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ABSTRACT
This essay analyses the 2016 congressional impeachment of Brazilian President, Dilma Rousseff, for alleged budgetary misconduct, as well as the related right-wing, 'anti-corruption' demonstrations calling for her ouster. I argue that Rousseff's impeachment was facilitated by a conflation of two models of 'corruption' operating in Brazil, one legal-behavioural and the other religious-ontological. What happened in 2016 was a tacit conflation of these two models, along with their associated regimes for construing evidence of guilt. More specifically, congressional deliberations on Rousseff's guilt allowed jurisprudential standards of evidence to be influenced by the evidential regime of the right-wing *Fora Dilma* ('Out Dilma') demonstrators. The demonstrators evinced Rousseff's corruption through a semiotic process I term 'cross-domain homology', a process that I claim is intrinsically dangerous for democracy because it invites a state of exception to the norms girding representative institutions.

The concept of corruption leads a double life, both a secular, jurisprudential existence and a religious existence. In both realms, its life is abstract, but only in its legal sense can corruption, defined as the 'abuse of entrusted power for private gain', be operationalised as discrete misdeeds.[1] Such jurisprudential accusations of corruption lead to fact-finding procedures for assessing actions in violation of specific statutes. Alternatively, accusations of corruption that assume a quasi-religious (a non-denominational though vaguely Christian) valence, cannot be proven or disproven by facts concerning behaviour. This quasi-religious form of corruption inheres in what people are, rather than what they do, and so one is accused not so much of violating a law but rather of being a fallen person, one whose soul is in a reprehensible state. What I hope to show is that these two models of corruption, and their associated evidential regimes, can get mixed up in practice as the *de jure* legal model of corruption becomes a *de facto* 'secular avatar' of the religious model of corruption guiding institutional action (Anders and Nuitjen

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[1]Transparency International operationalises 'corruption' into six misdeeds: (1) 'active bribery' – bribery of public servants; (2) 'passive bribery' – solicitation of acceptance of gifts by a public servant; (3) abuse of public position for personal gain; (4) possession by a public servant of unexplained wealth; (5) secret commissions made to or by an employee or agent (covering private sector corruption); and (6) bribes and gifts to voters (Carson and Prado 2014: 9).

2007: 1). This is what happened in the case of the 2016 impeachment of Brazil's President Dilma Rousseff of the centre-left Workers' Party (*Partido dos Trabalhadores* – PT).

In early 2016, hundreds of thousands of urban demonstrators alleged that President Rousseff and others in the PT comprised a 'corrupt, cynical, lying government … a bunch of liars, cynics, and all corrupt' (conservative televangelist, Pastor Silas Malafaia 2016). Like others in the *Fora Dilma* ('Out Dilma') movement, Pastor Malafaia framed Rousseff's corruption in characterological terms, often with religious undertones. So absolute was Rousseff's alleged corruption that many protesters called for another US-backed military coup and the imprisonment of Rousseff and former PT president, Luis Inácio Lula da Silva. A military coup never happened; instead, the legislature ousted the president on charges of *pedaladas fiscais* ('deceptive budgetary measures'), which amounted to a few commonplace (and arguably minor) statutory violations. In what many on the Left called a 'parliamentary coup', the legislature voted to turn the executive over to Michael Temer, Rousseff's vice president-turned adversary who was an affiliate of the Brazilian Social Movement Party (*Partido Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* – PMDB), a large, catch-all party notorious for its ideological incoherence. As interim president, Temer quickly implemented a series of conservative measures, including cuts to the PT's main redistributive policy, *Bolsa Família* ('Family Stipend') (Rodrigues 2016; Edgerton and Lima 2016; Sthephanowitz 2017).

How then do we reconcile the relatively minor nature of the charges against Rousseff with the widespread belief that her 'corruption' was so extreme as to warrant her impeachment (and for some, even an abrogation of democracy)? Clearly, an assemblage of factors coincided, including a popular climate of anti-government sentiment fuelled by falling currency values, 'biased coverage and misrepresentation' by Brazil's conservative mainstream media (van Dijk 2017: 200) and, more abstractly, the expression of a 'bipolar' dialectic between individualist and hierarchical manifestations of the state (Leirner 2016).[2] Without discounting the importance of these factors, this analysis builds in a different direction by examining the messages espoused by protesters in the *Fora Dilma* movement. I argue that these protesters formulated a quasi-religious model of corruption that was taken up by opposition legislators in Congress. Because her corruption was reckoned in these quasi-religious terms, standard jurisprudential logics for delimiting and evidencing accusations seemed inadequate to the task of redressing the nation's moral crisis. Brazil seemed to be in the throes of a 'state of exception' (à la Carl Schmitt) that demanded extra-legal action in the name of a sacred, pre-constitutional sovereign, variously named as 'the people', 'God' or the 'Brazilian family' (see Garcia dos Santos 2016). And yet, because the opposition controlled both legislative houses (and had the sympathy of several key judges [Benvenuto and Lins 2016]), it could accomplish its goal without officially suspending the protocols of impeachment proceedings. As a result, the parliamentary procedures employed to impeach Rousseff assumed a legalistic guise (as a deliberation on formal charges brought forward by jurists and presided over by a member of the Supreme Court), but nonetheless violated several important tenets of modern

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[2]While a summary of Leirner's argument is beyond the scope of this essay, suffice it to note that his thesis helps to explain why right-wing rhetoric episodically positioned the PT as a hierarchical 'gang' pitted against an individual hero (e.g., Sérgio Moro), while at other moments, Rousseff was figured as an individual scapegoat opposing the nation's proper (hierarchical) families.

jurisprudence. In short, the legal character of the proceedings provided the cover for Brazil's legislators to pronounce on Rousseff's ontological, rather than her statutory, corruption.

First, I discuss the general character of the impeachment movement that arose in Brazil's urban centres between 2015 and 2016, as well as some of the precursors and causal factors giving rise to this movement. Then, I outline the impeachment process as it played out in Brazil's Congress, arguing that this process deviated from modern jurisprudential standards of prosecution, especially with regard to the discernment of admissible evidence and the separation of expert and lay areas of decision-making. Then, I explore how the anti-Rousseff demonstrators' messages formulated an extra-legal, religious-ontological model of corruption with an associated regime of evidence. I argue that this regime of evidence, which I describe with the technical phrase 'cross-domain homology' (drawn from semiotics), made Rousseff's corruption appear both empirically certain and cosmologically absolute.

The impeachment movement and its precursors

The hundreds of thousands of *Fora Dilma* protesters who took to the streets of Brazil's big cities in 2015 and 2016 blamed President Rousseff for Brazil's economic stagnation. They also accused her of participation in the massive Petrobrás kick-back scandal (*petrolão*) that was then (and still is) the target of an anti-corruption investigation, 'Operation Car Wash'. Operation Car Wash charged some 100 politicians associated with the Petrobras oil company with money-laundering and bribery (Whitefield 2017). Judge Sérgio Moro, who led the investigations, had been unable to mount a case against Rousseff, but this did not stop mainstream conservative media outlets (especially *O Globo*) from highlighting his indictments of other PT politicians (more than those of politicians from conservative parties), nor from implying that the law was slowly closing in on Rousseff and Lula (van Dijk 2017). For this reason, Operation Car Wash, despite its support by many on the political Left, became largely identified with the Right. Certainly, pro-Moro signs featured prominently among the *Fora Dilma* demonstrators, but were rare among the counter-demonstrators supporting Rousseff.

The right-wing rhetoric of the *Fora Dilma* demonstrations did not simply echo the neoliberal ideology voiced in recent years by Brazil's urban middle classes. Rather, it was a peculiar blend of neoliberalism, Evangelical conservatism, sexism, racism and authoritarianism. Yet for all that, these protests had their roots within a vaguely left-wing social movement that had emerged two years before.

The 'Free Pass Movement' (*Movimento Passa Livre*) of 2013 brought accusations of Rousseff's corruption to the forefront of Brazil's public sphere, but not at first. The Free Pass protests were provoked by increases in city bus fares in several metropolitan areas. The protestors were mostly urban youth, including university students and young members of the so-called 'new middle class', a term sometimes used to caption those who rose above the poverty line during the PT administration (Sakamoto 2013: 95; and see Klein et al. 2018). The protesters' goals expanded and their component groups diversified to include those championing LGBT rights, indigenous rights and an end to police brutality and government corruption. Both heterogeneous and decentralised (Dent and Pinheiro-Machado 2013), these protestors generally expressed distrust for all politicians

and political parties (Sakamoto 2013: 96). They demonstrated vociferously against governments at all levels, but came to focus their criticism on President Rousseff for her neglect of public infrastructure in favour of building grandiose stadiums to host the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics (Singer 2013). In June of 2013, conservative demonstrators clad in national colours joined their ranks and, according to some accounts, forcibly expelled leftist activists from protest sites (Melo 2015: 4; Sakamoto 2013: 95–7). This right-turn in the 2013 movement spread and intensified anti-Rousseff sentiment and invigorated the anti-corruption idiom that would later dominate the *Fora Dilma* protests beginning in 2015.

In 2017, many of the 'new middle class' participated in the *Fora Dilma* protests, but it was generally a wealthier,[3] whiter[4] and older (mean age of 45) demographic that oriented the 2015 protests (Ortellado et al. 2016). These strata of the Brazilian middle class largely blamed Rousseff for the diminishing buying power of the Brazilian *Real* (Leirner 2016), notwithstanding many mainstream analysts' attribution of this decline to China's reduced demand for Brazilian exports (e.g., Gillespie 2015). These sectors were generally in favour of limited state spending, but even when Rousseff implemented a 'spell of austerity' in 2014, they showed her little sympathy, viewing her as a fraud who had stolen 'the clothes of her opponents' (Anderson 2016: 16). In the months following Rousseff's narrow reelection in 2014, her popularity plummeted below ten per cent, making her a vulnerable target (Bahia Notícias 2015).

The *Fora Dilma* demonstrations of 2015 were mostly coordinated through social media by three official social movements, *Vem pra Rua* ('Come to the Streets'), *Movimento Brasil Livre* ('Free Brazil Movement') and *Revoltados Online* ('Online Revolters'). Their mission statements all named the fight against corruption as one of their main goals, and identified secondary objectives associated with diverse fragments of right-wing thought, e.g., not 'creating artificial divisions' (*Movimento Brasil Livre*) and maintaining 'a state no bigger than necessary' (*Vem Pra Rua*) (Scartenzini 2016: 191). Some of their resources and intellectual influences came from the US-based organisation, 'The Atlas Network' (itself funded in part by foundations run by the conservative Koch brothers). Atlas 'provided hundreds of grants to conservative and free-market think tanks in Latin America, including the libertarian network that supported the Free Brazil Movement' (Fang 2017). The anti-Rousseff movements and the libertarian think tanks backing them effected what journalist Lee Fang (2016) calls a 'Brietbartization[5] of [Brazil's] public discourse' through the deployment of media tactics similar to those seen in the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump in the United States. These included 'a daily barrage' of conspiracy theories and anti-elitist narratives (e.g., referring to PT officials as 'limousine liberals') through social media, 'YouTube videos mocking the Workers' Party government' and 'an interactive scoreboard to encourage citizens to lobby their legislators to support impeachment'. And like the 'Alt Right' (alternative right) in the United States, the *Fora Dilma* demonstrators voiced decidedly authoritarian messages, e.g., displaying posters calling for 'Military

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[3]One poll of the *Fora Dilma* protestors showed that (at least) 22 per cent of the sampled protestors earned less than R$4591/month, the maximum earning of the so-called 'new middle class' (or Classe C). The majority earned considerably more (Ortellado et al. 2016).

[4]According to Ortellado et al. (2016), approximately 77 per cent of the sampled protestors identified as 'white' (*branco*).

[5]This is a reference to the fringe or 'alt right' *Breitbart News Network* that became an important media actor supporting Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign in the US.

Figure 1. Photo of impeachment demonstrators carrying banners translating as 'Military Intervention Now' and 'Brazil Above All' (5 January 2015). Rio de Janeiro. Reprinted with permission from *Revista Sociedade Militar*.

Intervention Now', 'Help from the United States Army', 'Help GOP' (i.e., the U.S. Republican Party), etc. – signs often written in English. One poll of the protesters found that 45.7 per cent were in favour of 'provisional military intervention' and about 15 per cent were in favour of an outright return to the 'peace and order' of the military dictatorship (Gazeta do Povo 2015; Maia 2017) (Figures 1 and 2).

Counter-protesters sympathetic to Rousseff pointed to the racial and class privilege of the *Fora Dilma* demonstrators, labelling them, *coxinhas* ('little thighs'), a slang term for a prissy snob.[6] A particular photo went viral among Rousseff's supporters (Figure 3). It featured a white couple protesting in Ipanema (a wealthy beachfront district in Rio de Janeiro) while walking their dog. Behind them, an Afro-Brazilian woman – their domestic servant – dutifully pushes their two toddlers in a double stroller. The photo spoke to the protesters' callous disregard for the poor and the racially marginalised, those who had benefited economically and legally under PT rule. The demonstrators appropriated the *coxinha* label (Fagundez 2015), some wearing t-shirts bearing the French words, 'Je suis coxinha', (and 'Je suis Sérgio Moro') that signalled their alignment with cosmopolitan liberalism (see Figure 4).[7]

The *Fora Dilma* demonstrations also secured support from conservative Christian (especially evangelical) groups long opposed to the PT. During Rousseff's first mandate (2011–2014), Congress's powerful 'Christian Bloc' (evangelicals allied with conservative Catholics) united in their appeal for a 'moralizing and civilizing project' (Vital and Lopez 2013: 179). They aimed to block the legalisation of abortion that Rousseff was rumoured to support, as well as a programme that would allegedly 'cause our children to become homosexuals' by curbing homophobic violence in schools (Mundo Cristão

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[6]The 'coxinhas' labelled the counter-protesters, 'petralhas', a term combining 'PT' with 'Metralha' (the translated surname of Disney's crooked 'Beagle Boys').

[7]The reader will recall that early in 2015, demonstrators around the world had used the phrase 'Je suis Charlie Hebdo' to express solidarity for the slain cartoonists of the French magazine, killed for disrespecting the Prophet Mohammed. Sympathy with Europe's liberal intelligentsia was also prominent among Brazil's Left, but these 'coxinha' messages laid claim to this affiliation to the implied exclusion of the Left.

Figure 2. Impeachment demonstrators in Rio de Janeiro (15 March 2015) display a banner calling for help from the 'GOP' (US Republican Party) (*UOL Notícias* 2015a). Reprinted with permission from *UOL Notícias*.

2011; Vital and Lopez 2013: 64–91). In 2016, these segments of Congress, along with Brazil's megachurch pastors, televangelists and leading bloggers, demanded Rousseff's ouster (Carvalhães and Barreto 2016).

Figure 3. Virally-circulating photo (taken by João Valadares of the Correio Braziliense) of white couple marching in Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro (15 March 2016), accompanied by their Afro-Brazilian nanny pushing the couple's children in a stroller (BBC Trending 2016). Reprinted with permission from photographer.

Figure 4. Photo (taken by Henry Milleo, Futura Press) of impeachment demonstrator wearing a shirt reading 'Je Suis Coxinha' in Curitiba (12 April 2015). Reprinted with permission from photographer.

In sum, the right-wing *Fora Dilma* movement emerged against the backdrop of Operation Car Wash's high-profile indictments of PT politicians, declining currency values and earlier protests that suggested a widespread (even leftist) disposition for decrying Rousseff as 'corrupt'. These elements galvanised a broad coalition of right-wing actors – neoliberals, authoritarians, religious conservatives and race-class elitists – to demand her impeachment. As I will later explore, this shared objective contributed to the emergence of an ontological model of corruption that would influence congressional deliberations on her impeachment. But first, let me trace the impeachment process itself and explore the peculiar blend of its adherence to legal procedure and its deficit of jurisprudential standards.

The pseudo-legalism of Rousseff's impeachment

The legislators responsible for adjudicating Rousseff's impeachment were assigned the task of determining whether she had committed particular offenses that generally fall under the rubric of corruption. But the impeachment procedure was such that the legislators were not held to the standards of adjudication associated with Enlightenment-derived jurisprudence, including the impartiality of judges and juries, the equal treatment of different offenders in violation of the same crime, the distinction of matters of fact from matters of law and the regulation of admissible evidence (Frank 2009 [1930]: 327–35; Fletcher 1996: 170, 131; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2015). It was not that Brazil's impeachment procedures differed greatly from those of other liberal democracies; rather their implementation, in this case, deviated from the liberal principals girding those procedures.

Shortly after a major anti-Rousseff protest in March of 2015, three jurists presented the Congress with a formal denunciation (*Denúncia*) naming Rousseff's specific offenses, the

laws these violated and a legal justification for addressing them through the legislature rather than (or in addition to) the courts. While the *Denúncia* focused on Rousseff's alleged *pedaladas fiscais* ('deceptive budgetary measures'), it included assertions about her general responsibility for Brazil's 'moral and political crisis' (2), and insinuated that 'she probably knew that Lula was traveling the world using funds from Odebrecht Construction' (8). Thus, the *Denúncia* implied that Congress should construe her crimes as more severe than the narrow scope of the charges might suggest.

The legal arguments surrounding the *pedaladas fiscais* were anything but straightforward. The main question did not relate to the facts. No one denied that in 2013, under Rousseff's watch, the national treasury had delayed reimbursement to the federal banks (the Bank of Brazil, Brazilian Development Bank, etc.) that paid out monies to beneficiaries of federal social programmes, including *Bolsa Família*. The delay made the treasury, and by extension Rousseff's social programmes, appear more solvent than they were. Such actions, the *Denúncia* claimed, violated the 2000 Law of Fiscal Responsibility that 'prohibited the usage of credit between a state financial institution and the government entity that controls it, and that comes to benefit from the loan' (Lei Complementar #101 2000, Art. 36). The *Denúncia* further alleged that this same action violated the older Law of Responsibility that prohibits officeholders from 'contract[ing] a loan … without legal authorization', in this case, from Congress (Art. 6, Lei 1.079).

Rousseff's advocates argued the following: On the facts of the matter, they claimed she never knew of these manoeuvres personally (Costa 2017). As a matter of law, they argued that the Federal Auditor's Office had a precedent of accepting such accounting manoeuvres from previous administrations, and thus Rousseff, even had she known of these manoeuvres, had a right to operate according to this less stringent interpretation of the Law of Fiscal Responsibility (Costas 2015). Also as a matter of law, they argued that because the Law of Responsibility fell under the penal code, its infractions needed to be understood in *stricto sensu*, rather than by analogy, and thus Rousseff's actions could not be interpreted as being 'equivalent to' the contracting of a loan (Lodi Ribeiro 2015). Rousseff's team also claimed that because the charges themselves were minor, the opposition was breaching popular sovereignty by using a 'common accounting technicality in the national public administration to annul the manifest will of the Brazilian people at the polls' (Lodi Ribeiro 2015: 3).

However persuasive Rousseff's attorneys were, her ouster became a forgone conclusion once the Supreme Court (in December of 2015) allowed Congress to open impeachment proceedings on the *Denúncia* (Lotti 2017). Rousseff had lost majority support in both houses shortly after her reelection, due to the PMDB's defection (and that of Vice-president Temer) from the ruling coalition. In April of 2016, the Chamber of Deputies voted (367–137) to recommend impeachment to the Senate with strong support (89 out of 92) from its Evangelical Front (Congresso em Foco 2016). On 31 August, the Senate voted (61–20) in favour of impeachment. In both houses, the votes fell largely along coalitional lines.

Rousseff was (and still is) also facing criminal prosecution in the courts. In one case heard by Bahia State's Electoral Court, she (and Temer) stood accused of receiving illegal campaign funds from Odebrecht during the 2014 election (O Globo 2017). In another case, she faced an obstruction of justice charge related to Operation Car Wash. Judge Sérgio Moro had wiretapped a phone conversation between Rousseff and former

President Lula who was himself facing bribery charges. He recorded Rousseff offering Lula a government post that would afford him 'special privileges' (*foro privelegiado*) requiring prosecutors to retry him at the federal level (Bulla 2016). Another judge later ruled Moro's wiretap illegal, and therefore inadmissible, in the (still-pending) case against Rousseff, but it had already been widely publicised.[8]

While a criminal conviction would have surely cost Rousseff the presidency, her opponents did not want to rely on the courts. Indeed, the *Denûncia* encouraged Congress to proceed with 'double punishment', i.e., trying her in both branches of government for 'administrative improbity' (Bicudo and Paschoal 2015: 12). Placing Rousseff's impeachment in Congress's hands was important, and not only because a majority of the legislators were Rousseff's adversaries. These legislators were bound by less stringent legal standards than Brazil's judges. In liberal jurisprudence, judges must provide legal rationale for their decisions (including their choices to privilege certain bodies of evidence over others), decisions that are subject to appellate review (Jardim 2016). The legislators effectively enjoyed the same discretion as lay juries who, because they decide only matters of fact (not law), may treat as 'proof that [which] accords with [their] conceptions with no requirement for reasoning' (Lima 2015). Thus, Brazil's legislators were deliberating with the purview of judges (over matters of law), but with the same negligible accountability afforded to lay juries whose purview is restricted to matters of fact. This opened the door for them to consider the wiretap as evidence, to impeach Rousseff for offenses not named in the *Denûncia*, or even to condemn her on unspecified moral grounds. Indeed, in their speeches following the impeachment vote, most legislators who condemned Rousseff said nothing about the *pedaladas fiscais*, but instead justified their votes in religiously-inflected moral rhetoric, citing 'God' and 'Family' about 60 and 125 times, respectively (Shalders 2017).

This rhetoric closely resembled that of the 1964 military coup. Some of these legislators were old enough to recall the ouster of then-President João Goulart, whose alleged corruption and communism warranted the 20-year suspension of democracy (Cardoso 2011). Those who didn't were surely reminded by their colleague Deputy Jair Bolsonaro, who dedicated his impeachment vote to 'the military of 64' and to Colonel Carlos Ustra, chief of the regime's secret police, the organisation responsible for the torture of a young Dilma Rousseff (Rede Brazil Atual 2016).

There was another reason why Rousseff's adversaries preferred a quick and guaranteed legislative impeachment over a court trial; they needed Operation Car Wash to stop. Judge Moro, while often accused of political persecution against the Left, had brought corruption indictments against nearly a third of Brazil's legislators, many of whom were PT adversaries (e.g., Deputy Eduardo Cunha of the PMDB). Thus, many of Rousseff's congressional opponents were eager for Mr. Temer to assume office so he could quickly strike a deal with the Supreme Court that would help 'stop the bleeding' (Watts 2016). Surely enough, interim-president Temer disbanded the Car Wash task force (though the investigation continues) and supported two congressional bills to secure amnesty for legislators involved in campaign finance crimes (Romero 2017). He also faced his own charges of criminal bribery, but Congress voted not to proceed with impeachment hearings (Langlois 2017).

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[8]Moro later sentenced Lula to nearly 10 years in prison, effectively barring his 2018 presidential candidacy (Boadle and Brooks 2017).

It seems then that while Rousseff's impeachment played out through legal protocols, it circumvented liberal jurisprudential principles. Many on the Left attributed Rousseff's impeachment to her opponents' shear partisan hypocrisy (and self-preservation) (Laymert Garcia dos Santos 2016). This conclusion is tempting. But it may also be the case that those who voted against Rousseff believed her corruption was not only greater, but also qualitatively different from their own malfeasances. In this regard, they may well have been influenced by protestors' messages that construed Rousseff as an extra-legal threat to the nation's moral fabric. Because these messages figured the nation's moral community as ontologically prior to its law, those who saw themselves as this community's protectors saw fit to exercise a 'constituent power' to suspend the law (at least its spirit) so as to protect the nation (Schmidt 2008 [1928]). In order to explain how this model of ontological corruption could appear plausible, I turn to the *Fora Dilma* protest messages.

The semiotic emergence of ontological corruption

For the anti-Rousseff protestors, the president's culpability did not so much hinge on what she did, but on what she was. Hers was a characterological crime indexed by an assortment of accusations emanating from a broad field of domains (sexuality, communist sympathies, criminality, etc.). A unified multi-dimensional model of ontological corruption could emerge from the protestors' disparate messages because they agreed on the fundamental point that Rousseff was a blight on the nation and needed to be expelled from the body politic.

The protestors' shared orientation toward Rousseff's corruption led them to a default assumption of the coherence and mutual implication of their various representations of her moral degradation. Frequently, particular protest messages seemed to link together allegations of corruption tied to different domains of Rousseff's personhood, implying that her various culpabilities were homologous, i.e., originating from a common characterological source. A depiction of one domain-specific culpability (e.g., lesbian) could thus serve as an icon for Rousseff's guilt in another domain (e.g., communist). This process, what I call *cross-domain homology*, bears much in common with an often-found feature of discriminatory 'language ideology' (Silverstein 1979). In a process that semioticians call 'iconisation', people belonging to a dominant group presume that the verbal behaviour of subordinate groups replicates the form of group behaviour associated with another domain (e.g., a southern drawl is interpreted as a reflection of a 'lazy' approach to work). As with iconisation, cross-domain homology entails the 'attribution of cause and immediate necessity to a connection … that may be only historical or contingent' (Irvine and Gal 2000: 37). This ideologically-motivated construal of 'immediate necessity' works as an evidential presupposition that attributes a shared hidden cause to disparate, manifest effects. Once established, there is no limit to the number of behavioural domains that can be stitched together into this evidential bundle. Indeed, the addition of new behavioural domains serves as further evidence of the underlying cause.

One stretch of informal chat from a field consultant of mine, a self-identified 'coxinha' living in a small town in rural Piauí, exhibited this cross-domain homology very succinctly. 'Tomás', a middle-aged man, asked me in April of 2015 what I thought of the protests. As I sputtered towards a response, he interjected:

> She's totally corrupt. Totally dirty. Do you know that right here in Passerinho, many people get *Bolsa Família* who don't need it? She's a dyke (*sapatona*). She's an assassin, a terrorist. The military men even put her in prison. She's a communist. I'll never vote for that dyke …

Tomás begins his utterance by calling Rousseff 'corrupt', using the term as a sort of header that he then fleshes out by reference to more specific allegations of bad character in the domains of sexuality, criminality, ideology and policy proclivity. Rousseff's corruption slowly takes shape as a gestalt arising from a mosaic of disparate behaviours and identity features. Tomás's juxtaposition of disparate character features suggests their equivalence to one another, and he supplies further argument for their mutual implication by later alleging that the *Bolsa Família* stipend went to 'any old vagabond'. This, in addition to Dilma's putative homosexuality, suggests to him that, 'She wants to destroy the Brazilian family'.

Similar associations linking *Bolsa Família* to deviance from the heteronormative family were common among the small town middle class in southeast Piauí. These local associations dovetailed with two, more nationally prominent critiques of the Program: first, that it promoted laziness and second, that the PT used it to 'buy votes' in a state-clientelist fashion (see Fenwick 2016 for refutation). A range of memes and political cartoons, (many of which had been created before and then recirculated during the *Fora Dilma* protests), mobilised caricatures of the undeserving poor to present cross-domain accusations of the Program's corruption.

The cartoon in Figure 5 imputes a characterological resemblance between Rousseff and the welfare mother despite their obvious differences: Just as the mother is cheating the government because her family is not truly needy, Rousseff is cheating the nation by

Figure 5. The cartoon (by 'Zezinho de Caetés') features President Rousseff behind a desk with a voting machine marked 'Re-election' as she assures a mother of seven that her anti-poverty stipend, *Bolsa Família*, will not be cut off. 'What a scare my husband had', says the mother, 'he thought he'd have to go back to work' (Caetés 2014; recirculated by Berto 2015).

distributing *Bolsa Família* as compensation for votes. The two women deviate in inverse fashion from the norms of proper womanhood. The cartoon depicts an oversexualised welfare mother, implying that her children come from multiple fathers (as the children's variously racialised appearances indicate). Inversely, Rousseff's dress and severity of gesture accentuate her masculinity.

The complex texts of many anti-Rousseff internet memes similarly bundled disparate emblems of personal venality so as to imply their mutual evidencing. Consider the meme below (Figure 6) that merges two seemingly unrelated accusations: Rousseff as a lesbian and Rousseff as a communist.

The image counterpoises Rousseff on the left with her alleged lover on the right so as to immediately evoke the rumours that Rousseff had a sexual relationship with another woman. The depiction of Rousseff in military camouflage smoking a photo-shopped cigar both evinces her 'butch' queerness and her affinity for pan-Latin American, combat-boot wearing communism in the *fidelista* vein.

Another meme (Figure 7) deploys the tropic imagery of Rousseff's 1970 arrest in order to equate her political dissidence during the dictatorship era with common criminality. The photograph features Rousseff's mugshot beside Lula's, who the military also arrested for illegal union organising. The meme erases the ideological dimension of Rousseff's militancy (i.e., that she helped to rob banks to support the struggle for democracy) by framing it as street criminality. The message is that leftism and theft are two manifest versions of the same thing, a corrupt character. The meme also venerates nostalgically the dictatorship's torture of dissidents during the dictatorship, implying that this remains the proper treatment of today's leftist politicians.

Similarly, the protest poster below (Figure 8) deploys the register of mathematical certainty to assert the underlying equivalence of corruption and leftist policy, as well as the

Figure 6. Meme (creator unknown) juxtaposing Rousseff's alleged lover (right) with a doctored photo of Rousseff clad in camouflage and smoking a photo-shopped cigar (Libertos do Opressor 2010; recirculated by Panorama 2016).

Figure 7. Meme (creator unknown) juxtaposing Rousseff (right) and Lula's (left) arrest photos from the dictatorship era with the blurb, 'Pretty Huh?! Brazilian presidents got elected who were bosses of major robbery and corruption gangs in the country' (Amorim 2016).

equivalence of Rousseff, Lula and the PT as corrupt individuals. Its use of arithmetic symbols evokes the transitive property (if A = B and B = C, then A = C) to assert something like: *If the sum of Rousseff, Lula and the PT is the same as the sum of communism and corruption, then Rousseff (Lula or PT) is equivalent to both communism and*

Figure 8. Photo (by Reinaldo Canato) of impeachment demonstrators at a protest in São Paulo (12 April 2016) display a banner using arithmetical symbolism to express corruption allegation (*UOL Notícias* 2015b). Reprinted with permission of photographer.

corruption. The 'result', figured doubly as arithmetic sum and necessary conclusion, is 'Out Now' (*Fora Já*).

The protestors' messages produced a composite formulation of Rousseff's 'corruption' so richly terrible as to imply that the normal democratic process, with its secular distinctions (public/private, religious/political, etc.) and procedural constraints, might not save Brazil from crisis. Much like the Trump campaign in the US, the *Fora Dilma* protestors broke away from liberal discursive conventions and institutional presuppositions of liberal democracy. Even those who did not hold up signs for military intervention exercised expressive forms that defied the 'establishment's debilitating rhetoric of political correctness' (see Hall et al. 2016: 74). The *Fora Dilma* movement saw a disinhibition of nostalgia for dictatorship, race privilege and homophobia, all of which had become condemned since redemocratisation. But this disinhibited catharsis was often channelled through a cosmological, often expressly religious, idiom.

The overtly religious characterisations of Rousseff's 'corruption' bundled many of these same secular accusations (theft, criminality, etc.) and added to them religious condemnations. This linkage of religious and secular dimensions of corruption implied the need to transpose religious models of adjudication and regimes of evidence onto the impeachment's secular protocols. For instance, on one occasion the evangelical senator Magno Malta reformulated the impeachment's secular protocols as biblical judgment, affirming 'that Dilma will not be impeached (*cassada*) by himself or other senators; [rather] she will be impeached by Solomão who wrote of the pride that preceded the fall' (O Globo 2016).

A subtler intertwining of the religious and secular models of corruption can be seen in a YouTube video produced by the televangelist Silas Malafaia (cited earlier). Malafaia begins a long stretch of talk by urging his followers to 'keep an eye on these congressmen in this vote for impeachment', a phrase gleaned from Brazilian street-smarts discourse. He then code-shifts into a classically pastoral voice, 'Oh, my God! (Sigh). May God have mercy on Brazil', and then slides deeper into a still more dramatic evangelical register of demon exorcism: 'In the name of Jesus, let these people be defeated and broken to pieces'. Then, Malafaia switches back to the voice of a secular political critic, but infuses that voice with the religious traces of his earlier phrases: 'These people have no moral, political, psychological standing … and worse, they are full of subterfuges that mess with the simplest of our people'. Consider how the term, 'subterfuge', when uttered after an exorcismal phrase, would evoke among religious listeners the metaphor of the 'wolf in sheep's clothing' (Mathew 7:15). In other words, Malafaia is suggesting that Rousseff uses redistributive policies not to help the poor but to prey on 'the simplest'. And insofar as the 'simplest' here points to the artless, church-attending folk who are the locus of the nation's moral community, Rousseff appears as an outside contaminant demanding spiritual purgation (Ribeiro and Palerm 2016).

Secular right-wing figures were also prone to framing their enterprise in religious terms. The jurist Janina Paschoal (one of the three who authored the original *Denúncia*) explained that her impeachment efforts reflected 'her commitment to God' and her worry that 'occult forces' were manipulating the Marxist youth (Nogueira 2016). Deputy Bolsonaro, never before identified with the religious right, grabbed the media spotlight during the impeachment proceedings by travelling to Israel to have himself baptised in the Jordan River whereupon he blessed 'all Brazilians' as he was raised from the waters

(Extra Globo 2013). Even for those protestors who identified with cosmopolitan liberalism (e.g., 'Jes Suis___'), the absolutism and urgency of Rousseff's corruption led them to a spate of Salvationist appeals to a number of right-wing saviours, namely the Brazilian military, the US and Judge Sérgio Moro who one t-shirt implored to 'deliver us from evil'[9] (see Dawson 2008 on 'new era millenarianism' among the urban middle classes).

In sum, the protestors' *Fora Dilma* messages generated a particular model of 'corruption' that departed from any statutory model that could be operationalised through modern jurisprudence (i.e., as a set of litigable crimes). Protest messages mobilised accusations from multiple domains of Rousseff's personhood in ways that implied their shared characterological origins. Through the imagistic and textual coordination of these different domains of malfeasance, Rousseff's alleged 'corruption' assumed an ontological guise; she was a fallen soul. In doing so, these messages both performed and legitimated the protestors' unwillingness to abide by the separation of matters of state from matters of God. The shadow of Rousseff's ontological corruption, as evidenced by the logic of the protestors' messages, hung over the secular protocols for adjudicating her statutory corruption.

While I've shown how an evidentiary logic of cross-domain homology linked metaphysical corruption to leftist character traits, there is nothing about this logic that makes it an intrinsically right-wing semiotic practice. The upcoming 2018 election may well see leftist messages that construe the likes of Jair Bolsonaro (now a presidential candidate) in ways that impute a corrupt homology to his alleged racism, homophobia and militarism. It could also be the case that such representations of corruption find fertile soil in moments of economic anxiety, and so, should the decline of Brazil's Real continue, any successor to Rousseff might suffer a similar fate. Indeed, 'the discrediting of the currency … seems to have resonated with the discrediting of the government' (Leirner 2016: 35). However, I would guess that this recent lamination of 'corruption' to left-wing characterological stereotypes will make it harder for many Brazilians to conjure a decidedly right-wing face of corruption. Certainly, Temer's alleged bribery, embezzlement and vote-buying seem to have brought none of the moral panic associated with Rousseff.

Conclusion

There was something profoundly ludic and comedic to much of the *Fora Dilma* protestors' messages, an elation no doubt common to many mass protests, but which in this case was bound up with a sacrificial frenzy. The protestors' formulations of Rousseff's ontological corruption were also demands for spiritual purification. She became a scapegoat, a vehicle for pleasurable purgation meant to transform 'the disastrous violence of *all against all* into the healing violence of *all against one* (Girard 2004: 12, emphasis in original)'. So what effects might such a catharsis have on a constitutional democracy?

Like the Brazilian sociologist, Laymert Garcia dos Santos (2016), I am convinced that the impeachment hinged on a Schmittian 'state of exception' that suspended democratic protocol. And Garcia do Santos may be right that the Ministry of Federal Police, mainstream media and conservative politicians conspired 'to destabilize Brazil' and 'reduce it to neocolonial status'. Yet this state of exception was also co-produced by thousands of

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[9]These shirts were available through private venders who sold them on the site Produto Mercado Livre (https://produto.mercadolivre.com.br/MLB-754037637-camiseta-juiz-sergio-moro-livrai-nos-do-mal-_JM).

ordinary people who activated the 'metaphysical kernel of all politics' within liberal democracy (Schmitt 2006: 51). It was a 'parliamentary coup' (a paradoxical term) in the sense that its protagonists (politicians and protestors alike) aggregated to themselves the sovereign authority to suspend the legal order if it proved their only protection from cosmological evil. That authority did not answer to established rights to privacy, to impartial evidentiary regimes or to the separation of matters of fact from matters of law. But the state of exception never quite assumed its fullest expression as a military coup. Instead, the impeachment played out in legalistic protocols. The clever framing of the allegations (the *Denúncia*) maximised parliamentary leeway and invited the ontological model of corruption to shade into its legal counterpart. In other words, Rousseff's adversaries smuggled a cosmic allegation into the petty charge of accounting malfeasance, containing her impeachment within the polite fiction of constitutionality.

Of course, none of this exonerates Rousseff of her administrative improbity (or any other charge), but it does call into question the legitimacy of her ouster and the wisdom of mobilising allegations of corruption within mass politics. And it leaves me wondering if next time it will be easier to send the tanks into the streets.

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Disclosure statement

Notes on contributor

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