"They cannot be black and fat": analyzing verbal abuse in sociodiscursive reactions produced by readers in Brazilian digital journalistc contexts

"Não podem ser negras e gordas": analisando a violência verbal em reações sociodiscursivas produzidas por leitores/as em contextos jornalísticos digitais brasileiros

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Abstract: Verbal abuse, characterized as offensive by multiple semiosis (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003), has in the virtual environment a rich space for its performance. The anonymity and the lack of regulation of face-to-face interaction cause social agents to mobilize lexicogrammatical resources to produce violent discourses. This behavior can generate offenses and insults, promoting and perpetuating unequal power relations. In this paper, we aim to analyze authorial voices inserted in the news published by the news portal *BHAZ* and by the newspaper *O Tempo*, both from Belo Horizonte – MG, about a job offer advertised via *WhatsApp* app that was characterized as an insult crime. We analyze two news articles, one from each vehicle, and also the comments of internet users relate to the fact. We use the analysis categories of the verbal sociodiscursive reactions (GOMES, 2020), of the representational and identificational meanings (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003) intertwined with intersectional studies (AKOTIRENE, 2019; CRENSHAW, 2002, 2004; NASH, 2008). Our analysis allowed us to observe that verbal abuse is

constitutive of racist and fatphobic systems of oppression, which reproduce excluding power relations that regulate bodies and ratify the often opaque and naturalized privilege of the white and thin body.

Keywords: verbal abuse; intersectional studies; CDA; social discursive verbal reactions.

Resumo: A violência verbal, configurada por múltiplas semioses (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003) como ofensiva, tem no ambiente virtual um espaço profícuo de atuação. O anonimato e a ausência de regulações da interação face a face fazem com que agentes sociais mobilizem recursos lexicogramaticais produzindo discursos violentos. Essa escolha pode gerar ofensas e insultos, de forma a, inclusive, promover e perpetuar relações desiguais de poder. Esse artigo tem como objetivo analisar vozes autorais inseridas nas notícias publicadas pelo *BHAZ* e pelo jornal *O Tempo*, ambos de Belo Horizonte – MG, sobre uma transmissão via *WhatsApp* de uma oferta de emprego caracterizada como crime de injúria. Serão analisados não só dois textos noticiosos, um de cada veículo, mas também os comentários de internautas sobre tal fato. Para tal, utilizaremos as categorias de análise das reações sociodiscursivas verbais (GOMES, no prelo.), dos significados representacionais e identificacionais (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003) entrecruzados aos estudos interseccionais (AKOTIRENE, 2019; CRENSHAW, 2002, 2004; NASH, 2008). Nossa análise permitiu observar que a violência verbal se produz constitutivamente de sistemas de opressão racistas e gordofóbicos, reproduzindo relações excludentes de poder que regulam os corpos, ratificando o privilégio, muitas vezes, opaco e naturalizado, do corpo branco e magro.

Palavras-chave: violência verbal; estudos interseccionais; ADC; reações sociodiscursivas verbais.

1 Introduction

Verbal abuse is produced in different sociodiscursive practices, representing different forms of semiosis (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003). They have a discriminatory, vexing, accusatory, depreciating, and aggressive nature, and most often operate unequal and exclusionary relations of power that allows certain social agents to act violently towards others through their discourses. Such relationships, depending on the context and place, and the negotiation with identity axes in which they are

located, produce legitimizing spaces that allow the elaboration of violent discourses materialized by specific lexicogrammatical choices (HALLIDAY; MATHIESSEN, 2004). Thus, the analysis of verbal abuse acts and practices must consider not only the context in which they are produced (i.e., how and where such violence occurs, who are the agents involved) but also the socio-political conjuncture surrounding this context.

The socio-discursive practice that we analyze in this study occurs within the virtual environment. This environment favors a greater occurrence of verbal abuse mainly due to the feeling of anonymity of the social actors and the physical distance of the interactants, as discussed by Recuero (2014a, 2014b) in his studies in the field of digital communication. Both factors allow the construction of a virtual space that legitimizes the production of verbal abuse, since there is no inhibition caused by contexts of face-to-face interaction, such as explicit identity and immediate response. The choice of the virtual environment for the discussion of verbal abuse is both necessary and productive in the contemporary scenario since it is textually mediated (CHOULIARAKI; FAIRCLOUGH, 1999) and deeply digital, besides being currently the fastest, most effective, and usual form of communication.

In this paper, we aim to analyze, both discursively and critically, a controversial fact reported by two digital media, bringing to discussion the authorial voices of the actors involved in the construction of the controversy and, based on the news, analyze the verbal sociodiscursive reactions of Internet users to observe which reactions are intercrossed to the authorial voices represented discursively by the texts, including the very voice of the media. We discuss power relations in an intersectional perspective, by taking into account the identity axes, such as race, size, and gender, to understand how the agents produce violent discourses as well as question them.

First, we address the linguistic-discursive studies that focus on verbal abuse, and their structures and functioning, from the intrinsic relationship between language and aggression, highlighting lexicogrammatical recurrences to studies on (im)politeness as a strategy of offense and insult (BALLOCO; SHEPHERD, 2017). Then, we present the analytical proposal of verbal sociodiscursive reactions (GOMES, in press). We discuss questions related to Computer-mediated Communication (RECUERO, 2014a, 2014b), an approach that also

bases Gomes's proposal (in press). The categories are analyzed not only from their lexicogrammatical recurrence but also from the potential of meanings that they promote, (re)articulating different positions when chosen by the interactants.

To explore the power relationships that are formed in a legitimating or contesting manner, we also discuss intersectional studies (AKOTIRENE, 2019; CRENSHAW, 2002, 2004; NASH, 2008) to highlight the relevance of examining discursive production from the perspective of identity axes. Identity axes are characterized either as power or subordination axes, and intersect both in the identities of the interactants and in the representations formed from them. By focusing our attention on the identity avenues (see AKOTIRENE, 2019) that characterize these discourses, we demonstrate how possible social structures permeate verbal sociodiscursive reactions and reveal oppression systems such as racism, fatphobia, and how they materialize discursively in an intercrossed manner. After the theoretical and methodological discussion, we proceed to the data analysis, and then present the critical explanation of the analysis.

2 Studies on verbal abuse from a language perspective

According to Balloco and Shepherd (2017), verbal abuse, as an object of study in linguistics, has three major theoretical frameworks. Here, we highlight two of them: the first, the studies by Herring (1993), and the second, the studies of Culpeper (2011). The first author analyzes the relationship between language and aggressiveness in digital communication, more precisely the issues of domination and submission built between men and women. In Gender and democracy in computer-mediated communication, Herring notes that, regardless of the places where verbal abuse occurs, the use of linguistic strategies is carried out on a recurring and standardized basis. Culpeper's studies (2011), in turn, show (im)politeness as a strategy to offend, pointing out that both linguistic and social phenomena interact with each other in the production of verbal abuse. For the author, impoliteness occurs when the statements generated do not obey social norms of coexistence, producing performative effects of offense. Impoliteness, therefore, appears to be one of the strategies for the construction of verbal abuse. The author

also highlights the contextual character of impoliteness: certain contexts make verbal choices more or less violent.

The virtual environment, as mentioned above, is a space in which different forms of verbal abuse materialize discursively. The studies on flammings, a "negative verbal behavior, with the metaphorical power to ignite a debate, or "fry" an internet user" (BALLOCO; SHEPHERD, 2017, p. 1018), have as a starting point an examination of its causes, followed by an analysis of contexts and then its social issues. The first wave of flammings studies highlights anonymity as well as the loss of personal identity as causes for the proliferation of verbal abuse on the network. According to the authors, the non-incorporation of non-verbal traits typical of face-to-face interaction reduces social norms that regulate interactions and implies the expansion of verbal aspects contained in flammings. This aspect is important for this study as it will allow us to observe how interactants react linguistically-discursively to a post that addresses issues related to race, size, and gender, that is, which resources they mobilize to position themselves on the topic and interact with the other.

The second wave focuses his studies on the contexts of interaction (BALLOCO; SHEPHERD, 2017), mainly on the reception of flammings, and highlights the socio-emotional intensity produced in the interactional antagonisms. These studies are relevant for our purposes since the identified sociodiscursive verbal reactions demonstrate positions that not only support oppression systems but also question them (an issue that will be further analyzed in this text).

Finally, the authors point out that the third wave of studies on flammings deals with the negotiations of cultural norms that imply the structuring of social hierarchies. In other words, verbal abuse carries with it the way prejudices and stigmas are mobilized, and how social hierarchies are sustained. It is at this point that power relations are introduced from the perspective of language, demonstrating the direct and intrinsic relationship between discursive and social practice (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001). In this study, we analyze lexicogrammatical choices, contexts of interaction, and social causes that endorse verbal abuse.

Paveau (2015, p. 320), when discussing the role of technodiscursive devices in the production of virtuous discourses within the French context, draws attention to the "illusion of protection against the direct

reaction 'in the flesh', the physical absence of the other, whose presence produces effects of control of verbal expression, and the speed of writing and sending messages that create the illusion of monologism […]". Recuero and Soares (2013), when analyzing violence, humor, and stigma in Facebook comments, state that:

> To study online discourses is to study the language in use and the construction of meanings in different, mediated, and appropriated environments. These appropriations can also generate different behaviors, including violent and hostile ones, such as the reproduction of online aggression forms (RECUERO; SOARES, 2013, p. 243).

Paveau (2015, p. 321), in turn, when problematizing the issue of verbal abuse in these technodiscursive devices, affirms that "it is almost a rule to transgress the rules of the sites and the néticas, with the use of verbal abuse, confrontation, controversy, insult or any discursive form interpretable as non-virtuous". Therefore, studies on verbal abuse allow us to infer that it is increasingly necessary to categorize it, to analyze both how such violence is configured in the virtual space and the effects of meaning caused. The next section aims to present possible categories to discursively base the analyzes.

3 Sociodiscursive reactions

In this paper, we analyze cases of verbal abuse through reactive comments from internet users or readers of Brazilian digital news in the light of Gomes' methodological-discursive proposal (in press). We organize and articulate, theoretically, methodologically, and in a transdisciplinary way, concepts and fundamentals of different fields of knowledge to propose an analytical category called verbal *sociodiscursive reactions*,[1] for the analysis of reactive comments

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[1] The idea of using the word "discursive reactions" as an analytical category, was initially proposed by Nogueira and Arão (2015), in the study on Facebook as a space for virtual legitimation: an analysis of posts and discursive reactions on pages of environmental NGOs, to refer to the way in which Internet users reacted discursively to the content produced in the posts, based on the concepts and precepts of the French line discursive approach.

produced sociodiscursively and politically by readers in virtual interaction environments. Thus, we propose a descriptive-analytical category capable of identifying types of reactive comments produced in specific, controlled, and regulated spaces. We propose to explore digital culture through the communicational tool "comment" in the way that Recuero (2014b) defines: "an action that not only signals participation but brings an effective contribution to the conversation" (RECUERO, 2014a, p. 120), to show "also the relationships that emerge and the social and linguistic practices that take shape there". In this sense, Cunha (2012, p. 28) also states that commentary, in the digital space, acts as "a discursive practice that has its purpose and its rules. From a source text, the reader builds new discourses" to re-emphasize the thematic aspects, to displace them, that is, it is possible to analyze the socio-interactions built in the digital space and understand how people are productively potentiating meanings, ideologies, and representations of their experiences about the world and the ideas of others."

As Recuero (2014b) and Paveau (2015), Stranderbeg and Berg (2013) also recognize the interactive possibilities that the internet has brought to the public sphere, that is, the possibility that its citizens can creatively express themselves on the most diverse subjects. The reflection about the digital space as a deliberative potential in the public sphere, mainly in places intended for reader comments, has been the target of numerous researches that discuss the relationship between political participation, the discursive-democratic constructions, and the participative role of the citizen (DAHLBERG, 2001; WRIGHT; STREET, 2007; DOMINGO, 2008; TADEU, 2012). Thus, it is another way of using language in contemporary times, a possibility of effective intervention by citizens in the public sphere, and the understanding that acting together has the assumption of speaking together, but not in a consensual way (CHOULIARAKI; FAIRCLOUGH, 1999).

Díaz-Noci et al. (2010, p. 1 *as cited in* TADEU, 2012, p. 32) state that the space for comments represents for citizens "a simple way to react to current events and discuss them right after reading about them". Paiva (2014), questioning how readers reactively participate in interactions mediated in online comments spaces, noted that:

> In this reactive interaction, the reader reacts to the news that already exists, that is, he reflects what is in a way already reflected within the very construction of the news angle. He participates, in a form of reaction to the theme of the news, to the construction of the news, and the comments of other readers. Here, the reader is also a reagent within his action as a participative reader and ends up projecting in his action only what has already been proposed (PAIVA, 2014, p. 665).

According to Gomes (2020), the space of comments, in spatial terms, is a type of virtual support[2] that houses or allocates verbal sociodiscursive reactions, involved by power and control relationships, that is materialized in texts. This space allows us to understand that social life is mediated by texts, and for this reason, it is subject to control and regulation, as well as creativity and reflexivity. From the discussions raised by Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) regarding the regulatory facet of discursive genres and discourses, we can assume that this space acts as a type of "articulatory mechanism that controls what can be used and in what order, including the configuration and ordering of discourses" (CHOULIARAKI; FAIRCLOUGH, 1999, p. 144). It is a *locus* that allows a marked capacity for action and interaction at a distance, in a regulated manner (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003).

Verbal Sociodiscursive Reactions of readers are the ways in which people act and interact discursively towards: a *phenomenon*, a *participant (who)*, a *theme,* or a *news subject*. They are reactive sociodiscursive constructions, whose discursive-ideological perspectives are directed either to someone's speech, to the subject of a posted text, or to marginal and tangential themes.

Verbal sociodiscursive reactions can occur in three ways:[3]

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[2] The notion of support used here is based on the studies of Luiz Antônio Marcuschi (2008), for whom the support is a *locus*/space whose objective is to house discursive genres.

[3] Based on the Grammar of Visual Design we use the categories proposed for Narrative Structures: transactional and non-transactional action, and transactional reactions (KRESS; VAN LEEUWEN, 2006), by applying them to the sociodiscursive reaction types, as proposed in this study.

(i)   transactional reactions – Interactants and Reactors comment on subjects and themes, which may or may not be linked to the texts, establishing socio-interactive exchange;

(ii)   non-transactional reactions – The interactant comments (reacts to) subjects reported in the journalistic texts, but without the socio-interactive exchange;

(iii)   attitudinal transactional reactions – Interactants and Reactants react to exchanges, using quotes and speeches not only from the journalistic text but also those of other participants, in an attitudinal way.

This digital interaction space involves participants with reactive characteristics since they present actions resulting from the development of speeches or previous events. These reactions can either be directed to the comments of other participants, who are observed, judged, and put into scenes of discursive interpellation, or they can be directed to the topics (or even topics and themes marginal to the main subject), facts, or testimonies used and represented discursively in the texts.

Considering the evaluation system developed by White (2004), Martin and White (2005), Martin and Rose (2009) as well as the studies by Eggins and Slade (1997), Gomes (in press) initially proposes six types of reactions for the analysis of the comments produced by readers of online sociomediatic practices:

a)   engaged verbal sociodiscursive reactions (the person refutes, opposes, agrees, or endorses),

b)   verbal sociodiscursive reactions of condemnation (the person morally judges behavior and conduct),

c)   sociodiscursive reactions of admiration (the person judges social behavior positively),

d)   sociodiscursive reactions of criticism (the person judges social behavior negatively),

e)   sociodiscursive reactions of praise (the person positively praises moral behaviors and conduct),

f)   sociodiscursive reactions of appreciation (the person assesses aesthetic qualities).

Gomes proposes that reactions can be understood as a type of analytical category that allows us to observe and explore the particular ways the subject represents and identifies himself, materialized in texts (see FAIRCLOUGH, 2003), in media practices, through computer-mediated communication.

Engaged verbal sociodiscursive reactions are characterized by the level of commitment to what is being said. In linguistic-textual terms, it takes place through modalities, polarities (no/yes), concessions, logical-semantic relations of extension or enhancement, or angle circumstance (HALLIDAY, 1994; HALLIDAY; MATHIESSEN, 2004).

The *verbal sociodiscursive reactions of condemnation* are linked to negative manifestations that imply a certain type of illegality, dysfunctionality, guilt, or immorality, *i.e.*, they are negatively related to moral judgments that are associated in some way with legal institutions, reflecting cultural and ideological standards, as well as individual experiences. In other words, it is related to the way in which the world is conceptualized. When discussing the topic of condemnation in the context of gender studies and criticism of ethical violence, Butler (2015, p. 65) states that "condemnation becomes the way in which we establish the other as unrecognizable or reject some aspect of ourselves that we deposit on the other, which we then condemn." Condemnation tends to do just that, to purge and externalize our supposed neutrality and impartiality.

The *verbal sociodiscursive reactions of admiration* are also linked to the manifestations that positively judge the social conduct of consideration, respect, and esteem carried out through attributes, commentary adverbs, and positive epithets.

The *verbal sociodiscursive reactions of criticism*, as well as the reactions of admiration, are linked to behaviors of social esteem. However, critics judge negatively the way in which individuals evaluate behaviors, attitudes, ability, and tenacity. They are manifestations that criticize unusual, incapable, and unreliable behaviors. They are also realized through attributes, adverbial forms, modalities, and epithets.

The *verbal sociodiscursive reactions of praise* are positively related to the praiseworthy manifestations regarding ethical, moral, and honest behaviors. As well as condemnation reactions, they are associated with moral values, socio-cultural and ideological standards produced, mainly, by social institutions.

Verbal socio-discursive reactions of appreciation are affective manifestations related to aesthetics, the value of things, objects, processes, and state of affairs. In other words: they refer to appearance, spatial construction, type of presentation, and also to people's impact and reaction to the aesthetic issues of objects and identities. In other words: properties are evaluated and appreciated discursively.

This proposal follows the analytical tradition of discursive studies of initially focusing on linguistic-textual analysis. The categories are identified and described through not only the realization of the lexicogrammatics but also the production of meanings, often enhanced in a heterogeneous way, depending on the linguistic organization, the choices, and the way the elements are positioned in the text. In the texts we produce, the way we feel, evaluate, and judge presents itself through traces, and in the way they co-occur and how they are organized.

However, our goal is not only to identify the type of reaction being produced by the readers, but also to identify how people are producing, iterating, and transforming the world in which they live. In other words, how they are evaluating their knowledge and the knowledge of others, judging themes and people, and how they are exercising power relations. Thus, we articulate the categories proposed by Gomes (in press) to intersectional studies, to analyze how power relations are intrinsically related to the identity axes that make up the negotiation that generates the positions and the production of verbal abuse by the interactants.

4 Intersectional studies

The theoretical framework of intersectionality is based on the discussions held by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term in the late 1980s. According to the author, this term is the association of different subordination systems that involve the subjects, "a conceptualization of the problem that seeks to capture the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination" (CRENSHAW, 2002, p. 177). After that, her work focused mainly on the relation between race and gender, while taking into account the other axes of subordination.

The author recognizes that black women cannot be classified separately in the "gender" and "race" categories, because they combine such axes to highlight "intersectional discrimination", in which "racial

discrimination that affects women and gender discrimination that affects black women are considered mutually and not exclusively" (CRENSHAW, 2004, p. 8). This implies that when analyzing people in relation to identity axes, it should be considered that some identities confer privileges – the axes of power, and others confer oppressions – axes of subordination and that no person is formed just from one axis, but from the combination of these, which leads us to accept the idea that the coexistence of axes leads to greater or lesser degrees of intersectional discrimination.

A fundamental question for the goal of this study is the fact that the Intersectional Theory is a response to identity policies that hide the intra-group difference, and seeks to demonstrate "the ways in which difference can fracture unitary political movements, (…) with the necessary attention to variation and diversity within the category "woman" and "black" (NASH, 2008, p. 4). The gender category, like any other identity axis, can never be seen as unique and universal, because depending on how people co-experience different axes, their identities are different.

The identity axes can be seen as axes of subordination – vulnerabilities and of power – privileges. These two forms, however, are never fixed: depending on the way they combine, they can even change from one axis to the other (CARVALHO; COSTA, in press.). A fat white woman, for example, by combining her axes of race and size, may be subordinate to skinny white women. Their identity axes are, in this context, of subordination. But this same woman can operate power relations on fat black women, thus, the (white) race axis is combined with the fat-size axis to approach privileges more than vulnerabilities. This issue is fundamental for an analysis that intends to be intersectional since the identity axes must always be analyzed in their context. This is called by Crenshaw (2002) a bottom-up analysis, complexifying the relationship between the axes and the relations of oppression.

It is based on this view of intra-group differences that Nash (2008) reevaluates some questions about intersectionality studies. One of them interests us in an unsettling way: are all identities intersectional or do only marginalized subjects have an intersectional identity? The researcher also points out that the intersectional literature has excluded the analysis of identities that are partially privileged and hides the fact

that "these identities, as well as all identities, are always constituted by the intersection of multiple vectors of power" (NASH, 2008, p. 10). She also criticizes the tendency of intersectional studies to ignore the connections between privilege and oppression and advocates a view in which the analysis of other identity axes can lead to a greater conception of identity and oppression.

This criticism is important to highlight an identity axis that is little explored in intersectional studies: fat-size (CARVALHO, 2018). This axis is one of the issues that we intend to deepen in intersectional studies to investigate how the experience of fat women joins other identity axes and how this configures different forms of oppression and privileges among women. This point of theoretical discussion is consistent with the need that Nash indicates as fundamental in intersectional studies: they must "begin to expand their reach to theorize a series of experiences" (NASH, 2008, p. 10). The is essential to discuss the experiences of different fat women.

Thus, by establishing a dialogue with the categories described in the previous section, we analyze here, discursively and critically, how interactants negotiate the identity axes discursively in the production of verbal abuse in a digital environment, iterating and questioning two oppression systems: racism and fatphobia.

5 The sociodiscursive problem and the controversy

Below we present the fact that triggered the controversial fact between the professional who made the complaint, the psychologist responsible for the transmission list on WhatsApp, and the company that requested the hiring with the requirements. We present the news published by the news portal *BHAZ*[4] and the newspaper *O Tempo*,[5] both from the city of Belo Horizonte, MG.

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[4] Available at: https://bhaz.com.br/2019/11/12/empresa-vaga-negras-gordas/. Accessed on: 12 nov. 2019.

[5] Available at: https://www.otempo.com.br/cidades/anuncio-de-emprego-em-bh-exige-candidatas-que-nao-sejam-negras-ou-gordas-1.2261344?fbclid=IwAR0yPQ-_A43Shk74BxMPfBk5DU5rQC2Ax1t5EE_TWfdxN_E4KI-mSSXultU. Accessed on: 13 nov. 2019.

On November 12, 2019, Brazilian digital journalistic media in the state of Minas Gerais, in particular, *BHAZ* and *O Tempo*, reported that a company based in Belo Horizonte was against hiring "black and fat" elderly caregivers. This fact came to light through a complaint from one of the professionals who participated in a digital group linked to a service provider company that allocates this type of professional in the market: "The vacancy was advertised through a psychologist who maintains a transmission list with dozens of elderly caregivers. The opportunity referred to on-call work in one of the branches of "Home Angels" in BH, a reference company in the sector"(Voice of the *BHAZ* newspaper).

The *BHAZ* newspaper circulated on November 12, 2019 with the following information:

> The case occurred on October 31 and the victim, who preferred not to be identified, went to the police to report an incident on November 1. "I am currently working, but these opportunities are advertised and many people accept them to do freelance work and increase their income. **At that moment, I realized that if I had been unemployed, I would still be out of work, just because of my color.** We go through a lot in life, but that was **absurd**", said the woman to *BHAZ*. (emphasis added).

In the victim's speech, built from a perceptual mental sentence – *I realized* –, she emphasizes her negative experience (*absurd*) from not only a circumstantial characteristic of condition (*if I had been unemployed*), but also of cause: *just because of my color*. In this discursive construction, this body is crossed by two identity axes: gender and race. We emphasize that the victim does not highlight, in her speech, the size/fat axis as one of the causes of violence.

Note, in the excerpts below, that the owner of "Home Angles BH Centro-Sul", when questioned, states that the company works with a "diversified database", which allows the reader to assume that the lexical item "diversified" encompasses all types of bodies and identities. However, it is noteworthy, in the discursive construction, that it only highlights the issue of racism, leaving aside the fatphobia: "I ended up being taken as a racist, but I have several black employees, there is no such thing". Although the complaint was made for the insult crime – racism –, we cannot fail to point out the visible exclusion of fat bodies in the speech of the defense of the owner. Regarding her speech, the

fact of having black employees does not imply that the company cannot practice racist acts.

(1) **Company Voice:** The reporter spoke with Taís Arantes, who owns "Home Angles BH Centro-Sul", the company responsible for the vacancy. The businesswoman claims that the vacancy was indeed disclosed, but without the requirements set out in the message. (BHAZ)

"Our company has been in the market for 8 years and repudiates any type of discrimination. We will make a note to clarify things up and set the record straight. We always advertise vacancies like these because we hire people to work on-call shifts at the company. **Now, I didn't have these specifications, because I need every type of employee because my type of clients requires certain employee profiles, so I must have a diversified database**", says Taís. (*BHAZ* – emphasis added)

"We are taking steps to avoid having problems with the company name and the franchise. This is not part of our motto and what we preach. I don't want **the image of my company to be considered as racist, I have several black employees, there is no such thing here**", adds Taís. (*BHAZ* – emphasis added)

Note that the identity axes that make up the list of vacancies, which exclude "black and fat" women, perform an exclusion movement as follows: black women – fat or not – and fat white women are not suitable for work. The relationship between the identity axes and the relations of oppression marks racism and fatphobia, the former being evidently more exclusive than the latter. This shows us that the combined systems of oppression, even excluding fat white women, are more vulnerable to black women. This is what Crenshaw (2004) admits as "intersectional discrimination" that places black women as the most violent targets of discrimination. This fact is also described by Akotirene (2019), who shows how black women are hit more violently in the identity avenues that compose them. This evidence, however, does not diminish the fatness, since fat women, being white or not, are also excluded from the list, which demonstrates an important point in the discussion about

this discrimination: the loss of rights, since the size/fat prevents access to employment.

Van Dijk (2008), in the context of critical discursive studies, draws attention to some linguistic structures that produce racist discursive constructions, such as: "I (even) have several black employees". The company and the psychologist produce in their speeches what Van Dijk calls reservations, or "semantic movements with a positive part about Us and a negative part about Them" (VAN DIJK, 2008, p.142). In this specific case, they use two mechanisms: one of transference – I have black employees (BUT) it is my clients who do not want to, and the other of apparent empathy: I (EVEN) have black employees. The use of these mechanisms works as strategies for "face preservation and management of impressions" (VAN DIJK, 2008, p.143). The researcher, when discussing the denial of racism, proposes four categories in which we can view the denial of the discriminatory or criminal intention or purpose: (i) denial of the act, (ii) denial of control – I didn't do it on purpose, (iii) denial of intention – I didn't mean it, and (iv) denial of purpose, or responsibility (VAN DIJK, 2008, p. 162).

Note that the psychologist, in the following excerpts, when going over the requirement of not being fat and black and later denying, saying that she did not pay attention, that she did not say this with the intention of offending, or that it was not on purpose, because it is not what she thinks, but the company not only denies but also mitigates its racist act, by saying that it was just offering people jobs. In other words, it tries to minimize its responsibility for racist and fat-phobic acts, justifying that its only concern was to employ people. It, therefore, denies the criminal and prejudiced nature of these acts in favor of a socioeconomic justification crossed by a solidary discourse. It tries to convince us that its actions are just a diversion or incident and not a crime.

(2) **Voice of the Psychologist:** Fernanda Spadinger, the psychologist who posted the vacancy, also spoke with the reporter. She, who owns the company "Leveza do afeto", assumes that she is responsible for publicizing the vacancy with prejudiced content, but claims that the text was sent by "Home Angels". (BHAZ)

"I received this message from a Home Angels employee on Thursday, the 31st, in the late afternoon. She was saying that she needed people for the next day to interview. I **didn't** filter. I **have** my responsibility, I don't want to throw all the responsibility on the company employee, I **must** assume my responsibility. **It is obvious** that I **should** have filtered it, I **should** have edited the message and forwarded it in another way. But, in a hurry, without reading it properly, without filtering, I sent it. **It is obvious** that I am wrong and I am answering for that", says the psychologist. (*BHAZ* – emphasis added)

In the first speech, the psychologist, in an interview with the newspaper, assumes that she received the message with the excluding requirements, and states, categorically, through deontic constructions (*must*, *should*, *obvious*), that she could have acted differently in relation to the writing of the text (*should have edited*, *filtered*) and not in relation to the criminal and prejudiced conduct of the contracting company. The question we ask is: what would this edition look like? Through a euphemistic text, an evasive textual construction? Note that, by declaring herself responsible for the racist and fat-phobic act, the psychologist tries to make a speech of self-defense, presenting herself as a "tolerant" citizen who makes mistakes.

(3) "In my defense, I say that **my intention was to employ 10 people**. My mistake was to have been conniving with a company that has this attitude**. In an ideal world, I would have read the entire message and refused to post the vacancy. But** my intention was to employ ten people who take courses with me and **trust** me", says Fernanda. (*BHAZ* – emphasis added)

In the second speech, the psychologist, in her defense, builds an economic discourse based on employability, attenuating her connivance with the racist and fatphobic act, and in doing this ideological work, "transmits the voices of power in a disguised and hidden way" (FAIRCLOUGH, 2001, p. 140). She also appeals to the relationships of trust established between her and the group, through a solidary and affectionate discourse. Although she recognizes the offensive tone of the text in relation to black and fat people, it softens using the economic

discourse of employability, leading people to assume that, in a country with a high unemployment rate, she did a good deed. She also blames the economic crisis and market pressure for her alleged negligence as a recruiter of caregivers.

On November 13, 2019, the newspaper O Tempo de BH reported the fact; therefore, one day after the fact was reported by *BHAZ*. We found it interesting to analyze the construction of the headlines since they tend to bias the themes that are developed in the texts. In addition, in contemporary times, due to the rapidity of information, among others, it is well known that many individuals read only the headlines of the news, and often do not properly seek information about the facts.

Note that the *BHAZ* media mixes its journalistic voice with the company's voice materialized in the attributes, through the simple quotes: 'black and fat', in addition to the victim's voice: 'I was desperate'. By merging his voice with the others, *BHAZ* builds his narrative about the fact, even evaluates (demands) it, and adds new information: it *induces revolt*. This last information is due to the fact's circulation on social networks. Two other interesting choices made by the newspaper are: (i) the functionalized designation used to represent the victim (or victims): *elderly caregivers*, reinforcing the intersectional identity: gender, race, and size and (ii) the placement of the discriminatory action agent in thematic position: *a company from BH* (Belo Horizonte).

> A company from BH demands that elderly caregivers are not "black and fat" and causes revolt: 'I was desperate' (BHAZ)
>
> *Job advertisement in BH requires candidates who are not "black or fat" (*it is right under a highlighted topic*: Insult Crime) (O Tempo)*

While *BHAZ* reports the fact, pointing out the agent of the action, the victim, the reason why it provoked revolt, and the way it affected someone, the newspaper *O Tempo* puts the instrument of action (job advertisement) in a thematic position and not the agent. In addition, it represents, in a generalized and bureaucratic manner, the victims (candidates) and inserts, through single quotes, the cause of the fact that it is considered an insult crime: "black or fat". Note that when describing the cause, it changes the argumentative operator. Instead of using "and", it opts for "or", which generates other potential meanings and represents

inappropriately what actually happened. Hence, the way newspapers produce their headlines can guide how readers react to the topic; and that is exactly what we were able to verify in the data.

As previously said, the newspaper *O Tempo* presents the fact but inserts new information and voices, including the caregiver who reported the insult crime to the police station and who registered the police report. Again, the psychologist, who offers courses for caregivers, assumes that she has not "filtered" the insulting information because "At the time, I saw the possibility of employing these people, getting someone with little experience into the job market." In the Psychologist's discourse, we again observe the discourse of employability and the reinforcement of non-observance that she also committed a racist and fat-phobic act: "Where is my mistake? I took this message and sent it without filtering. This requirement (which excludes black or fat women) is not mine, it was never mine, it is a requirement of the company". The contracting company issues a note in which it defends itself stating that "We strongly repudiate the fact that occurred. We are a company with social and human values and whose values include respect for others and equal treatment, regardless of sex, color, creed, etc."

In the speech of the contracting company, however, we observed that there is no emphasis on equal treatment for bodies that do not meet the hegemonic standards of corporeality. In doing so, we agree with Fairclough (2001), for whom the discursive representation is not only a linguistic-textual tool but it is also a social practice, since the way the contracting company produces its speech ends up maintaining discursive constructions about body patterns. We also agree with the conception of intersectional studies when we admit that the identity axes that cohabit bodies are avenues (AKOTIRENE, 2019) that trace paths of vulnerabilities or privileges marked, including, by a discursive sphere. Pinto, in turn, states that "talking about language means exposing the power relations that are interwoven in it, as it defines what can be used, by whom, at what time …" (PINTO, 2014, p. 217). It is through language that we produce the regulatory framework for bodies by sustaining social hierarchies that favor certain bodies over others, admitting that systems of oppression place thin, white bodies in places of comfort and privilege.

6 Analysis of sociodiscursive reactions

The socio-discursive practices on the network allowed an expansion of the interactants' performance space, in the comments of the materials and other discursive genres that were posted. Thus, this space became an object of observation and analysis, mainly due to its "democratic" character, in which we can perceive the reception of the content posted online. This section focuses on the sociodiscursive reactions of the news discussed in section 5.

BHAZ has no comment on the fact, while the newspaper *O Tempo* has 15 comments in its space "Comment on the news article", all of which took place on November 13, 2019. Therefore, we will analyze the verbal sociodiscursive reactions produced in the space of *O Tempo* that addressed the phenomenon: the prejudiced requirement of the company, starting from comment 1.

The first comment of interactant 1 is reproduced below:

(1)   What a stupid agency instead of putting the characteristics in the message they could have just asked interested candidates to send the photos, or to send them the facebook link.

The blame of the agency, materialized by the evaluation of judgment "stupid", is explained by the action of describing the characteristics expected of the candidates. What is at stake here is not the problematization of racist and fatphobic discourses, but only an alternative so that the company's image is not defamed. In terms of positioning, interactant 1 does not seem to be bothered by the fact that he excludes black and fat women, which is demonstrated in "they could have **just** asked (…) candidates to send the photos, or (…) the Facebook link". The bold modalizer denotes the minimization of acts of oppression, making vacancies continue to be exclusive, but in a euphemized way, ensuring that the integrity of the company is preserved. For interactant 1, the company would preserve its face in the face of crime. He thus produces a non-transactional reaction because he interacts with the text and not with another interactant, and engages himself, refuting the company's behavior and condemning it for not having used another type of strategy, which would mitigate the crime. The fact is that he does not react by condemning the crime committed, but how the company did it.

Perhaps he reacted that way due to the discursive orientation undertaken by the headline, as already analyzed in section 5.

From a conflicting position of the interactant 1, the blame of the company is marked explicitly in an engaging way by the interactant 2, relating the case to the legal sphere:

> (2)   After an investigation by the Civil Police, the public prosecutor office (MP) **must indict** this company and **criminally punish it**. That can **lead to jail**!

In this sociodiscursive reaction that is also non-transitional, the interactant 2 condemns and criticizes the acts committed by the company and the Psychologist. In a thematic position, it puts, in a temporal circumstance, two actors in action, the "Civil Police" and the public prosecution office, representing the fact from a legal and punitive perspective. The modalizer "must" reveals a high level of engagement in the assertion of the interactant, placing the subsequent processes in a sphere of obligation, which uses material processes "indict" and "punish it", modified by the circumstantialist "criminally", placing the company's actions as a crime. The interactant 2 is against the company; through an evaluative presumption, it leads us to infer that the act practiced is racist. Since fatphobia does not yet have a legal framework that makes it a crime, he does not take a position on it. He then produces two verbal sociodiscursive reactions: condemnation and criticism.

In line with the interacting 3's condemnation and criticism reactions, the following sociodiscursive reaction also blames the company for the exclusion of bodies:

> (3)   I believe the **greatest prejudice** was **evidently** the contractor who **demanded thin, white women**. The agency and, **unbelievably**, the psychologist were **too unwise** to pass on such "**demands**" forward **without question**. **Regrettable**.

The criminal act is called "prejudice", which denotes oppression based on cultural issues. Although this prejudice is intensified by the use of "greatest" and epistemically modeled when using "evidently", implying that it is very serious, the interactant 3 is unable to name (and recognize) the act as a crime. When paraphrasing the demand based on

the hegemonically acceptable body standard: "thin, white women", it emphasizes the understanding that, in addition to racism, fatphobia also occurred, intersecting oppression in the systems of racism and fatphobia. This paraphrase is interesting because, instead of mentioning the excluded bodies, those that are not accepted, the interactant 3 highlights the axes of power, making explicit those who are privileged and, therefore, the agents of the systems of oppression. The interactant has a high engagement, because it reaffirms, discursively, the condition of truth, evaluating it both as "evidently" and "unbelievably" demonstrate a strong assertion that the company and the psychologist have responsibilities in the exclusion of such women. Another important lexicogrammatical choice is the use of quotation marks in "demands", marking the opposite position with a tone of irony, since he questions them, circumstantialized by the naturalization of racism and fatphobia in "without question". Fairclough (2001) points out the ideological and hegemonic power of naturalized representations: the more opaque the social meanings produced in the texts, the greater the efficiency of sustaining asymmetric power relations. Thus, "too unwise" and "regrettable" are choices that show her negative critical engagement in relation to the psychologist's action, condemning her for such lack of reflection and carelessness.

(4)   That **Brazil** is a **racist country is a fact**. **BELO HORIZONTE**, this large farmland, **has been standing out** (among the capitals) in this regard. And after all that, they still dare to say that people from Minas Gerais are a welcoming people.

Interacting 4 relates the fact to the macro level of the Brazilian reality, geographically marked by "Brazil", "Country" and "Belo Horizonte". The choice for an argumentative strategy based on geographic terms can be analyzed from the perspective of structural racism, that is, the fact is not isolated, but is reiterated in other actions, in addition to the company's requirement and the "unpretentious" circulation of the psychologist. Such reiteration is reaffirmed by the use of the past perfect continuous tense "has been standing out", a process that places the interactant 4 in the position of someone who makes denounces. The modalizer "is a fact" denotes high engagement and removes any counter-arguments because it is an unquestionable truth.

This sociodiscursive reaction demonstrates a social questioning when relating the content of the material to other racist actions and practices, bringing to the text intertext and interdiscourse that can be recovered by inferences and assumptions. Thus, he disapproves and condemns not only the acts practiced in the controversy presented here, but also all others practiced in Brazil.

This structure of relating the fact to the macro level is also seen in the following sociodiscursive reaction:

(5)   All this prejudice and inequality in **Brazil** is shameful. When you turn on the **TV**, it is rare to see [a black person] on the leading role, as a newspaper anchor or presenting a program. In **Football**, even with the FIFA campaign, there are always cases of Racism, News of Insult Crimes appears all the time, and that term wasn't even supposed to exist and the Law should be tougher against Racism. And now there is the **Right**, so it is rare to see someone being against or doing something to fight Prejudice and Inequality. Many people are false moralists, they speak of Meritocracy relativizing cases in which Minority wins some prize claiming to be just because of "Political Correctness" or *mimimi*

In addition to the geographical argument, the commentary also addresses the cultural sphere of television and football, as well as the legal and political sphere. The interactant 5, in addition to refuting the fact reported in the article, condemns how other socio-political and cultural fields act in the face of these visible relations of oppression and vulnerabilities. Here, there is no pronouncement on fatphobia like most: only one interactant reacted discursively to the problem of fatphobia.

7 Verbal abuse (and not only it) in the collision of bodies

Our analysis demonstrates critically and discursively how verbal abuse uses systems of oppression that are socio-historically and intersectionally constructed and that regulate bodies in multiple ways, as the identity axes collide. Furthermore, we want to reflect on how these collisions are present in the practice of analysis: we are two white

women, one being fat, reflecting on the systems of oppression that do not make us vulnerable: racism, which does not oppress us, and the fatphobia, which only oppresses one of the authors, but that does not intersect with racism. We were challenged and provoked (in the best sense of the word) by a fat black intellectual, whom we now thank and will continue to thank, Juliana Costa, who pointed out the universalizing addiction of our analyzes and the theoretical ethnocentrism. She did not give us finished answers but lead us to reflect upon our white posture in the academy and life. For this reason, our bodies were confronted, including by ourselves, and we were able to start to perceive the axes of power that compose us and, thus, try to highlight them critically in the proposed theoretical and methodological analyzes and reflections.

Based on this, and also based on stories and verbal sociodiscursive reactions, our paper discussed how the transmission of a vacancy for elderly caregivers via WhatsApp app that excluded fat and black women was portrayed. Thus, we analyzed how the voices inserted in the texts may (or may not) show the identity axes that make up the vacancy and how they mobilize, iterate, or question the oppression systems that structure them: racism and fatphobia. The same applies to the social gender because one of the media iterates the fact that this profession would be naturally linked to women when using the "caregiver" lexicon.

We observed that the Brazilian structural conditions operate and cross the bodies that escape the privileged white and thin patterns, making them vulnerable and violating them. The presence of the black body, in companies, is still suspicious, since its ability and work competence are put in check. The same has been happening with fat bodies. As Akotirene points out: "the heterogeneity of oppressions connected by modernity, the perspective of hierarchizing suffering is removed, as all suffering is intercepted by structures" (AKOTIRENE, 2019, p. 46).

Fact is: a fat black woman caregiver did not have the opportunity to work because her body, her identity, was involved by capital, structural racism, and fatphobia, that is, multiple passages that "reveal who are the people really injured by the matrix of oppressions" (AKOTIRENE, 2019, p. 47). Consequently, intersectional discrimination (CRENSHAW, 2004) was analyzed for its discursive facet, instantiated by the verbal abuse contained in the job vacancy. An interesting question about this discrimination is that, in the collision between fat black bodies, racism

is questioned more frequently than fatphobia. Both the subjects and the verbal sociodiscursive reactions work predominantly on the fact of excluding black women, both culturally and legally. The fact that fatphobia is a relatively new topic and the fact that there is still no legislation that specifically discusses this form of discrimination may constitute a situation that justifies its lower recurrence.

Thus, we state that more than discussing which verbal abuse is present in society, it is essential to analyze how they happen and how the social and discursive contexts dialectically produce conditions for them to exist. It is necessary to place verbal abuse (and not only them) in the identity avenues and highlight which bodies are in collision: both those who suffer violence and those who violate, complexifying the relationship between the axes of subordination and power, besides to the systems they are related to. This view contributes to not essentializing any identity and to question discursively more deeply how different discriminations (and crimes) operate.

Declaration of authorship

This article was developed by the two authors. The design and data collection were carried out by Maria Carmen Aires Gomes. All authors collaborated in the interpretation of results, writing, and review of the article.

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