

ARTIFICIAL UNITY IN SCANDAL MENTALITY



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ABSTRACT – In this article we reflect on some of the narrative strategies used to structure political scandals. In order to do this we conceive political scandals in journalism as a mentality. The narrative strategies contained in this mentality help toward understanding these events, which we perceive as scandals. We shall present three of these strategies contained in what we call “artificial unity”, which transmit to readers the idea that there is endless and uniform narratives on scandals. Using both critical analysis of narrative and the indiciary paradigm, we focus our reflections on a number of scandals which occurred while the Workers’ Party (PT) government was in power, as they were reported in the *O Globo* newspaper.

Key words: Political scandals. Mentality. Artificial unity. Narrative. Journalism.

A UNIDADE ARTIFICIAL NA MENTALIDADE ESCÂNDALO

RESUMO – Neste artigo, propomos refletir sobre algumas das estratégias narrativas que estruturam a ideia de escândalo político. Para isso, propomos conceber os escândalos políticos, no jornalismo, como uma mentalidade. É essa mentalidade que resguarda estratégias narrativas que auxiliam na compreensão desses acontecimentos, que são concebidos como escândalos. Aqui, focamos em apresentar três dessas estratégias, contidas no que chamamos de “unidade artificial”, e que oferecem ao leitor uma ideia de que há uma grande narrativa de escândalo, uniforme e infundável. Unindo pressupostos da Análise crítica de narrativa e do paradigma indiciário, focamos nossas reflexões na listagem de escândalos dos governos do Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), feita pelo jornal *O Globo*.

Palavras-chave: Escândalos políticos. Mentalidade. Unidade artificial. Narrativa. Jornalismo.

LA UNIDAD ARTIFICIAL EN LA MENTALIDAD ESCANDALO

RESUMEN – En este artículo, proponemos reflexionar sobre algunas de las estrategias narrativas que estructuran la idea del escándalo político. Para eso, proponemos concebir los escándalos políticos, en el periodismo, como una mentalidad. Es esta mentalidad la que protege las estrategias narrativas que ayudan a comprender estos eventos, que se conciben como escándalos. Aquí, nos enfocamos en presentar tres de estas estrategias, contenidas en lo que llamamos “unidad artificial”, y que ofrecen al lector una idea de que hay una gran narrativa de escándalo, uniforme e interminable. Uniendo los supuestos del análisis crítico de la narrativa y el paradigma indicativo, centramos nuestras reflexiones en la lista de escándalos de los gobiernos del Partido de los Trabajadores (PT), realizada por el periódico *O Globo*.

Palabras clave: Escándalos políticos. Mentalidad. Unidad artificial Narrativa. Periodismo.

1 Introduction

What are political scandals? We question whether, in addition to narratives, these scandals guide a fair amount of the political reporting in newspapers. They are news stories that report on political facts, but they can also shape our view of politics. For this reason, political scandals seem to be inherent in journalistic narratives, naturally straying away from the content that shapes them. But scandal narratives retain the same characteristics as any other journalistic narrative. This then leads us to believe that studying scandals is important specifically because of their content. But their importance is tied to a series of previous narrative structures that historically support their manifestation in journalism. This aspect of research also needs to be recognized and explored, and is the objective of this article.

In view of the importance of this thought process, the idea that scandals arise from a break in the order needs to be rethought. There is not always a break; in fact, this break is just one concept out of many. Normality and breaks are not pre-determined notions; they are also built and reshaped over time and, in the case of political scandals in journalism, they are articulated into the narratives in order to make an event seem as a scandal.

We propose a change in how political scandals are observed in journalistic narratives. We conceive them as a mentality, a way of judging certain events established by narrative strategies. There is less focus on the content of the scandals and more on the importance of the narrative forms and the previous structures that guide our perceptions.

One of the narrative strategies contained in the scandal mentality we shall explore is what we call “artificial unity”. This strategy is designed to provide a feeling of cohesion between different narratives. The factors of time, characters, and action in “artificial unity” structure a single narrative. They help portray the idea that there has been an unusual transgression that needs to be exposed. In this sense, they provide greater stability for the narration: this is a wrongdoing unlike any other and it must be examined carefully.

In order to achieve this we begin this article by introducing scandals as a mentality. We then deal with how this mentality is legitimized by the place of speech that journalism occupies as a guardian of democracy. Lastly, we hope to shed light on this discussion using the aforementioned “artificial unity” strategy. We start by looking at elements contained in narratives about scandals that occurred during the presidential terms of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, both from the Workers’ Party (PT), between 2003 and 2016. These scandals were reported in the *O Globo* newspaper, one of the major liberal-conservative newspapers in Brazil, and also the basis for our research *corpus*.

There were a number of scandals involving the PT party which garnered a lot of coverage. This coverage might have added to the already growing dislike of the government despite the fact that that party had won four consecutive presidential elections. There have been countless analyses, both in and outside of academia, conducted on this exact issue in the country’s history, generating both positive and negative views of the party’s governance¹. In this paper we shall look at some of the narratives related to scandals, and how to go about analyzing and debating them.

In this sense, our argument is that this “artificial unity” strategy was paramount to conveying the idea to the public that the political bases of the leftist PT government were guided by a framework of widespread corruption. From a methodological point of view, the observations and considerations made in this paper were based on the critical analysis of narratives (Motta, 2013). This material also considered the indiciary paradigm (Ginzburg, 1989), insofar as it helped with the complex task of trying to draw attention to elements that have been overlooked in analyses on journalism.

2 Scandal mentality: overview² of a new approach

“A scientific fact is a sign of resistance against free and arbitrary thinking”, says Fleck (2010) when discussing the changes in the conception and approach to the problem of syphilis. In general, the author argues that syphilis was generally treated more as a moral problem than a disease, and this contributed it to not being included in scientific investigations. He dealt, to some extent, with the impact scandals have on the scientific community because he believed in order for the science to advance it had to deal directly with the social, cultural, and economic disruptions that the systematic study of the disease caused over time. It is the same with political scandals. They have been treated as essential for maintaining democracy and legitimizing professional journalism systems as “moral sentinels” (Ettema & Glasser, 1989) of the societies they belong to.

This fact, added to the journalistic narratives, which are repeated throughout academia, is Fleck’s great provocation: there is a genesis and a development. A scandal is also a political spectacle, it is theatrical, accountable, entertainment, contains biased visibility, it is an aesthetic experience and legitimizes journalism. If we remove all these attributes, what is left? Once all the meanings of a scandal have been exhausted, what common points can be established? In short, what are the narrative supports that allow for the recurrence of political scandals in journalism over time?

This recurrence seems to have made scandals a basis for narrated political experiences and a strategy for successive reinterpretations of journalism itself; its relationship with democracy is essential for maintaining its symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1989) and political capital (Thompson, 2002). In other words, scandal narratives

are not differentiated from other types of political narratives. When one looks at a scandal, the feeling is that its constituent characteristics are external and pre-determined and, for this reason, perceived as natural, and therefore have an impact on analyses of these narratives.

Thompson (2002) identifies the stages of a scandal when seen as an instrument of political disputes. Silva (2013) discusses the *Mensalão* scandal as an event he previously framed as a scandal. Prior (2015) sees a scandal as an aesthetic experience, but he does so from the already consolidated event. Motta and Guazina (2010) identify the conflict as a structural pre-category in political journalism, and use the *Mensalão* case to illustrate this; however, they view the polarization as naturalized. Even though it is a category first, it is also a structure of political journalism, and as these aforementioned authors claim, it appears as a structure just as naturally as any other element in contemporary journalistic narratives.

This is evident when we try to think about scandals without attributing their recurring meanings in journalism: bias, spectacle, conflict. Without any of these, a scandal is just an empty narrative, waiting to be filled with meaning. They are successive incursions to already known places. One politician pays for electoral support. Another uses his or her influence to win a majority in a vote in the Chamber of Deputies. A good deal of the scandalous meanings we attribute to these narratives lies in the way we observe them.

And this relates to an aspect we wish to further understand in our approach proposal: professional culture. Journalists may disagree about the selection of sources and about what is or is not news (news judgment). However, these divergences occur within a frame of reference³ offered by the prevailing norms of journalistic professionalism. They are therefore debated and take into account what is normal and natural in society, as the notions of newsability tend to focus on what is different, strange, and unusual. This is why journalistic narratives contain a hidden morality that implicitly maintains and defends dominant social norms and values (Soloski, 1993, p.97). This basis seems to support a previous ability to define certain journalistic narratives as scandals. In this paper we view these scandals as a kind of mentality.

There are two important aspects here. First, this conception involves the generation of mental pictures. The notion of “reference structures” is somewhat similar to what Durkheim called “collective consciousness”, which materializes through external social facts

and is imposed on individual consciences. This makes it easy to understand the importance of journalistic narratives being subjected to peer review processes. Yet they also share a relationship with a set of shared representations which the average person uses to make sense of their beliefs and attitudes. In short, political scandals connect the specific language of professional journalism with the more general language of our culture (Darnton, 1988). This is what we mean when we use the word “mentality”. In Marxist terms, it is the mediations between the objective elements of human being’s lives and the way they narrate and live those lives (Volvele, 1985).

The second aspect is that there are certain authors, such as Darnton (2012) and Thompson (2002), who associate political scandals with libelism and slander; two literary practices that precede the advent of liberal democracy and professional journalism, and were later incorporated by them in order to defend public morality. They argue that, through these practices, well-known libelists like John Wilkies were able to enter the private worlds of relevant individuals and publicize secrets about their private lives in pamphlets and flyers.

Libelists thus often considered themselves to be heroes of a bigger struggle, one that defends “the rights of humanity”, “the rights of man” and “the sacred rights of nature” (Darnton, 2012, p.378). The prohibition of defamatory publications, even though sometimes “abusive” and “reckless”, was interpreted by some sectors of English society as a restriction on press freedom (Thompson, 2002, p.78). We give importance to the narrative attributes associated with scandals as they constitute one of the narrative forms of politics, and it is a type of political narrative in which ordinary individuals interpret politics in their everyday language (Schudon, 1993). This article thus aims to better understand the type of political commitment that exists in Brazilian journalism.

We wish to understand, from a historical perspective, the collective behaviors and attitudes which are traditionally seen as exclusive objects of attention in psychology. We look at the contagious and collective nature of these shared values over time, as per Wallon (1972). Wallon’s work is not mentioned in this context by happenstance. His studies on emotions are one of the foundations for which historian Lucien Febvre bases his thinking on; something he refers to as “fetishism of fact” (1977, p.252). He references his vigorous fight against positivism so prevalent in historical studies, the fervent search for historical fact as the “intended atom of history”

(Febvre, 1977), and the analyses that focused on “official” references, looking for data that is both limited and limiting.

Febvre defends interdisciplinarity (which up until that time was not recognized in the field of history) when he proposes “to perpetually negotiate new alliances between close or distant disciplines” (Febvre, 1977, p.24). It is not by chance that anthropology, together with ethnology, psychology and sociology, became an intricate part of this new vision. The author reflected on a need to open up and expand, not only with sources but with objects worthy of the attention of historians.

This expanded analysis of mentalities would go on to gain prominence, but not the same kind of prominence it had in past centuries, where it was more centered on building psychological profiles of historical figures (Raminelli, 1990); instead, it focused more on shared ideas. We believe that these ideas, due to the fact that they bridge time, situations, and social organizations, help us to understand an important part of how societies operate; their social, economic, political, and temporal contexts – in other words, their histories.

What we have then is a long-lasting history, one which seeks to understand the “collective psychology of societies” (Nora & Le Goff, 1974, p.76), understanding that this psychology progresses slowly. The term “long-lasting” is borrowed from an article by Braudel (1965), in which he points to the importance of structure when observing history over a long period of time and everyday life. In addition, the term draws attention to another issue we consider to be important: the difference between immediate and long-lasting. Coverage of major events (an object considered privileged in historical studies) used to favor shorter durations and “explosive events” (Braudel, 1965, p.264), but this would eventually change to include permanence.

Focusing on these permanences means focusing on the structures. “Is mentality itself not a structure?” ask Nora and Le Goff (1974, p.70). We agree with this question. We liken mentality to a structure in that it moves through the story slowly, contains pre-defined conceptions, and organizes different ways for observing and establishing itself in the world. When it comes to journalism and the political scandals it exposes, this structure needs to be thought of in professional terms. In order to fully understand this mentality we need to accept its contradictions and present other arguments.

What we are most interested in is likening the idea of mentality to a convergence of beliefs. In view of this challenge,

we use an approach that helps us to map out important strategies (Sodré, 2006) over time: what the judgments that we believe exist in journalism are, and the previous set of notions that establish specific readings about certain events.

In order to think about scandals as a mentality in journalism means we have to take this into account. As a mentality, scandals become a way to judge events based on established standards of translating a wrongdoing into something bigger. In journalism, mentality is related to the *ethos* of the profession (Ribeiro, 2003; Zelizer, 1990) and its established codes of how to approach facts.

We must remember that the Social Sciences, especially Sociology and Anthropology, have sought to understand how the sets of rules, beliefs, and values are shared in professional environments. With this in mind, we related two ideas when structuring the concept of mentality: 1) the Mindset Collective Analysis in sociology; and 2) understanding the “key moments”, as proposed by Barbie Zelizer.

This interdisciplinary exchange comes from the search to understand what this ability to judge particular events from a specific perspective is. We first considered the specific characteristic of scandal narratives. This characteristic is not one that allows us to highlight the narratives before they were even exposed; that does not seem to be possible for political scandals. So we had to look for a characteristic that could help us think about political scandals in journalism starting from what these narratives have to say about journalism itself as an institution, as a producer of knowledge, and as a political actor.

2.1 The place of self-proclaimed speech in journalism and “scandal mentality”

In the context of sociology, Pohlmann et al. (2014) and Pohlmann and Valarini (2013), look at the dynamics of large corporations: the cultural antecedents that cross these dynamics and the “stockpiles of knowledge” that result from these interactions. These “stockpiles” contain objective and subjective content within these institutions that is shared between people. This content is conveyed through direct, verbal teachings and through indirect forms of learning such as the sharing of individual and collective experiences of observation put into practice.

To clarify how the “stockpiles of knowledge” guide actions, Pohlmann et al. (2014) points to Mindset Collective Analysis (or MCA); a qualitative method of analysis which originated in Germany⁴. The notion of “collective mentality” has a Weberian influence, emphasizing what Weber thought of the role of ideas in history and how they lead to social changes, including changes in institutions (Pohlmann et al., 2014).

This “collective mentality”, in turn, “tells us about the spiritual construction and the stockpiles of knowledge in a given society, culture, or economy” (Pohlmann et al., 2014). In our analysis, this would be the same as differentiating between an opinion, style, or attitude of a particular journalist who writes about scandals and the entire professional culture that this specific journalist and all his colleagues belong to. This culture is constituted over many years; it is inserted in our society, in our culture, and it exposes the way journalists see themselves within the profession and how they see the institution they belong to.

For this reason we propose that these narratives be understood as belonging to a professional culture of journalism, adapted in a particular way in the country, and developed in such a way as to perceive that some sequences of events can – and need – to be emphasized in order for a particular opinion to stand out; an opinion or point of view that identifies them as political scandals and not as simply transgressions. This is how one needs to think about scandal reports in terms of a mentality.

Sharing these “stockpiles of knowledge” is the key point. After all, in order to establish the mentality for judging a scandal these stockpiles have to be transferred within the framework of the journalists’ activity. There would be no use to having only a small group judge this sequence of events; its existence must be recognized, passed on, and made known to everyone both inside and outside the journalistic circle.

According to Zelizer (1990), in order to publicize their narratives about certain events, journalists create repertoires of past events that are used as parameters for current events. Zelizer (1990) discusses the legitimacy of journalists through (their) narratives, stating that “journalists position themselves in their stories by building, documenting, and preserving their authority to retell events” (Zelizer, 1990, p.366).

The scandal mentality depends heavily on this professional culture shared by journalists. It is based on a range of specific knowledge and meanings that are brought together by the need for

journalists to talk about which events they consider to be scandals. This necessity comes from the need to talk about a scandal and attribute a differentiated condition to this series of events because it is more dramatic, carries greater political weight, and also has a journalistic narrative that empowers journalism itself. It is in this sense that the scandal mentality and journalistic legitimacy act as reciprocal influxes.

In Brazil, strengthening this legitimacy seems to be connected to changes in the way journalism was being performed and perceived – by those who performed it and, gradually, by those who consumed it. This process is commonly referred to as the “modernization”⁵ of Brazilian journalism, which started in the mid-1950s. It is seen as a milestone for these changes because it was the period when they could be seen in a single way, with more strength and self-recognition on the part of those who were at the center of it all: the journalists. There were also changes in the way journalists perceived their work. These changes had to do with journalistic ideals of seeking the truth, fulfilling a social role, and being a guardian of democracy – issues that arise in light of this new path (Câmara, 2019).

These new directions also contributed to the political commitment that Brazilian journalism would pursue (Câmara & Melo, 2018) in the country. We are referring to the role that journalism wishes to serve in society, its assertion to provide a service that benefits democracy, making itself a monitor of political powers, a kind of watchdog (Azevedo, 2010) or moderating power (Albuquerque, 2000).

This is not to say that scandals started with modernization, but they did play an important role in shaping “modern” Brazilian journalism – probably through an attempt (whether intentional or not) to imitate the American reality, but which then ended up evolving in its own way here.

During “modernization” the adjective “modern” was used to describe the reshaped way of doing journalism and this attempt at a “new” model. As Jácome recalls (2017, p.10), similar arguments circulated throughout the press as early as the 19th century talking about an earlier, “non-modern” way of doing journalism which was not compatible with the present.

This also seemed to be a narrative used to self-promote a shift from the way journalism was being done in the 1950s. Of course, newspapers started to change the way they structured their news, which changed the professionalism of journalists and newspapers and, consequently, how they started to see themselves

and the profession they worked in. But there was also the inclusion of an agenda to solidify all these changes as fundamental strategies and align journalism with the ideals of a “modern world”.

The ideal objective standard (at least how we see it) was about showing how journalism should primarily serve a noble cause, and do so under the intention of fulfilling that cause. Defending democracy was such a cause.

In this regard, a large number of analyses on scandals narrated by “modern” journalism have associated this practice with information (Chaia & Teixeira, 2001; Aldé & Vasconcellos, 2008; Senne, 2009; Azevedo, 2010; Guazina, 2011; Lattman-Weltman, 2016). This presupposes the idea that reports on scandals are key in making citizens aware of political struggles and helping them make more informed decisions about their voting choices (Chaia & Teixeira, 2001; Azevedo, 2010; Prior, 2016). This idea is still prevalent because of the legitimacy and authority that professional journalism has built up over the years.

The “modern” journalistic ideal is therefore associated with developing and consolidating liberal democracies (McNair, 2009). This perspective regards journalism as a fundamental component of maintaining democracy, especially as it elicits discourse on freedom of the press for a democracy to be fully functional. We believe that this position needs to be stressed constantly. There are important debates in this arena but they tend to focus on how journalism uses its power as a political actor (Lima, 2006; Azevedo, 2017) and as a company (Marques & Mont'alverne, 2015), particularly in relation to political coverage.

The analyses mostly seem to focus on this self-image that journalism has constituted for itself. But we might argue that the suppositions held in these analyses are a misconception. In addition to trying to measure journalistic objectivity (an ideal that has always been problematic and never achieved), some scandal analyses even try to (re)establish journalism's position as a moral guardian (Senne, 2009; Nunomura, 2012).

In this context, any deviation is regarded as a failure, but it does not necessarily lead to a path for understanding how journalism is practiced. Reporting on a scandal that implicates a specific politician or political party is biased coverage because it affects the electoral dispute (Thompson, 2002). Framework analyses⁶ can assess this fairly easily as it does not question bias in journalism. For this

reason, we look at what these scandal narratives say about Brazilian journalism. It is not a matter of pointing out the flaws in coverage, but of understanding the type of political commitment established in Brazilian journalism.

In order to do this it is important to focus on the place of mediation for journalists as narrators whose stories give meaning to our temporal lives. The key is to recognize that these stories include narrative patterns that legitimize journalists as a community of professional interpreters (Zelizer, 1992), but without losing sight of the constitutive ambiguity of this culture and whether or not to follow the parameters of journalistic objectivity (Bird & Dardenne, 1993, p.273).

On one hand, the more objective they are, the less interesting they become, as objectivity bypasses the dramatic and fictional elements from stories that audiences find attractive (Campbell, 1991). On the other hand, by using literary metaphors journalists become skilled storytellers who express their creativity, but do so at the risk of betraying their professional ideals (Soloski, 1993). This shows how objectivity alone is not the only strategy capable of legitimizing journalists as interpreters of reality. Even still, it opens up enough space for us to observe how narrative communication produces meanings by building events, which are reported to us on a daily basis (Motta, 2013) and are revealed when we accept the challenge of putting clues together, using sensitivity and the flexible precision of the indiciary paradigm (Ginzburg, 1989).

3 Approaches to narratives of artificial unity

The meanings presented in this paper are part of a larger study, one dedicated to reflecting on narratives as political scandals in journalism – specifically in the newspaper *O Globo*. However, before presenting the evidence we obtained from our observations of the *O Globo* newspaper we find it important to describe how we made our choices and explain our methodological procedures.

As previously mentioned, we use a methodology that incorporates both the indiciary paradigm proposed by Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg, and the Critical Analysis of Narrative as systematized by Luiz Gonzaga Motta. The basis of the indiciary paradigm is not to collect and describe evidence, but to select and organize in order to make inferences (Braga, 2008) – and it is in this sense that the

paradigm and the critical analysis of the narrative were used in this paper. The indiciary paradigm involves searching the signs and marks exposed in scandal narratives, such as the valorization of the beliefs, ideas, and perceptions that Ginzburg advocated. This is an important step in interpreting political scandals as a mentality.

This concerns a type of systematization that takes sensitivity into account. It is in this sense that Ginzburg's view of the residual and marginal is also echoed in Motta's methodological path of narrative analysis (2013). Motta upholds that the rhetoric of realistic narratives, such as journalistic ones, stimulates a continual game of opposites, and it is up to the analyst to capture their subtleties. Motta (2013) highlights that, just as in historiography texts – which Ginzburg revisited – journalism presents its argumentative resources in all its parts.

What we can say is that the indiciary paradigm reveals elements that are typically not so evident in journalism analyses based on its articulation with the question of time and how that plays an important role in understanding these narratives, as we shall see later. Critical Narrative Analysis, in turn, reinforces this marginal observation and also helps us to organize these signs and marks to build a panorama of narrative negotiations created so that scandals can artificially exist and remain in newspapers.

In this context, Motta (2013, p. 63) highlights that the narrative analysis “seeks to elect certain elements of the set, examine them in their substance, observe their connections, and permanently relate them to everything using inductive and associative processes”. The analysis of the narrative, in Motta's terms (2013), is a hermeneutical technique of interpreting the discourses surrounding the concrete and abstract phenomena of a given reality. Using this perception as a methodological resource helped us to think about the possible layers of interpretations of scandal narratives and the meanings that complement and oppose them. We then look for signs in these narratives, signs of a linguistic and temporal mediation operated by journalism (Motta, 2013), which we believe helps bring about the idea of scandal. “If the reality is opaque, there are certain areas - signs, indications – that allow us to decipher it”, states Ginzburg (1989, p.177).

Looking for these signs first involved: 1) establishing the timeframe (2003–2016) in which the PT occupied the presidency of the Republic and; 2) mapping the events interpreted as political scandals in the *O Globo* newspaper using surveys which the newspaper itself

conducted and published during Dilma Rousseff's impeachment process⁷. In addition, we used the newspaper's listing which was published on its website at the end of the entire process, and then updated it⁸; 3) we identified the front pages of those editions that mentioned these events; 4) we ordered these editions and proceeded to observe the material on the covers.

Regarding point 2, we would like to clarify that we combined these two lists and used them to draw a timeline (see Figure 1) to better visualize the distribution of scandals over the course of the PT government's thirteen years in power. This timeline also helps in organizing these episodes, which often overlapped other events identified as scandals and others that did not fall into this category, but were still covered by the newspaper during the aforementioned timeframe.

For this article we studied 16 editions of the *O Globo* newspaper. The front pages of these editions are described in the next section which helps to build meanings for these narratives in an attempt to present how this newspaper presented the "scandal mentality" in the professional journalistic *ethos*.

It should be noted that *O Globo* is part of the largest media conglomerate in Brazil: Grupo Globo. The newspaper started circulation in 1925 and is still one of the most well-known journalistic publications in the country today. Since its beginnings, from the old capital of Rio de Janeiro until today, *O Globo* has always reported on the major Brazilian political events. Recently, *O Globo's* involvement with politics was quite evident during the impeachment of ex-president Dilma Rousseff (PT), and was widely discussed by authors of varied approaches who emphasized the newspaper's strong articulating role in the impeachment process (Van Dijk, 2017) and its relationship with conservative liberal elites in Brazil (Goldstein, 2017).

3.1 Artificial Unity: strategies for unifying different scandal narratives

We identified some narrative strategies that contain this mentality. One such strategy is the artificial unit. An artificial unit is a narrative that contains a number of statements implying wrongdoing, as was the case with the *Mensalão* and *Lava Jato* scandals (narratives that created quite a stir in PT governments, as explained below). These statements create a false unity, almost as if all the narratives

were related to one single scandal; or they go over a previous scandal and update it to match the events.

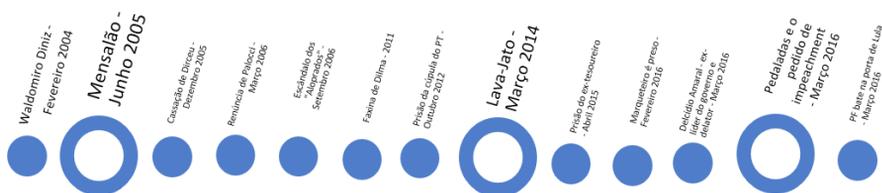
This artificial unity, generated by these strategies, is then repeated in the scandal mentality; in other words, it is capable of giving a kind of permanence to a scandal, making it last a long time and/or making it appear that all public events are rife with wrongdoings.

In this sense, our intent was to work with the press' characterization of a scandal. But instead of establishing a scandal in the media and trying to delimit the events in this pre-conceived path, we use the constructions of meanings (Motta, 2013) which the press has already provided and use them to problematize the concept of media scandal.

In terms of material, our initial observation focused on the content displayed on the front pages of newspapers. We looked at the front pages of newspapers during the scandals, looking for narrative strategies that helped to build the scandal mentality. If a scandal appeared on the front page, then we looked at the related articles inside that newspaper. We did this because these scandals were more visible as a result of being included in the paper's headlines.

We then look at journalistic narratives taken from the front pages of newspapers and the articles within them that present evidence of this scandal mentality. It is important to note here that this is only an initial attempt to illustrate the concept of scandal mentality and one of its narrative strategies, and should not be confused as an in-depth analysis. In fact, its purpose is to offer a possible understanding for political scandals and, consequently, to envision new ways of approaching these narratives.

Figure 1 – Timeline of scandals during the PT administration, according to *O Globo* newspaper.



Source: Chamber of Deputies (2019)

In addition to the timeline, for contextualization purposes, we included a summary of the thirteen PT scandals highlighted by *O Globo*. These scandals appear in the newspaper's list

in chronological order, including a brief description of the wrongdoings and the scandals.

It is worth mentioning that the newspaper includes a photo of the main individual(s) with all of their reports. In order to better understand how this list we use as a starting point is organized and better understand the content of these narratives, we have included a copy of the information included in each of the highlighted scandals below. This was also a way for us to be able to remember what each of these events were about without having to go into too many details, as we will allude to them throughout this section.

- **Waldomiro Diniz:** former presidential advisor on parliamentary affairs, he was implicated in the first scandal involving the Lula government in February 2004. Waldomiro Diniz was removed from office after the release of a video in which he is shown taking bribes to raise money for the 2002 election campaign. He was linked to Carlinhos Cachoeira. Photo of Waldomiro Diniz.
- **Mensalão:** this vote-buying scandal, conducted by the PT government, was revealed in 2005, and put Lula in hot water. Deputies were paid with public money, which was covered up with the help of former PT treasurer Delúbio Soares and operator Marcos Valério. The scheme, revealed by Roberto Jefferson, was headed, according to STF ministers, by José Dirceu. Photo of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.
- **Dirceu's Dismissal:** with 293 votes for and 193 against, the Chamber of Deputies revoked the mandate of former deputy José Dirceu (PT-SP) for breach of decorum in December 2015. The decision was made after a number of statements given by Roberto Jefferson (PTB) which exposed the Mensalão and Correios scandals, and led to Dirceu's dismissal from the Civil House. Photo of José Dirceu.
- **The 'Aloprados' Scandal:** the Federal Police arrested two PT members in 2006 for attempting to write up a false dossier linking José Serra and Geraldo Alckmin (candidates who were running for the São Paulo government and the presidency, respectively) to the leeches scandal. One of the 'crazy people' (a term coined by Lula) was Hamilton Lacerda, a former adviser to Aloizio Mercadante. Photo of Hamilton Lacerda.
- **Palocci's Resignation:** Antonio Palocci resigned as Minister of Finance in March of 2006. His resignation came after accusations of corruption while he was the acting mayor of Ribeirão Preto. Palocci was paid "monthly sums" of up to R\$ 50 thousand from companies that provided services to the city, and funneled those payments into the PT vaults. Photo of Antonio Palocci.
- **PT Summit Arrest:** in October of 2012, 8 years after the Mensalão scandal, José Dirceu, José Genoíno, and Delúbio Soares were convicted of corruption and conspiracy. In August 2014, Genoíno requested home detention, as did Delúbio and Dirceu. Photo of José Genoíno.

- Dilma forced to clean house: during Dilma Rousseff's first term as president, former ministers Antonio Palocci (Civil House), Wagner Rossi (Agriculture), Orlando Silva (Sports), Pedro Novais (Tourism), and Mário Negromonte (Cities) lost their jobs under suspicion of wrongdoing. Dilma faced her first conflict in power. Photo of Dilma Rousseff, Antonio Palocci, Michel Temer (vice president at the time) and Gleisi Hoffmann (new minister of the Civil House at the time).
- Lava Jato Scandal: judge Sérgio Moro, the Federal Police, and the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office conducted investigations into the country's biggest corruption scandal, focusing primarily on the diversion of Petrobras funds. Approximately R\$ 2.9 billion has already been recovered. Whistleblowers said that part of the scandal's kickback went to the PT party. Photo of former Petrobras Supply Director Paulo Roberto Costa.
- Former PT treasurer convicted: former PT treasurer João Vaccari Neto was accused of receiving bribes in the form of donations from Petrobras, and was arrested in April of 2015. He has already been sentenced by Judge Sérgio Moro. Photo of João Vaccari Neto.
- Fiscal pedaling and the impeachment process: in a unanimous decision from the Federal Court of Auditors, the tax pedaling (accounting techniques) conducted by President Dilma Rousseff was considered a crime of fiscal responsibility. The Chamber's request for impeachment against Dilma upholds her arrest for crime of liability. Photo of Dilma Rousseff.
- Marketeer arrested: in the "Acarajé" phase of the Lava Jato Scandal, the marketeer for Dilma and Lula's campaigns, João Santana, was arrested along with his wife, Mônica Moura. They were accused of receiving overseas bribes from Odebrecht. Photo of João Santa and Mônica Moura.
- Delcídio Amaral (former governor and whistleblower): former government leader Senator Delcídio Amaral was arrested for trying to bribe whistleblower Nestor Cerveró to remain silent. While discussing his plea bargain, Delcídio implicated Dilma and Lula in the Petrobras scandal. He said that both of them had tried to interfere with the Lava Jato scandal. Photo of Delcídio Amaral (PT-MS).
- Federal Police take Lula in: former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was the Federal Police's suspect in the 24th phase of the operation. He was taken in and made a statement. His relationship with contractors was investigated. Lula's children and right-hand man Paulo Okamoto were also suspects in the operation. Photo of Federal Police agents in front of the Lula Institute.

3.1.1 Time: scandals revisited years later

The first strategy we identified was the possibility of temporal fluidity in relation to the narratives of wrongdoings. These narratives are placed in a "here and now" that is gradually diluted. In this way, scandals are loose in time and can be revisited and updated weeks, months, or even years later. What generally happens is the legal processes of these scandals come to a conclusion, which then

go on to make headlines again, being presented as a scandal at its peak. In other words, even when a scandal is coming to an end, or has even concluded, it is still presented as if it had new angles that needed to be covered.

Over time this strategy of artificial unity adds to the chaos of the narrative that is explaining wrongdoing. That's because chaos is the subjectivity that journalism needs to master in order to keep the mindset of a scandal in motion. The longer the scandal goes on for, the more chance there is of creating an artificial unit and, thus, the more chance of expanding the mentality.

This is what happened with the Mensalão scandal, which went on for over a nine-year period. By constantly revisiting the scandal, *O Globo* was able to report on all the legal updates – trials, sentence recommendations, convictions – in order to keep what was seen as the biggest scandal of the PT government in the headlines. As a result, the “scandal mentality” was at its peak, even eclipsing other narratives on scandals. All other scandals seemed less important when compared to the Mensalão scandal.

On March 14, 2014, *O Globo* printed the following headline: “Mensalão scandal comes to an end”, referring to the Supreme Court’s final judgment of the case. After nine years which included 40 denuncancements, 37 defendants, 24 convicted, and 13 acquitted (according to the numbers printed on the newspaper’s cover) the Mensalão scandal finally came to an end, at least the narrative protagonism of it did. Of course there were other minor scandals reported on by the newspaper over the years, but none with the intensity that the Mensalão one received. After all, it was responsible for weakening the political continuity of individuals who, up until that time, were at the center of power.

Figures 2, 3 and 4 – The Mensalão scandal over the years, from left to right: 03/30/2006; 07/09/2011; 03/14/2014



Source: *O Globo* archives.

Figures 5, 6 and 7 – Reports on the Lava Jato scandal, from left to right: 03/21/2014; 07/30/2015; 04/12/2017



Source: *O Globo* archives.

3.1.2 Action: result of narratives on wrongdoings are presented as new independent scandals with multiple narratives on wrongdoings overlapping

While the Mensalão scandal was going on, the scandal mentality was fueled by investigations of Roberto Jefferson and his involvement in three scandals: the Correios (the Brazilian postal administration), bingo halls, and the Mensalão. These investigations, although interconnected, constitute entirely different violations. We cannot say today that the wrongdoings each CPI started to investigate would not constitute scandals of their own. However, we can say that the strength of the Mensalão scandal, its destructive power, and the ability to judge the PT party's political events – whether good or bad – were reinforced by the overlapping of these CPIs. They appear with little or almost no distinction on the front pages, which gives the feeling that they have been going on for much longer. Whenever something from one of the CPIs is announced, there is a convenient unity in the way they are treated, which only reinforces the idea of political normality. It is an almost permanent state of suspension of order.

Figures 8, 9 and 10 (left to right) – Highlights of the CPI of Correios (July 24, 2005), the Mensalão scandal (November 19, 2005), and the bingo halls (May 9, 2006).



Source: *O Globo* archives.

3.1.3 Characters: prominent political actors are implicated in suspicious narratives, not necessarily scandals, but may (or may not) be connected to existing scandals

We found three examples of artificial units through characters in the Mensalão scandal: one involving ex-minister Antonio Palocci, one with a narrative linking a character to the PT, and another in which the character was former Chamber mayor, Severino Cavalcanti (at the time, PP-PE).

The first unit occurred in July of 2005. There were 26 headlines on the Mensalão scandal in this month, the narratives on Marcos Valério and Delúbio Soares being the focus of the scandal. Links between the party and wrongdoings are easier to make in this instance, so much so that they don't even necessarily need to be about the Mensalão scandal itself. This was the case with one of the other headlines outside of the 26 aforementioned, from July 9, 2005: "PT leader is arrested and found with R\$437 thousand in his suitcase and underwear". The person in question, who was in possession of the money when arrested, was the PT Secretary of Organization in Ceará and advisor to the PT leader in the Ceará Assembly, José Nobre Guimarães – brother of PT national

president, José Genoíno. However, despite this connection, no relationship could be made to narratives from the biggest scandal at the time.

Another example of an artificial unit (which occurred in September of the same year) is that of Severino Cavalcanti, former president of the Chamber of Deputies. Although this time period was dominated by the Mensalão scandal narratives, it did include the scandal from December 2005 called “Dirceu’s Expulsion”. This scandal, however, got its start in June, when Dirceu was suspended from office, but had not yet been dismissed. We consider this to be the first part of the narrative that would eventually come to an end in December, with his dismissal. This seems to be the case as the narrative was later revisited in July, when Dirceu’s case was mentioned in two headlines about his unresolved future. The next month Dirceu appeared in five headlines.

Yet the month of September also included the Cavalcanti case, which had a connection not only with the scandal surrounding Dirceu’s dismissal, but also with the Mensalão scandal. Up until that time, there were no headlines citing Severino Cavalcanti, and then, all of a sudden, he became the principal figure in headlines. A headline from September 3 reads:

After requesting a lighter sentence for those involved in the Mensalão scandal, Mayor Severino Cavalcanti (PP-PE), ended the week defending himself against the charge that when he was first-secretary of the Chamber of Deputies, he was paid monthly sums of R\$ 10,000 from the Buani and Paulucci Ltd company to ensure they were the sole company to operate one of the Casa’s restaurants. Severino claims that Buani is putting pressure on the Chamber of Deputies to not have a debt (Denunciations on ..., 2005, p.1).

The initial tone of the political game at that moment was set at the beginning of the article: “After requesting lighter punishments **for those involved in the Mensalão scandal**, Mayor Severino Cavalcanti (PP-PE) ended the week by giving explanations about the charge that he had bribed a concessionaire from the Casa restaurant” (Lima & Medeiros, 2005, p.3, emphasis added). However, this is the only connection that can be made between the former mayor and the Mensalão narrative.

There were a total of 16 headlines including Severino in September. Severino’s case is not one of the scandals belonging to the PT era as none of the individuals in that scandal belonged to the

PT party. One of the few connections that could be made can be seen in the phrase “light punishment for those involved in the Mensalão scandal”, but that had absolutely no relation to the accusations against the former mayor. Another interesting point is that even if it was not one of the scandals listed at the time, all the articles with these headlines contained the same phrase: “political crisis”. In other words, the Severino case, at the time, was characterized as being part of the great political crisis that was being narrated, the Mensalão scandal and its developments also being a part of this same great political crisis. In terms of scandal mentality, any and all events at that time that were seen as being part of the possible break down of politics in the country was regarded as a component of the political crisis.

This is particularly relevant to our argument when we think that, in the previous month of August, all the front pages contained headlines related to the Mensalão scandal. It was unlikely that this scandal would just fade away – and it did not – but it also did not really have any new information to justify its position in the headlines. The Severino Cavalcanti case seems to be a factor that kept the scandal “hanging around” at the time.

One could argue that an artificial unit is created in both the José Nobre Guimarães case and the Severino Cavalcanti case, thus adding another narrative about another problem whose only common denominator is the fact that its theme is also about a wrongdoing – which establishes an idea of constant wrongdoing.

The third artificial unit, which also occurred at the same time the Mensalão scandal was going on, involved Antonio Palocci and Dilma Rousseff. In November of 2005, while Palocci was being implicated in the Mensalão scandal, there was another narrative circulating around about him: his disagreement with former head of the Civil House, Dilma Rousseff. Their disagreement centered on how the government’s economic policy was being handled, and had nothing to do with the investigation into Palocci’s involvement with the Mensalão scandal.

Figures 11, 12 and 13 – November 11, 12, and 23, 2005



Source: *O Globo* archives.

What happens here is that the scandal mentality takes the same characters involved in the scandal narratives and places them in “conventional” ones; that is, non-scandalous narratives. Doing this tends to convey the idea that the scandal is going on longer than it actually is, and what’s interesting about that is that these two narratives start to coexist at the same time, up until the point that they actually start intertwining with one another.

The Minister of Finance, Antonio Palocci, locked horns with President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva the night before last, at Planalto Palace. **Exhausted by accusations of corruption in Ribeirão Preto and his clash with head of the Civil House, Dilma Rousseff**, Palocci told the president that, if he is going to go down, he would prefer to leave the government and defend himself (Lima et al., 2005, p.3, emphasis added).

The lead contains two narratives involving former minister Palocci. There is no way to separate one story from the other. That article reads: “Yesterday, the minister testified at the Finance Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, where he was questioned about his suspected involvement in corruption, about the economic policy, and about his sensitive situation in government” (Lima et al., p.3). Eleven days earlier, on November 12, there was a full page dedicated to this matter. The lead of that article read “PT gives Palocci no reprieve”:

The **disagreement between ministers Dilma Rousseff (Civil House) and Antonio Palocci (Minister of Finance) was not enough because of the minister's criticisms of the economic policies he was responsible for**, PT national president, Deputy Ricardo Bezoini, yesterday called it inappropriate to make a primary surplus higher than expected – the annual goal of 4.25% has already reached 6.1% (Barbosa, 2005, p.3, emphasis added).

However, even with the narrative focused on the disagreement between Palocci and Dilma, there is a box in the middle of the page with a note about President Lula and his concern over Palocci's situation, it reads:

After demanding that the war between Antonio Palocci and Dilma Rousseff come to an end, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva spent yesterday and part of the previous night monitoring the crisis. **Lula stayed in the Planalto until 11:40pm the day before yesterday assessing Palocci's situation and following up on the operation to avoid extending the CPI of the Post Office** ('Na politics' ..., 2005, p.3).

This artificial unity of the scandal can also occur with situations involving individuals who had been previously implicated in wrongdoings, such was the case during the Lava Jato scandal with former President Lula and then president Dilma Rousseff. That was in 2016, when Lula almost became Dilma Rousseff's minister, which caused a huge stir among the public as it was seen as a legal maneuver to favor Lula in court. At that time, the investigations into Lula were gaining more speed, led by former judge Sérgio Moro⁹, which resulted in some attempts to protect him.

Figures 14, 15, 16, and 17 – front pages referencing the story “Minister Lula”, from March 12, 15, 17, and 18, 2016 (left to right).



Source: *O Globo* archives.

It is important to highlight these front pages because they corroborate what we have been arguing up to this point. Similarly to what happened with the cases presented in this section, this example appears to connect narratives considered scandalous, and leads one to believe that there is just one single, huge scandal going on which has no end. It is a false idea of unity; an artificial unity.

4 Final considerations

Anthropologist and historian Lilia Schwarcz' (2008) foreword on Benedict Anderson's work *Communities Imagined* reads: "nations are imagined, but imagining is not easy. You cannot imagine yourself in a void, based on nothing". We can think of the discussions that we have produced in this article in a similar fashion.

If we assume that political scandal narratives do not have their own meanings, then we can also assume that they need to constantly be imagined on the pages of newspapers. But they cannot be imagined in a void. There must be some elements to facilitate this imagination and make sure that the scandal does not completely disappear so that it can be easily revisited whenever necessary.

These elements accompany the journalistic narratives; from the constitution of a professional *ethos* through the structuring of a privileged place for political scandals – in which journalism also has the monopoly of its narration – and reaching the agency of specific narrative forms. Together these elements help us make sense of the narrative chaos that we imagine as the political scandal. Together these elements increase or decrease the way we imagine these scandal narratives and the way we judge these events. All of these elements are recorded in time; they are demarcated by it and help to give it historical value. We call this "scandal mentality".

We seek to present some of the strategies in this mentality, particularly the ones that make different scandal narratives appear to have more and more narrative unity. These strategies can be understood to have three elements: time, characters, and action.

In practice, the reader comes away with the idea that we are talking about a massive scandal narrative that is uniform and endless. It is uniform in the sense that it repeatedly presents the

same characters and similar actions, which develop the idea that the current administration is immersed in an unprecedented web of corruption which is unlikely to end any time soon – unless a narrative of salvation can be presented in contrast, with a hero or a possibility of interruption. This started to occur in 2014 with explanations given for narratives on the Lava Jato scandal, and ended in 2016 with President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment.

It is in this context that the issue of time comes into play, which is fundamental in establishing a scandal mentality. Time, necessarily chronologically linear, is the first attempt to structure the narrative chaos presented in the scandal when instituted. There are several overlapping actions, many of which are happening at the same time while others are revisited from the past. All these actions come together to give meaning in the present.

In view of this supposedly ordered structure, it is relevant to think about what this kind of journalism (which claims to be legitimate and has a monopoly on scandals) thinks of this scandal concept that it exhibits. This is important because it is apparent (by looking at the scandals published in *O Globo*) that it is impossible to get a clear idea of what a scandal is. This is true for a number of other wrongdoings that were not included in the “PT scandals” selected for this paper, which themselves could stand alone as scandals when compared to the profiles of the ones published by the newspaper. There are also scandals that are included in this list that, when looked at closely, deserve much more attention. In other words, there is a disconnect between what they say a scandal is and what their focus of a scandal is. Once again, the question of time is important here. Time also serves as a measure for observing the relevance that a given situation has for a newspaper. What are regarded as “big” scandals take up more time in newspapers, especially in their headlines. This is straightforward.

As events unfold, other narrative markers seem to gain importance. We therefore feel it important to highlight the characters that give impetus to the wrongdoings and the places they occupy in the political game. There is no political scandal that does not involve an important, current, political character. It is these important characters which skillful narratives of scandals are built upon. That is not to say that characters of lesser importance are not involved, but they remain on the outside, hovering around presidents, ministers, governors, and mayors.

Each of these characters plays a role in this articulation, from explaining a wrongdoing by casting blame to keeping the scandal mentality in motion with new clues. These are the characters we look at and hope they can return to the scandal narrative that is being presented.

Lastly, the amount of movement in the political game that the explanation of a wrongdoing is capable of generating was taken into account. In order to have a scandal we could initiate one, but we would need to generate at least some kind of unease or turmoil in a place of power in order that could influence changes to occur. Perhaps a minister who was forced to leave office or an assistant or advisor who had been fired; basically revisiting a decision which had already been made. What was once just a statement (one which would generate enough unease) was being replaced by increasingly significant actions. This is where the element of action is analyzed. It is not restricted to actions performed by the unease of the scandal; the action also concerns the CPIs that conduct investigations and movements that occur outside the political process such as public demonstrations that were part of some of the final narratives of the PT governments.

As Braga (2008, p.84) reminds us, “making inferences about a given phenomenon, from the evidence of a singular case, requires a work of ‘discovery’ or ‘invention’, which is inevitably a risky process”. By exposing these elements within these strategies of artificial units we hope to have taken this risk and taken a positive step towards analyzing narratives of political scandals, and viewing them as a mentality. The “scandal mentality”, established by journalism with the power of its privileged place of speech (and here we focus on the narration of political events) seems to be an interesting alternative for those who seek to understand these narratives beyond the bias and sensationalism of communication media.

NOTES

- 1 To reinforce this statement, and without straying too far from the line of reasoning that we are proposing, we draw attention to some of these discussions while also aware that we are not

exhausting the complexity of the situation. See Martins (2016); Antunes (2006); Almeida (2003); Keck (2010).

- 2 The discussions presented here are part of the analyses presented in author Clara Bezerril Câmara's thesis entitled "*Scandal Mentality*": *an analysis of narratives of wrongdoings based on the polarizations in Brazilian journalism*, defended in the PPGCOM-UFF in 2019 and awarded with the 2020 Adelmo Genro Filho Honorable Mention Award, in the Doctorate category.
- 3 There is a connection here to the collective representations from Durkheim's studies. The idea that there is a collective conscience formed from social, objectifiable facts because external and coercive individual consciences modulate this conception. This means that the values derived from the culture of journalism can be translated into rituals where the forms of writing journalistic texts have to be shared and accepted by peers. This explains the importance of "reporting awards" as a basis for horizontal solidarity among journalists.
- 4 This method was developed by Ulrich Oevermann, who proposed a method for analyzing structures to be used for empirical studies in the field of sociology in the 1980s.
- 5 We recognize that this term rejuvenates an idea of evolution that is false and inadequate. Most authors who discuss this period also share this reservation as they understand that it is a problematic term.
- 6 We would like to clarify, at this point, why we do not use the notion of framing. We understand that it refers to the symbolic interactionist perspective to which the context of dialogue (the scene) is fundamental. In other words, the interactionist perspective, which the notion of framing is a part of, is more centered on synchrony than on diachrony, while the term mentality is used precisely to point out the resistance of attitudes, beliefs, and values in historical time. Furthermore, the knowledge of this historical perspective can give the narratives a strategic nature in terms of their agents trying to achieve certain effects, something that also distances itself from the interactionist perspective in the notion of framing because, in that perspective, the frames involve intersubjective connections throughout human relationships and organize them; they do not necessarily aim to discuss the history of political perspectives

and disputes in this process. For more details, see Fabrino and Simões (2012).

- 7 These events were uploaded to a photo gallery on the newspaper's website in 2016, when Rousseff was facing impeachment but had not yet been removed from office. Retrieved from oglobo.globo.com/brasil/13-escandalos-do-pt-no-poder-18803710
- 8 This list was last updated on 01/25/2018. Retrieved from acervo.oglobo.globo.com/em-destaque/os-escandalos-do-pt-desde-inicio-da-era-lula-o-terremoto-com-lava-jato-18824010
- 9 After the 2018 elections, with Jair Bolsonaro (PSL) winning the election, Sérgio Moro was invited to be Minister of Justice for the current government – and accepted.

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