“Housemaids in Disney?”

Dissecting Racist Convivial Humour in Brazil

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Abstract: Brazilians like to make *brincadeiras* (jokes) about everything, and these brincadeiras often reveal the contradictions and tensions of the particular ways in which Brazilians behave toward social difference. This article revolves around a remark made by a public figure about domestic workers and the organized resistance of antiracism activists and allies, with a focus on Benedita da Silva, a Black Brazilian politician who called out the racism deeply imbued in the remark. This study is rooted in my observations of the contemporary cultural and historical contexts, publications on Brazilian domestic workers, my research on the recent antiracist movement in Brazil, and equally so in a linguistic anthropological approach to discourse. I demonstrate that, armed with the language of antiracism, Brazilians increasingly metadiscursively dissect convivial humour in Brazil in terms of how it enables racist discourse among Brazilians.

Keywords: Racism; *brincadeiras* (jokes); conviviality; domestic workers; Brazil

Résumé : Les Brésiliens aiment faire des *brincadeiras* (des blagues) sur tout et ces *brincadeiras* révèlent souvent des contradictions et des tensions des manières particulières dont les Brésiliens se comportent face à la différence sociale. Cet article tourne autour d’une remarque faite par une personnalité publique sur les travailleurs domestiques et de la résistance organisée des militants antiracistes et de leurs alliés, en se concentrant sur Benedita da Silva, une politicienne brésilienne noire qui a dénoncé le racisme profondément imprégné dans cette remarque. Cette étude est ancrée dans mes observations des contextes culturels et historiques contemporains, dans des publications sur les travailleurs domestiques brésiliens, dans mes recherches sur le récent mouvement antiraciste au Brésil, et également dans une approche anthropologique linguistique du discours. Je démontre que, armés du langage de l’antiracisme, les Brésiliens dissèquent de plus en plus métadiscursivement l’humour convivial au Brésil pour voir comment il permet le discours raciste parmi les Brésiliens.

Mots-clés : Racisme ; *brincadeiras* (blagues) ; convivialité ; travailleurs domestiques ; Brésil

Brazilian *brincadeiras* (subtle or not so subtle jokes) partake of several features of convivial humour, including the discursive labour of living with and negotiating difference. In this article, I concentrate on a particular event, a racist remark about domestic workers made by Paulo Guedes, a member of the cabinet of Brazil's President Jair Bolsonaro, on 12 February 2020.[1] In the ironic overtone of Guedes's remark, one hears the echoes of what Mikhail Bakhtin describes as the ability of irony to provoke laughter. I also explore the backlash that ensued, in which critics dissect the complex strata of Guedes's joke. With the recognition of racism running high in Brazil, antiracism activists and allies turned their frustration with Guedes's remark into a prime opportunity to embrace the discursive double-duty of effectively identifying and addressing racial tensions in Brazil. The bulk of my analysis focuses on the response by Benedita da Silva, a Black female member of the Brazilian House of Representatives.

Brincadeiras are a long-standing theme in sociological and anthropological studies of Brazilian sociality (Caldwell 2003, 2007; Sheriff 2001; Telles 2004; Twine 1998; and others). According to scholars, brincadeiras often reveal the contradictions and tensions of the particular ways in which Brazilians behave toward difference (class, gender, race) (for example, Pinho 2009). As Telles (2004, 154–155) notes, there is a common belief that racist jokes are just jokes. A sense of political correctness, as Telles points out, is practically absent in this kind of practice. Going against the ideals or practice of diversity, explicit (openly) racist humour (racist stereotypes, negative stereotypes about Black people and other racial groups) often come inextricably linked to "deep-seated ideologies regarding differentiated symbolic social spaces for black and white people in Brazil" (Trindade 2019, 1; see also Moreira 2019). Caldwell (2007, 84) shows how brincadeiras "serve to erase the personhood of Afro-Brazilians and replace it with a racialized sense of difference that, by virtue of being marked particular and non-universal, is inherently inferior to whiteness." In the brincadeiras, as shown in a later section of this paper, Black people are commonly represented in stereotypical ways as undeserving recipients of benefits from government policies. The telling of popular jokes that reinforce norms, values, beliefs, and standards that favour white people and oppress Black people can be heard

through the speech of individuals. In present-day Brazil, jokes that reproduce racist structures are used not only to mark intimacy among Brazilians in everyday mundane kinds of practices but also occur in more public venues. For example, Brazilians continue to embrace their own version of Blackface during *carnaval*. In 2020, like in previous years, a group known as Bloco da Nega Maluca (Simões 2020) marched on the streets of the town of Angra dos Reis located in the state of Rio de Janeiro. Nega Maluca (crazy Black woman) is a derogatory term used for a Black woman. The fact that the *Nega Maluca* parade is still ubiquitously present in Brazil today reveals a meaningful aspect of Brazilian culture past and present.

There is no shortage of scholarly literature that focuses attention on the coexistence in Brazil of discourse that condemns active racism and discourse that accepts passive racism, while indirectly deploying discriminatory ideology (for example, Roth-Gordon 2017; Sheriff 2001). There is scholarly consensus that historically, Brazilians of all racial backgrounds have accepted jokes that "reproduce white supremacy and black inferiority" (Twine 1998, 136; also see Caldwell 2007; Telles 2004). However, in contrast with ethnographic observations made in the 1990s in which Black people did not respond to racist jokes or just responded with silence or laughter (Sheriff 2001, 93; Twine 1998, 136–139), this article analyzes a very distinct moment in Brazil, in which each racially-biased joking situation presents an opportunity to speak out against racism. In fact, a recent event involving Paulo Guedes, a cabinet member of Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, provides a window into this phenomenon: "Having the exchange rate at BRL 1.80 [to the dollar] doesn't make sense. We are going to import less, to import substitutions, tourism. Everyone was going to Disneyland, maids were going to Disneyland, a hell of a party." This retort was in response to a reporter who, on 12 February 2020, asked Guedes about the currency exchange rate, which had been experiencing turbulent trade in the preceding days, reaching 4.50 reais to the dollar (Caram 2020). Guedes was referred to by Brazil's dominant media as "serious man," who would lend credibility to the presidency of Bolsonaro, who was considered a "buffoon." Guedes initially admitted that "the dollar was a little high." But showing clear signs of being annoyed, Guedes went on to say that 1.80 reais to the dollar "doesn't make sense." Here he referred to the times during ex-president Lula da Silva's administration when the dollar was relatively low. Then, in forming his argument, Guedes escalated his statement and, with a pinch of irony, talked about maids going to Disney when the dollar was low. The understanding

of Guedes' remark as ironic is important because it captures not only his perception and awareness of a discrepancy or incongruity between his words and the reality but also because, as Bakhtin's dialogic approach to irony reveals (Meyler 1997, 109), it is intimately associated with laughter. As Rodney notes, "Nas raias da brincadeira, das frases infelizes, do mal-entendido caem sempre as afirmações do presidente e de seus ministros" (the statements of the president and his ministers always fall in the domain of play, unfortunate phrases, and misunderstanding[2]) (Rodney 2020). Critical reception further helps us understand that Guedes intended his remark as a joke, the words of which were weighted with racist undertones.

Sources and Methods. My analysis of racist brincadeiras in Brazil revolves around the racist remark by Paulo Guedes and equally so around the backlash that ensued. It draws on various sources: different types of media that circulated information about Guedes's remarks and the backlash that followed, scholarship and other publications on Brazilian domestic workers, my research on recent antiracist movement in Brazil, and my ongoing and periodic participant observations of the contemporary cultural and historical contexts. My analysis of Guedes's remark about domestic workers draws on Mikhail Bakhtin's writings on irony and laughter. In his repeated characterizations of irony as "reduced laughter," Bakhtin argues for the inherent potential for laughter within irony (Meyler 1997, 109; see also Morson and Emerson 1990). In elucidating the relationship between critics and Guedes's remarks, I use the concept of stance in Linguistic Anthropology to examine the ways through which people orient with respect to a common object of evaluation, that is, Guedes's remark (Du Bois 2007). I also draw on Erving Goffman's (1981) concept of footing, which together with stance-taking, helps us understand how Brazilians are changing their standpoint toward others' use of racialist brincadeiras.

Slavery Culture and Facts of Domestic Work in Brazil

When I was back in Brazil for two and a half years from 2013 to 2015, three years had passed since I had begun research on antiracist activism in Salvador, and almost ten years had passed since I began following the unfolding of a range of Black collective struggles and the Brazilian government's responses in terms of public policies aimed at racial equality. Since the period from 2013 to 2015, I have followed with great interest the public debate over domestic workers' rights. I have also had the opportunity to observe firsthand, a middle class uprising against domestic workers' struggles for equal rights. How would

they be able to afford overtime pay? And what would happen to their routines if they had to significantly cut back on their domestic help? These questions had become ever-present since information about labour disputes became more commonplace. At the heart of the disputes is the demand by workers for basic benefits, such as contracts and social security deposits. The arguments of employers thus center on concerns about conditions they had taken for granted, which have shifted right under their feet.

The domestic workers' struggles for rights did not happen overnight. They have been ongoing for many years. The wheels were put into motion by Law No. 5,859 (1972) and Decree-Law No. 71,885 (1973), which officially recognized the occupation of domestic workers. Article 3 of this law defines a domestic worker as "one who provides services of a continuous nature and of a non-profit purpose to a person or family in their residential home" (Decree-Law No. 71,885, 1973, 1) (Brasil 1973). In 1988, the Federal Constitution regulated some rights under the domestic worker category, falling short of establishing rules pertaining to workload and working hours. It took two decades for lawmakers to fully equalize rights for domestic workers through the 478 amendment to the Constitution in 2010 (known as PEC of the Domestic Workers), which was sanctioned by President Dilma Rousseff in 2015 (Brasil 2015). As Silva et al (2017, 458) notes, the new laws have not guaranteed real changes in working conditions since the first quarter of 2016—only 34.9% of domestic workers had a formal contract.

On several occasions, I asked my friends and relatives (in Salvador and in my nearby hometown of Feira de Santana) what they thought about the changes in domestic workers' rights. When talking to domestic workers themselves, I heard things like, "slavery ended a long time ago." Unsurprisingly, I heard a series of complaints from employers, mostly about the impact of the changes on a family's budget. "Domestic workers now are only for the rich," said a middle-class friend. After saying that small businesses can only afford higher wages by raising prices, and that middle-class families would have to foot the bill, she added, "I wonder what magic a family that has a maid will have to do to compensate for the new costs that maids' new rights will generate? I told people not to vote for PT" (the Workers Party in office, which supported the measures).

My uncomfortable conversations with middle-class friends and relatives reminded me that not enough time had passed for there to have been much change in basic Brazilian values regarding domestic work. For most of the

twentieth century, for a great majority of rural inhabitants, life was hopeless, with high rates of illness and malnutrition. In the 1970s, most female domestic workers came from the countryside and worked for room and board. Without remuneration, many worked beyond their capacity and more than regular working hours, leaving only limited hours for their own personal needs like sleeping, eating, and bathing (Corossacz 2018, 80). In *Domestic Servants in Literature and Testimony in Brazil, 1889-1999*, Sonia Roncador, scholar of Brazilian literature and culture, provides a detailed analysis of the complicated overlap between Blackness and servitude in Brazil (Roncador 2014). The well-documented relationship between race/colour, little or no schooling, and domestic work persists in Brazil today, as Silva et al notes based on the 2013 report by the Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos (DIEESE: Inter-Union Department of Statistics and Socioeconomic Studies) (Silva et al 2017, 455–456). Mario Avelino, the president of the *Instituto Doméstica Legal* (Documented Domestic Worker Institute) notes that the average monthly salary of domestic employees, in the fourth quarter of 2019, was R$ 904. Currently, the average is R$ 1,267 for those working with a formal contract, according to the National Household Sample Survey, PNEAD. Still according to Avelino, referring to data from IBGE, in the last three months of 2019, 6.3 million people worked as domestic workers. Of these, 72% are informal. For Avelino, there is clearly an effort by the government to keep informal work in the sector (Jornal da Cidade de Bauru 2020). Of course, as Silva et al (2017, 463–464) point out, the combination of values and meaning stemming from racial discrimination still holds when we turn to the culture surrounding domestic work in Brazil (also see Silva et al 2017, 455–457, 463, 465). Looking at how this is depicted in popular culture, two films, "Domésticas" (Maids) (2000) and "Que horas ela volta?" (When will she be back?) (2015) and a play, the Eduardo Barata Production "Fulaninha e Dona Coisa" (Fulaninha and Ms. Coisa) (2010), stand out as important examples for understanding the relationship between race, gender, and domestic work in Brazil. In Silva et al's (2017, 460) analysis, "in all these artistic productions, the domestic worker goes through the process of subjectification that is in constant tension between, on the one hand, affirmation as an autonomous subject and a citizen of rights, and, on the other, the feeling of worthlessness, generated by their devalued work activity."

Domestic Workers as a Target of Ridicule

Recently scholars have been captivated by the question of representation and treatment of domestic workers in Brazil, including the use of humorous irony in the relations between domestic workers and their employers. As Goldstein (2003) demonstrates in her research, the use of deprecating humour by middle- and upper-class employers toward their domestic workers not only constructs identity boundaries between them; it also works as a frame of reference in relation to which judgments can be made about domestic workers, both implicitly and explicitly. For example, by making fun of the inability of domestic workers to speak "proper" Portuguese, employers construct domestic workers as ignorant or low others (87). Patricia Pinho (2015, 114) has also shown that derogatory brincadeiras about domestic workers abound in Brazilian media, such as a photograph of an iron labelled "mouse" resting on an ironing board labelled "mouse pad" suggesting that "the closest a maid will ever get to using a computer is by operating an iron." In the most extreme examples of this discourse, white middle-class Brazilian men in Valeria Corossacz's (2018) study use humour to tell personal stories of sexual harassment against domestic workers (96–97). Adilson Moreira coined the term *racismo recreativo* (recreational racism) to describe Brazilians' use of deprecating brincadeiras toward racial minorities. He argues that racist brincadeiras have become an acceptable form of racism among Brazilians, an expression of the *espírito jocoso brasileiro* (Brazilian mocking spirit). Herein lies Brazil's central paradox, racism in a racial democracy, which is also the deepest truth of Brazilians' relationship with racial difference. As Amanda Wise (2016, 482) points out, the laborious negotiations of difference in the practice of convivial humour do not always mean "'happy' togetherness and can involve everyday racisms as well." In recognizing the contradictory aspects of conviviality, Wise and Noble (2016, 424) describe, citing Frankenberg (1970, 245), the "paradoxical nature of 'community,'" which includes connection and difference, coherence and conflict, cooperation and change. Like Frankenberg, Wise and Noble are especially interested in "the role of communal practices in negotiating these tensions." Wise and Noble go well beyond standard assumptions that community entails the identification with like-selves and the exclusion of unlike-selves. Exploring the struggles inherent to the experiences of differences, Wise and Noble's main argument is that negotiations of differences are not a by-product of conviviality. But instead, they argue, negotiations of differences are at the centre of the complexity of co-existing (Wise and Noble 2016, 424).

In the studies of conviviality, Wise and Noble, as well as other scholars, foreground the role of everyday, mundane practices/interactions in dealing with differences (and tensions) in convivial relationships. Rather than adopting the English language sense of cultural harmony, friendly relationships, their use of conviviality foregrounds the negotiation, friction, and even conflict that are part of the achievement of living together. Dealing with difference figures prominently in their examples of convivial culture and their analyses offer important insight into the constant transformation of multiple identities that characterize living together. The concept of conviviality has yet another feature that makes it useful as an analytical tool in Wise and Noble's (2016, 424) study of the "everydayness of living together." It takes into consideration the broader structural forces implicated in the everyday practices of living with difference. These forces shape/create, for instance, social differences such as race, class, and gender.

With the study of humour as a tool of conviviality in multicultural experiences, Wise (2016) provides useful insight into the role and effect of interactional humour in mediating, reinforcing, and overcoming boundaries of racial and ethnic differences. Her study privileges the centrality of ambivalence in humorous practices that navigate the complexities of living with difference. Wise documents the process through which racial categories and racial meanings are constantly reproduced in the ongoing encounters that develop groupness in diverse situations. Wise considers both the positive, ludic qualities of humour as well as its negative dimensions. She offers the concept of convivial labour to describe the work that goes into negotiating humour among ethno-racial groups and individuals.

Back to Maids Going to Disney

Guedes' remark that "everyone was going to "Disney" rang a bell. It revived past comments that people made about the rise out of poverty of millions of Brazilians, mostly brown and Black people, during the first two decades of the twenty-first century when Lula and the Workers Party were in office (Almeida and Guarnieri 2017).

As Almeida and Guarnieri (2017) point out, Brazil's anti-poverty efforts during this period increased the number of those in the middle-income bracket, followed by a change in consumption patterns. Airports across the country became "crowded with new travelers who replaced slow long-distance bus

journeys with air travel." The social mobility of a large number of people also resulted in the exponential increase in the number of cars on the streets, which in turn made waiting in one of the interminable traffic jams in every Brazilian city and town a constant in people's lives (Almeida and Guarnieri 2017, 175). Almeida and Guarnieri write about how controversial this was in an economic and political sense. Although popular among both the poor and Brazil's leftist politicians, the anti-poverty programs revealed an outburst of prejudice against the beneficiaries of those programs, prejudice that is all too common among Brazil's elite. I personally remember that it also involved controversies at a different level in public discourse. In one particular instance, Danuza Leão, a Brazilian socialite, wrote in her op-ed column for Folha, a daily newspaper, "Going to New York was fun, but now that the doorman can go too, what's so fun about it?" ("Após esbravejar" 2012). The recurrence of similar statements, mostly in humorous situations, sparked lively discussions between the supporters of the Workers' Party's public policies and those who opposed those policies during the election periods, including the period leading up to Bolsonaro's 2018 electoral victory.[3]

By talking about "maids going to Disney," Guedes was signalling his criticism of the ethnoracial reforms that lifted people, mostly brown and Black people, from poverty. Guedes's words could be read as an allusion to and a stance on Lula's anti-poverty efforts themselves and an appeal to Bolsonaro's supporters and critics of those efforts. The "reduced laughter" in his ironic comment subtly conveys his view that the idea of maids going to Disney was so unreasonable as to be laughable or ridiculous. However, by singling out domestic workers, Guedes also discursively constructed categories of people in very specific ways. In his comment, domestic workers also came to epitomize the conception of a racial other, as most domestic workers are Black women. As Sueli Carneiro argues, "pobreza no Brazil tem cor" (poverty in Brazil has color) (Carneiro 2011, 57) and it is Black. Another important point about Guedes's comment is his phrase "a hell of a party." Here, domestic workers are represented not only as different but also as undeservedly benefiting from government policies. Observers understood how the subtle humour in Guedes's ironic remark exploited the profound racial paradox within Brazilian society, which signifies racism in a racial democracy. In what follows, I tease out how Guedes's critics argued that he intended his remark as a joke, one loaded with racist ideologies.

Mobilization and Change: The Backlash

As Sheriff (2001, 36) notes, "racialized brincadeira [in Brazil] can and does backfire on occasion, and even when it is successful, it often gives rise to a kind of laughter that is laced with awkwardness." Yet recently we have seen a more concerted effort by individuals and organizations to explicitly and publicly frame this kind of incident as a matter of racial justice and to hold people who engage in this kind of brincadeiras accountable. Guedes faced backlash for his comments, which critics described as an unashamed manifestation of racist humour. This section of the article explores examples of such efforts through the lens of conviviality and studies of anti-Black humour in Brazil. It is my view that the changing political articulation of race in contemporary Brazil allows for the dissection of the terms of conviviality in Brazilian society, particularly when it comes to racist humour. As seen in the rest of this paper, Brazilians are increasingly deploying the powerful language of anti-racism to challenge core racial beliefs that have historically permeated convivial humour in Brazil. This paper is rooted partly in the personal experiences of someone who lived in Brazil before and during the beginning of the changes, and equally so in ethnographic observations of antiracist activism over ten years of fieldwork in the city of Salvador (Bahia, Brazil).

As late as the turn of the twenty-first century, a sizable group of domestic workers in Brazil had no legal recognition and were underpaid and overworked. Although a 1973 law was drafted to define the occupation of domestic work and the 1988 constitution brought some regulation of their rights, it was only in 2015 that their rights were equalized, when then-president Dilma Rousseff sanctioned the change in the constitution through Law 150 (Brasil 2015). The author was also galvanized to write this paper as a result of experiencing these recent transformations. Yet, as Silva et al (2017, 458) show, "the approval of the domestic workers' PEC, as the new Law became known, constitutes an achievement of the category; however it does not guarantee a change in effective working conditions, legal rights for domestic workers, nor the overcoming of prejudices directed at them." Days after Guedes's comments, Paula Guimarães interviewed Luiza Batista, president of the National Federation for Domestic Workers, for the Catarinas, a news portal specializing in gender, feminism and human rights. In the interview, Batista provided a backdrop to Guedes' reference to domestic workers. One theme that surfaced during the interview was the situation of uncertainty faced by domestic workers and the change in

their struggles. I have included some excerpts here because they contribute effectively to the readers' understanding of the issue (Guimarães 2020).

> [Guedes's remark] is representative of the disrespect for a law that was passed with so much struggle against employers who do refused to recognize our rights.
>
> We see it as a way of discriminating against domestic workers and especially when the worker is black. Unfortunately, no matter how much we talk about it, this issue persists—it is always in our conversations, dialogues, lectures, where we arrive and make this debate the problem. The fight against discrimination is far from desired… when you stop to think about it or look, you see that there is still a lot of prejudice.
>
> Even today, 46 years later [after the 1973 law defining the category], with all the advances, there is still the fact that 45% of over 7 million workers are paid under the table…we are still fighting to get what we have achieved.
>
> What we cannot afford is to cross our arms and say, "Let it go, what can we do about it?" It's not like that, we must react.
>
> Recently the manager of a homecare service who was hiring caregivers said that she did not want a caregiver who was black nor fat. See the absurdity, the person is doubly discriminated against for being black and fat…if we have the government's support, we will have more tools to seek redress for women who have suffered from this type of discrimination in the workplace.

The overall pattern is clear in Batista's words: At the heart of domestic workers' struggles is the belief that they're fighting an uphill battle. But times change. At one point in the interview, Batista sighed and said, "Não há mal que dure pra sempre" (There is no harm that lasts forever).

"Lugar da trabalhadora doméstica é onde ela quiser." (Domestic workers' place is where they choose.) As we have seen, Guedes adopted a caustic attitude toward the reporter's question about the rise in the dollar-real exchange rate. When closely looking at his remark, expressions like "everyone going to Disney," "maids going to Disney," and "a hell of a party," all represent typical instances of convivial humour in the form of brincadeiras that reproduce racial bias and uphold long-held anti-Black sentiment in Brazilian sociality (Caldwell 2003, 2007; Sheriff 2001; Telles 2004; Twine 1998; and others). Not long ago, in

2011, Delfim Neto, Minister of Finances under Dilma Rousseff's government, compared domestic workers to animals in a televised interview on *Canal Livre* on *Bandeirantes TV*: "There is an incredible social rise. The maid, unfortunately, is no more. Whoever had this animal, had it. Whoever didn't have it, will never have it again" (Doméstica Legal 2011). As Silva et al (2017) notes, there are plenty of biases toward domestic workers in social media, including jokes, offensive comments, and slurs. In contrast to earlier research findings, which indicated that derogatory humour was often a socially acceptable form of communication in Brazil, racial bias in joking is facing a growing backlash from different sectors of Brazilian society. Guedes's words, for example, garnered a lot of negative responses from those concerned with fighting back against not only racism but all forms of discrimination. This rapidly developed into a national debate that centred on the convergence of race, gender, and domestic work. In this section, I revisit a number of reactions to Guedes's comments. The notions of stance and footing map well onto people's responses to him.

The first examples provide a general account of the significance of Guedes's remark and of its interpretation in the context of sharp socioeconomic disparities affecting domestic workers. Shortly after Guedes spoke, there was a public backlash against his comments, and he was pressured to apologize for the offensive nature of his remarks. For example, Creuza Oliveira, President of the National Federation of Domestic Workers in Brazil and active in the Unified Black Movement and the Women's Movement, saw Guedes's prejudiced and discriminatory words as representative of opinions widely held by many Brazilian, so she was not surprised (Tupi FM 2020):

> I was not surprised by his statements because they reveal the prejudiced and discriminatory thinking with which the government treats not only domestic workers but also public employees. It shows a total lack of respect for the working class, black people, Indigenous Peoples.

Creuza Oliveira's story is that of millions of Brazilians who are domestic workers, mostly women, mostly Black. She was born poor and did not have access to formal education. To make ends meet, she found a job as a domestic worker in Bahia. She later joined social movements to rebel or fight against the entrenched and systemic injustices affecting domestic workers. She has been active in the Brazilian Black movement as well as the Black women's movement. Fighting the stereotyping of Black women as unworthy of respect, her organization has won important victories in terms of domestic workers' rights (United Nations n.d.). Both naming and framing Guedes's remarks,

Creuza Oliveira attributed Guedes's words to his "prejudiced and discriminatory thinking…total lack of respect for the working class, Black people, Indigenous Peoples." Creuza also spoke out about the alarming income disparities between domestic work and all the other occupations (Tupi FM 2020): "Due to the living conditions of domestic workers in Brazil, when they travelled with their employers, it was to look after the children of these families."

Guedes's point about domestic workers travelling to Disney was used by Creuza and others to highlight how unjust what he said is to people who face so many difficulties in their everyday lives. A similar observation was made by Mario Avelino, President of the Online Portal *Doméstica Legal* (Legal Domestic Worker) (Jornal da Cidade de Bauru 2020): "I even met domestic workers who went to Disney, but as babysitters, they went to work. Personally, I have never met a domestic worker who has gone to Disney on the salary that she earns. Even those who earn R$ 5,000 are not able to do it."

Mario Avelino is a leading specialist in domestic employment in Brazil. He has dedicated himself to research and studies on domestic employment. He created the NGO *Instituto Doméstica Legal* (Legal Domestic Worker Institute). By challenging the truth and reality in Guedes's comment, "I never met a domestic worker who has gone to Disney on the salary that she earns," Mario Avelino reclaimed the narrative, a fundamental and critical way of engaging anti-anti-Blackness. As Vargas (2018, 48) notes, only in this way can we "begin to imagine a world not structured by a type of sociability that demands Black abjection." Finally, Benedita da Silva, a prominent Brazilian politician and the country's first Afro- Brazilian member of the Senate, explicitly and publicly used language that describes the issue as a matter of racism (Revista Forum 2020): "Racist and prejudiced government." Benedita da Silva started as a community activist in one of the favelas in the city of Rio de Janeiro. She began her political career in 1982 on the city council of Rio de Janeiro. She also served as senator, vice-governor, and governor of the State of Rio de Janeiro. She was the first Black woman in all these positions. She was also part of President Luís Inácio da Silva's cabinet (Lula). Since 2010 she has served in the Brazilian House of Representatives for several terms in a row. Known among Brazilian political circles for speaking openly and critically about racial discrimination in Brazil (Glueck 2011), she has also championed the rights of domestic workers and street children in Brazil (McFarlane-Taylor 1991). Speaking on the floor of the House of Representatives, Benedita named and framed Guedes's remarks as racist and prejudiced.

As a whole, the reactions to Guedes suggest that Blackness and anti-Blackness became important in the debate. The critical use of terms in the various responses, and the range of content that the authors devoted to them helped frame Guedes's remarks as more than just an isolated incident, but as the result of a deeply ingrained system of racial subjugation that has for too long justified the exploitation of domestic workers, the legacies of which still shape their economic, political, and social standing. João Costa Vargas (2018, 18) writes about the importance of "strategies able to identify and challenge the core institutional aspects of antiblackness" because the central premise of any antiracist mobilization is that antiblackness is foundational, and that any attempt to [get to it] requires "nothing short of detecting and destroying our structuring codes" that cast Black people—and domestic workers for that matter—as worthless (worth less). Goffman's (1981) concept of footing can be used to indicate the ways that people interact (content and form) with one another to signal their position (stance) in relation to what they are saying, who they are (their own selves), the people they are interacting with, and the world around them. To be clear, in managing the production or reception of an utterance, people normally adopt some kind of footing, which could be in the form of alignment (acceptance and support, going along with what is expected, etcetera) or disalignment (distancing of oneself from (refusing to align with) others and/or what they said in the interaction). Through strategic shifts in footing (from aligning with to acquiescing to taking a stand against), critics of Guedes were able to identify and challenge his anti-Black bias.

In these examples, the speakers were calling racism by its name and explaining how domestic workers, mostly black women, were impacted by it. In their struggles to change the terms of Brazilian convivial humour, Benedita da Silva and others employed strategies to call out the sarcastic effect of Guedes's words for what they are: racism. But Benedita da Silva did not stop there in her strategies to identify and challenge the core institutional aspects of anti-Blackness (Revista Forum 2020): "Respect domestic workers, Minister. And if they are going to Disney and their children to university, it is because PT governments have made this access possible that your racist and prejudiced government has been destroying."

Benedita da Silva's imperative "Respect domestic workers, Minister" marks a change in footing in relation to Guedes and others present in the Senate. This shift in footing is noteworthy because it frames Guedes as a direct interlocutor and forces him into his role as principal and author, not just the animator

or the person who simply uttered the words. Goffman's notions of principal ("someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken") and author ("someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded") are important here because they help us understand Benedita da Silva's strategy of naming and framing Guedes's words as coming from "someone whose beliefs have been told and who is committed to what the words say" (Goffman 1981, 144). In doing so, Benedita da Silva warned him to be ready for the reactions to his remarks. Speaking on the floor of the Brazilian senate, she added an interesting twist meant to counter Guedes's racist words. In doing so, she upends his degrading humorous statement, creating the opportunity to further revise the terms of conviviality by preventing the perpetuation of the idea throughout Brazilian society that there is something funny about prejudice and discrimination.

There is a common phrase in Brazil, *lugar de mulher é na cozinha* (a woman's place is in the kitchen), which has obvious sexist and discriminatory connotations that many Brazilians get a kick out of saying and accept as inoffensive. Exploring the comical aspect of sexism, as they sought to strengthen the debate on citizenship, rights, and violence, Brazilian women recently took the phrase *lugar de mulher é na cozinha* back and gave it a critical twist: *lugar de mulher é onde ela quiser* (a woman's place is where she chooses). In 2015, NEPGS (Núcleo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Gênero e Sexualidade) was founded on the Osório Campus of the Federal Institute of Rio Grande do Sul, with the outreach project entitled *Lugar de Mulher* (Women's Place) to launch a community debate about issues related to the place of women in society. Given its success, in 2016, the project continued to evolve and expand, as did its title: *Lugar de Mulher é Onde Ela Quiser* (A Woman's Place is Where She Chooses). In a report, Luciane Senna Ferreira explains why they chose that phrase: one of the objectives of the project was the "deconstruction of language about women" (Ferreira 2017, 3). In her analysis of the relationship between *lugar de mulher é na cozinha* and *lugar de mulher é onde ela quiser*, Roberta Rosa Portugal (2019, 111–112) shows how the meanings of the two phrases are produced in oppositional ways. Her view was that *lugar de mulher é onde ela quiser* linguistically appropriates the form and content of the popular saying *lugar de mulher é na cozinha* as a symbol of the community of feminists. She explains that the tension is established in the original words when they present different interpretations of the social place that women may occupy. She notes that the fragment *lugar de mulher...* becomes an important linguistic device to establish the symbolic foundation of the

disruption of meanings built in the fragment *onde ela quiser*. The replacement of the deeply rooted linguistic resource *é na cozinha* with *onde ela quiser* breaks the "discursive linkage" of Black women's place in the kitchen, complicating gendered and racialized conceptions of social space in Brazil (cf. Gal 2002). Substituting it with *onde ela quiser* makes known an ideology of gender equality, resistance, self-respect, and solidarity.

To account for the disruption and shift in meanings that set the stage for scrutinizing the terms of conviviality among Brazilians, I use the concepts of footing and stance, as they can give insight into how speakers position themselves vis-à-vis their utterances, the world, and one another during social exchanges. As Goffman (1981, 128) states:

> [a] change in footing implies a change in the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance. A change in our footing is another way of talking about a change in our frame for events.

In paying careful attention to the use of language in the reactions against Guedes's statement, we are able to see that they chose to use footing and stance to foreground how institutional or interpersonal racism, apparent everywhere and apparently nowhere, has manifested in the situation, as well as to construct/frame the issue as a matter of racial justice. After summoning the Minister, Benedita da Silva looked around the room and in a teasing voice said: "*lugar da trabalhadora doméstica é onde ela quiser*" (domestic workers' place is where they choose) (Silva, Benedita 2020). I hope to show here how Benedita da Silva put a combative twist on *lugar de mulher é onde ela quiser* to mobilize direct and indirect relationships with a chain of related statements, including Guedes's. Through various discursive and linguistic processes, Benedita da Silva deliberately engaged with the goal of challenging comical sexism: she repeats others' words, directly and indirectly indicating who was the original author or speaker of those words or ideas; she makes lexical choices that position herself in relation to those words or ideas, with socio-political effects; she uses these linguistic features to further project her critical position toward the series of connected elements in the chain of statements.

In *lugar da trabalhadora doméstica é onde ela quiser*, we see Benedita da Silva set in motion layers of dialogic imbrication, as her words relate to and interact with those of others past and present. Here I first use the lens of reported speech to examine her statement, and we see that, when she said, "lugar de…", she

drew the attention to its status as part of the original saying, *lugar de mulher é na cozinha*. She thus indirectly and dialogically quoted or voiced the whole popular phrase in the background, as if she was seeking, with a side-glance, to subvert it. She did not have to utter more than just *lugar de…* to indicate what would come next, so she also intertextually (how the meaning of a text is shaped by another text) framed her next words, "empregada doméstica é onde ela quiser," as oppositional to it. This way, Benedita da Silva also engaged with and was informed by the version of the saying already put forward by feminists who came before her when they said "*lugar de mulher é onde ela quiser*," since this revision of the popular saying also became widespread. "Lugar de mulher é onde ela quiser," as Portugal (2019, 111) notes, resists the popular saying "a woman's place is in the kitchen" by reformulating it in an antagonistic way. At every level, Benedita da Silva's verbal dueling with the popular phrase systematically drew the attention of the public to racism as an ordinary feature of social life in Brazil. By setting in motion these layers of dialogic imbrication, Benedita da Silva indicated an ongoing collective effort to break the hold of racial bias in joking relationships among Brazilians.

Two important linguistic moves conjoined to set Benedita da Silva's verbal dueling in motion. One of the moves is known as "footing," which, as we saw above, describes "the alignment we take up to ourselves and the others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance" (Goffman 1981, 128). Through the use of footing in key parts of her utterance "lugar de empregada doméstica é onde ela quiser," Benedita da Silva showed how she meant what she said to be understood. The first clear example was her choice of "lugar de…é.." to direct people's attention to the well-known discriminatory saying *lugar de mulher é na cozinha*. This way, Brazilians were immediately reminded of the saying that epitomizes gender-biased, convivial humour in Brazil. Then, Benedita da Silva completely switched footing—from making a general point about women to *empregada doméstica*—drawing attention to Guedes's biased voice about domestic workers: "maids going to Disney." This shift in footing was strategically designed to juxtapose Guedes's remark both with the sexist saying and feminists' rendition of it. Brazilians can, at this point, also hear in the background "where she chooses to be." Benedita da Silva then added the clause empowering women: "where she chooses to be." This whole construction reflects Bakhtin's (1984) argument about the dialogical character of words, which always connects to and is informed by other words, seeking to alter or inform them. The verbal dueling among the three versions

illustrates current struggles to bust classism, sexism, and racism from everyday brincadeiras in Brazil and can be understood as a dissection of the terms of conviviality in Brazil.

By choosing to say "o lugar da trabalhadora doméstica é onde ela quiser," we also see how Benedita da Silva achieved, in part by way of stance-taking, the feat of seeking to unsettle deep-seated convivial norms based on classist, sexist, and racist stereotypes. Her manipulation of grammatical and lexical elements offers a window into her reflexive activities toward Guedes's statement: evaluating its content; positioning herself; and (3) aligning as well as disaligning with others (Du Bois 2007, 163). Of special interest are both her epistemic stance expressing conviction about the place of women, and of domestic workers for that matter ("we know where her place is, *onde ela quiser*"), and her political stance of disalignment (distancing herself from) with the idea regarding the low value of domestic work and with Guedes himself ("we disagree with Guedes").

The backlash to Guedes's ironic remark resonated around Brazil because of how seemingly racist people thought his words were. For example, memes addressing the issue ricocheted the Internet. In one of those memes, which appeared several times on my own Facebook timeline, a white woman dressed in a Cinderella costume held a sign saying *A Única Empregada na Disney* (The Only Maid in Disney)[4] in reference to the children's story in which Ella, after the unexpected death of her father, was forced by her stepmother and stepsisters to work as a maid, washing dishes and doing other dirty household work in a room at the back of the house. Around the woman in the Cinderella costume are several people, men and women, wearing Mini Mouse headbands and other accessories representing iconic Disney characters. All this reflects the increasing recognition of racial prejudice in present-day Brazil, particularly the racist representations and treatment of its domestic workers, in part due, as one of my reviewers pointed out, to the very concrete consequences of the recently installed far-right government and the dismantling of the rights that had been arduously achieved during the Workers' Party's administrations. Anti-Black political discourses in Brazil, of which Guedes's is one example, "are ever-present without ever needing to utter any explicit ideas of race, gender, and blackness," as Keisha-Khan Perry (2020, 159) recently argued. I believe, however, that Brazilians are increasingly willing to help build alliances against anti-Black violence, as seen in the backlash to Guedes's remark.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I have explored how historically Brazilians have used humour as a form of convivial practice that draws lines of racial difference and racial exclusion, and I have demonstrated how people have come together to tackle this issue in the context of recent social and political changes in Brazil. This could be seen in the example of the backlash Guedes faced for his remarks about domestic workers. I have shown the metadiscursive process of dissection of the racialist jokes prevalent in Brazil today. Benedita da Silva and other feminists that came before her have worked together to establish recognizable echoes of the aphoristic saying that a woman's place is in the kitchen—once exchanged by people with the intent of being humorous—and to change it from the blunt sexist saying to a weapon in the struggle for social justice, with all possible social and political ramifications. Taking her statement as a whole, Benedita da Silva's political positioning was bolstered by her full-blown rejection of the premise that domestic workers are not deserving of a trip to Disney, as epitomized by Guedes's phrase, "festa danada." Benedita da Silva seized the right moment to impart a reaction of outrage that made Guedes's views misleading and unacceptable. As Portugal (2019, 112) notes, "the subject position of women in 'lugar de mulher é onde ela quiser' refuses the popular discourse that downplays the social place occupied by woman while promoting the sense of emancipation." Through an awareness of the intersection of race, class, and gender, Benedita da Silva redeployed earlier versions of cultural texts, under a different light at a different angle, and in doing so, Benedita da Silva unsettled categorizations of domestic work based on deep-seated sexist and racist stereotypes. Most importantly, by coining the new phrase, *lugar de empregada doméstica é onde ela quiser*, Benedita da Silva set in motion a new saying that aphoristically encapsulates all we can hope to see in terms of social justice for domestic workers and that, like other aphorisms, will hopefully be repeated and disseminated.

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Notes

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2 Unless otherwise indicated, translations are those of the author.

3 For recent insights on Bolsonaro's era in Brazil, see *Confluenze*'s Vol. XIII, No. 1.

4 https://oglobo.globo.com/rio/carnaval/com-domestica-na-disney-criticas-cedae-bloco-ceu-na-terra-leva-satira-politica-santa-teresa-1-24251124.

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