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**Agritoxins versus Pesticides: Reading Notes about Polemic and Discursive Amemory / *Agrotóxico versus pesticida: notas de leitura sobre polêmica e amemória discursiva***

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, we take as an object of study, on the one hand, excerpts from Bill 6299 of 2002 - PL 6299-2002 - known as the Agritoxin Law, authored by Blairo Maggi, the Minister of Agriculture during President Michel Temer's administration, and, on the other, the polemic ensuing from the recent passage of this bill, whose goal is to loosen the criteria for approval and risk analysis and to propose changes in the denominations that are currently used to refer to agritoxins, by the Special Committee in the Lower House. In order to discuss the latter objective, we have taken segments of the texts that circulated in multiple Brazilian media questioning the approval of the above-cited project, referring to it as the Poison Bill. We have anchored our work in the contributions of Ruth Amossy's theory on the argumentative character of polemic and also in Marie-Anne Paveau's approaches to the relations between language and moral, especially with regard to the concept of discursive amemory.

**KEYWORDS:** Discourse; Politics; Polemic; Media

**RESUMO**

*Neste artigo, tomamos como objeto de estudo, por um lado, excertos do texto do Projeto de Lei 6299 de 2002 – PL6299-2002, designado como Lei dos Agrotóxicos, de autoria do Ministro da Agricultura do governo Michel Temer, Blairo Maggi, cujo objetivo é flexibilizar os critérios de aprovação e análise de riscos, e propor mudanças nos nomes que são dados atualmente aos agrotóxicos e, por outro, a polêmica gerada em torno da recente aprovação desse projeto na Comissão Especial da Câmara dos Deputados. Para discutir esse último objetivo, tomamos alguns fragmentos de textos que circularam em diversos mídiuns brasileiros questionando a aprovação do supracitado projeto, designando-o como Pacote do Veneno ou PL do Veneno. Ancoramos teoricamente nosso trabalho nas recentes contribuições de Ruth Amossy (2017) acerca do caráter argumentativo da polêmica e também nas proposições de Marie-Anne Paveau (2015) sobre as relações entre linguagem e moral, especialmente no tocante ao conceito de amemória discursiva.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Discurso; Política; Polêmica; Mídia

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The constitution did indeed guarantee freedom of speech, but the laws punished anything that could be considered an attack on state security. *One never knew when the state would start screaming that this word or that was an attempt on its security [...]* (no emphasis in the original).  
*Milan Kundera*<sup>1</sup>

## First Words

The debate around the legal framework that regulates the use of agritoxins<sup>2</sup> in Brazil, sometimes more heated and sometimes less so, already lasts more than three decades. During this period, the conflict about the rules for the use of agritoxins has been shaped from two diametrically opposing positions, constituting a true dissent in the public space: on the one hand, under the allegation that it is necessary to modernize the rules, there are those who defend a more flexible position (landowners, the rural representation bench in congress, national and international chemical industries...) and, on the other, because of the risks to animal and human health, and to the environment, there are others who demand a more strict position from the Brazilian state (environmentalists, small rural producers, social movements, public health specialists, Anvisa [Brazilian Health Regulatory Agency] and Fiocruz [Oswaldo Cruz Foundation] representatives, international NGOs...). Recently, this conflict has had another heated chapter with the passage of the Agritoxin Bill by a Special Committee in the Lower House in Brasilia.

In this paper, we take as object of study, on the one hand, excerpts from Bill 6299 of 2002 – 6299-2002,<sup>3</sup> known as the Agritoxin Law, presented by Blairo Maggi, the Minister of Agriculture in President Michel Temer's administration, whose objective is to loosen criteria for approval and risk analysis and to propose changes in the denominations that are currently used to refer to agritoxins. On the other hand, we look into the controversy around

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<sup>1</sup> KUNDERA, M. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Translated by Aaron Asher. New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1999, p.4.

<sup>2</sup> The word *agritoxin(s)* has been used throughout this article as a near equivalent to “agrotóxico(s),” which is a prevalent term in Brazilian Portuguese. Even though *agrochemical(s)* is often found as the translation for “agrotóxico(s),” the decision to use *agritoxin(s)* can be justified by the more evident similarity, which is highly relevant in this article.

<sup>3</sup> The complete text can be accessed at: <http://www.camara.gov.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=46249>. Access on: February 01, 2019.

the recent passage of this bill by a Special Committee of the Lower House. In order to discuss the latter objective, we take segments of texts that appeared in several Brazilian media<sup>4</sup> questioning the approval of the bill, referring to it as The Poison Package or The Poison Bill.

Our work is theoretically grounded on recent contributions by Ruth Amossy (2017) about the eminently argumentative character of polemic and also on the propositions advanced by Marie-Anne Paveau (2015) on the relations between language and morals, especially with regard to the concept of discursive *amemory*.

Henceforth, it is necessary to make it explicit that the objective of this work is not to revisit important rhetoric and discourse analysis scholars, who have already dwelled on the theme of polemic, as already shown by Amossy herself. Besides, it is not our objective either to comprehend to what extent the opinions, beliefs, interests - divergent if not contradictory - that are inevitably produced in the public space must find their place in polemic, insisting on the importance of dissent in democracy and on the possibility of coexistence in dissent that democracy affords. These are Ruth Amossy's objectives in her book *Apologie de la polémique* [*Apology for the Polemic*] and not ours.

With this work, we aim to contribute minimally to substantiating more profound debates, showing that the discussions concerning Bill 69299-2002 go beyond a strong disagreement in the Brazilian society as far as agritoxins are concerned. This is because what one social group understands as the Agritoxin Bill, another understands as the Poison Package or The Poison Bill in this polemic. There is also the role of several *media* outlets that cover the issue and corroborate the report approved by the Lower House Special Committee, in a subtle attempt not only to revise, but also to completely erase dysphoric discursive lineages that have been historically constructed about agritoxins in Brazil.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Following Maingueneau's work (2011), we considered in this article the virtual newspapers and Twitter analyzed as a medium, that is, a mediation that can enable the most varied types of interaction ranging from a simple reading to a commentary or suggestions being posted. While working with the notion of medium, Maingueneau is concerned with the implication of (virtual or printed...) devices on discourse. In fact, for the French researcher, it is necessary to consider that the medium imprints a certain set of traits (from several areas – linguistics, institutional...) onto the contents of utterances and – in part – determines the affiliation to which they can adhere, whether they can dialogue with other utterances or not, restraining texts themselves and shaping generic scenes.

<sup>5</sup> In an interview to Rádio Agência NP, on 29 September 2018, physician and professor at Universidade Federal do Mato Grosso (UFMT) [Federal University of Mato Grosso] Wanderlei Antonio Pignati lists some of the diseases caused by agritoxins to workers. "There are acute and chronic health hazards. Acute and chronic

## 1 Some of the Likelihood Conditions for the Agritoxin Bill and the Poison Bill

### 1.1 About the Agritoxin Bill

Originating in the Federal Senate, Bill No. 6299 of 2002 was presented by senator-on-leave Blairo Maggi, the Minister of Agriculture in Michel Temer's administration, based on alterations in Law No. 7802 of 1989. The objective was to modify the registration system for agritoxins, their components and alike. In effect, by Maggi's Project, registration of agritoxins would occur in one single organization, The Ministry of Agriculture, and only for their active ingredient, thus recognizing the similarity of equivalent products in physical, chemical, and toxicological terms. According to the Bill, it will be the exclusive competence of the Federal Government to regulate the disposal of packages of such consumables in agriculture.

As they deal with similar matters, other bills were attached initially to Bill No. 6299 of 2002, such as Bill No. 2495 of 2000; Bill No. 2495 of 2000; Bill No. 5852 of 2001; Bill No. 5884 of 2005; Bill No. 6189 of 2005, among other proposals. The proposal of Bill 3200/2015 is worthy of special attention because it deals with the National Policies on Phytosanitary Defensives and Environmental Control Products, their Components and Alike, as well as with research, experimentation, production, packaging and labeling, transportation, sales, advertising, use, import, export, final destination of the waste and packages, registration, classification, inspection and control of phytosanitary products and environmental protection products, their components and alike. Among the reasons for changing legislation currently in force on agritoxins in Brazil, Blairo Maggi's project asserts that the current Law, No. 7802 of 1989:

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poisoning, fetal malformations among pregnant women, neoplasia (which causes cancer), endocrinal disorders (of the thyroid and suprarenal glands; some mimic diabetes), neurological disorders, respiratory disorders (many substances irritate the lungs).” The complete interview can be accessed at: <<http://www.radioagencianp.com.br/9574-Impactos-dos-agrotoxicos-na-saude-dos-trabalhadores-docampo>>. Access on: February 02, 2019. Text in original: “São agravos, na saúde, agudos e crônicos. Intoxicações agudas e crônicas, má formação fetal de mulheres gestantes, neoplasia (que causa câncer), distúrbios endócrinos (na tireoide, suprarenal, e alguns mimetizam diabetes), distúrbios neurológicos, distúrbios respiratórias (vários são irritantes pulmonares).”

i) is obsolete or incompatible with several concepts, fundamentals and principles in international treaties and agreements ratified by Brazil, such as the Treaty on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)/WTO, incorporated by Brazil through Decree 1355/1991, according to which WTO members have the right to take sanitary and phytosanitary measures to protect life or human/animal health, or to protect plants. These measures do not constitute an arbitrary means of discrimination among countries in the same conditions, or a restriction that violates international market practices; ii) disregards the criteria of toxicological classification for phytosanitary defensives of the Globally Harmonized System of Classification and Labeling of Chemicals (GHS), which was adopted by the United Nations in 2002; and iii) its execution and application have expired because it is not possible to respond to the current needs and expectations of society.<sup>6</sup>

Based on those justifications, the proposed bill consists in a National Policy on Phytosanitary Defensives and Environmental Control Products, its Components and Alike, and a new system of evaluation procedures for registration that is similar to those in countries like the United States or Canada. In those countries, regulatory activities are concentrated in only one governmental agency. In the understanding of Minister Blairo Maggi, the underlying principle in the bill is that science should inform the matter in order to detract from subjectivity.

As already mentioned, the Agritoxin Bill incorporated a number of other similar projects brought to Congress. Representative Luiz Nishimori (PR-PR) was responsible for steering the matter as rapporteur. In order to pay heed to the opinion of specialists in support to the rapporteur in his Final Report, the Lower House held many meetings for public hearings in a Special Committee, which had been appointed for this purpose.

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<sup>6</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “i) apresenta-se como defasada ou incompatível com diversos conceitos, fundamentos e princípios dos tratados e acordos internacionais ratificados pelo Brasil, tais como o Acordo sobre a Aplicação de Medidas Sanitárias e Fitossanitárias (SPS)/OMC, internalizado pelo Brasil pelo Decreto 1.355/1994, em que os membros da OMC têm o direito de aplicar medidas sanitárias e fitossanitárias para a proteção da vida ou saúde humana, animal ou para preservar as plantas, desde que tais medidas não se constituam num meio de discriminação arbitrário entre países de mesmas condições, ou numa restrição encoberta ao comércio internacional; ii) desconsidera os critérios de classificação toxicológica de defensivos fitossanitários do Sistema Globalmente Harmonizado de Classificação e Rotulagem de Produtos Químicos (GHS), que foi adotado pela Organização das Nações Unidas, em 2002; e iii) sua execução e aplicação está esgotada, pois não consegue responder à atual realidade e expectativas da sociedade.”

Thus, nine public hearings were held between May 2016 and April 2017 to subsidize the rapporteur's vote. In his vote, rapporteur Luiz Nishimori presented 14 items to justify a change in Law No. 7802 of 1989. Among these points, there is the change in the rules for the registration of those products. According to the law in force, registration must be sought with the Ministry of Health, IBAMA [Brazilian Institute of the Environment and Renewable Natural Resources] and the Ministry of Agriculture; however, in Nishimori's report, following Maggi's proposal, the Ministry of Health and IBAMA would become responsible only for sanctioning requests. Registration would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture. Another change consists in the ban on certain agritoxins. The 1989 legislation is stricter than the current proposal by Blairo Maggi because it explicitly prohibits the use of agritoxins for which Brazil does not have methods of neutralization; in other words, there is no way to deactivate their components, no antidote or no effective treatment in Brazil. In addition, the legislation in force prohibits the use of substances that show teratogenic, carcinogenic or mutagenic traits, which cause hormonal disorders, damage to the reproductive system, are more dangerous to people than laboratory tests with animals have shown, and whose characteristics are harmful to the environment. The proposed bill anticipates even another important alteration. It is the change of designation from agritoxin to phytosanitary:

[...] the concept "agritoxin" as used in the current Law is improper. In public hearings, some guests defended the continuity of the word "agritoxin" and others the term "agricultural defensive" or "phytosanitary product." [...] It happens that the lexical components of the word pesticide are: *pestis* (epidemic or pandemic disease) and *cida* (that which kills). Its hyponyms are: fungicide, germicide, herbicide, and insecticide. [...] In view of the several discussions about terminology, the term "phytosanitary product" has been proposed for use [...].<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: [...] o conceito de "agrotóxico" utilizado pela atual Lei é inadequado. Nas audiências públicas, alguns convidados defenderam a permanência da palavra "agrotóxico" e outros o termo "defensivos agrícolas" ou "produto fitossanitário". [...] Ocorre que os componentes léxicos da palavra pesticida são: *pestis* (enfermidade epidêmica ou pandêmica) e *cida* (o que mata). São seus hipônimos: fungicida; germicida; herbicida; e inseticida. [...] Diante das inúmeras discussões sobre a terminologia, propõe-se a adotar o termo "produto fitossanitário [...]. The complete text can be accessed at: <<http://www.camara.gov.br/proposicoesWeb/fichadetramitacao?idProposicao=46249>>. Access on: February 01, 2019.

However, in the version that was submitted to the appreciation by the Special Committee of the Lower House, rapporteur Luiz Nishimori (PR-PR) proposed the use of the term pesticide to designate agritoxins, instead of phytosanitary agent, which had originally appeared both in the first draft of his report and in Blairo Maggi's project. In this article, we will focus on this change of designation. While the change has generated much polemic in the public space, it was treated by *media* in general in little depth, thus engendering an attempt at erasing the dysphoric discursive lineages on this issue.

On June 25th, the Special Committee of the Lower House in charge of the Agritoxin Bill approved Luiz Nishimori's report by 18 votes to 9. Now, the text will proceed to the plenary vote. Should it pass, it will then be appreciated by the Senate before it can be sanctioned by the President.

During the voting of the rapporteur's analysis, several representatives were against Nishimori's report because of the risks that agritoxins pose to human and animal health, and to the environment. After the approval by the Special Committee of the Lower House, a fierce polemic has ensued in the public space around this bill.

## 1.2 About the Poison Bill

Next, we briefly describe six of the countless stories (items) that were published in different media about the repercussion of the approval of Nishimori's report. This description<sup>8</sup> aims at highlighting, metonymically, the irruption of the polemic in the public space. The first item<sup>9</sup> (Text 01)<sup>10</sup> that we selected was published on the G1.globo.com website, on June 25th, by Alessandra Modzeleski and Carolina Dantas. The title is Comissão Especial da Câmara aprova projeto que flexibiliza o uso de agrotóxico [Special Lower House Committee approves the project that facilitates the use of agritoxins]. This item shows several

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<sup>8</sup> We decided to make this description and include, on the footnote, the links to the items that we selected for analysis with the objective of avoiding legal issues with the owners of picture copyright.

<sup>9</sup> The full material can be accessed at <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/comissao-especial-da-camara-aprova-texto-base-de-projeto-que-flexibiliza-uso-de-agrotoxico.ghtml>. Access on: February 02, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> We methodologically numbered the selected items as texts 01, 02, 03... to facilitate comprehension by our readers in the analytical resumption of these items, which start on page 10 in this article.

representatives against the approval of the proposal, because of the risks to the environment and to animal and human health. Some posters are being held that refer to Bill 6299 as the Poison Law. On those posters, it is possible to read the following statements: “No more poison in food”; “6299/2002 Bill: Poison – Say No” and “Urgent: project can put more toxins in your food.”<sup>11</sup> Along with these statements, there are some pictures of skulls, which mean death danger in our imaginary.

Next, we draw attention to an item<sup>12</sup> published in the newspaper *Correio Braziliense* on June 26th (Text 02), which aims at emphasizing the central points in the Relatório da Lei de Agrotóxicos aprovado pela Comissão Especial da Câmara [Report on the Agritoxin Law approved by the Lower House Special Committee]. Below the title, it is possible to be read: “The Bill changes the word ‘agritoxin’ to ‘pesticide’. It concentrates power in the Ministry of Agriculture to approve new products, and anticipates the adoption of a new table of risk levels for new substances in Brazil.”<sup>13</sup> The item also brings a photograph by Cadu Gomes that shows a farmer using agritoxins in a strawberry plantation.

The repercussion of the approval of the Agritoxin Law Report also appeared in international media which circulate here in Brazil, as shown by item<sup>14</sup> (Text 03). This was published in newspaper *EL PAÍS – BRASIL*<sup>15</sup> by Felipe Betim on July 7th and circulated both in Brazil and in Spain. The item, entitled A operação para afrouxar ainda mais a lei de agrotóxicos no Brasil, na contramão do mundo [The operation to loosen the law on agritoxins even further, contrary to the world], highlights the fact that the approval of the aforementioned Report consists in an orchestration of the rural producers’ bench in the Lower House to loosen the legislation that deals with agritoxins in Brazil. Along with the item it is

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<sup>11</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Chega de veneno na comida”; “PL 6299/2002: Veneno – Diga Não”; “Urgente: projeto pode colocar mais tóxicos em sua comida.”

<sup>12</sup> The full item can be found at <https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/brasil/2018/06/26/interna-brasil,690951/relatorio-da-lei-dos-agrotoxicos-e-aprovado-plenario-votara-apos-elei.shtml>. Access on: February 02, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “O PL troca a palavra ‘agrotóxico’ por ‘pesticida’. Concentra poderes no Ministério da Agricultura para a aprovação de novos produtos e prevê a adoção de uma tabela de grau de risco para novas substâncias no Brasil.”

<sup>14</sup> Full item at: [https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/06/26/politica/1530040030\\_454748.html](https://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/06/26/politica/1530040030_454748.html). Access on: February 02, 2019.

<sup>15</sup> The newspaper El País – Brasil (<https://brasil.elpais.com/>), subsidiary to El País of Spain, was created in 2013. It proposes to cover topics related to Brazil, especially affairs related to politics, economy, culture, science, technology, sports. It publishes Portuguese translations of material published originally in Spanish.



possible to see a photograph by Jonas Oliveira, and a combined harvester in a soybean field in the state of Paraná.

Next, we show a post (Text 04) published in the Greenpeace – Brasil Twitter account. In this post, the global non-governmental organization urges followers to sign a public petition against the Poison Bill. In the call, Greenpeace affirms that more than 1.5 million people already signed the petition. At the bottom of the post, it is possible to read “POISON BILL: a grave threat to health!”<sup>16</sup> Right below, there is a link to follow the hashtag: #ChegaDeAgrotóxicos [#NoMoreAgritoxins]. Along with this post, it is possible to see a photograph (anonymous) where a man is fumigating agritoxins on a plantation.

On July 15th, almost a month after the approval of the Agritoxin Law Report, newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* published a long item discussing what would be true and what would be lies in the debate about the use of agritoxins by the Brazilian agribusiness. The item (Text 05) entitled *Agrotóxico faz mal? É possível não usá-lo? Veja o que é verdade e mentira no debate* [Are agritoxins bad for health? Is it possible not to use them? See what is true and what is false in the debate],<sup>17</sup> written by Reinaldo José Lopes and Gabriel Alves. It is organized into 04 themes – Definition, Environment, Economy and Health, in the format of 17 questions and answers. According to the authors, the objective of the item is to bring out what science and scientists say about the matter under debate. Along with this item, there is a photograph of a cotton plantation, taken by José Medeiros of *Folhapress*. Above the photograph, one can read the following statement: “A cotton plantation, the crop with the highest agritoxin use in Brazil.”<sup>18</sup>

Finally, we present an item<sup>19</sup> entitled *ONG internacional pede que Congresso rejeite mudança na Lei dos Agrotóxicos* [International NGO requests that Lower House reject the change in Agritoxin Law], published by newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* on July 27th (Text 06). This item draws attention to the fact that the international NGO *Human Rights Watch* (HRV),

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<sup>16</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “PL DO VENENO: uma grave ameaça à saúde!”

<sup>17</sup> The complete material can be accessed at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ciencia/2018/07/agrotoxico-faz-mal-e-possivel-nao-usa-lo-veja-o-que-e-verdade-e-mentira-no-debate.shtml>. Access on: February 02, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Plantação de algodão, cultura que mais usa agrotóxicos no Brasil.”

<sup>19</sup> The complete item can be accessed at <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/mercado/2018/07/ong-internacional-pede-que-congresso-rejeite-mudanca-na-lei-dos-agrotoxicos.shtml>. Access on: February 02, 2019.

through its associate director for their environmental program, Richard Pearshouse, recommends that Brazil reject the polemical Agritoxin Law and urgently study a plan to reduce the use of highly dangerous pesticides. Along with this item, it is possible to see a photograph by Pedro Ladeira of *Folhapress*, in which Brazilian Representatives appear holding posters against the approval of the law. On the posters, it is possible to read the following statements: “No more poison in food”; “6299/2002 Bill: Poison – Say No” and “Urgent: project can put more agritoxins in your food.”<sup>20</sup>

All the six texts briefly described here configure a kind of metonymic representation of the historical path of irruption and circulation of the polemic in question. The texts show us that the approval of the Agritoxin Law Report by the Special Committee of the Lower House, at the end of July, became a discursive<sup>21</sup> event, gradually engendering a heated polemic around this law both in the Brazilian public space and in the international public space. The repercussion of this polemic was so intense that several media found themselves urged to publish texts – of which these are just samples – in a kind of didactization of the conflict. The objective was to explain better to the readers/internet users what truths and lies about the Agritoxin Law would be. It is necessary, then, initially, to understand the function and the functioning of this polemic in the public space.

## **2 A Little Theory and Analysis about the Argumentative Character of Polemic**

Ruth Amossy, in her book *Apologia da polêmica* [*Apology for the Polemic*], published in Brazil in 2017, brings an important theoretical-methodological contribution for thinking about the verbal confrontations that happen in public life, especially the ones that

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<sup>20</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Chega de veneno na comida”; “PL 6299/2002: Veneno – Diga Não”; “Urgente: projeto pode colocar mais tóxicos em sua comida.”

<sup>21</sup> In a noteworthy essay entitled “Discourse: structure or event”, published in Brazil in 1990, Michel Pêcheux - while studying the relations between what belongs to structural order and what belongs to event order in discourse - tells us that the event unfolds in a point of encounter/confrontation between a memory and an actuality, sufficing for that the existence of the possibility of a disruption-restructuring of these networks [of memory] and [social] trajectories in which he affirms: all discourse is the potential index of a movement in the social-historical affiliations of identification, while it simultaneously constitutes an effect of these affiliations and the work [...] of displacement in its space: no identification is completely successful [...]” (PÊCHEUX, 1997, p.56).

circulate in the media. The concern of the French researcher while committing to studying polemic is to show that this kind of dissention plays a function, i.e., it performs some sociodiscursive functioning in our society. In this sense, however paradoxical it may look, the author understands that the function of polemic is to perform a verbal management of conflict, to be realized within dissention. Thus,

[...] polemic – which manages the conflicts by using the clash of contradictory opinions – is not conducive to neither a compromise nor the guarantee of coexistence within a shared community of divergent positions and interests. [...] Polemic thus plays important functions that range from the possibility of public confrontation amid insoluble tensions and conflicts to the formation of communities of protest and public actions (AMOSSY, 2017, p.13).<sup>22</sup>

Starting from the principle that polemic presents itself as a debate around a question of current relevance, public interest, which deals with important societal expectations, Amossy understands that polemic has an argumentative functioning. In effect, to Amossy, the first sign of polemic as a debate of current relevance is a discursive opposition. The clash of the opinions within a verbal conflict is its foremost condition. This enunciative activity consists in bringing arguments in favor of a thesis and, in the same process, recruiting arguments against that adversary thesis.

In this sense, as we take some excerpts from the texts that we have selected to show the functioning of polemic, we have, on the one hand, a group that defends the necessity of modernizing legislation, “the defenders of the proposal argue that the text will modernize the law, expediting the registration of substances. Nowadays, according to this group, registration can take from 5 to 8 years”<sup>23</sup>; and, on the other hand, a group that defends a

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<sup>22</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “[...] a polêmica – que gerencia os conflitos valendo-se do choque das opiniões contraditórias – não permite em conduzir a um acordo, nem assegurar um modo de coexistência numa comunidade dividida entre posições e interesses divergentes. [...] A polêmica preenche, por esse motivo, funções importantes que vão da possibilidade do confronto público no seio das tensões e de conflitos insolúveis à formação de comunidades de protesto e de ação pública.”

<sup>23</sup> Excerpt taken from the item Special Committee of the Lower House approves Project that facilitates the use of agritoxins (Figure 01). In the original, in Portuguese: “os defensores da proposta argumentam que o texto modernizará a legislação, agilizando o processo de registro das substâncias. Atualmente, segundo este grupo, o processo de registro leva de 5 a 8 anos.”

completely antagonistic thesis, according to which the issue does not concern modernization but rather the loosening of rules, which will limit the action of regulatory agencies on the use of agritoxins. Thus, the latter group, “which called the proposal ‘Poison Bill,’ understands that the new law will loosen the rules because it will limit itself to the action of control agencies in the authorization of agritoxin use. They even claim that the substances can cause cancer, harm fetal development and cause mutations.”<sup>24</sup> The previous excerpts show us a strong opposition between both discourses, as they present completely different responses to the issues in agritoxin legislation, compelling either group to strongly ground its position. In this way, for those in favor of the proposal, it is necessary to modernize legislation to expedite agritoxin registration, which currently takes many years. The ones who oppose the proposal justify their position by refuting the position of the other group, affirming that facilitating the registration of substances will jeopardize the action of control agencies. Opponents of the proposal even justify the need for strict rules because products may cause cancer and genetic mutations in fetuses.

Although limited in number, these first considerations compel us to agree with Amossy (2017, p.52) when she tells us that polemic is very well provided with arguments, i.e., “there is a continuum and that goes from the co-construction of answers to the clash of antagonistic theses. It is all about the structures of global interactions that can be understood as argumentative modalities.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, it is not only about a characteristic that is present in certain genres and types of discourse and absent in others. Because it is an argumentative modality, polemic lies ahead and beyond the questions of genres and types of discourse. As an argumentative modality, polemic has traits that distinguish it from other verbal conflicts. According to Amossy, because polemic is grounded on conflict, i.e., the clash of antagonistic theses that circulate in the public space where compromise becomes

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<sup>24</sup> Excerpt taken from item Special Committee of the Lower House approves Project that facilitates the use of agritoxins (Figure 01). In the original, in Portuguese: “que apelidou a proposta de ‘PL do veneno’, entende que a nova lei vai flexibilizar as regras porque se limitará à atuação de órgãos de controle na autorização de uso dos agrotóxicos. Alegam ainda que as substâncias podem provocar câncer, prejudicar o desenvolvimento do feto e gerar mutações.”

<sup>25</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “existe um continuum e que vai da coconstrução de respostas ao choque de teses antagônicas. Trata-se de estruturas de interações globais que se pode qualificar como modalidades argumentativas.”

almost impossible, there are three defining traits of polemic: dichotomization, polarization, and the disqualification of the other.

Dichotomization, for Amossy (2017, p.53), is about the fact that in every polemic there is a method for managing conflicts, which usually tends to sustain, throughout the entire interaction, a complete disagreement between participants without allowing this disagreement to become violent. In effect, “if there is a clash of contradictory opinions, it is because the opposition of discourses - in polemic - is the object of a clear dichotomization, in which two opposing positions mutually exclude one another.”<sup>26</sup> While the argued debate supposedly leads participants to an agreement, dichotomization, as a bifurcation of contrary opinions around the same theme, radicalizes the debate, making it hard to resolve.

The data show the functioning of dichotomization in the polemic around the law on agritoxin use. The speech of representative Alessandro Molon, PSB of Rio de Janeiro, taken from the first analyzed text (Text 01), summarizes the viewpoint of people against the legislation on agritoxins: “The text will allow the trade of substances that cause genetic, carcinogenic mutations. I wonder about the news around the world – in countries that import our products – what the terrible effects on Brazilian exportations will be like.”<sup>27</sup> Now the statement by representative Adilton Sachetti (PRB of Mato Grosso), also taken from the first analyzed text, summarizes the opinion of those in favor of the new legislation: “We are behind other countries with the new, currently available things that can be used in this sector. We are tied to bureaucracy. If it is an agritoxin, pesticide or poison, to whom does it matter? What matters is that the producer should have access to the product and use it.”<sup>28</sup> Both those against and in favor of the bill speak of public interest, the legislation on agritoxin use; however, they express completely different opinions. This seems to make the search for a compromise almost impossible.

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<sup>26</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “se há choque de opiniões contraditórias, é porque a oposição dos discursos, na polêmica, é objeto de uma clara dicotomização, na qual duas posições antitéticas se excluem mutuamente.”

<sup>27</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “O texto vai permitir a comercialização de substâncias que causam mutação genética, cancerígenas. Eu fico imaginando as notícias nos jornais do mundo, de países que importam os nossos produtos, como será o efeito péssimo disso para as exportações brasileiras.”

<sup>28</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Estamos atrasados com relação a outros países com o que tem de novo para ser usado nesse setor. Nós estamos atrelados à burocracia. Se é agrotóxico, pesticida ou veneno, a quem interessa isso? O que interessa é que o produtor receba o produto e possa usar.”

The other aspect of polemic listed by Amossy as a defining trait is polarization. The researcher begins with the principle that a debate, which opposes two antagonistic opinions, is achieved through social actors, actual individuals who, based on their ideological positions, support their discourses. Thus, in the case of the polemic about the Agritoxin Law, several important people and political organizations enter the battle field to manifest themselves in favor of either viewpoint. Let us look at two excerpts taken from the text *Relatório da Lei de Agrotóxicos aprovado pela Comissão Especial da Câmara* [Report on the Agritoxin Law approved by the Lower House Special Committee], published by *Correio Braziliense* (Text 02): “The project even mobilized the United Nations (UN), who sent a letter to the Congress. ‘The modifications in the current law significantly loosen the criteria to approve agritoxin use, creating threats to a number of human rights’”<sup>29</sup> and “According to Reginaldo Minaré, coordinator of Technology of (CAN), ‘the small farmers who work on small plantations could experience a significant gain because they are among those who are most negatively affected by delays in the system.’”<sup>30</sup> These voices are taken in an orchestrated way that establishes two opposite enunciative sets. On one side there is a Proponent and on the other an Opponent, in relation to a Third one: public opinion. This is not about people then, but rather about enunciative roles, social places of speech: the Proponent defends the proposed position; the Opponent opposes that position before a spectator (public opinion). The rhetoric of polarization, according to Amossy (2017, pp.56-7),

[...] consists of establishing enemy fields and is, therefore, a social phenomenon instead of an abstract division into antagonistic and irreconcilable theses [as in dichotomization]. It is about adhering to a constitutive identity group or presenting things in a way that those who feel initially sympathetic to a given group can mobilize in favor of a thesis that makes it stronger.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “O projeto chegou a mobilizar a Organização das Nações Unidas (ONU), que enviou uma carta ao Congresso. ‘As modificações ao atual marco legal enfraquecem significativamente os critérios para aprovação do uso de agrotóxicos, colocando ameaças a uma série de direitos humanos.’”

<sup>30</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “(S)egundo Reginaldo Minaré, coordenador de Tecnologia da (CNA), ‘os pequenos agricultores que trabalham com as pequenas culturas podem ter um ganho significativo, porque são os principais prejudicados com a morosidade do sistema.’”

<sup>31</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “[...] consiste em estabelecer campos inimigos e é, portanto, um fenômeno social, e não uma divisão abstrata em teses antagônicas e inconciliáveis [como é a dicotomização]. Trata-se de

In a published item in newspaper *EL PAÍS – BRASIL*, A operação para afrouxar ainda mais a lei de agrotóxicos no Brasil, na contramão do mundo [The operation to loosen the law on agritoxins even further, contrary to the world] (Text 3), it is possible to notice the presence of several institutions talking against the thesis defended in the proposal:

Against the bill that is being appreciated by the Lower House, in addition to SBPC, organizations such as Ibama, Anvisa and the National Institute of Cancer (NIC) have positioned themselves. The latest claims that the alterations will put “at risk agriculture workers, residents of rural areas or consumers of contaminated food and water, because it will lead to the possible authorized use of agritoxins that are responsible for causing extremely serious chronic diseases and that show mutagenic and carcinogenic traits.” Now, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation published a 25-page report that shows how the bill “represents in its entirety a set of measures that attempt to facilitate operations and reduce costs for producers, neglecting the impacts on health and the environment.”<sup>32</sup>

In this polemic about the legislation on agritoxins, the reasons that each social actor (individual or institutional) has to support the approval or disapproval of the bill are extremely diverse in nature. Those in favor of the law argue that its approval will expedite the registration process for agritoxins with the Ministry of Agriculture: “There is no doubt that this bill will improve the law, making things more modern and safer in food production,”<sup>33</sup> said Representative Luiz Nishimori at the time. “The objective of the alterations is to modernize legislation that dates back to the end of the 80s.”<sup>34</sup> Therefore, opponents to the approval are basing their opinions on the idea that “the bill represents in its

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aderir a um grupo constitutivo de uma identidade ou de apresentar as coisas de modo a que aqueles que se sentem, de início solidários a um dado grupo mobilizem-se em favor da tese que o reforça.”

<sup>32</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Contra o projeto de lei que tramita na Câmara dos Deputados se posicionaram, além do SBPC, entidades como o Ibama, a Anvisa e o Instituto Nacional do Câncer (INCA). Este último argumenta que as alterações colocarão ‘em risco trabalhadores da agricultura, residentes em áreas rurais ou consumidores de água ou alimentos contaminados, pois levará à possível liberação de agrotóxicos responsáveis por causar doenças crônicas extremamente graves e que revelem características mutagênicas e carcinogênicas’. Já a Fundação Oswaldo Cruz publicou um relatório de 25 páginas que mostra como o projeto de lei ‘representa em seu conjunto uma série de medidas que buscam flexibilizar e reduzir custos para o setor produtivo, negligenciando os impactos para a saúde e para o meio ambiente.’”

<sup>33</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Não tenham dúvida de que este PL vai melhorar a lei, trazendo mais modernidade e segurança para a produção de alimentos.”

<sup>34</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “O objetivo das alterações é modernizar uma legislação que remonta ao final dos anos 80.”

entirety a set of actions that seek to facilitate things and reduce costs for productive sectors, thereby neglecting the impacts on health and on the environment.”<sup>35</sup> We realize, from both excerpts, that the Proponent and the Opponent stand on completely different argumentative grounds. The reasons that either role has for supporting the approval or disapproval of the law are of completely different orders. The ones who are in favor of the law defend the compelling need to change rules on agritoxin use. The Opponent, in turn, mobilizes a group of voices from the most diverse entities to reinforce the choir against the approval of the law. Thus, utterly diverse entities such SBPC, IBAMA, ANVISA, FIOCRUZ and the National Institute of Cancer – NIC – are identified in terms of the values they stand for in order to manifest the dangers that the approval of the law may pose to animal and human health, and to the environment. This identification of voices shows us that, in the polemic in question, we do not have only two positions that are impossible to reconcile. Rather, there is an opposing “we,” formed by the most different entities and social groups, before a “they,” in favor of the proposal.

For Amossy (2017, p.58), polarization of two antagonistic groups – against and in favor - in which either affirms its social identity, in opposition to the other, and makes this other an image of what is wrong – usually a sign of evil – implies the constitution of another trait of polemic, i.e., the disqualification of the other. “In the dispute that happens in the face of the third party (public opinion), it (polemic) always distinguishes itself by the attempts at disqualifying the Opponent.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, polemic is not only a way of managing conflicting views, fighting them, dichotomizing them and polarizing them. The Opponent acts in polemic with the objective of delegitimizing the other’s thesis. In this sense, the item ONG internacional pede que Congresso rejeite mudança na Lei dos Agrotóxicos [International NGO requests that Lower House reject the change in Agritoxin Law], published by Folha de S. Paulo (Text 6), shows us that the Opponent refutes the reasons of the social actors who are

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<sup>35</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “o projeto de lei representa em seu conjunto uma série de medidas que buscam flexibilizar e reduzir custos para o setor produtivo, negligenciando os impactos para a saúde e para o meio ambiente.”

<sup>36</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “Na disputa que se desenrola face ao terceiro (a opinião pública), ela (a polêmica) se distingue sempre pelas tentativas de desqualificação do Oponente.”



in favor of the law, seeking to emphasize that their discourse is absolutely unreliable, so it does not deserve any support.

The picture in Text 6 shows the Representatives against the Agritoxin Law, during the session that approved Nishimura's Report, while they were holding posters with the sayings and images that symbolize toxicity and danger of death: "6299/2002 BILL SAY NO TO POISON"; "No more POISON in our food" and "URGENT: Project can put more TOXINS in your food."<sup>37</sup> These representatives, on the one hand, seek to weaken the thesis of those in favor of the project by linking it to the sign of absolute evil: poison instead of pesticide. On the other hand, they urge the Third party [the public opinion] to adhere to the thesis advocated by the ones against the proposal.

The toxicity metaphor and, consequently, an eminent death risk manifested in the posters through the sayings and images as the their strongest element aims to recruit all those who commune with "the truth and the good" to fight to the last consequences against the ones in favor of the project, as the latter represent "the lie and the evil." This is a manichaeistic strategy for forming groups, thus dividing society into defenders of the truth and what is good – a "we" – against the defenders of lies and evil – a "they."

Throughout the first part of this article, we aimed to show – based on Amossy's work (2017) – how the approval of the rapporteur's report on Bill 6299/2002, on agritoxin use in Brazil, and the subsequent circulation of antagonistic opinions in many media can be understood as polemic. We have addressed the three criteria proposed by the French author: dichotomization, polarization and disqualification of the other. Once more, it is necessary to underscore that our objective is not to render an apology of polemic. We limit ourselves to showing that, in the public space, there is polemic around the approval of the Agritoxin Law and that this polemic is important to the constitution of a discursive amemory around agritoxins.

Our first step will show that the media, while encouraging this polemic, strongly contributes to a total erasure of the dysphoric discursive lineages built around agritoxins in Brazil. To that end, we will base our discussion on the recent work of Marie-Anne Paveu on

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<sup>37</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: "PL 6299/2002 VENENO DIGA NÃO"; "Chega de VENENO na comida"; "URGENTE Projeto pode colocar mais TÓXICOS em sua comida."

the relations between language and morals, especially the first part of chapter 06, entitled Memory and virtue.

### 3 A Little Theory and Analysis about *Discursive Amemory*

The sixth chapter in the book *Linguagem e moral: uma ética das virtudes discursivas [Language and Morals: An Ethics of Discursive Virtues]* (PAVEAU, 2015), entitled Memory and Virtue, is divided into three parts: The question of memory in discourse analysis; Memory of words: use and abuse; and Ethical memory of scientific discourse. All these parts propose a rhetoric of an epistemological nature about the question of memory in discourse studies. We understand that it is in this chapter that the intellectual project truly begins as proposed by Marie-Anne Paveau, since it is here that the French researcher more assertively questions linguistics and discourse about the need to take ethical/moral properties of discourse as objects of study in the field of language studies. In fact, the author tells us:

In this chapter I try to answer this double question (on the one hand, the ethical dimension of lexical-syntactic changes and, on the other hand, the legitimacy of its consideration in linguistics), showing that the notion of discursive virtue, which manifests itself in the relation that discourses maintain with their memory, such as linguistic forms, enunciative positions or contexts of production of meaning, constitute one of the parameters for linguistic analysis. Understanding discourses also includes understanding its ethical properties, because those properties participate in the *meanings* of discourses (PAVEAU, 2015, p.232; original emphasis).<sup>38</sup>

Because of the type of the analyzed object, we will focus on the first part of this chapter by Marie-Anne Paveau. At this point, the author initially resumes discussions

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<sup>38</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “Neste capítulo tento responder a essa dupla questão (por um lado, a dimensão ética das mudanças léxico-sintáticas e, por outro, a legitimidade de sua consideração pela linguística), mostrando que a noção de virtude discursiva, que se manifesta na relação que os discursos mantêm com sua memória, tal como as formas linguísticas, as posições enunciativas ou os contextos de produção de sentido, constitui um dos parâmetros da análise linguística. Compreender os discursos é também compreender suas propriedades éticas, pois elas participam do *sentido* deles.”

undertaken by Michel Pêcheux, Jean-Jacques Courtine and Sophie Moirand on the notion of discursive memory, showing how each one of these authors understand the category. Next, Paveau, transposing the concept of discursive memory from the scope of materialism and relocating it within the field of social-cognition, tells us that, in her viewpoint,

[...] the discursive-cognitive memory is a discursive technology at the same time internal (human memory) and external (discursive and linguistic instruments, but also material traces of memory in the environmental setting), which constitutes a strong contributor to the production of discourse. This means that memory is not only a capacity of the speaking agent, but a capacity distributed throughout environments: a monument, a computer, an inscription, a notebook, [a cellphone application that reminds us of our daily tasks] or even an object without inscription constitute external memories that support and enhance human memory. I do not talk only about my internal competences, but also from other competences, human or non-human (pp.234-235).<sup>39</sup>

Proceeding with this social-cognitive shift and the notion of discursive memory, Paveau advances the concept of *discursive dememory*. According to the author, this notion designates a group of disjunction phenomena of the evocation and insertion in the memory thread of discourse. To Paveau there are numerous processes in action in dememory, which concern especially the elements related to the meanings and references of words. She mentions as examples the *disanchoring* of some established expressions from their original referents; *anchoring*, in contrast, refers to some discourses in the form of others performing a kind of transfer of a memory to another; *dysfunction between a signifier and its meanings and referents*, especially the case of the proper noun and *memory subjectivation*. Taking as an example the name of battles, it is possible to show that the construction of the meanings

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<sup>39</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “[...] a memória cognitivo-discursiva é uma tecnologia discursiva ao mesmo tempo interna (memória humana) e externa (instrumentos linguísticos e discursivos, mas também vestígios materiais da memória no conjunto do ambiente), que constitui um forte contribuinte para a produção dos discursos. Isso quer dizer que a memória não é apenas uma capacidade do agente falante, mas uma capacidade distribuída nos ambientes: um monumento, um computador, uma inscrição, uma caderneta, [um aplicativo de celular que nos lembra de nossas tarefas cotidianas] ou mesmo um objeto sem inscrição constituem memórias externas que vêm sustentar e aumentar a memória humana. Não falo apenas de minhas competências internas, mas também a partir das competências outras sejam elas humanas ou não humanas.”

of the proper noun is firmly located within a cultural, social, national and even regional community. In short, the author calls *discursive dememory*

[...] a set of discourse phenomena that enables the *revision* of discursive lineages, i.e., the semantic transmissions that are culturally and socially performed by instruments of discursive technology (street signs, for instance)... These revisions can be semantic changes, semantic neologisms, re denominations, reformulation, etc... [...] a class of language phenomena that will produce transgressive or counterintuitive effects in a context where a semantic, i.e., ethical, compromise reigns (2015, p.237).<sup>40</sup>

According to Paveau (2015), there is still another type of relation with discursive memory that is not of a *revision* order but, instead, an *erasure*. To this type of relation, Paveau assigns the term *amemory*. “I speak about discursive *amemory* not to designate a *revision*, but rather a conscious or unconscious *erasure* of a discursive past or legacy, of ‘source-formulations,’ about which the speaker would not like to have anything to say” (p.237).<sup>41</sup>

Further into the discussion of erasure of memory, the author tells us that this kind of erasure should not be confused with the denial of the event, a phenomenon that is widely studied in Freudian psychoanalysis. Instead, it has do to with the denial of the discourse about an event, of the words that would give a name to the event and, consequently, would make it exist or re-exist. The author refines her notion of erasure/denial even further by inscribing it in the area of oblivion. “The oblivion which I am talking about is a voluntary and orchestrated oblivion, an active oblivion motivated by the fact that remembering or ‘keeping in mind’ would be unbearable, for reasons that can be of various types” (p.238).<sup>42</sup> To Paveau, these

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<sup>40</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “[...] um conjunto de fenômenos do discurso que possibilitam a *revisão* das linhagens discursivas, ou seja, das transmissões semânticas cultural e socialmente realizadas pelos instrumentos da tecnologia discursiva (as placas de ruas, por exemplo)... Essas revisões podem ser mudanças semânticas, neologismos semânticos, re denominações, reformulações, etc... [...] um conjunto de fenômenos de linguagem que produzirão efeitos transgressivos ou contra intuitivos num contexto no qual reine um acordo semântico, (isto é), ético.”

<sup>41</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “Falo de *amemória* discursiva não para designar uma *revisão*, mas sim um apagamento consciente ou inconsciente de um passado ou um legado discursivo, de ‘formulações-origem’, sobre as quais o falante não gostaria de ter mais nada o que dizer.”

<sup>42</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “O esquecimento de que estou falando é um esquecimento voluntário e orquestrado, um esquecimento ativo motivado pelo fato de que lembrar-se ou „ter em mente“ seria insuportável, por razões que podem ser muito variadas.”

three categories - discursive memory, dememory and amemory - can serve as good references to realize the ethical dimension of discourses. Thus,

[...] if virtuous discourse is defined, among other things, by an adjustment to discursive memories in action in the fabric of societies, it is necessary to define the types of misfits by precisely evaluating the relation between discourses and memory: a phenomenon of amemory or of dememory is not necessarily a breach of adjustment but, on the contrary, it may be one of its factors (2015, p.241).<sup>43</sup>

After these brief considerations about the concept of discursive memory in the understanding of Paveau, we shall proceed to the analysis of the excerpt in the text by Rapporteur Luiz Nishimori (PR-PR) on the Agritoxin Law, precisely the part in which he – based on the initial project by Blairo Maggi – proposes the change of the designation “agritoxins” to the expression “phytosanitary products.” In the final version presented to the Special Committee of the Lower House, the term was replaced with “pesticide”:

[...] the concept “agritoxin” as it is used by the current Law is inappropriate. In the public hearings, some guests argued for the permanence of the word “agritoxin” while others supported the term “agricultural defensives” or “phytosanitary product.” As regards the term *agritoxin*, which seems to have acquired a derogatory connotation among public opinion, the Brazilian Agricultural Encyclopedia (by Julio Seabra Ingles Souza, Aristeu Mendes Peixoto, and Francisco Ferras de Toledo. 1. Edusp, 1995) is literally in favor of its use: “From the Greek term *agros*, which expresses the idea of field, and *toxikon*, which expresses the idea of poison. These are all the products of a toxic nature used in agricultural systems or, more properly, in agro-forestry, silvo-pasture systems. They include, under this denomination, all the toxic synthetic or natural substances, of chemical (organic or inorganic) or biological natures, used to fight pests, pathogens and invasive weeds in agricultural, horticultural, forestry and pasture cultures...” In addition to being derogatory, the term *agritoxin* is only used in Brazil. It is important to remember that the natural choice would be the term adopted in Portugal, which refers to these substances as *pesticides*. In the major languages of the world, variations with the same etymology are used: *pesticidas* (Spanish),

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<sup>43</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “[...] se o discurso virtuoso se define, entre outras coisas, por um ajuste às memórias discursivas em ação no tecido das sociedades, é preciso definir as formas de desajuste avaliando precisamente a relação entre os discursos e a memória: um fenômeno de amemória ou de desmemória não é obrigatoriamente uma ruptura no ajuste, mas ao contrário, pode ser um fator dele.”

*pesticide* (English), *Pestizide* (German), *pesticides* (French), *pesticide* (Italian), *pesticider* (Danish and Swedish), *pesticiden* (Dutch), *пестициды* (*pestitsidy* – Russian). It happens that the lexical components of the word pesticide are: *pestis* (epidemic and pandemic sickness) and *cida* (that which kills). The hyponyms are: fungicide, germicide, herbicide, and insecticide. In view of the countless discussions concerning terminology, the term “phytosanitary product” is proposed for use.<sup>44</sup>

In his text, the Rapporteur grounds the need to change the designation on five arguments: a) the concept “agritoxin” used in the current Law (nr. 7802 of 1989) is inappropriate; b) the term agritoxin acquired a derogatory connotation among public opinion; c) besides being derogatory, the term agritoxin is used only in Brazil; d) the natural choice would be to use the term used in Portugal, which refers to these substances as pesticides; and f) in the main languages of the world (Spanish, English, German, French, Danish and Swedish, Dutch and Russian) variations of the name pesticide are used, preserving the same etymology. The arguments presented by the Rapporteur seem convincing at first sight; they show, because of the mobilization of etymological knowledge, certain erudition. However, a closer look will show us that those arguments lack scientific grounding, especially in the scope of the language of sciences. For example, a quick analysis, based on a lexical semantics, would show us that traits of meaning, the semes that make up the word agritoxin, are different from the traits that compose the word pesticide. The following chart shows us some of the differences of meaning for both terms:

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<sup>44</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “[...] o conceito de ‘agrotóxico’ utilizado pela atual Lei é inadequado. Nas audiências públicas, alguns convidados defenderam a permanência da palavra ‘agrotóxico’ e outros o termo ‘defensivos agrícolas’ ou ‘produto fitossanitário’. Em relação ao termo *agrotóxico*, que parece ter tomado conotação depreciativa junto à opinião pública, a Enciclopédia Agrícola Brasileira (de Julio Seabra Inglês Souza, Aristeu Mendes Peixoto, & Francisco Ferraz de Toledo. 1. Edusp, 1995) é literalmente favorável a seu uso: ‘Do grego *agros*, que exprime a ideia de campo, e *toxikon*, que exprime a ideia de veneno. São todos os produtos de natureza tóxica usados nos sistemas agrícolas, ou mais propriamente nos sistemas *agro-silvopastoris*. Incluem-se, sob essa denominação, todas as substâncias tóxicas sintéticas ou naturais, de origem química (orgânica e inorgânica), ou biológica, usadas para o combate a pragas, patógenos e ervas invasoras de culturas agrícolas, hortícolas, silvícolas e pastoris...’ Além de depreciativo, o termo *agrotóxico* só é utilizado no Brasil. Cabe lembrar que a escolha natural seria o termo adotado em Portugal, que denomina essas substâncias *pesticidas*. Nas principais línguas do mundo, adotam-se variações com a mesma etimologia: *pesticidas* (espanhol), *pesticide* (inglês), *Pestizide* (alemão), *pesticides* (francês), *pesticidi* (italiano), *pesticider* (dinamarquês e sueco), *pesticiden* (holandês), *пестициды* (*pestitsidy* – russo). Ocorre que os componentes léxicos da palavra *pesticida* são: *pestis* (enfermidade epidêmica ou pandêmica) e *cida* (o que mata). São seus hipônimos: fungicida, germicida, herbicida e inseticida. Diante das inúmeras discussões sobre a terminologia, propõe-se a adotar o termo ‘produto fitossanitário’.

	Chemical	Physical	Biological	Fight animal pests	Fight plant pests	Fight epidemic pests in plantations	Toxicity
Agritoxin	+	+	-	+	+	-	+
Pesticide	+/-	+	+/-	-	+	+	-

In the chart above it is possible to see that the words are not synonymous; in other words, those are not terms likely to substitute for one another in any context. For example, in the sentence *The farmer used biological pesticides to fight the pests that are spreading diseases on his farm*, we will not be able to replace *pesticide* with *agritoxin*, as the latter has only chemical origin as one of its traits, while the former, besides having a chemical origin, can also have a biological origin. Another example is: *Organic farming does not allow for the use of agritoxins*. The term *agritoxin* could not be replaced with *pesticide* because the use of pesticides (from viral or bacterial origin)<sup>45</sup> in organic farming is perfectly possible.

It is important to highlight, however, that different languages may use similar lexical components to designate completely distinct referents. Consultation to dictionaries would reveal that terms with similar lexical components mean different things in different languages. For example, let us look at the definition given to the term *pesticide* by the electronic French dictionary Larousse<sup>46</sup> and, then, the definition given in Portuguese by the Electronic Dictionary Dicio<sup>47</sup>:

It refers to a chemical product used for the protection or treatment of plants. (Synonyms: phytosanitary product, phytopharmaceutical product). Pesticides include mostly fungicides, insecticides and herbicides, used

<sup>45</sup> According to EMBRAPA [Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation], a good example of an organic pesticide is Baculovirus in soybean cultivation. It is a natural product that fights the velvetbean caterpillar (*antarsia gemmatilis*) and does not have any direct effect on humans. In addition, it does not affect insects, natural enemies, and does not pose any contamination risks to the environment (soil and water). Available at: <<https://www.embrapa.br/busca-de-solucoes-tecnologicas/-/produto-servico/496/baculovirus-para-a-soja-inseticida-biologico-para-o-controle-da-lagarta-da-soja-antarsia-gemmatilis>>. Access on: February 01, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Available at: <https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedie/divers/pesticide/78782>. Access on: February 01, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> It could be expected that we would choose a more reputable dictionary, such as Aurélio or Houaiss, but the definitions in both for the term pesticide are very vague: “it is said of substances that fight pests.” In the original: “diz-se de ou substância que combate as pragas.”

respectively to control fungi, insects, and weeds. The use of copper sulfate (“Bordeaux mix”) against wine blight goes back to end of the 19th century. However, it is with the advent of industrial and intensive agriculture that it spread around the world in the second half of the 20th century through the systematic use of pesticides. These so-called phytosanitary treatments are used more and more frequently, sprayed by airplanes or helicopters, and have begun diffuse pollution of the environment because the technique favors the use of mists of these toxic substances in the air. Some organochlorides, such as DDT, lindane, etc., highly biodegradable and non-selective, show three disadvantages: they destroy beneficial species, reveal resistant strains of pests, and build up through the food chain, sometimes causing the poisoning of birds and even human beings. Their use is regulated on and they tend to be replaced with less harmful organophosphates, or their use is replaced with biological control.<sup>48</sup>

Now Dicio - Online Portuguese dictionary - provides the following entries:

Meaning of Pesticide: adjective. It is said of the substance (product) used to fight pests and parasites; *praguicida*. Masculine noun. That which can be used to fight pests. Etymology (origin of the word pesticide). From English pesticide/pest(i)+cide. Synonym of Pesticide. Pesticide is a synonym of: *praguicida*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In the original, in French: “Se dit d'un produit chimique utilisé pour la protection ou le traitement des végétaux. (Synonymes: produit phytosanitaire, produit phytopharmaceutique.) Les pesticides regroupent principalement les fongicides, les insecticides et les herbicides, utilisés respectivement pour lutter contre les champignons, les insectes et les mauvaises herbes (adventices). L'usage du sulfate de cuivre («bouillie bordelaise») contre le mildiou de la vigne date de la fin du xix<sup>e</sup>s. Mais c'est avec l'agriculture industrielle et intensive, apparue dans la seconde moitié du xx<sup>e</sup>s. et qui s'est répandue dans l'ensemble du monde, qu'il est fait un recours systématique aux pesticides. Ces traitements dits «phytosanitaires», effectués de plus en plus souvent par avion ou par hélicoptère, sont à l'origine d'une pollution diffuse de l'environnement, car cette technique favorise la dérive de brouillards de traitement chargés de ces substances toxiques. Certains composés, les organochlorés tels que DDT, lindane, etc., produits peu biodégradables et non sélectifs, ont montré trois inconvénients : ils détruisent les espèces utiles, font apparaître des souches résistantes dans les espèces nuisibles et s'accumulent le long des chaînes alimentaires, provoquant parfois l'intoxication des oiseaux, voire de l'homme. Leur usage est réglementé et on tend à leur substituer les organophosphorés, moins nocifs, ou à remplacer leur usage par le recours à la lutte biologique.”

<sup>49</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Significado de Pesticida: adjetivo. Diz-se da substância (produto) utilizada para combater pragas e parasitas; *praguicida*. substantivo masculino. Aquilo que pode ser usado no combate as pragas. Etimologia (origem da palavra *pesticida*). Do inglês *pesticide*/ pest(i) + cida. Sinônimos de Pesticida. Pesticida é sinônimo de: *praguicida*.” Available at: <https://www.dicio.com.br/pesticida/> Access on: February 01, 2019.

TN. *Praguicida* is a Portuguese word that would also translate as pesticide into English. To avoid repetition, the term has been preserved in Portuguese.



Based on both definitions it is possible to notice that, although both have in common the trait that a pesticide refers to a substance used to combat pests on the farm, in the French dictionary, a pesticide is a product of chemical origin, which is not mentioned in Portuguese. In addition, in Larousse, on the one hand, the term designates a product used to protect or treat plants and, on the other hand, it is synonymous with the French terms phytosanitary product and phytopharmaceutical product. Moreover, for the Portuguese term, the dictionary Dicio does not specify what kind of pests and parasites the substance fights and, as a synonym, it offers only *praguicida*.

If we look up in a specific dictionary or a specialized encyclopedia in the field agriculture, as the one mentioned in the Rapporteur's text – the Brazilian Agricultural Encyclopedia (by Julio Seabra Inglez Souza, Aristeu Mendes Peixoto and Francisco Ferraz de Toledo. 1. Edusp, 1995) – we will notice that the synonymic impossibility between agritoxin and pesticide becomes even more evident:

[...] They are, thus, agritoxins: insecticides, formicidas, termiticidas, nematocidas, acaricidas, tick killers, fungicidas, bactericidas, herbicidas, arboricidas, etc. The terms pesticides, *praguicidas*, defensivo and biocida are *wrongly* used with the same meaning of agritoxins. Pesticide (from Latin *pestis*, the disease + *cide*, that which kills) is the word that cannot be used in the general sense, since it refers only to the pest, and pest is a grave epidemic disease, of great mobility and mortality; even to diseases the term is inappropriate [...] (no original emphasis).<sup>50</sup>

The authors of the agritoxin entry are emphatic when they explain “the terms pesticide, *praguicida*, defensivo and biocida are wrongly used with the same meaning of agritoxin.” To base their assertion, they seek arguments based on the etymology of the word pesticide: “(form Latin *pestis*, the disease + *cide*, that which kills).” In fact, based on the

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<sup>50</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “[...] São, assim, agrotóxicos: inseticidas, formicidas, cupinicidas, bernicidas, nematocidas, acaricidas, carrapaticidas, moluscicidas, raticidas, fungicidas, bactericidas, herbicidas, arboricidas etc. Os termos pesticida, praguicida, defensivo e biocida são usados *erroneamente* com o mesmo sentido de agrotóxico. Pesticida (do Latim *pestis*, a doença + *cida*, o que mata) é o vocábulo que não pode ser usado em sentido geral, uma vez que se refere à peste tão-somente e peste é doença epidêmica grave, de grande mobilidade e mortandade; mesmo para doenças o termo é inadequado [...]” (sem destaque no original). Available at: [https://books.google.com.br/books?id=B031Rayt6tcC&q=Agricultura&hl=ptBR&source=gb\\_s\\_word\\_cloud\\_r&cad=4#v=snippet&q=Agricultura&f=false](https://books.google.com.br/books?id=B031Rayt6tcC&q=Agricultura&hl=ptBR&source=gb_s_word_cloud_r&cad=4#v=snippet&q=Agricultura&f=false). Access on: February 01, 2019.

Brazilian Agricultural Encyclopedia, the Rapporteur presents, in his argumentation, only the part of the entry that supports his interpretation: “From Greek agros, which express the idea of field, and toxikon, which express the idea of poison. They are all products of a toxic nature used in agricultural systems, or more properly in agro-forestry silvo-pasture systems...,” silencing (sneakily) the part where the authors of the entry contest the equivalence of meaning for agritoxin and pesticide.

Furthermore, it is also possible to notice in the Rapporteur’s text, as it proposes this change of designation from agritoxin to pesticide, that there is a clear erasure of an entire negative discursive memory around the former. The Rapporteur himself, through folk linguistics, empirically notes this negative meaning of the word agritoxin: “the term agritoxin acquired a derogatory connotation among public opinion.” This change of designation – however simple it may seem - is a perfect example of what French researcher Mari-Anne Paveau calls discursive *amemory*: “a conscious or unconscious erasure of a discursive past or legacy, of ‘source-formulations,’ about which the speaker would not like to have anything to say” (2015, p.237).<sup>51</sup> It is not about a simple revision of these discursive lineages.<sup>52</sup> In other words, the Rapporteur’s text and the subtle suggestion of terminological change attempt to erase, force into oblivion, and inhibit a whole history of discourses that negatively portrays agritoxins. This negative legacy was historically built because of all the harms that agritoxins cause to human and animal health, and to the environment. With this erasure, one is not only

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<sup>51</sup> In the Portuguese translation: “um apagamento consciente ou inconsciente de um passado ou um legado discursivo, de ‘formulações-origem’, sobre as quais o falante não gostaria de ter mais nada o que dizer.”

<sup>52</sup> In the article entitled *Pessoas com deficiência na Universidade: como devemos nos comportar e ajudá-las* [People with disabilities at University: how we should behave and help them], authored by Professor Francisco Ricardo Lins Vieira de Melo, from UFRN and published in *BiblioCanto* journal, we find a good example of discursive lineage review. In effect, the author tells us: “How should we refer to the people with disabilities? By their names or simply by the term people with disabilities. Nowadays, this is the most common term around the world, not because it is politically correct, but because, in this way, the noun factor (‘people’) gains more importance than the adjectival aspect (‘with disabilities’). With the advance of science and the knowledge of the potential of these people, terms that were and still are used to refer to them, such as: retard, mongoloid, crazy, lame, crippled, among others, should not be used anymore because they denote prejudice and the idea of inferiority” (2008, p.2). In the original, in Portuguese: “como nos referir às pessoas com deficiência? Pelo seu nome ou simplesmente pelo próprio termo pessoas com deficiência. Hoje em dia, este é o termo mais utilizado em todo o mundo, não por ser politicamente correto, mas porque, desta forma, a questão substantiva (‘pessoas’) possui mais importância do que o aspecto adjetivo (‘com deficiência’). Com o avanço da ciência e o conhecimento das potencialidades dessas pessoas, termos que eram e ainda são utilizados para se referir às mesmas, tais como: retardado, mongol, doidinho, manco, coxo, aleijado, entre tantos outros, não devem ser mais utilizados, pois denotam preconceito e ideia de inferioridade.”

denying the harms posed by agritoxins, as shown in countless, unquestionable cases reported in the medicinal literature and in the literature on environmental issues. Instead, the attempted erasure is forcing those discourses into oblivion. As it is not possible to erase events, it seeks to silence the discourses that talk about events.

There is also another point worthy of mentioning in the erasure proposed in the Rapporteur's text. When he proposes pesticides instead of agritoxins, his text mobilizes a term that is adjusted to the discursive memory in action in our social fabric. The Rapporteur himself once more empirically determines that *pesticides* is a virtuous term: "the natural choice would be to use the term used in Portugal, which refers to these substances as pesticides."<sup>53</sup> In other words, differently from agritoxin, pesticide is defined as a virtuous term, as it is adjusted to the values subjacent to the inter-relations of the agents. In other words, in this historic moment, based on studies in the fields of health and environmental sciences, the harms of agritoxins to the environment and to animal and human health have been proven, and this term is completely inadequate to the discursive memory.

To conclude we quickly return to some excerpts from the texts that we have discussed in the first part of this article, especially the ones that refer to the change of denomination from agritoxin to pesticide. In the first text, published on the G1 website (Text 01), we have: "Designation: What things are like today: Agritoxin. According to the project: Initially it was phytosanitary product, later Rapporteur Luis Nishimori (PR-PR) changed the term to 'pesticide.'"<sup>54</sup> In the second text, published by Correio Braziliense (Text 02), we have: "The Bill changes the word 'agritoxin' to 'pesticide.' It concentrates powers in the Ministry of Agriculture to approve new products and anticipates the adoption of a table of risk level for new substances in Brazil."<sup>55</sup> In the third text, published by EL PAÍS - BRASIL (figure 03), we have: "Another change refers to the nomenclature of these poisoning substances, which

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<sup>53</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: "a escolha natural seria adotar o termo adotado em Portugal, que denomina essas substâncias pesticidas."

<sup>54</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: "Designação: Como é atualmente: Agrotóxico. Pelo projeto: Inicialmente era produto fitossanitário, em seguida o relator, deputado Luís Nishimori (PR-PR), alterou o termo para 'pesticida'."

<sup>55</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: "O PL troca a palavra 'agrotóxico' por 'pesticida'. Concentra poderes no Ministério da Agricultura para a aprovação de novos produtos e prevê a adoção de uma tabela de grau de risco para novas substâncias no Brasil."

will be called henceforth ‘pesticides’ instead of ‘agritoxins.’”<sup>56</sup> Now, in the item published in *Folha de S. Paulo* (Text 05), we have:

Are agritoxins the same thing as agricultural defensives and pesticides? Yes. The difference is related to the decision to emphasize certain aspects with the word choice (another term is phytosanitary). Agritoxin is correct since it is about a toxic substance, used in agriculture. The same works for agricultural defensives, since the objective of their use is to defend plantations. Pesticide means that which ‘kills pests,’ while the definition of a pest, according to FAO (United Nations for Agriculture and Food) is, ‘any form of plant or animal life or any pathogenic agent harmful to plants.’ Thus, there is no mistake in using any of the terms above.<sup>57</sup>

The change of nomenclature in Rapporteur Luiz Nishimori’s text should be viewed with the same level of caution as the other foreseen changes – loosening the criteria for approval and risk analysis – because it is not simply replacing a word with another. Actually, it is building another historical journey of meanings for agritoxins, and this time it is completely free from the negative associations which had been attached to it because of the harm to human and animal health, and to the environment. The analyzed media, even when trying – in some cases – to explain what would be true and what would be lies in relation to the Agritoxin Law, preferred to evade this important discussion, claiming that “there is no mistake in using either term [agritoxin and pesticide] above.” This omission shows us that the polemic engendered by the different media, while focusing only on some aspects of the law on agritoxin use and neglecting the others, supports an erasure of the dysphoric discursive lineages of the term agritoxin.

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<sup>56</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Outra das mudanças se refere à própria nomenclatura dessas substâncias venenosas, que passarão a ser tratadas como ‘pesticidas’ ao invés de ‘agrotóxicos’.”

<sup>57</sup> In the original, in Portuguese: “Agrotóxico é a mesma coisa que defensivo agrícola e pesticida? Sim. A diferença está relacionada à decisão de enfatizar determinado aspecto com a escolha da palavra (outro termo usado é fitossanitário). Agrotóxico está correto já que se trata de substância tóxica, usada na agricultura. O mesmo vale para defensivo agrícola, uma vez que o objetivo da aplicação é defender as plantações. Pesticida quer dizer o que ‘mata pragas’, enquanto definição de praga, segundo a FAO (Organização das Nações Unidas para Agricultura e Alimentação) é, ‘qualquer forma de vida vegetal ou animal ou qualquer agente patogênico daninho para os vegetais’. Dessa forma, não há erro em usar nenhum dos termos acima.”

## Conclusion

With the objective of contributing to the debate about the Agritoxin Law from a linguistic viewpoint, more specifically discourse studies, we have engaged in an analytical endeavor of two types of texts: one extracted from the Report prepared by Representative Luiz Nishimori (PR-PR) on the bill drafted by former Minister of Agriculture during Michel Temer's administration, Blairo Maggi – Bill No. 2699-2002 – submitted to the Special Committee of the Lower House, and approved on June 26th and, others that are portions of the texts that circulated in many media, especially Brazilian outlets, on the polemic initiated with the approval of Nishimori's report in the Lower House.

Our analyses showed that the media have spiced up the polemic, bringing up relevant information about the implications of the approval of the Rapporteur's text to Brazilian society as regards economy, animal and human health, and the environment. In addition, the media circulated some information concerning the resistance of all those who see the proposal as the Poison Bill. However, there was a clear negligence on the part of these media, particularly as regards a more profound discussion of one of the key issues in the proposal: precisely the change of designation from agritoxin to pesticide. By placing this issue on a lesser plan, or simply silencing the proposal to change the words, as in the excerpt from *Folha de S. Paulo*, claiming that agritoxin is the same thing as agricultural defensive or pesticide (here a metonym was taken by the whole) there is also, on the part of several media, corroboration of the Report approved by the Special Committee of the Lower House. This is a subtle attempt not only to revise but to erase the dysphoric discursive lineages historically built around agritoxins in Brazil.

The previous statement may seem too broad in scope and not hold in view of the limited size of the corpus that has been used and analyzed in this article. However, it is necessary to consider that even in Natural Sciences, it is not the exhaustiveness of a *corpus* that guarantees the confirmation or the information of a research hypothesis, but rather the regularity of the inquired problem. In our case, in support of what has been written in Nishimori's Report – despite stirring polemic in public spaces – none of the media addressed the proposed change of designation in a substantiated manner. This attempt at erasure

reminds us of Milan Kundera in *The book of laughter and forgetting*, more specifically the moment when character Mikek tells us that “[t]he struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (1999, p.4; No emphasis in the original).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> For reference, see footnote 1.