sup>73</sup> were issued, protests were organized by ‘terreiros’<sup>74</sup>, criticism was expressed by public leaders<sup>75</sup>, and a lawsuit was filed against the councilwoman in the State of Pernambuco Public Prosecution (MPPE). At the time chairwoman of the Human Rights Committee at the Recife City Council, she also faced a process in the Ethics Committee of the City Council, which was later closed<sup>76</sup>. Her Facebook publication was framed by ‘terreiros’, social movements, and

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<sup>72</sup>An Afro-Brazilian divinity.

<sup>73</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/ileaxe.oxalatalabi/posts/1807955229275643>>.

<sup>74</sup>Available at <<https://g1.globo.com/pe/pernambuco/noticia/representantes-de-terreiros-fazem-ato-contra-vereadora-evangelica-do-recife-que-citou-maldicao-de-ianjanja.ghtml>>.

<sup>75</sup>Available at <<https://g1.globo.com/pe/pernambuco/noticia/representantes-de-terreiros-pedem-retratacao-de-vereadora-do-recife-que-citou-maldicao-de-ianjanja.ghtml>>.

<sup>76</sup>Available at <<http://www.recife.pe.leg.br/comunicacao/noticias/comissao-de-etica-divulga-nota-sobre-michele-collins>>. Unfortunately, it was not possible to find the primary sources in the City Council's database, but the reference appears in a news article in the Council's official communication.

even the MPPE not only as an act of disrespect, hatred, intolerance, and religious discrimination, but also as 'racism'<sup>77</sup>.

In the face of a problematic situation around a trouble – the councilwoman's act of intolerance –, different actors start investigating, inquiring, researching, in other words, searching for the causes that explain the trouble and proposing answers, solutions; in the course of this process, a 'trouble' turns into a 'public problem'. Also, during this broad problematization, a black anti-racist, anti-religious intolerance public is formed. As in the disinvitation scene, here we also see that actors have established a cognitive, affective, and political exchange guided by a common event. In the case of the disinvitation, only two individuals were disinvited, but a whole network of activists, organizations, movements, and churches felt they had also been affected. In the case of the councilwoman, the offense directed at Afro cults seems to have affected several other organizations such as black movement organizations, members of the Judiciary, municipal public policy councils, and human rights groups. It is a broad 'field of collective experience'<sup>78</sup> in the making (CEFAI, 2017).

In line with the black movement and groups of Afro cults, the MNE/PE issued a letter 'condemning religious racism'; in such letter, the [MNE/PE] identifies itself as a 'space for defending rights' composed of 'representatives of civil society', where religious traditions of African origin are valued and their 'historical importance' for the 'process of resistance and survival of the black people to the present day' is recognized. In addition, it classifies the councilwoman's attitude as a 'racist behavior', 'propagation of racism, hatred, and disrespect', a manifestation of 'racial hatred', 'religious racism', 'religious intolerance',

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<sup>77</sup>This episode thus triggered anti-racist legal provisions, as one can attest in the MPPE's official gazette (Available at <<https://www.jusbrasil.com.br/diarios/177480869/mp-pe-10-02-2018-pg-8>>) and in Official Letter Nº 013/2018, which opens a civil inquiry into the councilwoman's conduct – the official letter was addressed to the Human Rights prosecutor via the MPPE Working Group on Racism and subsequently accepted in ORDINANCE No. 001/2018-7<sup>o</sup>PJ-DH. The MPPE also determined that representatives from the municipal and state councils for the promotion of racial equality in Recife and Pernambuco should participate in the case investigation.

<sup>78</sup>According to the pragmatist literature, the formation of a public problem engenders necessarily an experiential and collective field: "... a *field of collective experience* with its ways of seeing, saying, and creating common sense, connected by a network of available numbers, categories, types, accounts, and arguments that allow for a state of affairs to be assimilate as an identifiable and recognizable problem" (CEFAI, 2017, p.193, free translation).

and a violation of the right to 'freedom of faith in a secular country'<sup>79</sup>. It is noteworthy that, although Michele Collins' act was framed as 'racism and religious intolerance' by an array of actors (the MPPE, black movement organizations, members of the racial equality council, leaders and supporters of Afro cults), it was the MNE/PE who underlined the racial dimension of the event and presented the 'religious racism' frame, in all its letters.

The letter from the MNE/PE went viral on social media, which took sectors of the black movement and Afro cults by surprise – they were also pleased by it. The letter was even attached to the file of the case investigation opened by the MPPE. The councilwoman sought to approach the group, unsuccessfully, as told by Maria (2019):

“So much so that she came to us. Not her, one of her assistants called. They came to explain what had happened, saying that we could understand what she had said because we shared the same faith and that she was being attacked. I said: if the councilwoman wants the MNE to mediate a meeting between her and the terreiro people so she can ask for forgiveness and make things right, we accept, otherwise we have nothing to say to her. Religious racism is a crime”.

All the activists that were interviewed affirm that participating in the Collins Case was decisive for the MNE/PE to gain some legitimacy and respectability in the eyes of the local black movement:

“In 2017 we took a position regarding a councilwoman. Our first action. An evangelical councilwoman of the Assembléia de Deus, elected by the Assembléia de Deus, that's what people say. There is a statue representing Iemanjá in Jabotão, and people usually go there on a certain date to make an offering and such. She is a resident of the city. She posted a photo “let's pray for God to break all of Iemanjá's curse”. People were in a frenzy, right? Religious racism from a councilwoman! And she is chairwoman of the City Council's human rights committee! Immediately, the MNE wrote a letter condemning the councilwoman, against religious racism. This story was phenomenal! No one had ever seen a group of evangelicals organize to say they condemned her behavior”(Maria (MNE/PE) (MARIA, 2019).

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<sup>79</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/movimentonegroevangelicorecife/photos/a.1941259662856386/2025173967798288>>.

Maria (2019, MNE/PE) also affirms that the group is often urged to act in situations involving religious intolerance against Afro cults. She says:

“We are called all the time here in Recife on the issue of religious racism. Because it's like this: the black social movement is mostly formed by terreiro people. “So, all right, you're getting here, you're a crente, huh? Even the pastor in my neighborhood is practicing religious racism against my supporters.” You see? “What can you do?” I'm often receiving messages from people: “is the MNE going to do anything?”

In being increasingly requested by groups of Afro cults and the black movement to intervene publicly against the religious intolerance promoted by evangelicals, the MNE/PE is also legitimized as an interlocutor and ally. Maria (2019) also states that ‘religious racism’ practically imposed itself as an agenda to the group, at the same time when solidarity with Afro cults offered the MNE/PE the opportunity to ‘prove that it is a social movement’.

“So, it was important [to participate in the Collins Case]. Initially, it was not our intention to work with this agenda [religious racism], because at first we were focused on strengthening ourselves as a group, getting to know our historical and theological foundations, and working with the church. But it was urgent that we took a position because we had already presented ourselves as a movement. So, to say that this is a social movement... we have to prove that we are a social movement”.

Once the MNE/PE's participation in the Collins Case was successful, it had the key to accessing the black movement and was able to advance in its visibility and legitimization trajectory:

“I realized that although it was not really our intention, to signal something to the terreiro people, at that moment, that was something important because it was read by the black social movement as something positive and as a path to becoming closer and more aligned. Because there are a lot of things, right? Look, I've already heard: “look, now this is the new thing crentes decided they want to do, to decide to be a black movement”. Friends of mine who are part of the black movement told me: “what are you up to Maria, do you want to be a social movement now?” At that time, huh? So, when we come and endorse and align ourselves with the discourse, with what the social movement already says, we are identifying, approaching, and aligning ourselves in some dimension. So, even though it was not our intention at the time, this has already brought us closer to the social movement”. (MARIA, 2019).

João (2019, MNE/PE) reiterates the activist's statements:

“And people began to see in the city, for example, after the letter related to what happened to Michele Collins on the Iemanjá day, the MNE released a letter against her behavior, and we came to be better known by the terreiro people. Because we are always in spaces that discuss religious racism, not talking, but listening, and when we introduce ourselves, we say “look, I’m from the evangelical black movement”. We ask questions. Then people started saying, “Is there such a thing?”

Although initially the MNE/PE aimed at doing ‘grassroots mobilization’ in churches, they changed direction as their difficulties to penetrate the churches combined with their participation in the Collins Case. The act of condemning the councilwoman, which ‘was read as something positive by the black movement’, was an experience of such significance to the MNE/PE that the group reviewed its priorities and started to be ‘requested all the time on the issue of religious racism’; this agenda was adopted by the MNE/PE as a mediating category between the group and the black movement.

As for the Collins Case, as attested in our field research, not only the letter of condemnation was attached to the lawsuit filed by the MPPE against the councilwoman, but also the MNE/PE was invited to mediate conflicts between evangelicals and Afro cults in the judicial sphere and to participate in hearings on the subject at the Legislative Assembly of Pernambuco.

In addition to this episode, the MNE/PE has engaged in other similar situations, also related to religious intolerance or, as they call it, ‘religious racism’, as recounted by Maria (2019, MNE/PE):

“Last week a highly regarded and famous ialorixá [a terreiro priestess] here made a speech against a certain group of pastors and told them to fuck off, this [happened] on the Lula Livre stage. Obviously, the well-organized and strong evangelical bloc here is suing her, and I have already received a message today from people who want to talk to me urgently, people of the movement, for us to take a position. Because with Michelle Collins we took a position. So? Shall we write a letter? In the Michelle Collins case, the terreiro people sued her and our letter was attached to the lawsuit! So, it's probably something like that now.”

The activist refers to the controversy involving Mother Beth of Oxum, who performed with her musical group during the Lula Livre Festival in Recife in November 2020. At some point, the 'ialorixá' shouted<sup>80</sup> loudly:

"Fuck these pastors who think we have no strength and no power! We are the majority, we are blacks, Afro-descendants, and women. Fuck the white and asshole elite of this country! Bolsonaro, fuck you! We did not vote [for this government], we do not accept this misgovernment that thinks we are nothing. We are black and indigenous women from the Northeast. Fuck him with these rich, white women who don't know what fighting is and don't know what it is like to bear the costs of raising a child!"<sup>81</sup> (PORTAL DA PREFEITURA, 2019).

To which she added: "It's time for all hell to break loose" ("Tá na hora do pau comer!")<sup>82</sup>. This was widely reported in evangelical websites<sup>83</sup>. The result was that a pastor reached to the Federal Public Prosecution in Pernambuco<sup>84</sup> and filed a complaint against Mother Beth's insult.

Evangelical leaders criticized the priestess, as illustrated by a speech by "pastor Jairinho": "Inciting hatred and religious war does not represent leaders and people of African origin. This was probably an isolated action taken by her. We are extremely offended by the slanderous manner in which this lady treated us, leaders and religious representatives" (PLENO NEWS, 2019).

In a session in which they issued a Vote of Protest<sup>85</sup> against the priestess, further right-wing state deputies spoke condemning her speech, while PCdoB and PT deputies were trying to mitigate the situation<sup>86</sup>. Mother Beth, in turn, published an open letter in which she defended herself from the accusation of having committed religious intolerance<sup>87</sup>. Her speech, she says, was "a critique of the

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<sup>80</sup>Excerpts of Mother Beth of Oxum's speech available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUFvworwZ6>>.

<sup>81</sup>Excerpts of Mother Beth of Oxum's speech may be available at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUFvworwZ64>>.

<sup>82</sup>Available at <<https://portaldeprefeitura.com.br/2019/11/18/mae-de-santo-xinga-pastores-no-festival-lula-livre/>>.

<sup>83</sup>Available at <<https://www.gospelprime.com.br/mae-de-santo-xinga-pastores-bolsonaro-e-elite-branca-no-festival-lula-livre/>>.

<sup>84</sup>Available at <<https://pleno.news/brasil/politica-nacional/pastor-aciona-mpf-contra-mae-de-santo-que-xingou-cristaos.html>>.

<sup>85</sup>Available at <<http://www.alepe.pe.gov.br/2019/11/19/joel-da-harpa-repudia-manifestacao-de-lider-religiosa-sobre-pastores-evangelicos/>>.

<sup>86</sup>Available at <<http://www.alepe.pe.gov.br/2019/11/19/joel-da-harpa-repudia-manifestacao-de-lider-religiosa-sobre-pastores-evangelicos/>>.

<sup>87</sup>Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/p/B5N0kacHULp/>>.

behavior of those fundamentalist evangelical pastors who control the media and politics in the country. I referred only to those people." "Because of what I said," she continues, "I am dishonestly and lightly accused of religious intolerance (...). How could I?"<sup>88</sup>. Finally, she resorts to the positive connections with progressive evangelicals, explicitly displaying such connections:

"I am an admirer of Pastor Henrique Vieira, a religious leader whom I respect and esteem as a priest; of Pastor Ariovaldo Ramos, someone who does not preach religious racism and with whom I cultivate a serene friendship; and also of the recently known Pastor Paulo César Pereira, admirable president of the Aliança de Batistas do Brasil [Alliance of Baptists of Brazil], with whom I participated in an interreligious meeting at the Synagogue of Recife recently, in a pre-conference on Climate (COP 25)"<sup>89</sup>.

The MNE/PE once again spoke in an official statement<sup>90</sup> praising and honoring Afro cults, valued as being relevant 'for the resistance and survival of the black people to the present day'. In the text, the MNE/PE also expresses understanding for Mother Beth's 'indignation' against 'religious racism' perpetrated by 'some evangelical pastors' and 'so-called Christian groups' in Brazil. The group framed the 'ialorixá's' insult as a legitimate act of anti-racist protest.

With respect to this episode, Maria (2019) defends her group's position on the matter, which was to defend Afro cults as something necessary and relevant:

"The case of religious racism is a constant demand because 80% of the black movement consists of terreiro people. "Oh, we don't mess with that because we are crentes." No! That's just it, the problem is with crentes themselves. See how important it is that we exist, from the point of view of the real demand of the black movement. So, these things are unsustainable, I go to places, people ask me on the spot. "Oh, you are in the evangelical black movement, how is it like?"

As the activist puts it, the MNE/PE is 'constantly' pressured to incorporate demands related to interreligious conflicts between conservative evangelicals and adherents of Afro cults, a position that has bolstered the group's legitimacy in the eyes of other black organizations in the state. Effectively, the group has 'accumulated

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<sup>88</sup>Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/p/B5N0kacHULp/>>.

<sup>89</sup>Available at <<https://www.instagram.com/p/B5N0kacHULp/>>.

<sup>90</sup>The statement is available at <<https://www.instagram.com/p/B50bi3pnnM9/>>.

experience', with significant memories and experiences shaping the horizons for its activists' engagement – it is in relation to these experiences that they define their expectations, priorities, and strategic choices about what 'works' and what 'does not work', about what lines of action to adopt.

It is worth saying that the category 'religious racism' has been increasingly used by black movement activists, supporters of Afro cults, ecumenical actors, left-wing activists, and even judicial authorities (BORTOLETO, 2019, 2014; NICÁCIO, 2021). This expression defines religious intolerance against Afro cults as racism – in other words, 'it is prejudice against everything that is African'. Therefore, religious intolerance should not be considered a discrete phenomenon, but only the surface layer under which lives ethnic discrimination.

This assertion, however, contradicts the enshrined sociological argument that racial prejudice in Brazil is based on 'mark', not on 'origin' (NOGUEIRA, 2006). Moreover, taking the racial – or ethnic – factor as an independent variable to explain religious discrimination against Afro cults also contradicts previous analyses, according to which Afro cults are demonized, especially by Pentecostals, based on religious beliefs related to 'spiritual battles' and valorization of practices of exorcism and 'liberation' (MARIANO, 2007). Thus, the racialization of religious intolerance should be understood as a political strategy used by Afro cults in a context of strong religious intolerance led by Pentecostals; it should also be seen as an operation that occurred during a process of ethnicization of racial differences and conflicts, perceptible in movements for Africanization within the Brazilian black movement in the last five decades (DOMINGUES, 2007; GUIMARÃES, 1999).

In sum, evangelical black activists embraced such a frame, defining intolerance as 'racism' and/or 'religious racism', categories widely used in their public appearances<sup>91</sup>. As attested in the field, by emerging as a public problem, 'religious racism' created special conditions for the political viability of evangelical black activism, since evangelical black activists began to be recognized as potential allies of Afro cults, willing to, as evangelicals, use the authority of their 'place of speech' (lugar de fala) and act as translators/mediators between churches and the black movement. Evangelical black activists thus found an exclusive

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<sup>91</sup>Available at <<https://www.facebook.com/page/1964939960258880/search/?q=racismo%20religioso>>.

strategic role that allowed them to configure their anti-racist identity based on their fight against 'religious racism' and their sympathy for Afro cults, gaining more legitimacy in the eyes of the black movement in the process (MEDEIROS, 2022).

## Conclusion

Contrary to the argument of part of the literature, evangelical blacks have not compromised their identity realization, nor is there any incompatibility between such racial identification and religious affiliation. Evangelical blacks can affirm themselves racially – and have coherence of the self – without resorting to particular signs of African/Afro-Brazilian heritage; after all, the mobilization of these signs should not be naturalized. Instead of 'rejecting' or 'fully admitting' these signs, evangelical black activists created a measure of political and cultural elements and filtered them based on their religious belongings, thus reiterating the singularity of their activism. In short, this finding counters essentialist conceptions of identity and points out the plasticity of anti-racism as a political value – its 'social refractions' as racial identity is positively associated with other social markers of difference, as observed in black feminism, in anti-capitalist and pan-Africanist expressions within the black movement, and even in the evangelical black movement. Moreover, this religious identity is equally flexible and operates providing various signifiers to political struggles, signifiers that are ethically filled by programs that are either more conservative or more progressive. A situation in which religion produces a form of anti-racism – or vice versa.

We also found that evangelical black activists assume the condition of minority group twice, as evangelicals in the black movement and anti-racist activists among evangelicals, which is why they have been called a 'political-religious minority' (MEDEIROS, 2022) or, as the American evangelical left has said, a 'moral minority' (SWARTZ, 2012). They are, therefore, in a position of 'political liminality', which conditions the public reemergence of their activism, as they need to legitimize themselves in both interfaces, political and religious.

Since evangelical black activists' access to churches was blocked due to political polarization and radicalization of the evangelical right, the activists were forced to rethink their agendas and focus elsewhere: on social media, participatory

institutions (such as public policy councils), self-reproduction activities, or more visible public interventions. With this shift, solidarity with Afro cults became central, particularly for the MNE/PE; it also became a significant trend for several other groups in the country.

If, on the one hand, it seems hard to get the churches involved, on the other hand, connecting with the black movement is also not that easy, given the prejudice and stigma attached to evangelicals, seen as conservatives and reactionaries. It is against this representation that evangelical black activists fight, and for that, they 'compete' for public visibility with their further-to-the-right brothers of faith, as well as they question the representativeness and protagonism of conservative evangelicals. As we saw in the 'Collins Case' scene, evangelical black activists seek to differentiate themselves and present to the left-wing, black activism the symbolic credentials that attest to their anti-racism and progressive inclination. In the context where religious intolerance is problematized, framed as 'racism', solidarity with Afro cults became central to the evangelical black actors' agenda and allowed/required them to configure their racial identity based on political criteria – a 'secular' form of anti-racism or a form of anti-racism under the wings of Afro cults. The 'frame alignment/reinforcement' allowed them to 'prove' how reliable and legitimate they were as black activists. In the 'disinvitation' scene, on the other hand, it was the religious identity that had to be configured and legitimized. Activists engage in a 'frame opposition' regarding the problematic situation: they define it as 'racism', while established conservatives define it as 'normality'. Evangelical black activists sought to highlight their religious integrity, their biblical commitment, and the Christian relevance of their activism to other evangelicals.

Evangelical black actors are thus guided by the prospect of 'acquiring the status' of a legitimate social movement and legitimate evangelicals. This need of theirs and the resulting politically 'liminal' position in which they find themselves are both taken into account by the actors as they build themselves as blacks and evangelicals in the course of the 'problematic situations' and 'public arenas' in which they engage. For all these reasons, both their religious affiliation and their racial identification are relational and situational positions that must be put into context to be understood.

Translated by Karin Blikstad  
Submitted on February 19, 2022  
Accepted on July 29, 2022

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