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Article

Culture War: Exploring the Influence of the Christian Religion and the Catholic Church Backing on Populist Party CHEGA

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Abstract: The endorsement from Christian circles in facilitating the rise of right-wing populism in Brazil, the United States, as well as the support and alliance of the Polish Catholic Church with the Law and Justice (PiS) government, is widely acknowledged. Embedded within the intricate fabric of multifaceted factors contributing to the surge of right-wing populism, the Culture War assumes a pivotal yet often underestimated role. Manifesting as a profound confrontation, the Culture War signifies an existential clash between contrasting perspectives concerning socio-cultural values grounded in religious scripture. Progressive endeavors strive to deconstruct longstanding norms, advocating for the ascendancy of post-materialistic ideals, while conservative domains portray an unwavering commitment to safeguarding national and religious socio-cultural values as sacrosanct. Employing a singular case study focused on Portugal, owing to the nation's enduring relationship with Catholicism spanning from Monarchical times to the Republic and the Fascist Catholic regime, Portugal emerges as indisputably one of the most religious countries in the Western world, akin to Poland. The research question aims to understand the support or relationship from the Portuguese Catholic Church (PCC) to the Populist right-wing, CHEGA, departing from their traditional center-right support for PSD and CDS, and if the PCC follows the Liberation Theology or neo-Thomism. The results show that the support extended to CHEGA by the PCC and the Portuguese Episcopal Conference is non-existent. Despite this fact and the lack of formal backing for CHEGA, some Christian politicians and Christian social movements have shown their approval or support to CHEGA. Moreover, the PCC adopts a more conservative stance than the Liberation Theology, aligning closely to neo-Thomism.

Keywords: christianity; politics; culture; social justice; religion in Portugal; neo-Thomism;

Introduction

In relation to right-wing Populism, there exists a widespread consensus regarding its increasing significance within the realm of social sciences. Additionally, it is widely acknowledged that Populism is fundamentally based on the establishment of an antagonistic connection between two collective entities: 'the people' and 'the elites'. The academical community reached a consensus that suggests the rise of Populist radical right parties (PRRP) has multifaceted reasons (Mudde, 2021). The dissemination of post-materialistic values (Inglehart, 1977, 1990) brought by the "New Left" and "global justice movements" (Della Porta and Diani, 2006) has led to a silent cultural revolution (Inglehart, 1977) that is believed by some scholars as responsible for the rise of right-wing conservative and populist parties (Minkenberg, 1992; Mudde, 2007; Betz, 1994; Green, Guth, Smidt, and Kellstedt, 1996) that conduct a "silent counter-revolution" (Ignazi, 1992; Hutter, 2014).

Populist right-wing parties and conservative religious movements consider that socio-cultural and religious values face an existential threat (Berman, 2021; Arzheimer and Carter, 2009; Montgomery and Winter, 2015). Henceforth, concerns within religious conservative circles regarding the secularization of Western values have prompted the endorsement of Populist leaders by Christian parties, as observed in Brazil (Zilla, 2020), and the Catholic backing for the Law and Justice (PiS) party

in Poland. This alignment is rooted in shared core cultural ideologies centered around religion and moral-ethical issues, particularly pertaining to abortion and gay rights (Resende and Hennig, 2022; Zuk and Zuk, 2020). In essence, Christian circles and populist parties, drawing upon scriptural sources, also manifest this theological dimension in their skeptical approach towards the integration of social justice topics and policies, especially those concerning sexual and gender rights. In their perspective and based on Christian doctrine and neo-Thomism, which believe that abortion, gender transition, identity and same-sex relations are a violation of the Divine word from scripture, and abortion is a violation of human rights and, therefore both should be insulated from majoritarian decision-making (Resende and Hennig, 2021).

The selection of Portugal as the focal point for this research emanates from a deliberate contemplation of its socio-political landscape, which presents itself as a formidable arena for social justice movements entrenched in post-materialist ideals, especially against the backdrop of the imminent elections in March of 2024. Portugal, asserting its presence as arguably one of the most devout nations in the Western hemisphere, pulsates with profound Catholic and religious affiliations (Resende, 2022) which naturally poses a challenge to post-materialistic endeavors.

The research question endeavors to investigate whether there exists some sort of relationship or support amongst the Portuguese Catholic Church, the Portuguese Episcopal Conference, and the Populist right-wing party, Chega, given their shared conservative and religious orientations. This inquiry seeks to ascertain whether a parallel dynamic akin to the reported alignment between the Polish Catholic Church and the Law and Justice (PiS) government, which has been extensively demonstrated within the academic community (Resende and Hennig, 2021), or even in Brazil (Wink, 2023). In order to be able to answer the research question the paper will employ the collection of data in the written press and online media from the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (PEC) and CHEGA.

. Moreover, then the research will use a documentary analysis, focusing on documents issued by the PEC and public interventions from the former Patriarch of Lisbon and President of PEC. Another method will include the analysis of several pastoral notes, opening speeches, interviews, aiming to assess the Conference's stance on various social justice issues. Additionally, political speeches, party political program, and interviews originating from the populist right-wing party CHEGA will be subjected to scrutiny, in a comprehensive examination featured in both print and digital media. The various methods outlined aim to address the research question, examining the potential backing from the PEC and the Portuguese Catholic Church for CHEGA, diverging from their usual support for the mainstream center-right parties, and if the Portuguese Catholic Church aligns themselves with neo-Thomism or Liberation Theology.

2. Culture War

Before plunging into the ocean of the Portuguese narrative, where the currents of the Culture War clash and the progressive tide seeks refuge in post-materialistic ideals and a dance with social justice within the tapestry of governance, one must embark on a journey to fathom the profound wellsprings that nourish the theoretical and philosophical roots of these convictions. In the realm of contemporary social justice, understanding this intricate framework becomes not just a prelude but a poetic pilgrimage, tracing the ethereal contours that shape the ethos of a nation caught in the embrace of aspirations for greater equality.

In the contemporary times, the global landscape bears witness to the unfolding conflict within the "Culture War" that pervades the Western sphere. This conflict is delineated through the discourse of the progressive spectrum, which is imbued with the principles derived from post-Marxist political theory and the Populist right-wing parties, alongside Christian fundamentalists (Hennig, 2022). As previously delineated, the term "Culture War" encapsulates divergent and antagonistic perspectives concerning the comprehension of the world, the desired mode of its operation, and the socio-cultural values deemed imperative for cultural hegemony, thereby fostering human advancement and justice (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Kaufmann, 2022). It is noteworthy, however, that the concept of a "Culture War" does not emerge as a recent phenomenon, as evidenced by the scholarly contributions of Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser in their seminal work, "CULTURE WARS: Secular–Catholic

Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe." Despite the temporal gap, the significance of their work lies in the discernible parallels between historical epochs. The late 1800s witnessed an ascendant wave of secularization, marked by a distancing from Christian and Catholic influences (Clark and Kaiser, 2003). This historical alignment is mirrored in contemporary times, where analogous sentiments prevail, manifesting as a contemporary endorsement of secularized policies and progressive ideologies in the Western domain: "There are also many thematic parallels. The meaning of marriage, for example, is at stake for those who have resisted calls for the legal recognition of non-marital relationships in the 1990s, just as it was for the exponents and opponents of civil marriage in the 1870s." (Clark and Kaiser, 2003).

The epoch of the 1960s bore witness to a profound metamorphosis in cultural paradigms, a transformation crystallized through the ascendancy of the counterculture movement—a milieu that, paradoxically, heralded the propagation of more conservative ethos. This era unfolded against a backdrop of tumult, marked by challenges to established social mores, a fervent civil rights crusade, and an outright repudiation of erstwhile conservative convictions. Within the crucible of the times, the sexual revolution, the emancipation of women, and the advocacy for civil, gender, and sexual rights emerged as salient motifs. In response to the perceived excesses of the counterculture, the late 20th century bore witness to a conservative resurgence, embodied by figures such as Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. Their rise denoted a nostalgic return to traditional values and economic policies that diverged markedly from the trajectory of socialist visions. A confluence of contentious issues, including abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and the role of religion in public life, crystallized as pivotal nodes within the tapestry of cultural debates during this epoch. It was an era wherein conservative and Christian factions, buoyed by social movements like the Pro-Family and Pro-Life, coalesced in a reaction against the perceived encroachment of progressive policies. The sanctity of religious values served as a bulwark against the tide of change, endorsing a steadfast adherence to conservative principles. In this crucible of ideological contention, the dialectics of cultural transformation played out with profound resonance.

For some, the overwhelming domination in the humanities-oriented bookstores (Agger, 1991) and education from Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Derrida's deconstruction and post-structuralism encompass a cultural silent revolution, as believed by Inglehart. The dissemination of Derrida's deconstruction, Critical Theory and post-structuralism is held by cultural studies, gender studies, post-structuralist feminist studies (Agger, 1991) or even poststructuralist queer theory (Namaste, 1994) that are believed to reimburse the Western cultural shortcomings (Foucault, 1976; Ard and Makadon, 2012) by erasing the oppressive nature towards gender, racial, sexual minorities (Reich, 1936; Mayer, Bradford, Makadon, Stall, Goldhammer and Landers, 2008). Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that the present-day social justice movements are considered essential, and possibly the sole means to achieve advancement, respect, and fairness for humanity. These movements encompass individuals and groups from diverse political ideologies, ranging from the far-left to the center or center-right (Suen, Lunn, Katuzny, Finn, Duncan, Sevelius, Flentje, Capriotti, Lubensky, Hunt, Weber, Bibbins-Domingo and Obedin-Maliver, 2020), while being criticized by Populist right-wing parties for being associated with the existing power structure known as the "establishment". Within this ideological battleground, conservatives assert their fidelity to a moral-ethical code purportedly bestowed by divine providence. In framing their argumentation, they contend that adherence to this code is tantamount to upholding a transcendent standard for humanity. The clash between these opposing perspectives unfolds within the intricate terrain of the Culture War, a multifaceted contest wherein questions of morality, ethics, and cultural foundations converge in a perpetual struggle.

3. The Contemporary Cultural Conflict and Its Intersection with Christian Doctrine

In the realm of the "New Left," a philosophical symphony unfolds, championing the deconstruction of age-worn conservative tapestries, deeming them formidable barriers to the march of human progress and the realization of our shared human rights. As shadows of right-wing populism dance upon the stage, a looming specter perceived as a perilous threat to both human rights

and the ethereal realms of post-materialistic concerns (Roth, 2017) materializes. In the eyes of these ideological custodians, the right-wing populists emerge as guardians of a perilous precipice, their emphasis fixated on the preservation of national culture and a harmonious homogeneity. A narrative in stark contrast, for within the embrace of the Populist right-wing cadence, an alternate verse resonates. Here, conservative circles and their populist brethren articulate a discourse tethered to the urgency of safeguarding socio-cultural traditions, their roots entwined in the "historical legacy of European cultural norms" derived from the crucible of Christianity (Furedi, 2017). In this intricate dance of perspectives, the stage is set for a profound dialogue on the very fabric of our shared existence, where contrasting notes vie for dominance, seeking to shape the destiny of a cultural narrative hanging in the balance.

Conservative and right-wing radical factions assume roles of either protagonists or antagonists, contingent upon the perspective of the beholder. Within this intricate dance, a notion emerges—a notion that within the conservative realm lies a potential hazard, a menace to the advancement of humanity. Detractors assert that a treacherous disregard for human rights resonates throughout the corridors of marginalized voices—the LGBTQ+ community, the resounding call for women's autonomy over their bodies, and the chorus of sexual liberation (Yazici, 2018). This is primarily attributed to their nationalist orientation (Yazici, 2018; Afshari, 2007; Eagleton, 1990) and adherence to Christian values, which fundamentally contradict the foundations of liberal democracies and social justice.

In the context of Portugal, the last four decades have borne witness to a series of government-driven secularization policies. These endeavors signify a broader societal inclination toward the delineation of religious institutions from state affairs, fostering a more secular public sphere. The overarching objective of these policies is to establish state neutrality in religious matters while upholding the principles of religious freedom and pluralism. Amidst Portugal's historical entwining with Catholicism, the enactment of secularization policies manifests the nation's dedication to cultivating an expansive and heterogeneous societal fabric, one that upholds the rights and convictions of individuals independent of their religious allegiances. The evolution of these policies throughout the past four decades underscores Portugal's persistent endeavor to harmonize the secular essence of its institutions with the tenets of religious freedom and pluralism. However, these endeavors do not denote a wholly secular Portuguese society, nor do they signify an absence of religious influence in societal and political realms (Vilaça and Oliveira, 2015). The enduring nexus between Portugal and Catholicism, intertwined with Christian doctrine, has historically borne formidable significance. Until 2007, the act of abortion remained circumscribed, relegated to exceedingly restrictive circumstances—specifically, instances of rape, jeopardized maternal well-being, or profound fetal abnormalities. In the ballet of policy, a doctrinal dance unfolded, notably marked by the resolute conservatism that the The Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality itself encountered during its formative foray into family planning in the late 1970s (Monteiro, 2012). The Commission's activities were perceived as posing a threat to the socio-cultural values of Portugal, a predominantly Christian country, particularly when confronted by the conservative factions within the Democratic Alliance (AD), a center-right coalition that held power in 1980. The ascendancy of these political forces precipitated a contentious atmosphere, especially concerning opposing viewpoints on diverse social justice matters. Within the Portuguese political landscape, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party (PCP) emerged as the primary advocates for the consistent legalization of abortion. This stance elicited discomfort and resistance from conservative and Catholic circles. Consequently, in 1997, the social movement "Juntos Pela Vida" (Together for Life) was established, demonstrating close affiliations with the Catholic Church (Monteiro, 2012). In response, commencing in 2002, pro-choice social movements began to observe endorsement from all major left-wing political parties, as documented by Monteiro (2012). Initiatives such as "Jovens pelo SIM" and "Movimento pelo SIM" (Mortágua, 2020) garnered support from the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the Left Bloc.

However, it was during this juncture that the Portuguese government, led by Prime Minister José Socrates of the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista), orchestrated a pivotal transformation. Through

a momentous referendum in 2007, voluntary abortion found legalization, extending the realm of permissibility up to the tenth week of pregnancy, a decision now vested in the woman's discretion, irrespective of causal motivations. Put differently, voluntary abortion is sanctioned up to the 10th week of gestation upon the pregnant woman's request, and it may be conducted within the Portuguese National Health Service (Sistema Nacional de Saúde) or approved private healthcare facilities. Governed by Law No. 16/2007, dated April 17, this legislation mandates a compulsory minimum contemplation period of three days. The Commission for Citizenship and Gender Equality played a pivotal role in instigating the referendum within the political spectrum through its agenda advocating for the decriminalization of abortion. This initiative encountered considerable opposition from the more conservative segments of Portuguese society (Monteiro, 2012), as well as from religious circles (Valente, 2005). Therefore, Catholic and Christian communities in Portugal expressed dissatisfaction with the endorsement of increasingly progressive policies concerning abortion. The Catholic Church and the Portuguese Episcopal Conference initially voiced discontent regarding the 2007 referendum on abortion (Sousa e Silva, 2023), contending that "human life constitutes an absolute value", and as such, should not be subject to legislation or referendums (Sousa e Silva, 2023). These theological circles regard the Bible as both inerrant and infallible, signifying its status as the "Word of God," and asserting that God, being incapable of falsehood, is reflected in its contents. Consequently, these circles contend that abortion contravenes one of the Ten Commandments outlined in the Old Testament (PEC, 2006). This perspective asserts the sanctity of human life, positing that only God possesses the authority to impart or terminate life (PEC, 2015). The Portuguese Episcopal Conference posits an argument concerning the correlation between abortion and the declining natality rates, as elucidated by Sousa e Silva (2023). This is perceived as an alarming reality that could potentially erode pro-family and pro-life values within Portuguese society. Expressing apprehension, the Conference advocates for the intervention of Catholic and Christian politicians in formulating legislation that preserves the inviolable right to life. Additionally, they contend that the implementation of Christian doctrine (PEC, 2015) would confer significant benefits upon Portuguese society, with the political party CDS being historically aligned with such Christian organizations. As such, the PCC and the PEC clearly show their distant stance from Liberation Theology, and align more with neo-Thomism, as both have critical opinions towards modernity, postmodern thought, such as moral relativism (e.g. post-Marxist theory), secularism and individualism from post-materialism. Moreover, neo-Thomism opposes abortion viewing it as morally wrong due to violating principle of the sanctity of life, as the neo-Thomistic ethics argue that human life possesses inherent dignity from the moment of conception, a Pro-Life stance. Furthermore, neo-Thomism argues against contemporary sexual right movements as they argue that the nature of human sexuality and its purpose in for marriage and procreation, a Pro-Life and Pro-Family stance, distancing themselves from contemporary social justice ideologies, ideas and movements, alike CHEGA and other radical right parties.

Nevertheless, the issue of abortion in the Portuguese context, constitutes a "polysemic and strategically oriented analysis" (Monteiro, 2012), necessitating an understanding of the intricate and multidimensional process, given the roles played by various entities, including the State, political parties, progressive-oriented social movements, and the Catholic Church itself. The Patriarch of Lisbon and President of the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (CEP) posits the existence of a prevailing "legal voluntarism" within the Portuguese context (Lopes, 2013). As articulated by D. Manuel Clemente, the legal frameworks guiding matters of abortion and same-sex marriage are perceived as incongruent with the convictions held by the majority of the Portuguese populace (Lopes, 2013). Nevertheless, as highlighted by Monteiro (2012), a 1982 poll conducted by the journal "Expresso" revealed that 72% of the Portuguese population already expressed support for abortion.

Moreover, within the spheres of post-materialism and social justice advocacy, the matter of abortion and women's reproductive rights, along with the issue of same-sex marriage, holds considerable significance. The preceding decades in the Western world have marked a socio-cultural transformation towards increased secularization, as elucidated by Inglehart (1977). This transformation has materialized through the endorsement of increasingly progressive legal

frameworks and policies on these matters across several Western nations (Vilaça and Oliveira, 2015). Such a profound shift has given rise to what can be termed a natural "Culture War" within the Western hemisphere. This is owing to the intrinsic connection between socio-cultural values, morality, and ethics with the Christian worldview, thereby engendering an environment of hostility (Dobbelaere and Pérez-Agote, 2015). The Portuguese landscape poses a formidable challenge for social justice movements rooted in post-materialism. Portugal emerges as arguably one of the most religious nations in the Western hemisphere, with approximately 80% of the population identifying as Christians (Teixeira, 2012).

This prevailing religiosity may elucidate the comparatively belated embrace of progressive policies within the realm of social justice, a delay attributed to theological contradictions and conflicts.

3.1. Incompatibility Between Same-Sex Marriage and Christian Doctrine

In the Portuguese 2005 elections, the issue of same-sex marriage appeared to be in its infancy, with only the Left Bloc incorporating a proposal to amend the Civil Code into its program (Vilaça and Oliveira, 2015). The fact that the Left Bloc stood alone in this regard could be attributed, perhaps, to the strong religiosity in Portugal, as such a perspective was considered heretical by the majority. Grounded in post-Marxist philosophy, influenced by Critical Theory, post-structuralism, and postmodernism, the Left Bloc contends that heterosexual marriage serves as a manifestation of the oppressive nature inherent in Western public structures and the societal oppression perpetuated by religion, acting as a hindrance to social progress and social justice.

The Left Bloc's stance found a growing resonance, weaving support from diverse political spheres. The Socialist Party, in a dance of conviction, cradled this cause at the heart of its political priorities, aspiring to carry the standard of modernization through the corridors of Portugal (Vilaça and Oliveira, 2015). Certain members of the Socialist Party accentuate the melody of influence, where the harmonies of the LGBT community's advocacy lend their notes to the chorus (Vilaça and Oliveira, 2015). As such, same-sex marriage was legalized in Portugal on June 5, 2010. The legislative measure permitting same-sex couples to marry and avail themselves of equivalent legal rights and protections as heterosexual couples was enacted by the Portuguese Parliament. In response to these political advancements, the Portuguese Episcopal Conference and the Catholic Church characterized the position embraced by the Socialist Party as heretical. Their dissatisfaction was articulated in a pastoral note titled "Em favor do verdadeiro casamento" ("In Favor of True Marriage"), dated February 20, 2009 (PEC, 2009). This document delineates their position grounded in Biblical scripture, particularly emphasizing traditional marriage values. The Portuguese Catholic Church aligns itself more closely with neo-Thomism rather than the progressive Liberation Theology. It distances itself from utopian ideologies and ideas, which are seen as a challenge to the "perfection of God's creation" (Wink, 2023). Consequently, the Church rejects progressivism, postmodern and Marxist theories, including those associated with the "New Left" and social justice concerns. In this light Olavo de Carvalho leads an anti-egalitarian right-wing movement (Wink, 2023), claiming like Orlando Fedeli that inequality is hating order, and hating God (Fedeli, 2003), as the world is designed that way.

In addition to the Catholic Church and the Portuguese Episcopal Conference (PEC), several movements emerged, notably the Citizenship and Marriage Platform (PCC), the Portuguese Federation for Life (FPV), the National Confederation of Family Associations (CNAF), and the Hope Portugal Movement (MEP). All of these are pro-family and pro-life movements with a Christian conservative origin were against abortion and same-sex marriage. Their support was predominantly concentrated within the center-right spectrum, particularly among mainstream parties such as the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the Democratic and Social Center – People's Party (CDS).

4. The rise of Populist Right-Wing, Social Justice and Christian Doctrine

The emergence of the populist radical-right party known as CHEGA can be likened to a political phenomenon rising in the dawn of Portuguese politics. Established in 2019 by André Ventura, a former member of the Social Democratic Party (PSD), CHEGA has garnered recognition for its right-

wing populist orientation (Mendes, 2022). The party's platform is characterized by nationalist and anti-establishment rhetoric, coupled with Christian-oriented perspectives on socio-cultural matters. Notably, CHEGA has articulated positions against post-materialistic issues, including abortion, same-sex marriage, relations, gender identity, and stands in opposition to certain stances of the LGBTQ+ community. The formation of CHEGA is characterized by the involvement of individuals who were previously affiliated with more established political parties, primarily the PSD (Social Democratic Party) and notably the CDS (SIC Notícias, 2022). Among these individuals, Pedro Pessanha and Diogo Pacheco de Amorim, both presently serving as deputies for CHEGA, had previous affiliations with the CDS party. They collaborate with Pedro Frazão, a former member of the PSD, and the leader of the populist party, André Ventura. Notably, all individuals involved in the leadership of CHEGA identify as professed Catholics and currently serve as deputies for the party. The political party adopted the slogan "God, Fatherland, Family and Work" which bore a striking resemblance to the fundamental principles of Salazar's Fascist and Catholic regime.

In the Portuguese socio-cultural and political realms, the narratives of legalized abortion, same-sex marriage and gender identity ideology have already woven themselves into the fabric of public discourse. A succinct panorama reveals that gender identity posits gender as a social construct—an ethos rooted in the interdisciplinary tenets of Critical Theory, post-structuralism, and post-modernism from post-Marxist theory. Akin to other populist right-wing leaders, like Bolsonaro, there is the prevailing belief among some that the country has been corrupted by "cultural Marxism" (Wink, 2023; Rocha, 2021). This perspective, encounters opposition within Christian-oriented families, circles, and religious institutions in Portugal. Notably, various Christian social movements, including the FVP have organized a walk event to advocate for the Pro-Life movement and express their opposition to abortion. This initiative received endorsement from several Portuguese bishops (Tiago, Ravara and Bastos, 2024), in April of 2024. It is worth mentioning that the Christian social movement known as "Leave the Children Alone", represented by Maria Helena da Costa, has shown to be closely tied with CHEGA. Maria Helena da Costa herself became a CHEGA member (Mascolo and Marchi, 2024). Similarly, the growing Brazilian evangelical community in Portugal has endorsed and publicly supported CHEGA (Carvalho, 2020; Mascolo and Marchi, 2024).

For in these conservative circles, gender identity's rejection of the traditional gender dichotomy, anchored in religious scripture and biology, diverges from the accepted doctrine. Instead, gender identity unfurls a tapestry of myriad genders, shaped by individual emotions and personal convictions, transcending the confines of antiquated dichotomies. Henceforth, within the deliberations of CHEGA's National Council of 2021, André Ventura posits the imperative of eradicating gender identity, contending that its existence portends a significant peril to the bedrock of traditional values (TVI Player, 2021).

In the other side political spectrum, and using a post-structuralist critique, particularly in alignment with Derrida's deconstruction, wherein traditional language and meaning are scrutinized for their inherent bias against sexual and gender minorities, rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of the Western world, notably influenced by Christian religious paradigms. The doctrinal principles propagated by the Left Bloc party, coupled with the backing of numerous adherents within the Socialist party, manifest eloquently in their public discourses and political agendas. Both these parties, in conjunction with the Communist Portuguese Party and the newly formed party LIVRE, regard social justice issues as inherently fundamental. Their commitment stems from a moral-ethical impetus, as elucidated by Sousa e Silva (2023), seeking to propel society towards loftier and higher standards. Addressing the Constitutional Court's verdict, the Left Bloc has proactively set forth a proposition for the establishment of a dedicated framework, a strategic response designed to safeguard the exercise of the right to self-determination of gender identity within educational institutions. At the vanguard of this endeavor stands Joana Mortágua, the deputy of the Left Bloc, who ardently strives to bolster the assurance enveloping the right to self-determination. Her efforts extend to encompassing aspects of gender identity, gender expression, and the preservation of sexual characteristics within the educational sphere. In alignment with Critical theorists from the Institute of Social Research, Mortágua articulates the profound injustice ingrained within the patriarchal

power structure that oppresses women's rights, particularly in the context of abortion and sexual liberation. Her advocacy reverberates with a dramatic resonance as she endeavors to reshape societal perspectives on self-determination and rectify systemic inequalities: "It is a cause that encompasses all of us, regardless of our identity, gender, or sexual orientation. It is an assertion of our control over our own sexuality. The patriarchal and capitalist system seeks to exert control over our bodies. Within this cause, we persist in addressing vital issues such as the right to abortion (legally achieved but with stagnations and challenges in its concrete implementation) and the right to sexual education." (Mortágua, 2022). The sexual education promulgated by the Left Bloc extends beyond conventional boundaries to encompass explorations of gender identity, LGBTQ+ issues, and heightened sexual awareness from a tender age, all in pursuit of fostering healthier and more informed sexual relationships. This philosophical orientation finds resonance with the insights of Critical theorists such as Reich and Lukács. This historical precedent attests to the discernible influence of Critical theory and neo-Marxist principles within the ideological framework of the Left Bloc party.

In a significant development in May 2023, Joana Mortágua championed a legislative project pertaining to gender self-determination. Motivated by a nuanced understanding of the expansive gender spectrum, countering the conventional and binary gender framework, this legislative endeavor advocates for the right of intersex and non-binary individuals to abstain from explicitly specifying their gender on Portuguese Identity Cards. As aptly stated by Mortágua, "The society is more diverse than the identities of man and woman. And democracy must adapt its rules to finally recognize this right to existence and identity" (Esquerda, 2023). This phenomenon holds significant importance, as it extends beyond the concerns articulated by traditional Christian-oriented circles. Some argue that a comprehensive understanding of right-wing populism necessitates an exploration of the influence of gender identity and queer theory. According to Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (2020) in their influential work, "Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives and Beyond," gender is viewed as a socially constructed concept intricately woven into Western traditional power structures, perpetuating social injustice and oppression through overarching metanarratives (Dietze and Roth, 2020). Aligned with post-structuralist and post-modernist perspectives, the authors posit, "it is concerned not only with gender as an issue in itself, but also with gender as a metalinguistic tool to negotiate different conditions of inequality and power in the context of current struggles for hegemony and resources shaped by neoliberalism" (Esteves, 2022).

Populist parties across the Western world consider these ideology as having deep ties and influence within public institutions and education, that seek to overthrow or it aims to modify what they perceive as the natural order of things, such as the distinct roles of men and women in family and sexual contexts, the concept of marriage (or traditional marriage), and the understanding of traditional family dynamics and structure (Esteves, 2022). Henceforth, the burgeoning embrace of ideologies deeply rooted in post-materialistic ideals and social justice by mainstream political factions throughout the Western sphere is perceived by some as the primary impetus behind the ascendancy of right-wing populist parties (Esteves, 2022; Kaufmann, 2022). The contention posits that mainstream parties are deemed remiss in addressing or acknowledging the paramount needs of the "nation" and "the people," while disproportionately prioritizing issues related to historically oppressed gender and sexual minorities. Thereby, CHEGA argues the current socio-cultural and political landscape in Portugal is suffering a form of "ideological indoctrination" (Gomes, 2021), this perception has further fueled the ongoing Culture War, leading to calls for an education reform (Gomes, 2021). In other words, despite sharing certain aspects with its Populist and European counterparts in its approach to "gender ideology" particularly concerning the family, CHEGA naturally seeks to eradicate this ideology from educational systems (Esteves, 2022; Gomes, 2021). In a more recent development, specifically in April 2023, the political party CHEGA stood alone among political parties in opposition to the protection of LGBTQ+ individuals. This opposition was particularly evident in its stance against the establishment of public mixed-gender bathrooms in public schools (Observador, 2023). According to CHEGA's deputy Rita Matias, articulated in October 2023, she asserted that "Marxist scholars and professors" propagate what she terms as "Marxist propaganda" through concepts such as critical race theory, post-colonialism, or gender studies, and

what commonly Populist-right wing parties claim to be “cultural marxism” (Esteves, 2022; Kaufmann, 2022; Bolton, 2018). This perspective extends to the issue of public mixed-gender bathrooms, with Matias contending that it mirrors the perceived natural consequences of critical theory and Marxist ideology, positing that everything in society is merely a social construct (Sapo Polígrafo, 2023). The rhetoric of the populist right-wing frequently asserts that issues pertaining to social justice are indicative of Marxist propaganda as believed by Trump, Viktor Orban or the Law and Justice (PiS) party in Poland. This sentiment has been recently articulated by anarcho-capitalist and the newly inaugurated President of Argentina, Milei, who contends that the “post-Marxist” agenda poses a threat to his nation. In his own words, “(...) they moved class struggle into other aspects of life. For example, the struggle between black and white (Black Lives Matter), the entire LGBT lobby, everything related to radical feminism (...). This agenda also includes the agenda of man against nature, where man is the one supposedly harming nature” (Javier Milei, 2023).

In Portugal, Iniciativa Liberal (IL) is a political party positioned within the center-right and liberal spectrum, established in 2017. The party espouses classical liberal tenets, endorsing principles of limited government intervention, free-market policies, and individual freedoms, while concurrently adopting more progressive socio-cultural stances. However, a schism within IL resulted in the departure of 25 members, citing the party's perceived alignment with “far-left and radical left agendas” on social justice issues (Malhado, 2023). Among these figures, the resonances of names such as Nuno Simões de Melo and Mariana Mendes Silvestre linger prominently. Nuno Simões de Melo contends that the Portuguese political landscape and the Iniciativa Liberal have succumbed to the allure of social justice progressive narratives, colloquially identified as the “Woke culture”. Delving into a deeper elucidation, Melo posits that “The IL must confront the veering of liberalism towards woke, identity-based, or segregationist causes—advocates of cancel culture and, notably, adherents of cultural Marxism.” (Pires, 2022), resembling Milei’s or even CHEGA’s position on the topic, all of them emphasizing the importance of Natural law, and thus having Pro-life stances.

Their discontent resonates in unison, marking a decisive “tipping point” that shattered the unity: the party’s entanglement with resolutions conceived within the intellectual crucibles of the Socialist Party and the Left Bloc (Malhado, 2023). These political liaisons, intricately woven into the choreography of liberal deputies’ votes, assumed the role of a tragic prelude in this political opera. In the crucible of destiny, a crossroads materialized—a tumultuous convergence wherein ideals collided with concessions, notably in the realm of legislating the self-determination of gender identity for the fragile spirits inhabiting the sacred halls of primary and pre-primary enlightenment. The unfolding saga, an exodus of operatic proportions, plays out as a poignant narrative, each chapter etching its tale on the vast canvas of political dissent. This phenomenon, a dramatic crescendo, may encapsulate the echoes of conservatism resonating within Portuguese society. A society steeped in religiosity and nurtured by Christian-oriented families (Teixeira, 2012), viewing ideologies of gender, LGBTQ+, abortion, and same-sex marriages as menacing harbingers, threatening the very fabric of national cultural values and portending the specter of societal secularization. In response, a cadre of politicians, spanning the spectrum of political affiliations, voices their discontent, departing the fold in search of refuge. They cast their gaze toward the populist right-wing party, CHEGA, as the solitary “solution” to staunch the tide of progressive and secular policies, perceived as affronts to the sanctity of Christian doctrine. The stage is set, and the political theater unfolds, a tapestry woven with threads of discord and ideological strife. The delicate connection existing within Christian spheres, such as the mysterious Opus Dei, and CHEGA, remains shrouded in ambiguity. Historically, the organization has chosen to maintain a certain distance from political affiliations, further enhancing the veil of uncertainty that surrounds their engagement (Mascolo and Marchi, 2024).

In the wake of the 2022 electoral winds, leader André Ventura found himself drawn to the grandeur of Almudena's cathedral in Madrid, a sacred pilgrimage to offer gratitude to the divine. In his fervent gestures, Ventura invoked the name of José Maria Escrivá, the visionary founder of Opus Dei, weaving the threads of divine providence into his political tapestry (Correio da Manhã, 2022). A whispered belief emerged—a conviction that a celestial mandate had been bequeathed upon him, entrusted to navigate the labyrinthine corridors of Portuguese politics. Opus Dei, a sonnet woven

into the annals of Roman Catholicism, unfurls its tale. Born on the breath of Saint Josemaría Escrivá on October 2, 1928, in the soulful landscapes of Spain, it stands as a personal prelature of the Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, a recent incident involved Opus Dei's school, "Colégio Planalto," planning to convene a meeting between the two entities. Nevertheless, the gathering was called off by Opus Dei, citing CHEGA's stance on the obligatory use of masks for children as the reason for the cancellation (Figueiredo, 2022). In the tapestry of alliances and affiliations, this episode paints a vivid portrait of the intricate dance between religious sanctuaries and the political stage. Yet, amid the nuanced choreography, a spotlight reveals a figure—Pedro Frazão, a luminary within the ranks of Opus Dei (Malhado, 2020) and CHEGA. In this juncture, the narrative unfolds, delving into the intricate interweaving of spiritual ardor and political zeal - a tableau wherein the strands of faith and governance intricately construct a narrative fraught with complexity and fascination. As scrutinized by the periodical "Visão," a considerable contingent of Evangelical Christians manifests notable endorsement for the populist faction CHEGA, particularly in the realm of social justice issues encompassing abortion, LGBTQ+ concerns, and the like. Moreover, a noteworthy cohort of influential members within the political party aligns with this Christian denomination (Carvalho, 2020).

The stance of the CHEGA party on gender identity has been previously explored, and now attention turns to its position on abortion. In this realm, CHEGA adopts a more conservative standpoint, arguably the most conservative stance in the absence of CDS representation in the Portuguese Parliament (Figueiredo, 2022) until the recent 2024 elections in Portugal. While a comprehensive consensus within the CHEGA, the party tends to harbor traditional and conservative perspectives that closely align with Christian doctrine, as articulated in their "Political Manifesto" on their official website: "Tyranny, which is the power without reason to steal another's life through any form of murder, be it abortion, infanticide, eugenics, or euthanasia. (...) Reject the dictatorship of Gender Ideology; reject abortion on demand or sex-change surgeries funded by taxpayers. Reject the State's support for the entire array of cultural Marxism's fruits." (CHEGA). In the year 2023, Pedro Frazão, the representative of CHEGA, publicly avowed his status as a distinguished adherent of the Catholic faith when he addressed the Left Bloc party within the parliamentary realm. In this discourse, he castigated Joana Mortágua and her political faction for what he perceived as the culpability for the demise of over 200,000 unborn infants since the legalization of abortion in Portugal in 2007. Furthermore, Frazão disparaged Mortágua's profound apprehensions regarding women's access to abortion in public health facilities, characterizing such concerns as tantamount to endorsing the termination of lives within maternal wombs. This perspective aligns with a conventional and conservative ethos that regards abortion not as an inherent facet of women's rights and reproductive well-being but rather as a transgression against Natural law, and the moral-ethical principles by traditional Christian societies (CHEGATV, 2023). Within this paradigm, deliberations concerning abortion or gender identity have incited reactions within Christian factions, most notably following discussions surrounding LGBTQ+ themes within a civic education curriculum in a public school (Mascolo and Marchi, 2024). This occurrence catalyzed the emergence of various social networks and advocacy groups, exemplified by the formation of "Deixem as crianças em Paz" (Leave the Children Alone), wherein Maria Helena Costa, a prominent Christian Evangelical activist and now a member of CHEGA, assumed a leading role (Mascolo and Marchi, 2024). Hence, there exists an overlap between Christian doctrine and the Populist stance on social justice issues arising from post-materialism or what they considered to be a "left-wing agenda" and the so-called "cultural Marxism" (Mascolo and Marchi, 2024). This convergence can be attributed, in part, to the increasingly progressive positions adopted by mainstream political parties on such issues. Moreover, the diminishing relevance from CDS as a political party has played a role in the burgeoning endorsement of Christian-oriented sentiments within the ranks of CHEGA. A noticeable pattern has surfaced, as a significant number of former members of CDS and PSD have decided to disassociate themselves from their previous political parties. Instead, they have chosen to align with CHEGA. Examples include Paulo Veiga from CDS, António Pinto Pereira from PSD, Henrique Freitas who served as

Secretary of State in two PSD administrations (Santos and Monteiro, 2024), and Nuno Simões de Melo from IL who joined CHEGA in opposition to "wokeism" (Diário de Notícias, 2023).

The recent elections held in March 2024 in Portugal manifested a notable surge in electoral backing for the political party CHEGA, which garnered over 18% of the vote, compared to a mere 7.2% just two years prior. This increase in support for CHEGA can be attributed to the escalating "Culture War" and social justice concerns within the nation, stemming from Portugal's historically conservative societal outlook rooted in its Christian heritage. Despite sharing cultural values with CHEGA and espousing conservative principles, the Portuguese Catholic Church refrained from extending official or formal endorsement to the party. Nonetheless, some Christian social movements have actively engaged with CHEGA's activities and demonstrated their solidarity with the party (Mascolo and Marchi, 2024).

Conclusion

Within the context of post-materialistic social movements and political parties, the objective is to position themselves as the legitimate representatives of personal and national identities, liberating them from the constraints of "false consciousness" and the oppressive cultural values inherent in Western Christian countries. Critical Theory, propelled by its inherent dynamism, endeavors to interrogate entrenched cultural norms and values. In Portugal, the left-wing political parties perceive these social justice issues as imperative moral-ethical imperatives, envisaging them as indispensable measures towards the principles of diversity, social justice, and tolerance. Contrary to this stance, and to answer one of the research questions, the Portuguese Catholic Church shows a traditional and conservative opinion, following more neo-Thomism than the progressive Liberation Theology, and as such their positions on social justice issues are closely similar to CHEGA.

Furthermore, there is no concrete evidence demonstrating the endorsement or alliance between CHEGA and the PEC and the PCC, despite their shared position on social justice issues. However, it is worth noting that some Christian social movements have expressed their support for CHEGA. Additionally, some individuals who were previously affiliated with other political parties have chosen to align themselves with CHEGA, primarily due to their similar perspectives on social issues, the "cultural Marxism" amidst the ongoing Culture War, which could explain the growing electoral support in recent elections due to the traditional Christian tradition in the country.

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