

# Center for Urban Ethnography

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## Gender, education protests

Research on  
Brazilian protests  
against "gender  
ideology",  
education, religion  
and politics



Dossier Urban Controversies #1

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**Núcleo de Etnografia Urbana e Audiovisual /  
Center for Urban Ethnography**

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**Columnists**

Jacqueline Teixeira

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**Contributors**

Akira Guimarães

Felipe Paludetti

Karen Florindo

Gabriela Mello

Suzana Schulhan

Isadora Salazar

Gabrielini Correa

Rafael França

Matheus Farah

**EDITORIAL OFFICES**

Rua General Jardim, 522

São Paulo - SP

Brazil

press@neu.city

[www.neu.city](http://www.neu.city)

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**Above**  
Protest against the philosopher Judith Butler in Brazil.

The protests against and in favour of the philosopher Judith Butler at the event “The ends of democracy”, performed in Sesc Pompeia, on 7/11/2017, reveals some issues that goes beyond the disagreement with the philosopher’s ideas and positions about gender or even about democracy.

This controversy supplies us with elements to think about the current Brazilian political scenario in formation for the 2018 elections.

That is what the research “Gender ideology x Genesis ideology: perceptions and divergences at the demonstrations against and

in favour of Judith Butler in São Paulo”, which I have coordinated at NEU (Center of Urban Ethnography) of Fundação Escola de Sociologia e Política de São Paulo, reveals.

Counting on the participation of NEU members and guest researchers, the research approaches the divergences between the groups motivated by the philosopher’s participation in the event.

The investigation was built from the following dimensions: gender, childhood, education, politics and religion.

## **Gender, politics and religion in the protests against Judith Butler in Brazil\***

\* Article by Isabela Oliveira originally published in Portuguese in the Nexo newspaper with the title “Gênero, política e religião nos protestos contra Judith Butler” in 11/21/2017 .

It's possible to state, based on the research made on November the 7th morning, that people against and people in favour of Butler's presence have organized themselves in two groups with equivalent number of participants.

Within four hours both groups have counted on something about 200 people.

Among the ones in favour of Judith, there was the presence side by side of members from antifascists Corinthians soccer team fans and also Palmeiras communist soccer team fans.

On the opposite side, there was a group of skinheads "certifying" the safety of the unhappy protesters. One of the most tense moments happened when a Palmeiras fan started communicating with members of his crowd for a possible conflict with the communists and antifascists of his own team and also the ones from the opposite team.

We were not only at Sesc street, we were also at a landscape marked by soccer disputes, only 500m far from Palmeiras soccer stadium.

Considering that a online petition against the event had over 370 thousand signatures, the number of protesters on the streets was small.

At first, the protest counted on only 15 people among the ones against the event, under the look of curious people, passers-by, researchers, academics, journalists, photographers and Sesc usual visitors. It is not possible to state that these protests represent the general population's opinion.

For us to use it as comparison, according to a recent research made by Ibope, most part of Brazilian people are in favour of discussions about gender in school.

Even the profile of the ones in favour and the ones against the event must be analysed inside a context, since we're talking about an event of academic nature with the presence of university students, scholars and researchers.

Among people in favour of the philosopher Judith Butler, there is a higher number of white people, more educated and with higher income. This sampling reflects aspects of race and class that are very visible within the university people in comparison with the population in general.

However, besides the relatively small number of protesters, the protests managed to gain attention and mobilize different types of groups (on the streets and internet) with leaders and members that play the role of influencing people's opinion and providing information (having bases or not).

The expressive and growing audience of these leaderships is defined by a group that goes from a ultraright defending a military intervention and/or a divine intervention until voters potentially undecided between candidates considered right wing, center or left wing.

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On the other hand, 19% of the ones in favour of the event affirm not believing in right and left in Brazil and 16,2% of the ones against the event affirm the same.

If we add the ones who couldn't answer, this part of not believers in right and left and the undecided people it equals 27% of the people against the event and 28,5% of the ones in favour of it.

In this scenario, the event in Sesc was the pretext for demonstrations of force and visibility of groups in favour of Judith and against her, leading to the street demonstration of historic soccer enemies, antifascist groups from the poor areas, anarchists, atheists, young mothers (organized by the movement homeschooling), communists, right wing feminists, skinheads, ultra-nationalist groups, Jair Bolsonaro supporters, Psol activists, evangelical missionaries, catholics from TFP (Family Tradition and Property), black conservative leaderships, black LGBTQ activists, groups against UN, transsexual activists, anti-antisemitic protesters, groups claiming for an urgent military intervention in the country and some guarani Indians leaderships protesting against a bunch of human rights violation in São Paulo and in Brazil.

What could be seen were demonstrations that included swear words between journalists and protesters, a small punch fight between opposite sides of the protest and even a misunderstanding between the leaderships and the research team (relatively big given the fact that 1 in 2 people accepted being interviewed). However the highlight of the protest started with the exposure of puppets in natural size representing the multimillionaire George Soros and the ex-president Fernando Henrique Cardoso.



**Above**  
Brazilian protesters burn an effigy bearing George Soros and President Cardoso

According to the interviews, Fernando Henrique is being accused of promoting, financially supported by Soros, a strategy to support leftist groups in Brazil to form what is called “globalism”. Globalism could be defined by a kind of supranational anti-israel that would promote the “world’s islamization”, the “cultural Marxism” and the decriminalization of drugs – aspects that reveal how the notions of left and right, traditionally mobilized in academic debates and political analyzes, don’t find referents in certain discourses present in the common view and defended by a piece of these conservative leaderships.

Along with the puppets of Soros and Fernando Henrique, the highlight of the protests happened with the performatization of elements of exorcism against the natural size puppet of Judith Butler, with a picture of her face, dressed with a witch’s hat and a pink bra off. In a circle with many journalists in, the puppets were burned on the sidewalk at first, and then, they kept burning on the car lane representing the death of Butler, Fernando Henrique and Soros. Fours hours later, the protests ended with women who were against Butler cleaning and sweeping the street under the astonished look of the supporters of the event.

It is possible to state that, in symbolic terms, these demonstrations reveal operations of condensation and displacement, concepts that are used by the pshychoanalysis to talk about the oneiric universe. It means that the protests are not so much about the deffense of family and brazilian children but more of a series of equivalents and a net of meanings that mix ideas, affections, narratives, political positions, categories of accusation, such as processes of building legitimacy and orchestration of groups and people who were there.

The expressed content, which is visible, said and narrated is focusing on the fight against the “Gender ideology” (term that fits as a category of accusation and political operation that is not recognized on the academic area). However its “hidden” content makes reference to a bunch of meanings that unite different groups in favour of Escola Sem Partido {movement for unpolitical schools} ideas.

The terms “Gender ideology” and “Genesis ideology” are used by groups that describe themselves as “conservatives”(81,1% of the ones against the event) as a category of accusation and political operation against the “progressives” (28,6% of those in favour of the event) and “libertarians” (42,9% of those in favour of the event).

The significant mark/presence of the “libertarians” may be in part explained by the presence of anarchists, autonomous and antifascist groups that led the protest called by the group Periferia Antifascista {Antifascist Periphery}.

On the qualitative interviews it was tried to investigate how these terms are defined and the comparability between the use and/or the recognition of these categories, in both groups.

Given that, the research reveals a clear identification between “gender ideology” and communism, this is where the approach with Escola Sem Partido movement comes from and the effort to stop the debate about gender in school daily life.

If the suppression of the debate about gender is the content expressed in this protests, the thing behind these mobilizations in the streets and internet is Escola Sem Partido.

Escola Sem Partido is a movement that represents a set of actions and ideas that aims to put kids away of topics identified as leftist, Marxist or communist.

Specifically, in this protests, what could be seen was not a thing against PT but something against communism, since the references of Lula, Dilma and even PT were absent.

To me it doesn't seem to be a random thing that a group mostly formed by Jair Bolsonaro supporters (62,2%), did not make any references to Lula, Bolsonaro's main enemy on internet.

What is most striking is not the presence of Fernando Henrique (his puppet), but Lula's absence, considering the rage against PT on the recent political manifestations, something pointed out by another researchers and also strongly present in a research that we did among the ones camping in FIESP last year asking for Rousseff's impeachment.\*

\* FIESP (Sao Paulo Federation of Industries) supported to the impeachment process against Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff, thus becoming the first business corporation to publicly express such stance



By the way, it was during the research in Fiesp that we saw, for the first time, this puppet burn thing happening. In Sesc Pompeia, Fernando Henrique's puppet burn is attached to a set of ideas that are defended by the one against the event that would put them as been part of a leftist politics strategy.

But when they save PT and it's representatives, Bolsonaro supporters who were present there may dispute a part of possible electors and supporters of Lula. Among the ones against the event, 27% couldn't answer who they would like to vote for president in 2018 and 8,1% affirmed voting for Dilma Rousseff in the second round of the last elections.

Given that, it's not that the protests mobilized different and random topics, it's just that the groups that were present back there in the public space (or social media) have mobilized chains of meanings and established equivalents that may be represented in equations that, surprisingly, the defense of human rights might become the equivalent to an incentive for pedophilia.

Qualitative data that have being collected by the execution of the open interviews allowed us to map these web of equivalents that may be more or less sophisticated and that are mixed, for example, in the idea that is shared by many conservative groups that the "gender ideology" must be fought by its antithesis, the "genesis ideology".

The crossing of data that have being collected by the survey with the open interviews shows us that, in this specific context of the protests, It seems to happen an understanding by the interviewee that "sexuality teaching" involves exclusively reproductive health themes based on heteronormative patterns. However, about the word "gender", it seems to happen an understanding when it comes to a set of harmful practices that would negatively influence children's will.

According to this point of view, teaching sexuality would be on the field of premature pregnancy prevention and sexually transmitted diseases,

as the discussion of gender would affect forms that are considered natural of gender identities making the boys behave, act and dress like girls and vice versa.

For that matter, an important data of the research reveals disputes between different conceptions and perceptions about the role of the State in society - being the public school the main reference and controversy area.

From this view, when the ones in favour of the event yelled "Temer Out" and the ones against the event responded "Butler Out", both sides were stating positions related to the role of the State, positioning the the field of children's education, the school environment and the cultural institutions as a priorit field of battle and political dispute for both conservatives and progressives.

About possible mistaken interpretations of Sesc as a public institution, the fact is that the places of family and religion, in this context, are understood by the conservatives as a relation of counterweight along with the State.



**85,71% of those in favour of the event agree with the statement “the state is important for people’s lives” and among those against the event, only 43,24%.  
Among those against the event**

The presence of religious and family values considered as traditional and desirable could be a way to prevent the establishment of a communist state in the country. A point of view that sometimes finds reinforcements in the idea of necessity of firearms licence by a part of the population to fight an authoritarian leftist state. It draws my attention the fact that, 85,71% of those in favour of the event agree with the statement “the state is important for people’s lives” and among those against the event, only 43,24%. Among those against the event, the amount of people who totally disagree or partly disagree with the statement equals 56,75%.

Of course both sides of the protests build and reinforce different chains of meanings that result in categories of fascism accusations for both progressives to conservatives and conservatives to progressives. If we consider only the categories of accusation, what could be saw in Rua Clélia was a visible clash of fascists against fascists with the alleged defense of freedom of speech by both sides. Eventhough the very idea of “Escola Sem Partido” movement is based on the alleged defense of individual freedom. In performatic terms, perhaps this was the only point of agreement between the ones in favour of the event and the ones against it, that alternated with each other, shouts of “fascists, fascists, you shall not pass!”.

**fascists,  
fascists, you  
shall not pass!”**

## **“Ideology of Gender” x “Ideology of Genesis”: perceptions and controversies in protests pro and con Judith Butler in São Paulo**

This research concerns the controversies among groups mobilized around the participation of philosopher Judith Butler in the international seminar “The ends of democracy”, hosted by Sesc Pompeia in the morning of November 7th, 2017. Since its disclosure, the event caused divisions between distinct political and ideological groups.

The repercussions became visible on the internet, specially in social media, aggravating conflicts between the groups involved. Beyond internet debating, different groups organized in initiatives of dispute over public space, with demonstrations favorable and contrary to the participation of Judith Butler in the event.

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