

**Between Invisibility, ‘Discursive Whitening’ and Hypersexualization:
‘Controlling Images’ Over the Term *Black* and Its Place in
Enunciation / *Entre a invisibilidade, o branqueamento discursivo e a
hipersexualização: imagens de controle sobre o termo negro e o seu lugar
na enunciação***

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ABSTRACT

Based on the statements that (1) the word in interaction manifests itself as an ideological sign, oriented to a precise social audience, circumscribed in a given historical time; (2) that *race* is a language and (3) that geographic displacement involves a clash between different systems of meaning, I interpret data from the cultural translation process for the term *black* [*negro*, in Portuguese], based on the enunciations of two Portuguese language learners in a course for immigrant mothers held in Southern Brazil. The data presented were generated as part of an ongoing ethnographic investigation.¹ The discussion points to *controlling images* that persist in the social imaginary from effacement procedures, *discursive whitening* and *hypersexualization* of the term *negro* [black]. Data also reveals that the processes of attributing meanings around *race* are in full dispute in the current socio-historical context.

KEYWORDS: Discursive whitening; Hypersexualization; Invisibility; Controlling images

RESUMO

Partindo das premissas de que (1) a palavra em interação manifesta-se enquanto signo ideológico orientado a um auditório social preciso, circunscrito a um dado tempo histórico; (2) de que raça é uma linguagem e (3) de que o deslocamento geográfico envolve um choque entre diferentes sistemas de significação, interpreto dados do processo de tradução cultural para o termo negro, a partir de enunciações de duas aprendizes de língua portuguesa de um curso para mães imigrantes realizado no sul do Brasil. Os dados apresentados foram gerados no âmbito de uma investigação etnográfica em curso. A discussão aponta para imagens de controle que persistem no imaginário social, a partir de procedimentos de apagamento, de branqueamento discursivo e de hipersexualização do termo negro. Os dados revelam, ainda, que os processos de

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atribuição de sentidos em torno de raça encontram-se em plena disputa no contexto sócio-histórico atual.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Branqueamento discursivo; Hipersexualização; Invisibilidade; Imagens de controle

Introduction

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Vološinov (1973)² laments the lack of a well-established conceptual field around the concept of ideology. This lack does not prevent the author from embracing the idea of *ideological sign* at the center of his reflections on the word in interaction. Vološinov understands utterance as oriented to specific social audiences. In this direction, the utterance materializes sedimented ideas that circulate in certain historical times.

Emphasizing the temporal duplicity of each enunciation, the author conceives it as an unrepeatable act, at the same time as it is a historical one. The utterance is unrepeatable because it is updated, with each new utterance, by the intention and by the unique communication situation; it is historical because it depends on a sequence of uses, with a certain stability, which allows the process of meaning making as echoes of the past (Vološinov, 1973).³

In the echo, the enunciator recognizes his voice, as it is the same timbre to be echoed. However, the utterance does not wholly belong to the enunciator, since it fulfills itself in relation to another, and in the relationship with this other. It is also about the appropriation of someone else's word in the course of its destiny (Vološinov, 1973).⁴ In this pendular and harlequin style movement of dialogue, the utterance belongs to the enunciator regarding the originality of the act, however, by not being able to completely get rid of the other for the attribution and negotiation of meanings, the utterance remains in a space between the speaker and the social audience to which it is directed, configuring an individual and collective act at the same time. In Vološinov's (1973, p.117)⁵ words:

² VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by Ladislav Matejka and I. R. Titunik. New York and London: University of Michigan, 1973.

³ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁴ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁵ For reference, see footnote 2.

The mechanism of this process is located, not in the individual soul, but in Society - It is the function of society to select and to make grammatical (adapt to the grammatical structure of its language) just those factors in the active and evaluative reception of utterances that are *socially vital and constant and, hence, that are grounded in the economic existence of the particular community of speakers* (emphasis added).

Vološinov (1973, p.117)⁶ mentions the “socially vital and constant” elements of evaluative reception that make sense within a particular community of speakers. These elements of ideological cohesion, however, also allow an opening to the new.

It is about this novelty dressed in the past, about this undecidability of the ideological sign, that the reflections I have selected for this article deal with, caught by the gaze of the diasporic translation that raises the suspension of fixed meanings for signs, as observed by Stuart Hall (2019).⁷ From the analysis of data generated in an ethnographic investigation in a Portuguese language course for immigrant mothers, I focus on the strangeness of two students regarding the use of the term *negro*⁸ in interactions in Florianópolis.

Marlene and Rosario,⁹ both from Venezuela, question whether or not Brazilian society would be racist in the face of the discursive mechanisms they witness. Faced with the failure of their interpretive frameworks, I develop a debate around ideas operating in racial language that inform the uses of the term *negro* emerging from the situated interactions under analysis. Considering the clash between the students’ systems of meaning and the one found in face of the displacement of meaning, I draw attention to the process of naturalization of social places crystallized in the social imagination for people who are read as *black*.

To guide the interpretation, I use the perspective of Patricia Hill Collins (2000)¹⁰ on *controlling images*, a concept that condenses the past and present into social

⁶ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁷ HALL, S. The Multicultural Question. In: HALL, S.; MORLEY, D. (ed.). *Essential Essays: Identity and Diaspora*. v. 2. Duke University Press. 2019, pp.95-133.

⁸ The term *negro*, as a way to refer to African Brazilian people in Brazil, as discussed in this article, is a sign under dispute in the battlefield of meaning making about race in Brazil, a system in which the phenotype aspect is central to the racial classification, in opposition to other places in which the place of origin plays a major role in defining racial belonging.

⁹ Marlene made a point of using her own name, *Rosario* is a pseudonym.

¹⁰ COLLINS, P. H. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2a ed. Routledge, 2000.

stereotypes that re-update certain ideologies of group categorization. This strategy preserves the systems of oppression that make them possible: in this case, racism.

From a heterogeneous sociocultural and linguistic view, as proposed by Signorini (2002), which privileges the look on the situated phenomenon for the attribution of legitimacy to the subjects instead of looking at the “legitimate language” as a reified object in the enunciative scene. What matters in my reflection is to point out some of the “traits” that constitute this order which, according to the author, would be circumscribed in a given historical time and shaped by the originality of the enunciative inscription (Signorini, 2006).

Language learning is a process of apprehension of meanings within specific systems of meaning that always operate in context, based on the relationship with other people’s speech (Vološinov, 1973).¹¹ In this discussion, I emphasize how the research participants, in their search for legitimacy as Portuguese speakers, point to important issues for reflection on the social relations and ideologies present in the use of the term *negro* in the Brazilian socio-historical context.

1 Race as a Language

According to Almeida (2018), “the notion of *race* as a reference to different categories of human beings is a phenomenon of modernity that dates back to the mid-16th century” (Almeida, 2018, p.19).¹² At first, as religious discourse, then anthropological and, finally, discursive (Hall, 1997),¹³ it is only in the 19th century that it gains deterministic contours, from the applications of Darwinism to the social field (Schwarcz, 2012). The idea of an essential difference between human groups that could be within anyone’s reach serves the discursive strategy of *race* as a text that can be read from visible indexes (Hall, 1997).¹⁴ Technological achievements allowed Anthropology to use varied measurement resources to associate the arguments that attested to this supposed essential difference (Seyferth, 1996).

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 2.

¹² Original in Portuguese: “a noção de *raça* como referência a distintas categorias de seres humanos é um fenômeno da modernidade que remonta aos meados do século XVI.”

¹³ HALL, S. *Stuart Hall: Race the Floating Signifier* (1997). Conference at Goldsmith College, London, Media Education Foundation, 1997.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 13.

Without an effective way to identify genes, physical characteristics made up a visual apparatus that indicated one's belonging to a particular ethnic group. In a metonymic procedure, taking the part for the whole, the phenotypic aspect is taken as an index of behavior x or y, superior or inferior, depending on the belonging to a given group – this discourse persists in common sense (Hall, 1997).¹⁵ The colonial discourse, therefore, dealt with a set of behaviors and moral inclinations taken as continuous characteristic of a racial group (Schucman, 2018).

Racial theories had been considered pseudoscience, as they justify their hypotheses without due scientific proof that there would be an essential difference that could lead a subject classified as a given group to a determined behavior (Schwarcz, 2012). In the mid-twentieth century, the advance of studies in genetics destroyed the hypotheses of racialist theorists. These investigations found that miscegenation is a characteristic of all human beings and groups, and no gene has been identified that indicates a given behavior or a specific moral inclination, a fundamental assumption of the racialist theory (Munanga, 2019).

As Hall (1997)¹⁶ noted, the racialist procedure is discursive rather than biological. It is a framework of assumptions that operates regarding language to allow the possibility of reading a subject as a member of this or that racial group based on visible indexes. The author emphasizes that the relationship between genetics and phenotype is a discursive construction and not a reality, which continues to guide racial classification (Hall, 1997).¹⁷

Within the imagined groups, the difference would be the same, if not greater than that imagined in the presumably distinct groups in the elucubration about *race* (Hall, 2019).¹⁸ From this position, Hall concludes that *race* is like a language, a floating signifier, and points to the need for investigations within each specific framework of meanings:

The idea that race might be described as a signifier is not one that, in my experience, has penetrated very deeply into or done very effectively the work of unhinging and dislodging what I would call common sense assumptions and every day ways of talking out race and of making

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 13.

¹⁶ For reference, see footnote 13.

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 13.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

sense about race in our society today and I am really talking, in part, about that great untied, dirty world in which race matters outside of the academy, as well as the light we may through from inside (Hall, 1997).¹⁹

Considering the concept of ideology as underlying the utterance, Hall (2019),²⁰ a reader of Vološinov, observes the historical echo of racial ideology:

the “postcolonial” does *not* signal a simple before/after chronological succession. The movement from colonization to postcolonial times does *not* imply that the problems of colonialism have been resolved or replaced by some conflict-free era. Rather, the “postcolonial” marks the passage from one historical power configuration or conjuncture to another (Hall 1996a).⁵ Problems of dependency, underdevelopment, and marginalization, typical of the “high” colonial period, persist into the postcolonial. However, these relations are *resumed* in a new configuration (Hall, 2019, p.99).²¹

Assuming that there is no immediate structural suppression for the gestation of an entirely new framework of relationships, it is possible to infer that the ideologies that support the colonial system persist in the *post*-colonial period:

Once they were articulated as unequal relations of power and exploitation between colonized and colonizing societies. Now they are restaged and displaced as struggles between indigenous social forces, as internal contradictions and sources of destabilization *within* the decolonized society, or between them and the wider global system (Hall, 2019, p.99).²²

The novelty in it would be the garments. The modification of production systems would not, by itself, be able to put an end to the ideologies that produce it. Since racial theory was destined to the base of the societal pyramid for populations read as *black*, it is important to realize who might be identified by the term *black* in the world when it is used in the utterance, in light of the social and economic relations established in the period that one wants to interpret.

¹⁹ For reference, see footnote 13.

²⁰ For reference, see footnote 7.

²¹ For reference, see footnote 7.

²² For reference, see footnote 7.

In the colonial period in Brazil, from the colonizer's point of view, the term black was applied to African and Afro-descendant populations that constituted a "subordinate" way of working and living, a life for the "other." The country in which the system of exploitation of Africans was the longest lasting one in the world, also saw the transition from the slave production mode to free labor with an ideological echo of 300 years. If the reiteration of acts is what forges the notion of culture (Giddens, 1990),²³ it seems unreasonable to think that, after just over 100 years of slavery system, social relations – and, with them, the discourses that founded them in the period, – have become extinct altogether. As Schwarcz (2012, p.37) observes: "slavery, in the first place, legitimized inferiority, which from a social value was naturalized. While it lasted, inhibited any discussion about citizenship."²⁴ After all, it was not as a result of the enlightenment and humanization of the brutalized colonizers that slavery ended in Brazil, but as a result of intense external pressure (Schwarcz, 2012). The reflexes are seen in the policies of exclusion of black people after the so-called abolition of slavery (Almeida, 2018).

Thus, if we understand *race* as a political and economic concept that structures contemporary societies crossing all its institutions (Almeida, 2018), it is reasonable to think that the discourse of *race* is on the same axis of production of the social configuration, changing itself as a meaning making system only in time, in history and, according to evidences of the suspension of meanings provided by diasporic experience, also in geography (Hall, 2019a).

In addition to *race* as a language, Hall (1985, p.107)²⁵ also understands that "[the term black] functions like a language" which formation is unique in each context. Thus, each system of meaning would trigger at each moment in historical time distinct semantic networks for the term black. Hall (1985)²⁶ exemplifies the use of the term black in Jamaica to explain an exchange in the discursive chain of negative connotations, which had been associated with the colonial period. Later it was related to a semantic field that began to operate from a positive point of view, i.e.: it was re-signified, with the advent of Rastafarianism, Reggae music and Bob Marley. These and other symbolic elements

²³ GIDDENS, A. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990.

²⁴ In Portuguese: "a escravidão, em primeiro lugar, legitimou a inferioridade, que de social tornava-se natural, e, enquanto durou, inibiu qualquer discussão sobre cidadania."

²⁵ HALL, S. Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and the Post-Structuralist Debates. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, v. 2, n. 2, pp.91-114, June 1985.

²⁶ For reference, see Footnote 25.

modified the system of meanings for the black term in that specific socio-historical context.

In present day Brazil, the meanings attributable to the term black are ambivalent. On the one hand, we witness a use that points to the visibility of racial marking, invoking a chain of positive connotations for the term black. This language is expressed through clothing, African-influenced religions, symbols associated with black struggles for liberation, such as Black Power, Rap, Hip-Hop, Beyoncé's Pop, Black Lives Matter movement, Slam Poetry and other manifestations of re-existence. These positive images follow the debate demanding public policies to repair the historical faults for African descent people in the process of abolition of slavery in the country.

On the other hand, negative meanings to the term black persist. They come from both others and from the black subjects themselves. These subjects, faced with the imposed assimilationism, sometimes seek to whiten themselves to conquer social places of privilege, still designed for white people (Munanga, 2019), in a kind of undeclared apartheid.

On one side or the other, the effects of the racial whitening strategy are present. In the following section, I discuss some of the characteristics of this ideal of whitening in Brazilian migration planning, which configures the country as endowed with selective hospitality.

2 The Racial Whitening Strategy

Brazilian intellectuality in the late 19th and early 20th centuries interpreted racial diversity as a problem. Applying racialist theories to their own context and projecting a possible future for that nascent people, scholars translated miscegenation in an ambivalent way, sometimes as a sign of degeneration, sometimes as hope in view of miscegenation, which would permit whitening of the local people (Munanga, 2019). In both cases, the project of erasing the black presence is evident.

The replacement of slave labor by European immigrants, in search of whitening the Brazilian population, as a possibility of "racial improvement" of the Brazilian people, an explicitly eugenic strategy (Seyferth, 1986, 1996, 1995), begins to be generated in parallel with the slavery abolition process (Schwarcz, 2012). From the 1930s onwards,

Brazil was still searching for a national identity. In the contest of who would have the best definition for that, miscegenation as an identity characteristic of the Brazilian people won. Narratives based on the idea of harmony among the three *races* (white, black and indigenous people), made Brazilian identity stand under the model of idealized racial democracy (Schwarcz, 2012). It is important to emphasize that only then does the *negro* element enter as a composite of the Brazilian formative matrix. Made invisible in Brazilian narratives, the Africans and their descendants were left aside as the indigenous people were preferred, constituting the native element, in the imagination of Brazilian society that was built in the nineteenth century (Schwarcz, 2012).

Seyferth (1995) observes that the concept of racial or ethnic belonging as an index of morality has strongly affected migration planning in Brazil. Germans, for example, initially targeted for immigration because they were presumed to feel pleasure for working, were later left aside, as their sense of nationality and strong ethnic identification did not favor crossbreeding with other ethnicities. Unlike the Portuguese, Spanish and Italians, the Germans were not open to miscegenation. This degree of closedness was not suitable for the whitening plan that was being devised.

In the migratory project of European populations to Brazil, a series of conflicts in social relations was drawn in the country's imagination towards a white future. In the 19th century, southern Brazil was the intended place for this experience, as we will see in the next section.

3 Invisibility of the Black Presence in Santa Catarina

Santa Catarina is imagined as an extension of Europe in Brazil, a place where the whitening project would have worked due to the “natural” will of its people to progress (Leite, 1991b). This essentialist imagination, notably racialist, did not happen without the effacement of other groups that compound the region, such as the African, the Afro-descendant, that is, the black, and the indigenous people.

Critical reviews of the official history of Santa Catarina have highlighted the invisibility of Africans and Afro-descendants in narratives about the occupation and the State development process (Leite, 1991a; 1991b; Cardoso, 2006). These authors point out that, despite the black people's contribution in sectors such as agriculture, whaling,

domestic services and others, the presence of Africans and their descendants is minimized due to the lower degree of dependence on enslaved labor that the state's economy had compared to other regions of the country (Leite, 1991a; 1991b; Cardoso, 2006). Leite (1991a) states that Santa Catarina's development is often referred to as an exclusive white achievement.

According to data from the *Arquivo Histórico de Santa Catarina* [Historical Archives of Santa Catarina], the presence of the population in the province of Santa Catarina in 1833 was composed of 1,124 white, 97 indigenous, 564 brown and 422 black individuals, adding up to 2,207 free subjects. The enslaved totaled 260 subjects, including 78 brown and 182 black individuals (Machado, 2001). This population would multiply in the 19th century "both due to vegetative growth and, mainly, due to the state having received a large number of immigrants from São Paulo, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul, reaching a total of 80 thousand inhabitants by the end of the century." (Machado, 2001, p.18)²⁷

Data on the enslaved population in Lages point to the presence of 1,000 subjects in 1840, 1,195 in 1856, 2012 in 1872 and 1,522 in 1883. Assuming that the number of freed black individuals has always been greater than that of enslaved ones, this picture leads the author to

re-evaluate the old dominant statement in Santa Catarina's historiography, which always considered the black population contingent to be of little significance in the *planalto serrano* [highland plateau], basing this assertion solely on the defective censuses of the slave population (MACHADO, 2001, p.18).²⁸

In the frame above, the author takes the term "freedom" as a mere euphemism, considering the condition under which workers were called "freed" or "free":

we use the word free only in opposition to the enslaved condition, since this poor free man (mestizo, descendant of Africans, indigenous people and even the Portuguese, the so-called *biriva* [type of Southern

²⁷ Original in Portuguese: "tanto por crescimento vegetativo como, principalmente, por receber um grande número de imigrantes de São Paulo, do Paraná e do Rio Grande do Sul, alcançando no final do século o total de 80 mil habitantes."

²⁸ Original in Portuguese: "reavaliar a antiga afirmação dominante na historiografia catarinense, que sempre considerou o contingente populacional *negro* pouco significativo no planalto serrano, baseando essa assertiva unicamente nos censos estritos da população escrava."

hillbilly], the ranch hand and the resident attached to the large farm) was subject to the absolute power of land owners, *entangled by ties of compadrio* [brotherhood], subject to a set of obligations much more complex than those of the modern free worker, understood as one who simply sells his labor power (MACHADO, 2001, p.19).²⁹

With regard to interethnic relations in the context of the state, the depreciation of the other was a constant narrative. Arend (2001, p.34) states that one of the strategies of Brazilian elites to enhance the arrival of European immigrants to Brazil was the “dissemination of a discourse of valuing the immigrant.” According to the author:

In this discourse, European foreigners are described as hardworking and disciplined people, while Afro-descendants and Portuguese descendants, who had lived in Brazil since the colonial period, are considered lazy and without initiative (ARENDA, 2001, p.34).³⁰

The emphasis of historiographic accounts on the export-oriented economy contributes to erasing this presence, elevating the work of the European immigrant. In addition to hiding the differences in production conditions and in land property rights between Afro-descendants and Europeans, the idea of white people as morally better prepared for work was fostered. This idea often failed to point out that, while the European immigrants worked for themselves and their future generations, black people did it for the enrichment of the other, even after the so-called freedom. Arend (2001, p.36; emphasis mine) points out some of these issues in the following passage:

The lands in the province considered vacant by the imperial and local government became private property and the immigrants started to produce goods for the regional internal market and, later, for the national one. This view, with *economic focus*, leaving aside the other dimensions of the social, was present for a long time in Santa Catarina’s historiography that deals with the nineteenth century. *This vision transforms the immigrant, and especially the German, into the pioneer-entrepreneur.* The other groups – Afro-descendants, indigenous people,

²⁹ Original in Portuguese: “empregamos a palavra livre apenas em contraposição à condição escrava, uma vez que este homem livre pobre, mestiço, descendente de africanos, indígenas e mesmo de portugueses, enfim o biriva (tipo de gaúcho serrano), o peão de estância e o morador agregado à grande fazenda encontrava-se submetido ao poder absoluto dos grandes fazendeiros, *enredados por laços de compadrio*, sujeito a um conjunto de obrigações muito mais complexas que o trabalhador livre moderno, entendido como aquele que simplesmente vende a sua força de trabalho.”

³⁰ Original in Portuguese “Nesse discurso, os estrangeiros europeus são descritos como laboriosos e disciplinados, enquanto os afrodescendentes e descendentes de portugueses, que viviam no Brasil desde o período colonial, são considerados preguiçosos e sem iniciativa.”

Portuguese descendants, and even German immigrants who arrived in the province before 1950 – who, in the period, did not build similar worlds *are perceived as supporting characters or made invisible*.³¹

Silva (2001) points out processes of effacement, differentiation and depreciation of black people in Brazil in the coexistence with the white immigrant, despite the discourse of abolitionism being current in the city of Joinville. The author states that “if silence prevails in the history of the indigenous people, the African presence in the city’s history is not that different” (Silva, 2001, p.56).³² In research based on locals’ memories, she adds that:

African males and females hardly appear in reports about Joinville, the lines are few, which, unfortunately, *makes them so absent from the local historiography*. In the memoirs, the presence of *black* people often appears marked by a harmonious relationship [...], other statements point to the separation of Germans from Africans [...], though. Moreover, indications are that prejudice was present anyway as *black men and women were not well regarded in that society*, being them slaves or free, [...] although the press ratified how much the city disliked slavery, this did not mean that *black* people were seen as ‘equals’ (Silva, 2001, p.57).³³

In short, the idea of a profound differentiation in social relations seems to be a constant in these studies that strongly emphasize the effacement in memory, in official and historiographic records, a silence that helps to compose the imagination about the period. It is possible to admit a desire for the invisibility of the black element indicted by the lack of humane treatment in daily life, in the workplaces destined for these subjects

³¹ Original in Portuguese: “As terras da província consideradas devolutas pelo governo imperial e local tornaram-se propriedade privada e os imigrantes passaram a produzir mercadorias para o mercado interno regional e, depois, para o nacional. Este olhar, que centra o *foco no econômico* deixando de lado as outras dimensões do social, esteve presente por longa data na historiografia catarinense que versa sobre o século XIX. *Esta visão transforma o imigrante, e em especial o alemão, no desbravador-empresendedor*. Os demais grupos – os afrodescendentes, os silvícolas, os descendentes de portugueses, e inclusive os imigrantes alemães que chegaram na província antes de 1950 – que, no período, não construíram mundos semelhantes *são percebidos como personagens coadjuvantes ou então invisibilizados*.”

³² Original in Portuguese: “se da história dos índios o que prevalece é o silêncio, não muito difere a presença africana na história da cidade.”

³³ Original in Portuguese: “os africanos e africanas quase não aparecem nos relatos sobre Joinville, as falas são poucas, o que, infelizmente, *os torna tão ausentes da historiografia local*. Nas memórias, a presença negra aparece, muitas vezes, marcada por uma relação harmoniosa [...] todavia, outras falas apontam para a separação dos alemães em relação aos africanos [...] Aliás, o preconceito estava presente, ao que tudo indica, sendo escravo ou liberto, pois *os negros e negras não eram bem vistos naquela sociedade* [...] apesar de a imprensa ratificar o quanto à cidade repugnava a escravidão, *isso não significava que os negros eram vistos como ‘iguais’*.”

who, even after being freed, continued to live in precarious situations. As well as their existences, their perspectives on the living conditions, struggles and resistances they may have fought for were equally made invisible.

The whitening strategy, central to the Brazilian migratory project in the post-abolitionist period, is at the heart of the elaboration of stereotypes about subjects belonging to the group read as *black*, in conjunction with other markers of oppression that act mutually, such as class and gender, as we will see in next section.

4 Controlling Images

Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p.299)³⁴ names the creation of stereotypes in a matrix of domination as *controlling images*. As “matrix of domination,” the author calls “the overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society,” in her words:

a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g., race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age; and a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal (Collins, 2000, p.299).³⁵

Collins’ (2000)³⁶ social critical theory is based on the American *black* women standpoint of all classes, intellectuals who build knowledge as outsiders within dominant scientific production. The author does not limit herself to naming the instruments used by hegemonic thinking to maintain the social relations summarized in a given configuration. Collins (2000)³⁷ goes further, and also names the forms of resistance to it developed within American black women’s groups.

Controlling images serve the dominant group as an instrument of coercion to enclose subjects/groups in subordinate positions in the imaginary and, consequently, in the social structure. In the US context, the author reveals:

Controlling images applied to *black* women that originated during the slave era attest to the ideological dimension of U.S. *Black* women’s

³⁴ For reference, see footnote 10.

³⁵ For reference, see footnote 10.

³⁶ For reference, see footnote 10.

³⁷ For reference, see footnote 10.

oppression (King 1973; D. White 1985; Carby 1987; Morton 1991). (...) Within U.S. culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal, and inevitable. In this context, certain assumed qualities that are attached to *black* women are used to justify oppression. From the mammies, jezebels, and breeder women of slavery to the smiling Aunt Jemimas on pancake mix boxes, ubiquitous *black* prostitutes, and ever-present welfare mothers of contemporary popular culture, negative stereotypes applied to African-American women have been fundamental to *black* women's oppression. Taken together, the supposedly seamless web of economy, polity, and ideology function as a highly effective system of social control designed to keep African-American women in an assigned, subordinate place. This larger system of oppression works to suppress the ideas of *black* women intellectuals and to protect elite White male interests and worldviews (Collins, 2000, p.5).³⁸

The controlling images that the author brings to the fore to deal with the experiences of African American women maintain a historical link with the images produced in the colonial period. The author mentions, as examples, the figures of the black women as the opposite of the universal woman. Conceived as white, this universal woman is imagined as fragile, sensitive, caste and passive. *Black* women would be strong, bearing any unforeseen situation, lascivious. Some of the controlling images she lists are of *black* ladies, jezebels, slave mothers, mammies, prostitutes, freaks, animals, hoochies, matriarchs, mules, Aunt Jemima's, super strong *black* mothers (Collins, 2000),³⁹ that update a colonial echo.

By naming this complex process of producing stereotypes and their effects on the social imagination, Collins (2000)⁴⁰ also addresses the way in which *controlling images* are contested within groups. As they materialize external definitions about the oppressed group, produced by the dominant group, self-definition would be a way of refuting these images from the *standpoint* of the oppressed group itself. A critical key is to contest external images, a central resource of the black feminist thought.

By analyzing the knowledge of resistance produced by American black women as a way of surviving oppression as a group through the intersectional analysis that makes up the matrix of oppression in that country, Collins (2000)⁴¹ opens up the possibility of

³⁸ For reference, see footnote 10.

³⁹ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴⁰ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴¹ For reference, see footnote 10.

thinking about forms of resistance and solidarity also among other social groups, in other configurations and regions of the world.

I understand that there is a close relationship between the thoughts of Stuart Hall and Patricia Collins, made possible because both start from the margin and combine a concept of ideology as “the body of ideas reflecting the interests of a group of people that naturalizes and changes over time” (Collins, 2000, p.5).⁴² Gramsci’s texts, common to both authors, which points to other elements beyond class, such as regionality and nationality, allows for an understanding of the intersectionalities that mark human experiences in relation to dominant groups. Hall (2019)⁴³ sees this gap in Gramsci’s work as a possibility for us to think about racism and sexism as ideologies present in social differentiation. Collins (2000)⁴⁴ interprets these markers as systems of oppression that must be considered in their mutual conjugation. Collins’ (2000)⁴⁵ concept of *controlling images*, in turn, proves to be productive for thinking about *race* or the term *black* as a “floating signifier” (Hall, 1997, 2019).⁴⁶

The two students in the Portuguese course, marked in their living experiences by the intersection of different systems of oppression, are concerned about racism in Brazilian society, in solidarity with other groups. Although the contestation of a certain controlling image was not made by a member of the group itself, I share the premise that the commitment to an anti-racist education must belong to everyone and not just be a responsibility of the oppressed groups.

In order to understand why these concepts make sense together with what emerges from the research field, we will go on to contextualize the investigated scenario and the ethnographic method used prior to data analysis.

⁴² For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴³ For reference, see footnote 7.

⁴⁴ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴⁵ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴⁶ For references, see footnotes 7 and 13.

5 An Ethnographic Approach

The data presented here were generated in a PhD research (Reis, 2021),⁴⁷ which aimed to better understand the learning needs of immigrant mothers as Portuguese learners in Florianópolis.

The classes were held in 2018/2 and 2019/1 in a Portuguese course specific for immigrant mothers. The ethnographic instruments used to generate the data were field diary and audio recordings. As participant-observer (teacher-researcher), it was possible to deal with situations in which negotiation of meaning was needed, some of them, from which the term *negro* [black] emerged. The meanings attributed by the Venezuelan students to the term *negro* were different from the ones they faced locally. Favoring the meanings constructed according to the research participants' perspective, as proposed by Erickson (1990), in such a way that it is possible to suspect about the familiar, I will demonstrate in the next section the utterances recorded in a field diary that raised the analyses and interpretations around the use of the term *negro*.

6 Invisibility and Discursive Whitening

I bring a brief summary, in vignette format, of what I pointed out in the field diary, in order to present the dialogue that gave rise to the speeches of Rosario and Marlene about the silencing of the term *negro*:

We talk about discrimination and racism because Marlene said that the neighbor told her that one should not say the words *negro* [black] or *preto* [black] in Brazil, as this could be understood as racism. Marlene didn't understand why, since, she said, in Venezuela, saying *negrito* [blackish] is a compliment. Marlene said she thought that what seemed like racism to her was *not to be able to say the word negro to a black person*. It was then that Rosario recounted a scene in which her daughter corrected her. When Rosario commented "what a beautiful blackish boy!" to a child with whom her daughter was playing in a playground, Penelope corrected her, saying, "It's not a pretty blackish boy, Mom, it's cute brownish" (FIELD DIARY, 09/22/2018).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the university where it was carried out.

⁴⁸ Original in Portuguese: "Falamos de discriminação e de racismo porque Marlene contou que a vizinha disse a ela que não se deveria falar *negro* ou *preto* no Brasil, pois isso poderia ser entendido como racismo. Marlene não entendia o porquê, já que, dizia, na Venezuela, dizer *negrito* é um elogio. Marlene disse achar que o que parecia racismo era não poder dizer a palavra *negro* a uma pessoa negra. Foi, então, que Rosario

Marlene, when remembering the interdiction experienced in an interaction, questioned the reason for the pejorative meaning of the words *negro* and *preto* in Portuguese, exemplifying how the use of the term *negro* was seen as positive in her culture. According to the students, in Venezuela, *negro* and *preto* would be, respectively, affectionate and gallant ways of referring to someone. Marlene quoted the expressions “what a *negro!*” or “what a handsome *negro!*,” highlighting its positive connotations, saying that the nickname of his own son-in-law is *Negro*. Then she explained to me that, in the form of a compliment, it meant *sensuality*. She also told us that the term *negro*, as an adjective, was also attributable to white people.

The chains of meaning mobilized by the use of the term *negro*, at first sight, seem distinct to Marlene, in her defense of sensuality as a *positive* synonym in contrast to the effacement as a strategy of silencing of the term’s *negative* meanings. However, the character of essentialism and the use of skin color as a metaphor, in the two semantic networks, support the idea of controlling images (Collins, 2000)⁴⁹ about people read as black.

The *race* marker, as a discursive procedure, appears in two controlling images: (1) *Black* as an absent presence: made invisible in the discourse and prohibited in the enunciation space, suffering a kind of miscegenation by language, a “discursive whitening” (Nogueira; Major, 2020, p.8)⁵⁰; and (2), as a body reduced to primitive drives, *hypersexualized*, metonymy of the attributes of sensuality allegedly intrinsic to bodies read as black.

Following the interpretive path of cultural translation, with Hall (2019),⁵¹ for which the experience of the diaspora would trigger a clash between different systems of meaning, we see that the chain of meanings that the term *negro* triggers in the students’ imaginations differs from the chain of meanings that emerges from the application of the term in the interactions that the students have in Florianópolis. Both in Marlene’s neighbor’s warning, and in Penelope’s correction, Rosario’s daughter, the silencing of the

contou uma cena em que a filha a corrigiu. Quando Rosario comentou “que negrinho lindo!” para uma criança com a qual a filha brincava em um parquinho, Penélope a corrigiu, dizendo: “não é negrinho lindo, mãe, é marrom fofinho!”

⁴⁹ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁵⁰ Original in Portuguese: “*branqueamento discursivo*.”

⁵¹ For reference, see footnote 13.

term *negro*, paradoxically, seems to *say* a lot about social relations in the country and in Santa Catarina, specifically.

As Hall (2019)⁵² observes, taking the functioning of language as suggested by Vološinov (1973),⁵³ the scope of meaning of a word turned into sign would be in accordance with its possible ideological translation in a given historical-social context (HALL, 2019).⁵⁴ From this premise, Marlene's translation of the word *negro* as a positive aspect, related to a physical attribute of sensuality, does not find the corresponding meaning in the context in which she applies the same word, leading the student to get lost in translation. Faced with the impossibility of transposing the meanings, the students are led to reflect on the corrections made in an attempt to understand the situated language use in the new socio-historical context.

In the first meaning of the word, present in the interaction of Marlene with the neighbor and Rosario with her daughter, *negro* figures as a forbidden, unspeakable term, whose content should not come to light. The students ask if Brazilian society is racist. To answer the question, I suggest thinking together with Almeida (2018), for which each society would produce racism in its structure in a specific way, and with Munanga (2019 [2004]), who strongly points out Brazilian racism as *sui generis*, marked by the desire for whitening.

Taking the sign as ideological (Vološinov, 2000), I interpret the procedure of eliminating it from the utterance as a way of silencing the debate that informs the meanings attributable to it in a given historical time. In other words, the interdiction of the sign would be a means of preventing the emergence of meanings that are still difficult to re-signify or dissociate from a recent colonial past, which has not been over, as it remains present and veiled, reinventing itself in the social structure and made invisible in the language. Sales Jr. (2006, p.229) understands the process of making racism invisible as the "racism not-said." According to the author, the racism not-said is a device articulated with the idea of racial democracy that establishes an interdict on racism in the debate, allowing the free circulation of racist utterances leaving the ones who utter them free of responsibilities (Sales Jr., 2006).

⁵² For reference, see footnote 13.

⁵³ For reference, see footnote 2.

⁵⁴ For reference, see footnote 13.

As Seyferth (1986, p.56) observes, “there is no more marked category by negative and pejorative traits than the *negro*, symbol of subjection and inferiority; nor more ambiguous than that of the mulatto, a true axiom of the ideology [of whitening], since it overcame the mishaps of color and ‘escaped being *negro*’.”⁵⁵ By presenting a formula that tries to “escape from being racist,” the neighbor, a pragmatic adviser – guiding Marlene in the use of the Portuguese language – operates the other way around, pointing out precisely that there is a current meaning that foresees the term *negro* as offensive, intrinsically negative. Marlene and Rosario do not accept this pejorative meaning, nor the prohibition of racial discussion, and they give visibility to the discursive phenomenon of effacement.

Since the sociological concept of *race* is structural in capitalism (Almeida, 2018), the effacement of the racist ideology would not be possible, but an update of this framework, elaborated discursively. However, negative meanings for the term still persist, although other positive connotations for the term are present, considering that it is a floating signifier, as stated by Hall (1997, 2019).⁵⁶

Marlene’s interlocutor, her neighbor, would have translated some of the meanings attributable to the term *negro* in her society, privileging the negative ones, indicating the effacement as a possibility of making the racial theme invisible, a typical discursive *modus operandi* of Brazilian society. Marlene unknowingly points to a taboo theme in Brazilian society, which, despite being central to the identity of the people, invented as an example of miscegenation, is far from reflecting the atmosphere of harmony in the social as suggested in theory by the universalist idea that “we are all mestizos.” (Munanga, 2019)⁵⁷ This cultural implicit becomes the norm in Brazil in the 30s, at least until the 70s of the 20th century, when social movements began to strengthen (Munanga, 2019). In this period of time, the invisibility of certain groups has become one of the touchstones of the Brazilian sociocultural and linguistic order in which *race* acts as an important category in the attribution of (i)legitimacy to speakers.

Effacement can be interpreted, therefore, as one of the discursive mechanisms that contributes to the maintenance of racism as a veiled structure in Brazilian social relations,

⁵⁵ Original in Portuguese: “não há categoria mais marcada por traços negativos e pejorativos que a do *negro*, símbolo de sujeição e inferioridade; nem mais ambígua que a do mulato, verdadeiro axioma da ideologia [do branqueamento], uma vez que superou os percalços da cor e ‘escapou de ser negro’.”

⁵⁶ For references, see footnotes 7 and 13.

⁵⁷ Original in Portuguese: “somos todos mestiços.”

sustained through the myth of racial democracy. In the alleged harmony, social inequalities are naturalized in the attribution of the lesser legitimacy the darker the speaker's skin.

In the typically Brazilian racial classification, chromatic, Marlene can be read as white. In the conversation with the neighbor, with whom she establishes an intense exchange relationship, she is warned about interactions with members of a presumably different racial group. In this specific context, in which different translations are shown, both in the correction made by Marlene's neighbor, and in the one made by Rosario's daughter, the invisibility related to the decreasing the chromatic hue or discursive whitening is updated: "Not *black*, [...] cute brownish." Replacing *black* with *brown* would be a pedagogical strategy to present the possible place for the *black*-skinned individual, towards whitening (Munanga, 2019). In the local language, in an euphemism: while brown, whitened, to fit into the semantic field tolerated in that horizon of meanings.

The desire for whitening, a project by the Brazilian racial laboratory (Schwarcz, 2012), seems to persist in language, causing the term black to be denied and replaced by the hybrid, but no less controversial, figure of the mestizo, "not *black*, cute brownish," midway to a white ideal (Munanga, 2019). These assumptions seem to be evoked both in Marlene's interaction with her neighbor and in the school attended by Rosario. This demonstrates that in these spheres of circulation the racist ideology is still present, that is in the school, a formative institution, and in the everyday small talk.

The invisibility of black people in the narratives becomes a symbol of the denial of a presence, the mark of an inconvenience, of a returning past, of an unresolved relationship with those who had their rightful place neither in the territory, nor in historiography, nor even in language. *Black* people have been carrying the burden of a past of pejorative meanings. In short, those connotations make up an image of control (Collins, 2000)⁵⁸ related to the position of black people in society considered as absent, prohibited territory, silent, and made invisible.

The reports that the students bring to the classroom reveal the persistence of these controlling images based on the biological racist paradigm, for which skin color continues to be used as a "heredity metaphor" to indicate belonging to a given racial group, not just another, but presumably inferior (Seyferth, 1986, p.57).

⁵⁸ For reference, see footnote 10.

Seyferth (1996, p.202) points to the persistence of the idea of race as “an explanatory factor of social differences,” rooted in the popular imagination,” “it manifests itself in many ways, whether through stereotypes, anecdotes, associated color and blood symbologies to heredity or, simply, by objective discrimination,” (Seyferth, 1996, p.202)⁵⁹ that is, widely proliferated in everyday discourses. Racial ideology would not only be present in Santa Catarina, where the author gathers a series of proverbs and sayings present in that state, which, according to her, contain the same content as racial theories defended by intellectuals and scientists. Modified only in the way of explaining inequalities, racist theories are fully present in the Brazilian social imagination as a whole (Seyferth, 1986, 1995, 1996).

However, I do not suggest that the actions of erasing the term *negro* or discursive whitening in the specific scenes that Marlene and Rosario bring should be interpreted as racist or non-racist acts from an individual perspective. Since the processes of meaning making operate in a social and not an individual framework, it is important to consider the ideology underlying these procedures as an important feature of the contemporary Brazilian sociocultural and linguistic order (Signorini, 2002) that structure social relations. Based on this important record of a metapragmatic operation, it is possible to say that the racist ideology is still present, that there is an effort to silence it and that, as Marlene and Rosario vehemently reinforce it, that it is possible and necessary to make it visible and to contest it.

7 Hypersexualization

In the second network of meanings, based on Marlene and Rosario’s defense of the positive use of the term in their country, Venezuela, *negro* is taken as a synonym for sensual. To paraphrase Marlene, the term is used when you want to say that someone is sexy. In this sense, we find the echo of racial theories elaborated by Physical Anthropology which, based on an allegedly scientific apparatus of measurements of bodies, assumed that populations considered black would be closer to apes than to humans

⁵⁹ Original in Portuguese: “fator explicativo das diferenças sociais,” “arraigada no imaginário popular,” “manifesta de muitas formas, seja através dos estereótipos, do anedotário, das simbologias da cor e do sangue associadas à hereditariedade ou, simplesmente, pela discriminação objetiva.”

(i.e., white men) and they would be, therefore, savages, with deviant sexual instincts, endowed with great physical strength, but incapable of intellectual gifts (Seyferth, 1996).

Metonymically, when taking the part for the whole, the exacerbated quality as presumably intrinsic to certain social groups that would be oriented by primitive drives, the very attribute of *sensuality* becomes synonymous with the term *negro*. This synonymy relationship cannot be considered only positive, considering the reduction of the experience of an entire imagined group of subjects to a more animalistic and instinctive life drive. Again, animality and primitivism figure as adjectives for black bodies, resembling sexuality of their bodies, a mark of objectification and dehumanization, in short, of the exoticism with which the term black is invented in the West (Hall, 2019).⁶⁰

The hypersexualization discourse provoked and continues to provoke and legitimize a series of violent acts against black men and women (Ribeiro, 2018; Collins, 2000).⁶¹ Controlling images of black women and men reduced to their sexuality were central to the discourse of colonialism, as colonizers needed to invent a way to convince others and themselves that colonial violence was justifiable. The association of Africans with animals in the minds of colonizers was a way to calm consciences, exempting them from living with the self-image of genocides (Cesaire, 2010). Brutalized themselves, they brutalized others (Cesaire, 2010).

Controlling images that take the term *negro* as synonymous with deviating sexuality both facilitated the demonization of black men, invented as a threat to white women (Fanon, 2008), and allowed the naturalization of the rape culture to African and African-American women during the period of enslavement in the United States (Davis, 2018 [1981])⁶² and to African descendants after abolition, in controlling images of hypersexualized women (Collins, 2000).⁶³

In Brazil, the naturalization of rape in the colonial period updated the controlling image of Afro-descendant women in the post-abolitionist period based on the discourse of “romanticization of miscegenation” (Ribeiro, 2018, p.117),⁶⁴ developed by intellectuals and academics in the decade of 1930 under the guise of the myth of racial democracy with the aim of concealing violence against black men and women. Ribeiro

⁶⁰ For reference, see footnote 13.

⁶¹ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁶² DAVIS, A. *Women, Race and Class*. London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1981.

⁶³ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁶⁴ Original in Portuguese: “romantização da miscigenação.”

(2018) states that black Brazilian women are currently more susceptible to sexual and domestic violence than white women, since “their bodies have been historically dehumanized and ultrasexualized” (Ribeiro, 2018, p.117).⁶⁵ Ribeiro states that these controlling images “also contribute to the culture of violence against these women, who are seen as lustful, ‘easy’ and unworthy of respect” (Ribeiro, 2018, p.117). In the field of Anthropology, Lélia Gonzalez (1984) would have observed this production of stereotypes about black women in Brazilian society even before Patricia Hill Collins named this discursive procedure as controlling images.

In Applied Linguistics, Melo and Ferreira (2014), Melo and Moita Lopes (2015) also point to the permanence of objectification discourses of subjects read as black who remain in the Brazilian social imagination.

In short, historical echoes persist in the social structure as discourses crystallized by language that have consequences for the lives of black people (Melo; Moita Lopes, 2015). Ideological procedures underlie enunciation and are central elements of the meaning making process, important to be punctuated, named and discussed in language conceptions, for which an approach informed by situated uses is important.

Final Considerations

In this article, part of an ethnographic investigation, we pointed out discursive procedures and ideologies underlying the use of the term *negro* emerging from the meanings constructed in the Portuguese language learning experience of Marlene and Rosario, both from Venezuela. We saw that in the diasporic phenomenon the displacement is not only geographical, but also of meanings. When face to face with the other, certain networks of meaning, which until then worked well, prove to be defective. In their negotiation processes in the new context, the apprentices show themselves to counterargument pejorative meanings for the term *negro*, demonstrating, as pointed out by Hall (1997, 2019),⁶⁶ that it is a floating signifier, open to new networks of meaning in each specific socio-historical context.

⁶⁵ Original in Portuguese: “seus corpos vêm sendo desumanizados e ultrassexualizados historicamente.”

⁶⁶ For references, see footnotes 7 and 13.

Invisibility, discursive whitening and hypersexualization were the procedures focused on from a brief historiographical excavation of local discourses that support them. The brief analysis reiterates the importance and richness of Vološinov's ideas for understanding how ideology operates in everyday discourse, becoming naturalized and assimilated from the alien, foreign word to the proper word, as well as crystallizing certain discourses in the evaluative reception of utterances of the speakers.

The discursive mechanisms that the students make us see – of invisibility, discursive whitening and hypersexualization – indicate a framework in which, despite the struggles of social movements around positive semantic networks for the term *negro* (Munanga, 2019), it continues in full ideological dispute of meaning, in search of its own space in which it can be fully realized as a sign of humanity.

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REVIEWS

Review I

The article deals with ethnographic research on the cultural translation of the term black, based on the utterances of two Venezuelan immigrants in southern Brazil. Supported by a robust theoretical basis and good text (although lacking a new revision) the author discusses race and language, the strategy of racial whitening, the invisibility of the black presence in Santa Catarina, the images of control and the possibilities of an ethnographic look at the phenomenon. We must highlight the texts from the researcher's field diary with the speeches of two immigrant women. These texts were analyzed and rethought from the discursive whitening, invisibility and hypersexualization point of view. It is concluded that in the relationship with the other, the networks of meaning "prove fallible." In their negotiation processes in the new context, the apprentices show themselves to contest pejorative meanings for the term *negro (black)*, demonstrating, as pointed out by Hall (1995, 2003, 2006), that it is a "floating sign, open to new networks of meaning in each social-historical context." The discussion is relevant and original, the argumentation is organized and well-founded. Thus, I recommend the publication. ACCEPTED.

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Review II

The title of the article fits the mobilized discussion. The author's objective was achieved since, through theoretical basis, she raises and deepens the discussion about the naturalization and crystallization of social places for black people in the social imaginary through language. Referenced works are relevant and current; however, the work "Marxism and the Philosophy of Language," attributed to M. Bakhtin, could be updated. The authorship of the work is currently attributed to V. N. Vološinov. His name does not appear in the references. The reflections raised in the article are quite relevant and will certainly contribute to the scientific studies of language and ethnic-racial issues. However, the writing of the article presents some punctuation and spelling problems that need to be reviewed before publication. The article is relevant and must be approved, but the term "blackness" could also be revised to be unambiguous. ACCEPTED

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Review III

The title is appropriate for the article. The objective of the work is well defined in the Abstract and in the Introduction of the text and was duly developed. The theoretical basis is coherent and well-articulated with the proposed objectives. Although not entirely original, the proposed reflection in the text articulates relevant and important concepts for critical studies of race relations in Brazil, more specifically regarding the understanding of racism as a discursive phenomenon. Finally, the article meets the requirements of rigor in a scientific work and academic writing; writing is clear, correct and fluid. ACCEPTED

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