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Vocabularies of denial: A Brazilian case study in discursive psychology

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This article attempts to analyze contemporary forms of racism and xenophobia in the case of Bolivian immigrants in the city of Sao Paulo, Brazil. The study examines the prominent role of denial of racism and xenophobia in contemporary discourse. The article is based on a qualitative empirical study conducted in Sao Paulo with Bolivian immigrants and with Brazilian university students. The research is eager to analyze various forms of denials in the discourse of both sides. While in the discourse of the members of the host society denial of racism and xenophobia appears in forms of disclaimers, counter-attack, mitigation and positive self-presentation, the immigrants tend to deny the existence of racism in order to create a positive self-image, to avoid conflicts and to reduce anxiety and frustration during the acculturative stress. Overall, the found in-group favoritism of the host society and the out-group favoritism of the immigrants result in the maintenance of the status quo.

Key words: Discourse analysis, denial, racism, xenophobia, immigrants, Bolivians, Brazil.

INTRODUCTION

Bolivian immigration to São Paulo began in the 1950s, and thus has more than 50 years of history. However, there has never been a discursive study conducted of Bolivians living in São Paulo, just as there has also never been a study of their host Brazilians in the same city reflecting on this inter-ethnic experience. Our research is intended to fill this gap and offer an exploration of various discursive examples of the denial of the existence of racism, xenophobia and conflicts on both sides. In this paper the term 'racism' refers to a system of racism consisting of a social and cognitive sub-system. Thus it includes, but is not limited to, attitudes, opinions, statements, policies and actions. However, discursive psychologists and discourse analysts have addressed issues of racism mostly in respect of discourse. This is understandable. While racist beliefs and attitudes can be present in a person's mind with varying degrees of conviction, awareness, scope and intensity, we can

define somewhat less vaguely, through discourse, and catch, analyse and criticize contemporary racist discourses that contribute to social and political inequality in society. Racist discourse is a form of discriminatory social practice that manifests itself in talk and communication. According to Van Dijk (2004) together with other non-verbal discriminatory practices, racist discourse contributes to the reproduction of racism as a form of domination. However, the main problem, both theoretically and methodologically, is to recognize racism in contemporary racist discourses, as, paradoxically, contemporary racist discourse does not look racist at all. Thus our work points to the prominent role played by denial in contemporary discourse, and follows the discursive work of denial in the area of racial and ethnic relations between Bolivian immigrants and Brazilians in the city of São Paulo. While a number of research studies have demonstrated that denial of racism by majority ethnic groups (Petrova, 2000; Van Dijk, 2002) as well as by the host society (Petrova, 2000; Billig, 1997; Van Dijk, 2002) – in the migratory context – is becoming the most typical discursive form of modern racism, there

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has so far been little acknowledgement or study made of the fact that denial, as a rhetorical form, has become a widespread response for minorities and immigrants as well, but for different psycho-social reasons. To understand these psycho-social conditions, it is necessary to engage in a discursive study exploring the fantasies, fears and emotional engagements of the participant communities. Concerns have been raised about the treatment of Bolivians in Brazilian society and the practice legalization of Bolivian immigrants in the city of São Paulo (Silva, 2006). While public discourse in politics, media and a recent research has demonstrated that the majority of the Brazilian population supports the presence of immigrants in Brazil (IpsosGlobal, 2011), it has also shown that not all constructed immigrant identities have the same status (Simai and Hook, 2011). In other words, some immigrants are regarded positively while others are not. Most studies show that Bolivian immigrants belong to the groups that are not viewed favourably by Brazilian society (Simai et al., 2011; Silva, 2006). From this socio-political climate came the impetus for the research referred to in this paper. Thus this study was motivated by the belief that only by knowing and understanding the particular characteristics of the discursive constructs of both Bolivians and Brazilians in the city of São Paulo could an understanding be reached of their attitudes towards each other.

The sociologist Stanley Cohen developed a theory of denial in his famous book *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. According to Cohen (2001), there is one common characteristic in all types and forms of denial, and that is that it occurs in cases when a set of people from any particular social group – family, government, society, etc. – are presented with information that is too disturbing to be fully absorbed as it is, or openly acknowledged: ‘The information is therefore somehow repressed, disavowed, pushed aside or reinterpreted’ (Cohen, 2001: 1). Cohen distinguished internal denial (the alcoholic who denies the extent of her problem) from public acts of denial (the happy outward persona of a dysfunctional family) from state-wide or official forms of denial (the ‘bystander states’ that stand in silence despite knowledge of widespread horrors). All these forms of denial, Cohen argues, have social origins

– they are ‘learnt by ordinary cultural transmission, and are drawn from a well-established, collectively available pool’ (Cohen, 2001: 59) – and ‘follow the same internal logic’ (Cohen, 2001: 77). Cohen further argues for a sociological typology of denial, in which (he claims) it is important to see what exactly is being denied, and, based on the content of denial, he talks of literal, interpretative and implicative denial. Cohen continues this typology and distinguishes forms of denial in time and space, such as contemporary and historical denial, and more importantly he highlights that the agent of denial is fundamental for an analysis of denial. This last categorization he calls the

‘atrocious triangle’ (Cohen, 2001: 14), which consists of victims, people to whom things are done, perpetrators, the ones who do these things, and observers, those who see and know what is happening (Cohen, 2001). These are the sociological origins and the narrative logic of the denial process.

In psychology, denial is a concept originating with the psychodynamic theories of Sigmund Freud. According to Freud, three mental dynamics, or motivating forces, influence human behavior: the id, ego, and superego. The id consists of basic survival instincts and what Freud believed to be the two dominant human drives: sex and aggression. If the id were the only influence on behavior, humans would exclusively seek to increase pleasure, decrease pain, and achieve immediate gratification of desires. The ego consists of logical and rational thinking. It enables humans to analyze the realistic risks and benefits of a situation, to tolerate some pain for future profit, and to consider alternatives to the impulse-driven behavior of the id. The superego consists of moralistic standards and forms the basis of the conscience. Although the superego is essential to a sense of right and wrong, it can also include extreme, unrealistic ideas about what one should and should not do. These three forces all have different goals (id, pleasure; ego, reality; superego, morality) and continually strive for dominance, resulting in internal conflict. This conflict produces anxiety. The ego, which functions as a mediator between the two extremes of the id and the superego, attempts to reduce this anxiety by using defense mechanisms. Defense mechanisms are indirect ways of dealing or coping with anxiety, such as explaining problems away or blaming others for problems. Denial is one of many defense mechanisms. It entails ignoring or refusing to believe an unpleasant reality. Defense mechanisms protect one’s psychological wellbeing in traumatic situations, or in any situation that produces anxiety or conflict. However, they do not resolve the anxiety-producing situation and, if overused, can lead to psychological disorders. Although Freud’s model of the id, ego, and superego is not emphasized by most psychologists today, defense mechanisms are still regarded as potentially maladaptive behavioral patterns that may lead to psychological disorders.

From a social psychological perspective, denial has a slightly different meaning. During the early socialization period, when we learn to speak correctly and appropriately, we also learn all norms to be polite and social, thus we need to know what cannot be said, what is rude, impolite, etc., – in short, what is acceptable or not. Children often cause embarrassment in adult conversations simply by saying things and touching on topics that are considered taboo. Thus, language is repressive and expressive at the same time (Billig, 2006). As we know from psychoanalysis, what is forbidden increases in desire (Freud, 1950; Billig, 2006), therefore

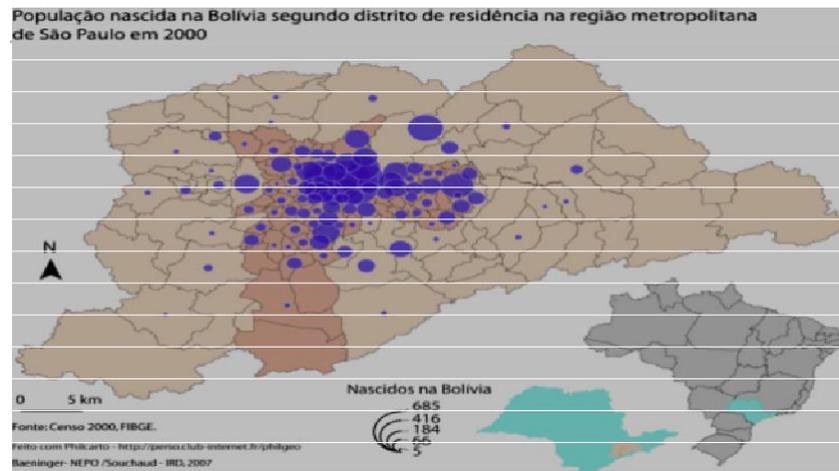


Figure 1. Source: Extracted from Souchaud (2010).

there is a constant force to repress such desires. Thus, temptations to transgress moral and ideological norms must be habitually repressed, driven from awareness and denied in discourse. Having said this, we can conclude that if language creates a necessity for repression, it also provides the means of repression as we acquire the skills and techniques of denial. This is to say that denial as a discursive form for expressing and repressing what is prohibited can be learned and socially practiced. Thus, denial is a discursive form that is being used habitually in every day communication and has become the most typical, widespread and modern way of dealing with condemned moral and ideological attitudes, statements, views, actions and policies – such as racism and xenophobia. In these cases, we can observe an ambivalent turn. Following WWII, racism and xenophobia were morally condemned and prohibited ideologies, and those who shared these ideas needed to repress and discursively deny them. Consequently, denial of racism as a discursive form in social practices is, ironically, a "product of the progress of the struggle against it" (Petrova, 2000).

To understand the context of Bolivian immigrants in São Paulo, it is important to know that Bolivian immigrants constitute the largest group in the recent international migrations to the city. According to Silva (2006), Bolivian immigrants claim to come from La Paz County in Bolivia, and in fact Souchaud's research (2010) indicates that Bolivians living in greater São Paulo have an Aimara origin. The research shows a strong connection between the municipality of El Alto La Paz County and the migratory flow to São Paulo. According to Silva (2006: 159), 'The beginning of Bolivian immigration to São Paulo dates back to the 1950s when a cultural interchange program between Brazil and Bolivia brought to our country some students looking for academic

development that was not available in Bolivia. Many of them stayed on.' These agreements permitted a migratory profile of highly qualified Bolivian professionals to enter Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, they lived in concentrations close to the border so the migratory characteristics were different from the current migratory profile, which is now mostly directed to the metropolis (Sala, 2008; Souchaud, 2010). We must add that the historical migration of Bolivians to just over the Brazilian frontier did not feed the other migration 30 years later to the metropolis of São Paulo. The migration to the frontier was not a migratory step in the direction of São Paulo. The spatial distribution of Bolivian immigrants in São Paulo reveals the visible and invisible faces of Bolivian immigration to the city. According to studies by Souchaud (2010), three aspects are relevant here: i) the concentration of population born in Bolivia and living in central areas of the municipality of São Paulo (Pari, Bom Retiro and Belém Districts), which differs from internal migration of which the main destination has been the periphery of the metropolis; ii) the confluence of spatial location for Bolivians and Koreans in the municipality of São Paulo; and iii) the importance of time spent residing in the metropolis as a dispersion factor for Bolivians living in the metropolitan centre (Figures 1 and 2). Among the characteristics of Bolivian migration to the Metropolitan Region of São Paulo, we can stress how invisible women have been in the process. Male Bolivians form 82% of heads of households (on the border this drops to 70%), and there is a marked predominance of masculine labour in the sewing shops. These specificities of the formation and origin of the flow of Bolivians to São Paulo, in addition to the current specificities and characteristics, allow elements to be identified that are (re)produced in quotidian practices in social relations and in the perception of this contingent of immigrants in the life of

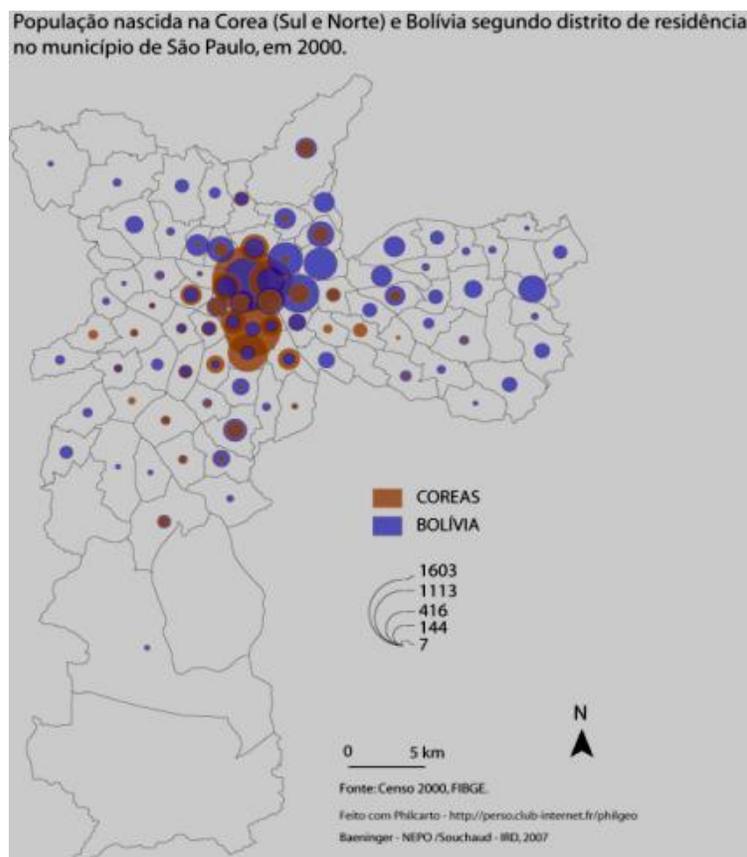


Figure 2. Source: Extracted from Souchaud (2010).

the city.

METHODOLOGY

We conducted focus groups with Brazilians to allow more engagement in the study of contemporary social rhetoric about Bolivian immigrants in São Paulo, whereas we carried out individual in-depth interviews with Bolivian immigrants living in the city in order to explore their migratory experiences and analyse the subjective experience through discourse.

Discourse analysis is the name given to a variety of different approaches to the study of texts, which have developed from different theoretical traditions and from different disciplines. Thus there is no one type of discourse analysis, but different schools. Our proposed discourse analytical method as a way of analysing the collected materials is based on the psychoanalytically informed discursive psychology of Michael Billig and the psychological version of critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on the works of Teun Van Dijk. Therefore, the intersection of these two lines is referred to here as 'psychoanalytically informed critical discourse analyses'. The main reasons for and advantages of the use of these two discourses analytical schools are as follows:

i. Both are psychologically informed, and everyone might agree that in principle the study of language should be allied to psychological

considerations. Language can no longer be reduced to an abstract system of signs, as that would ignore the fact that people constantly speak in diverse ways for diverse purposes.

ii. Discursive psychology studies what is said and how it is said, and here we suggest the inclusion of psychoanalysis in discursive psychology, which allows us to reach out methodologically to include the unsaid too.

iii. The unsaid, then, is useful for examining the operation of ideology, and the very same notion, ideology, is also at the centre of CDA. CDA studies the socio-cognitive interface between social structures and their discursive reproductions.

Thus these two schools bring to life three influential theories: the theory of ideology, psychoanalytical theory, and discursive psychology. For our intellectual purposes, it is crucial to bring together these three theories and use them methodologically. This is because we wanted to study ideology that becomes a lived experience through discourse and the many notions of the unspeakable. Contemporary racism and migration in our view include a number of areas that cannot be expressed verbally, such as the experience of loss, shame, taboos, and morally and ideologically prohibited opinions that are omitted and denied, but issues related to states of illegality and fear belong to these areas too. Thus the psychoanalytical eye is also necessary in our research context.

We audiotaped both the focus groups and the individual interviews and then had them transcribed and used as texts for

discourse analysis. Overall, this research report offers a discursive reading of the data from the focus groups and the individual interviews on contemporary forms of the denial of racism and xenophobia in São Paulo.

The focus groups¹ were conducted between February 26 and 28, 2011 with 24 graduate students from a university setting. Groups from the departments of psychology, communication and economics were selected at the São Paulo campus of the University of São Paulo. These participants all claimed to be from São Paulo and their ages ranged from 18 to 50 years. Their ethnic background was as follows: 5 Asian-Brazilians, 8 Afro-Brazilians and 12 whites. During the focus groups I asked open questions, as for a discursive study it is very important to see what directions they go in when given a topic to talk about. Halfway through of the focus group I proposed a concrete problem for them to resolve. It seemed to be working, as at the beginning the participants felt free to bring up ideas to elaborate the open topics and after the problem was proposed they got into conflict with each other. We thought it was very fruitful to see the discourses in these two very different ethos with the very same people.

Our 15 individual in-depth interviews² with Bolivian immigrants were conducted and taped and later transcribed and submitted to discourse analysis. We made a strategic choice of places to go to interview Bolivian immigrants. These were areas where Bolivians live and work in São Paulo (the historic centre, Brás, and the Center for Migration Studies (CEM) in São Paulo). Then we interviewed Bolivians without any further selection. This ethnographic technique *per se* combines ideas on studying people as they go about their lives and seeks the spontaneity of the respondents by linking people's political thoughts/emotions to their everyday lives, incorporating the material, the political and the emotional during the conversation. Thus, from our perspective it is presumed that the analysand subject remains in a place that is familiar to the respondent and her daily and routinely practised activity, without any special preparation for the interview (such as appointment-making, date-, time-, place- or topic-fixing), and it encourages the voluntary and spontaneous participation of the respondent(s) during the conversation in the form of doing and letting the other do a form of cultural immersion. Altogether, 15 Bolivian immigrants participated in the research, of whom 13 were women and 2 men. Their ages were between 21 and 53 and they belonged to the following professions: tailor, nurse, domestic worker, lawyer and designer.

As regards analysis, the participants' statements are not taken to be representative of the individual's personality, personal attitude or underlying cognitive processes (Edwards and Potter, 1992, 1993; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) but as articulations of current, socially available narratives on inter-ethnic relations between Brazilians and Bolivian immigrants in the city of São Paulo.

We were particularly interested in how 'the other' is constructed (by both the Brazilians and the Bolivian immigrants), what discursive resources are employed, and for what purposes. For us, grappling discursively with the function of a particular construction means engaging with the socio-historical resources that underpin it, the conditions that make it possible, and its material and ideological contexts. In this sense, discursive constructions inform and regulate what can and cannot be done and thought (Burman and Parker, 1993). How people position themselves and others, however, occurs both actively and passively; subjects can exercise agency in choosing their constructs while also being defined by the availability

and accessibility of discourses. What people say, then, is discourse in action, ideology that has become lived experience.

During data analysis, a number of linguistic, semantic and discursive categories were identified and a typology of the rhetoric of the denial of racism was reconstructed. The hypothesis was then reapplied various times to the text, resulting in the findings presented in this paper³.

RESULTS

At a more general level, Brazilian students showed strong in-group favouritism. Their choices of vocabulary and their associations concerning the Bolivian immigrants continuously reinforced this positioning in their discourse. They rigidly minded the gaps between the positive *we* (Brazilians) and the negative or exotic others. As part of this discursive tendency, positive self-presentation of Brazil and Brazilians was very common. Brazilians were auto-described as very receptive and respectful of various ethnic and racial groups from anywhere in the world. Comments like 'I think that Brazil is a country that has always accepted different cultures and there should not be any reasons for Brazilians to exclude others. Immigrants can maintain their cultures and still integrate into our society', or that 'Brazilians are much more receptive to foreigners than other countries' were frequent.

Counter-attacks were also commonly used to emphasize that Brazilians also suffer a lot abroad, and shifting categories from race to economic class was habitual in discourse when touching on the subject of racial or ethnic discrimination. For instance, declarations such as 'I think this is about another issue [...]. If, for instance, a Brazilian goes abroad and has the opportunity to work as a manicurist or waitress or babysitter, she is seen by others as being from a country of service workers', and 'I think he will be stigmatized; I have this impression, because he comes from a place that is very poor. Just like the Brazilian north-east where the north-easterners are stigmatized in São Paulo, too.'

Moral censorship was quite rare but appeared during the focus groups as a rejection of the more liberal view present on campuses about the acceptance of foreigners in Brazil, and this created conflict among participants. Censorship is the control of communication between people. It includes restrictions on what can be seen, heard, and even thought. Of course, from a discursive perspective, it refers to talk. The most common type of censorship is moral censorship, which restricts what can be said from an apparently moral perspective. In our context it sees liberal political thought on immigration as

¹ Focus groups conducted in Portuguese were translated into English and transcribed.

² Interviews conducted in Portuguese were translated into English and transcribed.

³ In the focus group reporting, references were made to the researcher as moderator and to the respondents as informants, while the sections analysing the individual interviews with Bolivian immigrants refer to the researcher as interviewer and the respondents as informants.

immoral. For instance, participants expressed their censorship through comments like this: “I really do not know what he means when he says “making them feel welcome”. Does this mean inviting foreigners here and giving them house, etc.?”

Various disclaimers, such as discursive choices of denial, were used frequently, and a number of types of these will be discussed in the next section, including empathetic, apparently ignorance-based, transference-based and explicitly denial-based disclaimers.

Contrary to the Brazilians, Bolivian immigrants showed strong out-group favouritism by praising Brazilians and often attacking their fellow Bolivians. Internal conflicts and discrimination were therefore very significant in their discourses. Affirmations like ‘[...] The Brazilians helped us a lot. [...] The Bolivians treated us badly at times’, or ‘At that time Bolivian immigrants who came to São Paulo were professionals ... professionals like my father, not like today[...]’ were found.

The third-person effect was also commonly found in the collected material in the sense of attributing negative experiences to others than oneself, for instance: ‘There are people who have had really bad experiences [...].’

Low self-esteem – along with its companion, denial – and intense frustration caused by stereotyping Brazilians were identified, as were various strategies being used to deal with this internal turmoil. These were expressed clearly, as in ‘At times, when I say that I am a Bolivian, they say that Bolivians are bad, that they are not worth anything. [...]’; ‘Brazilians also say they drink a lot. [...] Indeed, Bolivians really drink a lot, it is true.’

Positive self-portrayal to hide problems and deny conflicts was also clearly recognizable in statements like this: ‘I have never introduced myself as someone who has problems.’

In general, praise of the host Brazilians was very common among Bolivians. All these behavioural characteristics suggest that there is an attitudinal ambivalence present in the Bolivian community as well as a tendency towards system justification at both individual and group level.

DISCUSSION

Brazilians talking about Bolivians

Choices of topic

A close analysis of the discussion helps us to map the main topics that surfaced. The choice of topics tells us a lot. Earlier studies on conversations about immigrants conducted in the US and various European countries show a number of particularities to do with topic choices. According to Teun Van Dijk (2002), when respondents were asked casually about their neighborhoods, many of them often spontaneously began to speak negatively

about foreigners (Van Dijk, 2002; Wetherell and Potter, 1992). Interestingly, in everyday conversations about people or about one another, many diverse topics can be approached, but when it comes to immigrants the discussion topics have proved to be limited, and also predominantly negative. Positive topics did also occur in the context of emphasizing differences between groups, as in considering foreigners as exotic or as providing cultural enrichment. Below are a number of excerpts taken from the focus groups.

MODERATOR: The topic today is Bolivian immigrants in São Paulo. How do you feel about this topic?

1. INFORMANT: [...] I know that they have lots of difficulties here in São Paulo, that they are semi-slaves at work.

2. INFORMANT: When you stated the topic, the first thing that came to my mind was a weekly artisan’s market here in São Paulo. MODERATOR: Have you been there?

3. INFORMANT: No, never, but I know it exists. This led me to think about the cultural richness they bring here, while at the same time I know that this market is a result of the many Bolivians who have come here and who are involved in very difficult work, as she said, and that they suffer a lot. They work and live in the same place.

4. INFORMANT: The first thing I thought about when we started talking are the handmade products they sell here [...] I see them as being very united. This is what I see, that they look like a kind of tribe, the whole family walks together, they have more oriental eyes and wear their colourful outfits and sell their handmade stuff.

5. INFORMANT: I heard that in the slum (favela) near here there is a strong contingent of Bolivians. So...so they are different from us. For instance, it’s normal for them to hit a woman [...] They have difficulties in a lot of the work they do...they come here to find work ...

6. INFORMANT: [...] When I visited Bolivia, I had the impression that the country is very poor. But they are not refugees here, either.

7. INFORMANT: [...] their culture is very old and you have the impression that people are carrying this antique thing around, indigenosity in their lives and their culture [...] so, they are very culturally rich.

8. INFORMANT: [...] Bolivia is a fantastic country. It was the country I most liked. [...] The impression I had was that you do not understand anything when you are there, you know what I mean. MODERATOR: No, not really. INFORMANT: Well, because everything is so different, you look around at stuff curiously but you don’t really understand anything.

We see from these excerpts that the discussion in the focus groups focused principally on three areas. One was poverty, suffering and semi-slavery at work, cited in excerpts 1, 3 and 6. The second was their exotic nature,

the idea of Bolivians as being different, as seen in excerpts 2, 3, 4, 7, 8. The third idea was the concept of morally unacceptable, aggressive foreigners, as described in excerpt 5. All topics discussed were negative and associated with poverty, slavery or violence; the only positive view put forward was when Brazilians approached Bolivians as the exotic others who are culturally rich and economically poor, as was summarized in excerpt 3. This line of thought was in fact expressed very eloquently by another focus-group participant.

9. INFORMANT: I also think that there are some very interesting things about these people, like what she said, that we have the impression that Bolivia is a nation with a glorious past and that today they are very poor.

Thus the group began to think together and this participant allowed herself to say that what the others had said was true and that WE, the Brazilians, think of Bolivia as a nation with poor people but a culturally rich past. This narrative was interesting in that it was able to integrate the various individual views and express them as a group thought.

Positive self-presentation

As the informant sees it, the semantic basis of denial is truth. The denial of racism in everyday conversation and logic presupposes that the speaker believes that his or her group or country is essentially tolerant and receptive towards immigrants. Positive self-representation, therefore, is an important ingredient in daily discourse and should be understood as the argumentative denial of accusations of anti-racism (Van Dijk, 2002; Billig, 1997).

10. INFORMANT: I think that Brazil is a country that has always accepted different cultures and there should not be any reasons for Brazilians to exclude others. Immigrants can maintain their cultures and still integrate into our society. For instance, you see the Japanese district in São Paulo where it is clear that they maintain their Japanese traditions while at the same time being part of the larger Brazilian society.

11. INFORMANT: The experience I have in travelling through neighbouring South and North American countries is that Brazilians are much more receptive to foreigners than other countries. I do not claim that the situation here is perfect, but we Brazilians are more permissive and receptive.

12. INFORMANT: I think that as our country was developing there were so many different people who participated from abroad that I think that for our people here in São Paulo, it is easier to live together with other races and ethnic groups. As we are diverse, we accept diversity easily.

We can see from these excerpts the positive self-presentation of the history of immigration to São Paulo, the diversity of the population in the city and, generally, the constructed image of Brazilians as more permissive and receptive people, and these all lead to in-group favouritism among Paulistas (people from São Paulo) and Brazilians in general. One participant goes so far as to express that this is self-evident (see narrative 13):

13. INFORMANT: Everyone here in São Paulo is, in one way or another, an immigrant, not indigenous or native. All of us are descendents of the Portuguese, or Italians, or French, etc., you know. The whole city is composed of immigrants...so...

So positive self-presentation is fundamental to the denial of our bad side and their good side, and it shows a tendency to derogate the other and praise and glorify one's own history, background and past. As Teun Van Dijk put it, 'All these different structures at different levels [...] contribute to the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other presentation. We have seen that precisely such structures may derive from and be geared towards the construction of similar mental structures, that is, negative attitudes and ideologies on minorities and immigration' (Van Dijk, 2002).

Counter-attack

Counter-attack in discourse about immigrants refers to a strategic rhetorical move whereby the subject is reversed. Thus this type of denial works through reversal and it goes like this: It's not that we are excluding or being racist, but we are victims, too. We suffer from racism and exclusion elsewhere. So this type of denial changes the subject of the discourse and projects the speaker into the place of the immigrant. In the focus groups, this appeared in complaints about how Brazilians are seen abroad when they are immigrating. Although the focus group was really about the immigrants living in São Paulo, one speaker made this strategic discursive comment (narrative 14):

14. INFORMANT: I think this is about another issue, too, which is legalization. If, for instance, a Brazilian goes abroad and has the opportunity to work as a manicurist or waitress or babysitter, she is seen by others as being from a country of service workers. If she was able to take normal jobs as well it would be different. If everyone who goes abroad becomes a manicurist, then we Brazilians are seen as a country of manicurists.

What is interesting about this type of denial is that, for it to occur, one basically needs to identify a symbolic

enemy and to say that whether we are intolerant or not is really not the main question. The real issue is (to her) that others are intolerant towards us.

Presenting race or ethnicity problems as economic and social problems in general

This is a very common form of denial and basically it considers the economic disadvantage of a minority group and uses this to deny the racist side of the reality. It is, of course, true that in most cases a minority group is socially disadvantaged, marginalized or excluded, but there is also a racial aspect that is being denied. Dimitrina (2000) analysed this type of denial and concluded that such rhetoric considers race, nationality and ethnicity unimportant and accidental, but also, and more importantly, as irrelevant, and this brings a Marxist approach to the issue of denying racism. It is possible to follow this strategy in the extracts from the focus groups below:

15. MODERATOR: We are at a job interview and many Brazilian candidates are there when a Bolivian suddenly arrives. What will happen? INFORMANT: I think he will be stigmatized; I have this impression, because he comes from a place that is very poor. Just like the Brazilian north-east where the north-easterners are stigmatized in São Paulo too.

16. INFORMANT: Yes, I think they are stigmatized because they are poor.

17. INFORMANT: I do not know much about public policy but I think this has to do with the fact that there are lots of poor people here in Brazil, too. Work is hard for all of us, for Brazilians too.

18. INFORMANT: I think that this is a general issue and not specific to Bolivians.

19. INFORMANT: Here, those who have money, like black football players, are not black to society because they have money.

We can see from narratives 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 that this strategy of shifting from race to economic standing works in various ways and may emphasize the fact that Brazilians are suffering equally from such discrimination, and so this has nothing to do with nationality, as we can see in narratives 16, 17 and 18. However, there can be a mix of race, ethnicity and nationality, which can produce statements like number 19.

Mitigation

Earlier conceptual analyses of denial have already shown that denial may also be implied in various forms of mitigation, such as the use of euphemisms or generally minimizing the act or the responsibility of the accused.

20. INFORMANT: I have the impression that this is a more important issue elsewhere, like Europe for instance. We can see on TV how difficult it is in France for Islamic immigrants to integrate into society. So I don't think this is so much an issue here in Brazil. Maybe we should take this more seriously, but I do not think that it is an issue in Brazil at all.

As excerpt 20 clearly shows, mitigation doesn't just appear in the use of euphemism, but can also appear in the rhetoric of redistribution of responsibility, and hence in the denial of blame. The psychological logic of discourse like this is that it is not we who are principally responsible for tensions but rather that the problem lies elsewhere. The responsibility is someone else's. Apparently, in this form of denial the agency itself is being disputed.

Moral censorship

The focus groups revealed a conflict that ended in the formulation of another type of denial, as highlighted in the excerpts from the following narratives:

21. INFORMANT: I think I see it as valid for foreigners to come and live here, as it is for Brazilians to go abroad and live [...] This is more a question of making human beings feel welcome than of making immigrants feel welcome.

22. INFORMANT: I really don't know what he means when he says 'making them feel welcome'. Does this mean to invite foreigners here and give them houses, etc....? If that's what he means, I don't accept that.

As excerpts 21 and 22 illustrate, the participant with the more liberal view was blocked and censored. Narrative 22 indirectly accused the other informant of having an excessively liberal view and clamouring for the truth, and this should not be accepted, in the opinion of informant 22.

Disclaimers

A disclaimer is a semantic device that contains an apparently neutral part regarding 'us' and a clearly negative part regarding 'them', or the 'other'. This semantic structure is so typical that a number of sub-forms can be distinguished here. The apparently neutral part of the phrase is based on various aspects. For instance, it could be based on apparent ignorance, as in this example:

23. INFORMANT: I do not know much about this topic, but I have heard from others that, even though they claim they have bad conditions here, they do not return to

Bolivia. This means they must have even worse conditions there.

Other devices serve to neutralize the first part of the phase, that is, transference; apparent empathy or even explicit denial can form the basis of disclaimers.

24. INFORMANT: I have not participated, but I heard quite a lot of comments on the bus like, 'Look at that. There are so many Bolivians here'... and so on.

25. INFORMANT: I am sure that they have many difficulties, but Brazil is also full of problems, so we cannot help them any more than we already are ...

26. INFORMANT: For example, the bolsa familia⁴. I mean I am not complaining here, but there are many people who are complaining. They all claim that those who receive the bolsa familia are lazy and criminals, etc....

All this reinforces the idea that disclaimers use the grammatical structure of the Neutral part plus the BUT plus the Negative aspect of the OTHER. As was disclosed in narrative 23, the Neutral part was composed of an apparently ignorant or misinformed part, and, in narrative 24, the Neutral part was structured as transference. Narrative 25 also used empathy in the Neutral part of the phrase and narrative 26 demonstrates explicit denial. According to Dimitrina Petrova, 'A personal disclaimer is so typical of most contemporary racist discourses that it can be seen as an ideological marker' (2000, 32).

Bolivians talking about their experience of living in São Paulo

Internal discrimination

Internal discrimination is the first and most visible form of out-group favouritism. The presence of and references to internal conflicts within the Bolivian community in São Paulo were expressed through various denials. Most of the denials concerned the merits of the Bolivian group, wherein advantages and positive sides were denied and negative factors emphasized. Alternatively, there is internal group identification but it clearly outlines who belongs to that in-group, as there are sub-groups. For instance, there is internal in-group favouritism among Bolivian professionals but an exclusion of Bolivians from other sub-groups. Here are some narrative examples of the conducted interviews:

1. INFORMANT: When I arrived here, I just thought all was very good. INTERVIEWER: So, you like it. INFORMANT: Yes, I do. It has been very good to be

here.[...] The Brazilians helped us a lot. [...]INTERVIEWER: OK, so you are satisfied here then. What would you recommend to any other Bolivian women who want to come to São Paulo? INFORMANT: That...that it is very good here and the Brazilians are very helpful. There is everything here. INTERVIEWER: So, everything is good...[...] INFORMANT: Well, there are people I know who have had bad experiences too, very bad ... and I also was treated very badly once. [...] The Bolivians treated us badly at times. I had some problems in the house where I was staying because of my children. They didn't like us much because the children were noisy.

This excerpt clearly shows the tendency that appeared over and over again in the interviews with the Bolivians, namely to positively value and praise the group that is not an in-group but an out-group – in this case the Brazilians – while at the same time negatively looking at and talking about the in-group – the Bolivians. From a psychological perspective, this would be a case of self-hate, the hypothesis being that minorities, immigrants and low-status groups may suffer easily from an inferiority complex both individually and collectively. Indeed, social-psychological studies following WWII have shown that groups who suffer from prejudice may internalize society's biases against them and adopt certain preferences for more advantaged groups (Allport, 1954). Recent advances in the field, particularly in system justification theory (Jost and Burgess, 2000), have found that, in order to tolerate all kinds of injustice and inequity, people in difficult situations may support or rationalize the status quo and reinforce at a subjective level the dominant ideology and actions of the principal power group. Thus the more powerful the group one belongs to, the stronger the in-group favouritism will be, while those belonging to groups with less power demonstrate stronger tendencies to out-group favouritism. These attitudes can extend so far that they can lead to conflict within the group. We discovered that Bolivians discriminate against newly arrived immigrants who have no qualifications, as shown in the narratives below:

2. INFORMANT: At that time Bolivian immigrants who came to São Paulo were professionals ... professionals like my father. In order to get the documents it was required that they go through a lot of exams, from psychological through to blood tests. Not like nowadays! Today, people from Bolivia come from rural areas; they don't want to study...but it was not like this. [...]These Bolivians who are immigrating now are from rural areas, but Bolivia is not only this. INTERVIEWER: So, what is your relationship like with the Brazilians? INFORMANT: Brazilians accept foreigners very well, quite differently from other countries. Brazilians welcome foreigners with kindness. [...] Although if you say you are Bolivian, they

⁴ A government grant given to needy families in Brazil.

have the idea that Bolivians are all the same. But we're not. For instance, Brazilians think that Bolivia is entirely like Rua Coimbra, the Bolivian market here. But it's not. There are Bolivians who go there, but Bolivia cannot be summed up as being only like that.

This interview reinforces that same tendency to talk negatively about one's own in-group and even create conflict within the group. It's a type of separation that occurs when contemporary Bolivian immigrants are defined as being uneducated and even as not wanted by the earlier immigrant community. The narrative even goes so far as to reveal serious frustrations about the image of the Bolivian community in São Paulo being jeopardized by the newly arriving immigrants, who are described as low-profile immigrants. On the other hand, Brazilians are praised and seen absolutely positively. The Brazilian host society receives no criticism even for the unjust stereotypes. The criticism and complaints are directed at the in-group members, the Bolivians.

Low self-esteem

Closely related to this previous example, low self-esteem can be expected when a group shows signs of out-group favouritism. According to John Jost (Jost and Burgess, 2000), groups with perceived out-group favouritism have a general psychological tendency to justify and rationalize the existing social order and think that existing group relationships are legitimate and fair. Thus, if the in-group relationships are conflicted, the tendency will be to believe that there is a legitimate reason for this and that the group has done something wrong for relationships to have gone in this direction. We can see this highlighted in the extract from this interview:

3. INFORMANT: At times, when I say that I am a Bolivian, they say that Bolivians are bad, that they are not worth anything. They say that you are Bolivian, but you know that Bolivians are bad people. Then I say no, not all of them. But yes, they do exploit each other. They do not pay the workers; we all know about these cases. Brazilians also say they drink a lot. INTERVIEWER: So Brazilians say that Bolivians drink a lot. Is that so? INFORMANT: Yes, indeed, Bolivians really drink a lot, it is true (laughing). INTERVIEWER: So, does this bother you? INFORMANT: A little bit. Because when I say that I am a Bolivian I always add that not all Bolivians are the same. I agree that they exploit each other, but not all do, and when I explain this to Brazilians, they understand.

In the interview excerpt above, the Bolivian woman justifies the stereotype of Bolivians having a tendency to exploit one another and drink too much. Legitimization of these two negative stereotypes reinforces the idea that

Brazilians are indeed correct in thinking this way. The interviewee must then justify why these negative habits exist. Thus low-self esteem prevents the interviewee from resisting the embedded stereotypes. In the end, she also adds that Brazilians do understand her explanation, portraying Brazilians as very tolerant and understanding. This entire psychological process inverts the situation and, instead of rejecting unfounded accusations and generalized stereotypes, she legitimizes them through a lack of strength and insufficient self-esteem.

Positive self-portrayal

A blatant form of denial found among Bolivian participants is the denial of problems, which results in an exclusively positive self-portrayal.

4. INFORMANT: I have never introduced myself as someone who has problems. I always told them in Brazil that I came here to study.

Some informants believed that telling the truth about difficulties in one's life would be an obstacle to a good relationship. They maintained the belief that if someone is presented as a person who wants to study, this gives a positive image, whereas economic migrants are seen negatively. Economic migrants are associated with poverty and problems, and the informant thus thinks that this is not a good way to position oneself in the host society. The informant below also showed that he is very frustrated with the negative image of Bolivia and therefore endeavoured to portray Bolivia in a good light.

5. INFORMANT: I created this Bolivia Cultural project where I show that Bolivia is not only what most people see it as ...[...] There are many Brazilians who enter the site and send emails saying that they did not know that Bolivia was so beautiful, etc....[...]

The desire to portray one's own country positively is natural; however, continuously hiding and denying problems because of fear of rejection is rather common among Bolivian immigrants in São Paulo.

Third-person effect

The third-person effect is a semantic pattern whereby people are able to find an excuse for freeing themselves from a referred-to example, case or situation. This means that the person is able to refer to a potentially humiliating, embarrassing, or ideologically and morally prohibited case by putting the blame on other people who are not present at the time of the actual telling of the story. According to Michael (2006), when people use third-

person-effect structures, they in reality claim indirectly that others have this opinion or that thing that has happened to them, but I do not; I can resist, I do not share these views, and I will not have such a negative experience.

6. INFORMANT: There are people who have had really bad experiences [...].

The third-person effect produces unrealistic optimism and impersonal impacts, and this psychological relief is the essence of these rhetorical forms. Like all forms of denial, it causes people to refuse to accept reality.

Overall, the discovered in-group favouritism among Brazilians and the resulting out-group favouritism among Bolivian immigrants are well defined discursively on both sides, and power-position roles are clearly expressed and identified. The Brazilians consider themselves to be a very receptive nation, so you should give value to being here and we are also discriminated against abroad. These are the positions and dominant social rhetoric from the Brazilians. The Brazilian normalization discourses also have the same intention of reducing the stress on foreignness as a basis for discrimination, and this is a rhetoric that reinforces the power position of the host society over the Bolivian immigrants. On the other hand, the 'Brazilians are good to us; they help us a lot' kind of praise rhetoric is also quite common in showing clear out-group favouritism. Out-group favouritism towards the powerless minority and in-group favouritism towards the powerful host society result in the maintenance of the status quo. In order to tolerate all sorts of inequity, the Bolivian immigrant community as well as the Brazilian host society supports or rationalizes the status quo even when it contradicts their own self-interests. This research really shows us that repression and discursive denial have become the main techniques in the struggle against reality. It truly echoes Freud, who believed that repression is our main form of self-protection. It might sound ambivalent, but what we found was that, to cope with reality, people refuse to see it and express their experiences through denial. As Ernest Becker (1973) argued once in *The Denial of Death*, 'The essence of normality is the refusal of reality.'

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