

The politics of emotions: the public and the private in Porta dos Fundos

*A política das emoções:
o público e o privado em
Porta dos Fundos*



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Abstract: this study analyzes the process of interpenetration between the public and private spheres in two videos of the YouTube channel Porta dos Fundos, *Questão de Ordem* and *Nome na Lista*, problematizing the notion of *politics of emotions* through the videos. For this, we will carry on a theoretical discussion on the evolution of the notions of public and private, through Richard Sennett (2014) and Sandra Jovchelovitch (2000), the analysis of emotional discourses as political practices, through Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz (1990) and Claudia Rezende and Maria Claudia Coelho (2010) and the humor about politics made by the channel, by analyzing these two videos.

Keywords: humor; audiovisual; politics of emotions; public; private.

Resumo: este trabalho analisa o processo de interpenetração entre as esferas pública e privada em dois vídeos do canal *Porta dos Fundos* no YouTube, *Questão de Ordem* e *Nome na Lista*, problematizando a noção de *política das emoções* através dos vídeos. Para tanto, será feito o diálogo entre uma discussão teórica sobre a evolução das noções de público e privado, através de Richard Sennett (2014) e Sandra Jovchelovitch (2000), a análise dos discursos emocionais como práticas políticas, por meio de Lila Abu-Lughod e Catherine Lutz (1990) e Claudia Rezende e Maria Claudia Coelho (2010) e o humor sobre política feito pelo canal, pela análise destes dois vídeos.

Palavras-chave: humor; audiovisual; política das emoções; público; privado.

Contemporary audiovisualities and comedy on politics

The so-called internet user (KILLP et al., 2015; MONTAÑO, 2015; PRIMO, 2013) shows different forms of consumption and interaction with the content made available online. From mere spectator to content producer, users often show great appreciation for audiovisual content – as well as content of different natures – and can access such content through multiple devices: smartphones, laptops, desktops, smart TVs.

In the case of audiovisual media, content mobilization is not the only factor worth considering; sharing platforms also include (at least partially) consuming trends, and appropriate in part users of these digital social networks. Kilpp et al. (2015) propose that the sum of icons, borders, available information (such as number of views), duration and related suggested videos configure frames that function as a kind of “packaging” for the content, besides representing a type of “digital trail” (BRUNO, 2012) of the themes preferred by the user.

In addition, visibility algorithms (kept secret by their platforms) use different metrics such as number of views and timeliness of the content to the number of likes or dislikes obtained from the “call to action.” As such, they act as guiding or conditioning agents to users, often unaware of these interactions.

In addition to the interactions between the subject and the platforms, we have the relationship of society with the contents consumed. Although there is no “passive” consumption, that is, appropriation without “deviations” between the intentionality of producers and their consumers, web-based audiovisual media contributes significantly to feed the social imagination about various themes, including politics. “Politics” here is taken in its broadest, most generic conception; that is, built upon public personas, institutions and organizations that relate to power and civil society, grounding itself on the ideas of the welfare state and maintenance of order through democracy. As such, comedy plays a role in this political definition as an ever-vigilant gaze.

Under the cover of permissiveness, comedians have long been able to utter certain truths that otherwise no one would be brave enough to direct to institutionalized power (MINOIS, 2003) and thus are able to either promote catharsis, acting as translators of the anguish of the oppressed, or invite others to laugh about the tragic and chaotic elements of life. For Bergson (1983), laughter triggered by comedy is a collective act, as both creators and recipients of such

laughter share the same set of signs in a given cultural context. Even further, the author argues that laughter is a political act of a reprehensible nature, that reveals the recognition of what “should not be” and directs a sign of correction to it.

This political act, when related to the public persona and the political field (especially elected representatives), seems to reveal a superposition between the public space and the private space, blurring the boundaries between society and the individual freedom of the subjects. Examples of this appear in two comedy skits of the YouTube channel Porta dos Fundos, chosen by the authors because they represent more clearly and punctually the concepts explored here. Namely: *Questão de Ordem*, aired on Aug. 31. 2015 (3,367,575 views, 134,000 likes, 2,700 dislikes³), and *Nome na Lista*, aired on 25 May 2017 (2,912,787 views, 142,000 likes, 2,700 dislikes⁴).

For the analysis, we used the methodology proposed by Julier and Marie (2009), associated with the techniques of film analysis listed by Penafria (2009), which emphasize both the difficulty of “translating” audiovisual contents into textual support and the need for a comprehensive look at the work, as image and sound constitute a single, inseparable aesthetic experience. From a holistic perspective of the content, we can perceive elements such as language and stylistic traits used to audiovisual construction, as well as senses and affections triggered by the narrative. To this end, we describe the plot, the scenic elements and the narrative structure to explore these signs and senses throughout the work. External elements such as context and political information may compliment perception of the established audiovisual culture, from the concepts of dispersion and persistence (JOST, 2012). This mixture of scenic narrative and everyday facts, according to Hoff (2018), is one of the distinguishing marks of the comedy of Porta dos Fundos. The group often employs this sense of reality when writing its political skits.

At this point, we emphasize that this article aims at the theoretical discussion about the figure of the public man and the slips between public and private, as observed from audiovisual narratives. To this end, we use the comical videos of Porta dos Fundos as a way to illustrate, exemplify and describe how these tensions take place, in order to tie the theoretical discussion to an empirical

³ Data taken from the video page on March 27, 2020.

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object, without exhausting it or finding an end point in this exercise. Thus, we propose a reading that navigates between ideas and material reality without a structural distinction, but with an intrinsic, dialectical and complex process between systems.

As a writing strategy, the authors opted for an interconnection between theoretical and empirical objects, that is, a script that does not divide concepts and then apply them on the corpus, but merges these elements and admits the emergence of theoretical elements from the empirical object. Thus, the structure is based on this introduction on politics and audiovisual media as sensitizing elements to the discussions proposed. Then in two subsequent moments, the friction between the public and private spheres are discussed based on Sennett (2014) and Sandra Jovchelovitch (2000), in addition to the politics of emotions triggered in the targeted object, based on the works of Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz (1990) and also Claudia Rezende and Maria Claudia Coelho (2010). The first discussion analyzes *Questão de Ordem* (2015), while the second discusses *Nome na Lista* (2017). At the end, the authors discuss questions and proposals for future endeavors based on the encounter of theoretical elements and audiovisual media.

Friction between the public and the private

In his analysis of the historical process of emptying the public sphere for the benefit of intimacy and privacy, Richard Sennett (2014) points out that, before such emptying, the public and private domains were seen together and with a self-regulatory function. As the private would restrict the public vice of injustice and the public would soften the rudeness of the private, the two domains acted, for Sennett, through the idea of a molecule, as competing and complementary modes.

This complementarity between the public as a human creation and the private as the human condition, however, began to be disintegrated with the movements of demand for freedom in the 18th century, resulting in the weakening of social force, order and the public sphere. As a result of this weakening, the author states that individuals turned to other forms of association, especially the family, which in the 19th century consolidated itself as an exclusive and ideal

environment in moral terms, promoting stability and privacy as a counterpoint to the turbulence and amorality of the public sphere.

Parallel to the strengthening of the private domain and its consecration of intimacy, a narcissistic mobilization also grew that prioritized individual demands at the same time as it gave less space for the expression of collective feelings and values. Group sensitivity, in this context, has lost prominence and the relationship between person and public entity gains the status of obligation, since the other, the foreigner, is constantly associated with a threat.

Thus, as Sennett points out, only in the private environment is it possible to reflect, feel pleasure, and have security, and the act of living with family, friends or yourself is consecrated as a purpose per se. Consequently, with interaction seen as obligation, such endless search for privacy imposes self-identity as a burden, and not as a form of self-knowledge. Within this obsession with people, and not with impersonal projects or relationships, public figures are not valued as such, but only as individuals. The *public persona* is thus replaced by the *political persona*, that must be the least political possible, in a public and collective sense.

In the study by Sandra Jovchelovitch (2000) on the perception of the Brazilian political context by citizens, through the representation of issues related to society and public space in Brazilian newspapers between 1992 and 1993, the connection between public space and the behavior of individuals in the face of the loss of protagonism in the public sphere is also noticeable. Jovchelovitch emphasizes the distance between constitutional rights and everyday life in the Brazilian context, considering the exercise of citizenship in a country notably marked by illiteracy, hunger, concentration of income, violence and economic instability as well as diversified industrial activity and high index of natural wealth.

In this context, a process of disenchantment with the public sphere was consolidated, marked by the inability to build projects for the public space and the discredit of political activity. As a consequence, this process was marked by an empty and verbose discourse that illustrates the distance between said and done between the public and private rhetoric. Disenchantment and discredit are both present in her work (JOVCHELOVITCH, 2000) through the conception of the streets as sources of violence and fear, while the Brazilian people are seen as violent, uncontrollable or manipulated by external forces, policed only by the military. The social issue then becomes a police issue, associated with the devalued representation of a country and its people in constant moral decline.

The first video, *Questão de Ordem*, reproduces through framing elements the television broadcast of plenary session of the Chamber of Deputies (Figure 1). The watermark of TV Bancada identifies the broadcast channel, in the upper right corner of the video; the stripe with the symbol of the Chamber and the caption bearing the name of the characters preceded by their function; there is also the identification of the current session just below the names of the characters in the frame, as well as the time fixed in the lower left corner and continuously rolling data and details about the projects being voted.

Through these elements, the video builds the frame of the plenary session of the Chamber as a public and mediated space. This space, however, is quickly crossed by private issues of deputies Maria Da Rosa (Júlia Rabello) and Welder Montenegro (Victor Leal). As the skit proceeds, the two deputies of opposing parties further raise objections and start a heated debate that leads to namecalling in the tribune. Throughout the objection requests mediated by the resigned and increasingly impatient President of the Chamber, Fernando Cunha (Antonio Tabet), Da Rosa and Montenegro move from political disagreements to personal accusations.

From allegations of sexism to misuse of official transportation to take the children to school, the two deputies come to offenses increasingly related to each other's intimate life, motivating the unexpected intervention of the President: "Guys, for God's sake, you're married!" (2min20s). After an abrupt end to the exchange of offenses, both apologize to each other.

In *Questão de Ordem*, the strength of private domain and the privilege of intimacy analyzed by Sennett (2014) are transposed in an unusual way to the public sphere, tensioning the very identity of the couple. Within a predominance of the expression of feelings, narcissism and individual demands, Da Rosa and Montenegro cannot dissociate political disagreements from their marital problems, exposing the latter in a public space.

In the dispute between familial and political issues, the former wins, and the two deputies expose themselves as political personas, not public, so concerned about their individual, frustrated demands that they begin to discuss them in a plenary session. Both are linked to the private environment of the family in such a way that they cannot see one or the other as political opponents, but as a husband and wife in marital crisis.



Figure 1: Frames of *Questão de Ordem* that show the evolution of the political debate to the marital quarrel.

This exposition of marital drama acquires a critical dimension, resonating to the arguments used in actual plenary sessions by opposing deputies, who often break the Code of Parliamentary Conduct to question the suitability of others with arguments of a private nature (sexual orientation, for example). The skit then shifts the mockery (and the political act of correction) to those who use the tribune and the public space for private (and personal) discussions, dialoguing with the crisis of the notion of public persona, taking it by its sarcastic, cartoonish and inappropriate aspect, as a subject responsible for its community, but whose actions seems displaced from this role when private issues guide actions and arguments.

Thus, *Questão de Ordem* also dialogues with the process of disenchantment and emptying of the Brazilian public sphere identified by Jovchelovitch (2000). The emptying of the public sphere involves the inability to build projects on and in the public space, as exemplified in the skit by the overlap of the marital quarrel over the political dispute, with private problems triumphing over the discussion of collective problems in a space that should privilege the latter.

If the plenary of the Chamber of Deputies is transformed into an environment of outbreak of family quarrels, President Cunha is also diverted from his role as mediator of public debates, intervening to end the marital dispute, appealing precisely to the marriage bond that unites Da Rosa to Montenegro. Public and private, therefore, unite and privatize a public space, mischaracterizing it as such.

The politics of emotions triggered by audiovisual narrative

Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz (1990) defend a political and sociocultural analysis that considers emotions as discourses materialized in communicative practices, proposing the concept of *emotional discourses*; through this concept, the authors highlight the importance of language in social construction and in the way emotions are transformed into sociocultural acts.

Contextualized through *emotional discourses*, emotions are problematized within their ability to reproduce as individual corporatized experiences, through acts such as postures and gestures. Emotions, therefore, belong to the social body from its repercussions on the human body, which allows us to understand the formation of these *emotional discourses* in certain political and economic contexts.

In this analysis, therefore, the authors consider emotions as social phenomena given their role in the construction of power relations. The sociopolitical understanding of emotions allows us to understand the discursive capacity of these relationships, limiting what can be said about individuals and their feelings, especially in the possibility of showing in what ways emotional discourses establish, challenge or reinforce power imbalances.

Also having as its starting point the analysis of the sociocultural and political capacities of emotions, Claudia Rezende and Maria Claudia Coelho (2010), in turn, problematize the way that emotions dramatize and modify the social context in which they are inserted, culminating in the concept of *micropolitics of emotions*. Through this concept, Rezende and Coelho intend to formalize a theoretical framework that includes recurrent themes in social science, such as the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in interpersonal relationships (contempt, indifference) and the instruments of complexity of social bonds (fidelity, compassion), relating them to the characteristics of the specific contexts in which they are found.

The authors start from fundamental ideas for the understanding of interpersonal dynamics, such as morals and compassion, to study various possibilities of application of the micropolitics of emotions, relating the manifestation of these ideas to the relational dynamics within which they are inserted. As a way of exemplifying this proposition, Rezende and Coelho (2010, p. 79) highlight the connection between sympathy and solidarity in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, with the establishment of the "relationship between feelings and relative positions between subjects and the articulation between the vicarious experience of the experience of others and the emergence of sympathy."

Thus, the dialogue between feeling and otherness is exposed, within what the experience of observing the suffering of the other can awaken in individuals. Thus, feelings are directly linked to the so-called *us-them frontier*, which makes moral feelings control the functioning of the dynamics of inclusion/exclusion and are able to shape the micropolitical dimensions of emotions through the dramatization, reinforcement and alteration of macro social relations.

The second video, *Nome na Lista*, presents a press conference with a congressman (Antonio Tabet) who is interrupted by a reporter (Fábio Porchat) with the news of a denunciation of the contractor Marcondes, accusing the politician of being known as impotent and having embezzled three hundred million reais of school lunch money (Figure 2). The questioned representative is upset by the news and emphasizes, through various arguments, that he has no problems of recurrent erection. Outraged by the accusation, the congressman complains of lack of ethics and companionship of the whistleblower businessman, defined by him as a *cuckold* and a *voyeur*. Despite the reporter's insistent tackling on the testimony regarding appropriation of public funds, the congressman continues to discuss his impotency-related nickname, prioritizing this topic instead of the corruption accusation: "Forget about it, boy." "That's forgettable." "The nickname, however, is gonna catch on... what about my household?" "How I'm gonna look at my son in the eye, or my father, or my mother?" (*Nome na Lista*, 54s).

This outburst leads to a debate in the skit, within the dynamics of comedy, which is related to the analysis of Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) of the capacity of emotions, as *emotional discourses*, to reflect collective and individual issues. Reacting to the exposition provoked by the disclosure of the nickname, the congressman serves the humorous narrative of politics to exemplify the mockery of those who, invested in a position of political representation, take the interests and issues of a private and personal nature to the detriment of the public interest.

Amid the arguments, with no regards to public opinion of his behavior, the congressman admits having erectile problems once for trying to have sex "drunk and on coke" (*Nome na Lista*, 1min5s) with highlights how important he considers the defense of his virility in relation to his erectile capacity. Contextualized as social phenomena, the emotions of the politician gain discursive capacity and interference in power relations. Weakened by his public exposure as impotent, but without bothering to be seen as corrupt, the congressman begins to use the space of the press conference to vent his indignation, as an individual and public persona, to the exposure provoked by the denunciation of the contractor on private matters.

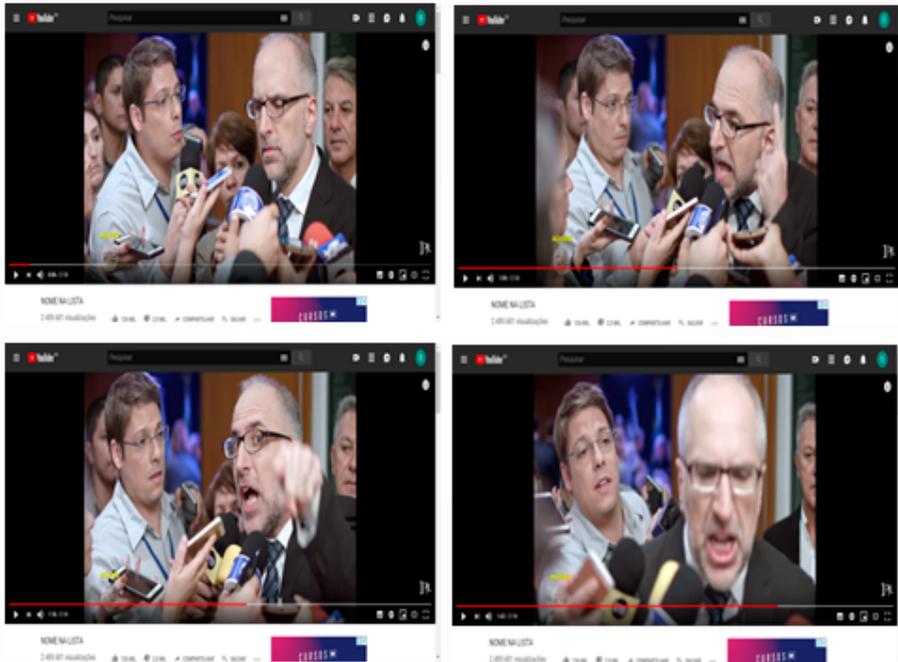


Figure 2: Frames of the skit *Nome na Lista*, emotions and exposure of the intimacy of the congressman.

The reporter, in his insistence on the issue of embezzlement, becomes the representation of the ideal media and journalism, which guard the public interest and the social order, antagonizing the figure of the public man represented in the skit. The media also gains a special role in the narrative when, questioned (in the figure of the cameraman) by the congressman and instigated to film the genitalia of the politician, is taken as the one that *carries the truth*, even if this is, in this case, the proof of the erectile capacity of the congressman. Irony and satire (MENDES, 2008) take a part on leading the spectator to feel emotions that range from embarrassment, to indignation, to mockery and laughter, both for the acknowledgement of the *possible* as well as the *improbable*.

It is in the fine line between these two poles we can observe this sense of reality, which is a distinctive mark of this skit and of the production of *Porta dos Fundos* as a whole. Although the events of the video did not actually happen, they at least could have happened; it approaches the absurdity of reality itself, dialoguing with the collective imagination on Brazilian politics and its repertoire of scandals and mediatic spectacles.

By capturing this spirit of absurdity in the presentation of a scandal involving the private and political life of a congressman, *Nome na Lista* also makes room for the verification of the micropolitical capacity of emotions analyzed by Rezende and Coelho (2010). Through the congressman's indignant reaction to the disclosure of the nickname, it is demonstrated the possibility of emotions interfering in certain specific contexts and relational dynamics. Through the micropolitics of emotions, in this case with the televised reaction of a public person to the repercussion of private issues, the viewer of the audiovisual product is invited to laugh and mock the one who, taken by indignation and wounded pride, weakens his political action in the name of private issues and personal interests, nurturing by empathy a feeling of *vicarious embarrassment*.

Considerations and notes for the politics of emotions in the political skits of *Porta dos Fundos*

We problematized the two political skits based on the fusion of the public and private spheres, as well as on the manifestation of the micropolitical capacity of emotions in institutional public environments. Such problematization allowed us to observe, in the analysis of both videos, how, through the fusion of the two spheres, the private dimension overlaps with the public dimension, occupying the space of institutional policy, of discussion of collective problems.

In *Questão de Ordem*, this overlap is exploited by the absurdity and hilariousness of a political divergence between two congresspeople that quickly turns into a conjugal discussion. Self-obsessed by their frustrations as a result of a marriage in crisis, congresspeople of rival parties subvert the public nature of the Chamber of Deputies, using a regimental instrument to continue an intimate fight and exemplifying the process of disenchantment and weariness of the public sphere.

In *Nome na Lista*, in turn, the privilege of the private over the public is addressed from the exposure of the impotency-related nickname in the list of denunciation of a contractor, to a congressman also accused of embezzling hundreds of millions in public funds. Outraged by the exposition of the nickname (but indifferent to the accusation of corruption), the congressman reacts publicly, during a televised press conference, and articulating an emotional outburst, exposes private issues to the detriment of the concerning public issues. Regardless of the possibility of being arrested or publicly associated with corruption, the congressman is concerned

only with his immediate individual image; for him, it is more important to be seen as virile rather than honest.

Regarding the aesthetic experience provided by the two analyzed videos, we have focused on issues of audiovisual language through the elements that Jost (2012) calls dispersion and persistence. The first, dispersion, concerns elements in the narrative that are easily perceived by the viewer, allowing for notions of time and space to the characters and diegesis. The second concept, dispersion, deals basically with less dated elements, but they also allow the orientation of the viewer in the time and space in which the narrative takes place. Both resources, applied to the construction of the script, impute on the aesthetic experience a sense of reality by verisimilitude. As humorous content that takes as its mocking target the political field from institutions and organizations, agents and mediatic events, we have as a consequence the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction. Characters and their performances blend into these events in order to build an imaginary that does not clearly distinguish the facts of what is built for entertainment. Citizenship looks *dull* in this highly mediatic political everyday, that proves itself as incredible as it is absurd, were it not actually real.

Such feelings of apathy, disbelief e devaluation of public personas mixes discussions of private character with those that touch public interest; as such, they occupy mediatic spaces that frame the social imagination regarding the political field and shift the image of the politician to one that denies professionalism, ethical conduct and decorum, symbols of a traditional political culture. Mockery in both of these skits seems to aim at the public persona and, by either reflection or ricochet, hits the citizens responsible for the presence of this mocked-upon person in the public sphere.

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