

# Reclaiming presence: Anti-gender nationalism and Marielle Franco's deictic field of resistance in Brazil

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## Abstract

*Political actors' embedding of the here-and-now of enunciation into constructions of gender, sexuality and race is a deictic practice that can be uncoupled from its context and projected into political fields. This article unpacks alternative invocations of the deictic field by Jair Bolsonaro's new right in Brazil and by Marielle Franco, a queer Black councilwoman who was assassinated in 2018, the same year Bolsonaro was elected president. While Bolsonaro has vilified progressive tropes, such as gender equality, sex positive education and Marielle's legacy, Marielle and later her mourning movement have mapped her here-and-now onto mottos such as 'Marielle lives', which defy chronologic time. Marielle's central figure has thus been 'present' across the political spectrum – for progressives as a figure of immanence, and for white supremacists as a symbol of the Black gendered body whose life is not mournable but whose phantasmatic presence is a continuing threat.*

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*O encaixe, realizado por atores políticos, do aqui-e- agora da enunciação em construções de gênero, sexualidade e raça é uma prática dêitica que pode ser separada do seu contexto e projetada em campos políticos. Este artigo analisa invocações alternativas do campo dêitico pela nova direita bolsonarista no Brasil e por Marielle Franco, uma vereadora lésbica assassinada em 2018, o mesmo ano em que Jair Bolsonaro foi eleito presidente. Ao passo que Bolsonaro vilipendiou tropos progressistas, como a igualdade de gênero, a educação sexual e o legado de Marielle, a vereadora e posteriormente seu movimento de luto politizaram o aqui-e- agora de Marielle e o mapearam em motes como 'Marielle vive', que desafiam o tempo cronológico. A figura central de Marielle tem estado assim 'presente' no espectro político brasileiro – para o campo progressista, como figura de imanência, e para o bolsonarismo, como sintoma do corpo negro generificado cuja vida não é digna de luto, mas cuja presença fantasmática é uma contínua ameaça.*

KEYWORDS: ANTI-GENDER POLITICS, CONSERVATISM, 'GENDER IDEOLOGY', MARIELLE FRANCO, NATIONALISM

## **Anti-gender politics, Bolsonaroism and Marielle Franco**

Reactionary political movements across the globe are increasingly turning gender into an enemy of the nation. Gal (2021:99), for instance, cites street protests in Poland against 'genderism' in the early 2010s, explaining that genderism is part of a conservative register that includes other novel terms such as 'gender ideology' and 'gender theory', which have been used 'against equal rights for women, civil unions, marriage equality, LGBTQ rights, reproductive rights, IVF and contraception' (see also Borba 2022). In 2012, Vladimir Putin claimed protests against his re-election were 'sponsored by Western feminists and gay lobbyists who planned to overtake the globe'; in 2016, conservative politicians in Colombia criticised pro-gender equality language embedded in a proposed peace agreement with the FARC guerilla group, an agreement that was ultimately rejected (Borba, Hall and Hiramoto 2020:2).

Examples of such nationalist assaults against feminist causes, and gender and sexuality research, are legion. These so-called 'anti-gender' movements are citational, extracting textual and semiotic forms from each other (see Kuhar and Patenotte 2017; Borba, Hall and Hiramoto 2020; Gal 2021). They draw much of their force and performative efficacy from discourses crafted in conservative sectors of the Catholic Church and recycled in evangelical Protestantism (Butler 2019) as well as in conservative neoliberal economic discourses (Cooper 2017; Brown 2019). As Borba (2022) explains, the floating signifier 'gender ideology' has variously been

deployed to unify otherwise disparate opposition to the idea that gender is a social construction.

In this article, we look to contemporary Brazil to investigate the entanglements of gender, democratic decline and political resistance. Empirically, we focus on two opposing political movements and their ideological legacies: far-right president Jair Bolsonaro (who served between 2019 and 2022) and Bolsonarism, the current reticulated and largely digital movement supporting him; and progressive councilwoman Marielle Franco, who was brutally murdered in 2018, and her mourning movement. We observe some key examples from 2017 and 2018 that showcase modes of connecting the deictic here-and-now of interaction (Hanks 2005) and political macro-constructions, specifically as they intersect with the 'presence' of Marielle and gender, race and sexuality. After her death, Marielle, a Black lesbian feminist from a favela (low-income neighbourhood) in Rio de Janeiro, has been differentially summoned by her opponents and supporters. Bolsonarists have invoked Marielle as a figure to be abhorred, but whose image is necessary for constituting Bolsonaro as the leader of a moral crusade against 'gender ideology', communism and other spectral inversions associated with the 'enemy' (Borba 2019; Correa and Kalil 2020; Cesarino and Nardelli 2021). At the same time, Marielle's followers have projected her voice as an authoritative symbol of resistance to white supremacy and reactionary populism. In uttering phrases such as *Marielle vive* 'Marielle lives', *Marielle, presente* 'Marielle is here'<sup>1</sup> and *Marielle é semente* 'Marielle is a seed', they assert that Marielle lives on in the social movement she inspired.

We take Marielle's assassination as a temporal and spatial axis for the current political moment in Brazil. With Gal and Irvine (2019:118), we believe that it 'takes interpretive work, situated in interaction, to invoke (index) an ideological axis of (political) differentiation and 'to interpret real-time phenomena as instantiations of the qualities that are part of that axis'. We approach the interactional work that differently invokes Marielle and her gendered Black body as an axis of differentiation by looking at the indexicality of deixis in interaction: the projection of a deictic field (Hanks 2005) – that is, the compound of expressions such as 'I', 'you', 'here' and 'now', as well as linguistic ideologies and often body postures, gazes and gestures – into the political sphere. Deictic expressions occur in all languages, and their denotational values 'depend strictly on the occasion of their use' (Hanks 2005:191). The fundamental contextual anchorage of deixis, its co-occurrence with body movements and the embedding of shifters (Jakobson 1971) or deictic indexicals into broader fields of action reveal the malleability of language in providing users with dynamic coordinates of time, space and person for further social action.

Methodologically, we build on three case studies to investigate how actors diversely project the here-and-now of interaction into a broader political arena where Marielle and her legacy have been projected as present. We selected the data from a larger linguistic ethnography of contemporary reactionary populism in Brazil (Silva 2020), which also looks to the production of resistance and hope by grassroots activists in Rio de Janeiro who worked with Marielle or who identify with her cause (Silva and Lee 2021). Our case studies exemplify different layers of the deictic projection of gender into politics: Marielle interacting with a feminist public; a televised interview with Bolsonaro for Rede Globo; and a political rally in which three Bolsonarist candidates broke a street sign of Marielle, and the responses by Marielle's mourners to this public display of violence. Our data evidence the centrality of Marielle and the performativity of deixis in the production of her abiding 'presence' in contemporary Brazilian politics.

First, we discuss Hanks' practice approach to deixis and present the first case study, centred on a speech that Marielle gave at a feminist seminar in Rio de Janeiro in 2017. In her speech, Marielle singles out coordinates of space and time in the chamber in order to situate the emerging white evangelical discourses on 'gender ideology'. In politicising these spatial and temporal reference points, she invokes an alternative inhabiting of them and projects herself not as an individual but as the embodiment of a collective. The second case discusses an interview with Bolsonaro in which he marshals deixis to produce an epistemic field of truth on 'gender ideology' and child pornography. His reliance on the deictic field to produce the 'presence' of referential objects that did not exist as factual referents in the sex-positive book presented to the audience helps us to discuss, in the third case study, the contemporary invocation of Marielle Franco as *presente* in both Bolsonaro's bloc and in her mourning movement. Yet, while both camps invoke Marielle's spectral presence through deictic indexicals, their political interests are different. For Bolsonarists, Marielle's Black queer female body is a 'non-reference' (Fanon 1969; Alves and Vargas 2020): her death ought not to be mourned, yet her phantasmatic presence is necessary for the right's construction of the political field. However, activists who mourn her death summon her spectral 'presence' and embed her legacy and indexical inversions into current politics. To conclude, we systematise our findings on the relations between deixis, Marielle's presence and politics in contemporary Brazil.

### **Marielle's deictic field of resistance**

Scholarship on indexicality has demonstrated the historical force and social complexity of actors' language use in context. Indexicality may be

understood as ‘the way that, by degrees, linguistic and other signs point the users of these signs to the specific enveloping conditions in which they use them’ (Silverstein 2006:14). Our interest here is in a particular type of indexicality – deictic reference – and the political effects of lodging particular deictic practices in broader political fields. Hanks (2005) explains that deictic expressions, such as ‘I,’ ‘you,’ ‘here’ and ‘now’ exist in all languages, and their meanings shift according to the participant frameworks in which they are used. Hanks (2005:191) studies deixis from a practice approach, which focuses on ‘*relations* between verbal action, linguistic and other semiotic systems, and the common-sense ideas that speakers have about language and the social world of which it is a part’.

Building on Bourdieu’s (1985) sociology, Hanks proposes to understand users’ deictic orientation in context through the notion of ‘field’: ‘a space of positions and position takings in which agents (individual or collective) engage and through which various forms of value or “capital” circulate’ (Hanks 2005:192). Although the limits of social fields are not clearcut, participating in a social field involves boundary work, which in turn raises issues of power and control. Logically, for Hanks (2005:193), a deictic field is a space of practice where communicative agents take positions ‘relative to the participant frameworks they occupy ... the positions occupied by objects of reference, and the multiple dimensions the former have access to the latter’. While access to a purely grammatical ‘deictic’ field is not as ‘controlled’ as other sociological fields, because using shifters is a matter of mastering a relatively arbitrary system, deictic practice always embeds deixis in other fields. As Hanks (2005:193) puts it, ‘through embedding, social relations of power, boundedness, conflict, and value are merged with the deictic field’.

We believe Hanks’ emphasis on the material significance of *embedding* in turning coordinates of speaker, addressee, object of reference and the social spacetime of utterance into sites invested with political significance is especially relevant for understanding Marielle’s political importance. Marielle represented a large sector of Brazilian society: people racialised as Black and Brown (54.9 per cent of the population), especially Black women from the periphery – that is, those underrepresented in politics and suffering the worst effects of the neoliberal penal state (Wacquant 2009), including subjugation to paralegal normative regimes such as the ‘world of crime’ (Feltran 2020),<sup>2</sup> anti-Black violence (Alves 2018) and restricted access to public health and other social services (Valladares 2019). Marielle’s trajectory represents the agency and production of solutions for practical life that Black people and residents of favelas historically have pursued in Brazil. After slavery was abolished in 1888, formerly enslaved Brazilians and their descendants built their homes on hillsides in central Rio de Janeiro, in

neighbourhoods known as favelas. Today, these territories are subject to extreme economic inequality but are also locations of intense creativity and cultural production. Marielle participated in progressive movements in the Catholic Church and NGOs in the Complexo da Maré favelas that provided her with forms of literacy crucial to her entry into university as a social science student and to her political activism (Franco 2018; Souza 2020; Duncan 2021). In the late 2000s, Marielle brought her experiences to the mandate of Marcelo Freixo, a state deputy from the progressive Partido Socialismo e Liberdade ‘Socialism and Liberty Party’ (PSOL). Together, they designed public policies focused on public security and human rights. In October 2016, some two months after a soft coup d’état had impeached Dilma Rousseff, the only woman ever elected president of Brazil, Marielle was elected councilwoman for Rio de Janeiro. Her grassroots campaign centred on the lives of Black women from the periphery. She was the only Black woman in the city council (out of only seven women in a group of 51 council members). Her cabinet primarily comprised women, including one trans woman. Tragically, on 14 March 2018, Marielle and her driver, Anderson Gomes, were murdered in an ambush.

In her public appearances, Marielle embedded, in Hanks’ (2005:194) terms, her coordinates as a speaker and resident of Complexo da Maré into ‘sites to which power, conflict, controlled access, and the other features of the social fields attach.’ An example of the reflexive nature of Marielle’s embedding of deixis in the political field, particularly in gender politics, was a talk that she gave at the Terceiro Seminário Feminista ‘Third Feminist Seminar’ at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. It is worth noting that Marielle delivered this talk in May 2017, in the troubled political moment following Rousseff’s impeachment. Correa and Kalil (2020:64) write that ‘the dynamics of conservative restoration’ in Brazil ‘first peaked with the impeachment [at which point] attacks on gender beyond the religious realm became more propitious.’ As we discuss in the second case study, the elision of neoliberalism and family values (Cooper 2017; Brown 2019; Butler 2019) was already nascent. It is therefore in this broader context, in which ‘gender’ had become a dangerous word, that Marielle addressed the feminist seminar participants. As Marielle spoke to her peers in sociology, she invoked her scholarly training to analyse the city chamber. In her words, she wanted to ‘look at it as fieldwork.’ In Excerpt 1, Marielle describes the spatial and social configurations of power and comments on the ‘dynamics of conservative restoration’ (Correa and Kalil 2020:31) in the municipal legislature. More specifically, Marielle elaborates on the move by the chamber’s conservative caucus to erase the word ‘gender’ from the city’s education plan (see Excerpt 1).

**Excerpt 1.** Marielle's speech for a feminist seminar at IESP/UERJ [12 May 2017]<sup>3</sup>

Just so you have an idea, two sessions ago, the audience in the plenary looked like fans of a soccer match (.) it was a place:: where (.) they even had banners (.) for us who occupy this place not only of a sociologist, but also (...) the place of someone who is (...) re-reading the world, that perspective of family reminded me of TFP ((Tradition, Family, Property – a conservative Catholic movement in Brazil)), it reminded me only of the place (.) <of tradition, of family, of property, of capital> there were banners written exactly along these lines, in defence of <the traditional family, in capital letters> (.) so my family, with my daughter and my female partner ((she looks at Selma, who is sitting next to her)) or the family of your daughter would never be (.) included in the municipal plan of education for the board of city counsellors

(2:40 minutes omitted)

in the chamber, there are the nerds in the front (.) and there are the back-row slackers, of course I'm being mean and stereotyping, but there are the back-row slackers, and the leader of the govern::ment Paulo Messina says hey, you vote like that (.) it's literally like this (.) WHAT IS IT, HUH? ((the back-row slackers ask for clear instructions on how to vote)) (.) it's picturesque (.) it would be fun if it weren't tragic.

(Translated from Portuguese by Daniel Silva)

Marielle first compares the plenary session to a soccer match and later to a classroom. The atmosphere of a soccer stadium helps Marielle to convey the affective involvement of activists who oppose the discussion of gender in schools. Like soccer fans, they brought a banner promoting their 'defence of the traditional family'. Marielle's stance in describing these axes of space and values is as critical as it is good-humoured. This becomes more evident in her reading of the typical spatial order in a Parliament voting session, which resembles a stereotypical classroom where 'nerds' sit in the front and 'slackers' sit in the back. This configuration, where the caucus leader literally cries out to those in the back to tell them how to vote, epitomises political coalitions in Brazil and their occasional entanglements with corruption. This spatial order is also a temporal order: in the plenary session, there was a banner echoing the conservative movement *Tradição Família e Propriedade* (TFP); the space of the chamber, Marielle added, iterates the time of 'Eurocentrism, hierarchy and domination'.

Marielle depicts these time-space configurations to emphasise the importance of embedding her own speaking coordinates into that space. Alongside her informal ethnography of power, Marielle projects an opposing deictic field in which she often references herself as 'we'. She emphasises not only that she did not arrive alone in the halls of government (there were the voters she represented and her female cabinet), but also that her

embodied presence represents queer Black women from the favelas. She explains that ‘being in the city chamber today’ is ‘not about my life Marielle ..., not my identity ... in my- our perspective, ... it is the place of the collective.’ Her hesitation in using ‘my’ to explain her perspective and her constant use of ‘we’ to talk about herself further index a deictic field that references a collective of women.

Marielle also says that she is often considered inappropriate in elite spaces. She was the only Black woman in the house and frequently dealt with her white parliamentary colleagues’ invasive questions about her turban and natural hair. She recalled a situation in which she was hailed from a distance by a security guard who didn’t recognise her. Upon her passing the entrance, the security guard yelled, ‘Yo! Yo! Yo!’ When recounting the incident, Marielle reproduced her look of surprise and commented, ‘I didn’t believe it, those ten seconds, then I came back and looked, and he was a Black man, right? A colleague, a brother.’ Her response was pedagogic: ‘I can’t believe I’ve been here for two months and you didn’t recognise me ... but that’s okay, someday we’re going to make a workshop for the security guards so that you understand that you can’t treat anyone like that.’

Marielle’s remarks show not only how the parliamentary time-space is bound up with racism, sexism and homo-lesbo-transphobia, but also how she aimed to inhabit this time-space differently. In line with grassroots movements that add innovative feminine or gender-neutral inflections in otherwise masculine, ‘unmarked’ words in Portuguese (Borba 2019), Marielle termed her cabinet *mandata*, thus neologically applying the gender morpheme *-a* to the word *mandato* ‘cabinet’ which has no feminine counterpart. The *mandata* was composed mostly of women, including a trans woman, Lana de Hollanda, whose presence at the seminar Marielle frequently referenced: ‘And then we get to that house, right, Lana? And we don’t arrive alone.’ Lana’s presence in the *mandata* also informed Marielle’s resistance to council members who viewed gender as a ‘contagious word’ (Butler 2017; Miskolci 2018). Marielle recalled that the word ‘gender’ ‘had become such a slur’ that some tried to take it out of all city laws, including food legislation (*gênero alimentício* ‘food type’ is a phrase that contains *gênero*, which means both ‘gender’ and ‘type’ in Portuguese). Marielle narrates her clash with a councilman in Excerpt 2.

**Excerpt 2.** Marielle’s speech for a feminist seminar at IESP/UERJ [12 May 2017]

There’s a councilman from the main caucus who textually said, Marielle, let’s [replace gender for] man and woman (.) I said, I cannot stand it (.) what do I do about Lana? ((She points to Lana de Hollanda, who is sitting nearby))

(Translated from Portuguese by Daniel Silva)



Marielle thus contests the councilman's denial of Lana's right to belong in the letter of law.

This case study on Marielle's indexical practice shows her alternative embedding of deictic speaking coordinates in politics, thus challenging taken-for-granted indexical relations. In her parliamentary action, Marielle projected a deictic field in which indexicals such as 'I', 'us', 'here', 'now' and 'tomorrow', along with her body and gaze, inverted the denotational values that a majority of white male politicians have historically tried to stabilise in Rio de Janeiro (Khalil, Silva and Lee 2022). In other words, while mainstream officials in Rio and Brazil more broadly had been engaged in singling out a white, male, heterosexist, racist and LGBTQ-phobic individuality and political community as the referents of the here-and-now of politics, Marielle had long been working to unsettle the assumed referential relations in this deictic field.

### **Bolsonaro and the present absence of 'gender ideology'**

In March 2018, a year after Marielle made her speech, the councilwoman and her driver Anderson were assassinated. This political murder was an important cornerstone of the 2018 election year; other major events included the controversial imprisonment of Lula, the prospective leader in votes for president, in April, and the stabbing of Jair Bolsonaro in September, a month before the election. The Bolsonaro family extracted from these events part of the electoral force that allowed Jair to be voted president and his sons Flávio and Eduardo to be elected to the Senate of Rio de Janeiro and to the House of Representatives for São Paulo, respectively (Carlos preferred to keep his position as councilman of Rio de Janeiro while he ran his father's digital campaign). During the election year, the Bolsonaro family and Bolsonarist candidates cited Marielle as an example of the supposed perversion of 'gender ideology' and feminism.

Bolsonarism is built on the coupling of 'traditional morality' (i.e. religion, patriotism and the patriarchal heterosexual family) with laissez-faire economics, a combination enshrined in the early frameworks of neoliberal thought as designed by scholars such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. According to Brown (2019:14), these founders of neoliberalism tied traditional morality to the 'preservation of the past with patriotism by casting the latter not just as love of country, but as love of the way things *were*, which tars objections to racial and gender injustice as unpatriotic'. The alliances that Bolsonaro made with market representatives such as Paulo Guedes, an investment bank owner who studied with Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago, were not merely coincidental (Gaspar 2018). Further, Flávio and Carlos Bolsonaro supported Miguel

Nagib, a prosecutor who collaborated with Guedes' think tank Instituto Millenium, in his campaign against supposed communist indoctrination in the education system. In 2014, Flávio and Carlos Bolsonaro presented to their legislative houses in Rio similar Bills written by Nagib in a first attempt to turn the anti-gender neoliberal ideals of the movement into education policy (Ciavatta 2017).

Our second case study presents an interview with Jair Bolsonaro for *Jornal Nacional*, Brazil's main live news program, in which Bolsonaro embeds the here-and-now of enunciation into a political field seemingly menaced by 'gender ideology'. In his cunning use of deixis, he breaches the rules of the debate and shows a sex education book (Bruller and Bruller 2007) to the camera (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Bolsonaro showing a sex education book as evidence of alleged indoctrination

In Bolsonaro's projected deictic field, the physically present book evidences a leftist plot to pervert schoolchildren. Simultaneously, Bolsonaro falsely states that the book was part of a 2010 project of distributing sex education materials in schools, which he famously branded as a 'gay kit' at the time. He adds that the kit was distributed at a children's LGBT conference that he witnessed taking place in congress. (The National LGBT Conference was not in fact a children's conference, but a conference discussing sexuality in childhood and adolescence.) The interviewers, Renata Vasconcelos and William Bonner, initially seem to accept his showing of the book cover, but when Bolsonaro warns the audience to take children out of the room because he will show inappropriate images inside the book, Vasconcelos and Bonner discourage him from doing so.

**Excerpt 3.** Bolsonaro's interview for *Jornal Nacional* [28 August 2018]

- (JB = Jair Bolsonaro, RV = Renata Vasconcelos, WB = William Bonner)
- 01 JB Among this material, Bonner, there was this book there, Bonner  
(.) so, tell your children to leave the room so that they don't see  
this, well, actually the libraries in public schools have it on their  
shelves, [look
- 02 RV [CANDIDATE, I will ask you to not show it if the children  
shouldn't see it=
- 03 JB =no, but this is a TEXTBOOK, it's for CHILDREN, IT'S A BOOK  
FOR CHILDREN, PARENTS DON'T KNOW IT'S IN THE  
[LIBRARY
- 04 WB [we have a rule (...) that candidates don't show any documents,  
they don't show any papers=
- 05 JB =no, but it's here in the book, this is proof, here.  
(Translated from Portuguese by Daniel Silva)

Bolsonaro invokes the here-and-now of interaction to produce an epistemic field of truth, fear and morality. Although the book had never been part of the failed project of advancing anti-homophobia educational materials, through deixis it becomes evidence of a perverted plot: 'it's here in the book, this is proof, here'. In this deictic field, epistemic authority is also invoked to alarm parents ('tell your children to leave the room so that they don't see this') and to stoke outrage ('well, actually the libraries in public schools have it on their shelves'). And even though the interviewers did not ideologically align with him, they helped to project the 'presence' of child pornography and 'gender ideology' by asking him not to show the images at the moment of interaction. Interactionally, Bolsonaro and the interviewers presuppose that the pornographic images are 'there' and, by implication, that such seemingly offensive images would have been distributed as part of a 'gay kit'. The deictic composite of the book, Bolsonaro's serious countenance, the potentially pornographic images to be shown, the interviewers' presupposition that the images exist and the simultaneous bodily postures and familial arrangements to be performed provide a metaphysics of presence (Derrida 1978) that grounds truth, affect and morality in the present utterance. Although, from a strictly logico-semantic point of view, Bolsonaro's indexicals failed to accurately represent factual referents in the world 'out there', in that no such 'gay kit' ever existed, these indexicals were interactionally effective in producing these referents while also projecting an inverted image of the left to a wide *Rede Globo* audience. In this way, Bolsonaro conflates the protection of children and heteronormative familial structure with defence of the nation.

This case study highlights the importance of indexicals – and deictic indexicals in particular – for providing the epistemic ground on which a political agenda may be claimed or advanced. Even though referents in the world such as 'gay kit' or 'gender ideology' did not exist as objects to be

represented along the lines of a referentialist language ideology (Bauman and Briggs 2003), the (absent) ‘presence’ of such objects was performatively produced in the deictic field through Bolsonaro’s use of image, body, talk and interaction – with the interviewers and worried parents alike.

### ‘Marielle, presente’

Our third case study demonstrates how other agents have taken positions in the deictic space and how their embedding of space-time coordinates in the political field yields different modes of inhabiting gendered politics. Importantly, this case highlights the construction of the ‘presence’ of Marielle – either as an inverted mirror for Bolsonarism or as a hero or martyr who makes herself present for progressive social movements.

We begin by describing a political rally in the turbulent electoral year of 2018. In Petrópolis, a medium-sized mountain city in the state of Rio de Janeiro, three pro-Bolsonaro candidates broke a street sign honouring Marielle Franco. Wearing yellow and green t-shirts (the colours of the Brazilian flag, symbolising nationalism), Daniel Silveira and Wilson Witzel, candidates for federal deputy and governor respectively, took turns filming the rally. Wearing a black t-shirt with Bolsonaro’s face printed on it, Ricardo Amorim, a candidate for state representative, used a microphone to address the public (see Excerpt 4).

#### Excerpt 4. Candidates rallying on the top of a sound truck [3 October 2018]

- (DS = Daniel Silveira, RA = Rodrigo Amorim, WW = Wilson Witzel)
- 01 DS ((speaking to his phone camera)) What’s up folks, Daniel Silveira, judge Wilson Witzel [number twenty
- 02 WW [that’s right
- 03 RA [((RA talks to the public))
- 04 DS ((to the camera; people cheering in the street)) our candidate to the government, we’re in Petrópolis, I want you to understand our strength (.) HERE NOBODY WILL HOLD A RED FLAG (.) THIS IS OUR STRENGTH
- 05 WW ((to the camera)) we’re here with (.) our candidate to the house of representatives, we’re together, Daniel (.) he will be a voice in the lower house, here from the mountain region of Petrópolis
- 06 RA ((speaking to the crowd)) they’re lost (.) they will have TOUGH DAYS at Alerj ((Rio’s house of representatives)) (.) I will poke my finger at these VAGABUNDOS DE ARAQUE ((‘FAKE BUMS’)) (.) I want to say this, just to wrap it up (.) MARIELLE, MARIELLE was assassinated (.) [but more than 60,000 Brazilians die every year
- 07 DS ((speaking to someone down in the crowd))  
[get the STREET SIGN, THE STREET SIGN IN THE CAR (.) THE SIGN, THE SIGN, GET THE STREET SIGN

- 08 RA ((speaking to the crowd)) those bums did- those bums- I will tell you something (.) these bums, they went to Cinelândia square, and in ignoring everyone else they took down the sign (.) from Marechal Floriano square in Rio de Janeiro and replaced it with a square named [Marielle Franco ((people boo in the crowd))
- 09 DS [the sign, the sign ((he gets the sign, which is broken on the edge, and shows it to the crowd))
- 10 RA I, I, I, and Daniel went there AND BROKE THE SIGN ((the crowd cheers)) Jair Bolsonaro (.) Jair Bolsonaro suffered a threat to democracy ((by being stabbed at a rally)) and these rabbles didn't say a word (.) that's why WE WILL WIPE THOSE BUMS ((Daniel displays the broken plate to the audience, who scream)) IT'S OVER PSOL ((Marielle's party)), IT'S OVER PCdoB ((another leftwing party; he points to the plate and says)) no more of this shit here, now it's Bolsonaro FUCK
- 11 Crowd â MYTH, MYTH, MYTH, MYTH

This interaction was highly entextualised and commented on during the election (Figure 2). Deictically, the three candidates invoke a spatial and temporal origo, which is then mapped onto the political scenario. They speak from a 'here' (Petrópolis) that stages their 'strength' and is brought to bear on the 'wiping out' of the mess over 'there,' in the square where Rio's Municipal Parliament is located, Marielle worked and 'those *vagabundos* [bums]<sup>74</sup> abound. Temporally, Amorim indexes a time that is beginning to change ('now it's Bolsonaro, fuck') and does not welcome Marielle's time-space ('no more of this shit here,' he says while pointing to her street sign).



**Figure 2.** Marielle Franco street sign being broken in half: 'This is Witzel ... a guy who thinks it's okay to seek political advantage after the assassination of a councilwoman.' (Talk and text translated by Daniel Silva)

All three candidates involved in the rally were elected in 2018. In their public display of the broken street sign, the candidates invoke the epistemic force of deixis to enact hatred of Marielle, so they epitomise ‘a long, enduring and foundational odium of Black people’ (Alves and Vargas 2020:645). As in Bolsonaro’s display of the sex education book, a metaphysics of presence is produced in the here-and-now of interaction to ground broader political constructions. Yet, instead of the dread of child pornography, it is Brazil’s enduring gendered anti-Blackness that structures the presence of interaction in the Petrópolis rally. In their reading of Fanon’s (1969) racialised positionalities in the colonial world, Alves and Vargas (2020:652) write that, in ‘an antiblack world, the Black subject is part of an asymmetric field of structured positionalities insofar as their unique physical presence is a threat yet their symbolic absence is unimaginable’. In this sense, Marielle’s ‘presence’ is simultaneously necessary for and abhorred by the Bolsonarist candidates. That is, while Marielle is hated and ought to be forgotten, she is nonetheless continuously remembered because her dead Black gendered body is iconic of the anti-Black sentiment that helps constitute Bolsonarists as a group.

The spectral presence of Marielle is thus invoked by Witzel, Amorim and Silveira as occupying a central adversarial position in this political origo. This affective dynamic is perhaps best exemplified in turn 07, when Silveira frantically shouts at someone in the crowd to fetch him the street sign. His anxiety to display the ripped sign indicates that the present moment of interaction is also one that accumulates history, namely the constitutive violence on which Brazil was founded (Starling and Schwarz 2018). In the country that received the most enslaved Africans during European colonialism, where their descendants are the majority of the population (Blacks and ‘*pardos*’, or mixed-race people, are 54.9 per cent of the population), they are still the most affected by structural racism, police violence and economic inequality. In turn 06, Amorim indexes this accumulated anti-Black history by repurposing the discourse surrounding the murder of Marielle and the attempted murder of Bolsonaro, who had been stabbed a month earlier. Amorim thus downgrades her assassination and reframes it as an average murder in a country where some ‘60,000 Brazilians’ annually lose their lives to violent crime. According to Brazil’s Fórum de Segurança Pública ‘Forum of Public Security’, in 2017 there were 65,602 people murdered in the country – a shocking statistic that represented a rise of 4.9 per cent from 2016 (Cerqueira et al. 2019). The study also notes that 75.5 per cent of the victims were racialised as Black. Echoing Bolsonaro’s discourse, Amorim presents this statistic both as mundane (thus Marielle’s murder would be just one of thousands) and as evidence for a law-and-order agenda (that helped elect them). Further, in rendering Marielle’s life disposable and her death as merely another statistic, Amorim brings her

'presence' through an inversion of her legacy: for him, the valorisation of her life must be dreaded. Along the same lines, Jair Bolsonaro was the one who 'suffered a threat to democracy' (by being stabbed), and 'these bums didn't say a word'.

Nobre (2020) argues that the current extreme right-wing government renders 'real democracy' as a return to the dictatorial past. The Bolsonaroist deictic order is 'conservative', especially in its temporal sense. After the rally, Flávio Bolsonaro rationalised the breaking of the street sign as 'nothing more than restoring order' (Maia 2018). He explained that the square was officially named after marshal Floriano Peixoto (a past president and a 'real' democrat in this register) and that 'the PSOL people think they are above the law and can change the street name by force'. Amorim, Silveira and Witzel were only fixing an 'illegality'.

Following the destruction of the street sign, Marielle's mourning movement reacted rapidly. Mourners had already been reclaiming her 'presence' since she was murdered. They thus embedded their semiotic response in the 'metaleptic temporality' (Silva and Lee 2021) that they had been reclaiming for the time-and-space of Marielle. In narrative theory, metalepsis is the transgression between narrative universes (Genette 1980) – for instance, when a character in a novel thrusts their way out of the 'told' register and into the 'telling', where the reader is located. As we write this article, mourners still talk about Marielle in the present (Figure 3), as if she had transcended the time and space of the deceased and returned to the world of the living.



**Figure 3.** 'Marielle lives!' banner held by protesters in Melbourne, Australia (Fenizola 2019)

Mourners also say that Marielle is a ‘seed’, meaning that this metalectic time is forward-looking and aimed at multiplying her influence. Shortly after the rally went viral, her movement engaged in crowdfunding to print hundreds of street signs for protesters who challenged the overt racism, lesbophobia and gender violence predicated in the Petrópolis rally. Hashtagged #MarielleMultiplica, this concerted action spread through different cities around the world (see Figures 4, 5 and 6).



**Figure 4.** City and state representatives at the Municipal Parliament in Rio de Janeiro (Fenizola 2019)



**Figure 5.** Demonstration in Lisbon, Portugal (Fenizola 2019)





**Figure 6.** Rio de Janeiro metro station in Buenos Aires, Argentina (Fenizola 2019)

Today, more than 18,000 such signs have been produced and distributed around the world.<sup>5</sup> Spatially, Figures 3, 5 and 6 exemplify the projection of Marielle's deictic field into places such as Melbourne, Lisbon and Buenos Aires. Crucially, this concerted global action suggests that mourners' meta-aleptic projection of time and space – that is, the retroactive projection of Marielle into temporalities and spaces where she now posthumously inhabits – grows from the 'seeds' she had been planting. For instance, mourners in cities such as Rio, Melbourne, Lisbon and Buenos Aires came to inhabit her inversions in the deictic space: like Marielle, they insist on being a 'we' and not an 'I'. In this way, her mourners assert that they are connected to one another through Marielle's ongoing, metaaleptic 'presence', even in spatial and temporal locations to which the individual Marielle perhaps had never visited.

## Conclusion

In this article, we discussed Brazilian contemporary politics from the vantage point of deictic speech. More specifically, we looked at the centrality of Marielle Franco in Brazil's current political moment, both as an 'enemy' frequently evoked by the far-right and as a symbol of hope to progressives. Hanks (2008:11) writes that a very basic pragmatic function of deictic speech is to 'establish a relation between an origo and an object of reference'. In his ethnographic approach to deixis, however, Hanks questions

'egocentric' frameworks of deixis that view deictic indexicals such as 'I', 'we' and 'you' as mere indicators of the physical proximity of objects of reference to a speaker. For Hanks (2008:11), the 'idea that physical proximity is the core of deictic meaning' may function well for frameworks that assume the deictic system of English and a language ideology of meaning as springing from a physically bounded individual, yet other languages may privilege other origos, such as the addressee, a relation between the speaker and the addressee, or even some other aspect of context. In his critique, Hanks (2008:10) maintains that it is not physical proximity that undergirds deixis, but 'rather the access (perceptual, cognitive, social) that participants have to the referent'. We believe that our analyses may contribute to extant conceptualisations of deixis in that they bring to the fore the construction of 'presence' not in physical but in cultural and ideological terms. Bolsonaro's production of a metaphysics of truth on the basis of 'gender ideology' as a seemingly present object in a sex-positive education book and the invocations of the 'presence' of Marielle in interaction show the differential importance of 'absent present' referential objects ('gender ideology' and Marielle Franco) in Brazil's contemporary political turbulence.

Our three case studies on the projection of the deictic field into the political arena have other implications. These instances of language in interaction all point to the performativity of deixis. Throughout the cases, indexicals – and deictics in particular – are used to call particular understandings of time, place and the world into being. Participants invoke an experiential field to project interested modes of inhabiting politics, with consequential effects for the contemporary political arena in Brazil. In the first case, Marielle herself politicised her access to the experiential space of the municipal legislature, denouncing the foreclosure of her access to the chamber as a Black woman. In politicising her here-and-now of enunciation in politics, she interactionally inverted taken-for-granted gendered and racial relations in Brazil. Further, she metaleptically positioned Black women, queer minorities and the poor as 'originators' and 'agents' of political change (see Franco 2018; Khalil, Silva and Lee 2022), in addition to projecting her speaking position not as an 'I' but as a 'we'.

In the second case, Jair Bolsonaro's cunning use of deixis in a presidential interview invoked the present threat of 'gender ideology' and child pornography. Even though Marielle is not referenced in the interview, her gendered Blackness is another spectral presence there, in that the Black subject is 'always and already the non-reference' of white supremacy and therefore of Bolsonarism – that is, the Black person, and Marielle in particular, 'provide[s] the fixed point against which all other positionalities attain social freight, yet their presence is negated, erased, ignored' (Alves and Vargas 2020:645).

In the third case, the explicit invocation of Marielle by Bolsonaroist political candidates and mourners' summoning of Marielle's 'presence' further evidence the importance of indexicals. In their display of a physically present, ripped street sign and in their delineation of a deictic field, Witzel, Amorim and Silveira invoked Marielle's 'presence' as the epitome of the Black person's non-reference (Fanon 1969; Alves and Vargas 2020:645) – that is, her life is deemed unmournable, yet her 'absence is unimaginable.' We discussed the resistance to this non-reference by delineating the temporal and spatial fractalisation of Marielle's here-and-now: mourners responded to the violent ripping of Marielle's street sign by multiplying the street signs and making her movement 'germinate' in other cities around the world. Their assertion that Marielle is deictically 'present' invokes a queer temporality that directly challenges Bolsonaroism's heteropatriarchal linear time. Marielle's Black queerness performed a dual disruption: as a queer Black mother, she challenged Brazilian 'order and progress' discourses centred on whiteness (Smith 2015; Alves 2018), and the naturalness of biological reproduction and the nuclear family. Her queer 'presence' and the dissemination of her 'seeds' into different spatial and temporal scales make manifest the transformative potential of 'experiences not regulated by "clock" time or by a conceptualization of the present as singular and fleeting; experiences not narrowed by the idea that time moves steadily forward, that it is scarce, that we live on only one temporal plane' (Dinshaw et al. 2007:185). Marielle politically espouses and embodies these revolutionary disruptions: her collective presence in the halls of government and in the progressive field that metaleptically summons her 'presence' redefine the here-and-now enforced by right-wing conservatism.

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## Notes

- 1 In Portuguese, 'Marielle, *presente*' phonologically invokes a roll call, in which Marielle's name is called and the response is 'present'. The chant might be punctuated as 'Marielle? *Presente!*'
- 2 Following the pioneering work of Machado da Silva (1999), Brazilian sociology has found substantial empirical evidence that most Brazilian peripheries do not have one normative regime of government, but two: the state and the 'world of crime' – that is, drug traffic and *milícias*, depending on the location (see Biondi 2016; Feltran 2020). Generally, wealthier areas only abide by the rule of the state, but most favelas and other peripheries have to abide by both the state and 'crime'. For instance, if someone is murdered in a wealthy neighbourhood, it is the state (the police, the justice system, etc.) that will investigate and stipulate punishment for the wrongdoing; if it is in the periphery, it is probably the 'world of crime' that will respond (with rules that are internal to crime). Biondi (2016) and Feltran (2020) describe such rules and the conflict and occasional cooperation between the state and the 'world of crime' at length.
- 3 Utilized Jefferson transcription conventions:
 

(.)	A micropause
[ ]	Overlapping talk
(( ))	Analyst comments
Underlining	A raise in volume or emphasis
CAPITALS	Louder or shouted words
<word>	Decreased speaking rate (slowing down)
=	Indicates that there was no pause between sentences
::	Stretched sound
- 4 'Vagabundo' in Portuguese can mean a person who does not work as well as a vagrant. In this case, the word is used offensively to refer to those who don't work.
- 5 See <https://www.ruamariellefranco.com.br>.

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