The event of *trolling* in the order of Brazilian political discourse: boundaries between humor and hate speech

O acontecimento da trollagem *na ordem do discurso político brasileiro: limites entre o humor e o discurso de ódio*

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Abstract: The article aims to analyze the event of *trolling* in the order of Brazilian political discourse, occupying a place on the threshold between humor and hate speech. Considering the impact of the internet on the political scene and the rise of the extreme right, as well as the discursive practices that emerge from it, the discussion will contemplate the emergence and functioning of political *trolling* in Brazil. The objective will be to demonstrate that *trolling*, here taken as an event, provoked a discursive mutation in relation to the ways of saying hate speech within the political discourse, since the latter, in contemporary times, adopts previously regular humorous strategies only in a digital environment. With view to this discussion, two statements produced by the Brazilian extreme right will be analyzed, particularly materialized in a public speech and in a public gesture. As a theoretical-methodological contribution, we will use the tools offered by Foucaultian Discursive Studies, especially regarding the archaeological method proposed by Michel Foucault and the notions of statement and event.

Keywords: Political discourse; Trolling; Humor; Hate speech

Resumo: O artigo objetiva analisar o acontecimento da *trollagem* na ordem do discurso político brasileiro, ocupando um lugar no limiar entre o humor e o discurso de ódio. Considerando o impacto da internet no cenário político e a ascensão da extrema direita, bem como as práticas discursivas que daí emergem, a discussão contemplará a irrupção e o funcionamento da *trollagem* política no Brasil. O intuito será o de demonstrar que a *trollagem*, aqui tomada como acontecimento, provocou uma mutação discursiva em relação aos modos de dizer do discurso de ódio no interior do discurso político, uma vez que este último, na contemporaneidade, adota estratégias humorísticas anteriormente regulares apenas em ambiente digital. Com vistas a tal discussão, serão analisados dois enunciados produzidos pela extrema direita brasileira, particularmente materializados em uma fala pública e em um gesto público. Como aporte teórico-metodológico, utilizaremos as ferramentas oferecidas pelos Estudos Discursivos Foucaultianos, sobretudo no que concerne ao método arqueológico proposto por Michel Foucault e às noções de enunciado e acontecimento.

Palavras-chave: Discurso político; *Trollagem*; Humor; Discurso de ódio

1 Introduction

"She [reporter] wanted a scoop. She wanted to give a scoop, at any price, against me"[1]. There it is the declaration put forth by the current Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, on 18 february 2020, in an interview for a group of supporters in front of the Alvorada Palace (URIBE, 2020). Given the sexual connotation of the statement, with this declaration – apparently inoffensive, followed by laughter from both Bolsonaro and the attending public –, the president insults the journalist of *Folha de São Paulo*, Patrícia Campos Mello. The insult referred to an article published in december 2018 in which the journalist revealed a leasing scheme of marketing companies hired to deploy mass messages during the 2018 electoral campaign, which would have favored the president's election. Due to this accusation, Patrícia Campos Mello would have suffered severe persecution from far-right groups, which only increased when her findings were put in check by an ex-employee of one the hired companies, in a briefing to the CPMI of Fake News. The declaration of Jair Bolsonaro is a response towards the journalist and a gesture of support for the deponent, which would be denied by *Folha de São Paulo* in the very same day (VEJA, 2020). More than that: the declaration of the president, such as other uttered by himself and his supporters, is a statement that attests the event (FOUCAULT, 2014; 2020) of *trolling* (troll-behavior) within the framework of Brazilian political discourse, holding a place between the fine line of humor and hate speech[2].

To understand this event, it is *ex ante* necessary to state that until 1997, the archive of political discourse was more homogenous, i.e its means of production was more systematic (SARGENTINI, 2015). However, in the past 20 years, a series of factors from the most diverse orders have created a disturbance within the political discourse: the popularization of the internet, the intense use of social media by political agents and, more recently, the ascension of far-right movements and the proliferation of fake news, all have produced discontinuities in the order of political discourse[3]. One of the aspects that

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[1] Original version: "Ela [repórter] queria um furo. Ela queria dar o furo a qualquer preço contra mim" (URIBE, 2020).

[2] We will adopt the concept of hate speech as defined by the UN: "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of what they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor" (UNITED NATIONS, 2019, p. 2).

[3] Here we make a distinction between the moderate/mainstream right, which has prevailed in the Brazilian political system since redemocratization and whose main characteristic is the defense of the market

suffered from this discontinuity is the use of humor. In this sense, we can say that the Brazilian presidential campaign of 2014 already produced a structural break relative to previous campaigns given the use of aggressive humor, even though through sutil and indirect attacks (CHIARI, 2021). Between the campaigns of 2014 and 2018, there was a considerable intensification and expansion in the number and aggressiveness of the use of humor. This is because, in 2018, humor was used as hate speech. It was a campaign whose degree of aggression was classified as "uncontrolled, pure and tolerant": "It consists of disqualifying the other through attacks, provocations, threats and direct accusations. It lies on the threshold between symbolic and physical aggression" (CHIARI, 2021, p. 38)[4]. It is this kind of aggressive humor, regularly used by the current president and his respective allies, that characterizes trolling.

In this paper, we consider the concept of political trolling as coined by Lamerichs et al: "not only as an act of posting hateful messages and memes, but as a wider phenomenon through which users engage in influential, toxic behaviour" (2018, p. 182-183). In these terms, we consider trolling as an event that, in the order of political discourse and under the veil of a humorous and harmless discourse, makes possible an escalation of authoritarian and conservative discourses, causing a discontinuity in the use of humor in the political scenario and promoting the resurgence of hate speech directed to certain social groups. It is this event that we propose to discuss here, considering its irruption and its functioning in the dispersion of Brazilian political discourse. As a corpus of analysis, we will take two statements produced by the Brazilian extreme right, particularly materialized in a public speech and in a public gesture.

2 The event of trolling: irruption and function

Despite the recent visibility of the term troll, particularly in the early 2010s, the first record of the nomenclature comes from the *Usenet* platform, created in 1979 in the United

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economy; and the radical right/extreme right, which overlapped after the victory of Jair Bolsonaro in the 2018 elections and which can be characterized as having a neoliberal economic perspective, conservative agendas and state interference in citizens' private choices, in addition to an aversion to the system politics and persecution of opponents (SANTOS; TANSCHEIT, 2019).

[4] Original version: "Consiste na desqualificação do outro por meio de ataques, provocações, ameaças, e acusações diretas. Encontra-se no limiar entre a agressividade simbólica e a física" (CHIARI, 2021, p. 38).

States[5]. The migration, on the part of trolls, from this type of platform to social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr was largely due to the rise of the alt-right (short for the term alternative-right, or "alternative-right") in the Western political context, especially after the election of former US President Donald Trump in 2016. Lamerichs et al (2018) state that the alt-right has a long history of ties to the American extreme right, which has grown considerably since the 1990s, with the spread of an exacerbated patriotism. Neiwert (2017 apud LAMERICHS et al 2018, p. 181) defines the alt-right of recent years as a "movement which consists of seemingly disconnected groups - nativists, patriots, white supremacists, and self-declared neo-Nazis to name a few". These are groups that, although homogeneously classified, have conflicting agendas; and precisely these conflicting ideas would have produced the immense and singular universe called the "alternative right", which has its origins in white nationalist ideas, in the "traditionalist" ideologues of the extreme right and whose adherents are recruited and organized mostly through the web.

Among the various discursive practices (FOUCAULT, 2016) inherent to the alt-right, the mastery of the art of trolling was introduced it to the national scene. An internet troll is:

> someone who fosters discord online, provoking strong emotional reactions from readers and often changing the topic of conversation. Trolling does not always have an obvious political purpose; a troll may be looking for nothing but a moment of nihilistic amusement. Trolling can take the form of insulting someone's appearance or deliberately giving bad advice about a technological problem, for example. But the Alt-Right trolls for a purpose. By leaving sites specifically aimed at a radical right-wing audience and joining discussions at other message boards, in, for example, the comment sections of major news venues, YouTube, and especially on Twitter, the Alt-Right is able to circulate its message widely. Alt-Right trolls help disperse the movement's views far beyond what would be possible if the movement could only be found on its own platforms. (HAWLEY, 2017, p. 19-20)

Thus, trolling would be based, initially, on a discursive practice that attacks the interlocutor's sensitivity and that diverts the subject as an objective that aims at humor despite the aggressive means of the troll. But, beyond that, trolling, as used by the alt-right, is still a practice that helps to spread messages within the movement, using humor

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[5] Usenet is a distributed network, that is, a network that is not controlled by a single source. It works with servers from different hosts feeding each other, distributing and storing data. In such a network, users post text messages on forums that are grouped by subject.

to distribute hateful messages. While old white national movements are considered reactionary, bitter and antisocial, the contemporary alt-right presents itself as cheerful and jovial, even when members of this group say abominable. For example, non-believers of the Holocaust treat the genocide as a joke. This discursive difference around the same issue favors potential supporters of the alt-right, as this group attracts new members with boldness (edginess) and fun. These idiosyncrasies are responsible for a paradox on the right, as adherence to trolling groups occurs, contrary to other movements such as the Klux Klan, because the alt-right potential threat is comparably smaller, which generates even more fear in face of traditional politics (HAWLEY, 2017).

The displacement of trolling from its usual environment to popular digital media entails some changes in this practice. Sanfilippo and Fichman (*apud* ANTUNES, 2019) present the existence of two troll profiles on social media: social and political. Social ones are driven by the search for belonging or personal trust. Political trolls, in turn, attack opponents' arguments in comment sections or social media and news sites, platforms where they spread their ideals. Political trolling, in addition to being a practice of common web users, has become, especially since the 2016 US elections, a regular practice among politicians sympathetic to the alt-right, who use their discursive strategies, without necessarily being members of the movement. Stein (*apud* ANTUNES, 2019) points out former President Trump as a practitioner of trolling, because, in addition to sharing, on his official social networks, content produced by trolls, such as memes and tweets, the Republican also uses identical discursive strategies to attack their political opponents. Thus, what could previously be read as a form of humour, albeit questionable, ends up taking on a political agenda with an extremist right wing. A nihilistic and contemptuous politics of humanity: "Contemporary trolls find pain humorous and use it as a weapon from which they derive amusement and power at the expense of another person's mental, physical, or emotional well-being" (OLSON; LAPOE, 2017, p. 119).

Similarly, Brazilian political representatives have also been using trolling to draw the attention of potential followers. The recently deceased Brazilian far-right guru Olavo de Carvalho, for example, published a photo and address of journalist Denis Russo Burgierman on his social media (SILVA, 2019). The attack occurred due to an article published about the philosopher in Época magazine, which earned the journalist the title of enemy by Olavo de Carvalho. Carvalho's attitude represents a case of doxxing (the act

of revealing identifying information about someone on the internet). Cases like this prove the ideological bias of trolling, in which there is the imposition of political ideals, used as a pretext for attacks. They are practices of bragging and inflammatory humor, which act as an agitator and cause emotional shocks in those who do not belong to the group. Thus, the exploration of trolling, in the Brazilian political sphere, mobilizes certain predominant emotions in the sphere of the sensitivities of mass societies, such as anger and resentment, which inflame political polarization and encourage the dissemination of hate speech.

The conquest of the Brazilian presidency by Jair Bolsonaro – or by the "Partido dos Trolls", according to Avelar (2020) – not only promoted the rise and popularization of the extreme right in the country, but also provided an outlet for the use of digital trolling, used incessantly by the Bolsonarism's ideological group on social networks, especially on WhatsApp, and whose use assumes a series of rhetorical regularities:

> reiterated performance in the same vehicles, extremely aggressive recording against the interlocutor or the subject thematized in the discourse, complete disregard of the difference between factual truth, unsubstantiated hypothesis and pure invention, hyperbolic mode of discourse, permanent postulation of something hidden and adoption of an ambiguity about the seriousness or not of the utterance and the belief or disbelief of the uttering subject in it. (AVELAR, 2021, p. 256)[6]

One of the aspects pointed out by the author is fundamental to understand the use of trolling as a discursive strategy for political purposes: uncertainty about the veracity of information aims to support automatic denial, in case the utterance is denied or questioned, in addition to providing the necessary humor for conservation. of user attention in the ephemerality of social networks. In this way, the troll operates in a discursive game in which truth and lie are amalgamated and confused within the digital discursive order. This context of proliferation of statements that are beyond the scope of the instances and mechanisms for ascertaining the veracity of discourses intersects with the struggle for the domain of "truth" fostered by the culture war. And this cultural war, according to Rocha (2021, p. 113), "implies a fundamentalist understanding of the world,

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[6] Original version: "atuação reiterada nos mesmos veículos, registro extremamente agressivo contra o interlocutor ou o sujeito tematizado no discurso, desconsideração completa da diferença entre verdade factual, hipótese não fundamentada e pura invenção, modo hiperbólico do discurso, postulação permanente de algo oculto e adoção de uma ambiguidade acerca da seriedade ou não do enunciado e da crença ou descrença do sujeito enunciador nele" (AVELAR, 2021, p. 256).

whose corollary is the pure and simple elimination of everything that is different"[7]. It is from this agonizing conception of cultural dispute, in which there is no space for democratic dialogue, that the Bolsonarista discursive stratagem conquered space in the Brazilian political context. And it is in the meantime that trolling ceases to be a "joke" of some web trolls, and becomes a strategy for the proliferation of hate speech by members of the ideological core of the Brazilian extreme right.

That said, and considering the distinctions presented before between the use of humor and the levels of aggression between the 2014 and 2018 elections, it can then be said that the practice of trolling is configured as an event, understood according to Foucault (2014; 2020)), in the order of Brazilian political discourse. On the one hand, we conceive as an event (FOUCAULT, 2020) the utterances that materialize trolling, given the fact that they produce, through their functioning and within the archive of political discourse, a series of discontinuities, particularly those concerning to the use of humor in this scenario. On the other hand, we also conceive as an event the very functioning and the very dispersion of the trolling phenomenon within the power relations. After all, also according to Foucault (2014), an event is "always a dispersion; a multiplicity. It is what weighs here and there; is polycephaly". It is something that "is dispersed among institutions, laws, political victories and defeats, claims, behaviors, revolts, reactions" (FOUCAULT, 2014, p. 175)[8]. Thus, to consider trolling as an event is to consider a phenomenon that both materializes in the utterances it produces, and is dispersed within the political struggle, promoting ruptures of different orders.

3 Materialities of trolling: public speeches and public gestures

In a previous paper (NASCIMENTO; BRAGA, 2021), we analyzed the role of trolling in memes produced by the Brazilian alternative right. Here, considering the dispersion of trolling within the political race, our proposal is to extend this analysis to two more types of materiality: public speeches and public gestures. To do so, we start from the

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[7] Original version: "implica um entendimento fundamentalista do mundo, cujo corolário é a eliminação pura e simples de tudo que seja diverso" (ROCHA, 2021, p. 113).
[8] Original version: "sempre uma dispersão; uma multiplicidade. É o que pesa aqui e ali; é policéfalo". Trata-se de algo que "se dispersa entre instituições, leis, vitórias e derrotas políticas, reivindicações, comportamentos, revoltas, reações" (FOUCAULT, 2014, p. 175).

Foucauldian idea (1999, p. 56-57) according to which, despite the common tendency towards a teleological view of events, it would be necessary to consider them not from notions such as consciousness and continuity, but from notions such as "the event and the series, with the play of notions that are linked to them; regularity, causality, discontinuity, dependence, transformation". In this way, foucaultian discursive studies do not aim to understand the interplay of causes and effects that permeates events, but to "establish the diverse, intersecting, often divergent, but not autonomous, series that allow us to circumscribe the 'place' of the event, the margins of its contingency, the conditions of its appearance" (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 56)[9]. Therefore, it is in the dispersion of statements that trolling materialized in political memes of the extreme right has already presented us what we will analyze, here, the functioning of the event of trolling in speeches and public gestures in the Brazilian political context. Some question emerge: What are the conditions of possibility for the rise of trolling in the state language? Why these statements and not others instead?

We will start our analysis with the statement described at the beginning of this article. There, in February 2020, Jair Bolsonaro makes a misogynistic statement about Patrícia Campos Mello, a journalist from *Folha de São Paulo*, in reference to the testimony of a former employee of a marketing agency in the CPMI of Fake News. The journalist had been responsible for journalistic articles that revealed the hiring of such companies during the 2018 election campaign, which is why she had been harshly persecuted. In addition to this offense, in the same statement, Bolsonaro still uses the derisive context to perpetrate an aggressive speech against the PT, his main opponent during the presidential elections:

> She [reporter] wanted a scoop. She wanted to give a scoop, at any price, against me [laughs from him and the others]. In 2018, he [Hans] said that she would arrive and ask: Bolsonaro paid for you to disclose information via Whatsapp? Another thing, if you made fake news against PT, less with less gives more in math, if i'm going to lie against the PT, i'm speaking well, because the PT just did stupid things. (URIBE, 2020)[10]

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[9] Original version: "as do acontecimento e da série, com o jogo de noções que lhes são ligadas; regularidade, causalidade, descontinuidade, dependência, transformação" (...) "estabelecer as séries diversas, entrecruzadas divergentes muitas vezes, mas não autônomas, que permitem circunscrever o 'lugar' do acontecimento, as margens de sua contigência, as condições de sua aparição" (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 56).
[10] Original version: "Ela [repórter] queria um furo. Ela queria dar o furo a qualquer preço contra mim [risos dele e dos demais]. Lá em 2018 ele [Hans] já dizia que ela chegava e ia perguntando: "O Bolsonaro pagou para você divulgar pelo Whatsapp informações? ". E outra, se você fez *fake news* conta o PT, menos com

Foucault (1999) affirms that discourses should be taken as sets of discursive events. And these events are not immaterial, on the contrary, they take effect in materiality: the events are produced "as an effect of and in a material dispersion" (1999, p. 58)[11]. Thereby, we take the above statement as an event that erupts and is inscribed in a set of heterogeneous formulations in which trolling is dispersed in the contemporary Brazilian political scenario. It is a statement that, anchored between humor and aggressiveness, leads us to the strategic use of derision in political discourse. Feuerhahn (2001) asserts that ridicule and derision have contempt and evaluative subtraction of the object to which they refer as points in common. Derision is presented, then, as a strategy of devaluation and exclusion of social objects considered despicable. Therefore, the laugh of derision is a laugh that is based on contempt, from which a double movement is signaled: on the one hand, it intensifies the feeling of belonging among those who share the values conferred on the object; and, on the other hand, a detachment from this feeling is assumed, given the supposedly humorous context.

That said, the derisive use of the word "scoop", in such conditions of possibility, makes possible the inference of an ambiguity on the part of the interlocutor: the first moment the president mentions the term, he refers to journalistic jargon, which designates the publication of exclusive news or information; the second time he utters that same word, he recovers the misogynistic connotation of the term, insinuating that the journalist would be wanting to have sex with him. This enunciative game operates according to the double meaning of derision: in the same way that the laughter shared between Bolsonaro and his supporters marks their misogyny in relation to the journalist, it also signals the distance of these subjects in relation to the possible reprisals that could result from said action, considering that "humor makes it possible to say or suggest unpleasant ideas, without fear of reprisals or violent reactions" (ZIV; DIEM, 1987 *apud* MERCIER, 2001, p. 11)[12].

In fact, the use of derision in order to refer to the journalist's sexual organs is part of a recurrent discursive practice of sexist populist leaders. According to Finchelstein (2019, p. 280), "this vulgarity and sexist obsession with sexual organs is not occasional

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menos dá mais na matemática, se eu for mentir contra o PT, eu tô falando bem, porque o PT só fez besteira" (URIBE, 2020).

[11] Original version: "de efeito de e em dispersão material" (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 58).

[12] Original version: "o humor possibilita dizer ou sugerir ideias desagradáveis, sem medo de represálias ou ações violentas" (ZIV; DIEM, 1987 *apud* MERCIER, 2001, p. 11).

and clearly shows a peculiar tendency of recent populism". Like Bolsonaro, former Ecuadorian president Abdalá Bucaram also made statements with sexual connotations on several occasions, such as when he compared his "big tomatoes" to genitalies of his political opponents. De la Torre (*apud* FINCHELSTEIN, 2019) explains that such leaders display their virility as a form of resistance to "effeminate elites". In their objectifying speeches regarding the female gender, they claim to express what all men think, but cannot say. According to these leaders, their acts and bodies reiterate the masculinity of the people: the "people", in this case, concerns only their male followers. These are discourses that result in the maintenance of stereotypes that subordinate women and expand the sexist authoritarian power pact.

Such resources of derision integrate the rhetorical aesthetics of trolling used by the extreme right, and the statement we are dealing with is one of the elements of this discursive chain. After all, the ambiguity characteristic of derision is also a trait adopted by trolling, since it confers uncertainty about the seriousness of the utterance and the speaker's belief or disbelief in what he utters, guaranteeing the function of automatic denial if the utterance is denied or questioned (AVELAR, 2021). In the case analyzed above, Bolsonaro makes sexist statements against the journalist, in addition to making unsubstantiated hypotheses about the political conduct of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT)*. Despite the possible negative effects of his speech, or even the accountability that may fall on him, the president uses the automatic denial inherent in trolling as an escape route for the consequences of his actions.

Therefore, the use of trolling as an attempt to attenuate the seriousness about the production of injurious speeches goes against the responsibility inherent to this type of enunciation. According to Butler (2021, p. 54), "whoever utters hate speech is responsible for the way it is repeated, for reinforcing this type of speech, for reestablishing contexts of hate and injury"[13]. Once shared on social networks, hate speech reaches the victim not only symbolically, but also through real threats, as the public enunciation of a misogynistic hate speech, carried out by the subject who occupies the highest position in the country's executive power, supports the existing structural male sexism in Brazil and feeds the enunciative network that distributes this discourse in other enunciative contexts.

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[13] Original version: "quem enuncia o discurso de ódio é responsável pela maneira como ele é repetido, por reforçar esse tipo de discurso, por restabelecer contextos de ódio e injúria" (BUTLER, 2021, p. 54).

After all, "There is no statement that does not presuppose others; there is none that does not have, around it, a field of coexistences, effects of series and succession, a distribution of functions and roles" (FOUCAULT, 2016, p. 121)[14].

And it is precisely considering such series and successions that Bolsonarist trolling can be characterized as a whole discursive practice that maintains a regular aggressive humor in its manifestation; a humor filled not only with criticism and pure verbal attacks, but also with various discursive mechanisms that aim to disqualify the other through ridicule. A trolling, therefore, that uses derision both to delegitimize its opponents and to dodge questions considered problematic. Suffice it to say that the statement analyzed here, more particularly the statement "She wanted a scoop. She wanted to give a scoop, at any price, against me", was uttered shortly after the president was questioned by a journalist about the matter dealt with by Patrícia Campos Mello in her article.

But the event of trolling in political discourse is not restricted to public speech, it also extends to public gestures. Let's see the statement below:

Figure 1 – Anti-Semitic gesture usado used by the former Special Topics for International Affairs at Presidency of Republic

Source: *BBC News Brazil* (POR QUE, 2021)

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14 Original version: "Não há enunciado que não suponha outros; não há nenhum que não tenha, em torno de si, um campo de coexistências, efeitos de série e de sucessão, uma distribuição de funções e de papéis" (FOUCAULT, 2016, p. 121).

During a session of the Senate in which parliamentarians demanded the departure of Chancellor Ernesto Araújo from office, on March 24, 2021, the international advisor to the presidency, Filipe Martins, was caught making an anti-Semitic gesture behind the back of the President of the Senate, Rodrigo Pacheco. The aide joined his thumb and forefinger, kept the other fingers stretched and made repetitive movements with his hand next to his jacket. The criticism that he faced was due to the connection of this gesture to racist movements. The three outstretched fingers express the letter w, alluding to the word white. The circle formed, in turn, refers to the letter p, in reference to the word power. The symbol, then, represents white power. Despite the accusations, Martins later refuted any racist connotations in the gesture and asserted that he was just fixing the lapel of his suit (URIBE; COLETTA; CARVALHO, 2021).

The use of gestures that have a double meaning, that is, one meaning for a certain group and another for the majority of the population, is a component of a policy called dog whistle. This policy makes use of coded language that means one thing to the general population, but has specific meaning to the subgroup it is targeting. Thus, this subgroup understands the message and is empowered (NEMER, 2020 *apud* ALESSI; HOFMEISTER, 2020). It is a policy that is part of the strategic use of trolling, making use of codes disseminated among its members to enable the dissemination of hate speech in the public arena. This aesthetic, widely used by the American alternative right, was appropriated by the Brazilian extreme right and has been used by some adherents of this ideology, as we can see in the statement in question. As with other modes of materialization of trolling, the use of injurious gestures outside certain ideological bubbles can cause negative effects on the subjects who practice such acts, given the criticisms made to the advisor. However, the automatic denial and dubiousness intrinsic to trolling are possible escape routes used by trolls.

In addition to the meaning, the type of humor used in the gesture is also restricted to a given group. This is specifically about the humor of superiority. In it, there is no co-participation of the pairs present in the communication, since only the troll and the members of its group have the knowledge of the serious status of its practice, directing the other interlocutors to a state of Kantian minority (FOUCAULT, 2010). The superiority humor operates under a logic of group belonging in which its members mobilize similar toxic sensitivities, such as indignation and anger, in relation to others.

Thus, Filipe Martins' gesture is both a nod to the other trolls and an externalization of his "superiority" in relation to the other interlocutors, who do not have the knowledge about the seriousness/humor of that gesture in relation to the white supremacist movement.

Regarding the repercussion of such acts, it is important to emphasize that political trolls use the controversy produced to divert the focus of public debate, which starts to focus on the act of gesticulation itself. About this characteristic of trolling, Avelar tells us that:

> Troll-defining is the infinite amount of time and energy devoted to the art of repeatedly intervening in a conversation in order to dynamit the conditions of possibility of that conversation, while turning the very scrap of dialogue left over into an eternal self-talk, about who he is, about what he does. This is a troll. (AVELAR, 2021, p. 260)[15]

In this way, the use of a coded language through unusual gestures in the daily life of normies, that is, people who are not trolls, causes a centralization of the debate around its possible meanings and its degree of seriousness and/or just kidding. This movement diverts the political debate on matters of great relevance to specific issues, such as the gestures themselves. Thereby, members of the Brazilian extreme right who are inspired by the aesthetics of the American alternative right make use of this practice to guide and conduct the course of politics in the country. Proof of this is that the statement analyzed here was produced during a critical period of the pandemic in Brazil, during which thousands died as a result of the coronavirus and during which several criticisms, from different sectors of society, were woven regarding the denialist conduct of the Government. Federal. With the event of this statement, however, many of the debates that could be centered on the pandemic turned to its elucidation.

Thus, the event of trolling in Brazilian political discourse, materialized in different materialities, such as speeches and public gestures, is made possible by the resurgence of authoritarian discourses in the country's political scenario. Courtine (2006, p. 77), when studying the authoritarian phenomenon, states that "discourse analysis does not ask if what the discourse says is true, but tries to ask how the discourse assures what was

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[15] Original version: "Definidora de troll é a quantidade infinita de tempo e de energia dedicada à arte de intervir repetidamente em uma conversa de forma a dinamitar as condições de possibilidade daquela conversa, enquanto transforma o próprio frangalho de diálogo que sobra em um eterno bate-boca sobre ele próprio, sobre quem é ele, sobre o que ele faz. Isso é um troll" (AVELAR, 2021, p. 260).

constructed as truth"[16]. So, it is up to the subjects who fight for an egalitarian democracy to understand the functioning of this discursive strategy, which covers up hate speeches through humor, and to combat its harmful effects of persecution and imposition of certain narratives as true.

4 Conclusion

The rise of the extreme right, especially since the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, and the massive use of social media as a communication tool, make use of humor a way to camouflage hate speech in the Brazilian political scenario. Since the last presidential campaign, the functioning of a brutal humor against political opponents and social minorities, materialized through trolling, has been regularly used as a rhetorical strategy by the president and his allies, especially those who belong to his ideological base and reproduce an aesthetic discourse from the American alt-right, of which trolling is an essential component.

Considering the dispersion of trolling within the political struggle, we examined its event through two types of materialities: public speech and public gesture. With the first one, we analyze that trolling takes up some characteristics of derision, such as double meaning and ambiguity, using such resources both to delegitimize the veracity of accusations about political practices, and to avoid problematic questions about certain subjects. Regarding the practice of trolling materialized in a public gesture, we observe that it not only integrates the "dog whistle" policy, making use of a coded language, but also materializes the specific humor of trolling: the humor of superiority. A type of humor whose level of aggression is known only to the troll and its members.

Thus, the rise of trolling from the deep web to the state language reveals how much this event has been producing mutations and discontinuities in Brazilian political discourse and how essential this discursive strategy is for the aesthetic constitution of the extreme right, especially in relation to the use of the discourse of hatred produced under the veil of alleged humorous harmlessness. It is a discursive strategy that operates with the aim of ridiculing the political enemy and persecuting subjects already historically

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[16] Original version: "a análise do discurso não pergunta se o que o discurso é verdade, mas tenta perguntar como o discurso assegura como verdade o que foi construído" (COURTINE, 2006, p. 77).

marginalized, so that their confrontation is an unavoidable duty of democratic commitment.

Contribution

Myllena Araujo do Nascimento: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft; **Amanda Braga:** Supervision; Writing - analysis and editing.

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