

In the (Mis/Re)Encounter of Voices: The Dialogical Construction of the Polemic in Utterances with a Political-Religious Theme / No(s) (des/re)encontro(s) das vozes, a construção dialógica da polêmica em enunciados de temática político-religiosa

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ABSTRACT

In Bakhtin's works on Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, there is a set of very relevant notions for the analysis of the functioning of the bivocal word, which is conceived as an utterance directed both toward its referential object and toward the discourse of others about that object. This object carries within it all the refractions of the voices that have already valued it in the discursive interactions of which it has been the theme. In this paper, I analyze the dialogic relationships that compose the speaker's axiological positioning through the polemic (open/hidden) in Facebook posts with thematic content constituted through the dialogue between the political and religious spheres. Based on Bakhtinian studies, I demonstrate how the (mis/re)encounter of voices in a given utterance demands from the contemporary subject an attentive look at the sinuous movements of the forms of emergence, circulation and management of the voices that constitute/constituted certain historical discourses in Brazilian society, with all the enunciative procedures of reworking and re-accentuating involved in this process.

KEYWORDS: Dialogic relations; Bivocal utterance; Open and hidden polemic; Facebook post

RESUMO

Nas obras de Bakhtin sobre o romance polifônico de Dostoiévski, há um conjunto de noções muito relevantes para a análise do funcionamento da palavra bivocal, concebida como um enunciado direcionado tanto para o seu objeto referencial como para o discurso de outrem acerca desse objeto, com todas as refrações das vozes que já o valoraram nas interações discursivas de que esse objeto já foi tema. Neste artigo, analiso as relações dialógicas que constroem o posicionamento axiológico do falante por meio da polêmica (aberta/velada) em postagens de Facebook com conteúdo temático constituído mediante o diálogo entre as esferas discursivas política e religiosa. Demonstro, com base nos estudos bakhtinianos, como o (des/re)encontro das vozes em um determinado enunciado demanda do sujeito contemporâneo um olhar atento aos movimentos sinuosos das formas de emergência, circulação e gerenciamento das vozes que constituem/constituíram certos discursos históricos na sociedade brasileira, com todos os procedimentos enunciativos de reelaboração e reacentuação envolvidos nesse processo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Relações dialógicas; Discurso bivocal; Polêmica aberta e velada; postagem de Facebook*

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Preliminary Considerations

For the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.202).¹

The experience with language in ordinary contexts of use, in the multifaceted practices of socio-verbal interaction in which we participate, seems to exert a sense of automatism such that it has, at times, undermined the constant and continuous exercise of reflection on the effects that language produces in our way of being in the world. The illusion of a possible homogeneity in the forms of interacting with the other and of marking our axiological/ideological position through language often seems to remove from us the perception that our (mis/re)encounter with the other and with their discourse takes place in various forms that reflect - and refract - our beliefs, values, ideas, behaviors, gestures, attitudes, etc.

Bakhtinian concepts about language are much more concerned with a person's way of acting in the world in their most natural and spontaneous activity, which is socio-verbal communication, than with the composition of a theoretical-methodological apparatus to think about language, i.e.) the utterance. After all, whether in the ethical, aesthetic or cognitive domain, in Bakhtin there is a treatise on the condition of being a speaker, who is always in a relationship of constitutive alterity with the other(s).

In this sense, my word goes to/against the word of the other, in this ambivalent game, refracted by the communicative intentions and purposes of my enunciative project in a given real and concrete circumstance of my experience, establishing bonds and links as diverse as possible with the word of others, with equally diverse discursive effects.

The media discursive sphere is not insensitive to these nuances. There, the (mis/re)encounter(s) of the voices that intersect produce(s) meanings from the desire that one wished to enunciate, marked by emotive-volitional tones that corroborate the

¹ BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and Translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

axiological position of the subjects, which are participating in social interactions. One of these [emotive-volitional] tones is the conflict/confrontation, revealed in the utterance, under complex and diverse bivocalized forms of composition, such as the parody, the stylization, the open/hidden polemic, among many others.

In this article, I aim to reflect on the dialogical construction of the polemic by analyzing the axiological positioning of the speaker in Facebook posts that carry a political-religious theme, in which I examine the dialogical relations that preside over the discursive functioning of this utterance in the sphere of communication in which it circulates. In order to do this, I undertake a reading gesture that contemplates the observation of the ways in which consciences can (mis/re)encounter themselves in this utterance. Based on Bakhtin, I attempt to demonstrate which means the enunciator uses (without an alibi) to mark his evaluative position in relation to the discursive objects the enunciator deals with, and how he or she does this from the clash/tension with the word of the other about the given object. In particular, I attempt to show how the (mis/re) encounter of voices, points of view, valuations in a given statement demands from the contemporary subject a gesture of reading the world that is mindful of the sinuous movements of the forms of emergence, circulation and orchestration of the voices that constitute/constituted certain historical facts and discourses in Brazilian society. These will become clearer in the illustration of the selected concrete utterances. Indeed, these voices appear as operators of discursive memory with all the enunciative procedures of re-elaboration and re-accentuation involved in this process.

Imbued with this purpose, I refer to fundamental concepts formulated mainly in Bakhtin's works that deal with the specificities of Dostoevsky's poetics, such as voice, dialogism, dialogue, dialogical relations, word/speech, monological novel, polyphonic novel, parody, stylization, open and hidden polemic, etc. Evidently, these concepts are related or, I would argue, something much greater unites them; after all, they find shelter in a great matrix called bivocality. However, as a theoretical-methodological framework, I intend to reflect specifically on the notion of polemic (open/hidden), in order to understand how this phenomenon conceived by Bakhtin in the analysis of the aesthetic discourse (but not detached from life; after all, in the world of culture, the boundaries between art-life-cognition are blurred in the unit of being) can also be thought of in other discursive practices from our contemporaneity.

In this sense, I highlight three essential aspects of this consideration, which are not only restricted to the concepts as elaborated by Bakhtin, but also allow us to make further incursions through the paths of dialogical discourse studies: (1) the first one, in relation to the *sphere of human activity*, by adjusting my focus on media discourse crossed by political and religious discourses – unlike Bakhtin's work, centered on the aesthetic discourse of Dostoevsky's work/poetics; (2) the second one concerns the way in which some concepts are so current in the sense of the political and ideological motivations that gave rise to them that they offer hermeneutical keys to the understanding of our socio-historical reality, with due regard to the proportions of events in time and space, of course; (3) the third one gives rise to a consideration of the ethical motivations that underlie the reporting of the discourse of the other, the refraction of another conscience, without the subject's authorization or consent, which goes beyond, in my view, the dimension of use of stylistic-compositional procedures of the artistic creation process (the ethical dimension experienced by the hero as an element of the work of art and the ethical dimension experienced by the subject in real concrete life), while recognizing, of course, the legitimacy of this aesthetic enterprise.

Here, I adopt the dialogical confrontation of the utterance as a methodological guideline for reading the data that will be used to illustrate our analysis. I rely on Bakhtin's theoretical-methodological formulations about Dostoevsky's discourse, as they are found, basically, in two reference works on the theme, to lead the discussion of the analysis of the forms of relationship between the author of the utterance and the utterance itself. To this end, I use Bakhtin's 1929² text, entitled *Problemi dell'opera di Dostoevskij* [*Problems of Dostoevsky's Work*]³ (hereafter *POD*), as well as the text published in 1963,⁴ with reformulations of the 1929 text, entitled *Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski* [*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*] (hereafter *PDP*), among others by him and Voloshinov ([1926] 2019). For the considerations proposed herein related to the 1929 work, it is crucial to consider the fact that, according to Brait,

² Here, I work with the Italian version published in 1997, with its introduction, translation and comments by Margherita De Michiel, and presentation by Augusto Ponzio. This text was published by Edizioni dal Sud, Bari, Italy.

³ TN: This text was translated into English with the title *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Act* in 1973 by R. William Rotsel, but is currently out of print. Therefore, the quotes herein use the 1984 English translation of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, by Caryl Emerson.

⁴ In the original article, in Portuguese, I work with the Portuguese version, translated directly from Russian by Paulo Bezerra, published in 2005 by Forense Universitária.

The period of elaboration, publication and reception of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Act* must be considered to be a long and complex moment involving *intellectual, artistic effervescence and, at the same time, political, intellectual and religious stances subjected to harsh penalties*: Bakhtin was jailed in 1928, exiled, his sentence was commuted in 1930, but he only returns from his exile in 1936; Voloshinov dies of tuberculosis in 1936; Medvedev is executed in 1938 (BRAIT, 2009, p.50; emphasis added).⁵

For this purpose, I rely on some specific notions addressed by Bakhtin in these works, such as dialogical relations and bivocal discourse, among others that are fundamental in this articulation. Specifically, I take the concept of open / hidden polemic – in relation to others such as parody, parodic stylization, etc. – to think about the individual and/in his or her chronotope, that is, with whom this contemporary subject, from social networks, contends / antagonizes; about what he or she contends / antagonizes. I herein consider the contemporary Brazilian socio-historical context, which has demanded from the subject a watchful, suspicious / doubtful look at discourses and centripetal discursive practices, whose purpose is to provoke axiological-ideological movements of the voices that circulate in our space-time, in a winding path that goes from silencing them to the total distortion of their historically consolidated senses. Having made these preliminary considerations, I proceed to the presentation of some theoretical assumptions.

1 Some Notes on *Dialogic Relations*

Dialogic relationships, therefore, are extralinguistic. But at the same time they must not be separated from the realm of *discourse*, that is, from language as a concrete integral phenomenon. Language lives only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it. Dialogic interaction is indeed the authentic sphere where language *lives* (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.183).⁶

⁵ TN: From the original in Portuguese: “A época de elaboração, publicação e recepção de *Problemas da obra de Dostoiévski* deve ser pensada como um longo e complexo período que envolve *efervescência intelectual, artística e, ao mesmo tempo, posicionamentos políticos, intelectuais e religiosos sujeitos a duras penas*: Bakhtin foi preso em 1928, exilado, teve a pena comutada em 1930, mas somente retorna do exílio em 1936; Voloshinov morre de tuberculose em 1936; Medvedev é executado em 1938.”

⁶ For reference, see footnote 1.

In Bakhtin's most initial formulations (as in *POD*, 1929), one can already find programmatic elements for the postulation of a vision of language that transcends the scope of linguistic studies of his time. Both in *POD* ([1997 [1929]]) and in his revised edition *PDP* ([1963], 2005),⁷ the author develops the thesis of the polyphonic novel by analyzing Dostoevsky's particular form of disposing and conceiving the dynamics of voices in his creative process. In this sense, Bakhtin (1984, p.181) states:

[...] we have in mind *discourse*, that is, language in its concrete living totality, and not language as the specific object of linguistics, something arrived at through a completely legitimate and necessary abstraction from various aspects of the concrete life of the word.⁸

This rupture with the way of understanding language has far more complex consequences for the approach to forms of socio-verbal interaction. This is because it will not take language as an object of linguistic study formulated in the Saussurian molds, but dialogical relations as an object of a discipline whose limits go beyond those of linguistics, that is, metalinguistics, whose objective would be to account for aspects of language life that linguistics, even if legitimately, did not succeed in doing or did not intend to do.

However, as defended by Bakhtin, it is necessary to consider that dialogical relations are of an extralinguistic nature, that is, they refer to something that is outside language, at the same time, as we know, that they do not detach themselves from it as a concrete integral phenomenon. Evidently, they do not exist without logical and concrete-semantic relations, but are not limited to these. There is no, and neither can there be a, dialogical relationship between the elements and units of the language, as in morphology or syntax, not even between texts if we consider them in their strictly linguistic dimension. Dialogical relations occur only between relatively integral concrete utterances, with the fundamental requirement that they express the axiological position of their enunciators, as Bakhtin (1984, p.184; emphasis added) himself teaches us:

[...] a dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's

⁷ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 1.

semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance; that is, if we hear in it someone else's voice. Thus, dialogic relationships can permeate inside the utterance, even inside the individual word, as long as two voices collide within it dialogically [...].⁹

Still, according to Bakhtin (2005), dialogical relations are defined by some specificities: (i) they must discuss among themselves, that is, they must have a discussion about the object they address; (ii) they must necessarily express the axiological position of two (or more) consciences, in order to demarcate the value judgment – explicitly or not – that they assume; and (iii) they must have an author, that is, the creator of the utterance, “[...] a definite position, to which it is possible to react dialogically.” (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.184).¹⁰ These particularities are interwoven into each other and constitute the way of observing the functioning of language in different spheres of communication, not only in the aesthetic sphere.

The conclusion of these considerations about dialogical relations appears in chapter five (Discourse in Dostoevsky) in *PDP*, in which Bakhtin presents “some previous methodological observations,” covering various phenomena which he studied in this section under the concept of *bivocal discourse*, which, broadly speaking, concerns the fact that the word is turned, at the same time, to the object of the discourse as a common word, and to the discourse of an other. Among the forms of bivocal discourse, I highlight the polemic (open / hidden), which I shall discuss in what follows.

2 Amidst the Symphony of Voices, our Daily Polemic

The individual manner in which a person structures his own speech is determined to a significant degree by his *peculiar awareness of another's words, and by his means for reacting to them* (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.196).¹¹

In *POD* and *PDP*, Bakhtin proposes a classification of the types of discourse in three major groups, although he does not consider it to be exhaustive, given the complexity of the orientation modes centered in the discourse of the other. The first and

⁹ For reference, see footnote 1.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 1.

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 1.

second groups, namely, the referential discourse (directly and immediately oriented towards its referent) and the objectified discourse (discourse of the person represented), are characterized as monovocal discourses, in which the author's word prevails. The third group, on the other hand, comprises a series of phenomena whereby their mode of existence is found in the discourse of the other, that is, all the forms in which "[...] discourse in them has a twofold direction – it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another's discourse*, toward *someone else's speech*" (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.185; author's emphasis).¹² The notion of polemic, open or hidden, appears, in these works, alongside other concepts on which Bakhtin (2005) focused, such as stylization, parody, *skaz* and dialogue. My focus will be on the polemic given to the objective outlined for this reflection.

It is not enough to assume, based on Bakhtin, that every discourse is dialogical by nature, but there is a case for analyzing the ways in which interactions between the utterances in the social fabric occur. Indeed, the polemic constitutes one of those forms that I engage with, in the midst of a vigorous tension between centrifugal and centripetal forces operating in the verbal-ideological life, in order to think how crucial it is to pay attention to the movement of voices in / under / about discourses.

In this sense, the hidden polemic, for example, concerns the way in which, in a not (so) ostensible way, the author of the utterance imprints a valuation tone to a given discourse object that is already valued by another axiological instance, another judgment of value about what is enunciated, covered with other appreciative accents. In this case, there is a discourse in which two voices are heard, with different accented nuances of value. In the polemic, two consciences, two centers of values (mis)encounter each other, each one with its worldview about the theme on which it enunciates. When dealing with this concept, Bakhtin (1984, p.196, emphasis added) states:

In the hidden polemic, however, discourse is directed toward an ordinary referential object, naming it, portraying, expressing, *and only indirectly striking a blow at the other's discourse, clashing with it, as it were, within the object itself*. As a result, the other person's discourse begins to influence authorial discourse from within. For this reason, hidden polemical discourse is double-voiced, although the interrelationship of the two voices here is a special one. The other's thought does not personally make its way inside the discourse, but is

¹² For reference, see footnote 1.

only reflected in it, determining its tone and its meaning. One word acutely senses alongside it someone else's word speaking about the same object [...].¹³

Understood as such, the authorial discourse necessarily inscribes the other in its [the author's] materiality, summoning the interlocutor to a clash whose recognition and understanding, on his or her part, are possible through what can be presumed, which can range from the presumed of the family, the community to that of the nation, as Voloshinov ([1926] 2019) teaches. In specific cases such as those portrayed in the concrete utterances analyzed below, which address the current political management of Brazil, this aspect is important because the subject shares a fragmented socio-historical context of discourses that are hostile, given the polarization of the axiological positions that make up the enunciative arena.

The way in which utterances are constituted and organized stylistically and compositionally in the social body is crucial, from the point of view of the reader or the listener, for the conception of a subject without an alibi in his existence (cf. BAKHTIN, 2010), a subject responsible for his unique and singular act of responding actively to the valuations that are impregnated in the discursive threads of the utterances he or she reads / sees / hears. In this sense, its primary function is to unveil these threads, understanding how two consciences formulate their value judgments about the same object of which they speak. It is as if the discourse is always looking at its other, or as Bakhtin (1984, p.208) contends, a discourse with a look around:

The other's rejoinder wedges its way, as it were, into his speech, and although this rejoinder is in fact absent, its influence brings about a radical accentual and syntactic restructuring of that speech. The rejoinder is not actually present, but its shadow, its trace, falls on his speech, and that shadow, that trace is real.¹⁴

In Bakhtin's conceptualization, the hidden polemic is characterized as a discourse of a conflicting nature, where it is possible to find the hostile influence that this discourse

¹³ For reference, see footnote 1.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 1.

TN: The quotation used in the Portuguese version of this article was the Italian translation (BACHTIN, 1997), and reads as follows: "È come se nel discorso si incuneasse la replica altrui, che di fatto, è vero, manca, ma la cui azione produce una netta ricostruzione dell'accento e della sintassi del discorso. La replica altrui non c'è, mas sul discorso giace la sua ombra, la sua traccia, e quest'ombra, questa traccia, sono reali."

causes in the conscience of the subject who also speaks of the same object. This can be found both in the arrangements of composition and style – of the mobilized grammatical forms, of the selected lexicon – and in the emotive-volitional tones and appreciative accents. As Bakhtin (1984, pp.195-196) explains:

In a hidden polemic, on the other hand, the other's words are treated antagonistically, and this antagonism, no less than the very topic being discussed, is what determines the author's discourse. This radically changes the semantics of the discourse involved: alongside its referential meaning there appears a second meaning – an intentional orientation toward someone else's words. Such discourse cannot be fundamentally or fully understood if one takes into consideration only its direct referential meaning. The polemical coloration of the discourse appears in other purely language features as well: in intonation and syntactic construction.¹⁵

Having made these considerations about the concept of polemic, I propose an analysis of the following utterances in order to demonstrate, on the one hand, how this notion possibly reverberates a chronotope (among other possible ones) experienced by Bakhtin – with all the perplexities of his time, of the political and ideological conjuncture – and, on the other hand, how it evokes today the urgent need for a careful reading of Brazilian historical events to clearly perceive the ambivalences and movements of the axiological positions of an era, inscribed in the same utterance about a (unique) discursive object.

3 Movement of Voices in Two Concrete Verbal-visual Media Utterances: The Polemic in Focus

In order to consider the phenomenon of the polemic, I analyze the movement of voices that superimpose/overlap in the verbal-visual materiality of the media, which is the religious-themed Facebook post. I do not intend here to weave a theoretical discussion about the discursive genre under analysis, suffice to say that I consider it from a dialogical-discursive perspective. In the two Facebook posts that make up the corpus¹⁶ of

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 1.

¹⁶ I use the term “corpus,” oversaturated in the positivist research sphere, only to situate the set of data I analyze. However, based on Bakhtin, I am conscious that they are concrete utterances – produced or

this work, there is a predominance of stylistic materiality more focused on criticism, provocation of dissent, which contributes to accentuating the controversial character of the utterances. Based on these considerations, I present the analysis of the first post.

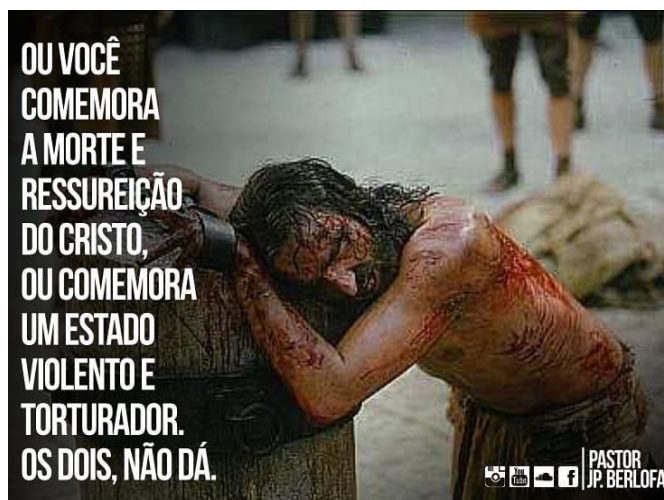


Figure 1. Post that portrays the theme of the proposal of the President of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, to commemorate/celebrate the 1964 civil-military coup. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2003219339788576&set=p.2003219339788576&type=3&theater>

The utterance above was taken from Pastor João Paulo Berlofa's page (that is how he identifies himself) on the social network Facebook. It is a page that deals predominantly with issues related to religion, from a perspective marked with a parodic/sarcastic/ironic connotation. As it is registered in the profile, it is a page "For those who feel INADEQUATE for the conventional religious system." Therefore, it is common for the reader-viewer to find posts whose content and treatment appear in valuable tones and are inclined towards laughter, humor, irreverence.

In the materiality of the utterance, we observe a verbal part, occupying more of the lefthand side, with white letters, in upper case, in a relatively large size if we consider the whole of the utterance, in which the following is written: "either you celebrate the death and resurrection of Christ, or you commemorate a state of violence and torture. You can't do both." In the other major part of the utterance, there is an image of a very bruised, bloody man, with torn skin, tied to a kind of wooden trunk by chains and iron handcuffs,

broadcast by social and historical subjects, equally concrete – that disseminate points of view about a discourse object.

with a face of suffering, with a direct reference to Christianity, in the figure of Jesus Christ.

In the hidden polemic, we hear the whispers, the echoes, the reverberations of other voices that awaken in the consciousness of the authorial discourse the most diverse reactions, agreeing or dissonant about a given object of discourse. Considering the dialogical relations that the statement maintains with others in the complex chain of discursive communication, we can affirm with Bakhtin that even a single word is sufficient to unveil the threads that weave this enunciative web. The author states:

Dialogic relationships are possible not only among whole (relatively whole) utterances; a dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, *even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's semantic position*, as the representative of another person's utterance; that is, if we hear in it someone else's voice (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.184; emphasis added).¹⁷

This quote is emblematic for reading the dialogic relations – and, consequently, the polemic – that are established in this verbal-visual utterance. Evidently, this occurs in the integral utterance, considering all its hybridity and not just part of its materiality. However, already at the beginning of the verbal utterance, the triggering element of the polemic is found in the syntactic structure itself, when, from the stylistic-compositional point of view, the author constructs the period with a coordination of clauses, with the use of alternative coordinating conjunctions. For the reader who does not share the presumption of the utterance, the crossroads that the author presents to the interlocutor may not make much sense, but the effect of this offer of options becomes clearer when considering the political context and, in particular, the fact portrayed.

In the week of March 25 to 31, 2019, a controversial theme dominated the media and social networks, namely the Federal government's initiative to celebrate 55 years since the beginning of the military regime in Brazil, which lasted from 1964 to 1985. The current President of the Republic, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, instructed, through an Order Paper, written and issued by the Ministry of Defense, that military barracks celebrated the March 1964 event, unprecedented during the last 20 years, since the creation of the

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 1.

Ministry in June 1999.¹⁸ The President's decision pleased a wing of the military, which intended to recompose its own version of the military coup, viewing it as a revolution in the midst of the Cold War, but also displeased the military who saw that this could lead to a possible division within the country.

As was expected, the Protestant (particularly Pentecostal and Neopentecostal evangelicals) and Catholic segments of the Brazilian Christian church significantly supported the election of the current elected President Jair Bolsonaro. They also approved of the political-economic (as well as other) policies of the government in its most diverse aspects, as could/can be verified in the mainstream media and social networks in general. In this sense, returning to the reading of the utterance under analysis, the author suggests the impossibility or incompatibility of celebrating the two events, both conceived as true and historical, that is, the death and resurrection of Christ, which is the object of faith in Christianity, and the military dictatorship, which tortured people during its implementation. A curious and even comical aspect is that the impression one has is that part of this segment seems to believe in the death and resurrection of Christ, which is a matter of faith, but not in the fact that a regime of intervention called "dictatorship" took place in Brazil, or at least this group seems to silence this fact.

The author of the statement problematizes the stance from part of the church in accepting and adhering to the idea of celebrating a moment in the history of the country considered harmful due to a series of events that range from the impediment of freedom of expression to torture and murder of those who opposed the regime. For this reason, the author questions the posture of that part of the church, through the verbal construction formulated and the image of Christ in pain. With that, a polemic has been established through a type of discourse in which, according to Bakhtin (1984, p.195; emphasis added),

[...] the author's discourse is directed toward its own referential object, as in any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, *a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object.*¹⁹

¹⁸ From: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2019/03/ordem-para-celebrar-golpe-e-inedita-nos-ultimos-20-anos-e-incomoda-tambem-militares.shtml>

¹⁹ For reference, see footnote 1.

The image of Christ in his suffering refers to linguistic signs that orbit in the utterance itself, as is the case with “torture,” in a reading that shows that the contradiction would be in the fact that Christians support the celebration of a similar type of practice [torture] that led to Jesus’ death. The valuation tone of criticism permeates the utterance insofar as the author of the post calls into question the very faith and body of the doctrines that the Christian religion professes, pointing out an incoherence or contradiction in its posture of condoning the celebration of the Brazilian civil-military coup of 1964.

The critical / tense / conflictual relationship with this other discourse goes towards the religious social part, especially if we consider that most of the utterance is occupied by the image of Christ in his martyrdom, that is, reiterating the words of Bakhtin (1984, p.196),²⁰ “One word acutely senses alongside it someone else’s word speaking about the same object [...]” In this specific case, the (religious) discourse of the other talking about this event in the history of the country certainly causes rejection, indignation and other possible similar emotional-volitional tones, as expressed by the author of the utterance. With these words, the author seems to have already anticipated his disgust with the church discourse on this object.

In our view, the hidden polemic may still constitute a way to fool the less attentive reader about certain social and historical themes. Through it, it is possible to say what at a given time is liable to any possibility of interdiction, censorship or something similar, as a way of minimizing the possible direct confrontation with the discourse of others. With regards to this, Bakhtin (1984, p.192, emphasis added) observes:

*Direct authorial discourse is not possible in every epoch, nor can every epoch command a style – for style presupposes the presence of authoritative points of view and authoritative, stabilized ideological value judgments. [...] Where there is no adequate form for the unmediated expression of an author’s thought, he must resort to refracting them in someone else’s discourse. Sometimes the artistic tasks themselves are such that they can be realized only by means of double-voiced discourse.*²¹

²⁰ For reference, see footnote 1.

²¹ For reference, see footnote 1.

Although the assertion above refers to the literary aesthetic discourse, it is possible to extend this reflection to any utterance from another discursive sphere. In the case of the post, for example, the author's enunciative project materializes in the form of the polemic already analyzed here.

I shall now proceed to the analysis of the second statement selected to compose the corpus of this work.

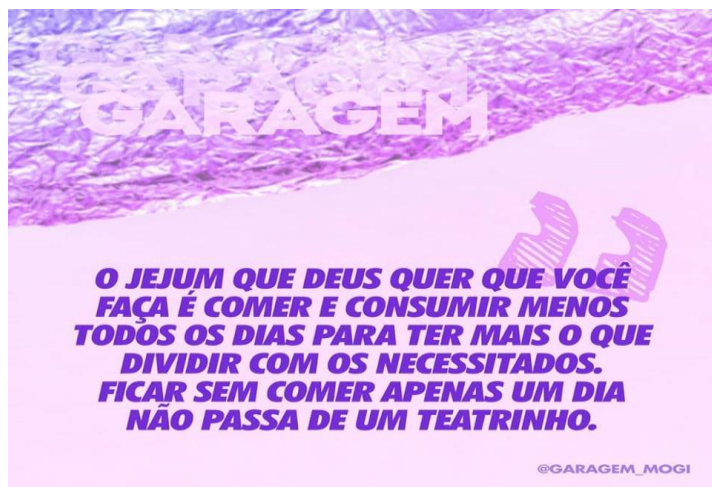


Figure 2. Post that portrays/refracts the national period of fasting called for by President Jair Bolsonaro for April 5, 2020. Source: <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2700524730058030&set=p.2700524730058030&type=3&theater> acesso em: 19/05/2020

The above post was also published by Pastor João Paulo Berlofa on his social network Facebook, on April 4, 2020, the day before the event mentioned was propagated. The utterance consists predominantly of verbal elements distributed in three parts: in the upper part, there is a type of header, drawn up in a predominantly blue color, in a gradient that goes from light blue to purple and in which the word “GARAGEM” appears discreetly in white capital letters. In the central part of the utterance, there is a text written in blue capital letters, with the following words: “the fast that God wants you to take is to eat and consume less every day so as to have more to share with the needy. Going without eating for only one day is nothing more than theater.” Finally, in the lower right corner of the figure, the expression “@GARAGEM_MOGI” is written in blue capital letters, smaller than the other words in the image.

The reader who is unfamiliar with the content posted or with the profile of Pastor Berlofa's page will possibly not understand the meaning of the word 'garage' that appears twice in the image. However, in order to give meaning to the uttered statement, it is necessary to understand that it is the name of the Christian faith church led by that pastor. The church maintains a website²² on which it disseminates content related to the (whether ecclesiastical or social) activities carried out, all based on the theological perspective and political ideology that the church upholds, which is part of a progressive worldview. According to information available on the website itself, this church is one of the pillars of a tripod made up of "[...] three different works, but linked and based on the same root – the Gospel of Christ,"²³ namely, *A Garagem*²⁴ [the Garage], *o Inadequados*²⁵ [the Inadequate] and *O Coletivo*²⁶ [the Collective].

For the reader to understand the meaning of the utterance under analysis, it is necessary to reestablish the dialogical threads that make up this fabric, since always responding to others is in the nature of the utterance. In the case of a polemic discourse, the word appears bivocalized, enabling the perception of the superscript/overwritten voices,

Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist—

²² <https://www.localprayers.com/BR/Mogi-das-Cruzes/645345232609738/Garagem>

²³ <https://www.localprayers.com/BR/Mogi-das-Cruzes/645345232609738/Garagem>

²⁴ "THE GARAGE is our church! When we look at our Faith (inappropriately), we feel the need to live this experience that Jesus called the CHURCH. A space of communion, welcoming, mutual help, reflection and learning. The GARAGE is our home, that is, the place where the inadequate gather in the name of Jesus. But don't think it is an ordinary church. The Garage is an inadequate church, which does not follow the traditional standards of liturgy, pulpit, preaching, praise, hierarchy and those things. You need to look to understand." Available on: <https://www.localprayers.com/BR/Mogi-das-Cruzes/645345232609738/Garagem>. Accessed on May 22, 2020.)

²⁵ Already mentioned in the analysis of the utterance in Figure 1, "The 'INADEQUATE' is our worldview! Our theology, our political ideology, our way of seeing and understanding the world, our spirituality, our way of dealing with the issues of our faith, all of this is inadequate. In other words, the "INADEQUATE" is a movement of theological, ecclesiastical, social and political criticism. It is our essence, our root, our soul. It is what underpins everything we do." (Available on: <https://www.localprayers.com/BR/Mogi-das-Cruzes/645345232609738/Garagem>. Accessed on May 22, 2020).

²⁶ "The COLLECTIVE is our job! When we experience the church, Jesus's proposal, it is impossible to stay just inside its doors. The Church of Christ goes beyond its four walls. There is no Church that does not act directly and relevantly in society. And to do this effectively, we started the Inadequate Collective, a project of social impact. We operate directly within a community in need of more the 70,000 people, promoting human dignity, promoting art and culture, and demanding authorities fulfill their responsibilities towards the community." Available on: <https://www.localprayers.com/BR/Mogi-das-Cruzes/645345232609738/Garagem>. Accessed on May 22, 2020).

or, on the contrary, by the "light" of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile (BAKHTIN, 2008, p.276).²⁷

In this case, the immediate constitutive alterity to which he reports, in a polemical way, concerns a national religious fast called for by President Jair Bolsonaro, set for April 5, 2020, with the aim of leading this religious segment to a period of fasting and prayers in response to the situation experienced in the country with the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19). The President of the Republic and various evangelical leaders from different denominations in the country appear in a video calling on the religious population to join the campaign.

The central part of the statement establishes a polemic relationship with the campaign starting from the very stylistic-compositional structuring of the first period (the fast that God wants you to take is to eat and consume less every day in order to have more to share with those in need). In this fragment, it is possible to notice an emotive-volitional tone in opposition to the arguments used by the campaign video to carry out such an act. The author enunciates from one place that seems to close off the other (the organizers and supporters of the convocation) in a contradiction, in other words caught in a moment of great hypocrisy, because the President would be promoting a religious event that seems to have no foundation in the socio-ideological horizon that houses such an idea. In other words, it is as if the author accused his or her interlocutor of proposing something incompatible with the very principles that underlie the professed worldview (which could be stated in terms of a denial: the fast that God wants you to take is not X, but Y).

This interpretation can be supported if we unveil another dialogical thread that backs the message between the lines assumed by its enunciator, which gives the hidden polemic an even more subtle effect, since

²⁷ BAKHTIN, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Edited by Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008. p.276.

[...] the hidden polemic does not encounter precise syntactic limits exactly, but, by means of a contrasting semantic bivocality, it congregates dissimilar axiologic positionings, which are characterized by discursive bivocality or plurivocality (VELOSO, 2011, p.31).²⁸

The author's statement that the true fast would in fact be the one in which faithful consume less food in order to be able to share with the needy could converge into an idea of social criticism, that is, a way of calling the attention of the targeted segment of the campaign to the fact that, while they are deprived of food for a religious reason (looking for supernatural intervention to end the pandemic), thousands of people still do not have anything to eat. However, entering the ideological horizon that circumscribes the extraverbal environments of the sphere that houses this utterance, it is possible to extrapolate this possible reading of social criticism. In this sense, it is necessary to resort to the Judeo-Christian universe to understand this polemic. Let us start, then, with the sacred text of Judeo-Christian scripture, the Holy Bible, particularly the book of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 58 and verses 5 to 7:

⁵ Is that the sort of fast that pleases me, a truly penitential day for men? Hanging your head like a reed, lying down on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call fasting, a day acceptable to Yahweh?

⁶ Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me – it is the Lord Yahweh who speaks – to break unjust fetters and undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke,

⁷ to share your bread with the hungry, and shelter the homeless poor, to clothe the man you see to be naked and not turn your own kin? (THE JERUSALEM BIBLE, 1968, p.1055).²⁹

According to the biblical Judeo-Christian tradition,³⁰ the context of the extract portrays God's message to His people, through the prophet Isaiah, regarding the request for an answer to His silence in the face of fasting and the search for Him. In the narrative, God repudiates the contradiction experienced by the people in wanting to get closer to Him, but living in a way inconsistent with the precepts of His law. According to the text, God would have disapproved of the behavior of his people for apparently presenting such

²⁸ From the original: “[...] a PV [polêmica velada] não encontra propriamente limites sintáticos precisos, mas, por meio da bivocalidade semântica contrastiva, congrega posicionamentos axiológicos díspares, caracterizados pela bivocalidade ou plurivocalidade discursivas.” (VELOSO, 2011, p.31).

²⁹ THE JERUSALEM BIBLE. Reader's Edition. General Editor Alexander Jones. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1968, p.1055.

³⁰ Cf. Bíblia de Jerusalém (2002).

pious conduct, guided by the foundations of the tradition of the law, but in practice, in essence, governed by indifference in the relationship with others, as it was, for example, in the case of worker exploitation.

The knowledge of the content of the biblical text allows us to more clearly see the conflict that is established between the utterances in question: the post of *A Garagem* and the video of the national fasting campaign. This is because the author of the utterance (Facebook post) entraps his or her other in a possible contradiction of the use of the theological assumptions of the interpretation that this other makes of the sacred scripture. In other words, the fast approved by God would be one that resulted in the social and economic welfare of his or her kin and not, to the contrary, the one whose concern was the mere practice of a religious rite (cf. verse 5). Hence, the author of the post unostentatiously denounces a possible hypocritical attitude on the part of those who propose to raise their prayers to a deity and to practice the fasting ritual without, in fact, considering the conditions of existence / survival of their fellow men and women.

Besides the context of the biblical First Testament, there are other biblical passages that corroborate the thesis that the practice of love and justice for one's neighbor overrides the rites once established by God for his people. If we look in the Second Testament, it is in the figure of Christ himself that we will find the guidelines for fasting which are consistent with what was presented by the prophet Isaiah, in the text described above.

When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you (Mt 6.16-18, p.12).³¹

The text above comprises a well-known statement from the Christian religious context, the sermon on the mount (or the mountain), which consists of a series of teachings from Jesus on various themes, written down by the evangelist Matthew. In this fragment of chapter 6, in which questions pertaining to the practice of justice are addressed, Jesus deals with fasting, a pious practice that should be undertaken in a

³¹ For reference, see footnote 28.

reserved, discreet manner, without being noticed by people; the contrary would reveal a hypocritical stance in wanting to show a religiosity with exhibitionist motivations. Jewish piety consisted of three types of acts of justice: bestowal, prayer and fasting. In the teachings of Christ, these acts would only have their due value if they were practiced observing devotion and submission to God, and not as a way of gaining prestige on the part of other people.

The polemic started from the moment the author of the post criticized the intention of the organizers of the fasting campaign in the context of a serious public health crisis, with strong economic consequences, especially for the less favored. In this sense, the proposition of performing a ritualistic practice by this segment would sound dissonant while thousands of people suffer from a lack of basic living conditions, such as access to enough food. This criticism is corroborated by the final part of the utterance of the post (Going without eating for only one day is just theater), in which the author uses a sarcastic emotive-volitional tone materialized in the word *teatrinho* [little theater] (diminutive form of theater), negatively valuing the campaigners. In this sense, a relationship is established between the theatrical and hypocrisy: considering that, just as in the theater, the subject interprets a character (that is, he is not what lives on the stage), in hypocrisy something similar occurs (that is, the subject appears to be what he or she is not).

I will now proceed to some considerations arising from the readings of these utterances.

Final Thoughts

The considerations made in this brief space do not account for all the complexity and productivity of the phenomenon of the polemic, conceived here from Bakhtin as a bivocalized word in which voices whose axiological positions diverge from / repel one another and (mis/re)encounter themselves, as Bakhtin has shown in his analysis of the Dostoevsky aesthetic discourse.

However, as already shown in the introduction, my intention is to build on this by pointing out two aspects of the productivity of this concept. The first concerns the possibility of addressing it in utterances from other discursive spheres, such as the media (and this one in dialogical relationship with the religious and political spheres), according

to the nature of the utterance that I showed: the Facebook post. And this aspect applies to the reading of the two utterances analyzed here in this article. The second points to two very recurring facts in the discourses of these posts, which I will discuss below.

In the case of the first utterance, I highlight the way in which, in this polemic, some voices refract worldviews that have brought great misfortunes to our society when experienced historically. Here, I refer specifically to the real, concrete and also official fact of the celebration of a historic moment in the Brazilian State in which thousands of voices were stifled, separated, denied, and usurped, in short, temporarily or definitely, silenced! The polemic established in the first utterance problematizes a theme that is very dear to the political history of Brazil, which materializes – and is updated, discursively – in a hybrid materiality that congregates a dispersion apparently contained, or even, dormant (the memory of a sad chapter of our history, that is, that of torture in the military dictatorship of 1964, in Brazil), but whose flashes seem to awaken an enunciative will to return to this past, valued in a very negative way.

In the case of the second utterance, the author reveals a false religiosity, a Christian morality distanced from its possible real and authentic assumptions, which implies caring for others who have essential survival needs. In this sense, it polemicalizes with the other in the field in which both are inscribed (considering both the discourse object and the discourse(s) about that object), as well as in divergent positions, with evidence, through a different hermeneutic reading of the concept of fasting. Through the polemic, the author of the post delimits the axiological position in relation to the event, establishing some resistance to a discourse that, in this socio-historical moment, presents itself in a hegemonic way, motivated by centripetal forces of socio-ideological communication.

As one of the forms of manifestation of bivocal discourse, the hidden polemic reveals itself in contemporary times as a very propitious concept to think the (stylistic-compositional and axiological) way in which the subjects demarcate their evaluative positions, their points of view in their social interactions. In a virtual environment extremely inflamed by a political-religious polarization, mediated by social networks, as shown above, there is an increasing need to develop enunciative analyses capable of describing and interpreting the discursive functioning of the utterances that orbit this sphere of socio-verbal communication.

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Received May 25, 2020

Accepted March 29, 2021