Democracy as a disputed ‘message’ in Brazil’s 2022 elections: tracing echoes of trumpism and (de)naturalisation of violence across media spaces

Democracia como ‘mensagem’ em disputa nas eleições brasileiras de 2022: rastreando ecos do trumpismo e a (des)naturalização da violência em espaços midiáticos

RESUMO

Influenciado pelo Trumpismo, Jair Bolsonaro, presidente do Brasil, vem fazendo afirmações sem comprovação sobre a existência de supostas vulnerabilidades no sistema de votação local durante a disputa presidencial de 2022. À medida que Bolsonaro dá visibilidade a essas afirmações, tal sistema (e consequentemente a democracia) podem se tornar performativamente (ou ‘produtivamente’) desacreditadas ou alvos através da circulação digital e da violência textual. Esta pesquisa recorre a construtos foucaultianos e a perspectivas trandisciplinares para rastrear diferentes espaços midiáticos. Eles apontam para como disputas e dinâmicas de (des)naturalização da violência se tornam (in)visíveis no contexto electoral discutido.

Palavras-chave: crise da democracia; trumpismo e sistema de votação; Análise do Discurso; transmidiatização e tradução; linguagem e (des)naturalização da violência.
ABSTRACT

Influenced by Trumpism, Jair Bolsonaro, the president of Brazil, has been presenting unsubstantiated claims about the existence of purported vulnerabilities in the local electronic voting system during the 2022 presidential race. As Bolsonaro gives visibility to such claims, that system (and consequently democracy) can be performatively (or ‘productively’) discredited and targeted through digital circulation and textual violence. This research resorts to Foucauldian constructs and transdisciplinary perspectives to trace different media spaces. These point to how disputes and dynamics of (de)naturalisation of violence become (in)visible in Brazil’s 2022 electoral context.

Keywords: democracy crisis; trumpism and voting system. Discourse Analysis; transmediatisation and translation; language and (de)naturalisation of violence.

RESUMEN

Influenciado por el Trumpismo, Jair Bolsonaro, presidente de Brasil, viene haciendo afirmaciones sin comprobación sobre la existencia de supuestas vulnerabilidades en el sistema de votación local durante la disputa presidencial de 2022. A medida que Bolsonaro da visibilidad a tales afirmaciones, tal sistema ( y consecuentemente la democracia) pueden volverse performativamente (o ‘productivamente’) desacreditadas y blanco a través de la circulación digital y la violencia textual. Esta investigación recurre a constructos foucaultianos y a perspectivas transdisciplinarias para rastrear diferentes espacios mediáticos. Señalan cómo las disputas y dinámicas de (des)naturalización de la violencia se vuelven (in)visibles en el contexto electoral discutido.

Palabras clave: crisis de la democracia; trumpismo y sistema de votación; Análisis del Discurso; transmediatización y traducción; lenguaje y (des) naturalización de la violencia.
INTRODUCTION: ECHOES OF THE INTERNATIONAL FAR-RIGHT IN BRAZIL’S 2022 PRESIDENTIAL RACE

Steve Bannon, former Donald Trump’s political strategist, has stated that the 2022 presidential election in Brazil would be “the most important of all time in South America”1. Bannon’s statement points to interconnexions between Jair Bolsonaro and the international far-right. Amongst such interconnexions, the domain of communicational and (geo)political strategies in particular reaffirms the influence of Trumpism over Bolsonaro’s administration.

Through a process of politicization of digital technology, Trumpism may interconnect different types of online/offline violence against democracy, generating a hybrid stratagem of ‘government’ For instance, an interconnexion involving neoliberalism, militarisation, religious discourse (e.g. neopentecostalism) and Trumpism can be perceived in different contexts. In the U.S.3, with Trump; and in Bolivia4, with Jeanine Añez5.

In Brazil, this interconnexion points to two relevant aspects: (i) the neoliberal echoes of the international far-right that resonate through Bolsonaro’s Pinochetian ideals6; and (ii) the instrumentalisation of religious and military discourses and how Bolsonaro mobilises these to (somehow) reunite7 the State and the church, projecting a process of de-calendarisation (i.e. a sense of calendar disorientation or civilisational disruption). Since such discourses can relatively control through dogmas and condition through discipline/obedience, when associated, locally, they contribute to the dissemination of beliefs or the peremptory repetition of claims through technopreacherism (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2021, p. 14).

During the presidential race, preliminary poll results showed Bolsonaro behind8 his main opponent, former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (Workers’ Party/PT). As a reaction, Bolsonaro began mobilising a script or a communicational repertoire of interpretation that was, to some extent, associated with Trumpism in the U.S. 2020 presidential election. Jair Bolsonaro’s re-election campaign has been investing considerable time and effort in forging a belief that is expected to turn into a claim. In his

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2 In this paper, I use the parentheses in ways that might not be described in traditional grammar books/manuals. The parentheses will be frequently mobilised in order to: (i) indicate two possibilities of reading a term, like in (geo)political; and (ii) present actions or effects that point to a dispute, such as in: (in)visible dynamics.


6 In Brazil, the influence of Pinochetian neoliberalism is currently promoted by Bolsonaro’s Ministry of Economy, Paulo Guedes – locally framed as a ‘Chicago boy’.

7 It is observed even when the Constitutional principle of secular state repels that.

view, the system would be fraud-prone. He has been sending mixed messages, leading many to believe that, if he loses, defeat will not be conceded. This was Donald Trump’s script/playbook for some time in the U.S. – what contributed to the emergence of the egregious Capitol events on 6 January 2021.

As Bolsonaro disseminates such claims and messages through different media spaces, not only the voting system can be performatively (or ‘productively’) discredited and targeted through textual violence (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2022), but also democracy, as a Constitutional construct, becomes a disputed ‘message’. Against this background of textual violence, a pro-democracy letter-manifesto has been presented and promoted by the Faculty of Law of the University of São Paulo (USP).

The digitalisation and dissemination of the manifesto generated a transdimensional and a transmedia event (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2021). The event became transdimensional, because it interconnected the offline dimension of the University to the on-line domain of the internet. Moreover, it can be framed as transmedia, because the manifesto and its message circulated across different media spaces, pointing to digital traces, textual trajectories and on-line disputes.

I am interested in addressing that event and its on-line resonances. To do so, I resort to Foucauldian constructs and transdisciplinary perspectives. Guided by the transdisciplinary lenses of Discourse Studies and following recommendations from the domain of transdisciplinary studies (LATOUR, 2005, p. 124; p. 182), the discussion that the paper develops is focussed strictly on the unfolding of processes of (de)naturalisation of violence. As it stands, I simply try to understand how, through these particular processes, interconnected trajectories, (in)visible dynamics and disputes emerge.

In the final section, I present a final panorama regarding the context under discussion. This includes the limitations and the potential contributions of this study.

1. THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS: DEMOCRACY, DISCOURSE, DIGITAL CIRCULATION, TEXTUAL DISPUTES AND (DE)NATURALISATION OF VIOLENCE

In different ways, several authors have been contributing to the study of democracy. They point to how it may be endangered/subverted or preserved and perfected.

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See, for example, Dahl (1989) for a more comprehensive discussion on aspects/principles that can be associated with the constitution of democracy.
Amongst such contributions, we find those that project what can be viewed as a *structural perspective*. The thesis proposed by Fukuyama (1989) would provide a model through which this perspective reverberates. Such studies may point to the existence of the following elements: (i) juridical foundation; (ii) local Constitution and its principles (e.g. rule of law); (iii) three-fold nature (which usually comprises the Executive, the Judiciary and the Legislative as independent powers); (iv) institutions; and (v) a ‘toolkit’ of checks and balances.

This set of elements, which serves to exemplify some of the components and the epistemological complexity of democracy, would allow us to see each of these as ‘a brick in the wall’. The ‘wall’ would make visible the representation of a ‘final product’, whose ‘infrastructure’/bricks would reflect liberal democracy’s Constitutional principles. Such principles would impose a kind of order or normativity/positivity, whilst (de)regulating the functioning of democracy. The ‘image’ of the erected and ‘effective wall’ as a ‘fortress’ would also contribute to configuring and sustaining what is usually called *indirect or representative democracy*.

Alternatively, it is possible to examine democracy as a system of government by mobilising what can be described as a *relational perspective*. The latter, succinctly, leads the researcher to problematise at least two aspects. Firstly, the notion of ‘representation’ and its association with democracy. Secondly, the centrality of structures/institutions/principles and their constitutive hierarchical normativity. The assemblage of structures/institutions/principles would, on one hand, sustain and protect democracy like a fortress or, on the other, open a pathway not only to deregulation but also to exception, being the latter capable of endangering or subverting democracy and the normativity/positivity that it forges.

Drawing on Foucault (1995, p. 217; p. 221), it is possible to argue that the structural viewpoint and its (de)limitations contribute to understanding democracy in a rather idealised way. This viewpoint appears to ignore (or neglect) that representative democracy is constitutive of a system of government (or a domain of power-knowledge), whose positivity and trajectory are associated with some sort of condensed historicity. Nevertheless, the historicity of that domain (as a stable/structured form of ‘consciousness’/repertoire) and what it would ‘represent’ can be viewed as elements that are not transparent (i.e. easy to access). For this, the positivity that constitutes such elements may be misinterpreted (or not fully understood/accessed) by ‘ordinary citizens’.

The relational approach is also important for us to understand how circulated messages that target democracy (paradoxically being guided by one of the latter’s basic principles: *freedom*) can make visible performative changes in historicity. Such changes can put democracy’s institutions, values and integrity to the test as a central event. Through this perspective, it is possible to examine the performative/productive (de)construction of democracy “from the inside”, as Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) put it in How democracies die14 (2018).

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Here, I focus more specifically on discussing actions and reactions as dynamics of power and resistance, when Bolsonaro's performances discursively catalyse and operationalise networked violence. Developing this focus becomes possible because, as Foucault observes: “(...) we must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case we impose on them” (FOUCAULT [1970] 1981, p. 67). As it stands, networked violence, in the case at hand, involves textual violence. Both give rise to textual disputes, through which the Brazilian electronic voting system and democracy can be targeted.

Furthermore, if it is possible to address democracy from a discursive point of view, hence, we can conceive democracy as a discursive construct, because both its representation and ‘message’ need to be constantly reinforced and circulated in a transdimensional way. Nowadays, if this ‘message’ fails to be reinforced, democratic values (as ‘the message’ itself) may no longer circulate, nor influence the social sphere/citizens. This potential failure can generate a process of (de)naturalisation of violence, through which democracy, haunted by perils and powers, becomes a ‘disputed message’. For this, democracy, as a complex or multilayered domain of power-knowledge, can be (de)constructed during Brazil’s 2022 electoral process.

Democracy can be associated with perils and powers these days because, to some extent, in the so-called Western societies (but not exclusively in these), the existence of this system of government is becoming more and more dependent on media discourse and on the circulation of texts. This dependence can be viewed as an effect of algorithmic-multilayered influence of the so-called big tech firms over (geo)politics or local partisan politics.

This influence can catalyse disputes (and violence). They may involve, for instance, these kinds of textual manifestation: (i) national Constitutions; (ii) international treaties/agreements; (iii) (written/spoken) speeches; (iv) demonstration placards (and in other contexts the bodies that accompany those); (v) journalistic texts (e.g. news items); (vi) digitalised institutional manifestoes; and (vii) social media posts. The latter (materialised, for example, as comments, memetic constructs, fake news, deepfake videos or live sessions) are capable of encapsulating, redistributing and performatively (de)constructing the messages communicated by the abovementioned items.

Directing my focus towards this ‘textual dimension of democracy’ is of sheer relevance. It allows me to discuss how this performative or productive dimension has an impact on the way ‘democracy as a message’ can be circulated, (mis)understood or (re)interpreted through textual disputes. These can ‘translate’ and/or be ‘translated’ as performative processes of (de)naturalisation of violence that derive from transmediatisation. The latter indicates a decentralised process of production and circulation of texts across media spaces.

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15 Message, for example, of perennial dialogue, which allows for the existence of internal contradictions.

This characterisation of the process of circulation outlined above reflects aspects that are related to the concept of *transmedia order of discourse* (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2021, p. 2). Through it, I am led to problematise discourses, media spaces (as domains of power-knowledge), participants and texts that can (re)forge (de)stabilisation and struggles as performative processes. In the case at hand, such struggles/disputes involve the performative circulation of discourses that may be specialised/authorised (e.g. legal/journalistic) or non-specialised/non-authorised (e.g. social media influencers’ or users’ dissemination of opinions/aspirations/beliefs).

2. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGICAL DECISIONS

The corpus of this study encompasses: (i) USP’s Faculty of Law pro-democracy letter-manifesto, which was made available at their website; (ii) a tweet made public by Bolsonaro’s official profile, through which he reacts to the circulation of the letter-manifesto; (iii) a news item from *Folha de São Paulo*, which captures Bolsonaro’s ethos of recalcitrant commentator in relation to Brazil’s 2022 electoral process and also reports one of his relevant statements about USP’s manifesto; and (iv) the so-called “people’s letter”, an alternative pro-democracy manifesto that has been proposed and promoted by André Janones (a federal lawmaker).

The selection of such texts can be justified, first of all, in terms of their quantitative relevance. Text (i) reached more than 1 million signatories from diverse segments of the so-called civil society 16 days after being released on-line, on 26 June 2022. Text (ii) was posted on 28 July 2022, generating 22,000 retweets/ 6,892 comments/ 113,400 positive reactions (i.e. Twitter ‘hearts’). Text (iii) was published on 9 August 2022, on *Folha de São Paulo*’s website – access average17 24 million/month. Lastly, text (iv) was released on 19 August 2022 and until 26 September 2022 it had attracted the attention of those who identify as ‘the people’, making visible more than 110,110.000 signatories.

Additionally, this selection, which is never neutral, can be justified in terms of its: (i) balance (since I take into consideration different stages and voices that give visibility to the event); and (ii) qualitative relevance. In this regard, firstly, it becomes important to point to the aspect of semiotic restriction and expansion. Whilst having an English version of these available, texts (i) and (iii) seem to have been published to circulate farther. Texts (ii) and (iv) have been originally published in Brazilian Portuguese. For this, I had to translate these into English. Secondly, I was led to take into account aspects such as participants, discourses, kinds of texts, media spaces, trajectories and resonances that these selected texts make visible, as indicated previously.

Hence, such texts are part of the corpus because they capture three key and interconnected stages of Brazil’s 2022 electoral process, namely: (i) the emergence of USP’s letter-manifesto; (ii) how Bolsonaro’s reactions to that latter resonate through different media spaces; and (iii) how André

Janones, as an influencer, reacts to the circulation of USP’s manifesto, projecting a new *letter* and his ethos. Janones gathers more than 12 million\(^\text{18}\) followers on social media. On Twitter\(^\text{19}\), he plays a very active role as a social media influencer, bringing into the spotlight an ethos that has been engaged in confronting and ‘translating’ the far-right strategies of disinformation or the intricacies of specialised discourses (including those circulated by the so-called leftists). Looking at how the alternative manifesto makes the communication of such discourses less specialised (i.e. less complicated) for the ‘ordinary citizen’ (or ‘the people’) matters.

Once these aspects, stages and resonances are traced, it is necessary, firstly, to reflect on how the emergence of USP’s letter-manifesto pointed to a trajectory of actions and reactions. This sense of trajectory leads me to highlight the importance of the *genealogical perspective* (FOUCAULT [1970] 1981, pp. 70-71), which, succinctly, allows me to focus on how Discourse unfolds and circulates. In other words, I take into consideration Discourse, its formation, discontinuities and modulations, as these emerge across media spaces.

Through the *critical perspective* (Foucault [1970]1981, p. 73), it is equally important to take into account how the alluded trajectory of actions and reactions pointed to the emergence of textual and epistemic disputes that became visible as the event under discussion unfolded. I discuss how/what/who these disputes (as dynamics of power and resistance) performatively include or exclude, expose or invisibilise. More precisely, the critical perspective leads me to explore the domain of the (un)said, by discussing how these disputes produced (in)visible dynamics, threats and what/who is threatened.

3. **DISCUSSION**

3.1 **Democracy in USP’s letter-manifesto and (de)naturalisation of violence**

In this section, I discuss: (i) how the notion of democracy is mobilised; and (ii) what/who USP’s manifesto performatively includes or excludes, whilst projecting processes of (de)naturalisation of violence.

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Preliminarily, Figure 1 exposes the layers of networked violence (cf. Section 1), which once have effectively contributed to leading Brazil to a dictatorship (line: 10). Now, context-specific elements of that network catalyse the emergence of USP’s manifesto. Regarding such elements or layers, textual violence emerges explicitly in the following excerpts “(…) insinuations of contempt for the results of the elections” (line: 35); Groundless attacks unaccompanied by evidence [which] question the fairness of the electoral process and the democratic rule of law” (line: 36). These occurrences expose the vulnerabilities of democracy, if we take into account its ‘textual dimension’ (cf. Section 1).

It is also possible to observe how Figure 1 exposes the performative potential of textual violence. In other words: it makes visible what the repetition of such violent practices can actually generate through textual manifestations: “Threats to other powers and sectors of the civil society (…)” (line: 37). That potential can also give visibility to how these practices can be repeated and discursively naturalised, affecting, therefore, democracy: “(…) [through] the incitement of violence and the breakdown of the constitutional order (…)” (line: 38).

In addition, it becomes visible how the potential referred to can be expanded, become more hybrid and disruptive/destructive, if misleading premises of ‘freedom’ (cf. Section 1) are adopted locally in association with textual violence: “(…) authoritarian rants that have jeopardized secular American democracy (…) attempts to destabilise and people’s confidence in the elections (…)” (lines: 39-41).

At this point, it is necessary to look at how the letter-manifesto produces a performative process of denaturalisation of that kind of violence. If violence unfolds in a networked way, it is
possible that reaction or a dynamics of networked resistance towards that emerges. Here, this
dynamics/network can reveal a set of elements/layers, as indicated below.

The letter-manifesto itself is a form of textual manifestation (cf. Section 1) that can be viewed
as the primary instrument of textual reaction. In this document, a network of textual and traceable
‘instruments’ (e.g. Constitutional principles) becomes visible. These instruments can work in
association, whilst being capable of promoting textual reaction or denaturalisation of violence. In
Figure 1, the following traceable and textual elements appear to work together/embedded: “[the]
Letter to Brazilians (...) [which] called for the re-establishment of rule of law(...)” (lines: 9-11); “(...) the
Federal Constitution of 1988 (...)” (line: 17); “(...) political debate on projects for the country (...)”
(line: 18); “[a] call on Brazilians to be alert and in the defence of democracy and respect for the
electoral results” (lines: 44-45). In this context, whilst called for and call on indicate ways of producing
textual manifestation, re-establishment of rule of law, political debate and to be alert point to the
embedded democratic elements or dynamics that indicate processes of reaction, dynamics of
resistance and denaturalisation of violence.

A final dimension of the letter-manifesto can be explored. It projects specific constitutive
elements that may be read as ‘messages’. The latter seem to ‘translate’ and expand (moving beyond
the mere semiotic mobilisation of English) the social and political meanings of democracy (i.e. what
it would stand for in this context). These meanings and message project, then, expanded and indirect
conceptualisations of democracy. Such conceptualisations would reflect, as indicated below, the
cherished and the contradictory constitutive elements, which, in a relational way, co-exist and seem
to characterise democracy in the Brazilian scenario.

Amongst the cherished ones, the following can be singled out: “(...) the legitimacy of (...) institutions (...) the democratic rule of law with the prevalence of respect for the individual rights.”
(lines: 13-14); “(...) the powers of the Republic, the Executive, the Legislative, the Judiciary, all independent, autonomous, committed to ensuring compliance with the greater covenant, the Federal Constitution.” (lines: 15-16); “(...) the dispute between the various political projects aimed at convincing the electorate of the best proposals for the direction of the country (...)” (lines: 32-33); “(...) respect for the electoral results” (lines: 44-45). When it comes to the contradictory and co-existent ones, I highlight these: “(...) profound social inequalities, with deficits in essential public services, such as health, education, housing and public safety (...). Demands for greater respect and equality of conditions in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation” (lines: 32-33).

From a critical standpoint, it becomes relevant to highlight the following aspects that USP’s
letter-manifesto makes visible: (i) the targets of violence (e.g. democracy, its principles, powers,
institutions, the electronic voting system); (ii) the ways through which networked violence emerges
(e.g. through textual manifestation and textual violence); and (iii) the instruments through which
textual violence can be equally resisted (e.g. pro-democracy letter-manifesto and defence of the
constitutional order and rule of law). In 4.2, we will see how such aspects can be related to the discussion involving Figures 2 and 3.

3.2 Bolsonaro’s reactions towards USP’s letter-manifesto in the media: tracing (in)visible dynamics and transmedia resonances

In this section, I address the process of transmediatisation of USP’s pro-democracy manifesto regarding two different media spaces: Twitter and the news website Folha de São Paulo. Figures 2 and 3, below, allow us to have access to such spaces:

Figure 2: On Twitter, Bolsonaro reacts to the digital circulation of USP’s letter-manifesto


In Figure 2, Bolsonaro’s declaration could be viewed as an implicit dynamics of vulnerabilisation, targeting democracy. The latter, through its textual dimension, little by little, seems to ‘crack’ or become vulnerable with the emergence of networked and textual violence. The alluded sense of vulnerabilisation gives visibility (in different ways) to a process naturalisation of violence.

Figure 3: Bolsonaro’s second reaction to the digital circulation of USP’s letter-manifesto in the media


In Figure 3, this sense becomes not only more visible, but also reinforced across media spaces: “Bolsonaro attacks pro-democracy letter again (...)” (lines: 2-4). Moreover, this alluded reinforcement develops further, when, as reported by the media outlet, Bolsonaro refers to the pro-democracy manifesto as “(...) the little letter (...)” (line: 7). From a critical perspective, the mobilisation
of little projects the emergence of textual violence. It recycles and expands a sense of hierarchisation, which Bolsonaro’s declaration projects in Figure 2.

It is important to note that, from a genealogical perspective, Bolsonaro uses little frequently – as a discursive resource, in order to construct himself as a ‘superior’ actor in contexts of conflict/crisis. Little is commonly mobilised by Bolsonaro, when he is confronted with entities or participants that may lead one to see him as inferior\(^{20}\) in such contexts.

The recycling and expansion alluded to also contribute to making more explicit why the clash between collective (e.g. manifestoes) and individualistic forms of pro-democracy textual manifestation (e.g. tweets) should not be disregarded in Bolsonaro’s declaration. In Figure 3, we can see his explicit refusal to adhere to USP’s manifesto, in case Lula became one of its signatories.

In sum, we can observe that the reported statements in Figure 3 (if understood as projecting a ‘conversation’ with Bolsonaro’s individual tweet in Figure 2) give visibility to his explicit dynamics of ratifying a perception of dispute for protagonism and legitimation in the face of the discursive authority of USP’s manifesto as a collective pro-democracy textual manifestation. To understand why USP’s manifesto becomes ‘authorised’ to circulate democratically two aspects need to be observed. On one hand, the manifesto not only emerges from a domain of power-knowledge that is specialised (i.e. a source of legal discourse), but also (and most importantly): the discourse projected through the manifesto is a Constitutional one. On the other, Bolsonaro, as a recalcitrant commentator, used his Twitter account in order to promote his own ‘letter’, which, according to the message that he projected, would neither be compatible with the pro-democracy views of USP’s “little letter”, nor with those of his opponent: Lula.

There is another implicit and relevant aspect in Bolsonaro’s dynamics. Bolsonaro’s explicit textual dynamics makes use of two different media spaces to become amplified. It is necessary to observe how this dynamics involves the media space of traditional journalism as its domain of culmination. In this way, an additional dimension or layer of networked violence can be activated. More precisely, in Figure 3, this suggested activation is connected with how the space of the news item and, as a consequence, the democratic and Constitutional principle of freedom of press may amplify a process of naturalisation. The latter can vulnerabilise democracy through textual violence.

This naturalisation is developed through an attempt to militarise the electoral process\(^{21}\), which, according to the Brazilian Constitution, should be conducted by civilians\(^{22}\). Here, we can see the rise of a militarising configuration or a military order of discourse (SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2022). This order, as discussed elsewhere, connects military, political and media discourses, whilst opening a

\(^{20}\) During the Covid-19 pandemic in Brazil, Bolsonaro repeatedly disseminated a belief that the deadly Covid-19 infection should be simply regarded as ‘a little flu’ (cf. SOUZA JÚNIOR, 2021, pp. 4-5).


\(^{22}\) It should be noted that, unlike the U.S., Brazil has in its Judiciary power a special segment, the Electoral Justice. For more details, see: https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/15/bolsonaro-brazil-election-trump-gop-jan-6-insurrection/. Accessed on: 08 Oct 2022.
pathway to the performative production of textual violence and vulnerabilisation in/of democracies, as a result of the activation of military interferences in civilian domains.

The attempt referred to allows for the amplification of Bolsonaro’s militarising ‘suggestion’, which is reported (without any indication of democratic or Constitutional contestation) in the space of journalism as follows: “If the Armed Forces were invited to participate in the Elections Transparency Commission and presented suggestions, let the technical teams discuss. Maybe the Armed Forces are wrong? But do not refuse this approach and this conversation.” (lines: 26-30).

If the relational perspective is considered (cf. Section 1), Bolsonaro’s reported statements in Figure 3 suggest a sense of Constitutional deviation, which seems to be naturalised/trivialised in the space of traditional journalism. This deviation would potentially promote relations of friction as follows: (i) between State institutions (i.e. The Armed Forces/Brazilian Army and TSE - the Superior Electoral Court); and (ii) between the Executive and the Judiciary powers. In this way, we would have, ‘from the inside’ of democracy, rule of law giving rise to a configuration that would be capable of legitimising and/or ratifying the naturalisation of traces of a state of exception as a manifestation of networked violence.

In this context, exception would materialise through Bolsonaro’s ‘simple suggestion’. However, this ‘suggestion’ ought to be read as a kind of textual violence, which, discursively, can subvert and vulnerabilise the textual dimension of democracy. This ‘suggestion’ also exposes how the Brazilian Army may be activated locally to take part as an actor in a context that projects an atmosphere of crisis and competition between institutions. The military are expected to operate through a domain of inter-institutional dynamics. The latter can lead the Army to take a pathway to what can constitute a deviation from their Constitutional duties, at the expense of taxpayers, whilst the military partake in a Commission whose Constitutional prerogatives of legitimation are civilian in nature.

As an effect, this scenario can promote exception instead of the ratification of the Constitutional order/normativity. The alluded senses of deviation/subversion, violence and vulnerabilisation would become manifested if the dynamics of redirecting the Armed Forces to a civilian domain (i.e. the Elections Transparency Commission) became a reality.

When examined through the genealogical lenses, it is possible to understand how a trajectory of ‘conversation’ between Figures 1, 2 and 3 is projected; and how these can reveal additional (in)visible layers and dynamics.

If critically observed, invisibilising (or not targeting explicitly) those who could be framed as a threat to democracy can be viewed as one of the key dynamics in USP’s manifesto. When Bolsonaro refuses to endorse the message of democracy that the manifesto projects and promotes his individual tweet, it can be viewed as an attempt to ‘replace’ or compete with USP’s manifesto. This dynamics seems to lead him to ‘take a bait’, which, in a sophisticated way, was ‘left hanging’ in the manifesto. The interconnexions between Figures 1 and 2 show how, as he takes that ‘bait’, this may
performatively contribute to projecting Bolsonaro as a source of violence or the potential 'aggressor', whose dynamics the manifesto seemed to denounce, but did not explicitly mention.

To sum up, the interconnexions between Figures 1, 2 and 3 seem to amplify Bolsonaro’s projected ethos of aggressor. One of the indirect effects of this alluded amplification points to how Bolsonaro’s conspicuous refusal to adhere to USP’s pro-democracy manifesto promotes and amplifies the image of Lula as his main opponent, whilst ratifying, through an invisible or indirect dynamics, the latter as a pro-democracy candidate. Understanding this indirect amplification of Lula’s image in that way becomes possible, since Figure 3 indicated that he was about to become a signatory of USP’s manifesto.

3.3 Democracy, (re)interpretation and co-existent ‘messages’: a ‘conversation’ between USP’s letter-manifesto and ‘the people’s letter’

In this section, we shall look at how the so-called people’s letter ‘converses’ with USP’s letter-manifesto. Figure 4, below, allows us to explore dynamics of (re)interpretation and related (in)visible dynamics that (de)naturalise networked violence:

**Figure 4: The people’s letter**
In Figure 4, the people’s letter seems to propose and promote a dynamics that reinterprets, ‘translates’ and makes visible several aspects. The latter seemed invisibilised or gained less attention in USP’s pro-democracy manifesto. In paragraph (1), the people’s letter appears to contest the specialised way through which USP’s manifesto communicated the message of democracy.
This epistemic contestation, however, does not seem to reject or defy the authority that legal discourse (in accordance with the Constitution) confers to USP’s manifesto. The contestation makes visible a dynamics of expansion, which addresses an often invisible (and very subtle) layer of networked and textual violence.

This layer points to the repertoire or principles of democracy (e.g. rule of law) and their constitutive legal complexity as a form of epistemological violence – a violence that democracy may impose, for example, on the so-called ‘ordinary citizens’ (cf. Section 1). The following question is indicative of that (violent) sense of complexity which triggers contestation: “Much has been said about democracy. But, after all, what is democracy for us, the people?”

Additionally, the dynamics of expansion referred to makes visible a dispute that seeks to expose epistemological complexity and overcome some sort of ‘communicational breakdown’ or barrier between ‘the people’ and domains of specialised discourse like, for example, universities or courts of justice.

At this point, it is important to stress how translation can contribute to overcoming this communicational barrier. In the people’s letter, translation emerges as a visible communicational and sociopolitical dynamics of democratisation or ‘palatability’, which can help ‘the people’ in their task of understanding ‘encrypted’ or complex democracy principles, such as rule of law. Locally, the strategy derived from this dynamics allows for more comprehensive and complex processes of reinterpretation than those that have been mobilised by USP’s manifesto. The latter resorted to different semiotic systems/resources (i.e. Brazilian Portuguese and other languages/signs) in order to circulate its message of democracy, including the global sphere (cf. Figure 1).

In Figure 4, we can see how the translated and communicated meanings of democracy expand it as a message. These meanings and message, firstly, point to traces of co-existence, which emerge as transmedia resonances. Secondly, these resonances bring into the spotlight disputes that gain visibility, as we explore additional paragraphs of the people’s letter. When we trace and contrast these resonances, translated meanings and message(s) of democracy, it is possible to perceive a ‘conversation’ between media spaces. As a consequence, in Figure 4, we can see some sort of translanguaging being strategically developed as a derived form of ‘translation’.

Translanguaging, in this context, emerges as a dynamics that crosses discursive fields and serves to make levels of discursive specialisation less complex (or more understandable), pointing to how Constitutional principles of democracy, such as rule of law and secular state, resonate through those levels. In Figure 4, these principles co-exist, being reaffirmed and communicated through translanguaging, in a ‘less complicated’ way, as paragraph (2) shows: “Democracy means that we have the right to vote, right to freedom of thought, right to profess our faith and creed. Moreover, it means to live without [fearing] authoritarian threats (…)”. This co-existence, as an effect, reinforces, firstly, the crafting of democracy as a continuous endeavour as well as a collective
construct. Secondly, this suggests stark contrast with Bolsonaro’s individualistic dynamics of “pro-democracy” textual manifestation, which projected networked and textual violence in Figure 2.

In Figure 1 (cf. lines 25-30), aspects related to social inequalities (i.e. “race, gender and sexual orientation”) as well as deficits in essential public services (i.e. “health, education, housing and public safety”) are presented or ‘translated’ as “challenges” that “the State is inefficient [to deal with]”. In Figure 1, such aspects seemed to have been naturalised as attributes that are part of the repertoire of liberal democracy. These “challenges” (a term that is often found in the liberal jargon) did not seem to be understood as part and parcel of what liberal democracy as a regime of government can also produce. If contrasted with Figure 4, this process of naturalisation, which projects networked and textual violence in Figure 1, seems to focus on the defence of rule of law as the cornerstone of democracy, whilst everything else (e.g. inequalities and deficits) appears to be framed as ‘collateral’ effects.

In Figure 4, it is exactly this idea of regarding rule of law as ‘the real’ driving force of democracy that projects a dispute. The latter leads us to see how democracy becomes a disputed message. The message under dispute indicates that the constitution of this system of government ought not to be viewed or defended solely from the point of view of legal discourse or political liberalism (cf. Section 1). Undoubtedly, rule of law is central, for example, to the constitution of liberal and representative democracy. Nevertheless, from a genealogical perspective, this cardinal principle may also be activated or embraced in order to produce exceptions to the rule, as certain ‘democratic’ claims or ‘suggestions’ emerge, giving visibility to traces that point to dysfunctional democratic panoramas (cf. Section 3.2, Fig. 3).

As it stands, in the people’s letter, this disputed message involves the principle of rule of law, whilst the latter seems to be mobilised in order to expand democracy’s repertoire (cf. Section 1). Through this alluded expansion, democracy’s repertoire and its associated legal positivity/normativity are activated no longer to identify “challenges” that seem to be invisibilised or framed as collateral effects. In turn, through this expansion, this disputed message gives visibility to two notions of ‘justice’. In Figure 1, USP’s manifesto takes as central a notion of justice that is specialised, being more oriented by the technicalities of the legal domain.

In Figure 4, this specialised notion of justice appears to be complemented and balanced, making visible a(n) expanded/hybrid form of democratic consciousness/repertoire. The latter is not simply restricted to/by the technical/legal domain. It becomes, to some extent, more sociopolitically inclusive, projecting an emergent positivity or notion of social justice. Through this notion, the idea of social democracy emanates and becomes interconnected with that emergent positivity/notion. This interconnexion allows us to understand that, in the panorama under discussion, the notion of social democracy and its historicity can be viewed as a more ‘productive’ discursive construct, when we compare the repertoires of liberal democracy and social democracy, and the panoramas that each of these notions can derive.
For this, in Figure 4, the notion of social democracy and its productivity point to traces which become central. These can no longer be framed as ‘collateral effects’ in democratic panoramas that seem to be more robust, since they are influenced by two interconnected notions: democracy and justice. As a result, two groups of traces that interconnect and are oriented by the notions of social democracy and social justice can be highlighted in the people’s letter:

a) Components of relevance: (i) gender and/or sexual orientation (paragraphs: 3 and 10), (ii) education (paragraphs: 4 and 7), (iii) race (paragraphs: 5 and 9), housing (11), health (paragraph: 14), public safety (paragraph: 16);

b) Expansions and aspirations: (i) infra-structure (paragraph: 13); (ii) employment and citizenship (paragraph: 15); and (iii) culture and leisure (paragraphs: 6 and 17).

These invisibilised traces or less detailed dimensions in Figure 1 resonate from an expanded notion of democracy, which gains visibility in Figure 4. This alluded expansion indicates the necessity of amplifying liberal democracy’s repertoire in the context under discussion, whilst calling into question Fukuyama’s thesis (cf. Section 1). These traces, dimensions and expanded notions lead us to understand that the abovementioned repertoire/consciousness seems to be limited to relationally cater for the contextual and current democratic aspirations of a considerable amount of Brazilians.

As it stands, Figure 4 suggests that this limited repertoire, then, needs to be locally expanded, by incorporating a relational and more comprehensive notion of citizenship, which can be sustained and developed in tandem with an expanded notion of social justice. Otherwise, the erected wall of democracy, if (de)limited to/by the notion of rule of law, may begin showing its ‘cracks’ or, in other words, it may become dysfunctional, vulnerable to networked violence and/or disruptions. It is this notion of citizenship, after all, that the co-existing traces listed in the people’s letter appear to dispute and reflect upon. Indicative of this co-existence is what the message of democracy that the final paragraph of the letter文本ually projects as a form of denaturalisation of violence whilst it envisages: “Freedom, welfare, rights and opportunities”.

A FINAL PANORAMA

I have been arguing that violence can be performatively operated in a networked way, through the domains of language and Discourse. The operationalisation of this kind of violence gave visibility to textual violence and epistemic disputes. The latter have been ‘translated’ in this research as dynamics of (de)naturalisation of violence. To some, the notion of textual violence should not be conceived as ‘real’ violence. If this perspective is taken into account, one may argue that the focus on this ‘subtle’ kind of violence could be viewed as one of the limitations of the present study.

Notwithstanding, I have sought to show that currently this ‘subtle’ type of violence ought not to be framed as a ‘minor’, ‘less disruptive’ or ‘less destructive’. I contend that textual violence can
lead us to identify the first signs of friction and/or fracture in the erected wall of rule of law – here, translated as the central pillar of democracy. Textual violence can also open a pathway to the activation of additional dimensions of the repertoire of networked violence in unpredictable ways.

When we reflect on Bolsonaro’s communicational strategies of techno-preacherism and de-calendarisation (cf. Introduction), we can see that these have interconnected locally with the script of Trumpism. Both the script and its related resonances appear to have contributed to Bolsonaro’s defeat in the 2022 presidential race. In 2020, Trumpism generated a similar result in the U.S. With Bolsonaro’s electoral defeat, a demand which combines the domain of social justice with that of rule of law as part of democracy's expanding repertoire of checks and balances has re-emerged locally. The alluded combination would pave the way to hold Bolsonaro accountable for the charges that he faces – some including accusations of genocide against indigenous people. As discussed, language and Discourse allow us to understand democracy as a discursive construct, which gives visibility to the textual dimension of democracy and its related resonances. The latter lead us to look at how digital circulation in connexion with digit(al)ised texts can disseminate and/or counter violence.

Lastly, in what concerns the contributions of this study, I would highlight how, depending on one’s theoretical and methodological perspectives, it invites, encourages or challenges researchers from diverse areas and transcultural contexts to address and discuss democracy. Additionally, it offers a perspective that takes as central the roles of language, Discourse and texts as common (inter/trans)disciplinary elements. These elements, as primary sources of (in)visible traces, can tell us a great deal about the democratic (?) contexts through which such traces emerge.

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