

# Self knowledge and citizen communication: from conformism to action in the June 2013 protests

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## Abstract

The knowledge of self, the telling the truth and the free speech, principles of citizenship of Ancient Greece, reported in Foucault's work, are also theoretically principles of Journalism. However, from the analysis of the coverage of broadcast television channels about the protests that took place in Brazil in June 2013, what we saw was an antagonism between the media discourse and popular aspirations, transmitted in the streets and various forms of citizen Communication, including on-line universe. Thus, this paper explores, through Discourse Analysis, these antagonisms, aiming to examine the comments of José Luis Datena, Arnaldo Jabor and Rachel Sheherazade. This research reveals that while the public sphere has changed, the TV coverage follows the standards enshrined in the television news of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Television Journalism. Citizen Communication. Cyberculture. Social Movements. Protests.

## To start the conversation

The events that resulted in the June 2013 protests revealed much more than popular mobilization capacity and the obvious influence of new technologies on popular protests. More than this, it explains the discrepancies between the media discourse of powerful communication conglomerates and the desires and thoughts of the citizens, the intended audience. Before and after the episode, there were many other similar protests, which can also be analyzed in depth. The wave of protests during this period begs this question: considering the purpose of powerful communication companies and media outlets to produce content for the population, why was there such a difference between media discourse and the actions of millions of protesters? Will the powerful Brazilian media ever stop looking out for itself and continuing to ignore the people who are, in theory, their audience? From

these guiding questions, this paper aims to determine how such antagonism is presented in the speech of some journalists who occupy a privileged space in Brazilian broadcast television during the June 2013 protests.

For this purpose, we chose the Discourse Analysis by Orlandi (2013). The author said that all speech is made by metaphors, not in the sense of rhetoric which considers a figure of speech, but as taking a word that refers to one or more meanings. In Discourse Analysis, a metaphor is the word transferred to its various senses. In this sense, we work with the discursive metaphor that powerful Brazilian media companies are failing to know themselves. During the courses offered at the Collège de France from 1971 to 1984, Michel Foucault spoke about the importance of knowing oneself before one rules, a reference to ancient Greece. While it may be argued that rule is not exactly the goal of media companies, Foucault noted (2013) that all speech is related to two elements: desire and power. Speech is a way to show or hide the desire and to negotiate the different forms of power, from economic to symbolic, political to social. Thus, to address a significant number of people, the media discourse pervades many spheres of power and governance.

Methodologically, it is important to emphasize that the literature will be used in all stages of this research. For a literature search, any questions should be directed to the authors. It occurs “if the desire is to formulate and find answers in literature sources of the field of education and other fields of knowledge” (TEIXEIRA, 2005 p.118 – Our translation). Meanwhile, “the literature is developed from material already prepared, consisting mainly of scientific books and articles” (GIL, 1995, p.71 – Our translation).

Given these considerations, it is emphasized that this paper is composed of three main parts. We begin with a reflection about the speech relationships, self-knowledge and power. Second, it is a reflection on the construction and formation of the scenario that resulted in the discursive difference between the mainstream media and popular actions of the streets and online. Finally, it makes a specific analysis of the June 2013 protests, considering the discourse of three major television network journalists: Arnaldo Jabor (TV Globo), Rachel Sheherazade (SBT) and José Luis Datena (Rede Bandeirantes). As becomes clear throughout the text, from the moment that powerful vehicles stopped to look at their own discursive actions (even with the collaboration of observatories and other tools), citizens put aside conformism urged by media discourse to seek through citizen communication, a response to the displayed content mainly by major television networks.

### **The speech and the knowledge of itself: a media metaphor**

The speech, according to Orlandi (2013, p.16), is the mediation between the subject and the social and natural reality. Therefore, it is impossible to ignore some specific characteristics

of the speech to think of a relationship of knowledge that the media may have about itself. It is also important to point out that the media and communication professionals, as well as the public, are embedded in a historical context: the real is affected by the symbolic, and involves the language of meanings. There are plenty of open possibilities of interpretations, which in the case of such studies, presents variations because, as noted by Orlandi (2013, p.35), the same material can be analyzed according to different concepts and issues.

In journalism, the effects of meaning are identified from each event and placed and organized in a discursive way, so they can be disclosed to the public. These senses are influenced by various aspects, from the historical to political and from corporate to individual. Then comes to the question: why is the effect of discursive meaning by the mainstream media turned away from the comprehension of the events made by the public? Of course, the discussions around the popularization of information over the internet is a key element, but not unique. However, what has changed in the traditional media?

It seems as if the traditional media have stopped to look at the context in which they operate among the public, through technology and through changes of the public sphere. They have ended up with decisive participation in the gap between the world view of themselves (explicitly influenced by political and corporate issues) and the public eye. This difference between the media and the public results from the little self knowledge that many newspaper companies have. But why is there such a difference in the worldviews between the mainstream media and the public?

In courses he delivered between 1981 and 1984, Foucault reflected on the question of knowledge and self care as a way of being able to talk – and command – others. Knowing oneself is directly related to the speech delivered by a person or group of people. Thus, Foucault (2010a) explained that part of a relationship between two terms that relate the act of telling the truth are: 1) *epimeleia heautou* (self care) and 2) *gnothi seauton* (know thyself). No wonder that in *Socrates' apology*, Plato presents Socrates as inciting others to occupy themselves. And how, after all, has this worked? As Foucault explained (2010a), care is directed to the intellect and reason. For the author, assuming Greek thought, the care with reason and with truth is a way to take knowledge of oneself?. Based on this thinking, as recorded in Greek culture and explained by the French philosopher, the gods had instructed Socrates to challenge people, telling them that they may labor with themselves. As the philosopher said, “care of itself implies a certain way of being aware of what you think and what goes on in the mind” (FOUCAULT, 2010a, p.12 – Our translation). After all, self care involves the relationship of subject with different ways of thinking about his/her time.

The historical period of Greek thought about the care of oneself rescued by Foucault (2010a), dates from the 5th century B.C, running, since all Greek philosophy, Hellenistic and Roman, extending beyond the Christian spirituality. However, as the philosopher

posed the question: “why, despite everything, the notion of *epiméleia heautoû* (self care) was disregarded in the way thinking, Western philosophy, remade their own history?” (FOUCAULT, 2010a, p.12-13 – Our translation). The same question can be asked in relation to the journalistic field: why are care of themselves and frank speech (*parresia*) rarely reflected from the perspective of the field?

There is, then, the first indication of a lack of self knowledge by powerful media companies: the removal of their goals of telling the truth and using frank speech. Their objectives are now business and political issues. Inside, the focus has changed according to company policy. Agendas and reports are censored, cut or edited because of power games (of all types, symbolic, financial, political). Meanwhile, in the public imagination, the newspaper company, especially television, is – or should be (even if utopian) – a real representation. We can then present the first discrepancy between media discourse and the objectives and anxieties of their audience: one wants the truth and to speak frankly while another just wants to appear that it is offering this in the speech. We can say that even thinking simultaneously about concepts and ideas of centuries ago, these notions crossed by millennia and can not be ignored by a field that is based precisely on its ability to tell the truth, or, at least ideologically, is placed in this position.

In fact, Foucault (2010a, p.4-5) recalls that the truth is only acquired through knowledge; and knowledge is a premise of care and knowledge of self. As Foucault (2010b, p.51-55) said, around the 5th century B.C, the prevailing idea is that self care is necessary for every human being. Meanwhile, later in the Socratic-Platonic view, the care itself is a more focused concern for those aspiring to enter political life. Why is knowing oneself necessary to get into politics? Because in that period there was the clarity that “taking care of oneself is taking care of justice” (FOUCAULT, 2010a, p.67 – Our translation). And the sense of justice is another principle that, ideologically, is the purpose of journalism.

### **Media discourse and popular aspirations: the growth of antagonisms**

Questions about media discourse are not new and have been around since the formation of the media society, described by Martin-Barbero (2013) and Canclini (2013). This is independent of the technical issue. As we pointed out in the first notes, the confusion between communication and techniques is so deforming as the thinking that they are not part of the communicative processes. We share the view that communication is a matter of mediation and culture (MARTÍN-BARBERO, 2013, p.13-14). Therefore, when referring to the differences between media discourse and popular intentions, we are talking about mediatized and mass societies in which television, with its emergence and development, is now trying to absorb most of the differences. But this does not mean that they are

eliminated. In doing so, it ignores the fact that the popular cultures are not a “passive effect or mechanical reproduction controlled by the rulers; also they are resuming their own traditions and experiences in conflict with those who exercise more than domination, hegemony” (CANCLINI, 2013, p.273 – Our translation). Precisely through popular culture, throughout history, that citizen communication will relate to those in power - political or financial, “When we can not change the government, we play with it. In the dance of Carnival, in journalistic humor, in the graffiti” (CANCLINI, 2013, p.349 – Our translation).

Historically there are often situations in which holders of hegemony do not consider the wishes, culture and aspirations of the masses. This creates a gap between the goals of the conglomerates and the worldviews of the audience, which takes place from the moment that knowledge of each other, which leads to speaking frankly and to telling the truth - come to stay in the third plan, while bringing the relations of political and financial power in the first and second, as if they had no direct link with others. No wonder that there is a general distrust, explained by Castilho and Fialho (2009), the media of small towns are now controlled by businessmen or politicians who place the interests of their audience in the background. We are now in the epicenter of the problem: the antagonism between the media discourse and the interests of the public who consume these products. And social networks help to expose these antagonisms – even if it is clear that the internet is not a revolution. But simultaneously, it is impossible to speak of the media discourse, of antagonism and the public interest without addressing the influence of the online world.

As shown by Castilho and Fialho (2009, p.119-120), digital age citizen journalism ends up becoming the return of civic journalism, pointed out by the authors as a variant of professional journalism. This kind of journalism arises in the United States when there is a reaction of media professionals against the differences recorded between the media’s agenda and community’s concerns. Then we have a first explicit record of antagonism between the media and public. This causes the readers to seek alternative information materials, which are enhanced by the online world. One of the most popular examples are blogs, as Braga said (2006, p.62-63), which quickly became a space for the placement and movement of these alternative views. The fact that people are talking, organizing and informing each other through other sources, puts in check the institutions that hitherto held the hegemony of information (DORIA, 2009, p.185-186).

The blogs and alternative information channels are not the only that encourage the formation of a citizen communication. The principle of connection highlighted by Santaella and Lemos (2010, p.29), is essential for this to occur. The authors use the metaphor of the rhizome, which unlike the arboreal model, does not have a center but “connects by mutual contagion or alliance and grows everywhere, in all directions” (SANTAELLA; LEMOS, 2010, p.29 – Our translation). The proposed networks of the authors demonstrates that the

development and complexity of communication ended up not being followed as it should by the large media companies.

All this context leads to the *midialivrisism*, which according to Malini and Antoun (2013, p.21) brings together the experiences of organized social movements that previously depended on alternative citizen media such as newspapers or community radio, and is now a practice of civil society, serving as “antagonists in relation to how to make communication of business and transnational corporations and national media” (MALINI; ANTOUN, 2013, p.21 – Our translation). But what is *midialivrisism*? According to the authors, the *midialivrist* is the hacker, is one who seeks to release the voice, escape any kind of control, be it technical, ideological, economic or political. Or, is it also a group of people who “also performs a cross activity struggle for democratization in countries such as Brazil” (MALINI; ANTOUN, 2013, p.22 – Our translation), while these people are equipped to present an alternative way to larger media outlets.

We then have the clear difference between the media discourse and popular interests which are exposed on the network, but still, there is a lack of self-knowledge that large vehicles refuse to consider. A variation of this is the cyberactivist *midialivrisism* as Malini and Antoun (2013, p.21) pointed out, which works collaboratively. The main objective is to produce in a world where there is no intermediation of large conglomerates, that is, a free production without hierarchy where communication takes place towards all-all.

The *mediativist* is a central character in the antagonism between the media and population. As he does not want a center, he ends up becoming the center that exemplifies the disparity of worldviews between a private communications company that works with journalistic products and the public for which the product is intended. According to Malini and Antoun (2013, p.23), the *mediativist* becomes a hacker of narratives, with the discourse clashing of the visions of traditional media. In this scenario, the narrative becomes nonlinear, blending personal and political views, objectivity with subjectivity, information with personal impressions, fiction with reality, using copies and individual creations (MALINI; ANTOUN, 2013, p.23-24). This is the world where citizen communication can emancipate the big media companies. Peruzzo, in turn, points out that “when the existing participation channels are not enough, the population invents another” (PERUZZO, 1998, p.65 – Our translation). The Internet offers many of them. The open question still remains: how does the mainstream media react to differences in their interests and the public’s interests?

Before presenting evidence of answers to this question, it is worth noting that observatories have been created and maintained by professional journalists or social groups concerned with information and media content. The observatories arise precisely from “a widespread awareness that the cultural and information industry does not respond to the demands of civil society: it is too accommodated, pro-government, superficial” (MOTTA,

2008, p.23 – Our translation). But even with this contestation from professionals who are in the hegemonic vehicles, it is not enough to make the mainstream media look at itself in order to make the expected critical reading around their own speeches. Neither the observatories nor other forms of criticism (such as academic articles) are enough for large media companies to recognize their social responsibilities, as explained with this quote: “the media is a public service that needs to respond to the demands of the collective interest” (MOTTA, 2008, p.34 – Our translation). Since media outlets do not recognize this, the media became a major target of Brazil’s June 2013 protests.

### **The citizen response to media-televised speech through June 2013 protests**

Even before the emergence and popularization of the Internet, there was a lack of synchronization between media discourse and popular interests. Examples abound, such as the Direct Elections Now movement and the process that resulted in the impeachment of former President Fernando Collor de Mello, narrated by Conti (2012) – as well as the history of Brazil’s four major TV broadcasters – show that view of the television media – producing content aimed at the general public – not only does not follow the view of the population. In fact, it often underestimates or ignores events as seen through the eyes of the citizens.

According to Woitowicz (2007, p.59-63), the popular movements and social groups present different views in the media discourse, since they are able to challenge the hierarchies of the hegemonic culture and disrupt the relationship between dominant/dominated. That is what happened during the June 2013 protests. Once again in Brazilian history, communication vehicles have not corresponded with the popular view, this becoming the protestors’ target. Although it began by criticizing the increase of R\$ 0.20 in public transport passes, protestors asked for many improvements in the public sphere, including better information quality in the media.

Figueiredo (2014, p.23-26) points out that there was a change in the information process emerging from the social networks. Previously, the motions and claims were born in the networks, and remained there until they disappeared or dissolved. However, in June 2013, the movement began in the networks and quickly spread to the streets, turning against the discursive view of traditional media. Tognozzi (2014, p.73), in turn, cites Ibope data published two months before the popular protests, which show the country had already reached more than 100 million people connected to the World Wide Web, which includes access through mobile phones. Already Sorj (2014) highlights the decline of institutions in the face of popular needs, and we can include here the mainstream media as a traditional institution. These dissonances allow us to critically analyze what happened in the relationship between media and population during the protests.

On June 13, 2013, Globo TV commentator Arnaldo Jabor said something that illustrated the tone that Brazil's most watched station was giving to the protest coverage during that month. (His comment was recorded in a studio, where the journalist was not in contact with people on the street.) It makes clear the different approach to the events used by the mainstream media and publications made by people on the streets through social networks:

But after all, what causes a too violent hate feeling against the city? We saw it when the criminal organization of São Paulo burned dozens of buses. It can not be because of 20 cents. The vast majority of protesters are middle class, it is visible. There was not poor with no pennies. The poorer people were the police men, threatened by Molotov cocktails, earning very badly. Basically, it is an immense political ignorance. The stupidity mixed with a grudge aimlessly. There is perhaps the influence of the struggle of Turkey, just and important, against a fanatical Islam. But here, takes revenge for what? Just cause, should be the absence of cause (Jabor).<sup>1</sup>

The Jabor speech exemplifies his view and the TV station's of the events. First, it equates the protestors with criminal organizations. Second, he criticizes the protestors as exclusively middle class, calling them "stupid" and "political ignorant", without knowing them and without analyzing the subjects in depth. But aren't middle class people protesting a social cause the opposite of political ignorance? Another questionable vision, shared by others broadcast television stations can be summed up this way: fights and causes defended in other countries are fair and important, while in Brazil they are stupid and aimless. Finally, the comment ends with the following statement: "They are the violent caricature of socialism caricature of the 50s that the old left still defend here. Indeed, these middle-class rioters are not worth 20 cents" (Our translation). The apology from the journalist, published a few days later, only confirms the lack of knowledge that Jabor and the TV station had of themselves and their audience. After all, those who did not fight for an increase in transport rate were the same that gave the leadership of audience to the Globo programs. Even during the coverage of the *Jornal Nacional*, terms like "thugs" and "rioters" were commonly used. For example, it is clear when we observe the TV program of June 18, 2013: "As a rowdy group attacked police officers and the building of the Assembly, against the peaceful tone of the protest of 100,000 people on the streets in the city center [...]".

Responses were immediate regarding Arnaldo Jabor's comments. A netizen named John Castro posted a YouTube video that quickly surpassed a million hits. Sharing this

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EN8bXvMgCks>. 2013. Access: 01/04/2015. (Our translation).

video on social networks, in addition to the tone of the Globo Television Network coverage, resulted in more protests in front of the station headquarters. There were also war cries, as shown in the documentary produced by the TV Folha and published by Cavalcante (2014), such as, “Hey, Globo, f... you!”. The same would occur with other television networks. A car of Rede Record was burned by protestors. To put this into context, it is worth mentioning the point of view of Bolaños and Brittos (2007, p.89-91), who highlighted the false politically correct tone of the stations without deepening sincere and plural debates. Even if broadcasters do not realize that the public in certain cases is aware of this - or ignores this data - the result can be a citizen revolt, which makes use of their own media to antagonize media discourse.

A situation similar to Jabor’s occurred when the presenter Rachel Sheherazade, in the *Jornal do SBT*, argued against the protests. She positioned the publication in favor of increasing the transit fare. First of all, it is necessary to share the speech the journalist delivered on 12 June 2013.

Protest is done with arguments and imposed by reason. Avenida Paulista’s protesters lost their reason when they allowed the movement to degenerate into vandalism. The buses that they have scrawled, vandalized, almost burned, are the same that serve the population. Because neither the mayor nor the governor use public transportation. Behind all this confusion there is the movement Free Pass, which is raising money to get free the troublemakers from prison. The movement is the same as claim zero rate. Good to know: when some group has discount or is exempt from paying, the account ends up being paid by other users. Because someone has to bear the loss, either apportioning the costs, or with tax increases. Do these protestors do not know that there is no free lunch? (SHEHERAZADE)<sup>2</sup>.

The Sheherazade comment is antagonistic to popular aspirations of the protest movement. Incidentally, the journalist also opined that no group should have free pass – including the elderly and people with special needs: “Because someone has to bear the loss, either with apportioning the costs, as increasing taxes”. Every journalist is allowed to share their opinion, but this comment as well as the others that are analyzed, show the journalists’ opposition to the protests and their support for police repression. In the first example, the journalist believed she was speaking on behalf of the majority and the public. But when thousands of people take to the streets, there is a change in the discourse of these TV stations: the tone of TV n124

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u-ccnBxkzuk>. 2013. Access: 01/04/2015. (Our translation).

ews switches from being against police violence and in favor of the protests. This example show how the principle of free speech and truth telling is corrupted. This makes it clear that the comments and opinions do not show what journalists think, but is an attempt of the TV station to please a large audience. And why those stations TV did not do this from the start? Simply because, somewhere, they were worried about what their audience thinks.

Of all the media discourse that took place during June 2013, Luis Carlos Datena on Rede Bandeirantes, best illustrates the antagonism between the viewers and presenter. On June 18, Datena presented a poll with the question: are you in favor of this kind of protest? Before submitting a question, he called the protestors rioters and vandals. Again we turn to the presenter's speech:

I do not know if the guys are understanding well, but most are thinking that this protest is to break everything, and this is legal. I mean, the opinion of the people prevails, I do not want here ... I give my opinion. I am not in favor of this type of break everything protest, because I think it's vandalism. This kind of protest with riot I am against. I would vote for no. I would vote for no. Because I am not in favor of this type of protest (DATENA)<sup>3</sup>.

In his speech, Datena made clear his opinion, and his intention to influence the public. At that time, the vote had 2,822 viewers in favor of the protest and 1,860 against. Not wanting to have his opinion contradicted by viewers, he asked: "Does this question is poorly worded? Are you in favor of protest with vandalism? I think that the question should be: are you in favor of protest with vandalism?". Then he went on to justify the result, trying to make the viewer believe that those who had voted "yes" did not understand the question. "The guy that called is seeing all quite, all calm down, he can find until the question is this. Ask the question the way I asked to formulate" (DATENA), said Datena.

The production did what the presenter asked, and prepares a new question: In a few seconds the score is already over two thousand votes in favor of the "yes" while the alternative "no" reached one thousand. Datena then seeks a justification: "I'm feeling what's going on. The people are so furious with increasing passage, no matter if it's by bus, if train, if subway, the people are so furious that supports any type of protest". This case shows the adaptation that the presenter made in his speech to justify the opinion of television viewer. Thus, the free speech and truth telling that is a basic premise of any news journalistic coverage ceases to exist. The message is guided by other interests: the political and economic audience. Realizing that the discourse is not reflective of the people, the opinion is changed.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7cxOK7SOI2k>. 2013. Access: 01/03/2015. (Our translation).

## The public sphere has changed, but not the broadcast television

While there was a significant change in the public sphere, the media discourse on public television has not changed and did not follow these changes. As Lévy points out (1999), territorial institutions, which are predominantly hierarchical and rigid, lost ground to the practices of Internet users, which are privileged transverse modes of relationship with a fluidity of structures. “The territorial political organizations are resting on representation and delegation, while the technical possibilities of cyberspace easily become feasible new forms of democracy on a large scale” (LÉVY, 1999, p.195 – Our translation). We share Lévy’s idea that the relationship between the spaces is not synonymous to eliminate territorial forms, but that there is hybridism. The 2013 protests demonstrated this with changes being born on the Internet and going to the streets.

The fact is that the way of doing journalism in the open channels of television is becoming as outdated as the institutional ways of doing politics. The disbelief of the citizens in the institutions is the same disbelief in the journalistic discourse of broadcast television. We are not defending the degree of influence of institutions and the mainstream media, but there is a growing gap between the interests of citizens and forms of government and media approaches. Remember: “Cyberspace growth results from an international movement of young people eager to experience collectively different forms of communication from those classic media offered to us” (LÉVY, 1999, p.11 – Our translation). The question becomes: how can traditional media survive in this context? Possible answer: by making less mistakes and knowing themselves, the citizen, and their forms of communication better. Including citizen communication in big media goes much further than the hegemony created by adding Facebook pages, blogs of journalists, Twitter posts and simplistic actions, where there is only a transfer of what was done to platforms described by Jenkins (2006). The negative position of the population to this actions is an insult of oversimplification and communicational and digital ignorance of journalists. Instead of making use of their *parresía*, they try to please the majority of their audience.

The three commentators analyzed and the TV stations in 2013 ignored what Lévy points. After all, the true social movement of cyberspace has “its leader group (the educated metropolitan youth), their slogans (interconnection, creating virtual communities, collective intelligence) and their consistent aspirations” (LÉVY, 1999, p.123 – Our translation). Such ignorance for more than ten years, leads us back to what was discussed at the beginning of this paper: knowing oneself, taking care of each other, free speech, and the possibility of having strength in power relations, is no longer on the agenda of powerful Brazilian media. Instead of knowing themselves (becoming aware of what is already being exposed for decades about the mainstream media), broadcasters follow agendas and decisions related to financial interests and cultural and political hegemony.

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