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Whiteness, Discourse and Representation of Black Women in the Academic Environment of the Federal University of Bahia / *Branquitude, discurso e representação de mulheres negras no ambiente acadêmico da UFBA*

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ABSTRACT

Symbolic elites perpetuate the most critical forms of racism, which points to the importance of the analysis of how racist discourses are constructed, with a specific focus on the white elite. In this paper, the focus is Bahia's capital whiteness as shaped by students at the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA). For this, we gathered data, generated at UFBA, from open questionnaires and a focus group with undergraduate students. For this critical discursive analysis (CDA), we used a section of a broader research, in which the perception of whiteness by self-declared white students from UFBA was investigated. Our analysis suggests that the understanding of white privilege is permeated with ideas that can support racist practices and discourses, and that the representation of black women is still based on socially constructed stereotypes in an actively racist society such as ours.

KEYWORDS: Critical discourse studies; Qualitative research; Whiteness; Raciality; Intersectionality

RESUMO

As elites simbólicas perpetuam as formas mais importantes de racismo, o que aponta a importância de nos dedicarmos à análise de como discursos racistas são construídos, com foco específico no discurso da elite branca e, neste trabalho, da branquitude soteropolitana conforme plasmada por estudantes da Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA). Para tanto, reunimos dados, gerados na UFBA, oriundos de questionários abertos e grupo focal com estudantes de graduação. Nesta análise discursiva crítica (ADC), utilizamos recorte de uma pesquisa mais ampla, na qual se investigou a percepção da branquitude por discentes autodeclarados/as brancos/as da UFBA. Nossa análise sugere que a percepção do privilégio branco, mesmo quando afirmada, é permeada de ideias que podem fundamentar práticas e/ou discursos racistas, e que a representação de mulheres negras ainda é calcada em estereótipos socialmente construídos numa sociedade fortemente racista como a nossa.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Estudos críticos do discurso; Pesquisa qualitativa; Branquitude; Racialidade; Interseccionalidade

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Introduction

People learn how to be racist from the context in which they are found. This context includes family, school, media, and others; thus, it is needless to say that this is not an innate characteristic of any human population but, instead, of culturally learned and taught content/behavior. Van Dijk (2008) points out that this process is neither automatic nor determined since it is possible to question the ideologies to which one is exposed and, consequently, build different opinions or alternative ideologies.

Ideologies are both learned and questioned through discourse. It can be said that, in Brazil, the dominant discourse is mostly white and is propagated by the symbolic elites, such as journalists, politicians, and scholars. For van Dijk (2008), white symbolic elites constitute and perpetuate the most critical form of racism today. This understanding points to the pertinence of applying effort to analyze how racist discourses are constructed, with a specific focus on the discourse of the white elite and, in the case of this article, on the Salvador-born whiteness as expressed in a specific sector of the undergraduate academic community of the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA).[1]

Considering that Brazilian public universities have, in recent years, been a space for discussion and respect for (and coexistence with) diversity, will the student body of a large Brazilian public university, when exposed to this diversity, be ready to resist the ideological appeals of racist speeches?

It is important to note that the university is located in Salvador, in the state of Bahia, a city that hosts the most significant percentage of afro-descendants in Brazil. Another point to consider is that the UFBA's current student body reflects the Bahian population in terms of racial composition. Among UFBA students, 75.6% are black, brown or indigenous;[2] and the population of Bahia is 76.7% black, brown, or indigenous.[3] In other words, UFBA students do coexist with Bahian racial diversity. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that there are still mostly white courses, such as Medicine, Law, and Communications; and there are

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[1] This article is part of a cooperative research and a result of post-doctoral studies conducted by Prof. Daniele de Oliveira, from UFBA, at the Graduate Program in Linguistics from the University of Brasilia.
[2] V Pesquisa Nacional de Perfil dos Graduandos das IFES 2018 (ANDIFES).
[3] PNAD/IBGE 2018.

courses such as the Interdisciplinary Baccalaureate, which represents diversity in closer terms with the Bahian reality.

UFBA students also have access to discussions on the theme of race relations in Brazil and racism through rounds of conversation, lectures, conferences, and other types of academic events that are regularly held at the university. An example would be the VII Congress of Black Researchers, which took place in July 2019 on the Ondina campus and presented the significant and consistent production of black researchers from different parts of Brazil.

Hence this article's goal is to investigate how white students from UFBA construct images of black women by employing discourse resources. Section 1 will begin by presenting a few considerations about what it means to be a black woman in today's Brazil, considering that the present echoes the past concerning the social position of black women. In section 2, we will discuss how the concept of whiteness has been constructed within the scope of the humanities. In Section 3, we present the theoretical-methodological framework of critical discourse studies adopted for this research. Finally, the fourth and last section of this article includes an analysis of the data generated for the research.

1 Violence against Black Women in Brazil

Revealing a gap in academic historical research on the theme, Angela Davis (1981)[4] emphasizes the importance of studying the experiences of enslaved black women. According to the author, it would clarify not only the current struggle of black women but also the pursuit of emancipation for all women. Davis (1981)[5] refers to the enslavement of black women in the United States; nonetheless, despite the differences, there are also similarities concerning the Brazilian experience with slavery, more specifically about the enslavement of black women in Brazil.

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[4] DAVIS, A. Y. *Women, Race & Class*. New York: Vintage Books, 1981.
[5] For full reference, see footnote 4.

Giacomini (1988) also discusses the social and sexual roles of enslaved[6] black women in Brazil, sharing Davis' belief in the need for historical understanding to perceive the present experience of black women in contemporary Brazilian society. The author stresses the importance of considering the historically determined social class in addition to gender, especially of *black women in the workforce*. The author thus highlights the need to consider intersectionality, a concept later developed in detail by Akotirene (2018) and inspired in Crenshaw, Hill Collins, and other black feminists.

The condition of the enslaved black woman was one of objectification, for her master owned her. However, compared to the male condition, enslaved black women had "the particular condition that comes from being a woman, that is, occupying a privileged role in biological reproduction" (GIACOMINI, 1988, p.24). This did not exempt her from a productive role as an enslaved person but added the intersectional particularity of gender to the oppression of enslavement. In other words, in the case of enslaved black women, added to the exploitation resulting from the social condition of exploitation, there were other forms of violence.

For example, because of a patriarchal and slave-owning logic and, consequently, the material and symbolic context existing in the colony, enslaved black women were sexually exploited by their masters, which was "justified" by their physical attributes. This "justification" reveals that the practice of blaming the victim of a crime (VAN DIJK, 2008) is not new in the oppressive discourse and points to the stories of violence hidden behind the celebrated miscegenation of the Brazilian people. Enslaved black women were still victims of the jealousy of their masters' wives, who were capable of "torture, amputations and all kinds of violence" (GIACOMINI, 1988, p.68) against enslaved black women whose masters were attracted to them, as Nogueira (2019) recalled.

Regarding the dispersion of this past in the present, Giacomini (1988, p.89) maintains that:

> slavery has ended, but the existence of its legacies in the midst of bourgeois and capitalist relations once again is manifested in this incredible ability,

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[6] Although Giacomini (1988) uses the term *slave*, the authors of this article chose to use the word *enslaved* due to the understanding that there is no such thing as people who are slaves; rather, they are being enslaved.

which all dominant classes have no matter what historical period, to incorporate the privileges that they possess and pile them onto the privileges conceded by previous dominant groups.

It is impossible not to establish a relationship between the condition of enslaved black women from the colonial period and contemporary black female wage earners. They often occupy subordinate positions, such as cleaning and childcare services, which is a direct legacy of the relations between slave and master. The Brazilian collective imagination, to this day, conjures the "black mamas," full-time caregivers, women with a highly significant role in maintaining Brazil's elite families, and destined to be an "absent presence." They are present in daily routines and leisurely moments, dressed in a uniform that marks the limits to which they are included in the family, despite the affectionate role that they indeed have in the upbringing of the white elite's children.

The hypersexualized image of black women, whether from the media or elsewhere, is also a continuation of the exploratory practices of yore, which reverberate insistently in the present. For example, until very recently, it was not considered at all scandalous that, every year, in the coverage of the Rio Carnival, the most prestigious television broadcast network in the country presented a black woman dancing on screen and carefully undressed for the occasion. Ribeiro (2016) points out the relationship between colonization and the rape culture, considering that black women have been not only harshly exploited, but also sexualized and objectified since the Brazilian colonial period.

When building these racialized images and roles associated with blackness, whiteness practices and discourses become consolidated, and often unconsciously reproduced conducts crystallize the comprehension of what the social world is or should be.

2 Whiteness and Discourse

It is common to find the black population as an object of study in critical studies on race relations; however, since the 1990s, critical studies on whiteness have also gained ground, and finally become the object of reflection about racism. In the same movement, white people begin to be understood as also racialized, since they inherit the privileges

associated with their group. Frankenberg (2004), for example, finds his conception of whiteness in societies "structured in domination." For the author, it is a place of constructed neutrality, which is why it is not named, and seldom examined for reflection. For Frankenberg (2004), the concept of whiteness starts from what it means to be a white person inserted in a racialized community, "a structural place from where the white individual sees others and herself" (PIZA, 2007, p.71).

Frankenberg's concept (2004) is a guide for several research studies on whiteness in Brazil (PIZA, 2005, 2007; CARDOSO, 2010; SCHUCMAN, 2012, 2014, among others), a position that this article also adopts, following the analysis of whiteness as a social standing within a hierarchically organized society based on race. Fanon (1967)[7] and Biko (1978)[8] have already discussed white racial identity and its fundamental role in racial relations in racially structured societies – such as in Brazil.

The two authors also shed light on white subjectivity. They revealed, each in a particular context, that colonialization and racism produce adverse effects not only for black people but also for white people, although racially-based societies (QUIJANO, 2009; BERNARDINO-COSTA, GROSFOGUEL, 2016) provoke opposite poles regarding scarcity and privilege. According to Biko (1978, p.36):

> There is nothing the matter with blacks. The problem is WHITE RACISM and it rests squarely on the laps of the white society. [...] White liberals must leave blacks to take care of their own business while they concern themselves with the real evil in our society---white racism. [highlight by the author][9]

The discussion on race relations must, therefore, include a reflection about whiteness, as well as include white people in this discussion by considering, of course, their place of speech (RIBEIRO, 2018). Biko (1978)[10] is the one who claims this need. In the 1980s, black

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[7] FANON, F. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 1967.
[8] BIKO, S. *I Write What I Like*. London: Bowerdean Press, 1978.
[9] For full reference, see footnote 8.
[10] For full reference, see footnote 8.

American feminists also drew attention to the gap in feminist theories about specific issues concerning black women:

> By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word *sisterhood* that does not in fact exist (LORDE, 1984, p.116).[11]

Thus, the author reinforces the idea that white women are identified according to their whiteness; in tandem, she emphasizes the importance of gender and race intersectionality (in addition to sexual preference and social class). She notices that it is not possible to discuss the issue of black women without considering the vital influence of their racial belonging. María Lugones (2008), an Argentine feminist working in the United States, also discussed gender and race intersectionality, emphasizing aspects that may not be seen when these categories are separated.

This article's goal is, therefore, to investigate student whiteness discourses at UFBA, more specifically, how black women are represented in this context, considered a restricted group of students from a specific course (see below). The relevance of this study lies in the reflection that points to the role of whiteness in maintaining and legitimizing racial inequalities, and in the possible reflections that it can engender, in addition to filling a gap in discourse studies concerning the dominant whiteness discourse in Brazil. In this respect, this article is merely an initial effort within a broader project on the horizon.

Considering that the concept of race, from a biological standpoint, cannot be sustained, it is crucial to (1) understand how mistaken assumptions validate discourses and, consequently, racist practices (HALL, 1996).[12] Furthermore, it is necessary to (2) understand the roles of whiteness in studies about racism and racial relations since, according to Schucman (2012), most of these studies are about blackness. Hence it is important because

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[11] LORDE, A. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984.
[12] *Stuart Hall: Race: The Floating Signifier*. Produced, directed and edited by Sut Jhally. United States: Media Education Foundation, 1996. United States: Media Education Foundation, 2002. VHS (60 minutes), colored.

(3) it acquires understanding about the *protagonists who display racist attitudes* and, especially in the case of our field of research, the discourses behind these attitudes.

3 Critical Discourse Studies

Considering that this is a discussion about racism, a social problem, this article seeks to investigate whether (and how) it manifests itself in the discourse of whiteness in Salvador and believes that critical discourse studies offer a relevant theoretical and methodological apparatus for developing these objectives. Fairclough (2009) highlights four stages for the development of interdisciplinary discursive research, namely: focusing on the semiotic aspect of a social problem; identifying obstacles that prevent the solution of this social problem; considering whether the social order "needs" this social problem (its function in practice) and identify possible ways to overcome it.

Racism is undoubtedly part of a discourse that has been structuring societies (ALMEIDA, 2018) since colonial-modernity. Indeed, the lack of perception by white people of the privileges they acquire from their race is one of the obstacles to be overcome by racism. Perhaps the first, since it is not possible to understand prejudice without perceiving privileges, and discourses about meritocracy are based on this effacement. It can also be said that the Brazilian social order "needs" racism in order to maintain white privileges, that is, to uphold the fictional story of our apparent racial democracy, so crucial to the continuity of the oppressive production practices that sustain our society.

The perspective adopted by Fairclough (1989, 1992)[13] considers language as an inseparable part of all social practice, which implies: i) language is a constitutive part of society; ii) language is a social process; iii) language is a process influenced by non-linguistic aspects of society. Thus, the author highlights the internal and dialectical relationship between language and society, a view he does not abandon in any of his later works and which remains central to his thinking. The intimate relationship between language and society is also fundamental to the work of van Dijk (2009), who considers that "social

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[13] FAIRCLOUGH, N. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

structures are produced by interaction" (p.99). He attributes this process to the cognitive interface, since "language users, the social members, know them and can think of them while speaking, writing, listening or reading" (p.26). Thus, in the theoretical model he proposes, it is the cognitive activity that explains the language-society interface.

This paper understands that the cognitive approach and the relational approach do not necessarily contradict each other. For Fairclough (2003), social structures are highly abstract entities, a potential and a set of possibilities, like language itself. In this social theory of discourse, the complexity of the relationship between what is structurally possible and what actually occurs is organized by intermediate entities between structures and events, that is, of *social practices*, such as teaching or managing educational institutions, and the *orders of discourse*, which refers to how the semiotic potential of a given practice is structured. It seems evident that this mediation could not do without a socio-cognitive aspect, with socially shared knowledge and used to organize and understand action in the world.

Social practices are, therefore, forms of controlling and sorting structural possibilities, and they include a semiotic apparatus. This way, certain structures are selected (allowed), and others are excluded (not allowed). A teacher should not, for instance, express private opinions about her students in the classroom, which would be ethically unacceptable. Furthermore, a journalist should not use excessively colloquial language in her texts; otherwise, she may lose reader credibility.

Language, therefore, can be understood as a social element at all levels: every language is a structure of meaning; discourse orders are structured in social practices, and social events materialize this potential in texts. For this reason, Fairclough (2003) points out, texts should not be understood only as effects of the potentialities made available by language. It is necessary to recognize the existence and influence of the conventions underlying discourse.

A concept recovered from Foucault (1971),[14] the order of discourse is defined by Fairclough (2003, p.24) as "a network of social practices in its language aspect." In discourses, genres, and styles, particular language possibilities are selected and others are

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[14] FOUCAULT, M. *L'ordre du discours.* Leçon inaugurale au Collège de France prononcée le 2 décembre 1970. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

excluded. Additionally, these conventions and orders of discourse embody specific ideologies. Thus, orders of discourse organize the social sphere by controlling linguistic variability in different areas of social life.

The order of discourse, as proposed by Foucault (1971),[15] is a fundamental concept in Fairclough's model of discourse analysis. Considering that discourse is the product of discursive practices, it is controlled, regulated; it must always submit to the order of discourse (FOUCAULT, 1971),[16] which is based on the possible relationships between discourse, subjects, history, and discursive practices.

Fairclough (1989) also highlights the relationship between discourse and power, explaining that we can refer to the order of discourse of a social institution, whose structures constitute specific discourses, as well as to the order of discourse of society as a whole, which, in turn, structures orders of discourse from several institutions in specific ways. Fairclough thus shows that power also manifests itself in the ability to control orders of discourse, since structural changes occur through changes in power relations, whether in social institutions or in society. The author also emphasizes that one aspect of this control is ideological.

Resende (2018) revisits the critical-realistic approach to discursive studies by Fairclough (2003) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) in order to compose a theoretical proposal that incorporates the learning of decolonial thinking, emphasizing the structures of race and gender, among others. From the identity meanings of discourse, expressed and performed in texts, it is possible, in the case of the present study, to investigate how identities and identifications are constructed in texts when discussing the identification of black women in the text written by white students from UFBA. The following discursive categories will be summoned for this purpose: representation of social actors (VAN LEEUWEN, 2008) and appraisal (MARTIN; ROSE, 2003), in addition to some interpersonal linguistic resources (FUZER; CABRAL, 2014) to investigate representations of black women in whiteness discourse among UFBA students.

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[15] For full reference, see footnote 14.
[16] For full reference, see footnote 14.

4 Representations of Black Women by White UFBA Students

For this analysis, we used a sample from broader research, in which the perception of whiteness by self-declared white students from UFBA was investigated. At that time, the students answered a survey about racial matters, given our objective of investigating their perception of the privileges associated with belonging to the white race. The same survey was sent to another group of students, in addition to two questions that specifically address the situation of black women in Brazil.

In this work, we analyze responses given to the new survey's following questions: *Do you think that women of different races are treated differently by society in general? If so, how? Could you give an example? (it does not have to be personal).*

In addition to this second questionnaire, this analysis will also consider the focus group held on June 10, 2019, which included the participation of three undergraduate students – majoring in Interdisciplinary Baccalaureate and Literary Studies – who declared themselves to be white. The theme involved a discussion of race-based quotas for admission to Brazilian public universities. Also relevant to this debate is the experience of the researcher herself at the university in daily activities (in the classroom, for instance) and in discussions on racial issues at the university.

Fifty-two undergraduate UFBA students enrolled in the Humanities Interdisciplinary Baccalaureate evening course answered the second questionnaire. The group was composed of students who were: 25 black (48%),[17] 16 white (31%), ten brown (19%), and one person who did not identify as any race (2%). The racial profile of the research participants is similar to the profile of the Bahian population, which is 76% black and brown,[18] and also similar to UFBA itself, whose student body is composed of 75% of black and brown students.[19] Before going into the discursive specifics related to the treatment received by women according to their race, some observations are worth mentioning with concern to the perception about the privileges that whiteness offers.

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[17] Rounded to the nearest whole number.
[18] PNAD/IBGE 2018.
[19] V Pesquisa Nacional de Perfil dos Graduandos das IFES 2018 (ANDIFES).

The 16 students who consider themselves white admit the existence of racism in Brazil, as suggested by their answers to Question 12: *Do you think there is racism in Brazil? If so, how does it manifest itself?* For example:

> a.   Definitely, it manifests itself in society as a whole, even among kids. Therefore, non-white people are always treated differently. (P31)[20]
> b.   Yes. It is manifested in that "little joke" told within a group of friends, and also through people's looks and judgments. (P35)
> c.   There is disguised racism, hidden by society, manifested mainly in "harmless" comments in the media or conversations with friends. (P38)

In these responses, the surroundings associated with racist attitudes are informal face-to-face interactions in the physical world and daily life, but also in media contexts and, in a broader sense, "society as a whole." However, racism is defined in vague terms – for instance, it is not clear in what sense "non-white people" are "treated differently," nor by whom, whereas there is reinforcement in the adverb "always."

Some answers reveal a more profound perception when mentioning, for example, issues related to inequality of access, representation, and violence:

> d.   Yes, in maintaining social inequality, in social representation, in offering opportunities for climbing the social ladder, and the rates of violence and mortality. (P28)
> e.   Yes, but in the most varied explicit and non-explicit forms, due to the police targeting black children and youth, the murder rate of black people, racist jokes, and many other examples. (P30)

Clearly, this is not an attempt to measure the consequences of racism, all of the perverse and devoid of logic, arising from the fiction of whiteness superiority. However, by emphasizing participants' answers (28 and 30), it is possible to observe a deeper reflection elicited by the question through the scope of its consequences; that is, there was a more sophisticated perception about the consequences of racism. The focus group also shows a structural perspective related to the Law of Racial Quotas, seen as a means of *ensuring the*

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[20] The participants who answered the survey will be identified by the letter P, followed by a randomly ascribed number; for example: P31.

right to basic dignity (PGF01)[21] after recognizing *a gap in public education* (PGF02); i.e., it also discussed the issue of inequality of access as being a result of racism. In any case, it was observed that this understanding involves the naïve assumption that access to higher education is a right, on the one hand, and is related with positions of dignity, on the other, which ends up reinforcing assumed subordinations.

In the set of previous responses, moreover, there was mention of racism in informal relationships and among friends, which also has harmful consequences in terms of subjectivity and access inequality, as indicated by Fanon (1967),[22] for example. A relevant meaning in the responses of this set is the diffuse aspect of everyday racism in "society as a whole" and its opaque, "hidden" and "disguised" character, but noticeable in "people's looks." It is also important to note that none of the 52 participants who answered the questionnaire denied the presence of racism in Brazil.

The affirmation or denial of racism is not a consensual topic, even in a city like Salvador. In a class called "Portuguese Language as a Communication Tool," offered in the first semester of 2019, when we discussed a topic presented in an opinion piece that would be produced by the students, the topic being race relations in Brazil, a white student declared: "*but here in Salvador there isn't racism, is there?*", which provoked an outraged reaction in a group of students, both black and white. This was the only direct statement proclaimed throughout the research, over about a year, which explicitly contested the existence of racism in Brazil. A naturalized perception of race-based subalternities and privileges was shown, also reproducing powerful discourses like the aforementioned claim to Brazilian racial democracy and miscegenation.

During the same semester, the author registered in the classroom a reference to the supposed existence of reverse racism. This time, the subject was "Portuguese Language, Power, and Cultural Diversity," and it was during a discussion about racism that a student, who is also white, stated that *racism is against any race*, also generating incensed reactions and a heated discussion with his classmates. This statement reveals the lack of perception of

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[21] The students who participated in the focus group will be identified by the letters PGF, followed by a random number – for instance, PGF01.
[22] For full reference, see footnote 7.

the asymmetric power relationship between black and white people in Brazil, as pointed out by Damaceno (2016). A black person cannot practice reverse racism against white people, since the structuring power of whiteness is the beacon of Brazilian race relations. If the social group of black people has never enjoyed a position of power above the social group of white people, how could they be racist? Furthermore, racism concerns a structural issue involving the delimitation of stigma and privilege, not isolated personal positions, as the rhetoric of reverse racism may imply.

Regardless, the almost generalized perception that we are a racist society does not lead these students to become interested in discussions about themes related to racism, actively assuming an antiracist stance. This was often perceived in the academic scope, in congresses and conferences whose theme was related to issues of blackness. In general, at these UFBA events, the public is mostly black. Surprisingly, even when the speeches were given by prominent people, such as, for example, Nilma Lino Gomes or Conceição Evaristo. One gets the impression that white people are not interested in hearing what black people have to say about racism, which could indicate a lack of interest in race issues.

Such indifference reinforces the importance of Angela Davis' speech: "*In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti racist*." Being antiracist assumes there is an interest in knowing the cause of racism so that actions can be articulated and there is availability to fight against racism continually. For a white person in a racist country, being antiracist also means a willingness to give up racial privileges.

Concerning the perception of the numerous privileges enjoyed by whiteness, the answers to Question 7 – *Do you consider that there is heightened/lessened difficulty in your life because of your skin color? Can you provide an example?* – reveal the perception of privileges mainly associated with the fact that they are not victims of racism:

> f.   There is certainly lessened difficulty since it never brought me discomfort or moments of discrimination. (P34)
> g.   Yes, because I am white, I don't suffer racial discrimination. (P36)

In these cases, although the obstacles of racism are perceived and (implicitly) identified, the access that this same racism provides to white people seems even more opaque,

which could be an aspect of the acceptance of the perverse discourses of meritocracy. However, there are answers more attentive to access as a privilege:

> h. Yes. As a white person in society, I have fewer difficulties regarding job opportunities and in the way I am treated. But, like everyone else, difficulties, and obstacles to achieve my desired goals. (P33)
> i. The lessened difficulty, yes. Unfortunately, we live in a racist country, where people tend to judge one another by their skin color. And yes, I have been "privileged" for being white. (P35)

Let us observe, for instance, the answer given by Participant 33 and the use of the argumentative operator[23] *but*, in "But, like everyone else, difficulties and obstacles to achieve my desired goals." The use of the argumentative operator *but* indicates the insertion of a more persuasive argument in the latter statement, consequently weakening the previous statement ("As a white person in society, I have less difficulties regarding job opportunities and in the way I am treated"). This way, the response seeks to match the level of difficulties and obstacles faced by black and white people in attempting to realize their aspirations, thus mitigating racial differences that were previously in focus.

Participant 35's response uses quotation marks when referring to whiteness privileges. One of the primary uses of quotation marks is to show disagreement about the original meaning of the word cited. Can it be inferred, then, that there is realistically no such thing as whiteness privileges? Or that these privileges are unimportant? Since the word "privilege" was not used in the question, if the quotation marks are meant to resume another voice, what voice would it be? What general enunciator was being borrowed, and with what meanings did the "privileges" assume in this issue? In the sense of denial, in comparison to the meritocratic discourse? There is no answer.

In the focus group, when the researcher asked a direct question about the fairness of the Law of Racial Quotas, the first aspect addressed by participants was the matter of evaluating the candidate: *you have to prove the reason for being included in the quota*, *you have to prove that you are black* (PGF01), thus highlighting the initial problems associated

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[23] The function of argumentative operators, according to argumentative semantics (KOCH, 2006), is to guide the interlocutor towards a certain end or for the discursive orientation of the statement. Other examples are: at least, already, yet, therefore, etc.

with this law, along with its many loopholes (PGF03). In other words, the answers initially focused on this law's problems and not on whether it is, in fact, fair and necessary. Group participants interpreted *fairness* from the perspective of the fair application of the law, and not from the justice that the law promotes through affirmative action repairing historical losses. This was a turning point in the conversation, leading the debate in a different direction than was expected from that question.

A direct answer occurred only about five minutes after the specific question and, even so, in response to a new stimulus from the researcher, when a participant stated that *the Law of Racial Quotas is fair, but I also agree with her [PGF01], that you have to know how [it is applied]* (PGF02). This statement about the law's fairness was followed by the argumentative operator *but*, indicating that the focus of this statement is also on the *breach* of the law.

The theme of colorism also emerged in the focus group and revealed a perception that skin tone distinctions should be a considered factor for admission into public universities through the quota system. *I think there is a big difference between dark-skinned and light-skinned blacks* (PGF02), and *I think that darker-skinned blacks should be more targeted than others* (PGF02). According to Almeida (2019), the unifying element shared by black people is racism, regardless of their skin tone; thus, a person becomes a potential victim of racism as soon as she is identified as black. Therefore, is it necessary to talk about colorism in the context of discussions about racial quotas? Is it possible to measure racism suffered by *more or less* black people? Moreover, if the goal is to correct historical injustice (SOUSA SANTOS, 2009), does it make sense to consider a scale of blackness?

Furthermore, this study observed that participants voiced what Fanon (1967)[24] identifies as the harmful effects of racism for both black and white people. In the author's words, this is a *neurotically inclined* behavior, concerning a feeling of inferiority, in the case of black people, and a feeling of superiority, in the case of white people. This phenomenon was addressed in the focus group: *because I think there is general suffering, you know? For both whites and blacks, I think there is some tension* (PGF02). On the one hand, this speech identifies the malaise that structural racism imposes on society, on all racial configurations

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[24] For full reference, see footnote 7.

that compose this racist fabric. On the other hand, this malaise is considerably appeased in Brazil, and the generated tension has not been enough to expose the conflict to the bone. It is thanks to this mollified tension that structural racism has continued to operate for centuries without radical change. Fanon's voice also echoes here, with his call for open conflict, the only tension capable of generating destructive social changes.

Let us now focus on the specific answers to Question 10: *Do you think that women of different races are treated differently by society in general? If so, how? Could you give an example? (It does not have to be personal).* The goal here is to investigate how students who claim to be white identify black women and their routine confrontation with gendered racism.

In the responses, we found 20 references to this identification, and the most recurrent process in the texts about this specific theme was the attributive relational process,[25] through which characteristics are attributed to members of a particular category. Thence it is possible to observe how the texts echo images of the category 'black woman,' even though in all occurrences, they negatively evaluate this constructed image or use distancing strategies.

Among the characteristics attributed to black women, the most recurrent answer was related to their objectification. Here are some examples:

> j.   Black women are always hypersexualized for having "the color of sin." (P29)
> k.   [I see] black women being belittled, objectified, differentiated from others. (P32)
> l.   [Because] black women, with their body type, have always been sexualized by the media. (P38)
> m.   Black women are, unfortunately, viewed as objects which are used and then thrust aside. (P39)

In the highlighted excerpts, the item "black women" occupies the position of *bearer*[26] in sentences, and the related attributes are negative ("always hypersexualized," "belittled, objectified, differentiated from others," "sexualized" and "used and then thrust aside"). The

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[25] Processes are semantic categories that discursively materialize our lived experiences, as suggested by the Systemic-Functional Grammar (FUZER; CABRAL, 2014). Processes are verbal groups: material, mental, relational, existential, verbal, and behavioral.

[26] In the structure of the attributive relational sentence, the bearer is the entity to which a trait is attributed. (FUZER; CABRAL, 2014).

attribution of these characteristics is negatively assessed, since they are not attributes stated as their own, rather identified as social generalizations from which the responses try to distance themselves. They are perceptions of how black women would, as a rule, be perceived, "hypersexualized," "objectified." However, through this discourse, it is not possible to identify who precisely is constructing this image of black women, which is suggested by the linguistic expressions *always*, *for having*, *with* [their body type], *others*. The use of expressions such as *always* and of the present continuous *I see* eternalizes and naturalizes the situation: that is, black women are seen in this way and this is pacified in our society.

Only two statements do not exclude the social actor who, in this representation, constructs the image attributed to black women (here exemplified by "body type … always been sexualized by the media"). Nevertheless, in all other statements, it is not possible to identify the subject who "hypersexualizes" black women, who considers their skin as "the color of sin," who "belittles and objectifies" them, who sees them "as an object," who uses and thrusts them aside. Moreover, what does 'used and then thrust aside' mean exactly? Furthermore, why is there no need to render the meaning more explicit? It seems that certain assumptions are considered to be shared by the audience (the researcher, in this case), assumed as capable of filling these significant gaps with the assigned cultural meanings, with the stories so often repeated in literature, on television, in everyday experiences. This explains how much may simply not be said.

The expurgation of the actor from the oppression, then, becomes merely eradication among so many meanings of ambush. This may suggest the influence of patriarchy on the whiteness discourse, a kind of protection for the group that objectifies and hypersexualizes. The sharing contexts evoked a conscious or unconscious reflection of the diffuse quality of patriarchy-coloniality over experiences.

The use of deverbal adjectives also contributes to the concealment of meanings and social actors. *Hypersexualized*, *belittled*, *objectified*, *differentiated*, *sexualized*, *used and thrust aside* refer to actions in which the purposes are known, but not the actors, for those actions are not linked to explicit agents.

Concerning *interpersonal linguistic resources* in these brief examples, one notes the use of the modal adjunct *always*, which indicates how recurrently black women are identified as eroticized bodies, as well as the use of the adjunct *unfortunately*, which reveals the point of view being enunciated – in this case, a negative assessment of the finding that *black women are viewed as objects*.

Despite the interpersonal distancing elements, the circumstance *with their body type* (similar to *having "the color of sin"*) broadens the meaning of the sentence when presenting a cause for the sexualization of black women. Are we facing a justification for violence against black women? Just like the social criminalization of black people as a form of justifying massive incarceration (BORGES, 2018)?

The students also referred to the question about black women's self-esteem:

> n.   [Yes, there is greater female representation of white women], which ends up violating the self-esteem of black women. (P28)
> o.   [Yes, the beauty norm is still centered on white women], thus generating low self-esteem in black women. (P34)

The examples above highlight the importance of black women's self-esteem concerning the existing beauty standard focused on traits associated with whiteness. It is relevant to note the use of the behavioral process *violating*, which also constitutes a negative assessment by the enunciator about the enunciated action, that is, *the aggression against black women's self-esteem*. The use of the material process *generating* also deserves attention since its extension, *low self-esteem,* demonstrates the scope of this action in relation to black women, who, in this sentence, symptomatically have space in the circumstance, i.e., in sentence periphery (*in many black women*). In these two examples, it is also not possible to identify who is conducting violent action.

Final Considerations

Our analysis suggests that the perception of white privilege, even when affirmed, is still permeated with ideas that can substantiate racist practices and/or discourses. For

example, by first pointing out the shortcomings but not the need and urgency of the Law of Racial Quotas, or when white privilege is perceived as merely not being a victim of racism, as we saw in the excerpts presented. This may point to the lack of reflection by white people about their privilege, given the naturalization of racism.

Furthermore, this study observes how the representation of black women is still based on socially constructed stereotypes in a profoundly racist society like ours. Such representation may be responsible for the alleged low self-esteem of black women, although greater black visibility is currently seeking, quite successfully in fact, to lead another direction. This greater visibility also generates violent reactions towards maintaining white privileges, especially from white people who are still not able to perceive the set of privileges they enjoy and that originate from their racial category. Such a violent reaction illustrates the neurotic orientation of white individuals in their supposed superiority (FANON, 1967),[27] in addition to reinforcing Biko's statement (1978),[28] for whom racism is a white problem, not a black one.

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[27] For full reference, see footnote 7.
[28] For full reference, see footnote 8.

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We declare that the authors had access to the *corpus* of the research, that they participated actively in the discussion of results and revised and approved the final version of the paper.

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