

The “others” from the street: the discursive event of the 2013 protests

Os “outros” da rua: o acontecimento discursivo das manifestações de 2013

Los “otros” de la calle: el acontecimiento discursivo de las manifestaciones de 2013

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Abstract *We seek to point out discursive regularities which are implicit in the focus from which the demonstrations of 2013 were treated by the mainstream press. We defend the hypothesis that informative instance (re) updates a number of previous interpretations, crystallized in the common sense, usually present in the coverage of events connected to urban violence. These elements reduce the polysemy of protests and create discursive conditions that legitimize repression by state forces.*

Keywords: *Demonstrations of 2013; Violence; Journalism; Discourse*

Resumo *Buscamos apontar regularidades discursivas implícitas no enfoque a partir do qual as manifestações de 2013 foram tratadas pela grande imprensa. Defende-se a hipótese de que a instância informativa (re)atualiza uma série de interpretações anteriores, cristalizadas no senso comum, usualmente presentes na cobertura de acontecimentos ligados à violência urbana. Tais elementos reduzem a polissemia dos protestos e criam condições discursivas que legitimam a repressão pelas forças do Estado.*

Palavras-chave: *Manifestações de 2013; Violência; Jornalismo; Discurso*

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Resumen *Se busca regularidades discursivas implícitas en el enfoque desde el cual las manifestaciones de 2013 fueron abordadas por la prensa dominante. Defendemos la hipótesis de que la instancia informativa (re) actualiza una serie de interpretaciones anteriores, cristalizadas en el sentido común, generalmente presente en la cobertura de los acontecimientos relacionados con la violencia urbana. Estos elementos reducen la polisemia de las protestas y crean condiciones discursivas que legitiman la represión por parte de las fuerzas del Estado.*

Palabras-clave: *Manifestaciones de 2013; Violencia; Periodismo; Discurso*

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Introduction

The demonstrations which sparked off from June 2013 on in the streets of the main Brazilian cities provoked intense discussions with regard to many of the aspects which became the order of the day due to these events. Among others, we question the place of traditional journalism in contemporary times, the monopoly and the responsibility for administering the informative fluxes, the limits of the right to protest, the modes of the police's repressive action, the governors' incapacity to cope with the multiple and diffuse demands as well as the myriads – very often contradictory – of groups and currents which began to occupy Brazil's streets with certain periodicity.

Since we are facing an event which is still going on, the consequences and deployment of which are far from being established, we do not intend, in this article, to carry out a definitive analysis of the multiple meanings and results of this contradictory and dialogic polyphony of viewpoints, interpretations of the world, places of speech, political gestures and actions. Thus, for many years, we have been seeking to point out fundamental guiding aspects of the discursive functioning of the mainstream Brazilian press which are put into action again and allow the emergence of a certain dominant tone in the informative accounts with regard to the demonstrations of 2013. Considering this choice, we take as an empirical-illustrative basis the journalistic coverage of the episodes which have occurred from June 2013 until today.

Our hypothesis, which is established on the basis of the systematic following of the reports about the demonstrations, from June to February 2014, is that such events allow the explication, in the hegemonic journalistic discourse, of a range of focus-constituting elements which, on the contrary to what it could seem, are no novelty. We will point out in which way, during the protests and their consequences, the Brazilian press (re)updates particular anterior interpretations which are

³ Here we avoid the expression "*Jornadas de junho*" [Days of June] because we consider that the events, which were engendered from that month on, were not limited to that period. We refer to the episodes as "the demonstrations of 2013", although the processes are still going on until now.

taken not as the directing of meaning they are, but as the ascertainment of a reality: an “already-said” which is crystallised in the common sense and which assumes an aspect of incontestable truth because it is “evident”.

Such constituting elements of the hegemonic discourse on the 2013 demonstrations can be perceived, in similar moulds, in the journalistic coverage of other complex issues. These seem also to require a more explicit position on the part of mass media, such as the question of the favelas [slums], the increase in urban violence and the mediation of social conflicts.

We take as a theoretical presupposition the existence of the regularities which Foucault points out as the capacity of every society to act so that the discursive production be “at once controlled, selected, organised, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role it is to ward off its powers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (FOUCAULT, 1996, p. 9).

In this sense, we must take into consideration Orlandi’s recommendation with regard to our attempt, in the analyses of the discursive processes, to explicate the organising elements of the text so that we obtain “the comprehension of how a symbolic object produces meanings, how it is invested with significance for and by the subjects, (...) [and] how the text organises the interpretation gestures which relate subject to meaning” (ORLANDI, 1999, p. 26-27).

In other words, here we defend the perspective which understands that the meanings of events and of discourses construct themselves on the basis of an exteriority relationship, “in the conditions with which they are being produced and which do not only depend on the subjects’ intentions” (ORLANDI, 1999, p. 30). Thus, to seek the vestiges of the strategies on the basis of which the effects of meanings, which are shared and conveyed by the press, are produced is fundamental for us to be able to succeed, in Foucault’s words, in executing the proper thing of every critical task: “to question the control instances, must, at the same time, analyse the discursive regularities by means of which they form themselves” (FOUCAULT, 1996, p. 66).

It will exactly be the discursive arrangement, very often silent, which conditions the hegemonic interpretations about the phenomena of urban violence and of the complex mediation of the conflicts, which come to the surface of the informative speech in the moment in which the demonstrations and their consequences break out in the streets and in the mediatic information spaces. Thus, to reflect on these discursive regularities in order to better understand them, can help us to point out some other aspects of these conflicts and to list the alternative possibilities for a journalistic coverage, which is able to better dimension the complexities which are at stake⁴.

In order to be able to better dimension to which extent the 2013 protests present themselves symbolically for the hegemonic press and for the governors, as multiple forms of “violence”, this time in the symbolic field, we propose a dialogue with the concept of discursive event. Orlandi defines the concept as something which “gives space to a new discursivity, produces metaphorical effects which affect history, society and the subjects in many and varied dimensions: political, cultural, moral ones” (ORLANDI, 2002, p. 52). The author refers to the unified discourse of globalisation in the means of communication as a discursive process which reduces the plurality of readings. An example of this is the gesture to consider any movement the meaning of which slides towards social mobilisation as politically unacceptable.

Thus events or discourses, that affect the social order which is in force, and destabilise it, are always interpreted as threats to be repressed. So we could define this kind of action such as those which sparked off in 2013 as a rupture not only “of the level of the political discourse, thought as a kind of discourse: it is a deep rupture in the political” (*Idem, Ibidem*, p. 57).

In their first moment, the protests were able to threaten the meanings which were apparently so established until that moment: the suc-

⁴ In this article, we do not carry out an empirical analysis of reports. We will have recourse to emblematic examples which allow us to point out the vestiges of the discursive regularities which we point out as continuity with regard to the traditional journalistic coverage concerning urban violence.

cess of Lula’s, Dilma’s and Cabral’s administrations; the “evidence” that Brazil finally became protagonist in the world’s political and economic order; the Brazilians’ “happiness” and “pride” (and mainly of the cariocas [inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro] to host the world Cup and the Olympic Games, among others. This symbolic threat, on its turn, ends up spurring a “violent” counter-discourse on the part of the big press, the implicit objective of which will be to attempt to reassume the discursive control of the right to name the world.

The criminalisation of the demonstrations: of the uses of violence as common sense

From the intervention actions carried out by the State in different communities of Rio de Janeiro, in the quest of what it calls “pacification”, the journalism of Rio de Janeiro developed a specific form of discursively materialising its support: the recurrent use of violence as a discursive operator in order to legitimise the State’s repressive gestures in these *favelas*.

Such enunciative strategy is traditionally being used, with regard to the way in which the press approaches the question of the administration of the conflicts on the part of the State, in its diverse instances, especially in the reports on the emergence of the problems linked to poverty and to the strategies of survival of the lower classes. The use of the argument of the increasing violence as a legitimiser of almost any repressive action of the State explains itself due to the form in which there is, on the basis of such journalistic reports, a particular understanding of the way in which violence is considered by common sense. The only meaning of violence, which seems to permeate many of the informative reports, ends up converting itself into a political gesture of intervention in the questions to the extent that it ends up domesticating the polysemic nature of the phenomenon of *violence*.

By attempting to typify the cases of violence in a not very complex way, we noticed that the problem is that the way of viewing the question causes the emergence of another action, such as an inevitable convoca-

tion, this time a contra-violent one, based upon the social relationships involved in constant dispute. Michaud already warned about the fact that “every society is involved in its own violence according to its own criteria and it deals with its own problems with more or less success” (MICHAUD, 1989, p. 14). By not considering the complexity of the topic, many journalistic reports end up walking into the trap of transforming the phenomenon of violence into a *subject*, capable of practicing *actions*, or as an *aberration*, which would provoke the collapse of the *pacific* normality of the ordering of social life.

Thus it is convenient to remember Misse’s warning (2008) about the implications to define some act (or somebody) as violent: “we are not only describing an event, but intervening in it. To say that somebody is violent is to act on this person; it is to demand something such as another violence, in order to interrupt this person’s violence” (MISSE, 2008, p. 9).

The adoption of such discursive perspective has important political consequences. The first is that, by not considering the cases of violence as a complex mode of social relationship – the meanings of which are historically and culturally produced, thus determinable by the play of the viewpoints that are constantly in conflict – a certain kind of journalistic report ends up silencing the political, moral and cultural uses, which will be put into action by their own speeches. By reverberating the not very complexifying vision that the “problem of violence” is “naturally” a mere rupture of the “order”, the hegemonic means of communication end up constructing a false syllogism that the solution of the problem would only reside in the increase in the force of the police’s repression.

It is exactly this discursive presupposition which gave the initial tone of the hegemonic journalistic coverage concerning the demonstrations which began in June 2013. In a first moment, the emphasis of the news reports is focused on the negative impact of the protests on the routine of the city and of its inhabitants: there is a constant gesture of discursive deligitimisation of the actions to the extent that the main hook of the first reports ends up being that of the chaos provoked in the traffic and,

consequently, by the “violation” of the right to go and come of the “honest citizens”.

An example of the way in which this coverage perspective impacted on the initial debate about the demonstrations is the proposal of the Military Police of Rio de Janeiro to establish a specific area in the city for the carrying out of the protests, which, according to the institution, would guarantee the maintenance of the “right to come and go of the population of the city”⁵.

This aspect of the Military Police’s argument is not actually a novelty in the way in which the journalistic coverage of the big press used to treat protests and strikes in Brazil. The emphasis which is present in the choice of the “public prejudices” as the most important aspect of the news is recurrent in the strikes of civil servants, bank clerks, teachers and of other categories: be it in the impact of the paralysis for the users, or even in the damages caused to the “normal life” of the city due to the protests of these same workers.

Therefore we are facing a discursive strategy which splits the inhabitants of the city into two types: the *honest citizens*, who would have the “legitimate” right to the city and the *others*, who would disturb the public order with their actions. Thus a discursive equation is being constructed, which would allow to authorise the State to use force (or the suppression of the right which is constitutionally guaranteed to the citizen to manifest himself in public spaces) in order to combat such “perturbation of the order”.

Coming back to the multiple meanings which are present in the question of violence, it is convenient to remember that we can treat the phenomenon from different perspectives. Sodré proposes an opposition between different natures of “violence”: one, *anomic*, inscribes itself in the social as an “act” and it is understood “as the rupture, through the disordered and explosive force, of the juridical-social order which leads to delinquency, to marginality or to many illegitimate acts which can be

⁵ ARAUJO, V. ‘Manifestódromo’ would free vital roads and would avoid chaos in the traffic. *O Globo*, 17/8/2013.

hindered by the power of the State” (SODRÉ, 1992, p. 11). The second perspective refers to the frequently silenced violent structure the origins of which refer to the modes on the basis of which the State constitutes itself. “There we have the *invisible violence*, *institutional violence* or *state of violence*; this is a continuous, structural and irrefutable condition (...) of the State with its social apparatuses and articulations” (SODRÉ, 1992, p. 11).

We defend here that, by emphasising the traffic problems caused by the demonstrators, at that first moment the press proposed a perverse synthesis between both perspectives Sodr  points out. The hegemonic interpretation that the protests would be acts of “anomic violence” would authorise the police’s repressive force in the same discursive gesture in which it would silence the “State’s violence”, which is present in the solutions (“manifest dromo” [in Portuguese “manifesta  o is demonstration] and “aer dromo” [aerodrome, on this basis they constructed the word *manifest dromo*]), which were proposed and implemented (systematic fight against the demonstrations with the exacerbated use of force, especially by the *tropa de choque* [riot police]).

There to, Chau  (2006) already pointed out some concealment mechanisms able to broaden the legitimisation of the use of the “State’s violence” as a response to an anterior “anomic violence”. Among the various proceedings through which the “myth of Brazilian non-violence” would be engendered, two of them can help us to think about the discursive effects of this way of viewing the demonstrations:

“A sociological mechanism, which considers violence (...) as a moment in which ‘backward’ or ‘archaic’ social groups make contact with ‘modern’ social groups and, ‘un-adapted’, become violent; (...) [and] An exclusion mechanism, that is to say, the distinction between ‘we non-violent Brazilians’ and a “violent they’, ‘they’ being all those who, ‘backward’ and deprived, use force against the property and the life of the ‘we non-violent Brazilians’” (CHAU , 2006, p. 125-126).

As far as this author’s public manifestations about the 2013 protests are concerned, we have recourse to the thought she proposed to think

urban violence as a way of perceiving to what extent there was a perverse distinction in the newspapers between “legitimate citizens”, victims of an exterior evil which is the result of the practice of subjects-others-demonstrators, violent “in their essence”.

After this first moment, we perceive a discursive displacement in the hegemonic coverage. The combination of the excess of the use of force by the Military Police (who even wounded journalists) with the population’s increasing adhesion to the demonstrations and the repudiation of the demonstrators on the social networks, concerning the way in which the protests were being interpreted, provoked the fact that the hegemonic coverage silenced the damages and displacements in the city. Even though, the fusing opposition between violent/pacific people will remain as the primordial discursive operator: this time, in the opposition between the terms “demonstrators” and “vandals”. The first treated as legitimate citizens with their right to demand and the second as the order disturbers, which, once more, will legitimise the (violent) repressive actions of the riot police.

Based upon the discursive articulation of such presuppositions, the symbolic equality between “protesting” and “practicing violence” is easily adopted, in an implicit way, in the hegemonic coverage of that moment. This equality unfolds in two distinct focuses: a first one is evidenced by the arguments that the majority of the demonstrators would be young middle class people, who would not have to complain about the rising bus fares. The second focus, as we will see further, will have to deal with the ascertainment that the slum residents of Rio de Janeiro were also taking part in the protests.

One of the most emblematic examples of the first focus was protagonised by Arnaldo Jabor, commentator of *Jornal da Globo* [TV Globo News]:

“But at the end, what provokes such violent hatred against the city? We only saw this when the criminal organisation of São Paulo set fire to a score of buses. It cannot be because of twenty *centavos* [equal to the hundredth of Brazil’s monetary unit: the Real]. Most of them are young middle class people, it is visible. There were no poor people there, who need

these twenty *centavos*. There the poorer were the policemen, who were stoned, threatened with Molotov cocktails, who earn very little. Actually everything is an immense political ignorance. It is stupidity mixed with aimless rancour. Maybe there is the influence of the struggle in Turkey, which is just and important against the fanatic Islamism. But here, what are they revenging on? The cause must precisely be the lack of causes. That's it: nobody knows anymore what one has to fight for! (...) These guys are living in a past of an illusion. They are the violent caricature of the caricature of the socialism of the 1950s the old left wing is still defending here. Really these middle class rebels are not even twenty *centavos* worth⁶.

The virulence of Jabor's initial argument was so combated by the demonstrators on the social networks and in the forums for analysis and debate about the journalistic coverage that the same columnist changed his discourse some days later, and he started stimulating the protests, now considered as "legitimate" as long as they are directed at just causes such as the impediment to the approval of the PEC 37 – Proposta de Emenda Constitucional 37 [Proposed Constitutional Amendment 37, limiting prosecutors powers] by the National Congress.

Still in front of this attempt to reduce the polysemy of that which occurred in the streets, Jabor's first analysis exposes the presuppositions, implicit until then in the discursive regularity of the press: the demonstrators were no more than rebels without-cause, belonging to the middle class, who violently turned against the city, like the integrants of the Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) [São Paulo's principal criminal organisation], in clear reference to the criminal episodes which were practiced by the mains criminal faction of São Paulo in May 2006.

The State disorder as the logic of punishment

Another fundamental aspect that will allow us to complexify even more such discursive elements, which were put into action by the hegemonic

⁶ Transcript of the original video.

press to cover the 2013 demonstrations, concerns the ambiguous logic of punishment on the basis of which the State instances, which are responsible for the administration of the conflicts in Brazil, characterise themselves.

Kant de Lima (1996) points out a structural conflict in the ordering of our country: the simultaneous living between a hierarchised society, “in which different segments have different accesses to rights and duties” (KANT DE LIMA, 1996, p. 166-167) and a republican legislation, which should guarantee the existence of a public order “which would be the result of the conflict deriving from the opposition of interests, between equals, in an equalitarian society” (KANT DE LIMA, 1996, p. 167).

In Brazil, still according to the author, this conflict interferes in the functioning of the Police Apparatus and the Judicial System, causing them to function in a contradictory and conflictive way. As a consequence, we see the emergence of an institutional violence, the result not of the conflict, but of the “inexistence of consensually accepted forms and of reasonable expectations in order to promote its administration” (KANT DE LIMA, 1996, p. 167).

Such contradiction also materialises the daily paradox of many of the police actions which usually seem not to see problems in living between obedience to law and the “necessity” to have recourse to illicit means – such as torture, violence, intimidation, – as the unique way of guaranteeing the well-being of society as a whole. Summing up, “the police operate as if they were an autonomous agency, at the service of an imaginary State, entrusted with the maintenance of an unjust order, in a society of unequal people” (KANT DE LIMA, 1996, p. 174).

The police’s ambiguous “functioning” materialises a Stately functioning which puts itself above society and not on the same level of the citizen. It is for this reason that the conflict (and the protests), instead of being considered in principle as fundamental elements of any democracy (even the more liberal ones), is considered in Brazil, as an undesired perturbation of the order. Facing this threat of the protests, the State starts punishing the conflicts (and the demonstrators) instead of

guaranteeing the apparatuses which are necessary to administer them in consensuses, even if they are momentary.

The same principle of understanding the repressive function of the State will reverberate in the journalistic coverage of the demonstrations at many moments. Although Kant de Lima's summary refers to the Brazilian judicial system, it could be used, without any problems, to describe the discursive functioning of many of the big newspapers with regard to the protests that are still going on:

“Our judicial structure continues being compartmentalised, holder of various justices, all of them unable to universalise themselves, because they function legitimately and officially with distinct principles. Thus they join other mechanisms of illegal institutional violence, because they are differently involved in distinct segments of the population. (...) Since the existence of substantially different people is recognised, these people are respectively attributed different motivations, different conflicts and a different justice for each of them” (KANT DE LIMA, 1996, p. 176).

An emblematic example of this wily capacity to put oneself above the equalitarian principles of Law by using the argument that, even though, the whole society's well-being is being preserved, is the cover of the daily newspaper [based in Rio de Janeiro] *O Globo* de 17/10/2013, entitled “Crime e Castigo” [Crime and Punishment]: Harder law sends 70 vandals to jail. By relating the mass incarceration of demonstrators, the day before, the newspaper, in the same gesture in which it silenced the possible exaggerations in the generalised police's repressions, updated the discursive memory of the sensationalist reports of the old popular daily newspapers dedicated to the criminal coverage: on its cover the edition had stamped the photographs of three demonstrators who had been arrested by the Military Police, discursively treated by the newspaper as “criminals”, inclusively with the right to the presentation of their “record cards” in a tone of derision, prejudgement and irony.



Figure 1. Box of the cover of *O Globo* of 17/10/2013⁷.

After the “tolerance” phase with regard to the “good demonstrators”, the press simplified again the multiplicity of voices in the streets, reducing them to the pre-judgment materialised in the use of the term *vandals*, which once more did not leave any doubts about the character of the protests. Nevertheless in the stream of such position, the newspaper still offered another aggravating fact: with its informative option it remembered the times in which the support to the actions of the military dictatorship were equally stamped on the pages of the newspapers of Rio de Janeiro.

The reaction to the report which, on its photograph, still stamped the photograph of a bus with the demonstrators who were taken to the police station (and which silenced the fact that the large majority of the arrested were sitting on the stairs of the Câmara dos Vereadores [legislative city council], in Cilenândia [major public square in the centre of Rio

⁷ WITHOUT MASKS: JAIR SEIXAS. Baiano goes back to prison. Musician known as Baiano [from the State of Bahia] or Macanhão [Big Marijuana] is a figure always present in violent actions. In July, he was arrested for damaging the police’s car at Leblon [beach of Rio de Janeiro]. / ELISA DE QUADROS. Sininho do barulho [Little bell of the noise]. Of fragile appearance, film-producer, known as Sininho has lead the Ocupa Câmara camp [Occupy City Council] in Cinelândia since two months and defends anarchists. / RODRIGO AZOUBEL. Engaged and shot. Young man shot in arms during Tuesday’s manifestation collects participations in protests and defends vandals’.

de Janeiro], in a “*pacífic*” protest”) was immediate. The social networks, the alternative means of communication and the journalistic forums for debate and analysis reflected the “*disastrous option*” of the newspaper by choosing the simplification instead of complexifying the multiple meanings (and voices) which equally constituted these events.



Figure 2. Comparison widely propagated on the social networks between the covers of the *O Globo* 17/10/2013 and of 6/4/1968, in support of the military dictatorship⁸.

The contradictory ordering of the Brazilian State, as Kant de Lima points it out, also helps us to understand, besides what this headline rages, two aspects which, according to us, are fundamental and which were silenced in this report and in many others: the police’s inaptitude to deal with the irruption of the demonstrations and the incapacity (and intolerance) of the governors to accept that a considerable part of the population could democratically express its dissatisfaction.

⁸ Harder law takes 70 vandals to prisons / Army alerts: we will treat street rioters as enemies of the homeland.

Such elements also constitute the dialogic and conflictive complexity which was staged at the moment in which the streets were taken by different profiles, requirements and groups. Nevertheless the understanding, that what would be incumbent on the State's forces is not the administration of the conflicts, but the suppression of these conflicts as violent threats to the order, causes the fact that a large part of the press does not emphasise the polices' excesses. More than this, if the State's repressive forces will be criticised, reprehension by the newspapers will come through the “ascertainment” of that which will seem, to the newspapers, tolerance and the little use of force in the accomplishment of the function to “hinder” the protests.

Of the silence of the police's excesses to the silenced deaths of the slums

The focus of the traditional coverage had to discursively approach a deployment in its hegemonic interpretations: the ascertainment that the slum residents of Rio de Janeiro also participated in the protests. To the extent that the first version – that the protagonists were only young middle class people – vanishes, the more and more perceived presence of other social strata did not confer complexity upon the coverage. On the contrary, the integration of slum residents into the protests evidenced the discursive strategies to narrate them as merely criminal actions even more.

Something, which Misse (2008b) defines as *criminal subjection*, came into play as an important discursive operator. By describing the elements which are part of the social construction of crime, the sociologist perceives the existence of parts of the population that are previously selected as “inclined” towards crime. Such constitution of the “dangerous classes” is processed nowadays in an almost automatic way when we think like Foucault (1999) that in modernity, the focus of punishments (and of the polices' vigilance) is no more the *action practiced* in order to dedicate oneself to the disciplinary examination which will seek to identify the different degrees of “dangerousness” in the subjects.

It is exactly this certainty of a “*dangerous essence*”, inherent in the slum residents, which materialised itself in the ways in which the focus of the presence of such actors in the demonstrations converted itself into another element of ascertainment of the criminal character of the protests. An empirical example that evidences the way in which traditional journalism as well as the police use criminal subjection as a method of action is the report we received, during the development of our field work in some communities of Rio de Janeiro, of young residents who informed us about the systematic police actions, in the protest days, aiming to prevent them from participating in the demonstrations in the Centre of the city. The proceeding, which was adopted, was the constant inspection, at the slum exits, looking for evidences of the young people’s participation in the protests, such as the “transport” of masks, flags or protest posters. Many reports also mentioned an incisive questioning of the policemen concerning the motive to leave the slums in order to participate in “confusions in the city”.

Still according to the young people we interviewed, the focus on the motorcyclists was even more violent, coming to cases of preventing their exits and threatening them to send them to jail. Thus the public debate, which starts to establish itself in February 2014 with regard to the Law Project that seeks to prohibit the use of masks in the protests, as a way of preventing anonymity, had already been in vigour, since June 2013, in the “pacified” slums of Rio de Janeiro.

The fact that the police’s action in the slums is usually based upon criminal subjection and, with this, materialises once more the ambiguous Brazilian judicial system to treat in distinct ways citizens who should be equal before the law, but who recognise themselves in their roles (of subalternity and of authoritarian repression) permits the generalisation of the guilty and the crystallisation of the meanings which “evidence” the existence of dangerous classes. This very framework of pre-judgment, which is customary in the violent confrontations in the communities of the city, is discursively transposed, in an almost automatic way, to the pages of the newspapers dedicated to the demonstrations.

Strange moments of “democratic equality” are those in which occurred the concretisation of the transposition of violent repression towards the young people of the slums (in the slums) to the indiscriminate use of force against the young people of the city (from the asphalt and from the slums, together) in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. In the city and in the text, we experienced the same ascertainment Misse points out – by combating the myth of “the State’s absence in the slums” – with regard to the governors’ incapacity to administer the conflicts in a democratic way:

“it is the kind of “presence” of the State (in the form of the discretionary power of the police and of their arms, the denouncers, the police spies, as well as the transactions between policemen and bandits), and not its “absence”, which constitutes one of the main focuses of the confrontations, violence and revolt in the slums, in the housing projects and in the poor districts of Rio de Janeiro” (MISSE, 2008b, p. 30).

The culminant point of this symbolic equivalence between the police’s repression “of violence” in the *morros* [hills of the slums] and the use of force in order to combat “vandalism” in the protests can be perceived in the way in which the newspapers treated the police’s “response” to the participation of the residents of the Complexo da Maré [one of Brazil’s biggest slums] in a demonstration in Bonsucesso, North Zone of Rio de Janeiro, which started to be referred to by the newspapers as “*arrastão*” [collective robbery] (another of the crystallised discursive regularities in the common sense that “speak for themselves” in the categorisation of the “evidently violent” acts of the “dangerous classes”).

On the pages of *O Globo* of 26/6/2013, the police’s action and the confrontations which resulted in three residents and a soldier of the Bope – Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais [military police battalion] being killed, the tone of the coverage was consensual in treating the dead of the community as dealers involved in a fight with the police. The public justification of the Military Police and of the Civil Police, which was presented without contestation by the newspaper, for the exacerbated degree of the force used in the action which resulted in the

residents' deaths was that the large majority of the victims had already been investigated by the police.

The mention that the non-explicated objective of the operation was to materialise an energetic response to the Maré residents' attempt to confuse the geography of the demonstrations by also taking them to the neighbour (and to the causes) of the suburbs, was only done by the declarations of the social movements of the locality, whose speeches are frequently little reverberated by the big press of Rio de Janeiro. Besides this, in the middle of the set of information the police propagated, they reported the number of apprehensions of drugs, weapons and stolen vehicles.

Nevertheless a scenario quite distinct of that which was described on the social networks, in real time, by the integrants of the social movement of the community, such as the Observatório de Favelas [Slum Observatory]. Who followed the NGO integrants' declarations could perceive the claims of the community and the climate of indignation and fear in front of the exaggerated force and the indiscriminate use of firearms since the beginning of the action of repression of the protest, which had begun hours before in the Avenida Brasil (in the centre of Rio de Janeiro). One of the most emblematic phrases of the protests of the social movements which followed the action helps us to deepen the approach we do here in this article. One banner said that "the police who kill on the asphalt are the same who kill in the slums".

A (non) conclusion

So we designed a short trajectory which mapped different moments of the association of the demonstrations with the criminal practices. Be it when, at first view, the event seemed, from far away, for the press, to be an agglomerate of young middle class people without a specific cause and without a political identity, passing from the attempt of discursive capture of its integrants to the pure and simple criminalisation of everybody.

The fatality of the deployments of the protests of 2013, which still go on, still added, in February 2014, another sad encounter between "symbolic violence" and "violence in act": the death of TV Bandeirantes'

cameraman Santiago Andrade, who was hit by a rocket firework which was lit by a demonstrator [TV Bandeirantes is one of Brazil’s leading broadcasters]. The indignation of a considerable part of the public opinion, of the communication companies and of the press professionals in front of what happened is discursively followed by the emergence of a climate of consternation, which directly or indirectly ends up permitting the legitimacy of a new series of authoritarian-repressive attitudes: especially that of pre-judgment and of the definition of the guilt and extreme punishment of the two accused/self-confessed culprits to have thrown the firework rocket.

With this, the circle of re-stabilisation of the meanings closes itself once more: a set of daily cases of violence (of the deaths in the Maré slums, the excess of the police’s repression, the absence of the rights to a just judgment – with guarantees to defence and to the presumption of innocence) turn to discursively re-accommodate, themselves, in the place which belongs to them in the coverage: the silence which will permit the irruption of the indignant shout “of the just” in front of the violence they suffer to legitimate the “necessary” repression of those who insist in threatening the social order in vigour.

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