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## **Lynching Network: Human Rights and Mediatic Effect / *Justiçamento em rede: direitos humanos e efeito midiático***

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### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses a chain of discursive events revolving around an attempted lynching that occurred in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The incident circulated in social networks and traditional media vehicles and gave rise to other similar cases. By analyzing opposing discursive matrices, this study traces the dialogic chains that unfold in the categories of intertextuality, intergenericity, interdiscursivity. Social ontology of discourse is discussed, theorized in critical discourse analysis, focusing on the centrality of the dialogical chains in this field, in analyzing Facebook posts in their relation with an opinion piece in the news. The lynching case generates interdiscursive oppositions in the interpretation of the poverty-violence relationship, and becomes illustrative to understand the relation between what is constructed and reflected in the media and what actually occurs on the streets.

**KEYWORDS:** Critical discourse analysis, Lynching, Interdiscursivity

### RESUMO

*Neste artigo, discutimos uma cadeia de eventos discursivos constituída em torno de um caso de justiçamento, ocorrido na cidade do Rio de Janeiro, de que foi vítima um adolescente de 15 anos. O caso espalhou-se nas redes sociais e em veículos de mídia tradicional, chegando a ensejar outros casos semelhantes. Analisando matrizes discursivas em oposição, mapeamos cadeias dialógicas que se desdobram nas categorias de intertextualidade, intergenericidade, interdiscursividade. Retomamos a ontologia social do discurso teorizada em análise de discurso crítica, buscando focalizar a centralidade das cadeias dialógicas nesse campo, para analisar postagens no Facebook em sua relação com uma coluna de opinião no jornal televisivo do SBT. O caso de justiçamento discutido por meio dessas ações discursivas, que ensejam oposições interdiscursivas na interpretação do binômio pobreza-violência, é ilustrativo para compreender a relação entre o que é construído e repercutido nas mídias e o que ocorre na realidade das ruas.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Análise de discurso crítica; Justiçamento; Interdiscursividade*

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## Introduction

What is the meaning of *damné*? The *damné* is the subject that emerges in a world marked by the coloniality of Being. The *damné*, as Fanon puts it, has no resistance in the eyes of the dominant group. The *damné* is either invisible or excessively visible. The *damné* exists in the mode of not-being there, which hints at the nearness of death, at the company of death  
*Maldonado-Torres*<sup>1</sup>

Society order in networks of practice has been an object of interest of several fields of knowledge due to the complexity that these networks present as sets of processes. Therefore, anthropology, geography, psychology, other social sciences, as well as computer science and engineering focus on different aspects of networks of practice, seeking to understand how it functions and is conformed in contemporary societies. In the field of geography, Santos (2006) defines that networks exist in both material and symbolic spheres.

Also in critical discourse studies, networks of practice have been viewed in an epistemologically coherent light regarding its aim to investigate language used in contexts of power abuse. This article analyzes a chain of discursive events, constituted around a case of attempted lynching, which is the primary event generating discursive productions that range from Facebook to television journalism, thus disseminating a chain of other similar events.

This article aims to discuss this subject-matter in four sections. The first section appropriates the social ontology of discourse theorized in critical discourse analysis, seeking to focus on the centrality of dialogic chains in this field. The second section contextualizes the chain of events and texts used as the objects of our analysis, then presented in section 3 – analysis of Facebook posts, and section 4 – analysis of the opinion column in the television news broadcast in the Brazilian TV network *SBT Brasil*. In these analyses, we make use of analytical categories developed in critical discourse analysis adapted to this article's analytical requirements.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2007, p.257.

<sup>2</sup> We decided to remove all images from this article, since the personality rights attributed to the journalist's image should also be extended to the educator/human rights activist and the victim in the incident under discussion. Therefore, we do not present any image; however, we allow, whenever pertinent, some description of the images that compose the multimodal texts under analysis.

## 1 Social Ontology of Discourse and Analysis of Networks of Meaning

As our study is interested in understanding how social, material and virtual networks are related to each other through networks of discourse activity, the concept of ‘network’ may also be associated with the concept of ‘orders of discourse’ (FOUCAULT, 2012),<sup>3</sup> in a theoretical delimitation updated in critical discourse analysis, for understanding the social role of language (ACOSTA; RESENDE, 2014; RESENDE, 2017a). By focusing on the ‘network of discourse activities’, it is possible to associate it with the concept of orders of discourse, and reflect on how genre, discourse, and style agglutinate into networks regarding certain practices.

In Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), a book that delineates general theoretical lines of the version of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that was initially developed by Norman Fairclough and was widely developed in Latin America (PARDO ABRIL, 2007; PARDO, 2011; VIEIRA; RESENDE, 2016), the concept of social practice is elaborated in terms of the discourse aspects of practice. This book is complemented in Fairclough (2003), when the author delimits, with more clarity, some methodological aspects of his version of CDA, and focuses on meanings of discourse – action/relation, associated with genres; representation, associated with discourses; and identification, associated with styles. According to the author, these three concepts – genres, discourses, styles – may be understood as components of an order of discourse.

The idea of discourse order is crucial when mapping senses in terms of their potential effects in hegemonic struggles, by understanding that the world of meanings is not disordered; rather, it is ordered according to social practices, which impacts the order of their own practices. Thus, concepts of genre, discourse, and style refer to continuity, to relative stability associated with discursive domains (or spheres of human activity, as Bakhtin preferred to call them) and social practices. This obviously benefits from the basic concept of genre, as formulated by Bakhtin (1986).<sup>4</sup> The perception of genres as “relatively stable types of utterances” – and then relatively stable modes of

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<sup>3</sup> FOUCAULT, M. *The Order of Discourse*. Translated by Ian McLeod. In: Robert Young (Ed.) *Untying the Text: a post-structuralist reader*. Boston: Routledge Kegan & Paul, 1981.

<sup>4</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *The Problem of Speech Genres*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.60-98.

discursive action – is replicated for the notion of discourses as relatively stable modes of representing aspects of the world and for the perception of styles as relatively stable modes of identification in discourse.

The influence of Bakhtin’s thoughts on the theoretical propositions of critical discourse analysis for the construction of a social ontology of discourse should, therefore, not be minimized. His voice echoes in two fundamental ways: first, in the very notion of genre, which, as we have seen, underlies the entire proposition around discourse meanings and, thus, guides discourse and style concepts in this ontological understanding of language in society that impacts the re-contextualization of Foucault’s notion of order of discourse. Secondly, the central notion of dialogism, with its discursive spaces of convergence and dialogical chains, unfolds into the categories of inter-text, inter-genre, and interdiscursivity, all of which are central to all models of discourse studies and are especially relevant when mapping chains of texts and their broader social effects.

As for the symbolic networks established for knowledge and information exchange, virtual environments existing within the worldwide network of computers are configured as converging spaces of social processes, enjoying the centrality of technology and influenced by media convergence (QUADROS; CAETANO; LARANJEIRA, 2011). The concrete stage composed of dialogical chains of texts that are published and then reverberated in digital environments are a propitious space for accessing social meanings that are structured with increasing complexity.

This article discusses how “discursive aspects of social practices, such as discursive representations of events, can generate causal effects in society; they can, for instance, legitimate certain forms of action or trigger a chain of events” (RESENDE, 2017b, p.90; see also Bolivar, 2010).<sup>5</sup> This triggering notion is interesting here to discuss a lynching attempt that occurred in the city of Rio de Janeiro and how it was spread by social network posts and then featured in the opinion piece of a broadcasting news program. Based on this object of study, it is possible to map the inter-discursive contrasts in the opposition between human rights defense and the segregationist security

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<sup>5</sup> In the original: “aspectos discursivos de práticas sociais, como representações discursivas de eventos, podem ter efeitos causais na sociedade; podem, por exemplo, legitimar certos modos de ação ou desencadear uma cadeia de eventos.”

perspective. The case also generates reflections about the potential effects of meanings of texts and the spaces empowered by discursive action.

## 2 Analysis of Discursive Network Configured from a Lynching Case

The analyses presented below arise from the concern regarding data collected on the subject of violence in online social networks when there is repercussion of events that also extend to websites of traditional mainstream media, as well as newspapers and broadcast news. For this study, we selected the attempted lynching that occurred on January 31, 2014 in the city of Rio de Janeiro, when a black teenager, racialized and impoverished, was tortured, suffered partial mutilation of an ear, and was chained, naked, to a street pole, in the upper and middle-class neighborhood of Flamengo, by a group of white adults. The pretext used by the aggressors was that the battered young man was known in the region for having stolen bicycles. It was then discovered that these aggressors had criminal records for drug trafficking, robbery, rape and, in mid-November 2014, two of them were arrested for participating in the commerce of illegal controlled substances.

This event cannot be understood outside the explicative key of coloniality. As explained by Ballestrin (2013), racialized hierarchies that founded colonial societies have not been overcome by processes of political decolonialization and, therefore, the intersectional meaning of race, class and gender remain central. Moreover, racial hierarchies became the foundational basis of power in the modern-colonial world in a broader respect (QUIJANO, 2000). Based on Fanon (1967),<sup>6</sup> Maldonado-Torres (2007, p.259) states that “not only poverty, but also the nearness of death – in misery, lack of recognition, lynching, and imprisonment among so many other ways – characterize the situation of the *damné*”, “the wretched of the Earth” (FANON, 2004),<sup>7</sup> which Wacquant (2009)<sup>8</sup> restates in mentioning “*les damnés de la ville*.” The low degree of humanity attributed to certain identities is what defines the ontological denial mentioned by Fanon (1967),<sup>9</sup> the concept of sub-otherness. For Benedito (2017), it is necessary to think

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<sup>6</sup> FANON, F. *Black skin, white masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 1967.

<sup>7</sup> FANON, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> WACQUANT, L. *Prisons of poverty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> For reference, see footnote 6.

about the torturable bodies: those who should be disciplined, dominated, domesticated, punished - as in the lynching attempt case which is presently in focus.

Lynching constitutes the event from which the discursive network presently analyzed is built. This event was followed by a second one – the boy’s rescue. On the same night, January 31st, Yvonne Bezerra de Mello, an educator and well-known human rights activist, was summoned by neighbors to rescue the boy, for the lynching episode occurred in her neighborhood. Therefore, the same person who denounced the Candelaria Massacre twenty years before, would, once again, come out publicly to denounce the teenager’s attempted lynching, through posts in her personal Facebook page.

Yvonne Mello then proceeded to cause event 3, when, while representing discursively what had happened, took the street incident to the virtual plane: She posted photos in her Facebook page that showed the boy naked, chained to a pole by the neck, in order to expose the situation. She immediately received a series of posts in reply, such as comments to two pictures she had posted, to show solidarity to her and the teenager and extending the discursive resistance movement she had initiated. There were also posts that sought to legitimate the aggressors’ actions.

The lynching incident combined with the rescue and the intense streaming of texts posted on Facebook prompted the response of the mainstream media, such as *SBT News*, which broadcasted a news report about the case and was followed by an opinion piece by the journalist Rachel Sheherazade. The dichotomy marked by Yvonne Mello and Rachel Sheherazade constitutes a discursive couple in which two discourse matrices are opposed – resistance and legitimation, respectively. From then on, the case was widely circulated in online social networks. The movement towards the occupation of spaces from the street to the internet fed the mainstream media, and the case resonated again online, sparking all the opposition poles.

The constituted discursive network was essentially shaped by the dynamics of solidarity (sharing the same discursive matrix) and of reaction (rejection, deconstruction of the antagonistic discursive matrix). Yvonne Mello’s position and Rachel Sheherazade’s reaction become the structure of the poles of resistance and legitimization of violence (of lynching itself) that inform the discursive events that followed. In this perspective, the information they bring, as central discursive events in

the analyzed network, delimits the inter-textual relationships based mainly on interdiscursivity, since texts (materialization in discursive events) construct and replicate particular ways of conceiving and comprehending the world. Thus, texts are solidary when they share forms of representing the same material event, by articulating the same discourses.

### 3 Analysis of Verbal Texts that Compose Yvonne Bezerra de Melo's Posts

Yvonne Bezerra de Melo is an educator, creator of the Uerê project, which works in schools in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and has a partnership with the Department of Education of the state of Rio de Janeiro. She is a human rights activist who focus on children and adolescents and first appeared in the media when she denounced, among others, the killing of children in the episode known as the Candelaria Massacre. Twenty years later, the pedagogue was once again at the center of a debate in which extreme violence confronts human rights.

Posting is the name given to virtual discursive actions that may include images (photographs, videos) and/or verbal texts, but are essentially multimodal texts, due to its characteristic of converging with the internet. The posts presently in focus introduce brief texts that are presented as captions for the photos that take the event from the street to the social network.<sup>10</sup> Consider the analytical excerpts 1 and 2:

(1) Good end of evening. After an *Aterro Vivo* meeting here at my place, while I was getting ready for bed, Álvaro Braga from the St. Teresa Association came back to pick me up because he was driving by Rui Barbosa Avenue after the meeting and he saw a young man who was wounded, naked and chained to a pole with a bicycle chain. He had been beaten by a motorcycle gang who usually robs around my street. We called the fire department, who immediately arrived and sawed the chain open. Soon the ambulance arrived to take the young man. The Police was also called by me but, in his case, he needed a hospital.  
Violence in Rio, another chapter.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> As explained in footnote 1, we decided to remove all images present in the original article, for reasons disclosed in the note.

<sup>11</sup> In the original: "Belíssimo fim de noite. Depois de uma reunião do Aterro Vivo aqui em casa, e me preparando pra dormir, Álvaro Braga da associação de St. Teresa voltou para (sic) me buscar porque passando pela Av. Rui Barbosa de carro depois da reunião, viu um jovem todo machucado, nu e preso a um poste com uma tranca de bicicleta. Tinha sido espancado por uma gangue de moto que costuma *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, 14 (1): 7-27, Jan./March 2019. 13

(2) More pictures from last night, saving the young man who was almost murdered by “*vigilantes*.” Social chaos leads to this.<sup>12</sup>

Yvonne Mello uses lexical resources in order to identify the social actors involved in the event, in an evaluative position in relation to them, and to characterize the action. At this point, it is possible to cross at least three analytical categories: meaning making and representation of social actors, articulating representational meanings, and evaluation, in which identificational meanings are articulated.<sup>13</sup>

In her post/exposure, Mello includes the person suffering aggression, targeted by extreme violence, which characterizes the beating and almost murder attempt – “he had been beaten” and “was almost murdered” –, however, without offering further information, probably because she was referring to a 15 year-old teenager. She thus classifies him as a “young man” in both Facebook posts, and the term appears twice in the first post. This term reveals the ambiguity of the teenager’s condition, viewed as a transitory phase between childhood and adulthood. This form of reference, although it displays certain representational neutrality in other contexts, in this case exposes value, when understood as opposed to reference modes often articulated in hegemonic discourses, in expressions such as ‘underage’, ‘minor’, ‘underage offender’, and ‘neglected minor’ used in referring to the impoverished youth (and often racialized youth) as opposed to the way the privileged class youth is often referred to – teenager, kid, boy, student, and also young man/woman. Thus, the repeated use of ‘young man’ in this reference has the effect of blurring these representational class-based (and also race-based) barriers.

Furthermore, regarding inclusion in representation, the photos, equally analyzable but not reproduced here, show the assaulted young man. The first photograph was shot at a high angle, not very accentuated, which depicts the moment in the viewpoint of the text producer while the represented participant is focused from top to bottom. The frame is American, showing half the body, but the boy’s face is plainly

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roubar aqui nessa minha rua. Acionamos os bombeiros que prontamente vieram e serraram a tranca. Logo depois chegou a ambulância para levar o jovem. A PM também foi acionada por mim mas o caso dele precisava de um hospital. Violência no Rio, mais um capítulo.”

<sup>12</sup> In the original: “Continuação das fotos de ontem a noite salvando o jovem que quase foi assassinado pelos ‘justiceiros’. O caos social leva a isso.”

<sup>13</sup> The categories employed here are meaning making according to Fairclough (1992), representation of social actors according to van Leeuwen (2008), and evaluation according to Fairclough (2003).

in view, so it is possible to see him crying and pulling the bicycle chain tightened around his neck. In the picture he is naked, a sheet of newspaper covering his sex. The marks of aggression, both physical and moral, are visible, stripping him of any human dignity – naked, mutilated and trapped like an animal.

As for the second photo, the represented participants are Yvonne Mello –self-represented in the captions as the boy’s ‘savior’, due to the portrayal of an act of “saving the young man” – and the young man is the object being ‘saved’. She looks much taller, though she is crouching, with her arms around the young man’s shoulder, who remains more or less in the same position, sitting in front of the street pole, but already free of chains, dressed with shorts and a bandage covering his mutilated ear. The angle is practically the same, with a slight horizontal angle between the lens/photographer and the represented participants. There is a vector emanating from Yvonne Mello’s eyes and that connects her with the photographer’s eye, which then becomes the viewer observing the photo; as for the boy, his face is side profiled and his eyes are turned sideways. She looks imposing and he looks like he can barely sit, which is significant, especially when associated with the verbal text of the photo caption, which shows that Yvonne Mello characterizes her own actions as “saving the young man who was almost murdered by “*vigilantes*.” The text thus creates an opposition between herself – “savior” – and the aggressors – “*vigilantes*.”

It should also be noted that the street pole symbolizes the violence to which the boy was subjected, visible in both the first and the second photo. The street pole appears as a type of modern urban pillory, since it plays the role of keeping the ostracized person in sight of all passersby of the public space. The symbolic act of violation takes place in the public square, as observed by Foucault (1995).<sup>14</sup> It is not enough to inflict physical and emotional torture; it needs an audience; it needs to serve as example. As shown below, after the legitimation promoted by Sheherazade on TV, the case did effectively serve as an example of how to violate: the pillory posts have multiplied across the country.

Yvonne Mello initially identifies the aggressors as members of a “motorcycle gang who usually robs around my street” and later as “*vigilantes*.” The first form of

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<sup>14</sup> FOUCAULT, M. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Allan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books, 1995.

including the aggressors undergoes unification (THOMPSON, 1990),<sup>15</sup> considering that, together, they form a gang. And the author of the post highlights the fact that they are regular thieves – “usually robs” – which creates an opposition to the justification used by the aggressors themselves, who were beating the young man because he was believed to be a thief. Using the same reasoning, the latter form of referring to the aggressors is “*vigilantes*,” which characterizes the act as lynching. Thus the quotation marks are relevant since their potential effect is to emphasize that justice is not what is at stake here. Therefore, the quotation marks become a discursive strategy of distancing oneself and implies low epistemic modality, or, in other words, little commitment to the truth of this representation by its author (according to the appropriation of the modality category by Fairclough, 2003). Thus, she imposes an intertextual distance.

Lastly, the relationship between the ways the two posts end is worth analyzing: the first caption “Violence in Rio, another chapter,” and the second, “This is what social chaos leads to.” There is a restrained style in most of the posts written by Yvonne Mello,<sup>16</sup> as she generally writes short texts and presents reflections about politics, safety in Rio de Janeiro, and other topics. Therefore, following the same reasoning, Yvonne Mello evaluates the event that she condemns as “another chapter” in the long history of violence in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and completes with the brief analysis: “This is what social chaos leads to,” through which she blames inequality for the current state of violence. It concerns the articulation of an alternative discourse in the representation of violence, which has been hegemonically imputed to poverty. The hegemonic discourse, in contrast, establishes relations of poverty-violence by means of security-related arguments that place a ‘villain mask’ on certain population groups (ZAFFARONI, 2017). Although Yvonne Mello does not provide an in-depth explanation of the social processes that resulted in (“leads to”) the lynching incident, she leaves traces of the interdiscursive chain that she establishes, thus antagonizing the hegemonic form in which poverty and crime are addressed.

This discursive act of exposure, amplified by the channel used by Yvonne Mello – the virtual social network Facebook, resulted in a series of comments to her posts,

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<sup>15</sup> THOMPSON, J. B. *Ideology and Modern Culture: Critical Social Theory in the Era of Mass Communication*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Two weeks after the attempted lynching event, Yvonne Bezerra de Mello erased her personal profile, but a few months later she created a new profile as “Yvonne B. de Melo.” The discussion here refers to the stylistic trait observed in this second profile.

which eventually drew the attention of television news nationwide. Regrettably, it was not possible to retrieve the comments made on Facebook, but their content can be deduced based on an article written about Yvonne Mello:<sup>17</sup>

The educator, who has already trained six thousand teachers employed by the city of Rio de Janeiro, and is a leader of an award-winning organization, could be on the hall of fame of national benefactors. But she ended up on the infamous sidewalks of social networks: she is the woman who, on the night of January 31st, posted on Facebook an image of a 15-year-old boy tortured and chained to a street pole by “*vigilantes*” acting in the neighborhood. In the ‘kindest’ messages, she was branded as “protector of criminals.” It was so intense that, two weeks after the incident, Yvonne deleted her account in the social network, which she had used as a tool for exposure (and also for fun). The online attacks surprised her due to their virulence, the high number and age range (the vast majority of the aggressors are young men between the ages of 25 and 35).<sup>18</sup>

As we can see in this narrative, many people using the social network took a stance against Yvonne Mello’s actions. The sum of comments marked the beginning of the dialogic chain of reaction and of legitimation of violence. The case became media-relevant from this repercussion, as it became newsworthy enough to appear in broadcast news, in some of the biggest newspapers (*Folha de S. Paulo*, *O Estado de S. Paulo*), in Brazil’s main weekly magazines (*Veja*, *Isto é*, *Carta Capital*), in progressive blogs, as well as alternative media journals and websites.

The following section presents an analysis of the most visible reaction to the actions of Yvonne Mello and the legitimization of lynching, in Rachel Sheherazade’s opinion piece, on February 4, 2014, during prime time in the SBT TV network evening news.

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<sup>17</sup> Available at: <<http://revistatpm.uol.com.br/paginas-vermelhas/140/yvonne-bezerra-de-mello.html>>. Accessed on: 20 nov 2017.

<sup>18</sup> In the original: “Educatora que já capacitou 6 mil professores da rede municipal do Rio e líder de uma organização premiada, poderia estar no *hall of fame* dos benfeitores nacionais. Mas foi parar na calçada da infâmia das redes sociais: ela é a mulher que, na noite de 31 de janeiro (*sic*), publicou no Facebook a imagem de um garoto de 15 anos torturado e preso a um poste por “justiceiros” do Aterro. E que foi execrada por gente que a define, nas mensagens mais suaves, como “protetora de bandidos”. O bombardeio foi tal que, duas semanas depois do episódio, Yvonne apagou seu perfil na rede social, que costumava usar como ferramenta de divulgação (e também de diversão). Os ataques on-line a impressionaram pela virulência, pela quantidade e pela faixa etária (na esmagadora maioria, os agressores são homens jovens, entre 25 e 35 anos)”.

#### 4 Analysis of Rachel Sheherazade's Opinion Piece

Journalist Rachel Sheherazade has worked in many traditional media outlets and became well-known in what is called opinionated journalism (MELO, 2003) when, while working for TV Tambaú, a branch of SBT in the northeastern city of Joao Pessoa, she criticized the carnival parade in the state of Paraiba. The video with this column was posted on YouTube and “went viral,” as it spread rapidly through social media and was widely commented in other internet platforms, such as blogs and websites. She went on to become the anchor of the evening news broadcast on *SBT Brasil* network, and one of the reasons for this promotion was the creation of an opinion column – *Opinião Rachel Sheherazade* – in which the journalist commented about pieces and reports broadcast on the news and other selected subjects.

By occupying the privileged discursive space of the evening news and with the opportunity to disseminate her opinions, Sheherazade commented, on February 4, 2014, on the lynching incident that occurred on January 31 that same year. This comment had repercussion in social network platforms, also going viral and triggering a chain of replies, both in solidarity to the ideas she defended and in reaction to the discourses she articulated. The reaction came from independent social actors, not associated with any institution, and even official statements from class entities and congressmen/women. From these last replies, it is worthy highlighting a repudiation note released by the Union of Professional Journalists in Rio de Janeiro, on February 5th, 2014;<sup>19</sup> a motion by the members of the political party PCdoB questioning public funds spent on SBT,<sup>20</sup> and a law suit from the Federal Prosecution Office, motioned by the political party PSOL for proclaiming an “apology for crime, by encouraging acts of lynching, exalting private vendettas and legitimizing the activity of vigilantes.”<sup>21</sup>

After these manifestations, the Prosecution Office and the District Attorney accepted the representations both against Sheherazade and SBT, and the television network had to dismiss the journalist to avoid paying a 500 thousand-real daily fine and

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<sup>19</sup> Available at: <<http://jornalistas.org.br/index.php/nota-de-repudio-do-sindicato-e-da-comissao-de-etica-contra-declaracoes-da-jornalista-rachel-sheherazade/>>. Accessed on: December 15, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Available at: <<https://www.pragmatismopolitico.com.br/2014/03/deputada-aciona-procuradoria-geral-da-republica-contra-rachel-sheherazade.html>>. Accessed on: December 15, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Available at: <<https://www.cartacapital.com.br/sociedade/psol-vai-encaminhar-representacao-ao-mp-contra-apresentadora-do-sbt-8604.html>>. Accessed on: December 15, 2017.

in order not to lose the funds spent from the Federal Government with publicity, which at the time reached R\$ 150 million.<sup>22</sup> The suit against SBT is still being judged.<sup>23</sup>

As a result of the law suit, when searching SBT's website, it is not possible to access the videos of the opinion columns: even though it is in the search list, when one clicks on the link, a blank screen appears. Still, the *SBT Journalism* channel on YouTube maintains the video excerpts of the journalist's comments.

This article's analyses are based on the video images and the transcript of the news commentary on *SBT Brasil News* (excerpt 3) on February 4, 2014.<sup>24</sup>

(3) The little delinquent chained to a pole was so innocent that instead of pressing charges against his aggressors, he preferred to run away instead of ending up in jail. That is because this person's criminal record is dirtier than your toilet seat. In a country where 26 people are murdered for every 100 thousand inhabitants, where 80% of homicide cases are left unsolved, and suffers from endemic violence, the attitude of the avengers is even understandable. The state is neglectful, the police are demoralized, the penal system is a failure. What is left for the upstanding citizens who, on top of everything, have been disarmed? Defend themselves, of course. A counter-attack on the bad guys is what I call the "legitimate collective self-defense of a stateless society, against a state of unlimited violence." And, for human rights defenders, who felt sorry for the little delinquent chained to a pole, I launch a campaign: "Do Brazil a favor, adopt a criminal."<sup>25</sup>

The first issue addressed will be the genre and inter-genre structure of the multimodal text (moving image and oral verbal text – audio-visual-verbal text) that composes the commentary on broadcast news. The text lasts just over a minute, during which the journalist states her opinion, in first person, with several modality marks (which will be subsequently analyzed), about the act of lynching, and proffers critical

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<sup>22</sup> Available at: < <http://www.jusbrasil.com.br/topicos/27268760/rachel-sheherazade-jornalista/noticias> >. Accessed on: December 15, 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Available at: <<http://web.trf3.jus.br/consultas/Internet/ConsultaProcessual/Processo?NumeroProcesso=00169821520144036100>>. Accessed on: December 15, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> However, as explained in footnote 2, the images analyzed (a sequence of images extracted from the video) will not be displayed; only a brief description will be made, when relevant.

<sup>25</sup> In the original: "O marginalzinho amarrado ao poste era tão inocente que em vez de prestar queixa contra seus agressores, ele preferiu fugir antes que ele mesmo acabasse preso. É que a ficha do sujeito está mais suja do que pau de galinheiro. Num país que ostenta incríveis 26 assassinatos a cada 100 mil habitantes, que arquiva mais de 80% de inquéritos de homicídio, e sofre de violência endêmica, a atitude dos vingadores é até compreensível. O Estado é omissivo, a polícia é desmoralizada, a justiça é falha. O que resta ao cidadão de bem que, ainda por cima, foi desarmado? Se defender é claro. O contra-ataque aos bandidos é o que eu chamo de: 'Legítima defesa coletiva de uma sociedade sem Estado, contra um estado de violência sem limite'. E aos defensores dos direitos humanos, que se apiedaram do marginalzinho preso ao poste, eu lanço uma campanha: 'Faça um favor ao Brasil, adote um bandido'."

remarks about social segments defined by her as “human rights defenders.” She looks directly at the camera, which slowly approaches for the first 15 seconds, gradually zooming in, narrowing the frame, initially the entire torso of the journalist, until only her face and shoulders are depicted, a technique that aims to simulate proximity between the viewer and the text enunciator.

The approach potentially builds a solidarity bond between the audience watching the video and the content being aired. At no point does the journalist waver; her firm gaze and punctuated gesticulations, which, although emphatic, do not leave the frame, are associated with the tone she employs, in the increased sharpness of her voice emitting each statement. These rhetorical features confer an intended degree of reliability/credibility to her words. It is also necessary to emphasize that it is a privileged discursive space, which means that what is said is amplified in terms of circumstantial potential.

The structure of the filmed commentary resembles the format established by Fox News, in which news anchors, way beyond their role of informing, deliver their interpretation and opinion on news subjects, according to the analysis of Hoineff (2014):<sup>26</sup>

Fox News’ astounding popularity, particularly in the last three years (the network was created eight years ago [in 2014]), has been viewed with justifiable unease. Rupert Murdoch’s broadcast news network emerged to compete with CNN and was willing to give up what had hitherto been considered a fundamental clause of journalistic principles of major television networks: impartiality.<sup>27</sup>

In this sense, we can observe, in addition to the inter-genre structure, the articulation of a relatively stable discursive format that can be defined as the genre “broadcast news commentary,” the interdiscursive relevance of the style adopted by the journalist, an identity forming personal presentation pattern, which is not based on the scrutiny of the “politically correct” (as the journalist says herself in a thank-you speech

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<sup>26</sup> Available at: <<http://observatoriodaimprensa.com.br/news/view/telejornalismo-e-a-crise-do-velho-modelo>>. Accessed on: December 21, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> In the original: “O espantoso crescimento da Fox News, particularmente nos últimos três anos (a rede foi criada há oito [em 2014]), vem sendo acompanhado há algum tempo com a inquietação que o caso exige. A rede noticiosa de Rupert Murdoch surgiu para enfrentar a CNN e disposta a abrir mão do que até então se considerava cláusula pétrea nos princípios jornalísticos das grandes redes de televisão: a isenção.”

when she was honored with the “Merit Award” bestowed by the House of Representatives in Joao Pessoa).

This style was largely fueled by the discursive actions built on programs aired on Fox News, a broadcast network that clearly defends hegemonic conservative right-wing interests and discourses, by assuming the role of a political party, as suggested by Anita Dunn, then White House Communications Director:

Journalist Luiz Carlos Azenha writes [...] about the interview that the White House Communications Director, Anita Dunn, granted to the television network CNN, [...] in which she states: “Fox News often operates almost as either the research arm or the communications arm of the Republican Party. [...] Let’s not pretend they’re [Fox News] a news organization like CNN is [...] As they are undertaking a war against Barack Obama and the White House, we don’t need to pretend that this is the way that legitimate news organizations behave. [...] When he [President Barack Obama] goes on Fox, he understands he is not going on it as a news network at this point. He is going on it to debate the opposition” (LIMA, 2009; suppressions and additions by the authors).<sup>28 29</sup>

These genre and style delimitations are associated with the articulation of the same discursive matrices, which creates a relationship of interdiscursivity between the texts of Fox News and *SBT Brasil*. It should be noted that this is not merely a reproduction of an American model; it is a construct of a large part of the traditional Brazilian media, and the cases of media commentators such as Arnaldo Jabor, Rodrigo Constantino, Eliane Castanhede, Reinaldo Azevedo and others are well-known. Sheherazade also stands out among the others due to the fact that she is a woman, and a young woman for that matter, since most of the journalists who undertake this stylistic approach are older men.

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<sup>28</sup> In the original: “O jornalista Luiz Carlos Azenha transcreve [...] repercutindo entrevista que a diretora de Comunicações da Casa Branca, Annita Dunn, concedeu à rede de televisão CNN [...], nas quais ela afirma: ‘A rede Fox News opera, praticamente, ou como o setor de pesquisas ou como o setor de comunicações do Partido Republicano [...] não precisamos fingir que [a Fox] seria empresa comercial de comunicações do mesmo tipo que a CNN. [...] A rede Fox está em guerra contra Barack Obama e a Casa Branca, [e] não precisamos fingir que o modo como essa organização trabalha seria o modo que dá legitimidade ao trabalho jornalístico. [...] Quando o presidente [Barack Obama] fala à Fox, já sabe que não falará à imprensa, propriamente dita. O presidente já sabe que estará como num debate com o partido da oposição’.”

<sup>29</sup> Available at: <<http://www.observatoriodaimprensa.com.br/news/view/a-midia-como-partido-politico>>. Accessed on: December 21, 2017.

It should be noted that in traditional media vehicles (whether the internet, television, radio or printed press), the media's position is supposedly neutral/unbiased, when reports and materials are based on information journalism; however, these vehicles open the door for some people to state their own views in commentaries and op-ed columns that characterize opinion journalism; thus, media vehicles are not responsible for what journalists and columnists say or write in these cases. Therefore, there is a paradox that mitigates responsibility for the consequences of what is published or broadcast through a discursive space composed of mass communication channels.

Also in the field of identification, we selected modality and evaluation as categories that make it possible to adjust the lens on the data presently analyzed.<sup>30</sup> There is a high degree of commitment with what is being said, by employing lexical items that build the epistemic value of the truth. Particularly, the tool systematically used by the text producer was the verb in the present tense, expressing her categorical truths. She also uses the expression 'he was so... that' and 'that is because', resources of emphasis that reinforce this epistemic commitment and impose the assumption of truth. See excerpt 4, below, in which these features appear in italics:

(4) The little delinquent chained to a pole *was so innocent that* instead of pressing charges against his aggressors, he preferred to run away instead of ending up in jail. *That is because* the criminal record of the person is dirtier than your toilet seat. In a country where astoundingly 26 people are murdered for every 100 thousand inhabitants, where 80% of homicide cases are left unsolved, and suffers from endemic violence, the attitude of the avengers *is even* understandable. The state is neglectful, the police are demoralized, the penal system is a failure. What is left for the upstanding citizens who, on top of everything, have been disarmed? Defend themselves, *of course*. A counter-attack on the bad guys *is what* I call "legitimate self-collective defense" [...].<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Once again, the categories of modality and evaluation are based on the appropriations made by Fairclough (2003).

<sup>31</sup> In the original: "O marginalzinho amarrado ao poste era tão inocente que em vez de prestar queixa contra seus agressores, ele preferiu fugir antes que ele mesmo acabasse preso. É que a ficha do sujeito está mais suja do que pau de galinheiro. Num país que ostenta incríveis 26 assassinatos a cada 100 mil habitantes, que arquiva mais de 80% de inquéritos de homicídio, e sofre de violência endêmica, a atitude dos vingadores é até compreensível. O Estado é omissivo, a polícia é desmoralizada, a justiça é falha. O que resta ao cidadão de bem que ainda por cima, foi desarmado? Se defender, é claro. O contra-ataque aos bandidos é o que eu chamo de: 'Legítima defesa coletiva' [...]."

The aspects of reality that are represented in her speech are categorized with Manichean distinction and a high degree of engagement. There is a modulating element of mitigation, the use of the word “even” in the passage “is even understandable,” which slightly disrupts Sheherazade’s commitment to what she is attesting, and it is precisely this expression that the journalist used to defend herself in the lawsuits, claiming she did not mean to incite violence, rather she meant that an eagerness for justice, by taxpaying “upstanding citizens,” such as herself, could be understandable. She contradicts herself in her defense by stating that she does not consider the action legitimate; however, she categorically states that the act would be one of “legitimate collective self-defense,” considering that, “on top of everything,” the state instituted a Statute of Disarmament (which conservative segments of the legislative branch are now trying to overturn). The mitigation of “even understandable,” however, in this passage is deconstructed with the “of course,” which is also emphasized in the excerpt.

Epistemic modality and commitment here are tied to evaluation, in which segments that articulate judgment are marked in the analyzed text. The tools undergo gradations, as a mark of force, such as in “was *so* innocent” (that bestows the idea of ‘completely guilty’) and in “*dirtier than* your toilet seat” (that complements the assessment of guilt). In the text, the evaluation tools create groups in opposition to each other: at the personal level, “little delinquent” is opposed to “avengers”; at the collective level, the opposition occurs between “human rights defenders” and “upstanding citizens.” By employing argumentative tools in the text, the journalist expurgates the former and aligns herself with the latter elements of these opposing sides.

Still in terms of evaluation, the lexical choices of the author characterize judgment. Employing lexical items such as “preferred,” in “he preferred to run away instead of ending up in jail”; “astoundingly,” in “a country where, astoundingly”; “endemic,” in “suffers from endemic violence”; “avengers” and “understandable,” in “the attitude of the avengers is even understandable,” builds the logical association between the aggressors’ actions and a social reply to violence, which, in turn, would be the young man’s fault (who is lynched). Therefore, there is an effort to justify, by means of casual associations, the violence of the vigilantes. In contrast, there is no causal explanation for the violence imputed to the young man chained to a pole – addressed as

“little delinquent” – the word choice “preferred” restricts delinquency to an optional possibility.

Sheherazade assumes that the teenager escaped in order not to be arrested; however, the escape never occurred, because after his rescue, the boy turned up at the 9th Precinct in Rio de Janeiro to press charges. Similarly, the journalist contributes to misinform when she suggests that the boy would be arrested, when the law assures that teenagers younger than 18 years old are protected by the Statute of Children and Adolescents. Thus, the author takes advantage of the legitimacy that the discursive space provides in order to render her version of the facts and mislead her audience.

The focus of the discourses articulated by Sheherazade in this speech is chiefly the situation in which “upstanding citizens” and “taxpayers” have no other choice but to avenge themselves of “little delinquents” and “criminals.” In representing the actors involved in the lynching event, she builds an opposition between “upstanding” (good people) and bad people, using the logical complementation. In this case, one may say that “upstanding” would involve being well-off, considering that she attributes badness to the “little delinquent” – a poor, black, homeless teenager – but not to the “avengers” – men with long criminal records for robbery, aggression and rape, but belonging to middle-class, white families.

Although she insists on the thesis that she has not committed any crime, since she merely stated her opinion, enjoying her constitutional right to freedom of speech, the journalist builds a set of juxtaposed ideas that offer society a seal of legitimacy for lynching acts: the good “upstanding” people can do nothing but defend themselves against the evil “delinquents.”

## **Final Considerations**

The lynching attempt discussed in this paper by means of discursive actions by Yvonne Mello and Rachel Sheherazade, who arouse interdiscursive opposition in their interpretation of the poverty-violence binomial, is illustrative in order to understand the relationship between what is constructed and reflected in the media and what actually occurs on the streets. That is because, between February and July of that year, there

were at least 50 other lynching incidents, some of which followed the same pattern.<sup>32</sup> This fact indicates the potential impacts of the dissemination of discourses of hate in empowered discursive spaces.

The degree of humanity attributed to certain identities is low, and this is the case of the reference to the battered young man as “the little delinquent chained to a pole,” who is defined according to the ontological denial of the “other” (FANON, 1967),<sup>33</sup> his sub-otherness. This is what allows the “other” to be unquestioningly recognized as a torturable body that should be disciplined, dominated, tamed, punished. Maldonado-Torres (2007, p.246) calls this dehumanization of the other “misanthropic skepticism,” based on ideological meanings that would explain “why security for some can conceivably be obtained at the expense of the lives of others.”

Statement of authorship and responsibility for published content.

We declare that both authors had access to the research *corpus*, participated actively in the discussion of the results and conducted the review and approval process of the paper's final version.

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<sup>32</sup> Available at: <<http://g1.globo.com/politica/dias-de-intolerancia/platb/>>. Accessed on: 21 dez 2017.

<sup>33</sup> For reference, see footnote 6.

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