

“THEM”, VENEZUELANOS, AND THE CRISIS IN VENEZUELA: DISCURSIVE PRACTICES IN THE MAGAZINE *VEJA*

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the feature article “Fuga de uma ditadura: a saga dos venezuelanos no Brasil” (Flight from a dictatorship: the saga of Venezuelans in Brazil), by Jennifer Ann Thomas, published by the Brazilian magazine *Veja* in 2019. The subject of the article is refugees and the crisis in Venezuela. This paper identifies the discursive structures used in the article to represent “others”, in this case, Venezuelan immigrants. Analysis is also made of linguistic expressions, which symbolise and produce differences between “us” (Brazil and Brazilians) and “them” (the other – Venezuela and its citizens). The paper concludes that the discourse about the “other”, which in *Veja*’s article also includes statistics and quotes sources close to the government, only states that which is appropriate for the magazine’s audiences to know, i.e. their readers. In summary, analysis of the article published by *Veja* magazine allows us to conclude that it reproduces the hegemonic discourse about “the other” – a reductionist, conservative and nationalist discourse. The theoretical reference underpinning this paper’s semiological orientation is Social Semiotics (Martins, 2002/2017), a discipline of Social and Human Sciences, whose main concern is to establish the conditions that govern the social possibility of meaning and that, in semantic and pragmatic terms, leads to the explanatory and comprehensive interpretation of discourses. On the other hand, since this paper aims to understand social construction processes of the other, i.e. understand the social construction processes of identities, it is inspired by the intellectual current known in Europe as the “philosophy of difference” (Descombes, 1998; Foucault, 1966; Levinas, 2002; Martins, 2019; Ricoeur, 1991).

KEYWORDS

immigrants; refugees; Social Semiotics; Venezuela; social representations

“ELES”, VENEZUELANOS, E A CRISE NA VENEZUELA: PRÁTICAS DISCURSIVAS NA REVISTA *VEJA*

RESUMO

Este artigo analisa a reportagem intitulada “Fuga de uma ditadura: a saga dos venezuelanos no Brasil”, da autoria de Jennifer Ann Thomas, publicada, em 2019, pela revista brasileira *Veja*. O objeto são os refugiados e a crise na Venezuela. Foram identificadas as estruturas discursivas utilizadas para representar os outros, no caso, os imigrantes venezuelanos. E foram analisadas as expressões linguísticas, que simbolizam e produzem as diferenças entre “eles” (os outros, a Venezuela e os seus cidadãos) e “nós” (o Brasil e os brasileiros). A conclusão a que chegámos é a de que o discurso sobre o outro, que na reportagem da *Veja* compreende também as

estatísticas e as fontes próximas do poder governamental, apenas dizem o que é adequado que os públicos da revista saibam, ou seja, os seus leitores. Em síntese, a análise desta reportagem da revista *Veja* permite concluir que nela ocorre a reprodução do discurso hegemónico sobre “o outro”, um discurso reducionista, conservador e nacionalista. A nossa linha de orientação semiológica tem como referência teórica a Semiótica Social (Martins, 2002/2017), uma disciplina das Ciências Sociais e Humanas, que tem como preocupação essencial estabelecer as condições de possibilidade social do sentido e que, em termos semânticos e pragmáticos, procede à interpretação explicativa e compreensiva dos discursos. Por outro lado, sendo o nosso propósito a compreensão dos processos de construção social do outro, ou seja, a compreensão dos processos de construção social das identidades, inspiramo-nos na corrente de pensamento, que ficou conhecida na Europa como a “filosofia da diferença” (Descombes, 1998; Foucault, 1966; Levinas, 2002; Martins, 2019; Ricoeur, 1991).

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

imigrantes; refugiados; Semiótica Social; Venezuela; representações sociais

INTRODUCTION

Granting asylum in foreign countries to people who are fleeing from persecution is one of the oldest practices of civilisation. There are references in texts written 3.500 years ago – during the heyday of the great Middle Eastern empires, such as the Hittite, Babylonian, Assyrian and ancient Egyptian empires¹. Etymologically rooted in the Latin verb *refugere* – to flee – the term refugee has been pejoratively correlated with a crime (Arendt, 1943/1994). Subsequently, the concept began to include political, social and economic dimensions (UN, 1951). In the essentially oral communities of Western antiquity, foreigners and those who did not speak the official language were treated differently from locals. They were not considered to be citizens and could not participate in public life.

However, in the contemporary era, referring to the migratory phenomenon, van Dijk (2016, p. 145) points out that socially shared knowledge about immigration may “contain beliefs about the identity, origin, properties, actions and objectives of immigrants, their relations with ‘our’ group, each associated with positive or negative evaluations based on norms and values”. Because “totality, the regime of sameness, which is our own regime, still assumes a central role and pushes the other to the periphery – to a subordinate, erased, dominated place” (Martins, 2019, p. 29).

Immigrants, refugees and foreigners are represented as being different from “us”, i.e. from “me”, and are categorised and “classified” (Bourdieu, 1979) as “them”, i.e. as “others”, each with their own complex subjectivity and identity. In Ricoeur (1991), identity resides in the dialectic between *identity-idem* and *identity-ipse*. *Identity-idem*, or sameness, being identical to oneself, immutable across time and distinct from the other, underpins the concept of character. *Idem*, *identitas*, Latin words which mean “the same”, “the same thing”, “the identical”. The term *ipse*, which is also a Latin word, refers to identity – “the

¹ Information retrieved from <http://www.acnur.org/portugues/quem-ajudamos/refugiados/>

same" in relation to the other. *Identity-ipse* is ipseity, personal and reflective, narrative and historical identity, that is marked by alterity (*altero* is the other, in Latin).

In turn, Stuart Hall (2003) points out that identity is a place that is assumed, a posture of position and context, a social construction, rather than an essence or substance. Identities are not linked to specific times and places; they are fluid and hybrid. Levinas (2002) argues that the presence of the other "puts me in check" and he emphasises that in the interpretative experience between "you" and "we" there is no automatic common identification and incorporation, but rather an identification process, produced by language, for experiences, narratives and discourses.

The collectivity in which I say "you" or "we" is not a plural of the "I". I, you – these are not individuals of a common concept. Neither possession nor the unity of number nor the unity of concepts link me to the Stranger (the Other). It is the absence of a common homeland that makes the Other a foreigner who causes a disturbance "in our home". But to be a foreigner also means to be free. I have no power over him. He escapes my apprehension in an essential aspect; even so, I have access to him. He is not at all in my place. But I, who do not pertain to a shared concept with the foreigner, am nonetheless like him, without gender. We are the same and the other. The conjunction *and* here designates neither addition nor the power of one term over the other. (Levinas, 2002, p. 63)

The differentiation process makes it possible to build identity. Distinguishing the self and the other is the way to understand and interpret what I am and what the other is (Ricoeur, 1991).

I find the other in a relationship, whereby the other comes into being in me, becomes part of me, constituting me. This is the path of falling in love, and it can also be the path of compassion and solidarity. But the relationship with the other is not exhausted through the encounter. After the encounter of the other, this is often followed, for my own reasons, by erasure, assimilation, and even domination of the other. In strict terms, what we can say is that the other is never reducible to the self, i.e. it is never erasable in me. And if what is at stake is to segregate, discriminate and dominate the other, the real issue at stake is to exert violence over the other. (Martins, 2019, p. 27)

The differentiation process also involves similarity recognised in otherness. It is through difference with the other that I build myself as myself. To differ is to distinguish oneself. "In this game in which 'losers win', in which we say 'identity', this immediately becomes a difference, and if we point out a difference, it becomes an identity" (Descombes, 1998, p. 199).

We can say that to understand a text is to understand oneself before a text. And to understand the other is to understand yourself before another person. Experiences, as well as narratives, are necessary for the production of meaning, which is always mediated

by an interpretation. The narrative identity of a person or a community is the story we tell about ourselves, and also the story that others tell about ourselves, at different times, and also, the memory we retain from these narratives. We recognise the other that exists in us by the reports made about ourselves and by the memory we have of them (Ricoeur, 1991).

The encounter of interpretation/differentiation occurs within the discourse – given that the discourse expresses the social system, as a territory of power struggles (Foucault, 1971). Foucault characterises the nature of the discourse as follows: “simultaneously battle and weapon, strategy and shock, fight and trophy or wound, conjunctions and vestiges, irregular encounter and repeated scene” (Foucault, 1969, p. 8), the discourse is “what we are fighting for, the very power we aim to seize” (Foucault, 1971, p. 12). In turn, the full scope of Moisés de Lemos Martins’ *A linguagem, a verdade e o poder* (language, truth and power) lies in the discourses that are considered to observe a specific way of producing meaning, or the regime of the gaze (Martins, 2002/2017). In the West, the way of producing meaning is based on the principle of analogy, or representation, wherein difference, all difference, refers to unity, i.e. where all difference is ultimately annulled and assimilated by unity. “And that is why the story is always the same” (Martins, 2019, p. 25).

Discourse is a social practice, an action, exercised within a structure, which is also social. “As a performative element [the discourse] aims to be effective. We speak in order to be understood, and also to be obeyed, respected, distinguished and believed” (Martins, 2004, p. 75).

To represent (and language represents the world) is to classify, to define, it is based on a power of di/vision. Now, the representation of social divisions jointly contribute to the realisation of divisions, given the performativity of language. Let us not forget, however, as mentioned above, that the inherent magic of the word is *social*. The discourse calls into existence that which it enunciates, according to the degree of legitimacy of the speaker (and *ipso facto* of the listener), which is always related to the structure and sanctions of a specific social field. (Martins, 2004, p. 75)

Let us look at the case of the news, which is a specific type of discourse. News is a discursive practice, that is socially elaborated and permeated by specific rules (van Dijk, 1990). As a social practice, any type of discourse causes meaningful effects, has a significant intention and a meaningful purpose. On the other hand, considering media discourses as externalities, it is up to the social analyst to make manifest its mode of production, in short, the conditions of the possibility of its existence, circulation and reproduction (Foucault, 1971; Peruzzolo, 2004).

Media narratives are part of this operational system of symbolic systems. Media correspond to a regime of discursive practices, which also means social practices, which simultaneously function as instances that produce meaning, with social effects. Given the illocutionary force of language, different discourses compete to call into existence that which they enunciate. We can therefore say, in short, that constructions of news articles involve not only a social and cultural, political and economic dimension, but

also cognitive aspects (see, for example, Berkowitz, 1997; Breed, 1997; Schudson, 1986a, 1986b, 1988; Sousa, 2000, 2004; Traquina, 2001; Tuchman, 1978; White, 1997; Zelizer, 1997); and that whoever produces the news is part of a journalistic community, which in turn is inscribed in the specific organisational context of a given society.

THE CASE STUDY

While we can attribute greater or lesser emphasis, we can clearly say that the Brazilian media renders the daily lives of Venezuelan immigrants visible. Media outlets are co-responsible for the formation of citizens' opinions and transmit contrasting points of view about the crisis in Venezuela, which is the origin of the phenomenon of Venezuelan migration.

The study we present herein has the fundamental purpose of analysing how the magazine, *Veja*, one of the magazines with the highest circulation in Brazil (*Veja* has a total print and digital subscription circulation of 557.314 copies², 16,5 million followers on social networks and 21,8 million individual visitors on the magazine's website³), presents Venezuela's political and economic situation. The magazine assumes the point of view of analysing what Venezuelan immigration means for Brazil, while describing, on the other hand, the social consequences of this migratory flow for the host country. We try to respond to the following main question: what does *Veja* make manifest and what does it omit, or even silence, when representing immigrants and their country of origin?

We start from understanding a media text as a discursive practice, explaining it as a social practice, exploring the confluence between textuality and enunciation/discursivity. On the one hand, we emphasise the field of writing, the field of the textual object, and suspend the relationship with the context. On the other, we emphasise the dimensions of discursive practice, i.e. interaction, intersubjectivity, reflexivity, intentionality and communication (Martins, 2002/2017). Analysis of the processes of social construction of otherness, of difference, in short, of the construction of the "other", as well as analysis of the construction of social identities, is based on the perspective of the "philosophy of difference", advocated in particular by Foucault (1966), Ricoeur (1991), Levinas (2002), Descombes (1998), Martins (2019).

This article analyses the report, by Jennifer Ann Thomas, entitled "Fuga de uma ditadura: a saga dos venezuelanos no Brasil" (Escape from a dictatorship: the saga of Venezuelans in Brazil)⁴, published in the Brazilian magazine *Veja* (issue No. 2646, of August 07, 2019) which not only addresses Venezuelan immigrants in Brazil, but also about the political and humanitarian crisis in Venezuela. We undertake a discourse analysis, centred on the linguistic expressions used, which represent the differences between "us" (Brazil and Brazilians) and "them" (the others, Venezuela and its citizens). We are aware that language is a social construction, in which the uttered discourses not only represent

² Information retrieved from <http://publiabril.abril.com.br/svp/tabelas/circulacao?platform=revista-imprensa-mais-digital>

³ Information retrieved from http://publiabril.abril.com.br/midia_kits

⁴ Available at <https://veja.abril.com.br/mundo/fuga-de-uma-ditadura-a-saga-dos-venezuelanos-no-brasil/>

social differences, but, on the other hand, contribute to the reality of these differences. We carried out the analytical process using the feature article available in *Veja* magazine's website.

Veja magazine, founded in 1968 by Editora Abril, is one of Brazil's weekly publications with the highest circulation. It is known for its extreme editorial line, as a conservative magazine, that is highly partisan in its political and party coverage, in particular in terms of the inspection of political power and its representatives. Grupo Abril does not explicitly inform the general public of its editorial principles or the code of conduct that applies to its journalists. The "Carta ao leitor: sobre princípios e valores" (Letter to the reader: about principles and values), 2019, explains that the magazine's "commitments are not with people or parties. They are based on principles and values". It also claims to be guided by the interest of "public opinion". In terms of its mission, it claims to be committed to contributing to the dissemination "of information, culture and entertainment, to the progress of education, the improvement of the quality of life, the development of free enterprise and the strengthening of the country's democratic institutions"⁵.

The front cover of issue no. 2646, of August 07, 2019, was dedicated to Venezuelan migration⁶. English journalist Jennifer Ann Thomas, educated and based in Brazil, recounts the life stories of Venezuelans who "fled the crisis that is plaguing the neighbouring country" (Thomas, 2019). Since the outbreak of the crisis (in late 2014) until that moment in time, no issue of the magazine had ever covered the topic, despite the historical importance of the events in question and the fact that it met several important journalistic criteria, such as proximity, public interest and permanence in the national news. Issue no. 2594 of *Veja*, published on August 08, 2018, had already included a feature article, and the front cover highlighted the rise to power of autocratic figures via democratic regimes. The countries cited were Venezuela, Russia, Poland, Hungary and the Philippines. Issue 2312, published on March 13, 2013, had addressed the legacy of Hugo Chávez, from the moment he became President of Venezuela until his death that year, in 2013⁷.

CONTEXTS OF THE CRISIS IN VENEZUELA

The global economic crisis of 2008 and the dramatic fall in oil prices in 2009, had worldwide consequences, including in Venezuela. In 2013 Bolivarian socialist, Nicolás Maduro succeeded Hugo Chávez (who was in power from 1999 to 2013), in a heated electoral process, which strengthened the opposition (Botelho, 2008; Lopes, 2013; Schurster & Araújo, 2015). In 2014, crude oil prices once again fell in the international

⁵ Information retrieved from <https://grupoabril.com.br/>

⁶ Retrieved from <https://veja.abril.com.br/mundo/fuga-de-uma-ditadura-a-saga-dos-venezuelanos-no-brasil/>. The content available on the *Veja* website is accompanied by a video report (available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=aMBUtl0ggKA&feature=emb_logo). As of March 07, 2020, it has reached 40,479 views. In this article, the video has not been analysed.

⁷ Retrieved from <https://acervo.veja.abril.com.br/>

market. Oil revenues represented a large part of Venezuela's foreign exchange and the country crucially depended on oil exports. The dramatic drop in oil prices in 2014 marked the beginning of a national crisis in the country. And the ensuing extreme and violent political polarisation caused serious institutional and social damage:

the situation worsened, until, in December 2015, the opposition won a majority in the National Assembly. The Supreme Court of Justice suspended four deputies, alleging electoral fraud, but the National Assembly disobeyed this decision. From then on, the institutional confrontation worsened and gradually spread through the streets, also fuelled by the serious economic and supply crisis that broke out in the country. With more than one hundred dead, there was a chaotic situation. (Sousa Santos, 2017, § 5)

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2017, § 3) commented on the long battle for succession in Venezuela, as well as foreign interference, and recalled the "attempted coup d'état in 2002, led by the opposition, with the active support of the United States", noting that, in 2015, the United States characterised Venezuela as a threat to its national security. All of these facts made a significant contribution to Venezuela entering a process of economic destabilisation, which has pushed the country to hyperinflation, lack of basic supplies, scarcity of food, health system difficulties and international financial sanctions (Santos & Vasconcelos, 2016). These problems have actually worsened and persist to this day.

On the other hand, it can be said that Venezuela's oil reserves – a strategic resource for the country – are of international interest, in particular for powers with neoliberal policies, such as the United States. Pointing out the external interferences in Venezuela, Sousa Santos adds:

recent history shows that economic sanctions affect innocent citizens more than governments. One only has to remember the more than 500.000 children who, according to the 1995 United Nations report, died in Iraq as a result of sanctions imposed after the Gulf War. We should also remember that half a million Portuguese or Portuguese descendants live in Venezuela. Recent history also teaches us that no democracy is strengthened after foreign intervention. (Sousa Santos, 2017, § 9-10)

The Maduro regime, in turn, with propagandistic public interventions, denounced the existence of an "economic war", waged by the opposition, by businessmen and by capitalist countries. Meanwhile, social protests began to place pressure on the government. Several conflicts ensued between Maduro's supporters and opponents, which then intensified. Repression of freedom of expression has become a harsh reality. At the time when the article was written, the president had complained of an attempted coup d'état (*Queda do petróleo em 2014 marcou início da crise da Venezuela*, 2016).

In December 2017, the Organization of American States (OAS) published a report on the human rights situation in Venezuela. The report highlighted the weakness of the

country's democratic institutions, the growth of repression by civil society, and violence and insecurity in the country, and called attention to the "serious political, economic and social crisis that has been ravaging the country over the last two years", "characterised by a general shortage of food, medicines, treatment, material and medical supplies, among others. Precisely in 2015, prices increased by 180,9% and in April 2016, 80% of the population faced food shortages" (OAS, 2017, pp. 22-23).

In January 2020, the Venezuelan leader complained, in an interview: "when we secure an important batch of medication from a specific country and we are ready to import it, an order arrives, they remove the cargo and the patient in Venezuela is left without their medicine" (Singer, 2020, § 2). In the same month, January 2020, Maduro refused the visit of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) to Venezuela, on the grounds that the country is no longer a member of the OAS (Maduro nega ingresso de delegação da CIDH na Venezuela, 2020). The Venezuelan Foreign Minister, Jorge Arreaza, addressed the issue, in the following terms (Lafuente, 2019):

we have a blockade, how could we avoid having a shortage of some products? This year's sanction costs exceed, with the eventual confiscation of Citgo, \$30 billion. Of course, there have to be some limitations. The EU, the Spanish Government, the UN, should do what they did in Cuba after almost 60 years: call for an end to the blockade. 25% of the hyperinflation may be the responsibility of the Venezuelan Government, but 75% is induced by an exchange which is placed in some websites.

The peak of the exodus of Venezuelans to Brazil occurred in 2018, when the Brazilian state of Roraima, despite transfers of resources from the federal government, faced serious logistical problems and great difficulties in offering decent accommodation to immigrants. A state of social emergency was decreed in Roraima on several occasions, and the state requested intervention by the Armed Forces to control the border, and other resources were mobilised for health care, in short, to provide generalised assistance to the Venezuelan immigrants. Gradually, in a process that involved the Armed Forces, non-governmental organisations and civilian volunteers, the situation was controlled, including the transfer of Venezuelan immigrants to other Brazilian states.

THE DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF *VEJA* MAGAZINE

In a detailed description, the journalist who wrote the feature article in *Veja* magazine is a witness and protagonist, in a flight in which 63 refugees were transferred from Roraima to Santa Catarina, in July 2019. Commanded by the Brazilian Armed Forces, as part of Operation Acolhida (Operation Welcome), this transfer was part of the process of distribution of refugees from the state of Roraima to other Brazilian states.

The journalistic narrative includes physical and psychological descriptions of the characters, environment, actions and events. The descriptions are provided throughout the text and focus on sensations and feelings, seeking to humanise the story and attract

the reader. The narrative explores the memories of Venezuelans, jumping between the past, present and future, representing the economic and social context of Venezuela and projecting, from the host country, possible scenarios of their stay in Brazil.

The feature article begins by positioning the narrative in time and space and it places the journalist in the theatre of operations: bringing the journalism closer to reality, with emphasis on the characters, situations and scenarios.

On one rainy morning, last Saturday, on July 20, a Hercules C-130 of the Brazilian Air Force (FAB) used its four engines to fly from Boa Vista, in Roraima, to Florianópolis, 5.000 km away. Developed in 1951 in the USA, the aircraft was designed for military purposes. However, the takeoff on the wet runway that day had nothing to do with war. It was a peace mission: to take 63 Venezuelan refugees, including twenty children, to Santa Catarina, where they would live with relatives, or in shelters. One of the passengers was Carlos Montaña, 28 years old: 'I'm frightened because it's my first flight. And because I have no idea what awaits us', he admitted. (Thomas, 2019, § 1)

The "rainy morning" on that Saturday created a certain melancholic spirit. The grey sky and uncertainty about the next day invited a subtle introduction. Words like "war" and "peace" were chosen, due to their obvious opposition. After crossing from Venezuela to Brazil, fleeing from a situation of scarcity and helplessness, a few dozen Venezuelans now had the opportunity to build a better life. Throughout the feature article, several passages highlight the differences between "us" (Brazil and the Brazilians) and "them" (Venezuela and the Venezuelans). For example, the strength and power of the Brazilian Air Force's Hércules plane is contrasted with the fragility shown by the fear of one of the passengers.

Wherein it is obvious that the connotative function of language can be used in journalism, especially in magazine journalism, the journalist, the author of the feature article, emphasises expressions and metaphors that refer to the climate, since they symbolise the gravity of the situation and the incidents that occur during the trip. The connotative use of language is a recurring feature of stories about refugees and migration, because it helps symbolise the gravity of the situation. Connotative use emphasises words such as "saga", "journey", "odyssey", "adventure", given that changes almost always involve difficulties and uncertainty. Verbs such as "escape" and "flee" are frequently used. Indeed the Latin verb *refugere*, that refers to the action of fleeing, is the etymological root of the word "refugee". The feminine noun "fuga" (flight) was used in the article's title. In some cases, "flight" refers to vague concepts, to inevitabilities over which we have no control and to external factors (Thomas, 2019). However, the narrative identifies American and Venezuelan foreign policy as being responsible for pain and death (Thomas, 2019). The journalist links her account to people, geographic spaces, dates, historical facts and photographs, as if they were copies of reality – via so-called referential anchoring of the discourse (Peruzzolo, 2004).

For feature articles, much more information is gathered than is actually used. The journalist reveals that she “talked to more than eighty Venezuelans”. And she adds that she chose only a few to illustrate the situation. Varied and plural sources are identified. However, the treatment given to them implies a somewhat conservative and elitist perspective. The reference to the fear experienced by one of the passengers, as noted above, refers to a 28-year-old man, who was indeed fearful. His profession is not revealed. However, Diover Gonzales, 59, is not treated in the same way, nor the members of his family. A neurosurgeon, his wife is a nurse and his son is a lawyer (Thomas, 2019, § 2).

Jennifer Ann Thomas is a journalist. As someone who is university-educated, she distinguishes the “other”, as being someone without education, at the same time that she shows the reader how serious the crisis is, a crisis that also forces professionals to seek exile, people who are doctors and educators, in short, who belong to the middle and upper class. The same thing happens later, when she describes the source using the passive voice: “Arisnelis Castañeda, 28, single mother of five children” (Thomas, 2019, § 9).

The narrator, sometimes shows herself, sometimes remains hidden. On certain occasions she explains, and on other occasions she implies. This speeds up or slows down the pace of her story. This style attributes the characteristic of ambiguity to the narrator, alternating between a mere character in the story and an omniscient narrator (Vilas-Boas, 1996). Evolving in the third person, the narrator can distance herself from the story and create the effect of impartiality; alternatively, when drawing closer to the story she creates the effect of veracity. We can consider the following examples: “*Veja*’s feature article conversed” (Thomas, 2019, § 2); “*Veja* burned” (Thomas, 2019, § 4). The narrator also draws closer to the refugees, thus creating an effect of subjectivity, which make the story seem more credible to readers, since only the rhetorical procedure can simulate that someone is narrating the experience, and that “someone” is precisely the journalist, who witnessed the facts “over five weeks in June and July” (Thomas, 2019, § 2).

The journalistic practice of *Veja* magazine’s feature article, whose discourse is narrative, opinionated and interpretative (Vilas-Boas, 1996), does not, however, present much news for those who are following this subject. It does not instigate readers to learn more, nor anticipate their expectations. It reproduces common sense knowledge, with well-known information and events and immediate emotions, when mentioning migrants who drowned (Alan Kurdi, in 2015, Óscar Martínez Ramírez and his daughter, in 2019) (Thomas, 2019, § 6-7), or by referring to US immigration policies as an example not to follow. However, use of the adverb “afinal” (ultimately) gives another meaning to the discourse, indicating that many Americans were already tired of the situation and expected a definitive solution:

the situation is, in fact, dramatic. Since 2012, the worldwide number of expatriate persons has doubled. Today, there are 25,9 million individuals officially recognised by the UN with refugee status. The country that received the most requests in 2018 – the United States – has not given a warm welcome to immigrants. This is not, ultimately, surprising since President

Donald Trump was elected precisely with the promise of building a wall on the US border with Mexico to prevent not only the migration of citizens from that nation but also of anyone who makes the US territory the gateway to achieve the American dream. (Thomas, 2019, § 6)

This journalistic practice does not explore the problems associated to this issue and eliminates its complexity, by denying the reader the possibility to hear contrary perspectives, which is fundamental for the construction of critical reflection. In short, "the story is always the same" (Martins, 2019, p. 8).

The indication of the number of Venezuelans interviewed and the number of weeks dedicated to producing the report, makes it appear as if the reporter immersed herself in the subject. "In five weeks, from June to July, *Veja's* feature article talked to more than eighty Venezuelans" (Thomas, 2019, § 2). And yet, the article is simply based on the effect of going deeper into the subject. It is rather sparse, superficial, filled with common sense observations, adjectives and adverbs - which is manifestly insufficient to constitute the cover story of a magazine read by millions of people.

Data from official agencies (UN, UNHCR, Federal Police, Conare) are displayed in the text. The "adjectivised" numbers are designed to frighten the less attentive reader: "every day, about 250 Venezuelans seek exile in Brazil" (Thomas, 2019, § 5). The emphasis placed in the sentence construction announces the content and tone of the paragraph:

it is the largest migratory flow, across land borders, that the country has ever received. In 2018 alone, approximately 90.000 people fled from the Maduro regime in search of new life on Brazilian soil. Since the worsening of the crisis there, in 2015, more than 170.000 people have left Venezuela with Brazil as their final destination. Last year, the Bolivarian country led a shameful ranking: it surpassed Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq as the nation with the largest number of exiles. In 2018 alone, 341.800 Venezuelans applied for asylum somewhere in the world. (*italics added*) (Thomas, 2019, § 5)

In this case, the numbers represent people. The "shameful ranking" refers to individuals – Venezuelan citizens looking for solutions and resources for a dignified survival – that is no longer possible in their home country. In turn, the comparison of Venezuela with Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq is a heavy criticism, given that the respective countries are dictatorial and authoritarian, and there is existence of terrorism in these countries. The close comparison made between the countries induces the reader to think the same thing about Venezuela. The article highlights: "12% of the population, of 32 million inhabitants, subjected to the Bolivarian regime, has already left the country", "about 38% of the Venezuelan emigrants have chosen Brazil". She adds that of the total of 11.231 individuals formally recognised as refugees in Brazil, 3% are Venezuelans (Thomas, 2019, § 7). However she continues that the true situation is far worse: "to date, around 15.000 Venezuelan immigrants have been transferred to Brazilian cities. But another 16.000 still await, with some hope, for the chance to start their life afresh" (Thomas, 2019, § 11).

There is no reference to the final destination for the other 62% of Venezuelan emigrants who have chosen other countries.

And yet, there is information that shows that 21,000 Venezuelans have already been recognised as refugees in other nations. And data on refugees is also known worldwide. Niusarete Lima, advisor to the Brazilian Ministry of Citizenship, has said that if each of the more than 6,000 municipalities in Brazil welcomed one family, they would not even be noticed (Gortázar, 2019). However, information of this nature, which aims to give perspective to the numbers of the migratory wave, using comparisons with the population, territorial extension and situation in other countries, does not appear in the feature article in question.

By 2018, 3.4 million Venezuelans had fled the country (Thomas, 2019). Brazil is in sixth place, among the nations that received the highest number of requests to receive refugees in 2018, with over 80,000 (Thomas, 2019).

Of course, in a journalistic feature article, it is impossible to address all the aspects of a topic. There are limits imposed by space and scope. But the point of view, focus, approach and tone are not limited by the available space. This is a choice made by *Veja* magazine's journalist. Point of view is a purpose, a guideline, and is not always explicit. It is the proposed perspective, for something that is presented to the reader. Point of view can be presented through the interpretation that is given to how a fact develops over time. The focus is the "direction" to be given to the choice of one – or several – "nuances" of a specific fact. Any subject or theme requires a focus, since it involves a significant number of "nuances" or developments (Vilas-Boas, 1996, pp. 20-21).

There is no confrontation of ideas in *Veja*'s cover story. Nor are any arguments and ideas presented that offer alternative interpretations of the same fact. There is a clear absence of official sources from the Venezuelan government and a contradiction concerning Venezuela's political situation. Aimed at its specific audience, this feature article maintains a conservative position, opposed to the left, whatever the country in question. "Fleeing from a dictatorship: the saga of Venezuelans in Brazil" places the reader in a historical context about migration and Venezuela, presenting points of view that are already known, even to the common reader, given the broad dissemination of the themes. In this way, the reporter explains the reasons for migratory movements:

Venezuela's situation is directly linked to the collapse of a leftist proposal, based on populism and economic irresponsibility. The name of the great villain is undoubtedly Hugo Chávez. Ruler from 1999 to 2013, he inaugurated the failed Bolivarianism, in his histrionic manner. After his death, the Vice President, Nicolás Maduro, took the reins, a sort of clone of his predecessor, in terms of his grimaces and lack of common sense. Owner of the world's largest oil reserves, the country has remained artificially based on the commodity for decades. When the price of oil fell – in 2014 its price fell by 50% -, the fantasy ended. Result: hyperinflation (now 10.000.000%) and lack of access to food and medicines. After a series of protests against the regime, the government

instituted a Constituent Assembly in 2017, to take over the functions of the National Assembly, where the opposition parties had the majority of votes. The outcome was to worsen the crisis: *the dictator gained even more powers*. Amid the chaos of 2018, the deputy Juan Guaidó became leader of the opposition. In January this year, he declared himself president of Venezuela. Donald Trump and President Jair Bolsonaro, along with other leaders around the globe, have declared support for the insurgent. But to no avail. Maduro remains in power to this day. (italics added) (Thomas, 2019, § 8)

“Destroyed by the authoritarian government, Venezuela suffers” (Thomas, 2019, § 9). The crisis in this Latin American country is framed, as if the point of view of the capitalist nations, which oppose the Maduro regime, was naturalised. No further explanation is given of the reasons that led to the economic crisis.

Words that are highlighted in bold nonetheless reinforce the thematic values presented in the feature article: the dictatorship, which is an authoritarian political regime and also an authoritarian form of government, belongs to someone, in this case, Nicolás Maduro. Nicolás Maduro is responsible for the crisis that is being experienced in the country. The situation in Venezuela is unsustainable and people will continue to flee the country. “An agreement must be reached as soon as possible between the two sides fighting for power in Venezuela”, warns American sociologist David Smilde, a senior member of the Washington Office on Latin America. “Unfortunately, Maduro still resists” (Thomas, 2019, § 11). Adverbs are used to reinforce the journalist’s position. And the sources chosen speak from a unilateral perspective.

Apart from Nicolás Maduro, no other Venezuelan politicians are identified in *Veja* magazine’s feature article – all are deleted. Officially, Venezuela is a presidential republic. Taking into account the events of recent years, international organisations and institutions characterise it as a dictatorship, and have imposed sanctions on it.

The problem of blockades and international sanctions, which are extremely relevant to the understanding of the ongoing crisis in Venezuela, is not even mentioned in contrasting terms in *Veja*’s article. The report does not present data from the Human Development Index (HDI) report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). No mention is made of the participation of multinationals in the Venezuelan oil market, nor of attempts by the United States to interfere in the country’s policy. Nor is reference made to Chavez’s and Maduro’s troubled opposition to US imperialism, or to US opposition to Bolivarian socialism (Lopes, 2013; Sousa Santos, 2017).

Criticism of Venezuela is also achieved through the voices of the characters, who are presented in *Veja*’s discourse. Almost 40% of the article is filled by photographs, taken by Jonne Roriz. These photographs focus on families, with emphasis on their voices. And narratives follow that describe each person’s journey, as well as their current situation. When the members of Venezuelan families are quoted, the journalist humanises and dramatises the report, looking for real effects, by invoking high democratic values, such as individual freedoms, defence of the country, state control and the market economy

(Thomas, 2019). And using rhetorical artifice, the narrator witnesses the stories experienced by the refugees.

"I saw children dying of malnutrition. When I lost my job as a clothes seller, I thought my family might face the same drama. I came to Brazil because I heard that there was no shortage of food here." Arisnelis Castañeda, 28, single mother of five children.

A month ago at the BV8 shelter in Pacaraima, in the north of Roraima, she left with her children, aged between 2 months and 10 years, from the Venezuelan city of San Félix. Her husband had abandoned her and their children. The first leg of the trip was by bus. From Santa Elena, in Venezuela, indigenous people helped them cross the Brazilian border.

"We are looking for a future for our children" says Roselis Figueira, 33, with her husband, Ricardo Moreno, 30, and son Miguel, 9.

"I was desperate when my daughter was born and I couldn't be with my wife. Now we are going to rebuild our life together". Luis Hernandez, 29 years old.

"She is so delicate," said Hernandez, tears in her eyes, when he was reunited with his 1-month-old daughter in Dourados (MS), after three months separated from her family. (Thomas, 2019)

Veja's discourse presents several positive examples, that praise Brazil, such as the actions of the Brazilian military, Armed Forces and Commander-in-Chief, Jair Bolsonaro, as well as the food processing company Seara, that has employed 420 Venezuelans in Dourados (Thomas, 2019), and even the "billionaire Carlos Wizard Martin" (Thomas, 2019, § 9). At the same time, the article criticises Nicolás Maduro's policy, suggesting a mistaken patriotism, which traces the dichotomy of good *versus* evil, capitalism *versus* socialism:

Operation Acolhida (Operation Welcome)⁸, coordinated by the Armed Forces since March 2018, combines federal government agencies and UN agencies, with the aim of providing housing, food and work for those fleeing from Nicolás Maduro's dictatorship – and the misery that affects 90% of Venezuela's population. (Thomas, 2019, § 1)

The [Brazilian] Army acts as a kind of Human Resources department: it takes pictures, prepares the curriculum and records the skills of each person. (Thomas, 2019, § 9)

⁸ For more information, see <http://www.eb.mil.br/operacao-acolhida>

We also see, in *Veja*'s feature article, Carlos Wizard Martins as one of the cited sources and a character of the magazine's next article (Thomas, 2019). Once again, the relationship of dominant versus subordinate appears as a discursive category, suggesting that capitalism is the only solution to social issues. Everything suggests, in fact, that the cover story has served as a background for the article about the "billionaire who embraced the refugee cause" – Carlos Wizard Martins.

These and other passages mark the differences between "us", a democratic and welcoming country, and "them", a dictatorial and miserable country: "venezuelans who crossed the border with Brazil to escape the crisis that plagues their country. These families are undergoing an authentic odyssey" (Thomas, 2019, § 2); "on the FAB's Hércules flight, nobody suffered from this situation". "Brazil has the task of continuing to serve as a safe haven (...) it is a humanitarian duty and makes us great as a nation" (Thomas, 2019, § 11).

The report certainly feeds the general public's curiosity. But it doesn't go any further than that. It fails to provide more in-depth analysis of the subject matter, which would enable readers to form an objective opinion. In conclusion, the article is partisan and lacks data to illustrate the complexity of the political issues associated to Venezuelan migration.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the paradox of the relationship between the self and the other, the more distant we are from that which we identify as "us", the more the discourses will be tied to extreme, segregationist, intolerant and dichotomous logics in relation to the migrant, refugee, foreigner, other – reflecting an order of meaning that is no longer promising, because no words redeem it. Man having ceased to be a "animal that may promise" (Martins, 2002a, 2009, 2011/2017), as Nietzsche (1887/1988, p. II) defined it, because his word is no longer able to make promises, has produced, in our epoch, a transition from the regime of the word to the regime of the technological image. And this transition has resulted in a crisis of truth, and the "impoverishment of experience" (Benjamin, 1933/2005), which in the new "sensological order" (Perniola, 1993), is exhausted through excitement, effervescence, euphoria and simulacrum – wherein the spectacle is the mere "guardian of sleep" of reason, as suggested by Guy Debord (1967/1991, p. 16).

This transition has left the human community "in suffering of purpose" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 93; Martins, 2002a, 2002b), as profound changes have occurred in the perception apparatus. This mixes together the influence of phenomena "such as the expropriation of sociality, immobility and deterritorialisation, the loss of historical consciousness and the dissolution of collective memory" and of opposite phenomena such as "naturalisation of culture, intensification of social ties, localism, tribalism and hedonism" (Martins, 2007, p. 6). In effect, the figures "of project, promise, historicity and purpose" are increasingly replaced by figures "where a permanent haemorrhage of meaning continues

to decline the theme of the end, whether it be the end of history and truth, or the end of the symbolic sphere and mediation" (Martins, 2007, p. 6).

In other studies, we have confirmed that the presence of migrants and refugees has been narrated as a threat to normality and social stability. Perpetuation of this discursive regime functions, in effect, as a mechanism of exclusion, generating new fears and insecurities (Marcondes & Martins, 2019). In the current study, we conclude that *Veja* magazine has reproduced a hegemonic, reductionist, conservative and nationalist discourse. The explanations, the linguistic options, the statistics and the choice of sources close to the Brazilian government indicate what is appropriate for the population to know. In *Veja*'s feature article, other perspectives that could contradict those presented, and that justified being highlighted through journalistic rigour are ignored, or even silenced,

Veja's discursive silence is exclusive, because it differentiates between "us" and "them", the dominant and the dominated (Weber, 2004), the powerful and the underlings (Spivak, 1985). This regime of the gaze is concretised through a discourse that aims to erase the other. It is a discourse that is part of an order that reduces everything to unity, leaving no room for otherness (Martins, 2019).

The dichotomies that permeate this discourse, between the north (centrally located and developed) and the south (peripheral and subaltern) are repeated in the Latin American context. There is sharp criticism of the Venezuelan regime, and by contrast Brazilian democracy is highlighted, without taking into account the problems that Brazil is facing in terms of threats to freedom of expression and democracy. The consequences of this regime of the gaze include reinforcement of cultural disparities and the denial of differences. Foreigners, migrants, refugees continue to be presented in the dominant discourse as subordinates, victims of a left-wing dictatorship. Given that the media discourse reproduces the hegemonic point of view, the others remain effectively deleted in the very country that they chose to be their homeland.

The social representations that media outlets provide of others and of themselves concretise effects of power, which interfere in the construction of the current worldview, since they produce the cultural unconscious that naturalises capitalist supremacy, reproducing its values and hierarchical relations.

Veja magazine's narrative about the crisis in Venezuela concretises discursive practices of assimilation of difference and exclusion of the other. The view taken is to emphasise the dangers of leftist governments. The "other", who is the subordinate, gains visibility through the voice of *Veja*, which only reproduces hegemonic thinking. *Veja* does not provide an opening to listening to plural voices, which enable a broad understanding of the phenomenon of migration of Venezuelans to Brazil, which might foster the creation of new perspectives for the inclusion and socialisation of the migrants as new social actors.

Translation: Formigueiro, Conteúdos Digitais, Lda.

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