

Man with Capital M: A Discursive Analysis of Jair Bolsonaro's Gender Performativity on Twitter During the 2022 Elections¹

Homem com H: uma análise discursiva da performatividade de gênero de Jair Bolsonaro no Twitter durante as eleições de 2022

Hombre con H: un análisis discursivo de la performatividad de género de Jair Bolsonaro en Twitter durante las elecciones de 2022

Dandara Oliveira Lima
Universidade de Brasília (UnB)
Brasil
ORCID: 0000-0003-2899-9250

Liliane Maria Macedo Machado
Universidade de Brasília (UnB)
Brasil
ORCID: 0000-0003-2576-486X

Abstract: This article seeks the effects of meaning in tweets from the personal Twitter account (currently X) of the former President of the Republic of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, when he was concerned with his gender performativity, his "role as a man" in the context of the elections of 2022, between July 15th and October 30th. Thus, we seek to understand how the discourse reinforces an anti-gender agenda, through the use of symbols and representations aligned with a hegemonic masculine language. As we demonstrated by recognizing the discursive formations The Messiah, Man with capital M and Wombs of the Nation, this strategy arises both through the reaffirmation of self and through the representation of the masculine and feminine in a strictly binary logic.

Keywords:

French Discourse Analysis, Gender Studies and Feminisms, Twitter

¹ Translate by Lee Sharp.

Resumo: Este artigo busca os efeitos de sentido nos tuítes da conta pessoal de Twitter (atualmente X) do ex-presidente da República, Jair Bolsonaro, quando este preocupa-se com sua performatividade de gênero, o seu "papel como homem" no contexto das eleições de 2022, entre 15 de julho e 30 de outubro. Assim, buscamos compreender como o discurso reforça uma agenda anti-gênero, através do uso de símbolos e representações alinhadas a uma linguagem hegemônica masculina. Como demonstramos ao reconhecer as formações discursivas O Messias, Homem com H e Ventres da Nação, esta estratégia surge tanto pela reafirmação de si, como pela representação do masculino e do feminino em uma lógica estritamente binária.

Palavras-chave:

Análise do Discurso Francesa, Estudos de Gênero e Feminismos, Twitter

Resumen: Este artículo busca los efectos de significado en los tuits de la cuenta personal de Twitter (actualmente X) del ex Presidente de la República, Jair Bolsonaro, cuando se preocupa por su performatividad de género, su "papel de hombre" en el contexto de la Elecciones 2022, entre el 15 de julio y el 30 de octubre. Así, buscamos comprender cómo el discurso refuerza una agenda antigénero, a través del uso de símbolos y representaciones alineadas con un lenguaje masculino hegemónico. Como demostramos al reconocer las formaciones discursivas El Mesías, Hombre con H y Vientres de la Nación, esta estrategia surge tanto a través de la reafirmación de uno mismo como a través de la representación de lo masculino y lo femenino en una lógica estrictamente binaria.

Palabras clave:

Análisis del discurso francés, Estudios de Género y Feminismos, Twitter

1. Introduction

At the time Jair Bolsonaro was elected president, in October 2018, Brazil was undergoing some political instability following the *impeachment* of the first elected female president, Dilma Rousseff, and the imprisonment of the leading candidate in voter preference polls, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Concurrently, the reactionary ideologies associated with Bolsonaroism attracted a number of followers, including supporters in Congress.

Bolsonaro consistently and openly “voiced his misogyny, his homophobia, his negrophobia, his contempt for indigenous people, and his desire to sell Brazil to the highest bidder” (Vergés, 2020, p. 29). And that would continue even after taking office. At the time (and even nowadays) social networks were blamed for this and for the growth of the political phenomenon of Bolsonarism.

The centrality of social networks revolves around government strategy. “Jair Bolsonaro transformed the analog world into a large content production studio for these platforms” (Lago, 2022, p. 52). The media revealed the “Cabinet of Hate”² that was created by the Planalto Palace to use digital media as a form to attack the adversaries of former president Jair Bolsonaro.

The former president’s personal Twitter account³ was used as a place to argue and create conflicts⁴. Bolsonaro tweeted an average of seven times a day⁵, according to a survey from the Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalism.

The former president often, and blatantly, pushed his anti-gender agenda by using “symbols and representations of a hegemonic masculine language” (Guazina et al., 2021, p. 45). The “moral framing” in Bolsonarism messages enabled “the resurgence of religious activism in national politics” and promoted “coalitions between new and old conservative, reactionary or extremist political groups” (Guazina et al., 2021, p. 45) that supported the former president's political project.

Our position is that *Twitter* is designed in such a way that it facilitates the circulation of hate speech in general, particularly misogyny. Let us not forget that Jack Dorsey, the former CEO and founder of *Twitter* told the *The New York Times* that “small choices made users and media companies prefer sensationalism over accuracy” (Dorsey, as cited in Valente, 2023, p. 166). In other words, *Twitter* users are often encouraged to learn the platform’s logic of competitiveness and beating out “competitors” (Castro, 2022, p. 96). Furthermore, the algorithmic logic of this social network tends to group like-minded individuals together (Castro, 2022, p. 97). “Individuals with similar positions isolate themselves from the rest of society, and

² Available at: <https://www.estadao.com.br/politica/bolsonaro-e-o-gabinete-do-odio-entenda-as-investigacoes-da-pf/> Access on: Oct.26, 2023.

³ We chose to use the original name of this microblog since the data analyzed in this article was captured before Twitter changed to X.

⁴ Available at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/epoca/bolsonaro-faz-do-twitter-seu-palanque-virtual-23572419>. Access on: May 4, 2022.

⁵ Available at: <https://abraji.org.br/noticias/mais-de-98-dos-tweets-do-presidente-sao-de-interesse-publico> Access on: July 16, 2022.

thus only hear opinions and information that reinforce their particular group's position" (Recuero, et al., 2021, p. 4). *Twitter* extends the reach of misinformation (Recuero & Soares, 2021, p. 5) and polarized narratives both in an ideological sense and the polarization that occurs when one group has a strong dislike toward another. By using *Twitter*, Jair Bolsonaro was able to communicate directly with the type of public he wanted to (in this case, his voters) without any interference from intermediaries. It was like a behavioral laboratory used to naturalize Bolsonaro's ideas.

Searching and mapping Jair Bolsonaro's tweets before and during the 2022 elections is relevant as it will allow us to further understand the effects of meaning behind the former president's misogyny in the context of an electoral debate. The main objective of this article is to study the effects of meaning behind former president Jair Bolsonaro's tweets (from his personal Twitter account) involving gender performativity and his "role as a man". This behavior arises both from the reaffirmation of himself and from the representation of the masculine and the feminine in a binary logic.

To achieve this objective, our theoretical/methodological contribution consisted of the French discourse analysis as it looks at how language works beyond what is said, and understands discourse based on the association between text and context and between language and its materiality. These reflections are associated with the Foucaultian perspective on discursive formations and the exercise of power. As Machado and Moraes (2019) explain, "in Foucaultian terms, power is of the disciplinary type, which organizes space and controls time. [...] It is perceived in the norms and constraints of discourse, in privileged knowledge, and in the processes of validating truth that format messages" (p. 109). Later on, we shall take a more in-depth look into the concepts of this methodology.

All of Jair Bolsonaro's Twitter posts during the pre-election and election period of 2022 (July 15 to October 30) were captured, mapped, and analyzed. The corpus was consolidated using the social media occurrence monitoring tool, *KnewIn Social*, an artificial intelligence (AI) platform that monitors keywords or mentions about products, personalities, and for the purposes of this article, open profiles, as is the case with the @jairbolsonaro account. The @jairbolsonaro account published a total of 789 tweets between July 15 and October 30, 2022.

Following Michel Foucault's (2006) suggestion, the discourse took into account the "cultural and historical conditions, the economic conditions, and the political conditions of its emergence and formation" (p. 49).

2. Gender and Patriarchy

In this article, we will look toward Feminist and Gender Studies for ways to understand what we mean by "gender" and how Jair Bolsonaro's gender performativity intends to maintain hegemonic systems, especially patriarchy. In a Brazilian society, the white man is "the one who holds the power and is the holder of the norm" (Foucault, 2005, pp. 72-73), unlike the "dispensable bodies" (Vergés, 2022, p. 10) such as women, among others.

Jair Bolsonaro knows this and thus directs his communication towards these types of people. A person who follows Bolsonarism is thought of as "a Eurocentric, white, masculine and heteronormative individual" (Lago, 2022, p. 50). Before we continue, it seems relevant to us to conceptualize what we understand by the term "gender". After all, the adoption of the term "gender" destabilizes previously fixed epistemological categories, especially within the human sciences and social sciences. The white man, the "holder of the norm" (Foucault, 2005, p. 72), is challenged to the extent that he leaves the place of universal subject.

North American historian Joan Scott (1986), in her article "Gender: a useful category for historical analysis", defines gender as the "constitutive element of social relations based on differences between the sexes" (Scott, 2019, p. 67). This subsequently led to criticism of the idea of a universal female subject which obscures the differences that exist between women themselves, in terms of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other intersectionalities. For example, Teresa de Lauretis' concept (1987/2019) of "gender" assumes the masculine as a starting point and, in this way, maintains the binary between men and women and the existence of women as opposition to men, ignoring the differences between women themselves.

Once we accept the fundamental feminist concept that the personal is political, [...] we can no longer claim that there are two spheres of social reality: the private or domestic sphere of family, sexuality, and affectivity; and the public sphere of work and productivity. Instead, we could posit several interrelated sets of social relations—labor, class, race, and sex-gender relations [...] Men and women are not only positioned differently in these relations, but women are differently affected by the different sets. (Lauretis, 2019, p. 130)

We draw attention to Brazilian politician Lélia Gonzalez (1935-1994), who did not coin the term "intersectionality", but had theorized on the subject *avant la lettre* in texts published between 1983 and 1988. Her concept of "Amefricanity" deals with the interconnected relationship between gender, race and social class, while also denouncing the strength of colonialism and imperialism on the experiences of women in "AMERICA as a whole (South, Central, North and insular)" (Gonzalez, 2019, p. 349). Similarly, Saffioti and Almeida (1995, p. 9) highlight the fact that subjects are necessarily multifaceted and the result of several subjectivities.

Contemporary philosopher Judith Butler (2003) argues that gender is neither "the causal result of sex, nor as apparently fixed as sex" (p. 22). It reinforces the idea of *gender performativity*, that is, "any gender is a historical situation and not a natural fact" (Butler, 2019, p. 215). This understanding, in conjunction with Saffioti and Almeida (1995) intersectional thinking (p. 9), seems to us to be the most appropriate. Thus, we move away from any essentialist perception in the idea of a universal woman or a fixed gender expression and we do not hierarchize gender by ignoring other divisions relevant to African-American women (Gonzalez, 2019).

Gender is constructed within and through language, which leads to our discursive analysis of Jair Bolsonaro's tweets during the pre-campaign and the 2022 elections that create effects of anti-gender meaning or overvaluation of the masculine. More than just using the former president's references to women, we look at the naming of gender as an attempt to regulate gender performativities.

The construction of the genre is historical and collective; its acceptance and reproduction occur in individual and performative acts. However, maintaining women in conditions of oppression is not the result of these individual acts but rather the social conditions of hegemonic systems such as racism, eugenics, Eurocentrism, patriarchy, and neoliberal capitalism. When Jair Bolsonaro constructs statements that regulate the role of "women", it is an individual act - even if from a privileged vector - and is only sustained because there are several hegemonic systems that support it, especially (but not only) patriarchy.

Just like "gender", the concept of "patriarchy" has been challenged by different authors due to the reductionism it presents to "universal patriarchy" - which ignores the various forms of oppression and systems of reaction and resistance which women have been subjected to in

different societies. "Patriarchy" has a "societal character and consistency" (Aruzza, 2015, p. 35). Aruzza presents a concept for "patriarchal systems" that departs from the idea of "universal patriarchy". She describes it as

a system of relations, both material and cultural, of domination and exploitation of women by men. This is a system with its own logic, which is at the same time malleable to historical changes, in a relationship of continuity with capitalism. (Aruzza, 2015, p. 39)

Thus, we understand the validity of the concept of patriarchy not as something given and universal or necessarily subject to capitalism or superior to it (as well as to colonialism), nor is it only in the literal sense of the term "paternal regime"; it is the name that designates the social-sexual contract signed by men yet the object of which is women (Pateman, 2020, pp. 15-16). We understand that "patriarchy" is still a useful category because it deals with the inequality of the civil relationship between men and women, and not just the private relationship, it is patriarchy that

gives men sexual rights over women⁶ [...]; configures a hierarchical type of relationship that invades all social spaces; has a material basis; embodies and represents a power structure based on both ideology and violence. (Saffioti, 2004, p. 60)

Two other interconnected concepts are noteworthy here: hate speech in a broad sense and misogyny in a specific sense. Luiz Valério Trindade (2022, p. 14) argues that

hate speech is characterized as a manifestation of thoughts, values, and ideologies that aim to demean, discredit and humiliate a person or social group. It is based on characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, race, place of origin, or class. These kinds of speech can be expressed verbally or in writing, which has been increasingly frequent on social media platforms.

One of the hypotheses supported by consulted authors (Biroli et al., 2020; Valente, 2023) is that the focal point of gender in Jair Bolsonaro's hate speech is a response to the social and political achievements of certain groups and is configured as a transnational phenomenon.

After redemocratization in Brazil, a number of conservative groups shifted their anti-communist rhetoric toward fighting feminist, LGBTQIAP+, anti-racist and indigenous agendas.

⁶ A number of examples in the Brazilian Legal Code can serve, such as the Virginity Law that was in force until 2003 which gave the husband the right to ask for a divorce if he found out that his wife was not a virgin on their wedding night. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/especial/2003/codigocivil/familia-1.shtml>. Another more recent example is a woman needing her spouse's formal authorization to have a tubal ligation procedure done, a law that was passed in 2022. Available at: <https://www12.senado.leg.br/radio/1/noticia/2022/08/10/senado-acaba-com-autorizacao-obrigatoria-do-conjuge-para-laqueadura> Access on: June 25, 2023.

Mariana Valente (2023, p. 71) refers to former president Dilma Rousseff's first term as a "progressive shock", when same-sex relationships were legalized, racial quotas were implemented in public universities, legal abortion was permitted in cases of anencephaly, and physical punishment of children was prohibited. "Conservative ideology and initiatives tend to appear when minority segments that challenge the established order become stronger to the point of threatening the ideal and material foundations of institutions" (Biroli et al., 2020, p. 24). Despite the varying terminologies (familism, fundamentalism, countermovement, and others) there are similar reactions among these groups that seek a "sexual and family order", as explored by Biroli et al. (2020).

The meeting between conservatism and neoliberal ideology guided by individualism is shaped as "a normative and disciplinary logic" (Biroli et al., 2020, p. 26) that reached its peak when Jair Bolsonaro reached the highest position in the Executive power. For most conservatives, "more than anything, women are the 'womb of the nation'" (Mudde, 2022, p. 163) and those who escape this stigma face the hostile fury of the "empire of opinion" (Lago, 2022, p. 52).

Like many of the terminologies used in this article, the concept of misogyny is the subject of dispute. In agreement with Kate Manne (2019, p. 32), cited by Mariana Valente (2023, p. 10), we believe that the idea of misogyny as just a "hatred of women" does not sufficiently account for the political nature of this phenomenon. Misogyny is seen here as a feature of a social system – especially capitalist, patriarchal and colonial – in which the subordination of women is echoed throughout culture, values and institutions. Misogyny also represents the hostility that some women experience for not fulfilling patriarchal gender roles as mothers, wives, and dedicated and obliging employees.

3. Methodological Procedures

Guided by French Discourse Analysis (DA), we understand discourse as the "space, place or instance of language in which meanings emerge, or even the effects of meaning" (Garcia, 2003, p. 134). Discourse therefore involves text and context, language and materiality. By using the DA methodology, we seek to recognize the scene play and categorize the discursive formations that exemplify gender performativity by Jair Bolsonaro on **Twitter** while running for re-election in 2022.

It is worth pointing out that "discursive formation" is a Foucaultian concept that deals with regularities in the production of meaning (Foucault, 2020, p. 43). This means, they are "correlations in their simultaneity, assignable positions in a common space, reciprocal functioning, linked and hierarchical transformations" (2020, p. 42). From the perspective of Eni P. Orlandi (2018), language must be conceived as materiality, "a place of relations of forces and meanings" because it is in this "historically regulated relationship between the many discursive formations that the different effects of meaning are constituted" (p. 21). In turn, Maingueneau (2002, p. 81) proposes that "meaning is constructed within borders in interdiscourse, that which is sayable and which exercises primacy over discourse. In other words, discourse can only be produced if it is materialized from something already said. For this reason, DA

is interested in discursive functionings and is not tempted to adopt a definitive position. It does not intend to reduce to unity all the discursive formations of a conjuncture, defining a universal invariant, nor does it aim to multiply infinitely and without hierarchy the relations between the fields. At a given moment, a discursive formation is associated with certain interdiscursive trajectories and not with others, and *this is an integral part of its specificity*. (Maingueneau, 1997, p. 118)

As such, the production of meanings involves strategic procedures which "seek to capture and direct interests" (Machado & Moraes, 2019, p. 77). It is the discourse analyst's job to recognize these strategies "in order to achieve a process of meaning beyond the simply semantic level" (2019, p. 77). The DA methodological procedure subjects the discourse to an analysis that accounts for the "cultural and historical conditions, the economic conditions, and the political conditions of its emergence and formation" (Foucault, 2006, p. 49).

4. Discursive Analysis

We chose the French Discourse Analysis (DA) qualitative method because our general objective is to recognize Jair Bolsonaro's discursive strategies when constructing anti-gender meaning effects. However, the complexity of the topic and the size of the *corpus* led us down a methodological path that also involved a prior quantitative categorization⁷ in order to effectively identify the discursive formations that guide our analysis.

⁷ The entire corpus can be found in the dissertation research "Guardian of Morality, Paladin of Truth: Anti-gender and anti-press discursive strategies on Jair Bolsonaro's Twitter in the 2022 electoral and pre-electoral period", by Dandara Oliveira Lima, presented on December 18, 2023 and available at: <http://www.realp.unb.br/jspui/handle/10482/49675> Access on: Dec. 12, 2024.

We used the **KnewIn** Platform to capture tweets (after a general analysis and manual categorization of the *corpus*) and identify the most significant occurrences in the written and published material where Bolsonaro claimed to be defending the honor of women, the innocence of children, and the integrity of families in the name of God. We identified more than 230 tweets of this nature between July 15 and October 30.

This moral defense ultimately produced anti-gender effects, which we then grouped into the following three distinct formations: The Messiah, Man with a capital M, and Wombs of the Nation. We shall now analyze these formations.

4.1 Discursive Formation: The Messiah

A long thread of 18 tweets published on July 26, 2022, at 10:55pm, contained different characteristics of gender performativity. The first tweet in this series is particularly noteworthy as the former president states that "we are one people, one nation. Among us there are no different colors, there are no different sexes or social classes. Among us there are only God-fearing Brazilians [...]" (see **Image 1**).

For Lago (2022), this Bolsonarist fantasy tries to "reduce the plurality and immense diversity of the Brazilian population into a single identity of the Brazilian people" (p. 62). The tweets we analyzed for this paper show a convergence between religious discourse⁸ and the military that is coercive in nature (Orlandi, 1996, p. 75), especially when interpreting them from the perspective of gender (not to mention race and social class).

For Scott (2019, p. 67), gender is the "primary way of giving meaning to power relations", which is what Jair Bolsonaro does by denying Brazilians any identity other than their nationality and religion, actively working towards maintaining a patriarchal system (Aruzza, 2015, p. 35) - and other hegemonic systems.

⁸ Two tweets published on October 12, 2023 contained religious discourse rooted not only in the words of Jair Bolsonaro, but also in a series of statements by religious leaders who associate "the bad guys" with abortion and the destruction of the family. Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1580382691572477955> Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.

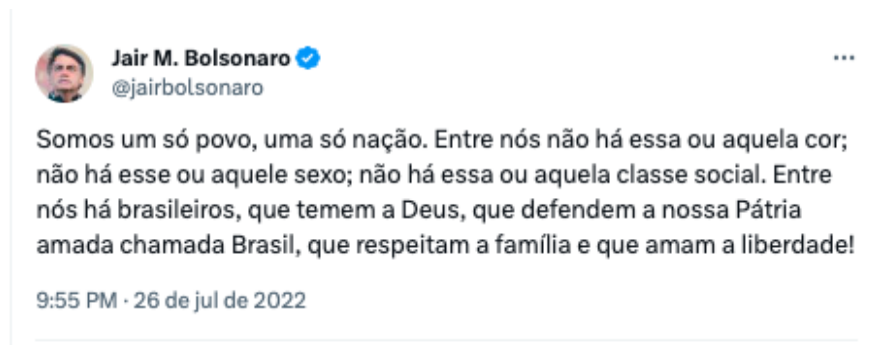


Image 1. @jairbolsonaro tweet from July 26, 2022 (Bolsonaro, 2022a).

Jair Bolsonaro went on to quote a biblical verse: "every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand Matthew 12:25" (see **Image 2**). This biblical quote expresses an interdiscourse that is shared among Christians⁹. Orlandi (2018) explains that the conditions for producing a discourse include an immediate context and a broader context, where "history and memory" are inscribed (p. 30-31). These comprise interdiscourse and discursive memory. In other words, "the discursive knowledge that makes all speech possible and that returns in the form of the pre-constructed, the already-said that is the basis of the sayable" (Orlandi, 2018, p. 31).

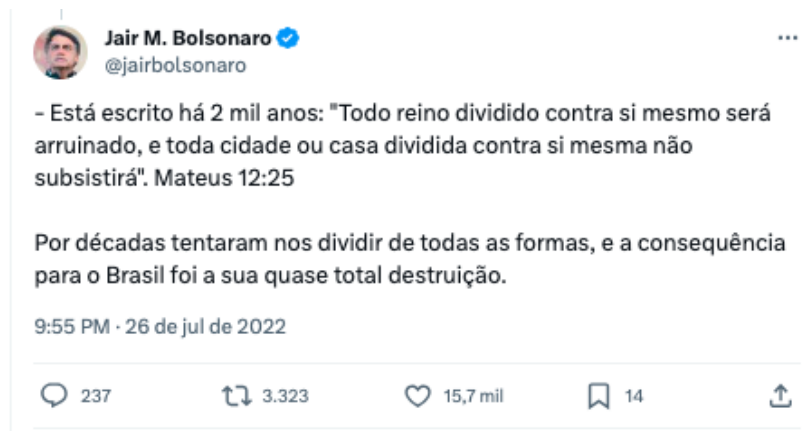


Image 2. @jairbolsonaro tweet from July 26, 2022 (Bolsonaro, 2022b).

We understand, as Miguel Lago (2022) does, that any person who follows Bolsonarism is thought to be "a Eurocentric, white, masculine and heteronormative individual" (p. 50). Being "one people" and *indivisible* means agreeing with male hegemony. This hegemony is also

⁹ This includes both those who profess their faith in the Catholic Church and those of evangelical origin. According to the IBGE, the number of evangelicals in Brazil grew by around 61.5% in ten years when compared to the results of the 2010 Census. In 2022, 50% of Brazilians claimed to be Catholic and 31% evangelical.

expressed in Bolsonaro's comments, using sexual connotations and toxic masculinity "defined in terms of violence, sexual prowess, status and aggressiveness" (Mudde, 2022, p. 164).

For social scientist Raewyn Connell (1995), masculinities are neither fixed nor universal; they are social practices that vary historically and culturally. Connell (1995) defines gender as "the way in which the reproductive capacities and sexual differences of human bodies are brought into social practice and made part of the historical process" (p. 189). She presents the concept of "hegemonic masculinity", a dominant pattern that sustains power relations between women and men, and also between different groups of men. What this means is that masculinity is constantly being negotiated within the social and political context of the day and is shaped and upheld through institutions such as family, school, work, and the communication mediums.

According to Forner and Soares (2024, p. 1), hegemonic masculinity became "the foundation for the main pillars of extreme right political discourse in Brazil", an example of which being the discourse that defends the "'traditional Brazilian family' and supports androcentric and patriarchal structures". As such, the hierarchy generated by the different masculinities generates relationships of domination, marginalization and complicity in the male universe (Connell, 1995). These relationships are based on a dominant form of hegemonic masculinity which controls the definitions of what it means to be a man.

One example that typifies Bolsonaro's call to masculinity occurred while commemorating Brazil's Independence Day on September 7, 2022, which was widely covered in the press¹⁰ and on social media¹¹. The former president compared his wife, Michelle Bolsonaro, to the wife of then-candidate Lula, Janja Lula da Silva, by proceeding to shout out the word "irresistible" five times¹².

This hypersexualized discourse goes hand in hand with the defense of reactionary values in *The Messiah*. One of the last publications in our *corpus*, posted at 7:14 pm on October 29, 2022, the day before the second round of the elections, was a list that Bolsonaro posted of 22

¹⁰ In a tweet from September 8, 2023, Jair Bolsonaro makes ironic comments and thanks CNN anchor William Waack for his comment. The excerpt with Waack's decontextualized speech is only 21 seconds long: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1567729791800836096> Access on: 15 de out. 2023.

¹¹ Available at: <https://veja.abril.com.br/coluna/virou-viral/bolsonaro-os-memes-que-viralizaram-no-7-de-setembro> Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.

¹² This was not the only time Jair Bolsonaro claimed to be irresistible. In February 2020, he also stated the same thing to journalists. In May 2021, he went further, saying he was "unbreakable and undying". We recommend the analysis of psychoanalyst Christian Dunker. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-62795997> Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.

reasons for why readers/voters should vote for him. Reason number eight on that list is: "Implement a National Policy to Strengthen Family Ties, a set of measures and guidelines that aim to encourage the creation and preservation of families"¹³.

Another example, in a tweet on August 14, 2022 (Father's Day in Brazil), the former president posted a home video of his father eating. His physical resemblance to Jair Bolsonaro is uncanny. The video contains common, everyday images, there is no dialogue, just background noises. The text included in the post is worth a closer look (see **Image 3**).



Image 3. @jairbolsonaro tweet from August 14, 2022 (Bolsonaro, 2022c).

The Bible verse quoted by Bolsonaro - Exodus 20:12 - is the fifth commandment that God gave to Moses. There are 10 commandments (or 'rules', if you will) one must follow in life in order to be accepted into the Kingdom of Heaven. It is noteworthy that two of these "rules" (Thou Shalt Not Kill and Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery) concern violence and sexuality.

¹³ Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1586481706739154946> Another example of this ideation of the father and mother can be found in: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1569525523185020929> Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.

There is a mobility in the interpretation of these two commandments, as we saw in Michel Wieviorka's analysis (1997), for whom "violence is not the same from one period to another" (p. 5). Adultery in the Bible referred to chastity - Matthew 5:28, Hebrews 13:4 - to all "sexual immorality" - Corinthians 6:9-10 - and, in some cases, to the renunciation of faith - Numbers 25:1-3; Jeremiah 3:6-10; Ezekiel 16:15-59; Hosea 4 (English Standard Version Bible, 2001).

One can say that Jair Bolsonaro does not appear to follow these interpretations of the sixth and seventh commandments, and perhaps this is because the process of meaning is open to interpretation, but it is also administered and subject to "determination, institutionalization, stabilization, and crystallization" (Orlandi, 1996, p. 52). The author, thereafter, continues,

In theoretical terms, this means that we continually work on the articulation between structure and event: neither the exactly fixed nor the freedom of the act. They are subject, at the same time, to language and history, to the stabilized and the unrealized, men and the senses make their paths, maintain the line, stop at the margins, go beyond limits, overflow, ebb. (p. 53)

We infer that Jair Bolsonaro's rhetoric "is given meaning" (Orlandi, 1996, p. 53) by the rule and also by the failure in "empirical repetition/parrot effect" of religious and reactionary speeches and sometimes in "formal repetition". For cases that interest Bolsonaro the most, there is a failure in "historical repetition", when he displaces the failure and breaks through what has already been established (1996, p. 54).

4.2 Discursive Formation: Men with a Capital M¹⁴

The strength of the authoritarian father figure also reverberates in the ways in which Jair Bolsonaro performs his gender as a man. We constantly "reference gender in certain social temporalities" (Hollanda, 2019, p. 12) and bodies only become intelligible "within the scope of culture and language" (Louro, 1997, p. 209). In a tweet from August 26, 2022 (see **Image 4**), the former president published an excerpt from an interview with Rodrigo Constantino on Jovem Pan in which he makes certain references to how he developed his masculinity.

¹⁴ We named this topic after the song of the same name, written by Antônio Barros and made famous by Ney Matogrosso. The song is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kw-6mm6Uu7c> Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.



Image 4. Tweet from August 26, 2022, in which Jair Bolsonaro gives examples of what his relationship with his father was like (Bolsonaro, 2022d).

Description of video:

The video is 1 minute and 21 seconds long and begins with a question from Rodrigo Constantino (RC). The journalist is wearing a green and yellow shirt.

RC: "There is a certain aversion to your candidacy for much more aesthetic reasons. They didn't like your stance or some comments that were taken out of context."

RC: "So, do you think you could have communicated better?"

JB: "I'm not a communicator. I'm a bit crude, man! I'm not going to deny that. I can't change it."

RC interrupts and smiles: "We all are".

JB: "I remember my father, for instance. My Catholic father. My Catholic mother. Us kids pushed a bunch of tables together in the house with the neighbors. Kind of like the tables here. Then we started walking on all fours, imitating a car. My father arrived, raised his heavy hand, and...*slap!* He said 'That's where you eat bread and feed the body. Respect the table.' That's the kind of upbringing I had and I don't think he was wrong. It worked."

JB: "I was accepted into the Agulhas Negras Military Academy. That was in 1974, and in the first descriptive geometry class, the teacher drew a line like this with two dashes underneath [*draws an imaginary line with his hand*]. 'It's a landline'. What the *hell* is this? I didn't know how to describe it. I asked for permission, and the captain there helped me out. When I got home I said: 'Dad, I'm not going to the gym today. I'm going to study more because I'm going to fail geometry if I don't'. He looked at me and said: 'You'll go tomorrow to Petrópolis, near Registro, you'll come back and pass the year'. The conversation was over. I went back and was one of the best geometry students at the Agulhas Negras Military

Academy. It's a different kind of education. There's no point in teaching your son to be a coward."

Jair Bolsonaro's gender performativity, as he himself describes it, is that of a crude man who uses violence as a form of discipline, who respects religion, hierarchy, and who rejects the idea of being a coward or, in his words, "a big coward". These characteristics were reinforced by images that refer to strength and virility (**see Image 5**), such as a muscular Jair Bolsonaro hanging out with bodybuilders (**see Image 6**), riding motorcycles (**see Image 7**), riding horses like a modern cowboy (**Image 8**) - in reference to the mythical fantasy of North American reactionaries (Cassimiro & Lynch, 2022, p. 74) - and who calls himself, as we have seen, "irresistible".



Image 5. Tweet from August 19, 2022, that reinforces gender performativity (Bolsonaro, 2022e).



Image 6. Tweet from August 26, 2022, that reinforces gender performativity (Bolsonaro, 2022f).



Image 7. Tweet from August 18, 2022, that reinforces gender performativity (Bolsonaro, 2022g).



Image 8. Tweet from August 27, 2022, that reinforces gender performativity (Bolsonaro, 2022h).

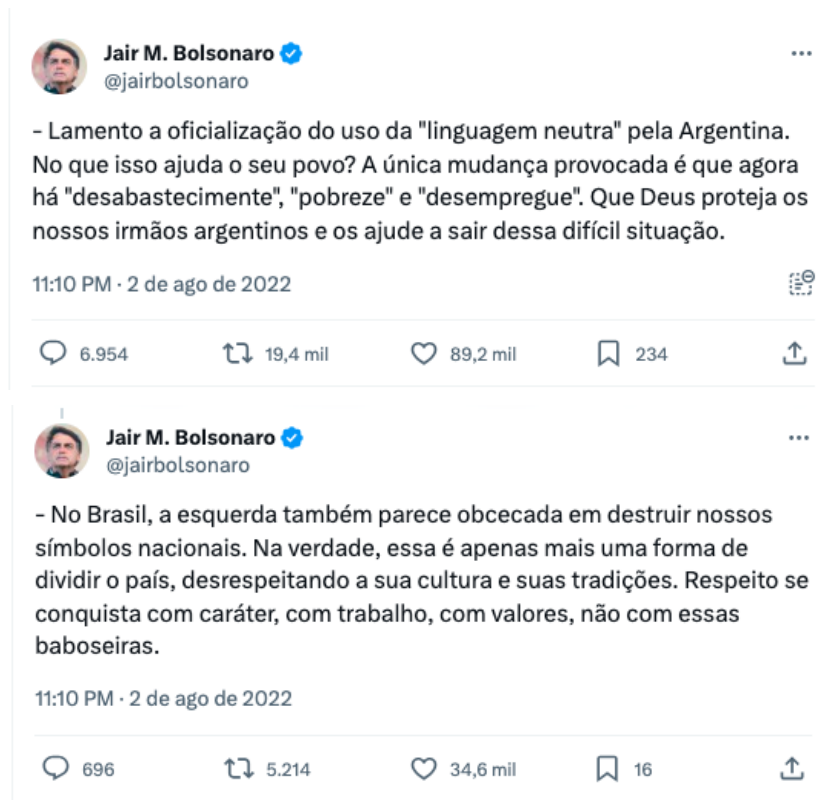
It is no coincidence that images of a masculine and powerful Bolsonaro are superimposed with the type of foul language he repeatedly uses to describe himself. His enunciative scene, a notion used by Maingueneau (2002, p. 20) to refer to the way in which discourse constructs "a representation of its own situation of enunciation", dialogues with the idea of masculinity linked to power and invincibility. At the same time, the former president actively works to disqualify LGBTQIAPN people and women.

By promoting a language based on sexual anxiety caused by threats to patriarchal masculinity and the traditional family, that is, to a man's duty to act in accordance with what society expects of him, establishes an enunciative regularity that constitutes a discursive formation [...] [*The discourse*] takes on a strategic role of domination and struggle in the social context. In this context, men, already concerned about the idea of losing status as a result of increased gender equality, can easily panic due to demagogic speeches directed against social minorities (Forner & Soares, 2024, p. 6, italic author's emphasis).

One example of this can be seen in the Twitter thread published during the pre-campaign period, on August 2, 2023 (see **Images 9 to 11**), in which Bolsonaro criticizes the use of “neutral language” by the Argentine Government. The Argentine context is important for this analysis as

the debate on "neutral language" has become the preferred stage for the cultural war of Olavian metapolitics (Cassimiro & Lynch, 2022, p. 77) in Latin America and some European countries¹⁵.

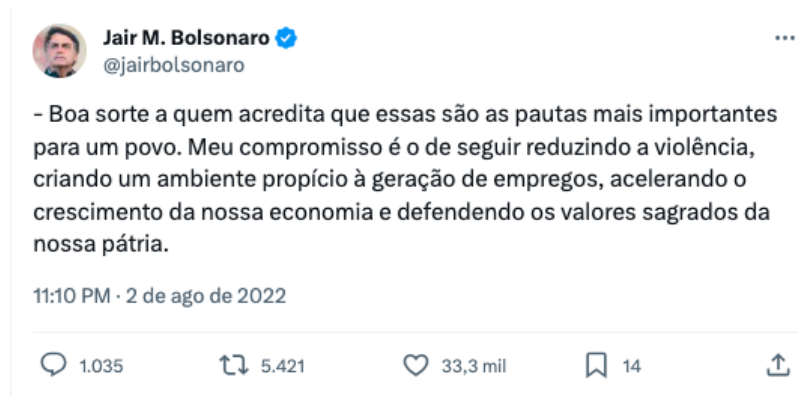
On July 22, 2022, the capital city of Buenos Aires prohibited teachers from using gender-neutral words in their classes, claiming that it violates the rules of Spanish¹⁶. A few days later, on July 28, 2022, the Argentine Ministry of Public Works published a Resolution in the Official Gazette stating that it would officially use non-sexist language and communication in documents, records, and administrative acts¹⁷. Jair Bolsonaro commented on this in the following tweets:



¹⁵ Menine, meninx or menin@: countries where neutral language is being contested. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/internacional-62025281>. Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.

¹⁶ For more information go to: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mundo/2022/07/buenos-aires-proibe-linguagem-de-genero-neutro-em-escolas-e-abre-batalha-com-ativistas.shtml> Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.

¹⁷ Available at: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2022/08/03/bolsonaro-ironiza-uso-de-linguagem-neutra-na-argentina-agora-ha-pobreze.htm> Access on: Oct. 15, 2023.



Images 9, 10 and 11. Tweet thread from August 2, 2022, about gender-neutral language that reinforces masculinist performativity (Bolsonaro, 2022i, 2022j, 2022k).

The former president begins by using misleading language. He states that Argentina has made the use of neutral language official - and not that it is a Resolution from a single Ministry. He then proceeded to ridicule (Maingueneau, 1997, p. 100) the country for using the neutral gender for words such as "desabastecimento" (shortages), "pobreze" (poverty) and "desempregue" (unemployment). He called on God to protect the "Argentine brothers" (**see Image 9**) and categorically stated that the use of neutral language represents the destruction of "national symbols", "culture" and "traditions" (**see Image 10**) - a clear association between "The Messiah" and "Man with a Capital M" discursive formation.

In French DA, language is movement and "power systems aim toward standardization" (Machado & Moraes, 2019, p. 108). Discourse exercises discipline and categorizes the contrasts of "prohibited/permited, appropriate/inappropriate, convenient/inconvenient" (Machado & Moraes, 2019, p. 108). We believe, therefore, that defending language conventions in the name of "tradition" is an attempt to conform minority groups - such as women and LGBTQIAPN+ people - as they feel that these groups represent a threat to established order (Biroli et al., 2020, p. 24). The final discursive formation analyzed in this paper seeks to mitigate this threat.

4.3 Discursive Formation: Wombs of the Nation

In addition to the religious component and masculinist gender performativity, there is a third feature of Bolsonaro's discourse which is related to how he refers to women as a social group. According to Cass Mudde (2022), politicians like Jair Bolsonaro commonly share the perception that, "women are first and foremost the 'womb of the nation'" (p. 163). These kinds of politicians are seeking to instill a "sexual and family order" (Biroli et al., 2020, p. 24) that is

"exclusively heterosexual" (p. 25), where the act of sex itself is performed only for reproductive purposes.

Joan Scott (2019, p. 56) explains that theorists who focus on explaining the notion of patriarchy point to the "means of species reproduction" to explain the "need" that men feel to subordinate women. We realize that Jair Bolsonaro's discourse works to strengthen a patriarchal system (Aruzza, 2015, p. 39) in which abortion is always related to other issues that refer to other systems that produce inequalities¹⁸.

For example, in a Twitter thread published on the eve of the first round of elections, at 00:04 on October 2, 2022 (see **Images 12 to 14**), Jair Bolsonaro claims that those who choose "his path" will be choosing "the defense of freedom and private property, the right to self-defense, the fight against drugs and violence, and the protection of life from the point of conception", just to name a few.



¹⁸ There are many examples that support this statement. On the first day of the campaign (August 16, 2022) the former president used the same trick. Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1559550052477042689>. The following day (August 17, 2022) Jair Bolsonaro stated that abortion and drugs are "the most intimate issues" of the Workers' Party. Available at: <https://twitter.com/jairbolsonaro/status/1559550052477042689>. In the second round, the term "abortion" is used in association with other reactionary issues in tweets published on the 6th, 7th, 12th, 16th, 19th, 21st, 24th, and on the eve of the second round, October 29th, 2022. Access on: Oct. 13, 2023.



Images 12, 13 and 14. Tweet thread from October 2, 2022, about “opposite paths” in which Jair Bolsonaro positions himself in favor of systems that reproduce inequalities (Bolsonaro, 2022l).

In practice, we recognize the "politics of silence" (Orlandi, 2018, p. 29) through constitutive silence, "which tells us that in order to say something, we must not say it" (p. 24). In other words, what the former president does not say is that he supports the concentration of income and assets and that he is against agrarian reform. So, to avoid saying this, he says that he supports the "defense of private property." He supports the arming of civilians - which increased sevenfold¹⁹ during his four years in office; however, he refers to it as "self-defense." He supports the war on drugs policy - which takes the lives of young black people in the Brazilian outskirts²⁰ - and supports the criminalization of women who wish to terminate their pregnancies, even in cases of rape, yet he refers to this as the protection of life from the point of conception²¹.

It is worth noting that the issues of reactionary values (in which abortion is the most recurrent) grew considerably over the three election periods: pre-election, first round, and second round. The closer it got to the final day of the second round on October 30, 2022, the more Jair Bolsonaro resorted to defending conservative values.

¹⁹ Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2023/01/22/numero-de-brasileiros-com-autorizacao-para-ter-arma-aumenta-7-vezes-durante-mandato-de-bolsonaro.ghtml> Access on: Oct. 20, 2023.

²⁰ For more information about this topic, we recommend reading Cirillo et al., "War on drugs in contemporary Brazil: prohibitionism, punitivism and militarization of security", published in the Journal Theory and Culture, Postgraduate Program in Social Sciences - UFJF v. 15 n. 2 July. 2020. Available at: <https://periodicos.ufjf.br/index.php/TeoriaeCultura/article/view/29332/21543> Access on: Jan. 12, 2023.

²¹ A Bill known as the Unborn Child Statute is currently under discussion in the National Congress. It proposes to recognize fundamental and personality rights to an unborn child, claiming it as an "unborn human being". This Statute is effectively prioritizing the embryo over the woman. It is this discursive memory that Bolsonaro raises when he states that he is in favor of life from the point of conception: <https://www.camara.leg.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=2270201> Access on: Oct. 20, 2023.

To conclude our analysis of the Wombs of the Nation discursive formation, we shall analyze some situations in which the former president used abortion to voice other reactionary agendas. it is interesting to note how all the reactionary agendas we saw in **Images 12 to 14** are attributed to the Workers' Party in **Image 15**.



Image 15. Tweet from August 4, 2022 using paraphrases (Bolsonaro, 2022m).

The objective in this tweet is to stimulate the discursive memory of his readership/voters by (re)stating everything he had already said about abortion, crime (drugs, prison release, cell phone thieves), and dictatorships in such a way that these issues are lumped together.

In this statement, Jair Bolsonaro uses intertext, the relationship between a text and other texts (Orlandi, 2005, p. 34), and resorts to paraphrasing, which is "express the same spaces of speech" (p. 36). As with **Images 12 to 14**, we note "different formulations of the same saying" (Orlandi, 2005, p. 36). In short, then-candidate Lula, the Workers' Party, and the left all represent a risk to families and children²².

5. Final Considerations

Our objective here is to better understand the effects of meaning in tweets from the personal Twitter account of former president Jair Bolsonaro and his use of a narrative strategy focused on gender performativity. We used French discourse analysis to understand this phenomenon as it manifested during the sensitive period of the 2022 elections and pre-elections.

²² We recognize that the defense of children, families and life from the point of conception are key to the Bolsonaro agenda. For this reason, the situation involving the former president and the Venezuelan girls forced Jair Bolsonaro's team to build counternarratives to support his image as "The Messiah". For more information: <https://bbc.in/3XCoGQJ> Access on: Jan. 12, 2023.

Twitter, due to its characteristics, is a social network prone to simplistic speeches (Castro, 2022; Recuero et al., 2021; Trindade, 2022; Valente, 2023) and Bolsonarism is strengthened by this. The centrality of the debate on gender in Jair Bolsonaro's discourse both appropriates a binary logic that claims women are responsible for household chores and caring for the family (Bandeira, 2014; Aruzza, 2015; Butler, 2003) and also claims that men are the "holders of the norm" and protagonists of the public debate (Foucault, 2021; Guazina et al., 2021). They also keep the various reactionary political groups that supported him on his run for office in 2018 united around his candidacy (Biroli et al., 2020; Valente, 2023).

During the pre-election campaign and the 2022 campaign, Jair Messias Bolsonaro performed the masculine gender by positioning himself as a typical example of it. In the first discursive formation, The Messiah, Bolsonaro uses values from the Christian religion as well as militarism to express his aversion to discussions and initiatives that promote diversity and the inclusion of groups whose rights are not fully guaranteed. Tweets published between July and October 2022 reject differences of class, race and gender by promoting the idea that we are one nation and one people, governed by God. Bolsonaro's nation is one that values white, heterosexual men with patriarchal attitudes. His god is the Christian god, and the Bible (which he often misuses to support his ideas) is what he claims provides the ideal of what it means to be a good citizen. He promotes patriarchal hegemonic masculinity which values the irresistible, God-fearing man.

In the second DF, Man with a Capital M, Bolsonaro continues his gender performativity by choosing his father as the quintessential figure in his life, even though, as the former president himself said, he was often violent and authoritarian. He also presents himself as a manly man, one who rides a wild horse, drives motorcycles across Brazil, and is followed by groups of bikers who idolize him. The theoretical/methodological framework of feminist and gender studies, as well as Discourse Analysis, allowed us to observe how these values and attitudes are based on a pre-constructed discourse that has been thoroughly discussed by authors such as Scott, Butler, and Louro, who explain how gender differences are constructed by denying binarism, biologism or religion in an attempt to prove that women are intellectually inferior to men.

In this same DF, Bolsonaro makes fun of the inclusive language, while also warning of the harmful consequences that arise from it, which in his opinion, equate to a divided nation in moral danger.

Lastly, the third DF, Wombs of the Nation, is where Bolsonaro expresses his opposition to issues such as the legalization of abortion and even the possibility of abortion as provided for in Brazilian legislation (in cases of anencephaly, rape, and risk to women's lives). Bolsonaro is adamant when he says that he defends life from the point of conception. By being so resolute, he effectively says nothing about the violence committed against women, such as rape, which can result in unwanted pregnancy. He opposes the right to abortion, and refers to his opponents in the second round, Luiz Inácio da Silva Lula and the Workers' Party, as enemies of the country, of childhood and of family since they defend what Bolsonaro despises and criminalizes.

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