HISPANIC STUDIES
review

Discursive racism against Afro-descendants in Uruguay

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Abstract

While discursive racism is generally well studied in Latin America, it has received little attention in Uruguay. Findings of other countries indicate subtle forms of racism through the denial of racial discrimination and negative presentation of minorities. This study explores how racism is manifested through discourse concerning Afro-Uruguayans by examining a debate between congressman Ortuño and journalist Hoenir Sarthou regarding affirmative action and employment of Afro-Uruguayans. An analysis was completed to uncover the race-related ideologies that exist in Uruguay as manifested by discourse. Results suggest that discourse in Uruguay follows similar patterns to other Latin American countries in that there is implicit racism as seen by discourse representing a 'racial democracy' ideology. The general denial of racism as well as the specific ideology of racial democracy were overarching themes in the current analysis, revealing that despite popular discourse of equal race relations, racism is constructed and reproduced through discursive practices.

Introduction

There has been considerable research on discourse and racism beginning in the 1980s with projects spearheaded by Teun van Dijk and Ruth Wodak involving discourse in the Netherlands and other European countries, the U.S., (e.g. Van Dijk 1983, 1993; Wodak & Van Dijk 2000), and then followed by inquiry into racist discourse in Spain and Latin America (e.g. Van Dijk 2003, 2005, 2009). Several discursive strategies have been identified such as positive-self presentation, negative-other presentation, the denial of racism, and apparent sympathy, among many others (presented in detail in the next section). These analyses aim to uncover racism and racial ideologies as manifested in language use with the goal of exposing and resisting such practices. While discursive racism has been widely studied in Latin American countries such as Colombia, Mexico, Argentina, and Brazil (e.g. Carbó 1995; Melo et al. 2003; Van Dijk 2003, 2009; Soler Castillo & Pardo Abril 2009; Courtis 2012), discursive practices relating to racism in Uruguay have received less attention. Thus, the goal of the current paper is to address this gap and to explore how racism is manifested through elite discourse, specifically concerning Afro-Uruguayans.

Primary findings of well-studied countries generally indicate subtle forms of racism as seen and heard through the denial of racial discrimination and the negative presentation of minorities and immigrants in the press, media, political discourse, etc. (Van Dijk 2003). The current study begins to explore the national context of Uruguay through an analysis of a televised debate concerning affirmative action policies and discusses some of the discursive strategies employed

in the debate that reflect racial discrimination. I argue that discourse is used that represents an implicit form of racism against Afro-Uruguayans, and that, despite popular discourse on equal race relations, racism is constructed and reproduced through discursive practices in Uruguay. I will also show that the primary discursive strategies used are the denial and mitigation of racism (as in 1 below), and that strategies of distancing, positive self-presentation, and negative other-presentation are also common.

> (1) la población uruguaya se está dividiendo, **no por razones de raza** sino por razones socioeconómicas y culturales (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)
> 'The Uruguayan population is being divided, not for reasons of race but for socioeconomic and cultural reasons'

This paper is structured as follows: The first section presents the main theoretical notions used in the paper, such as racism, ideology, and elite discourse, and the second section describes and exemplifies the primary discursive strategies observed in previous literature, primarily in Latin American contexts such as Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. The subsequent sections outline the methodology employed for the current study and discuss the findings of the analysis. Finally, the implications to these findings, conclusions, and avenues for future research are presented.

Discourse and racism

Theoretical notions

Racism in the current paper is defined as a system of social domination based on race/ethnicity (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Van Dijk 2005). That is, racism is not simply a matter of individual prejudicial attitudes or beliefs but is part of the structure of society (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Concerning *ideology*, I adopt Van Dijk's (1998: 8) definition as a 'shared framework of social beliefs that organize and coordinate the social interpretations and practices of groups and their members, and in particular also power and other relations between groups'.

The type of discourse analyzed in much previous work has been categorized as *elite* discourse, which is essentially the spoken or written language used by those who have power (politicians, journalists, professors, etc.) (Van Dijk 2003). Elite discourse is often discussed in contrast to *popular* or everyday discourse used by the working or middle class (Courtis et al. 2009). With regard to racism, popular discourse tends to reflect much more overt and direct forms than elite discourse, which tends to express racism and racist ideologies in a much subtler way. For example, the dehumanizing expression *negro de mierda*, used in popular discourse in Argentina and other countries, is clearly overtly racist, but we will see throughout this paper that elites tend to use much subtler expressions and descriptions. Van Dijk (2003: 109-110) points out the importance of elite discourse in explaining that the general tendency of racism goes from top to bottom. That is, its root is found among those in power who have access to certain discourses (e.g. the media, politicians, the upper class), which then spreads to the general society. Racism does not spontaneously emerge but is learned, and therefore taught, by the elites (Van Dijk 2003). The current analysis will be concerned with discourse in Uruguay, particularly that used by a journalist on a televised debate. The following section will address some of the most prominent discourse strategies observed in racist text and talk in previous research.

Discursive strategies in racist text and talk

There are numerous strategies utilized in spoken and written language concerning race that one should draw attention to in order to have a general idea of the ways in which racism is manifested through discourse. For instance, Van Dijk (1997: 36-38) highlights several common strategies employed in political speech, but which can also apply to elite discourse more generally. I will summarize and illustrate such strategies below:[1]

a. Positive self-presentation: strategies involving self-glorification, face-keeping, or impression management such as reference to how hospitable, tolerant, and equitable a certain nation or group of people are (p. 36). An example of this strategy can be observed in *disclaimers* such as what Van Dijk (2002) calls *apparent negation*, as in the example *No tenemos nada en contra de los negros, pero...* 'We don't have anything against black people, but…' (p. 11). Such disclaimers are often followed by a negative reference or description of "them" or the Other (Van Dijk 1997), in this case *los negros*. This example also illustrates more specific strategies, ones that are particularly relevant to the current analysis, namely the **denial of racism** (Van Dijk 1997, 2003). Other than outright denial, the **mitigation** of racism is also typical, such as when politicians downplay the existence of racism in their country by comparing it to a much worse situation in other countries (e.g. 'Racial discrimination is much worse in the U.S.'; 'it is not that bad in Uruguay').

b. Negative other-presentation: Conversely, at the same time of presenting oneself positively, out-groups are presented in a negative light. This can be seen in lexical choices such as "illegal" when describing immigrants (compared to "undocumented"), using the common metaphor of a "*wave* of immigrants", or simply describing immigrants and minorities as criminals, drug-dealers, or poorly educated, among other things. One example of this is seen below in the discourse of Robert Alemanna, a writer for an Argentine newspaper, when referring to immigrants from neighboring countries (Courtis et al. 2009: 39):

> (2) el bajo nivel cultural de muchos de estos inmigrantes deprime el nivel de la educación y perjudica a los demás alumnos
> 'the low cultural level of many of these immigrants lowers the level of education and is detrimental to the rest of the students'

c. Apparent sympathy: Another strategy involves constructing as favorable policies that actually have negative consequences for immigrants or minorities, that is, that the policies are "for their own good" (Van Dijk 1997: 37). For instance, when people argue that it is better for immigrants to stay in their home countries in order to help build the countries up or to prevent being treated badly in the host country, they are showing only apparent sympathy for immigrants because, in reality, those who use such discourse have anti-immigrant ideologies.

> (3) El problema de esta gente es que se vienen a Buenos Aires y terminan amontonados en una villa. Para eso, mejor que se queden en su pueblo, que prosperen ahí
> 'The problem with these people is that they come to Buenos Aires and end up piled up in a shantytown. It would be better for them to stay in their village, for them to prosper there' (Courtis et al.

2009: 34).

Van Dijk (2009) also highlights several other strategies and discourse structures that are used, which "affect the minds of the public at large, and thus how racist text and talk contribute to the reproduction of ethnic prejudices, racist ideologies, and discrimination of 'Others'" (p. 6). The first simple generalizations regarding strategies used (as described above) involve four main points, as summarized by Van Dijk (2009: 6):

> "To emphasize the positive things of Us, the ingroup"
> "To emphasize the negative things of Them, the outgroup"
> "To de-emphasize the positive things of Them"
> "To de-emphasize the negative things of Us"

More specifically, the author highlights numerous examples used in racist discourse, such as the following (Van Dijk 2009: 7):

> a. Giving prominence to negative topics about Them in headlines
> b. Using stereotypical words to describe members of an ethnic group (e.g. We are "freedom fighters" and They are "terrorists")
> c. Choosing pronouns and demonstratives that imply distancing (e.g. those people)
> d. Euphemisms for the in-group's racism (e.g. popular discontent)

We will see how such strategies play out in authentic discourse and how they are influenced by power structures in society and, by the same token, how such discourses influence society. The following sections discuss some of the previous research on discourse and racism, primarily in the Latin American context. We first look at Argentina.

Argentina

It has been argued that the formation of social classes in Argentina (lighter skinned people in positions of power vs. darker or "bronzed-skinned" people in inferior positions) has been due primarily to racial stereotypes driving the attitudes toward the Other (non-white), such as people of African and native descent (e.g. Courtis et al. 2009: 29). Research on discursive racism in Argentina has focused on the indigenous and (in)migrant populations in the country as well as Afro-Argentines (e.g. Ramos 1999; Courtis et al. 2009). For instance, Courtis et al. (2009) provide an informative analysis of a broad range of genres such as political speech, textbook discourse, media discourse, and everyday popular speech, among others. These authors point out that to refer to domestic migrants in the 1940s entering the city of the otherwise majority European Buenos Aires (seen as the "good immigrants"), a common pejorative phrase employed was *aluvión zoológico* 'zoological flood', evoking an image of animals (p. 18). Moreover, they highlight that the news media tend to present immigrants from bordering countries (Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay) as conflictive, dangerous, violent, and an overall "problem" (p. 35), which is consistent with Van Dijk's (2003) analysis of discursive strategies in Argentine newspapers such as the abuse of alarmist terminology and an overall positive-self presentation (e.g. civilized, healthy) vs. a negative-other presentation (e.g. sick, backwards) of border immigrants. This is not unlike media

representations of immigrants in Europe, the U.S., and other Latin American countries (Van Dijk 2003).

Other strategies in Argentine media include the association of immigrants with crime, disorder, the mafia, and the threat of an invasion of immigrants, among many others (Casaravilla 2003). Argentine media also uses the common nominalization *ilegal* to refer to immigrants without documentation. In fact, "illegals" are distinguished from "immigrants" at times, such as in the following example, in which we also see the aforementioned link with the mafia (Courtis et al. 2009: 40):

> (4) ...El proyecto no apunta a los inmigrantes sino a los **ilegales** que en su mayoría son manejados por verdaderas mafias que los explotan y los obligan a delinquir. (former member of Parliament Miguel Angel Toma. *Clarín,* 1-21-1999)
> 'The project is not aimed at immigrants but at the illegals most of whom are handled by real mafias that exploit them and force them to commit crimes'

Though media representations of immigrants and minorities are not monolithic, both conservative and progressive sources, according to Courtis et al. (2009: 45), tend to highlight some type of deviance (e.g. crime, disorder) and a certain degree of negativity in their coverage.[2]

Peru

To take another national context, the situation of race relations, ideologies, and discourse in Peru is particularly interesting. For instance, Zavala & Zariquiey (2009) present a study of both elite/upper class and middle-class discourse related to race in Peru. Regarding elite discourse, they explain how it reflects a general lack of awareness of race, and instead brings class to the fore. The one exception to this is the recognition of and discourse referring to white people as a distinct social group (e.g. *hay **blanquitos** y los hay aparte de todas las **escalas sociales*** 'there are little white people, and besides them there are people from all the social classes' [p. 267]). Most intriguing, however, is the idea, argued by the authors, that Peruvian racism is distinct from that of other national contexts due to racism being related to the relationship to oneself, not only to the Other. For example, this is done by the invisibilizing of racial features, denying that one is mestizo, but also discriminating against mestizos or indigenous people.

As is common in other countries, the denial of racism among elites is also apparent in Peru, in such phrases as *yo no diría que hay un problema de racismo* 'I wouldn't say there's a racism problem'. Instead, people attribute problems to cultural features or lack of courteousness, among other aspects (Zavala & Zariquiey 2009: 269). This shift from race to other features is reflected in discourses, as seen in the following example (adapted from Zavala & Zariquiey 2009: 269):

> (5) Yo no te segrego a ti porque eres blanca o porque eres rubia o porque eres chola/ yo te segrego a ti porque no tienes educación/ porque tu falta de educación me ofende/ entonces, yo no diría que hay un problema de racismo/ diría que hay un problema de difer-

2 See Courtis (2012) for a more exhaustive treatment of discursive racism in Argentina, specifically against Korean immigrants.

> encia educacional que crea estos conflictos...
> 'I don't segregate you because you're white or because you're blond or because you're *cholo*/ I segregate you because you have no education/ because your lack of education offends me/ and so, I wouldn't say that there is a racism problem/ I would say that there is a problem of educational difference that creates these conflicts...'

Aside from the denial of racism and transfer of attribution, we also see here a positive self-presentation by part of the speaker, who begins with arguing that he does not segregate according to race (*blanca, rubia, chola*). This could also be interpreted as a *disclaimer* (Van Dijk 1997, 2002).

Moreover, the use of diminutive forms can reflect racist discourse (Courtis et al. 2009; Zavala & Zariquiey 2009). According to Zavala & Zariquiey (2009), diminutives are used in Peru to represent the Other as inferior and express paternalism (e.g. *hijita* 'little daughter' in reference to a maid; *hombrecito* 'little man', *mujercita* 'little woman' [p. 275]) or as a form of possession rather than to show affection. The former strategy is seen in the following example, in which the speaker is placed in a superior position and expresses paternalism, according to Zavala & Zariquiey (2009: 275, emphasis mine):

> (6) Yo encuentro que la mujer peruana es muy solidaria/ la mujer peruana efectivamente/ tú la ves a la mujer**cita** en su triciclo/ está con sus cuatro hijos en el triciclo/ y está empujando/ es trabajadora, empeñosa. . .
> 'I find that the Peruvian woman is very supportive/ the Peruvian woman, in other words/ you see the little woman on her tricycle/ she's with her four children on the tricycle/ and she is pushing/ she is hard working, tenacious. . .'

Additionally, the use of the verb *tener* 'have' has been argued to represent the Other as a possession, as seen in (7):

> (7) Por ejemplo, yo **tengo** un hombrec**ito** que trabaja en aluminio/ tiene un tallercito chiquito aquí en La Mar.... (Zavala & Zariquiey 2009: 275, emphasis mine)
> 'For example, I have a little man who works aluminum/ he has a little workshop here in La Mar'

With regard to middle class racist discourse in Peru, one of the central strategies is the "denial of racism in order to place oneself in a better position in the social hierarchies" (Zavala & Zariquiey 2009: 279). Specifically, people who are part of the middle class generally attribute issues of discrimination to educational level rather than race, thereby using education differences to legitimize discrimination (Zavala & Zariquiey 2009). An illustration of this can be observed in the following example of discourse in Cuzco reported by Marisol de la Cadena (2004):

> (8) En nuestro país la raza ya no manda, ahora mandan la inteligencia, la educación, la cultura. (de la Cadena 2004, cited in Zavala & Zariquiey 2009: 279)

'In our country, race no longer rules, now intelligence, education and culture rule.'

Afro-descendants

Regarding Afro-descendants in particular, there tends to be a strong denial of their presence, particularly in the case of Afro-Argentines, as evidenced in their perceived absence or downplaying of historical roles in forming the nation (Courtis et al. 2009). Discursively, the denial of the existence of black people is demonstrated, according to Courtis et al. (2009), with straightforward clichés in everyday discourse such as "in Argentina there are no black people" (Courtis et al. 2009: 20). In addition, these authors explain that the term *cabecitas negras* '[lit.] little black heads' is used by elites to denigrate black people, noting particularly the use of the diminutive to imply little or lack of intellectuality or education (Courtis et al. 2009: 32). Other types of discourse that represent black people as uneducated refer to the misguided notion that they have 'too many' children because they do not use contraception. Moreover, black people have been represented as "pretentious", as in the following example, in which we also see the diminutive being used:

(9) Esos negr**itos**, como la criad**ita** del tío Antonio, **tienen muchas pretensiones.** Y es esa gente la que trajo Perón, que no se conforman con nada (adapted from Courtis et al. 2009:34)
'Those little black people, like Uncle Antonio's little maid, are too pretentious. And those are the people that Perón brought, who are never satisfied'

In the Brazilian context, we see similar types of discourse that associate Afro-Brazilians with a lack of intelligence as well as with animals, laziness, and delinquency. For instance, in everyday discourse (stores, workplace, bus, etc.), terms such as *macaco* 'monkey', *besta* 'wild beast' and *vagabundo* 'vagabond' are used to refer to black people (Van Dijk 2003: 161). In addition, it is common to see the phrase *boa aparência* 'good appearance' in job advertisements, a euphemism for light(er) skin, thus excluding dark-skinned people in Brazil (Htun 2004: 74).

Finally, to illustrate how explicitly racist everyday discourse can be, I will discuss an example from Afro-Peru. Carrillo Zegarra (2009) chronicles her experiences on the street in Peru as an Afro-Peruvian women. To provide just a few examples, we see how popular/everyday discourse tends to be much more explicit than elite discourse:

(10) 5:00 pm. Mientras camino alrededor del parque Kennedy me cruzo con un niño de aproximadamente 5 años que iba de la mano de su padre. El padre me apunta con su dedo y le dice a su pequeño: "**Cuco, cuco (monstruo**), ¿estás viendo al **cuco**?". El niño responde con una carcajada y dice: "¡Papá, ella está **quemada**!". (Carrillo Zegarra, 2009: 31)
'While I walk around Kennedy park I come across a child who is approximately 5 years old that was holding his father's hand. The father points at me and says to his little one: "Cuco, cuco (monster), are you looking at the cuco?". The child responds with a laugh and

says: "Dad, she is burnt!"'

(11) 10:42 pm. Una cuadra después, un comensal instalado en un café come un sándwich que parece ser de chicharrón. Me mira y grita: "¿De qué tribu has salido?". Casi me detengo. Medito. Continúo. (Carrillo Zegarra, 2009: 31)
'A block afterwards, a guest sitting at a café is eating a sandwich that appears to be pork rind, he looks at me and yells: "What tribe did you come from?". I almost stop. I ponder. I keep going.'

The above examples are just a small selection of what Carrillo Zegarra chronicles, a total of around 10 racist comments in 10 separate encounters all experienced in just two days. Thus, we can see a clear distinction between the subtler racism as generally manifested in elite discourse as opposed to more overtly racist discourse in popular or everyday speech.

Discourse concerning affirmative action

Discourse regarding affirmative action (AA) policies, the central topic addressed in the data employed for the current study, tends to be particularly problematic in relation to Afro-descendants. One ideology that arises with respect to AA (among other topics) is that of *Racial Democracy*, which maintains that racial relations are relatively cordial and less divisive compared to situations in other countries (Degler 1986). Consequently, many erroneously attribute discrimination to class rather than race (Van Dijk 2003: 158). Although commonly manifested in discourse throughout Latin America, such ideology is especially prominent in Brazil (Van Dijk 2003; Htun 2004), which has generated discourse that manifests racial discrimination. For instance, Htun (2004) analyzed issues around AA in Brazil. She reports that after certain AA policies were in effect around the year 2002, the discourse in the media and press involved simplistic debates that focused solely on quotas, ignoring other aspects of the policies. Those who were against quotas simply opposed AA, disregarding and silencing discourse concerning other aspects of the proposal such as social programs geared toward black neighborhoods, job training programs, support for businesses owned by black people, and courses aimed at university entrance exam preparation. She reports several instances of opposition to AA in Brazilian discourse, the primary motivations for such views being the following: it is viewed as "reverse discrimination"; the motivations for black exclusion are socioeconomic or class based, not racial; quotas will introduce false racial divisions; AA would be impossible to implement, with one of the main excuses being that it is difficult to identify *who* is in fact black . While this latter issue could in fact be a legitimate question, even by AA proponents for purposes of being maximally inclusive, Htun points out that proponents find this question disingenuous and dismissive on the part of opponents. For instance, she cites a Brazilian senator who argues that people in general acknowledge that structural discrimination against blacks exists (easily identifying who is black), but suddenly cannot identify blacks at the moment of discussing the implementation of actual public policies (e.g. reparations, compensation) (Htun 2004: 73-74). Similar views have also been documented in relation to affirmative action in Brazilian universities (see Van Dijk 2003: 173-176).

Furthermore, a racial democracy ideology in Brazil has prevailed and still continues to do so. Htun (2004) again cites an interview with a Brazilian senator, noting that many see class as the more important issue, with race being subordinate and instead support universal social policies,

believing these will also resolve the racial issues (Htun 2004: 78, n. 30, emphasis mine):

> In an interview, in Brasília, 18 June 2002, Senator Eduardo Suplicy, for example, believed that it should be a priority to universalize social rights through programs like his proposed minimum income, not adopt group-specific affirmative action measures (though he supports them anyway). Thus, though party leaders lend support to anti-racist struggles, black activists see this as "support" (in **rhetoric only**). (Interview with Deputy Paulo Paim, Brasília, 19 June 2002.)

Therefore, putting class above race is seen as a rhetorical tool to obscure the real issues of black people, irrespective of social class. Similar discursive strategies were discussed above, as used by the Peruvian middle class (Zavala & Zariquiey 2009). Moreover, discourse that reflects a favoring of universal social policies has also been seen in policy debates in different national contexts, such as the U.S. Civil Rights Bill of 1990 (Van Dijk 1997).[3]

In a similar vein, the study of attitudes toward AA in the U.S. generally reveals opposition to such programs (e.g. Lipset 1996; Schuman & Steeh 1996; Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000). For instance, in their interviews with white college students, Bonilla-Silva & Forman (2000) found that 85% of their participants were against AA. The students expressed their opposition in varying ways, but in general utilized discursive strategies that represented implicit opposition rather than openly/overtly racist discourse. This less overt expression, according to the authors, was to save face and to not appear as racist, similar to the strategies discussed above and highlighted by Van Dijk and others, such as disclaimers ("I am not racist but…") and positive self-presentation. They also used specific semantic moves such as what Bonilla-Silva & Forman (2000: 66) call 'topic avoidance by claiming ignorance' upon using expressions such as "I don't know" or "I am not sure", similar to what Van Dijk (2002) calls 'apparent ignorance'. In these cases, the participants appeared ambivalent, but actually revealed opposition to AA:[4]

> (12) "**I don't know** what I think about this. I mean, yeah, I think affirmative action programs are . . . needed. But … **I don't know**. Because, I mean, I'm gonna be going out for a job next year, and I'll be honest, I'd be upset if I'm just as qualified as someone else. And individually, I'd be upset if a company takes, you know, like an African American over me just because he is an African American. I think that would - ya know? I wouldn't." (Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000: 64, emphasis mine)

3 Another issue with favoring general social policies over race-specific ones is that this treats race and class as mutually exclusive categories. That is, given that race and class are intersectional, why not incorporate policies that assist both those of a low socioeconomic status and those who are marginalized due to their race/ethnicity? Targeting class groups alone does not fully deal with racial issues.

4 An anonymous reviewer rightly asserted that opposition to AA in and of itself does not necessarily indicate underlying racism; thus, in order to provide some additional context and explanation to this point, I will draw on further details of Bonilla-Silva & Forman's (2000) analysis: Considering the larger context of the participants' responses, Bonilla-Silva & Forman (2000) argue that "…the opposition to affirmative action of our respondents seems to be related to racial prejudice" (p. 65). The authors add that in elaborating on their (opposing) views, the majority of participants spontaneously used the same two problematic story-lines to justify not taking steps to minimize the effects of discrimination:"The past is the past" and "Present generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of past generations".

In addition, their participants often branded AA as "reverse discrimination", similar to what has been observed in Brazil and other countries. More specific to racial ideology and cognition, Bonilla-Silva and Forman highlight the general views that were commonly shared by participants:

> The fact that so many of the respondents used the same 'stories' underscores the fact that Whites seem to have a shared cognition and that these stories have become part of the ideological racial repertoire about how the world is and ought to be. The two stories were "The past is the past" and "Present generations cannot be blamed for the mistakes of past generations" and were mobilized as justification for not doing anything about the effects of past and contemporary discrimination. (p. 65)

The authors also noted the general denial of structural racism among the students and denial that discrimination affects minorities in a substantial way. The following section provides some sociocultural background for Afro-descendants in Uruguay, the main context of investigation for the present analysis.

Sociocultural context of Afro-descendants in Uruguay

Uruguay is often considered an exception to the extant racial inequalities in the rest of Latin America, with Uruguayans largely accepting the myths of racial democracy and equal opportunity (Bucheli and Porzecanski 2011: 116). However, there are clear inequalities between Afro-descendants and the rest of the Uruguayan population as evidenced in lower levels of schooling and significantly lower wages among Afro-Uruguayans (Bucheli & Cabella 2007; Scuro Somma 2008; Bucheli & Porzecanski 2011). In addition, the disparity in poverty rates is striking, being approximately 12% among the white population, but 28% among the Afro-descendant population (Rodriguez 2017).

Even though Afro-Uruguyans consist of 4% of the total population,[5] Uruguay is often viewed as racially homogenous (Arocena & Aguiar, 2007; Scuro Somma 2008; Arocena 2009) and as a "white country", as evidenced in homogenizing and invisibilizing discourse (Rodriguez 2017: 13). As in many other countries, such discourse has been challenged, in this case by Afro-Uruguyan organizations such as La Casa de la Cultura Afrouruguaya.[6] Some of the words and expressions documented that represent racist discourse in Uruguay include "trabajé como un/a negro/a", and insults such as "negro sucio" and "negro de mierda", as described by Olaza (2014: 134, emphasis mine):

> En Uruguay, por ejemplo, hay formas de decir: "**trabajé como un/a negro/a**", e insultos como este "**negro sucio**" o "**negro de mierda**" no necesariamente dirigidos hacia una persona negra, pero sí asociados a la delincuencia de los pobres, al consumo de pasta base o asuntos similares. Probable y generalmente, quien emite estos dichos o insultos no está pensando directamente en maltratar a

5 According to Index Mundi (2018), Uruguay is 4% black, 8% mestizo, and 88% white.
6 https://casaafrouruguaya.org/web/

> personas negras o afros. No obstante, lo está haciendo de una forma pre-consciente, naturalizada, automática, heredada por generaciones y cristalizada en el imaginario colectivo.
> 'In Uruguay, for example, there are expressions: "I worked like a black person", and insults like "dirty black person" or "negro de mierda" not necessarily directed toward a black person, but they are associated with the delinquency of the poor, the consumption of crack cocaine or similar issues. Most likely and generally, those who say these expressions or insults are not thinking of directly mistreating black or afro people. However, they are doing it in an unconscious way, naturalized, automatic, inherited from generations and crystalized in the collective imaginary.'

Further, it is widely accepted among the general population (erroneously) that Afro-Uruguayans do not constitute a significant aspect of Uruguayan national identity (Bucheli & Porzecanski 2011).

Although some previous research has been carried out on race and racism in Uruguay in general (and with mention of discourse in passing) (Bucheli & Porzecanski 2011; Rodriguez 2017), discourse analytic studies of racism that take discourse as the primary focus in the Uruguayan context have not received the same degree of attention. In fact, some argue that the social sciences in general have paid little attention to Uruguay (e.g. Bucheli & Porzecanski 2011). The following section will discuss the methodology for the current analysis.

Methodology

A debate concerning affirmative action for the employment of Afro-Uruguayans was analyzed. This particular debate took place in 2012 between Uruguayan congressman Edgardo Ortuño and well-known journalist and writer Hoenir Sarthou. The debate dealt with policies that addressed racial inequality in government employment, with AA at the forefront, and the discussion was sparked by Sarthou's previous criticism of an AA bill that promoted equality for Afro-Uruguayans in government positions. A written transcript of the televised debate was analyzed, which is available in the online newspaper *Semanario Voces*.[7]

The following research questions guide the current investigation:

a. What discursive strategies are used during the debate? Which are the most common?

b. What do these strategies tell us about the types of race-related ideologies that exist among elites in Uruguay as manifested by discursive practices?

c. How do such strategies and ideologies compare to those observed in other Latin American countries?

Analysis

7 http://www.voces.com.uy/articulos-1/debateortuno-sarthou%C2%BFcuotaafroparaingresoalestado

The denial of racism

One overarching discursive strategy used throughout the debate was the (explicit) denial of racism, with arguments suggesting that divisions in social relations in Uruguay are based not on race, but on social class and education, as seen in the excerpts below. In (13), Sarthou attributes the "verdadera divisoria" 'real divider' to a distinction between poverty and wealth, and "no la raza" 'not race'. He then reaffirms this belief by stating "Yo sigo creyendo en eso" 'I continue to believe in that'. There is a rejection that greater life opportunities are not given due to differences in race and a belief that socioeconomic status is the true dividing line. In the next example (14), we see very similar language being used to reinforce such beliefs, namely the verb *dividir*, the negation of race, and an attribution to socioeconomic standing rather than race.

> (13) La verdadera divisoria_que genera mayores posibilidades de vida es la pobreza o la riqueza, y **no la raza**. Yo sigo creyendo en eso (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)
> 'The real divider that generates greater life possibilities is poverty or wealth, and not race. I continue believing in that'

> (14) la población uruguaya se está dividiendo, **no por razones de raza** sino por razones socioeconómicas y culturales (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)
> 'The Uruguayan population is being divided, not for reasons of race but for socioeconomic and cultural reasons'

In (16) below, Sarthou ties his denial of racism to the more specific context of *el Estado* 'the state' in Uruguay. Here he denies that there are differential earnings in State employment according to race, after Ortuño asserts that this is in fact the case (15).

> (15) En este trabajo que habla justamente del sistema laboral, desigualdad salarial y discriminación por raza en el mercado de trabajo, se muestran dos cosas. Que con igual capacitación, con igual formación, con iguales capacidades **un blanco gana más que un negro**. Y lo segundo que se demuestra es que **hay menor ingreso de afrodescendientes al Estado**... (Edgardo Ortuño, Semanario Voces 2012)
> 'In this work that talks precisely about the labor system, wage inequality and race discrimination in the job market, two things are shown. With equal training, with equal education, with equal abilities, a white person earns more than a black person. And the second thing demonstrated is that there is lower admittance of Afro-descendants to the State...'

> (16) En el Estado eso no ocurre, **no es cierto que en el Estado según la raza se cobre más o se cobre menos**, se ingrese más o se ingrese menos. Se ingresa menos seguramente por un problema de formación" (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)

> 'In the State that does not occur, it's not true that in the State depending on race more is earned or less is earned, more are admitted or less are admitted. Less are admitted surely due to a problem of training'

We see overt negation (eso **no** ocurre, **no** es cierto 'that doesn't happen, it's not true') being used to deny this, followed by a statement that attributes lower earnings to a lack of employee *formación* 'training'.

The mitigation of racism

Aside from outright denial of racism, there was also discourse used during the debate that mitigated or downplayed racial discrimination in Uruguay. For instance, example (17) below illustrates the mitigation of racism in which Sarthou makes a comparison between Uruguayan and North American societies, pointing out that the latter is much more stratified (less integrated) than the former. This also implies a certain degree of acknowledgement that Uruguayan society is at least somewhat stratified/divided. Referring to AA, the speaker states that these procedures are brought from *sociedades muy poco igualitarias* 'societies with very little egalitarianism' where there is no true integration. He then refers to North American society as an example, describing it as "absolutamente estratificada" making a contrast with Uruguay with the phrase "mucho más que la uruguaya". Finally, an explicit contrast is made with the use of the overt pronoun *nosotros* 'we', meaning "us Uruguayans" and the assertion that *tenemos una tradición mucho más integrada* 'we have a much more integrated tradition'. Regarding the broader discursive strategies employed here, the comparisons made indicate a strategy of Positive-Self presentation/Negative Other-presentation (Van Dijk 1997, 2003, 2009): the speaker is presenting Uruguay, a society of which he is a part, in a positive light (integrated), while portraying North America in a negative way (stratified, lack of integration).

> (17) ...recurrimos a estos procedimientos, que en el fondo son traídos de sociedades muy poco igualitarias, donde no hay una verdadera integración. **La sociedad norteamericana es una sociedad absolutamente estratificada, mucho más que la uruguaya.** Crean este modelo, crean este tipo de políticas para defender una sociedad de grandes diferencias. **Nosotros tenemos una tradición mucho más integrada...** (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)
> '...we turn to these procedures, that ultimately are brought from societies with very little egalitarianism, where there is not true integration. The North American society is an absolutely stratified society, much more than the Uruguayan [society]. They create this model, they create these types of policies to defend a society of great differences.'

Branding of affirmative action as inegalitarian

Moreover, there were several cases in which AA was branded as inegalitarian by the speaker, specifically in terms of "apartarse" 'separating' or "romper" 'breaking away' from the principle of equality, as seen in (18) and (19). The use of these verbs presupposes that there was once or currently is equality, and that AA policies would interfere with such principle.

> (18) ...son políticas que pretenden apartarse del **principio de igualdad** (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)
> '...they're policies that try to separate from the principle of equality'

> (19) ¿Cuál es el problema con las políticas de discriminación positiva? Que rompen el **principio de igualdad**. (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)
> 'What is the problem with positive discrimination policies? That they break away from the principle of equality'

In response, Ortuño expresses that this perspective is simply wrong, and then more profoundly describes the notion of equality and the goals of AA policies:

> (20) ...en realidad la igualdad supone igualdad de oportunidades, "igualdad ante la vida", decía el Dr. Tabaré Vázquez, en una frase que resume lo que pensamos quienes tenemos una vocación ética por la igualdad y la justicia social. Y eso quiere decir que si usted en una carrera tiene a todos los corredores saliendo del mismo punto, efectivamente tiene que garantizar las reglas igualitarias para todos y la posibilidad de que todos lleguen a la meta. (Edgardo Ortuño, Semanario Voces 2012)
> '...actually equality entails equal opportunities, "equality in the face of life", Dr. Tabaré Vásquez used to say, in a phrase that summarizes what those of us who have an ethical vocation for equality and social justice think. And that means that if in a race you have all the runners starting from the same point, you have to effectively ensure egalitarian rules for everyone and the possibility for everyone to reach the finish line'

Discriminacion positiva (Reverse discrimination)

As is common and well-documented in discourse about affirmative action, Sarthou also criticizes and questions the term "acciones afirmativas" as being a euphemism for, in his opinion, what the policy should be called: discriminación positiva (example 21). This preference is reinforced by his regular usage of the latter term to refer to AA, exemplified in (22) below. In this way, the ideology that AA reflects a practice of reverse discrimination is evident, as observed in previous studies (Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000; Htun 2004).

> (21) Lo que yo cuestiono es lo que en el mundo se llama "**discriminación positiva**" y ahora se le ha puesto eufemísticamente el

> nombre de "acciones afirmativas" (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012).
> 'What I question is what in the world is called "positive discrimination" and now it has been euphemistically named "affirmative action"'

> (22) ¿Cuál es el problema con las políticas de **discriminación positiva**? Que rompen el principio de igualdad. (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012)
> 'What is the problem with positive discrimination policies? That they break away from the principle of equality'

Distancing strategy: **They** are the ones that should resolve **their** problems (not me/us)

Finally, we see the employment of a distancing strategy, primarily manifested through choice in person-reference and demonstrative adjectives. Consider these choices in (23) below. First, we see the demonstrative *ese* 'that' to modify *sector* 'sector'. We then see the use of third-person singular reference with the verb *logra* 'manage', as well as the choice of third-person pronoun *sus* 'their'.

> (23) Que **ese** sector, si **logra** resolver **sus** problemas, genera otros sectores que están perjudicados... (Hoenir Sarthou, Semanario Voces 2012).
> 'That that sector, if it manages to solve its problems, generates other sectors that are harmed...'

The use of demonstratives can signal distance from the speaker (Van Dijk 2009), making *ese* a way to distance "that sector" (Afro-Uruguayans) from the speaker. Secondly, the use of *logra resolver* indicates the belief that "that sector" is the one that should solve problems of discrimination. In other words, such distancing strategies mark the "other", a group with which the speaker does not identify (De Fina 1995). This is reinforced with the pronominal choice of *sus* to modify *problemas* (see also Limerick 2017). That is, in the mind of the speaker, the problems are *theirs*, not *mine,* or ours as a society. Notice that Sarthou could have said "los" 'the' or "nuestros" 'our' problemas, but chose "sus", creating distance between the outgroup and himself, and reflecting a belief that he is not part of the problem. Thus, ***They** are the ones that should resolve **their** problems*.

Discussion and conclusion

This final section will return to the three research questions posed previously and offer answers for each of them, while also discussing implications for the current findings, a summary of the analysis, and overall conclusions.

a. What discursive strategies are used during the debate? Which are the most common?

As seen in the above analysis of the affirmative action debate, numerous discursive strategies worked together to construct discourse opposing AA. First, we saw the outright denial of racism, the mitigation or downplaying of racism, distancing strategies through the use of third-person reference. We also observed the description of AA as inegalitarian, breaking away from principles of equality, an ideology then reinforced by the lexical choice of *disriminacion positiva* to refer to AA in a negative way that connotes inequality. The most common discursive strategies observed were, without a doubt, those of the denial and mitigation of racism. In addition, the overarching strategy of positive self-presentation/Negative Other-presentation was evident throughout the debate, for example in Sarthou's comparison of North American society, which is stratified, and Uruguayan society, a much more integrated and egalitarian society.

b. What do these strategies tell us about the types of race-related ideologies that exist among elites in Uruguay as manifested by discursive practices?

By analyzing the discourse used in this debate, we can see that the racial democracy ideology is still prevalent in Uruguay. Particularly, returning to the denial/mitigation of racism strategy, we observed numerous cases of Sarthou's discourse in which he denies that inequalities are due to racial issues, and instead argues that social class is the central focus. This is the foundational belief of the ideology of racial democracy observed in countries such as Brazil and Peru (Htun 2004; Zavala & Zariquiey 2009). This type of discourse articulated by elites in Uruguay suggests that popular/everyday discourse and attitudes are likely to be similar. Since elite discourse has the power to influence society, this ideology has likely spread to the general public, who reproduce these types of discursive practices (Van Dijk 2009).

c. How do such discursive strategies and ideologies compare to those observed in other Latin American countries?

As noted above, we can see several discursive strategies and ideologies that mirror those of other Latin American countries, in particular Brazil, Peru, and Argentina. These mainly include the branding of AA as inegalitarian and the view of AA as reverse discrimination, consistent with previous studies both in Latin America (Brazil, Htun 2004) and outside of Latin America (the U.S., Bonilla-Silva & Forman 2000). Additionally, consistent with what has been observed for discourse both in Peru (Zavala & Zariquiey 2009) and Brazil (Htun 2004), the analysis of elite discourse in Uruguay reveals that discrimination is attributed to a lack of education and lower socioeconomic status rather than race. Another finding for the current analysis is the proposal of "universal" policies instead of AA policies, similar to what the Brazilian government has promoted (Htun 2004).

In sum, elite discourse in Uruguay follows similar patterns to that of other national contexts in that there is implicit discursive racism as seen in discourse that denies institutional racism and represents an ideology of 'racial democracy'. Thus, despite everyday discourse of equal race relations and racial democracy ideologies in Uruguay, racism against Afro-Uruguayans is constructed and reproduced through discursive practices.

While this preliminary analysis has revealed concrete discursive practices and strategies in relation to race in Uruguay, an understudied region for critical discourse studies on racial discourse, future studies should explore a more diverse discourse sample that includes additional

members of elite Uruguay in order to provide a more representative view of elite discourse and racism in Uruguay. What also remains to be seen is whether such discursive patterns are similar (or not) to those used in other discourse genres aside from debates (e.g. speeches, newspaper articles, social media), as well as among members of Uruguayan society in general (everyday/popular discourse). Finally, it would be beneficial for future research to make additional comparisons with national contexts not discussed here, as well as to consider the analysis of *anti*-racist discourse in Uruguay, a type of discourse generally understudied in the Critical Discourse Studies literature (Van Dijk 2015).

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