Masculinity, Aging, and Reversion
An Essay on Losing Direction

Annette Leibing

> "Tenho tão nítido o Brasil que pode ser, e há de ser, que me dói o Brasil que é."
> "I am so clear about the Brazil that can be, and that should be, that the Brazil that is hurts me."
> (attributed to anthropologist and politician Darcy Ribeiro [1922–1997])

The starting point for this essay is my impression that there is a general tendency – a directionality – in masculinity studies. This is, of course, a simplification of an increasingly diversified field. Yet an example for a common underlying narrative could be the title of feminist journalist Liz Plank's recent book *For the Love of Men* (2019), and the sub-title she chose, *From Toxic to a More Mindful Masculinity*. Here, what I call directionality starts with a narrative of insufficiency. The detected male 'defect', in such tales, needs to be pushed towards an improved masculinity in a future, in which men, through a reflexive act of conscientization, ideally accept other types of gender and themselves as equal in rights and, at the same time, improve their way of living gender. But what if this desired evolutive and emancipatory idea – from bad to better, from traditional to modern – gets turned around or even loses direction?

I am not talking here about recent discussions found in countries like Germany where a major wave of immigration has come from countries in which parts of the population do not acknowledge equal rights for women (or LBGT+ individuals) – which, of course, aren't fully acknowledged by many Germans, either. Complaints about sexist assaults of women (as in the 2015 New Year's Eve attacks in Cologne)[1], is not what this essay is primarily about, although parts of it can be read as such. Even though these sexual assaults of German women by men from Muslim backgrounds were considered by one local politician a "*momentary* breakdown of civilization" (*zeitweiliger Zivilisationsbruch*; emphasis added; see note 1), the evolutive direction from bad to better is generally not questioned. For many Germans, immigration-related sexism is a – momentary – step backward in an imagined local gender equality, but not a return in itself. Solutions like sexual education courses for immigrant Muslims (also in other countries, like Belgium) can be seen as vectors pushing into one direction – here towards a culture-bound 'better', 'modern' man. Yet, following Corrigan (2018), this kind of "educational fix", based on "educational positivism", is a naïve way of trying to change complex identitary issues, in this case, issues of belonging and citizenship, in which masculinity models are embedded.[2]

What I want to call *reversion*[3] (in line with masculinities) results in deeper changes in societies, affecting underlying structures and value-systems that are generally perceived by those critical to such changes as regression, backwardness, and devolution, and as involving dominant forces in society, like the way of doing politics. The fact that politics is

1 https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sexuelle_%C3%9Cbergriffe_in_der_Silvesternacht_2015

2 On "Male citizenship" in so-called Western societies, see Dudink, Hagemann and Clark (2012).

3 Here 'reverse anthropology' comes to mind. This approach developed by Roy Wagner (2016 [1975]), means a radical change of perspective and, after Viveiros de Castro (2013: 477), "the art of determining the problems posed by each culture, not of finding solutions for the problems posed by our own". 'Reversion' in this essay is, first of all, the general feeling of fought-for value systems getting lost, and its consequences.

deeply gendered has been discussed by many scholars but, as Marx Ferree (2020) argues, this insight is rarely acknowledged. The author observes that "[g]ender (…) attaches the identifications of individuals, each with their own masculinity, femininity, sexuality, and nationality, to the postures leaders display, consciously or not, in the theater of democratic politics" (p. 899). In the specific case of reversion and masculinity, older men are practically absent from such narratives, as if while getting older, masculinity as an attribute fades away. This might be because masculinity is often associated with sexuality and performance, and aging men, in many societies, are more easily perceived as a-sexual (or, otherwise, as 'dirty old men') and as less performant (Kenny 2013).

It is the absence of old age in the following discussion on masculinity – the 'un-masculinity' so to say – that is the underlying issue, although this point will only be articulated towards the end of this text. And this absence is astonishing since powerful examples from current affairs are based on aging actors in politics. Examples are based on masculinity models many thought of as long overcome but that are on full display in countries like the US (a central figure being former president Trump, born in 1946) or Brazil (president Bolsonaro was born in 1955). In these places, the resurgence of "macho" role models, displayed in political enactments, are based on attributes linked to the young and aggressive, invulnerable body (and with the help of much younger wives in the case of the two politicians).

To make my point, I will provide, in the next section, a short and certainly incomplete narrative of political masculinities in current Brazil – at the time of writing this text situated specifically after the election of current president Jair Bolsonaro. This will be followed by a discussion of 'reversion' and its pitfalls as an analytical framework for certain masculinities, and, as a conclusion, I will highlight the aspect of aging within the chosen perspective.

Brazilian masculinities and 'obscene' current politics

For several years, Brazil had a leftist government lead by presidents Luis Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011), followed by his successor Dilma Rousseff (2011–2016). And although not all was perfect,[4] during this period, several important social programs were implemented. Some followed programs already established by the prior (social-democratic) Cardoso government (1995–2002), but an important number of new policies allowed even the most marginal and impoverished in the country to have better access to food, education, housing, and health, to a more dignified life (de Almeida 2005, Ansell 2011). Important laws protecting minorities against discrimination and violence were implemented (e.g., the 'Maria da Penha law' from 2006 targeting domestic violence against women)[5], but also more tolerant attitudes in general toward LBGT+ and other minorities were widely propagated (Machado 2016, Rodrigues 2021). Improved rights for LBGT+ individuals became firmly associated with the Lula/Roussef governments and, paradoxically, exploited as a sign of anomy by the opposition, which constructed a great part of its rhetoric on criticizing the, in their view, immoral new age. This reading of what some called an improvement (of rights) as a (re)turn towards anomy by far-right ideologists was, at least partially responsible for Bolsonaro's election (Cavalcanti 2017).[6]

4 See, for example, an analysis of recent Brazilian politics in https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aomyj6_KnKc. A major critique of the Lula/Roussef governments was the frenetic consumerism that went hand in hand with a financial empowerment of poorer Brazilians. The tragic side of this is captured in Fernando Bonassi's novel *Luxúria* (2016), in which hope, class-related hierarchies, desire and consumerism get entangled in a narrative of despair and destruction.

5 See https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-37429051

6 In between the Lula/Roussef and the Bolsonaro governments, interim conservative president Michel Temer started already abolishing some of the protective institutions in Brazil, such as the SPM (*Secretaria para Políticas das Mulheres*) – the Secretary for Women's Rights, as he implanted his central political program that he called "the bridge to the future" (*uma ponte para o futuro*). Again 'directionality' captures historical changes: after Cavalcanti and Venerio (2017),

On January 1, 2019, Jair Bolsonaro became Brazil's president with a political agenda that, as Assis and Ogando (2018) observe,

> *marks the return of white, male, sexist and authoritarian politics in Brazil […]* Although over the years, his rhetoric targeting women, the LGBTQI community and minorities grew increasingly obscene, it in no way upset his political career. In fact, it seemed to strengthen it.

Well-known examples that appeared regularly in the news and that did not affect the president's popularity, were, for instance, that

> [d]uring a parliamentary debate in 2014, he told MP Maria do Rosario that he would not rape her because she "was not worth it" [in terms of femininity]. The same year, he suggested during a TV interview that spanking a son who "showed signs" of being gay was the best way for parents to change his behaviour and assure he would grow up as a "proper" man. In 2017, he claimed that after having four sons, having a daughter was the result of a moment of "weakness". (Assis and Ogando 2018)

Among the multiple co-existing masculinity models in Brazil, those based on heteronormative and homophobic values, but also on an image of the man as the aggressive protector of women and children – modes that never were extinguished – became reinforced due to the growing number of people adhering to ultra-conservative groupings, but also because of a greater visibility and communication platforms of these groupings in recent years. Brazilians further became regularly exposed to media images showing the smiling president and his sons posing with firearms or, making with their fingers the sign of a pistol that became Bolsonaro's 'trademark'. These kinds of images were previously reserved for powerful bandits, who posed with weapons as a sign of their illegal leadership. Weapons here stand for a kind of masculinity

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"there is really a bridge here – but a bridge to the past, especially because it leads directly back to the end of the 18th Century" comparable to the accumulation of capital among the rich elite in Europe (p. 158; my translation).

that not only goes hand in hand with a banalization of violence, but that has now also become a material and symbolic sign of *positive* power – however only when linked to the country's (contested) elite. Forms of violence found in poorer communities continued to be a problem that, at the same time, legitimated the elite's violence, as indicated by one solution that Bolsonaro propagated, namely, to arm the entire general population. In the opinion of the president and many of his followers, Brazilians had "the right" to defend themselves against bandits and to protect women and children, the sacred family (Noblat 2021, Kalil, Pinheiro-Machado and Scalco 2021). These necropolitics (Mbembe 2003) offered a philosophy allowing violence for all, bandits and non-bandits, although with an important new line drawn between good and bad kinds of predominantly male violence (cf. Rouse 2021 for the US).

The heterosexual, white, and armed Brazilian male, as an ideal, stands for the legitimization of violent attacks against and the killing of members of sexual minorities and members of religious groups other than fundamentalist evangelical and neo-Pentecostal groups (*The Guardian* 2021, Henning 2021). Homophobia especially, in line with the new Bolsonaro government – although historically not a new phenomenon in Brazil (e.g., Mott 2001) – was turned into a virtue. Fake statements made by the president that "homosexual fundamentalists" were brainwashing heterosexual children so they could "satisfy them sexually in the future", helped to change the moral meaning of homophobia. "I have [parliamentary] immunity to say: yes, I'm homophobic – and very proud of it," Bolsonaro declared in a filmed interview (Phillips 2020).

Like Bolsonaro, his cabinet members, many from fundamentalist evangelical churches,[7] showed a stark obsession with sexual themes and

7 In fact, it was the "BBB" (*boi*, *bala*, *bíblia* – bulls, bullets, bible) – meaning elected politicians and institutions linked to the powerful agri-food industry, to pro-weapon and military movements and to fundamentalist evangelical and neo-Pentecostal churches – that supported Bolsonaro's election. The majority of these groups were also involved in the impeachment of former president Dilma Roussef that many called a *coup d'état* (Cavalcanti 2017).

gender issues, which have occupied a large part of public discussions in recent years. Some topics were so absurd that it is hard to believe (for me) that anybody took them seriously: the Brazilian carnival was considered immoral and debauched, and it was suggested that this important cultural institution be abolished. The minister for women, family and human rights, who received her master's degree – as she finally admitted after a lot of public questioning – from her church and not from a university, defended the idea that baby boys should be dressed in light blue and girls in pink, manifesting her disapproval of more fluid gender definitions. She further plead for sexual abstinence before marriage, said that sex was something for leftist people, and sex between gay men she described as an aberration.[8] These churches had already become extremely powerful in Brazil before Bolsonaro's election and increasingly occupied strategic posts in radio, TV, and the government (deputies, senators, governors), so that even the previous leftist governments had been forced to make deals with evangelicals, in order to keep votes (Zanatta et al. 2016).

And when right after the elections, still in shock, I started talking to taxi drivers, clerks and other people one meets randomly when in Brazil – many told me they voted for Bolsonaro because, in their opinion, the previous leftist government's success was based on a loss of family values. The words of an older taxi driver who admitted that Bolsonaro might not be the ideal president, but who added that the previous situation had been intolerable, could stand for many of those I talked to: "Sodom and Gomorrah! My granddaughter is traumatized because she saw two men kissing each other in public, in plain view! One sees that all the time now, no shame at all – the family isn't worth anything anymore, the sacred family was destroyed by the PT [Lula's workers' party]."

8 See https://www.telesurenglish.net/news/Brazil-Minister-Says-Her-Masters-Degree-Granted-By-Her-Church-20190131-0027.html; and https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/alexandreorrico/brazil-boys-wear-blue-girls-wear-pink-damares-alves (downloaded April 12, 2021)

These heteronormative family values are linked to another example of the changing – or 'inversion' (cf. Leibing 2001)[9] – of moralities. Recently, and paradoxically, well-known bandits and drug-dealers, declaring themselves evangelical, took part in this culture war and attacked members of Afro-Brazilian religions. Stories surged about "the rise in violent attacks by narcotics gangs claiming to be Christians – the so-called "drug traffickers of Jesus" (Bunker, Sullivan and Da Cruz 2017). The same story, though with different social actors, might be told about the president. When Bolsonaro first entered his residence in the *Palácio do Planalto*, in Brasilia, his wife Michelle, a member of an evangelical church, banned the famous paintings by Brazilian artist Djanira that were part of the palace, showing Afro-Brazilian deities, *orixás*. She had previously announced that she would also hide any reference to the Catholic church (Ferreira 2020).

A last example of the specific way politics (here of public health) and masculinity models are intertwined under the Bolsonaro government, can be found in responses to the Corona pandemic. Brazil has had one of the worst outcomes in terms of deaths worldwide as a result of the virus (607 000 in October 2021[10]). However, using masks is "coisa de viado" – something for fairies, gays – the president declared. He ostentatiously continued to shake hands and meet people without wearing a mask, and when he personally contracted COVID-19, he dismissed it as a "little flu", evoking his athletic condition. The recent exclamation by president Bolsonaro that Brazil is a "land of *maricas* [effeminate persons, sissies]," [11] referring to the fear of Brazilians preoccupied with uncon-

9 In this article about inversion (not reversion) I show how in some discourses (e.g., media, auto-biography) the traditional negative image of bandits in Rio de Janeiro gets renegotiated in positive, even heroic terms.

10 See https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=brazil%27s+covid+deaths

11 Quote (our translation): "I am sorry for the deaths, but we all have to die one day. There is no sense in fleeing from this [COVID] reality, we have to stop being a country of *maricas* [sissies]." (Folha de São Paulo, 10 November 2020; https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/03/veja-o-que-bolsonaro-ja-disse-sobre-coronavirus-de-certa-histeria-a-fantasia-e-nerouse.shtml)

trolled COVID-19 numbers in the country, shows the denigration of men who care too much about health issues.[12]

A common stereotype of Brazilian men is the *machista*, although this notion needs, obviously, to be situated and relativized, depending on the context and the multiple masculinity models at work in this very heterogenous society. In terms of class, Heilborn and da Silva Cabral (2013), in their study of young Brazilians, gender and sexual practices, arrive at the conclusion that notions of gender equality, even in more educated parts of society, are less commonly accepted and less put into practice by men as compared to women. The authors write that even

> … highly educated men demonstrate a weak adherence to the principles of gender equality, while their female peers show a remarkable flexibility in their attitudes toward and beliefs about sexuality. This unexpected disparity provokes us to suggest that there is a reinvigorated expression of gender inequality in a social stratum, in which the real progress of egalitarianism could easily be imagined (2013: 40).

However, a general growing acceptance of minorities and more fluid masculinity models in the country over time – especially under the Lula/Roussef governments – coincide with an increased organization and visibility of minority groups. Examples include the growing number of feminist organizations (e.g., Magalhães 2017), but also minority groups among older Brazilians which have lately become more mainstream, especially in the big urban centers, as for example the "gray pride" movement (cf. Henning 2021).

However, many of the issues that contrast so 'obscenely' with the previously growing rights and discourses of recognition and equality regarding minorities – for instance, the 'uncaring' male that is predominant in Bolsonaro's discourses – are not new phenomena. Now these issues have become condensed and reinforced as an overarching, but still

12 This denigration of male self-care needs to be seen nevertheless within a general high acceptance and desirability regarding health technologies and medications in the Brazilian population (Leibing, Engel, and Carrijo 2019).

contested, cultural model that reminds us of older models, in a new scenario for being male. As an example, Coelho, Giacomin and Firmo (2016) show in their study on older men, that most men – just like in other national contexts – often avoid receiving medical care, and link illness, as well as the aging body, to frailty and a loss of masculinity. Male self-care, like elsewhere, is typically enacted through practices located outside of the medical domain, although such activities – playing sports, sexual activity, or physical work in general – can easily get medicalized, when declining functionality is perceived as pathological (Katz and Marshall 2003, Medeiros et al. 2014, Pereira 2009). This reliance on activity, force, and performance as signs of masculinity was also part of the study by Brigeiro (2000) who introduced a category that was frequently employed by the older middle-class urban men he studied in Rio de Janeiro, nicknamed "the pyjamas". Different from the men Brigeiro observed and who regularly met in public spaces, a man described as a 'pyjama' is passive and stays mostly at home (imagined as wearing pyjamas and slippers all day); he is pitied and perceived as being dominated by his wife.

And in contrast to the often-encountered notion of older men as asexual, Debert and Brigeiro (2012), in their study, show that happening especially after the introduction of Viagra to the Brazilian market in the late 1990s, a major "eroticization of old age" took place, with a concomitant quasi-obligation – more for men than for women – of talking constantly about and ideally also having (heterosexual) sex in order to prove one's youthfulness.

In a recent study, Engel and Leibing (2022) observed that within such rather normative role models there was strong "identity tinkering" – a negotiation of what is (typically) male and female for the men who in that study were taking care of a dependent family member:

> In fact, there are various kinds of masculinity being disputed in these encounters that vary depending on the generation, but also on conflicting images of what it is to be a man. (…) As shown in many more recent masculinity studies (…; Santos and Rifiotis 2004), Brazilian men also adhere to multiple masculinities (…). In our two vignettes, men and women compose narratives in which there is

> a tension between the desire to increase men's caring side, while trying equally to avoid creating too feminine behaviors, within a strong homophobic paradigm. (Engel and Leibing, 49)

Can the fact that among the many existing masculinity models in Brazil, the reinforcement of a certain uncaring, aggressive and heteronormative way of being male surged especially under Bolsonaro, be seen as a reversion?

Reversions

As I will argue in the following, the dramatic changes in Brazil, here illustrated by anecdotes[13] mirroring ultra-conservative and aggressive masculinity models, can be read as a re-enactment of values of the past that have been changed over time, often through major fights within feminist and human rights movements. Several scholars have thought about such historical and societal changes that I want, for the moment, to gather under the umbrella term 'reversion' (see for instance, Heinze and Vogel (2016) on German bio-farmers returning to conventional agriculture).[14] Reversion, after the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), touches on the aspect of "returning… to a former condition", which of course, is an illusion, since the past cannot be the present, even if elements (values, objects, fashions etc.) from the past may get re-acknowledged and re-enacted (from neo-Nazis to back-to-nature movements). Reversions like those seen in Brazil can be defined, at least for the moment, as referring to a "… lasting degradation of material, health, and cultural conditions in a formerly modernized society, a return to premodern forms of life and collective identities", as Rabkin (2018: 23) defines what he calls 'demodernization'.

13 For a deeper analysis of Brazil's recent history, see, for example, Carvalho (2018) and de Souza (2019a, 2019b).

14 Agriculture here is a targeted example, not one that necessarily shows a wider, societal change as in our definition of reversion.

In recent years, the concept of demodernization has been used by several authors, to describe a historical backwards movement – a "future in the past", after Rabkin and Minakov (2018). Rabkin, in his chapter "Undoing years of progress" about contemporary Russia, explains that "the clock appears to be turned back" and that "demodernization means regression on the scale of modernity." (2018: 17) This, of course, raises the question of what modernity exactly means, whether it is a single and universal entity, if we all should eventually get there, and whether modernity is something like a civilizing process that can be measured "on the scale [of modernity]".

Demodernization needs to be seen in context, explains Rabkin (2018: 17)); it can co-exist with modernization movements and is not restricted by national boundaries. The result, according to Rabkin, is leading, among other manifestations, to growing inequalities, a degradation of public services, a loss of tolerance regarding diversity, and a resurgence of irrational religion-like authoritarian manifestations. Alain Touraine (1997), in a similar vein, described demodernization as a process in which (in France) a market economy leads to de-socialization, de-politization and de-institutionalization.

'Decivilization' is a similar concept; it means a reverse movement of a civilizing process – although 'civilization' itself is rarely defined – characterized principally by the destruction of more elaborated attitudes (with reference to Norbert Élias), but also of community and institutions, leading to a "savagization" of societies.[15] As Aramini and Gulli (2016) observe, this process can be described at an individual micro-level, as an increasing lack of self-control – the authors use the psychoanalytical term of "pulsations" – that often results in a brutalization of and an increase of

15 "'Décivilisation' désigne donc d'une part le processus de destruction des communautés et d'autre part, le retournement du processus de civilisation, le reflux des comportements civilisés, le relâchement du contrôle des pulsions, le retour de la violence notamment, le retour de l'immédiateté et l'indifférence pour le présent et l'avenir, etc. 'Décivilisation' réfère donc aux incivilités, à l'accroissement de la délinquance, aux nouvelles formes de violences particulièrement barbares, aux multiples formes d' tournée contre soi telle que la toxicomanie, etc." (Aramini and Gulli 2016)

violence among people. On a societal level, this process is linked to the weakening of institutions that regulate how individuals live together (US American individualism is an example here). Contemporary neo-capitalism is considered a central vector for such processes, destroying and uniformizing cultures, ways of being and local psychologies – "devaluing values" (2016).

Bolsonaro's enactment of politics can be easily described in these terms: the interaction of a weakening of institutions and a social net, with an increase in violence,[16] the empowerment of a specific kind of religious world-making, and the destruction of more inclusive rights for minorities. The impact of such a 'turn' of masculinity models on many Brazilians, but by far not all, is also easy to show. However, since "devaluing values" as a general tendency depends on the observer, current affairs under Bolsonaro can easily be described as a "savagization" of Brazilian society; but also, as mentioned above, Bolsonaro's huge number of followers had the opposite impression, namely that former, leftist social politics resulted in anomy, in 'savagization'. Yet it is not so much the relativity of positions that is at stake, but more so the absolute moral and directional positions that impede further discussions.

In fact, regarding the specific case of gendered reversion, after Paternotte (2020) this kind of "backlash" perception is a misleading narrative of the history of extensive nets of value systems:

> This perspective generally regards sexual politics as a long march to wards a bright future and imagines the latter as necessarily more pro gressive. Opponents would therefore come from the darkness of the past, and backlash is understood as a resistance to change. Erasing the complexity of politics, it assumes that history has a direction. (n. p.)

16 As we have seen, certain kinds of violence have gained a positive connotation in Brazil, so that some might perceive current measures like less restrictions to gun ownership and the symbolic and concrete campaigns in favor of its use, as limiting violence, although, it has been clearly shown that the contrary is the case (cf. Eisele 2021).

Along with history's problematic "direction", Paternotte argues that "the Right", "feminists", "LGBTQ+ individuals", among other groupings, are in such accounts often considered homogenous movements with unified positions and recommends that it would be better instead to pay more attention to diversity and frictions within and among groups. Marx Ferree makes a similar point, when she argues that "[b]ecause these [gendered] relations change, it is disingenuous to describe current assertions of masculine privilege in the language of patriarchy, *as if they were throwbacks to some prior age*. Instead, what appears is a new form of racialized hegemonic masculinity." (2021: 900; emphasis added).

A similar though even wider perspective is Bruno Latour's (2021) who, like other scholars working on the Anthropocene, sees 'decivilization' as caused by the gap between the world we live *in* and the planet we live *from*. Latour (2016) alerts us to the fallacy of thinking only in moralizing directions (e.g., backwards = negative, reactive, archaic). He suggests transcending the value-laden directivity in modernization and civilization processes located between two poles and suggests "attractor" as a third. By doing this, the directionality towards and away from modernity has vanished, which could then result in situating phenomena by looking at their (among others, ecological) *impact*, before attributing labels that immediately end discussions locked in morally opposed positions.

Within the context of this essay, this would mean looking, first of all, at the impact of the described masculinity models in Brazil. In line with Latour's preoccupation, there are, for instance, concrete ecological consequences linked to how masculine gender regimes are enacted (e.g., Hultman and Pulé 2018). In Brazil, those who support Bolsonaro, are also often those who are in favor of exploiting and destroying ecologies, for instance the so-called 'ruralistas' who need huge spaces for their cattle or soya plantations (one of the three "Bs" mentioned in note 6). Although not a new phenomenon, the destruction of the Amazon under Bolsonaro (and of indigenous land) became highly dramatic in the last years:

> Despite evidence that fire, drought and land clearance are pushing the Amazon towards a point of no return, they say the far-right lea

> der is more interested in placating the powerful agribusiness lobby and tapping global markets that reward destructive behaviour. (…) Amazon deforestation reduced 80% between 2004 and 2012 under the Workers party administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Bolsonaro has steadily dismantled or discredited the mechanisms that achieved that (Watts 2021).

Dunlop and Jacobsen (quoted in Menezes and Barbosa 2021) call this attitude "total extractivism", defined as "a global imperative of the capitalist economy that occurs through the use of violent technologies" (Menezes and Barbosa 2021: 231). Bolsonaro, for whom the environment is "only for vegans who only eat vegetables" (cf. Simões 2019), and who despised and ridiculed ecological concerns by recommending as a solution "to poop only every other day" (Simões 2019), represents exactly what Marx Ferree observed, when the environment is part of an entanglement of gendered, aggressive politics: "Environmental protection, science-based decision making, police accountability, mass incarceration, international diplomacy, and even a nonpartisan civil service all have now become aligned with the reproductive politics of gender itself" (p. 911).

What about aging masculinities? This aspect has until now been largely absent from the discussion of reversion.

Reversion and older men

Jair Bolsonaro was elected president at an age when many men are already retired. Yet he communicates explicitly youth-inspired values and attitudes through his enactment of politics, in which aging individuals are rarely mentioned. Seniors only appear as a counterpoint to what in extreme neo-liberalism is considered a good citizen, as "un-masculine".[17] This is astonishing, since in the past a number of political careers

17 Although neoliberalism has been criticized for being a too imprecise category as a single explanation for a variety of existing economic and social State models, extreme neoliberalism is nevertheless helpful as a notion. After Dutta (2020), it is "the free market ideology pushed beyond its organizing limits,

in Brazil have been built by adopting aging as a political cause, like the then federal deputy (and later governor) Sérgio Cabral, who in 1994 had the highest numbers of votes nationwide due to his political program aimed at older people (he is now in prison due to a major corruption scandal). It is possible that Bolsonaro's neglect of seniors might be the source of major changes in the near future, as some of the older people, who are an important constituency of Bolsonaro's voters, seem to change who they support quite readily (IPESPE 2022 in: Amado 2022). Within the current context, in which older people are easily denied a meaningful citizenship, this concluding section sketches two intermingled examples of aging-related reversion: one in terms of rights and politics, the other one in line with models of masculinity, including issues of identity and biography.

At least since the 1980s, Brazilian gerontologists (in the wider sense) have adopted the cause of rights for older people and, over the years, have established several highly advanced policies of inclusion, although, according to some observers, the actual implementation of many measures is lagging (e.g., de Mendonça 2016). Nevertheless, and especially since the Senior Citizen's Statute (*Estatuto do Idoso*) from 2003, older people receive several important benefits, including a pension that, in many cases, make the older person the main breadwinner in the family and, as a result, shift power relations within a great number of households.

With the Bolsonaro government (and the interim government of Temer before him), a steady attempt at dismantling achieved rights and care for older people can be shown to have occurred and, in this sense, reversion here can be understood as a return to a state when older people are/were more marginalized, and especially those in need. When thinking in terms of reversion, this kind of discourse can clearly be seen as a 'savagization' of society with regard of older people being a matter of concern. In fact, as Galvão, Resende and Resende (2021) write, older persons became central in Bolsonaro's necropolitics during

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with the structuring of the state as an authoritarian instrument of control […], generating precarity while simultaneously deploying the logics of business-friendliness to enable the mobility of capital across spaces/borders".

the Covid-10 pandemic as a counter-category of State concern. In his communications, seniors are understood to be disposable – they are seen as consuming resources, and, following an extreme neo-liberal line of thought, do not contribute to society in a meaningful way. Only older persons, according to the president, should be isolated due to COVID-19, because they are the fragile ones in the context of the pandemic, as if they were living lives that are disconnected from society. Social aid programs helping older people in need (e.g., "BPC")[18] were rejected or dismantled, and State responsibility clearly denied: "Each family has to protect its elderly, not throw that on the State," Bolsonaro said in a television interview in April 2020 (Canineu and Brown 2020).

More specifically regarding masculinity models, reversion can mean the resurgence and revaluation of those models that many thought were part of the past. Interesting here is the fact that within the wider landscape of the many overlapping and dynamic kinds of masculinities, two in particular have often been reinforced in recent years in Brazil: the aggressive, uncaring, white male briefly described above, and the 'neo-pentecostal or evangelical male' – two ways of being that would appear to be mutually exclusive. The predominant values of neo-Pentecostal churches, of which more than half of the members are female and Black (cf. Balloussier 2020), demand attitudes that are opposed to violence, drinking, and approve of sex only after marriage. In her insightful analysis of men adhering to the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Rio de Janeiro, Lima (2010) described how the 'divine' and, at the same time, this-wordly entrepreneurship that is central to such churches, improves in many cases the financial situation of its members (who then also contribute more to the church). And although opposed to the aggressive machismo, this is linked to the important positive image of a man as being able to take care of his family, as doing honest work, and as living in an orderly world that otherwise is often a chaotic and violent universe, especially in many poorer neighborhoods. The church identity based on doing the right thing, of leading a quiet, moral life, is much

18 See, on the social protection program for older Brazilians (BPC): https://www.socialprotection-toolbox.org/practice/brazils-continuous-benefit-programme

closer to the general image of older men in many societies than is the aggressive, youth-oriented one propagated by Bolsonaro. And yet both are linked to major groups of voters of the current president.

Sawin (2013), in the US-American context, describes how in his study young men who are part of an evangelical Bible group creatively navigate between conflicting role models, between "godly masculinity" and the more hegemonic American model for young men, by creating a third model that integrates elements of both. In Brazil, this might also be the case. There, the centrality of the 'sacred family' in Bolsonaro and his followers' discourses became a unifying factor for both 'godly' as well as 'aggressive' men. A central common cause of both models – a heteronormative family model and an opposition to "too-fluid" gender models—was an important reason for many especially older Brazilians to vote for the president. It might have been as important as the "Carwash scandal" that connected the former PT government to corruption and played in favor of Bolsonaro, as did his contested anti-violence promises (cf. Machado and Franco 2018).[19] However, the idea that he might not be the ideal president – as already mentioned above – is possibly changing the current voter landscape, as a good number of evangelical voters after three years of government seem less inclined to vote for Bolsonaro (*O Estado* 2021). In this sense, in both masculinity models – the aggressive macho and the virtuous evangelical man – the idea of reversion is in constant movement and might even become a source of renewal and change (as the more recent voting intentions show).

The specific case of LGBTQ+ men is even more telling, since they are excluded from both hegemonic masculinity models. In Henning's (2021) sensitive study about older LGBTQ+ individuals, reversion as a loss of rights and recognition is not only embedded in current increases in numbers of violent attacks of LGBTQ+ people, but mean an especially traumatizing déjà vu for these individuals:

19 Beyond the scope of this article, the "Carwash scandal" (*Lava Jato)* is well explained in Laura Carvalho's book "Valsa Brasileira" (2018). An English explication can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0myj6_KnKc

> Having lived part of their lives during the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985), their narratives in general terms highlighted their experiences with previous totalitarian regimes. They also addressed their daily hardship of having to deal with homophobia, lesbophobia, and transphobia, as well as, in some cases, racism and poverty during their entire lives in relation to the "struggles of the present". (2021: 196)

> Thus although they liked to assert their lives as marked by courage and resilience to adversity, such "old warriors" (…) were also largely impacted by undeniable vulnerabilities that became even more worrisome after Bolsonaro's victory. (2021: 203)

Henning's interlocutors' narratives point to the struggle they had fought already, during the military dictatorship, as a "baggage" within an aesthetic of courage and resilience, that prepared them for current struggles, while at the same time framing their life history as one of constant struggle, and in which current homophobic and, to a certain extent, ageist politics impact dramatically on LGBTQ+ lives and identities.

Final remarks

Reversion as an analytical tool means acknowledgment that something valued and achieved over time (often through struggles) is in the process of being lost or is already lost. And although reversion is deeply embedded in history, it is not an historical de-evolution. By transcending the very tentative impulse to call certain phenomena retrocession or backlash (and similar notions), the "matter of concern" (cf. Latour 2004)[20] that is at stake can be studied in its multiple manifestations, and especially how it is impacting on the enactment of (here gendered) politics and peoples' lives.

20 See also Gordon (2012) who argues in favor of "matters of concern", in order to avoid locked-in oppositions in arguments, or "rhetorical warfare".

In this sense, studying masculinities should, ideally, be longitudinal, in order to see how cultural change reflects on identitary tinkering, practices of recognition and the making and unmaking of glocal worlds. Extreme changes in hegemonic value systems – like the one in Brazil that strongly depends on images, metaphors and prescriptions based on masculinity – can then be analyzed as impacts on individual, collective and planetary lives and, in this way, we might avoid moralizing accounts (as tempting as they are)[21]. Looking at central discursive knots and how they are put into practice, for instance through matters of care and self-care, or the enactment of force (violence, arms) – the impact of masculinity models can be studied at different levels and ideally, over a longer period of time, in order to follow changes and ruptures, as has happened recently, dramatically, in Brazil.

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21 Many of such words come to mind.

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