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DISCURSIVE MEMORY, CORRUPTION AND FORCE ILLUSION EFFECT IN THE DUO POLITICS AND RELIGION OF FORMER FEDERAL DEPUTY EDUARDO CUNHA

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, we present the partial results of a research study conducted by the Research Group on Discourse Analysis (Grupo de Pesquisa em Análise de Discurso, or GPADis) at the Discourse Analysis Research Laboratory (Laboratório de Pesquisa em Análise do Discurso, or LAPADis), and which is closely associated with the thematic project Memory, truth effects and justice effects in cases of corruption crime. We have analyzed the functioning of the position-subject of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (Frente Parlamentar Evangélica, or FPE) of the National Congress, in the impeachment process of former Speaker of the House of Representatives Eduardo Cosentino Cunha. In the analysis, we have mobilized concepts of Discourse Analysis in the and from the field of Memory.

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INTRODUCTION

In Brazil, the phenomenon of corruption has been receiving considerable attention in comprehensive studies within the ambit of politics, economics, society and culture. It has also been an object of research within the ambit of the Discourse Analysis Research Laboratory (Laboratório de Pesquisa em Análise do Discurso, or LAPADis), by members of the Research Group on Discourse Analysis (Grupo de Pesquisa em Análise de Discurso, or GPADis) of the State University of Southwest Bahia. The results of the research studies developed at this laboratory indicate, in a direct and indirect manner, that the phenomenon of corruption has a constant presence in the political functioning of Brazil, and that the strengthening of institutions tasked with combating corruption has been highly

conducive to discoveries and accusations relating to numerous cases of corruption in Brazilian politics, besides being greatly spectacularized by the mainstream media (Fonseca-Silva, 2009). It is within this context that we analyze the position of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (Frente Parlamentar Evangélica, or FPE) of the Brazilian National Congress, in the process that resulted in the impeachment of former speaker Eduardo Cunha from the Chamber of Deputies, a federal legislative body and the lower house of the National Congress of Brazil. At the time, Cunha was the leader of the party known as the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, or PMDB), now called Brazilian Democratic Movement (Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, or MDB), and President of the Chamber of Deputies. He was a member of the FPE. He was also known with one of the top corporate sponsors of candidates and political parties, at the intersection of politics and religion. It is worth noting that the parliamentary fronts are associations of parliamentarians from different parties who come together

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under the prerogative of advocating for specific themes, as per Article 2 of the Act (Ato da Mesa) n° 69, introduced on November 10, 2005, which creates the register of Parliamentary Fronts in the Chamber of Deputies. In the discursive memory of former federal deputy Eduardo Cunha's political trajectory, the pragmatic subject is subjectivated in the political subject-position as: i) parliamentary advisor to the then candidate of the Social Democratic Party (PDS) Eliseu Resende to the State Government of Minas Gerais, in 1982; ii) advisor to Moreira Franco during his candidacy to the State Government of Rio de Janeiro, in 1986; iii) campaign treasurer in Rio de Janeiro for the then candidate of the National Reconstruction Party (Partido da Reconstrução Nacional, or PRN) to the Presidency of the Republic Fernando Collor de Mello; iv) senior executive at the now-defunct Rio de Janeiro State Telecommunications Corporation (TELERJ); vi) suspended from the State Housing Company of Rio de Janeiro (CEHAB) on charges of administrative corruption and billing fraud during the period he presided over the company; vii) accused of using false documents to evade responsibility in accusations of malpractice filed by the Court of Accounts of the State of Rio de Janeiro vis-à-vis the State Housing Company of Rio de Janeiro when he presided over the corporation; viii) lost his mandate as a federal deputy for breach of decorum; ix) as a former federal deputy, Cunha was convicted for the crimes of solicitation of bribe, money laundering and illegal transfer of funds abroad (money smuggling).

In the discursive memory of Eduardo Cunha's political trajectory, the pragmatic subject subjectivates himself in the religious subject-position, predominantly with political purposes. Having been a political "godchild" of former federal deputy and evangelical Christian Francisco Silva who owned a gospel radio station called Melodia, Cunha converted to the Evangelical faith and thus subjectivated himself in the evangelical subject-position as well as in the broadcaster subject-position. In 1996, he began to frequent the evangelical cults of the Sara Nossa Terra church, and in 2014, began frequenting the cults of the Assembly of God Madureira Ministry Church (Igreja Assembleia de Deus de Madureira) which, according to the Office of the Attorney-General of the Republic, intermediated the payment of bribes and kickbacks to the former federal deputy. On top of that, Cunha subjectivated himself as a member of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (Frente Parlamentar Evangélica, or FPE), created in 2003 - at the beginning of the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT) government of President Lula da Silva - as a multi-party occupation-driven political project, which aimed at the creation of political parties in the search for greater decision-making power in the public sphere. Above all, this was a project of ideological confrontation against PT and other left-wing parties. On that account, and considering that the discursive memory of the political trajectory of Eduardo Cunha is marked by the duo politics and religion, we analyzed the functioning of the position of Evangelical Parliamentary Front in the process that resulted in his impeachment, stripping him of his mandate as a federal deputy.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research adopts a mixed-method approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, which is well suited to its applied nature, descriptive objectives and case study

procedures. The corpus was composed of copies and reproductions of discursive materialities downloaded from Internet websites pertaining to the impeachment process of Eduardo Cunha, which circulated between the period of June 2015 and September 2016 - and which ultimately revoked the parliamentarian's mandate as a federal deputy. In the analysis, we mobilize operational concepts of Discourse Analysis, in particular the notion of discursive memory, coined by Courtine (1981) and reconfigured by Pêcheux ([1983a]1997, [1983b]1999), who understands it "something that, in face of a text that emerges as an event to be read, reestablishes the "implicit" [...] the pre-constructed, quoted or reported elements, transverse discourses, etc.) necessary for its reading" (Pêcheux, [1983b] 1999), and the notion of subject-position, which, according to Pêcheux ([1975] 2009), is a position on the inside of a discursive formation, an "empty" place or "void" that can be occupied by any individual who identifies with it and who does not confuse his or herself with the pragmatic subject.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of the discursive materialities indicated that, as an open ideological adversary of the Workers' Party (PT) and member of the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE), on February 1, 2015, Eduardo Cunha was elected to occupy the subject-position of President of the Chamber of Deputies, a position that confers those who occupy it the power to define the projects that will put before the Plenary Assembly for approval, and dictate the rhythm of the voting. In March 2016, former deputy Eduardo Cunha appeared as a suspect of corruption in the list of politicians investigated by the Lava Jato Operation (Operation Car Wash), launched in 2014 by the Brazilian Federal Courts system, with the aim of investigating a major money laundering and kickback scheme in the country. The investigations which gave rise to this operation began in 2009 with the verification of a money laundering scheme involving former federal deputy José Janene (Londrina, in the state of Paraná), Alberto Youssef and Carlos Habib Chater (business owners identified as dollar exchange dealer responsible for the laundering of millions of reais), and expanded significantly as the enquiry uncovered an extensive scheme involving money laundering and misapplication of public funds. The Prosecutors who headed the task force of the Lava Jato Operation accused the congressman of participating in a bribery and kickback scheme at state-run oil company Petrobrás. And on July 17, 2015, Eduardo Cunha formally broke ties with the government, claiming that the federal Government had articulated with the Attorney General of the Republic of Brazil to incriminate and indict him in the Lava Jato Operation.

The charges made by the Federal Prosecution Office resulted in the launching of a disciplinary procedure at the House of Representatives by the Board of Ethics on November 3, 2015, on charges of breach of decorum by the former congressman Eduardo Cunha, who had lied about the existence of bank accounts in Switzerland in a testimony given to the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito, or CPI) appointed to investigate the affairs of Petrobrás. Later that same year, on December 2, as a form of retaliation and revenge on the Workers' Party (PT), which refused to take any effective measure before the Board of Ethics to prevent the referred legal proceedings from being opened, Eduardo Cunha accepted one of the impeachment

requests filed in the House of Representatives against the then President of the Republic Dilma Rousseff. On December 16, 2015, the Attorney General of the Republic requested Eduardo Cunha's suspension, arguing that by engaging in pervasive misconduct, rendering the Federal Chamber of Deputies into "a business counter", selling legislative acts and interfering with the elaboration of laws, the speaker was disrupting the investigations of the Lava Jato Operation, in which he was a defendant in one lawsuit and investigated in several others. On May 5, 2016, the Federal Supreme Court (Supremo Tribunal Federal do Brasil, or STF) granted an injunction requested by the Attorney general and Eduardo Cunha was suspended. On June 14, 2016, the Board of Ethics of the Chamber of Deputies approved, by 11 votes to 9, a report advocating the impeachment of the parliamentarian. Regarded as the longest impeachment process in the history of the Federal Chamber of Deputies in Brazil, the revocation of Eduardo Cunha's mandate occurred on September 12, 2016, by 450 (four-hundred and fifty) votes in favor, 10 (ten) against and 9 (nine) abstentions. On October 19, 2016, Cunha was placed in preventive detention for the crimes of money laundering, solicitation of bribery and illegal transfer of funds abroad. The 55^a legislature of the Federal Chamber of Deputies of Brazil – composed of 513 (five-hundred and thirteen) federal deputies - represented 26 political parties, of which 23 had representatives who were affiliated to the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE), comprised of 199 deputies and considered the largest parliamentary bench in the Chamber. Of the 20 federal deputies who form the Special Commission on Ethics, 9 deputies were members of the FPE. But of the 11 federal deputies who voted in favor of the impeachment motion, 6 were affiliated to/members of the FPE, and 5 were associated with other segments. In the impeachment voting session, 450 of the 470 deputies who were present voted in favor of the report submitted by the Special Commission on Ethics, 9 abstained themselves, 1 was not able to vote since he presided the session, and 10 voted against the impeachment motion. Of the 10 dissenting votes, only 9 were cast by deputies affiliated to the FPE.

The analyses indicate that the functioning of the subject-position of the FPE in the impeachment process of Eduardo Cunha produced a force illusion effect exerted by the parliamentarian in the Front, seeing that 119 of the federal deputies who were members of the FPE at the time were under investigation or being prosecuted for malpractice.

Conclusion

The results indicated that, while the Evangelical Parliamentary Front (FPE) sustains the thesis that their members are guardians of morality and messianic instruments (of salvation) of Brazilian politics, the discursive memory reveals that its professed religious nature does not supersede or transcend its political nature, which prevails even when it comes to that which represents the very worse in Brazilian politics: corruption. Not rarely its members are found to be implicated in corruption cases and other illicit practices, in other words, are accused of subjectivating in and through the corrupt subject-position, just like in the case of former federal deputy Eduardo Cunha.

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