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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Affective politics. The 'Vulgar Vibes' of Brazilian far-right anti-feminism

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Abstract

A baby-bottle shaped as a phallus, a book illustrating oral sex practices for small children or lesbians defecating in a church were circulating as Bolsonaro was elected president in 2018. The left-wing ministry of health was purportedly promoting the baby bottle, the ministry of education the book and the National Secretariat of Politics for Women endorsing lesbians. What is the political significance this crass vulgarity for the far-right in Brazil and beyond? Answering that question, requires de-centering reason and facts and re-centering resonance and affects. Not the information but the crudeness of the images matter. To 'figure' how, we work with three thinkers that help us grapple with how the vibes of the Brazilian far-right anti-feminist vulgarity emerge and spread, how they orient politics and how they can be challenged. Unpacking Achille Mbembe's 'aesthetics of vulgarity', displacing Noura Tafeche's *Kawayoku* and complementing Vladimir Safatle's 'helplessness', we show how vulgar vibes are *circulating, charaterzing* politics and what is *challenging* them. We propose this figure of vulgar vibes as an encouragement and invitation to urgently 'go figure' how 'affective politics' such as that of 'vulgar far-right anti-feminism' can be more effectively engaged in Brazil and elsewhere.

Keywords Gender · Post-Colonialism · Misinformation · Digital mediation · Figuration · Resistance

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Introduction

On 7 September 2022 at the celebrations of the bicentenary of the independence of the Brazilian republic, then President Jair Bolsonaro explained to the crowd that had gathered for the solemn occasion that men should get themselves women to stop being unhappy. After demonstratively turning to kiss the first lady, Michelle, the president thanked the audience for his 'second life' and went on to say that he was 'imbroxável' which is Brazilian slang for a lasting hard-on. He started chanting 'imbroxável, imbroxável, imbroxável…'. The crowd joined in. Videos from the event went viral. They were picked up in mainstream media. Zealous journalists dutifully proceeded to interview the first lady, asking her if, really, it was true that the president was 'imbroxável'. Michelle assured them it was. The exchange was absurd. The truthfulness of the assertion was not the main concern. The vulgarity of the chanting was. It scandalised the prude, broke with the conventions of the usually solemn celebration, and debased all/any gender sensibility. In this article, we are concerned with the political significance of vulgarity such as this and of the affective politics to which it belongs more broadly (Fig. 1).

The contention in this article is that while the significance of affects in politics is acknowledged across a range of literatures and in regulatory and professional practices,[1] its far-reaching radical implications for how we conceptualize, engage and intervene with politics are widely underestimated. Often, focus continues to be on

Fig. 1 Bolsonaro chanting 'imbroxável' with the crowd. Stills from video recording (accessed 1 November 2024)

[1] In Brazil the issues posed by online politics are tackled almost exclusive in terms of information (e.g. Cazzamatta, Santos, and Albuquerque 2024; Rubio and Monteiro 2023). The focus is analogous to that adopted elsewhere including in the EU and the US. The 'main goal' of the Digital Services Act e.g. is to 'prevent illegal and harmful activities online and the spread of disinformation'.

mis-/dis-/mal-information, on alternative truths, on deep fakes and on analogous processes that all assume the primacy in politics of reason, language, deliberation, truth and the processes surrounding them. Thus, regulators (in Brazil[2] and elsewhere) are directing attention to fake-news and information flows. On this account, the significance of affects and emotions is that they impact information and the politics associated with it.[3] By contrast, our claim is that affects generate political processes. They generate, orient and shape political process. To grasp this affective politics, it is necessary to decentre the significance of truth, information and argument to instead focus on moods and atmospheres. This is no minor challenge. It requires rethinking politics. This article proposes to do exactly that by working with the notion 'vulgar vibes' associated with the anti-feminist vulgarity of the Brazilian far-right. A brief excursion into the theoretical, methodological and practical standing of this working with will help clarify its aims and delimit its scope.

Theoretically, we propose a reconstructive conceptualization that locates affective processes at the core of politics. We conceptualize by making alliances with thinkers that have developed the vocabularies we start from. Specifically, we work with the post-colonial scholar Achille Mbembe's notion of an 'aesthetics of vulgarity' (Mbembe 2001: chapter 3), with media-activist and artist Noura Tafeche's notion of '*kawayoku*' that captures a shifting manga-aesthetic constellation merging cuteness, sex, and militarism (Tafeche 2023a) and with Brazilian political philosopher Vladimir Safatle's (2016) notion of 'helplessness'. These concepts provide points of departure for conceptualizing respectively the circulation, the tropes and the contestation of the 'vibes' of the aesthetics of Brazilian anti-feminist vulgarity and perhaps of affective politics more generally. We are not simply 'applying' these notions, rather, we do 'concept work' with them.[4] In a pragmatist, feminist vein,[5] we do this relating to a practical 'problem': the difficulty of groping with the significance of anti-feminist vulgarity of the Brazilian far-right in the Bolsonaro period and affective politics. We think of vulgarity as the gross, crass, unrefined, indecent transgression of social limits ─ sexualized or otherwise. We focus specifically on

[2] A corner stone of its policy is the The Electoral Justice Permanent Program on Countering Disinformation, established in 2021 by the supreme electoral court.

[3] An example from the pages of this journal: Lokot has discussed the significance of Papacharissi's notion of 'affective publics' in the Ukraine war focusing on their strategic manipulation as opposed to the affective processes associated with them (Lokot 2023). Papacharissi develops the notion 'affective publics' with great care. However, to see its specifically political pertinence, she looks at 'what these mediated feelings of connectedness do for politics … to explore their impact on structures of storytelling, sentiment, and the mediality of events broadcast through different platforms' (Papacharissi 2016:308). The 'mediated feelings' of affective publics gain political salience through their 'impact' on the communication rather than (as we will argue) as political processes in their own right.

[4] We borrow the idea of 'concept work' from Stoler who sees it as the 'labour to be performed' in 'demanding and enabling … political entailments' from concepts that are unstable, mobile, connected and working through persuasion (Stoler 2016: 18-20).

[5] We connect the pragmatist plea for an anchoring of cognition and theorizing 'in real-life problem situations' allowing our 'unreflected expectations … [and] our habitual actions meet with resistance from the world and rebound back on us' (Joas 1996: 128). Or more simply put, we follow a well-established tradition in feminist scholarship that refuses to privilege the purity of abstraction over the 'dirty' political practice (Sylvester 2001; Hutchings 2018).

vulgarity transgressing the limits of decency with respect to feminism; that is on anti-feminist vulgarity. Our conceptualization is reconstructive in that it is primarily positively proposing, speaking with and elaborating on already existing thought. We speak *with* a range of thinkers and disciplines. We speak *to* a practical, political and conceptual problem: that of grappling with affective politics discussed through the anti-feminist vulgarity of the Brazilian far right specifically.

There are things we, therefore, do not do or claim. We do not advocate for or embrace affective politics or anti-feminist vulgarity. On the contrary. We write this article because their misrecognition is deeply problematic. Acknowledging the significance aesthetics and affects in politics is of essence precisely for understanding and intervening with it. The pertinence of arguments insisting that aesthetics and affects are crucial to all politics continues (Rebentisch 2018 or Austin and Leander 2021). We do not undertake a detailed critique of all the literatures that have engaged affective politics, of the far-right, in Brazil specifically, but continue to treat it as having an impact on politics rather than as being politics. In the space at our disposal, we privilege reconstructive conceptualization and engagement with some of those who have fronted it. We do not claim that we are the first to engage with these topics. The scholars we speak *with* obviously have done so and so have many others. Finally, we are not suggesting that vulgar anti-feminism is unique to the far-right[6] or to Brazil.[7] Rather, the aim in grounding our work in the anti-feminism of the far-right in Brazil is to ease conceptual connections, related reflections and hopefully also anti- anti-feminist vulgarity interventions elsewhere and beyond the Brazilian far-right.

Methodologically, our argument is self-consciously and reflexively figurative.[8] In proposing the notion of 'vulgar vibes', we are figuring a way of thinking about affective politics drawing on anti-feminist vulgarity in Brazil. We do this engaging both 'the problem space' of affective politics and that of the Brazilian far-right. In both spaces, the 'how' (i.e. methods) of this engagement assumes an openness to and embrace of the 'methodological inventiveness' that makes figuration possible (Lury and Wakeford 2012; Suchman 2012). Thus, we disrespect the boundaries of both spaces, working across them, borrowing from scholarly traditions usually kept apart. Centrally we borrow from feminist scholarship, political and post-colonial theory, and media studies. Analogously, we combine a range of heterogeneous materials including secondary sources exploring the significance of anti-feminist vulgarity in Brazil and elsewhere, images collected primarily from the '*WhatsApp* Monitor'[9] at

[6] An example of left-wing vulgarity in Brazil is the moniker 'Bolsonazi' (Gragnani 2018). For a discussion of vulgar left-wing misogyny, see Menon and DeCook (2021).

[7] For a discussion of the current resurgence of misogyny and its centrality to the far-right in Brazil see among many Dias (2022), Moraes and Bulgarelli (2023) or Möser (2022). For its historical roots in European history and connections to colonialism see Theweleit (1987).

[8] Figurative methodologies are associated with Donna Haraway (2013). They are geared to provide 'figures' that help understand and intervene in the world. Their emphasis tends to be on the materiality these figures. They have been developed and used primarily in the context of approaches that have as their core ambition to provide alternative figurations such as those including gender (Butler 1990), technology (Suchman 2012), race (Nakamura 2013).

[9] WhatsApp Monitor. Available at: http://www.monitor-de-WhatsApp.dcc.ufmg.br/.

the Federal University of Minas Gerais, and expert interviews that we conducted as part of our project on the digital infrastructures of democracy.[10] We are reflexively wary of theoretical (en-)closures and empirical claims to representativeness that flatten differences and do violence to real complexity of the connections we are establishing. While this obviously makes it impossible to produce disembodied and decontextualized truths about affective politics, it helps direct attention to spaces for debate and political intervention (Leander 2020). As figurative methods more generally, ours not only recognizes the situatedness of knowledge, but draws the logical consequence: 'inviting readers to "go figure!"' (Lury et al. 2022: 18 and chapter 4).

Our invitation to 'go figure' is an encouragement to extend and deepen the engagement with affective politics, generally, and with the vulgar anti-feminism of the far-right, specifically. Even if none of this is novel or underexplored, more is called for. The dominant 'figure' of a politics, where information, deliberation and truth prime, is ill suited for understanding and challenging the affective, anti-feminist politics of the far-right. More realistic 'figures' are needed. The invitation to 'go figure' implicates others in the search for such figures. Finding them is necessarily a collective endeavour. The plural in 'figures' is not incidental. Rather, and consistently with our approach, figuration is necessarily situated and contextual. The invitation to 'go figure' is a nod of acknowledgement directed at this diversity, at the consequently necessary involvement of others and at the practical import of opening, rather than concluding the debates making space for them. In this sprit, we offer a situated and grounded presentation of our figure of the 'vibes'. We introduce vibes through a discussion of the *circulation*, *characteristics* and *challenging* affective politics grounded in the anti-feminist vulgarity of the Brazilian far-right.

We start from Mbembe's 'aesthetics of vulgarity' to suggest that vulgarity is a modality of power adding that it operates through the *circulation* of 'vulgar vibes' and distinguishing three connected affective circuits: the digital, public and tribal. We then work with Tafeche's fluid and shifting understanding of online aesthetic constellations to show how vulgar vibes orient politics, adding the messianic, masculinist and militarist *characterization* of these vibes in the context of the Brazilian anti-feminist far-right. Finally, we work with Safatle's idea of helplessness that deviates the vulgar vibes, leaving room for political openness, to begin a reflection on what it means to *challenge* aesthetics of vulgarity and its affective politics. We complement his helplessness by directing attention to the place humour that deflects, and hopeful care that defines alternatives occupied in Brazil. The circulating, characterizing and challenging of vulgar vibes is the figure we propose for the affective politics of the aesthetics of anti-feminist vulgarity in Brazil.

[10] Infrastructuring Democracy: The Regulatory Politics of Digital Code, Content, and Circulation cofounded by the Brazilian CNPQ and the Swiss SNF.

Circulating vulgar vibes

To rethink politics in a way that makes room for affects, including anti-feminist vulgarity, Achille Mbembe's exploration of 'the aesthetics of vulgarity' as a core 'modality of power' in the 'post-colony' is a helpful starting point (Mbembe 2001, chapter 3 and passim). We unpack the idea suggesting that vulgarity operates through the circulation of 'vibes' that orient politics and are difficult to challenge. Moving beyond Mbembe's reluctance to centre on the aesthetics of vulgarity in the context of contemporary mediated politics, we proceed to suggest that they are essential there. We start doing this by focussing on three connected affective circuits that generate and amplify the vulgar vibes of far-right anti-feminism in Brazil: the social media, public and tribal.

Vulgar vibes

In 1992, Achilles Mbembe wrote about the 'banality of power' in African post-colonies (Mbembe 2001). The postcolony, he argued, had a distinctive style of politics. The 'mouth, belly, and the penis constitute the classic ingredients of *commandement* in the postcolony' (Ibid: 104). Mbembe's discussion of how this system operates spans a wide range of vulgarities ranging from 'obsession with orifices, odours, and genital organs [in]… Togolese popular laughter' to the situation where 'pleasure is transformed into a site of death' (Ibid: 105-122). In this discussion Mbembe leaves little doubt about frequently sexual and gendered qualities of vulgarity which turns it into a tool against women. In his words:

> 'To exercise authority is, furthermore, for the male ruler, to … pass most of his time in "pumping grease and rust into the backsides of young girls." The male ruler's pride in possessing an active penis has to be dramatized, through sexual rights over subordinates, the keeping of concubines, and so on. The unconditional subordination of women to the principle of male pleasure remains one pillar upholding the reproduction of the phallocratic system (2001: 110)

In Mbembe's view, this frequently sexist vulgarity is not simply an unfortunate, embarrassing and violent style 'African' rulers adopt because they lack in good (civilized) taste. Nor does it operate through the individual 'emotions' of the subjects. Rather, it orients political life. Its 'vibes' circulate (our terms) and infuse the 'atmospheres' of politics setting its 'mood' (Ahmed 2014). For Mbembe, vulgarity also fashions the connection between the *commandment* and the political subject. Vulgarity is manipulated by all. The subject, as much as the *commandment,* mobilize and 'play' with it (Mbembe 2001: 104). They contribute and become complicit in it. As a modality of power, the 'aesthetics of vulgarity' operates 'beyond the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination, such as resistance/passivity, autonomy/subjection, state/civil society, hegemony/counter-hegemony, totalization/de-totalization' (Ibid.: 103). Vulgarity and its vibes therefore generate political processes exceedingly difficult to challenge. In the subsequent sections we follow up

on how vulgar vibes orient and can be contested. Here we start by focussing on their circulation in the contemporary context of digitally mediated politics.

Digital mediation has no place in Mbembe's analysis of vulgarity. In 1992, when he analysed it, the internet was in its infancy and social media as we know it did not yet exist so there is an obvious reason. However, also in his later engagements with the 'digital technologies that weave themselves into the fabric of our everyday lives', Mbembe mostly dissociates the digital from affects and vulgarity. When focussing on future knowledges, he stresses that the digital is extending the plasticity of post-colonial knowledge connecting material objects and subjects and operating as 'an engine' of 'invention, imagination and speculation' thus opening for the place of affects but remaining silent on vulgarity (2019: 250). When discussing the politics of the digital specifically, his emphasis is on the rational and technical (Mbembe 2021: 16). Colonialism and capitalism become 'techno-molecular' (Ibid: 19 22). The high-tech violence of Israeli Apartheid is generalized as power is 'miniaturized', 'cellularized' and 'molecularized' (Mbembe 2018: 68). 'Reason' is put on trial.' It 'is increasingly replaced and subsumed by instrumental rationality [… and as] instrumental reason, or reason in the guise of *techne*, is increasingly weaponized.' (Ibid.: 26). The 'aesthetics of vulgarity' disappear from Mbembe's discussion of contemporary, digitally mediated, politics and its orientations. Affects beyond those associated with the technical and instrumentally rational are marginalized.

Reading Mbembe against Mbembe, we take his insights about the centrality of 'aesthetics of vulgarity' as a modality of power to be of particular significance in contemporary politics. Rather than marginalizing the aesthetic of vulgarity, the circuits of digital mediation generate and amplify the circulation of affects, including vibes of vulgarity. To offer a sense of why, we focus on three, partly overlapping, circuits of affective circulation: the social media, public and 'tribal' circuits where such arguments have often been made. We discuss each relating it, specifically to the vibes of far-right, anti-feminist vulgarity in Brazil.

Social media

The role of social media in generating and amplifying the circulation of affect has attracted considerable attention. Two aspects of social media occupy a central role in the analysis of how these circuits operate. The first is the *technical affordances* that makes room for images and sound that can be edited and re-combined by users. This opens for a vastly expanded range of communication where the 'haptic' qualities of images and sound occupy a steadily growing space (Pozo 2016; Parisi et al. 2017). In Brazil, the longer blogs and posts that occupied a central place in early digital mediation are filling ever less, while short X (former Twitter) posts and picture/video-oriented media such as Instagram, TikTok or Telegram are expanding (Júnior et al. 2021). To shock, for example with vulgarity, is to attract attention and create affects that help validate truths. The flourishing of online conspiracy theories is one consequence. 'The soothing power of repetition' displaces 'over-rationalization' (Venturini 2022: 71). As in oral cultures, repetition amplified by affects generated through for example music or images, confirms knowledge in the 'second orality'

of the online (Ibid.: 65). Mediation extends the range of possibilities of repeating and affectively amplifying conspiracy theories. As the possibilities are realized, conspiracy theories thrive and the place of affects in validating knowledge and truth expands. Analogously, shocking gendered, vulgarity is not only possible, it thrives in the space the technical affordances of online mediation open for it.

The *modulation* of communication is a second aspect of social media circulation often argued to generate and amplify the circulation of affects. Platforms orient and direct users. They 'control' that what they meet and experience online is resonate with them by referencing their earlier choices (Franklin 2015; da Costa Felipe and Mulholland 2022). However, social media platforms are not merely conservative. They are also designed to retain but also to deepen and intensify the engagement of the users. In this, affects are crucial. The success and centrality of online pornography with its 'carnal resonances' testifies to just how crucial they are (Paasonen 2024). Online marketeers, activists and social-media users themselves work to generate moods and atmospheres that engage. The intensity of these affects increases as their management-manipulation becomes a 'binding technique' hooking users into 'communication for its own sake' (Dean 2013: 95). The 'decline in symbolic efficiency' requires ever more intense affects for this binding technique to work (Ibid.: 125). Vulgarity is one way of generating such affective intensity. Social media therefore tends to generate and circulate it.

How affordances and affects operate, and what space the vulgarity occupies, varies across social media platforms and contexts. In Brazil (and elsewhere) *WhatsApp* played a particularly central role in the circulation of far-right anti-feminist vulgarity.[11] One reason is banally that it was widely used. The 'zero-rating' policies offered by mobile phone operators for mobile data used through the platform made many Brazilians access the internet through *WhatsApp*.[12] Moreover, video and voice communication options make the app suited for the roughly eleven million illiterate Brazilians (Tokarnia 2020, Interview with Sérgio Barbosa 2022). However, the intimacy of *WhatsApp*'s end-to-end encrypted communication that — so the platform — cannot be moderated or controlled was crucial.[13] The 'architecture of confidence' offered a space of affinity, intimacy, and affective proximity (Interview with Fernanda Bruno, 2022). *WhatsApp* groups became a safe-space for sharing and showing as well as vectors of 'anti-systemic' politics of anger, danger and discontent (Rossini et al. 2021). A decentralized, distributed pushing of the limits of the socially acceptable flourished (Davis and Straubhaar 2020; Bursztyn and Birnbaum 2019; Baptista et al. 2019). In this space vulgarity was nurtured and thrived. It grounded intimate, complicities. It attracted, provoked, shocked, and amused. The *WhatsApp* groups were generating and amplifying the circulation of vulgar vibes.

[11] For the significance of WhatsApp for politics in Brazil and beyond see among many: Bursztyn and Birnbaum (2019), Milan and Sérgio (2020), Rossini et al. (2021), or Treré (2020).

[12] In 2019, 93% of 45 central mobile-phone plans offered zero-rating for internet access through *WhatsApp*, against 48% for Messenger and 40% for Facebook (Oms et al. 2019).

[13] Exceptions to the 'impossibility' of content moderation exist when a *WhatsApp* message violates of the Terms of Service on grounds that it involves fraud, spam, child porn, and illegal activities, putting into question the impossibility itself.

Public

The generation and amplification of vulgar vibes were taken further in the wider circuits of public politics. As in the post-colony, so in Brazil, vulgarity was subject to strategic, political, manipulation. The 'vibes' of the 'vulgarity' flourishing in the Brazilian *WhatsApp* groups therefore leaked out of the ostensibly private space. Content was shared, reposted, recombined, commented and protested. The 'architecture of confidence' proved porous. It had passageways allowing two-way connections to other social media including *Facebook* 'pages', X (former *Twitter*) 'threads', TikTok videos, *Instagram* 'reels', and *Telegram* 'channels' (Júnior et al. 2021). Through these passageways or directly, *WhatsApp* vulgarity leaked into mainstream media including newspapers, television and indeed political debates where the content was referenced, represented and reinterpreted (Marés et al. 2018). The groups' circuits were connected to the public circuits of political communication in the 'expanded' online-offline space (Della Ratta 2017).

Political strategists, commercial consultancies and commercial logics played a core role in the building and sustaining these connections. They also nurtured the vulgar vibes circulating through them. Parties and activists developed online strategies that involved *WhatsApp* groups. They employed professionals. A considerable and heterogeneous undergrowth of discreet firms offering online political services thrived (Mello 2020; Mattos 2019). The content circulating in and seeping out from *WhatsApp* groups was often commissioned and/or produced elsewhere by companies proposing 'political advertising' (Rodrigues and Gomes 2020; Souza 2019; Rebello et al. 2018). The work of these companies was systematic and carefully designed (Audi and Dias 2018). Strategists and BOTs would 'infiltrate' *WhatsApp* groups to shape the political content there, conducting 'micro-segmentation' and 'micro-targeting' of users with the help of specialized software. The firms hierarchized the *WhatsApp* groups in their work (Interviews with Fernanda Bruno and David Nemer 2022). At the top, were groups created to serve as starting points for the dissemination. From there, it was forwarded until it reached into family, work, and other 'organic' or 'grassroot' groups. The links of 'spreader' groups were advertised on social media and users added by unknown numbers possibly belonging to the consultancies.

This careful strategic manipulation of the *WhatsApp* groups ensured that the vulgar vibes generated in *WhatsApp* circulated also in the public political realm. The manipulation necessarily worked in the prevailing style of the *WhatsApp* groups. AM4, a company that worked for Bolsonaro's campaign, claimed to spread content to 1500 groups 'that would never be distributed as part of an official election advertising campaign' (cited in Evangelista and Bruno 2019: 15). The *Cambridge Analytica* scandal of March 2018 further increased the space of the vulgar. In its wake, consultancies withdrew from public visibility. With this, their reasons to check and limit controversial, shocking content diminished. Companies, politicians, and activities operating strategically on *WhatsApp* might not intentionally have furthered 'vulgarity' or reinforced its 'vibes'. However, their operations did precisely that.

Tribal

Finally, vibes of vulgarity emerge and are amplified as they circulate in the 'world of the right' (Abrahamsen et al. 2024). Social media 'platforms' and 'digital infrastructures' span national contexts. They allow for the creation of 'neighbourhoods' where the likeminded meet and are made to meet by the 'homophilic' rationale through which algorithms guide users based on past searches (Chun 2021: 70-85 and passim). In these neighbourhoods, outsiders are unwelcome. An 'infra-destructure' of inclusive polities/politics reinforces the 'tribal 2.0' logic of online politics (Azoulay 2020; Byrd 2014). The 'tribal circuits' connecting and circumscribing right neighbourhoods further amplifies the vulgar vibes we are focusing on in two ways.

The tribal circuits, firstly, connect the far-right neighbourhoods and so provide impetus for the multiplication and morphing of forms of vulgarity. The 'neighbourhood' becomes a safe space where a specific international anti-feminist style can be cultivated, transformed and deepened (Sanders and Jenkins 2023). The travelling and translation of content, ideas and styles are encouraged in these neighbourhoods. Anything and everything ragning from 'deepfakes' to historical reconstructions can be developed in common and circulated there (Mulholland and de Oliveira 2021). Connections and consultancies help. Trump's former strategist, Steve Bannon endorsed Bolsonaro and might have been a strategic advisor his first campaign (Reuters, 2018; The Guardian 2018). So do credibility and collaborations. Bolsonaro often referenced presidents Trump, Putin, Orbán, Netanyahu and Modi indicating a shared commitment to values, worldviews and styles, including vulgar anti-feminism. Analogously, he revalorized the military regimes in Latin America, connecting to regional leaders who did the same (Sanahuja et al. 2023). Thick global and regional connections generated and diversified far-right affects, including vulgar anti-feminist vulgarity.

Second, vulgarity also helps bound and delimit far-right neighbourhoods. Embracing and futher elaborating vulgarity becomes a token of belonging and allegiance. The far-right tribe is exclusive. Entry requires identification with not only the key arguments and ideas but also the prevaliling style. The circuits conveying these thus also operate in ways that help draw the borders of the neighborhood. Historical accounts reconnecting the anti-feminism of the specific local tribes such as the Brazilian to global historical accounts focusing on anti-feminism were thus crucial in staking out and policing a terrain from which loyalty and votes could be extracted (da Hora, 2018). With Lizotte (2020), we would denote this terrain as a 'vulgar territory' controlling a 'hyper-bordered femininity'. The limits of this territory are reached where the circulation of vulgarity ceases and its vibes no longer resonate. This boundary making/policing significance of anti-feminist vulgar vibes for right-wing neighbourhoods further spurn their circulation and orientation of political processes.

This discussion of the social media, public and tribal circuits through which 'vulgar vibes' are generated and amplified has been firmly anchored in the vulgar anti-feminism of the Brazilian far-right. We have shown the specific role of WhatsApp groups, of political consultants and of far-right strategies in Brazil for the significance of 'vulgar vibes' there. More generally our argument has valorized the

significance of Mbembe's 'aesthetics of vulgarity' as a tool for tackling politics in the digitally mediated contemporary context more generally. Distinguishing the affective social media, public and tribal circuits that generate and amplify vulgar vibes in Brazil is helpful beyond that context. It is a starting point for figuring how the aesthetics of vulgarity operates also elsewhere. To take this figuration further, we need a stronger sense of how these vibes matter and how they orient politics. We therefore proceed to characterising the anti-feminist vulgarity of the Brazilian far right.

Characterizing 'vulgar vibes'

Vulgar vibes circulate and infuse politics. Their style orients political processes towards a range of issues, values. To characterise these vibes and say more about the topics, tropes and transgressions involved. We begin from the *Kawayoku Inception* project of Palestinian, feminist video-artist Noura Tafeche (2020; 2023a; 2023b). *Kawayoku* is an imperfect 'linguistic crasis' freely taken from the Japanese *Kawaii* >cute + *Bōryoku* > violence.Kawayoku refers to a fluid aesthetics combining manga, sex and militarism generating 'vibes of cute violence'. Tafeche centres on the variable, fluid and changing inflections by which these digitally circulating vibes inflect atmospheres and orient life. However, focus is also on the manga, sexual and militaristic forms that recur in ephemeral and ever shifting combinations. With Tafeche, we propose characterizing vulgar vibes as combining recurring forms *and* ever shifting constellations. We will focus on three recurring, central, forms that recur in Brazilian anti-feminist vulgarity: the messianic, the masculinist and the militarist. The article form cannot convey the shifting quality of their constellations as clearly as the Tafeche's video-essays do. However, contextualizing images, relating them to the global far-right and to the Brazilian context, renders some of the fluidity that characterize the constellations of anti-feminist 'vulgar vibes' of the Brazilian far-right.

Messianic

The appeal of the far-right might be anchored in its transgressive and 'carnivalesque' 'anti-thesis, anti-ideology, and anti-authority', that is 'anti-system' style (Gaufmann 2018). However, alongside and addition to this negative 'anti-', the far-right also offers an appeal to constructive and affirmative positive style. A moral, religiously grounded, deeply conservative 'civilizational' order with messianic overtones at its core figures prominently in the far-right online presence. The decency of the family is opposed to the degeneracy of the feminist (Junge 2021). Vulgarity is associated with the other and with the 'gender ideology' that opposes this far-right worldview (Corredor 2019). It undermines the conventional morality[14] confining women to the private, family sphere (Kalm and Meeuwisse 2023). A message 'to those who have

[14] With Theweleit (1987, p.312) one can draw them back to monogamization' of 16th century Europe.

not yet understood' is testifies to this assertive far-right mode (Fig. 2).[15] The message speaks of the aim to remake the global order. With a basic, indeed crude symbolism socialism, globalism and Islamism are associated with death and the destruction as well as with a context that extends beyond Brazil. The UN logo, the crescent with a star, and the hammer and sickle menacingly associate this vulgarity to threat aesthetics of the global far-right neighbourhood. They are kept at bay by the protective arch designed around a happy, ideal — unmistakably white — nuclear family situated in a green and lush landscape under a blue sky where the sun is shining. The arch of heaven, the Garden of Eden and the Holy Family. The reference to basic Christian iconology lends the messianic style resonance. It also makes it infinitely variable. The attribution of values and associations of vulgarity are effective and stable *and* infinitely malleable. Its unpolished imagery turns the defence of the white nuclear family into a core political issue, and orients politics towards the defence of its values. In the same stroke, it silently marginalizes and excludes feminists who question and criticize these.

The messianic form also comes in a starker, more direct, unapologetic version. There is no need for a detour via family values. The right-wing in Brazil has been closely associated with religion and particularly with the expanding, evangelical churches. The Evangelical Parliamentary Front and the Evangelical Caucus (respectively *Frente Parlamentar Evangélica* and *Bancada Evangélica*) have played a significant role in backing it up with prominent figures such missionary pastor Marcelo Crivella who has been senator for, mayor of and currently deputy for Rio de Janeiro, playing a core role. The far-right has represented itself as selected and protected by divine providence. The image in Fig. 3 is a clear illustration of how bluntly the far-right claims to be blessed. The Brazilian flag with which it associates itself closely is venerated by the angels standing on clouds underscoring that the location: heaven. In a peculiar interpretation of Christian iconography, the angels are white, bearded, elderly men. This may be underwriting the racialized, anti-feminist societal order envisaged by the far-right. It is certainly affirming that this is the order that any moral, 'real' (as opposed to feminist or non-cisgender) woman would want (Zahay 2022). The coarse and righteous pretence to divine status transgresses all norms of modesty. It is accompanied by an explicit imagery representing opposition against the far-right coming directly from hell from devils that ignore and insult the celestial sphere. Its existence becomes an ethico-religious problem. This encompassing messianic form allows for indefinite variation and recombination. Its 'vibes' however unambiguously orient politics towards religion framed in a manner that makes feminist opposition sacrilegious.

Masculinist

The 'vulgar vibes' of the Brazilian far-fight are also masculinist in character in an analogously recurring and malleable way. As is the case in in the broader global

[15] Unless otherwise stated all images below are from the WhatsApp monitor: http://www.monitor-de-WhatsApp.dcc.ufmg.br/.

Fig. 2 To who has not yet understood, we design. That which sustains our civilization is Greek Philosophy | Christianity | Roman Law

neighbourhood, this masculinity is 'aggressive' and 'entitled' in a way that becomes 'toxic'. It poisons any and every threat to masculinity (Harrington 2021). It thus opposes feminism, but is particularly directed at feminism that creates 'glitches' in the binary separating the masculine from feminine (Sundén 2015; Ging and Siapera 2019; Kimmel and Wade 2018).

The far-right is crude in its disdain for those who threaten the established division of sexes, such as the androgynous city youngster in Fig. 4. Repeating a far-right thematic connecting the decline of civilization with the weakening of masculinity (Mayne 2022), the image-text reads: 'Until the 70s, Western youth was ready to risk their life for their family, their country and their honour. Today we need "anti-bullying" laws to protect their fragile emotions from offensive language'. The attack on political correctness is frontal. Virility in decline is contrasted with sensitivity protected. The form directly connects the Brazilian context to the tribal far-right 'neighbourhood'. The distinctly blond soldier and the reference to the 1970s may create loose associations to the Vietnam war, to the Brazilian military coup, to other Latin American coups, to the decolonial wars of that time, or perhaps to all of these. It is impossible to know. It stands beyond doubt, however, that it relates to masculinity to a racialized dream of order through guns common in Brazil and elsewhere (Pinho 2021a). The androgynous youth, the hoodie, coloured black hair, the haircut, the lip piercing and the scorn directed at 'anti-bullying legislation' and the West are correspondingly open and vague in the multifarious associations they create. The youth could be from anywhere in the West. But the brutal, threatening, unforgiving, socially unacceptable (and therefore vulgar), condemnation of the trouble their frail

Fig. 3 Divine Order and Progress

weakness is causing leaves no doubt. Nor does the wish to impose masculinity as a political focus and value.

To convey the threat posed by feminism that undermines masculine leadership and order, the far-right routinely draws associations to paedophilia, sodomy, underage sex and more. Consider the example of how it contrasts classrooms as they would look depending on whether Bolsonaro or Haddad won the elections in 2018 (in Fig. 5). Bolsonaro is associated with a military school. Strict, conventional, masculine discipline reigns. The students are attentive, focused. Promiscuity between boys and girls is limited by the seating that strictly separates them. The order is impeccable. Girls seated on the front row benches are attentive listeners. They need the masculine authority to ensure an orderly society, where classrooms are free of underage sodomy and sexual references. Inversely, Haddad is identified with public school where women play a pivotal role as teachers and leaders. It is impossible to get an overview of the classroom. The children may even have escaped the classroom and be entirely out of control and reach. Only their public-school uniforms

link them to the school system. What we see is a ghetto-blaster presumably playing music while the children are engaged in a sexualized dance. The contrasting images convey a concern about the consequences of undoing gendered binaries and the boundaries around sex. It posits the public school as a site for reclaiming conventional masculinity and public morality and locates the military as an idealized agent for this (Teixeira and Bugarelli 2023; Sanahuja et al. 2023). The image associates public education and eroded masculinity opposing it to the military school with safely upheld sexual order. More subtly, it conveys a distinctly white, middle-class and passive image of girls amenable to education. As such, the vulgarity is an affront to feminist, racial and queer activists such as the iconic Marielle Franco (Pinho 2021b).[16] It refracts a wider racialized, class conscious, masculinity anxiously defending its privileges. Its elements can be indefinitely reconfigured. However, varied, its vibes orient politics towards a conservative, racialized, order that values the white masculinity that upholds it.

Militarist

The evocation of Marielle Franco points straight to a third characteristic of the 'vulgar vibes' of the Brazilian far-right groups, namely, the militarist. Marielle's murder has come to epitomize violence of public security forces and their connections to Bolsonaro and the antifeminist far-right (e.g. Davis and Straubhaar 2020: 92). More strongly, it has become an iconic case showing an unabashed unapologetic far-right taking pride in the violence of security forces guarding a conservative social order. Rather than apologizing for or covering up abuse by the security forces, the far-right attacks those who ask for accountability. The judicial system is criticized as protecting inadequately and criminalizing illegitimately. For the far-right, criminalizing violence and those who use it to defend the moral, social order is wrong – and so is protecting feminism and the gender ideology that makes the use of force necessary (Persson 2021). Human rights should be reserved for '(up)right humans.' Feminists are not among them. As human rights, feminism is an outside invention counterproductive in the Brazilian realities. When visiting Brazil, Judith Butler was met at airport by far-right demonstrators asking them to leave (Dias 2022: 2). The transgressive, vulgar, imposition of an order ruled by the military rather than the legal system defence can be — and is — spun in an infinite variety of ways. Figure 6 is one rendering of this militarist vulgarity. 'I killed, I robbed, and I kidnaped! But I will be temporarily released to celebrate Christmas. Thanks, human rights' its overlay text reads. An eye in the colours and forms of the Brazilian flag is watching this happening. The unarticulated but, in context, unambiguous alternative is the order secured through (para)military or militias. Bible, beef but also 'bullets' have been core objects of the Brazilian far-right (Lapper 2021). Their traces characterize the vulgar vibes of its imagery.

The vulgar glorification of arms is extended to the armed forces and other armed groups in what has become 'right common sense' (Abrahamsen et al. 2024:

[16] From the Maré community in Rio de Janeiro, publicly bi-sexual, queer, feminist and of Afro-Brazilian descent, Marielle was a human rights activist and politician. She was murder in March 2018.

Fig. 4 The Decline of Western Youth

chapter 5). In Brazil, such an extension can readily be made with reference to a range of imaginaries including those of 'cangaceiros'[17], of the 'pacifying' mission of the armed forces and of the military regime's securing of order in turbulent times (Gomes 2014). Such glorification is offensive — vulgar indeed — for those on the receiving end of the violence of these groups, including feminists. A video still claiming that 'defence gives life' (Fig. 7) shows such glorification at work. The video opens on images of fighter jets taking off. Bolsonaro appears in parade-uniform giving a solemn speech. He is one of them. He affirms the importance of the armed forces for everything including life itself. Hence the image. The military has the mission not only to save Brazilian lives but also to 'give life'. The video is slighting those who associate the military with death, torture and oppression. It is

[17] Cangaceiros are armed groups working for themselves but also in the service of landowners in the Northeast. Reference to them recalls the prevalence of violence in Brazilian society and so the import of arms.

Fig. 5 Contrasting Classrooms

also a slap in the face of the many well-known associations of mothers that contest the violence of public security forces as well as of militias (Caramante 2016). More broadly, the affirmation that the military 'gives life' is a 'pro-life' affirmation that asserts the superiority of military men over feminist abortion activism, women who resist motherhood but also in the broadest sense over women tout court. They give life. The vibes of images such as this, unequivocally orients politics, skewing it in favour of the military, other groups using violence and against those opposing them. The specific religious, historical, authoritarian, embrace of violence and the paramount belittling of women, mothers, feminists and any opposition can be infinitely varied but again across its variation orients politics towards arms and the army.

Just as the militarist characteristics of the vulgar vibes are infinitely variable, so too are the messianic and masculinist that we discussed earlier in this section. As visible through the discussion, the messianic, masculinist and militarist also interlace and combine in endlessly shifting constellations. The military that has a mission

to 'give life' is just one case in point. Yet, across this variability, the persistence of registers is striking. A meme celebrating Bolsonaro victories (Fig. 8) captures the interlacing and intertwining with exceptional clarity, underscoring its racialized qualities that we have directed attention to throughout this section. Bolsonaro's victory signals the end of blurred binaries threatening masculinity, of a blasphemous order's 'mess' and of the 'fuss' around 'dead thugs.' It heralds a world ready to face pain where 'feminists are unloved'. The vibes of this vulgar meme orient politics, unequivocally, towards the religious, masculinist and military.

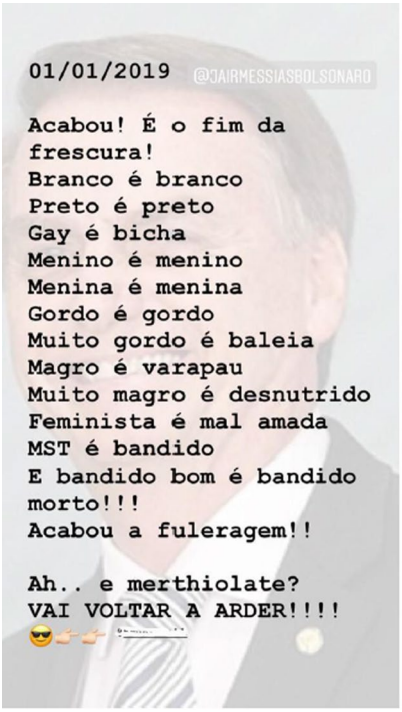
Inspired by Tafeche, we have conceptualized the vulgar vibes of the Brazilian far-right as infinitely malleable and yet stable. We have done so by distilling three core persisting perpetually varying characteristics. As manga, sex and violence are combined in infinitely malleable and yet stable ways generating *Kawayoku*, so the messianic, masculinist, and militarist merge and morph to generate Brazilian far-right anti-feminism. This matters fundamentally as the vibes of 'incalculable quantities of these images … imbibe politics' (Tafeche, 2023). They shift atmospheres and the moods that form political thinking, acting and judging politically. The vulgar becomes part of the 'banality of power' (Mbembe, 2001). The question this raises, and to which we now turn, is what implications this has for how we think about political processes and specifically those challenging the banally vulgar qualities of power. What might stem the vulgar, anti-feminist, far-right vibes orienting politics?

Challenging 'vulgar vibes'

While it is important to reason about how unreasonable, offensive and untrue a specific vulgarity is, this will neither undermine it nor limit the circulation of its vibes. It will increase them. Arguing about whether the Brazilian far-right is really blessed by divine providence, protecting Brazilian youth and education by affirming masculinity, and defining social order by critiquing human rights might potentially weaken the credibility of these claims. It will, certainly, expand the room for the vulgar style used to make them, amplify the vulgar vibes and deepen the vulgar tainting of politics. Deliberating is ineffectual at best and counterproductive at worst when it comes to stemming vulgar vibes. If reason does not challenge vulgar vibes, what does? What lines of thought can be pulled on to grapple with the political contestation of vulgar vibes? To propose possible answers, we again speak with a thinker and with the context of the Brazilian far-right. The thinker we speak with is the Brazilian political philosopher Vladimir Safatle. He locates 'circuits of affects' as core to politics (Safatle 2022: 2) in a way that resonates with our emphasis on the affective circuits of vulgar vibes. Safatle investigates the possibility of acting politically by introducing the notion of 'helplessness'. Starting from this notion of helplessness and working with it in the Brazilian far-right context, we extend the range of resistances. Centrally, we add humour and hopeful care.

Fig. 6 Thanks to Human Rights

Fig. 7 Defense Forces Give Life



'It's over! No more fuss!
A white person is white
A black person is black
A gay person is a faggot
A boy is a boy
A girl is a girl
If you're fat, you're fat
If you're really fat, you're a whale [insulting slang]
If you're thin, you're scrawny [insulting slang].
If you're really thin, you're malnourished
If you're a feminist, you're unloved
MST[2] are all thugs

A good thug is a dead thug!!!
The mess[3] is over!!

Ah… the antiseptic balm?[4]
IT WILL BURN AGAIN!!!

[1] Unloved is used for pushy, hard-headed and insistent women with whom no one wants to have sex.
[2] MST is the Landless Workers Movement.
[3] 'Fuleragem' slang for mess used in northeast Brazil that is a strong leftist stronghold.
[4] 'Merhiolate' is a balm for bruises and wounds extensively used on children. Until the 90s, Merhiolate burnt. The call here is for a return to a time of tougher people who can stand the burn.

Fig. 8 Its Over…you will continue burning

Helplessness

Confronting vulgarity is particularly challenging, uncomfortable and even paralyzing for those who strive to remain within the bounds of the socially. In Brazil, intellectuals, students, scholars, journalists, commentators and many others were incredulous when the waves of far-right vulgarity hit. They expressed this publicly in innumerably fora and ways. Outrage, shame and astonishment were common. So was the tendency to refuse and ignore the vulgarity as too base to be engaged. Analysts with few exceptions (e.g. Persson 2021) exclude it from their analyses. This is where Safatle's theorizing begins. He conceptualises this helplessness – which he associates with a collapse in possible reactions – against the backdrop of fear and paranoia produced by the affirmation of sovereign authority, whose legitimacy is secured 'mainly by providing the image of a possible detachment from a social fantasy concerning the imminent disintegration of the social and the constant risk of violent death' (Safatle 2017: 74). Helplessness is deepened by the endless repetition of this image and the 'exhortations to "care"' (Safatle 2022: 15). The vulgarity of the image also contributes to the collapse in possible reactions. Helplessness is expressed in incredulous reactions reflecting the impossibility of 'short-circuiting' the 'affective circuits' of vulgarity (our terms).

For Safatle, helplessness does not implicate paralysis. Rather, he suggests that precisely in hopelessness lies the kernel from which resistance to vulgarity can

germ. In Freudian terms, 'helplessness' provides an opening to social bonds insofar as a 'helpless political body is a body in continuous dispossession and disidentification of its determinations' (Safatle, 2016: 7). It is a radically indeterminate. Rather than closing itself with the help of (ultimately conservative) protective fantasies, it remains radically open. This, can be productive of emancipatory politics and of new social orders (Safatle, 2017: 77). In its refusal of prevailing affective circuits, helplessness generates politics that eludes them (so Safatle). It orients out and away from existing politics. It makes projecting the unknown possible. Helplessness is core to 'a practice of confrontation with events that disorient the aesthesis of time and space, as well as the regular character of norms and places to be occupied' (Safatle 2017: 78). It 'inaugurates another temporality, devoid of expectation, is expressed in a fundamental character of indeterminacy' (Safatle 2024: 467). Safatle generalizes this insight, arguing that 'all political action is initially a collapse of the ability to act, and only helpless people are able to act politically' (2017: 71).

Safatle's argument dovetails with strategies of resisting vulgarity in Brazil. Many Brazilians publicly displayed and expressed their dismay with the political atmosphere. They simply wanted an escape from the polarization running deep rifts through their social and intimate lives. Most of this was not on public display but remained a personal and personally kept sense of helplessness. However, it also took a range of public expressions. The wearing of white T-shirts such as that displayed in Fig. 9 is one example. The white colour conveyed a determinate refusal to stand with any of the public forces. Wearing white was to wave a white flag amid rising tensions and to refuse to take sides. It was a strategy striving to halt polarization through the intensification of affects. The texts on these T-shirts would be black, affirming the sobering message of wearing white, combining references to resistance, existence and to the queering of identities. In Portuguese, the letter x in writing serves to elide the masculine/feminine binary built into the language. Other versions of the T-shirt simply displayed words such as Resistencia or abstract symbols. In minimalist terms, the message was that there would be no engagement with the political strife, simply an affirmation of a potentially queer existence not affirming any traditions, binaries or the divides associated with them. The helpless refusal might of course open for alternatives. However, these are yet to emerge and stabilize. Precisely that indeterminacy is what is claimed. The wearing of white r-existo T-shirts was conveying both an indeterminate existence and the associated potential for resistance. They were a challenge to the vulgar vibes of the far-right and the grip of affective circuits. In not relating, they short-circuit affects and stem the vulgar vibes of the far-right. This might open radical novel politics yet to be articulated, as Safatle suggests. It certainly reduces the reverberations of affects and vulgarity in politics and so contributes to *deflate* atmospheres and moods.

Humor

Looking more closely at Brazilian political practices makes amply clear that helplessness is not the only form challenges to far-right anti-feminist vulgarity has taken. On the contrary, other forms of politics have emerged that — as Safatle's

helplessness — operate affectively and are clearly also directed at the affective. We will discuss two common forms, humour and hopeful care.

To underscore the importance of affects, this article opened with Bolsonaro's chanting 'imbroxável' at the bicentenary celebrations of Brazil's independence. In the wake of the incidence, memes, cartoons and jokes proliferated. One was of a proud mother visibly heading for a pro-Bolsonaro rally (Fig. 10). 'For the innocence of children' is the slogan printed on her T-shirt retaking and reflecting the vibes of far-right themes discussed in the previous section. Next to her, her son asks 'mom, what is 'imbroxável'? Instead of fuelling anger, offense, shock, or indeed dismay and a sense of helplessness, vulgarity is spurning ridicule. The inconsistency and sense of absurdity generated by the tension between the moralizing conservative values and the vulgar style of those promoting them is displayed and directed back at the far-right. Challenges through humour such as this are recurrent. Specialized fora have developed to make space for it. bolsoflix.com, created in the context of the 2022 elections, is an example amongst others. It shares satiric videos sorting them by genres — economy, corruption, pandemic, violence, lies and miscellaneous — with clear references to the format and genre sorting of Netflix. Humour is a pervasive form of engagement with the far-right in Brazil.

The pervasiveness of humour is significant as it directs attention to another form of challenge to vulgar vibes of significance for affective politics. As helplessness, humour works in a register that exceeds language, argument and reasoning (Lee and Kwak 2016). This makes humour difficult to control and punish for censorship focused on language, reasoning and meaning, and is one of the reasons it plays such a central role in resistance to authoritarian politics (Astapova 2021). However, unlike helplessness, humour engages. It accepts the given. It retakes and remakes it. The 'imbroxável' cartoon retakes and remakes vulgarity. As such humour may enshrine and even amplify the resonance of affective circuits — such as those associated vibes of vulgarity — in politics. It is a 'fundamentally ambivalent' form of politics (Kopper 2020). This said in the remaking of affects, there is also a possibility of shifting them, deflecting their significance. Joking about sexual violence can deflect shame and humiliation (Sahin 2020). The 'imbroxável' cartoon deflects the vulgarity of Bolsonaro's chanting. Operating in an affective register, it challenges it by deflecting it, shifting it in the direction of the ridiculous. Such deflection might, create room for 'emancipatory and creative gestures' and serve as a 'catalyst of action' (Gerlofs 2022: 236). However, for our purposes the core significance of humour is as a potential challenge to the vibes of vulgarity of the Brazilian far-right and its affective circuits. Where we helplessness deflates them, humour challenges by deflecting them.

Hopeful care

A third kind of affective politics has been pervasive in challenging the far-right vibes of vulgarity in Brazilian politics: hopeful care. Just as pervasive as humour, are efforts to show that a different world is possible. A world that is open to creative, inclusive and progressive alternatives. Such politics is less intent on outlining

Fig. 9 I Resist/Exist

the details of what these alternatives might be than on generating the hope and care that make them possible. As helplessness and humour, defining alternatives through hopeful care challenges vulgar vibes in an affective register.

An obvious and striking case of such hopeful care at work is the 2022 presidential campaign that brought Lula back to power. 'Love' was *the* core campaign motto. Electoral paraphernalia – cups, t-shirts, flags, caps, banners, etc., affirmed 'love'. Speeches and images were replete with references to 'love'. 'Love will win' was the official campaign slogan before the elections. 'Love has won' after the victory (Fig. 11). 'Love' was the centre of Lula's victory speech on election night. Love was the antidote to the vulgarity, the fear, threats, exclusions and depreciation of the far-right. 'Love will defeat hate' was a campaign refrain. As this indicates, the campaign was directly focusing on affects. It was also striving to engage affectively beyond worlds. The paraphernalia mentioned above did this. So did the many images of Lula embracing those scorned by the far-right. In Fig. 11 it is the poor, the young, the old, the women, and the Afro-Brazilians in what seems to be likely to be the Northeast. Since the 1970s Lula's campaigns

Fig. 10 Mom, what is Imbroxável?

has rested on 'an unprecedented politicization of the daily life of the subaltern' (French 2020: 281). The focus on love in the 2022 campaign extended this politicization to the *affective* daily life of the subaltern. However, the affective appeal was resonating beyond this. The campaign images could have (and did) feature also the LGBTQI+, the intellectual, feminist or other groups on the receiving end of far-right slogans and vulgarity. But more than this, the affective appeal was resonating beyond the obvious base of Lula and the left. 'Love' occupies a core space in Christian practice, including that of the Evangelical far-right. Locating love at the core of the campaign was to redefine its resonances, weakening its exclusive association to evangelists and other groups with right-wing allegiances and extending the possibility of alternative also to them.

A positive affective appeal is fundamentally challenging to the vulgar vibes of the far-right and to its affective circuits, as Lula's love campaign makes clear. It first and foremost weakens the resonances of the far-right vulgar vibes and the grip of its affective circuits. It creates other circuits with different vibes that disturb and distort them. The joyful atmosphere of Lula's embrace of the people in the campaign picture (Fig. 11) overlays and refracts that the far-right associates with it. It makes hopeful care palpable for all, including those directly concerned. By creating a different affective world, it diminishes the grip of the dominant views. As the reverberations of the 'flick of skirt' can shift our sense of what matters on a military base (Enloe 2016). Love can alter our sense of what matters in politics. In so doing, it may further distract — if not altogether subtract — those caught in the affective

Fig. 11 Lula's love will win/has won

circuits of the far-right and touched by its vibes of vulgarity. Love resonates powerfully with evangelicals and Afro-descendants alike. Its vibes may distract them from or even move them out of reach of the far-right. For far-right vulgarity, love acts as a 'killjoy that dampens affective appeal and penetration' (Ahmed 2023: 262). Lastly, offering positive alternatives, love creates the terrain for the restorative work necessary to ensure that the wounds left by past injustices heal (Bellacasa 120 following Sedgwick, 1989). Restorative work reduces the susceptibility of becoming caught in the affective circuits and receptive to the vulgar vibes. It might also lay the foundations for 'immunity' (Haraway 1989). Either way, the implications for the rippling of vulgar vibes and their political significance are far reaching.

Lula's 'love' concludes our discussion of how to conceptualize the challenges or resistance to affective politics such as the 'vulgar vibes' of the Brazilian far-right. Grounded in the discussion of political practices mobilising helplessness, humour and hopeful care, we showed how challenging and intervening with affects (such as vulgarity) requires moving to the affective terrain. We discussed three distinct forms of such affective challenge. Practices that deflate the intensity of the vulgar vibes by refusing to engage politically, practices that deflect them through humour, and practices that (re-)define the vibes and so create alternatives – as did the love in Lula's campaign. These three forms of challenge are derived from political practices in Brazil. They underscore the extent to which the politics of challenging vulgar vibes and the politics of affects moves the terrain of politics to a space beyond language that requires revisiting assumptions about politics. We have contributed to this endeavour. Our aim and ambition are to pick up on the work of conceptualizing to deepen and extend ongoing discussions about the significance of far-right vulgar vibes and affective politics and how to grapple with it, practically and theoretically.

Conclusion

Our article opened with Bolsonaro chanting 'imbroxável' at the bicentenary of Brazilian republic, underscoring the significance of vulgarity and affective politics and the related importance of acknowledging their centrality to politics and the radical implication for how we think about — conceptualize — it. Working with others who grapple with the politics of affects, vulgarity and with the Brazilian far-right, we offered a reconstructive conceptualization of vulgar politics of relevance for affective politics. We began from Mbembe's 'aesthetics of vulgarity', framing it as a modality of power operating through 'vulgar vibes' and describing the social media, public and tribal circuits that generate and amplify the circulation of these vibes in the contemporary context. We then drew attention to how these vulgar vibes orienting politics. Speaking with Tafeche, we qualified their characteristics as shifting and yet stable. Far-right anti-feminist vulgarity in Brazil orients politics towards the messianic, masculinist and militarist in infinitely variable constellations. In the final section, we focused on the processes challenging vulgar vibes. Safatle's notion of a helplessness that deviates them was the starting point. We complemented it with the humour that deflects vulgar vibes, and hopeful care that defines alternatives to them. The circulating, characterizing and challenging of vulgar vibes is the figure of affective politics we propose.

This figure of an affective politics operating through vulgar vibes has a determinate, limited, purpose. It is intended to provoke and advance discussions about how to grapple with a specific kind of politics in a situated manner. It is firmly grounded in the practical problem of facing the anti-feminist vulgarity of the Brazilian far-right. The figure may also be useful for thinking through other kinds of affective politics, such as that of humanitarian organizations, of companies selling humanitarian technologies, or of states giving/receiving humanitarian support. Thinking in terms of vibes circulating, characterizing and so defining what is challenging may be a starting point even if it will require reworking and further figuring. We propose our vulgar vibes figure of affective politics precisely to invite this. We encourage others to 'go figure' how affective vibes operate politically in their contexts.

As we are finalizing this article, far-right, anti-feminist vulgarity specifically is sadly salient. In Brazil, far-right vulgarity continues to be pervasively present in politics. Meanwhile, Trump has been re-elected. In Europe, India, the Philippines and elsewhere the far-right is invigorated. For Judith Butler (2025: 37), the far-right 'fear of gender ideology' and the 'destruction' it identifies with it is unfolding on a 'Global Scene'. For Jack Halberstam, the far-right is 'terrifying' in terms the 'scale' at which it is 'successful at capitalizing on popular fears' of gender (Butler and Halberstam 2025: 140). If the affective politics of anti-feminist vulgarity is core to this terrifying scale of far-right success, as we have suggested it is in Brazil, accepting the open and general invitation to 'go figure' how it works for the far-right globally is urgent. The figure of vulgar vibes is proposed as a place to start.

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