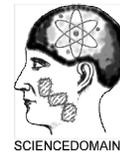




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## The Era of Dichotomies: Immigration and Discourse in Brazilian Schools

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Case Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** The study aims to map out the way Brazilian school workers discursively construct images of contemporary immigrants in Brazil. It intends to describe and analyze how in their discourse they move back and forth between a negative and a more sympathetic imaginary when talking about the presence of contemporary immigrants in the country.

**Study Design:** Case study.

**Place and Duration of Study:** The study took place in a public school in the town of Cosmopolis in the state of São Paulo in Brazil. The school is called E.M.E.B. Educador Paulo Freire. It is situated in Sete de Abril, street number 649, in the district of Vila Damiano, where the interviews took place during August 2011.

**Methodology:** Eighteen Brazilian school workers from the above-mentioned school participated in the three-part study. They filled in a questionnaire, which consisted of 19 thematic closed-ended questions. The completion of this questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes, and then they commented on four news articles, which took another ten minutes, and each of them participated in an interview, which lasted between 40 and 50 minutes. Discourse Analysis was applied to the collected material.

**Results:** The empirical material shows the oscillation of participants between a desire for a hardening of immigration control on the one hand, and an empathetic view in talking about immigrants on the other.

**Conclusion:** Participants think and talk about contemporary immigrants in dichotomies. The dynamics of these dichotomist discourses reveal that the dichotomies essentially involve an inner fight between what the speaker considers to be good and bad, and that they project this onto the immigrants.

*Keywords: International migration; empathy; denial; Brazil; education; discourse.*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The issue of immigration has been a controversial one in Brazil in recent years. While recent research has demonstrated that the majority of the Brazilian public supports the presence of immigrants in Brazil (Ipsos Global, 2011), it has also shown that people use only two legitimate arguments to support this view (Simai et al., 2011). One discourse that favours the presence of foreigners in Brazil argues that it is good for the economic development of the country. The other is the humanitarian discourse that uses a sympathetic tone about accepting refugees who are seeking to escape from hunger. On the whole the question of immigration is treated as banal in politics, in the media and in public discourses, and follows the normative discourses on the myth of receptivity in Brazil, which considers Brazil to be a paradise for immigrants where everyone is accepted wherever she comes from and whenever she arrives. This is the so-called 'national myth of receptivity', which has recently been subjected to criticism (Simai and Baeninger, 2011c), but a nationwide denial of the contemporary and historical existence of xenophobia and hostility toward foreigners still persists as one of the main characteristics of Brazilian society when it comes to the issue of immigration.

From this socio-political climate came the impetus for the research referred to in this paper. The project was motivated by the belief that only by knowing and understanding Brazilian school workers' constructions, expectations and fantasies of contemporary immigrants in Brazil could we understand Brazilians' attitudes towards them in the school setting. The study shows that the 'immigrant's identity' is a highly complex entity that people construct in relation to each other and to their own beliefs and feelings about what is different from themselves. The constructed identities included various categorizations of people, considering them good and bad for the country, and arguing for and against their presence in Brazil. Thus what we suggest is that the discourses collected and analyzed in this paper show that the construction of the identity of contemporary immigrants is diversified and categorized, but, more importantly, hierarchical and dichotomist. Each constructed identity, from a discourse analytical point of view, moves back and forth between a negative and a more sympathetic imaginary. Therefore the analysis will portray the dynamics of ethno-cultural empathy and various forms of denial(s) of the speakers while talking about the presence of immigrants in contemporary Brazil.

Three main concepts will be introduced below, which frame the analytical dimension of this study. They are ethno cultural empathy, denial, and the dynamics of these two notions.

Wang et al. (2003) coined the term 'ethno-cultural empathy' and conducted studies on the importance of the cultural and ethnic aspects of empathy. According to Wang et al., there are three main aspects that distinguish ethno-cultural empathy from general empathy. The first is the need to consider the individual in their cultural context. The second is to control one's own subjective prejudices against individuals or groups that are culturally different from one's own. The third one is that, apart from any theoretical knowledge of cultural diversity and empathy, the level of ethno-cultural empathy is dependent on one's practical experience with other culture(s). According to Rasool et al. (2011), ethno-cultural empathy is defined as 'feeling, understanding, and caring about what someone from another culture feels, understands and cares about' (2011:8), bearing in mind that feeling, understanding and caring about someone requires the capacity to enter into the otherness of a person who is different from oneself, and doing so in a new way, not by domination. As Jessica Benjamin neatly puts it: 'Being with breaks down the oppositions between powerful and helpless, active and passive; it counteracts the tendency to objectify and deny recognition to those

weaker or different to the other'. On the basis of all this we hypothesize that ethno-cultural empathy should be a key concept that could contribute to a sense of oneness across cultures.

In psychology, denial is a concept originating in the psychodynamic theories of Sigmund Freud. Denial is one of many defence mechanisms. It entails ignoring or refusing to believe an unpleasant reality. Defence mechanisms protect one's psychological well-being in traumatic situations, or in any situation that produces anxiety or conflict. In sociology Stanley Cohen developed a theory of denial in his powerful book *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*. According to Cohen, there is one common characteristic in all types and forms of denial, and that is that it occurs in cases where a set of people from any particular social group family, government, society, etc. are presented with information that is too disturbing to be fully absorbed as it is, or openly acknowledged (Cohen, 2001): 'The information is therefore somehow repressed, disavowed, pushed aside or reinterpreted' (Cohen: 1). In this perspective, whenever the participants had some views, ideas or thoughts that were to some extent frustrating, they used various rhetorical forms of denial.

From our socio-psychodynamic perspective the main scope is to capture the dynamics of these two phenomena in the context of immigrants and locals in Brazil via interviews conducted with Brazilian school workers. What is interesting for us is to see in what context ethno-cultural empathy succeeds and in what contexts it fails. To achieve this, it was our aim to explore what forms of reaction this failure creates. What we found is that various forms of denial surfaced in the participants' speech at the very moment when ethno-cultural empathy failed to succeed. In this sense we understand denial here as a mechanism of defence, in the Freudian sense, to the failure of cultural connection, that is to the failure of ethno-cultural empathy, and turns empathy into its antagonism.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHODS**

Overall, this paper offers an exploration of the various discursive constructions of contemporary immigrants used by the Brazilian participants in a school setting to argue for and against the presence of immigrants in Brazil. Eighteen people from diverse backgrounds agreed to participate in the three-part study and filled in the questionnaire, which consisted of 19 thematic close-ended questions with an instruction sheet, copies of four newspaper articles with images of immigrants in Brazil (of which two were positive and two were negative), and a guided interview. The completion of the questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes, the reflections on the four news articles took another ten minutes and each interview took between 40 and 50 minutes. Participants were told that participation was voluntary and that they would remain anonymous. They were then instructed to read the instructions on the first sheet and afterwards to fill in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on the Scale of Ethno-cultural Empathy (SEE), a self-report instrument that measures empathy with people of racial and ethnic backgrounds different from one's own, developed by Wang et al. (2003). The SEE is composed of four thematic areas: Empathic Feeling and Expression, Empathic Perspective Taking, Acceptance of Cultural Differences, and Empathic Awareness. Intellectual empathy is the ability to understand how a person with a different ethnic background thinks or feels (Empathic Perspective Taking, EPT). Communicative empathy focuses on the verbal expression of ethno-cultural empathic thoughts and feelings towards members of other ethnic groups. This component can also be expressed through actions (Empathic Feeling and Expressions, EFE). Ethno-cultural empathy consciousness is being conscious of how society, media and the job market treat other ethnic groups (Empathic Awareness, EA).

Finally, the acceptance of cultural differences is concerned with accepting why people of other ethnic groups behave as they do, for example wearing traditional clothing, or speaking their own language (Acceptance of Cultural Differences, AC). Then the four news articles were given to the participants. These were entitled *Prison for gringos*, *Foreign collaboration*, *American scientists in Brazil* and *Falsification of famous brands by foreigners*. Participants were given time to look at these materials and, once they felt ready, their impressions were taped. After having audiotaped their comments, they participated in the guided interview, as described above.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before we begin the analysis it needs to be understood that the perception of immigrants by Brazilians was a very controversial topic. The collected material is viewed as ground on which a battle is being fought between two very different states of mind. It is very important for us to capture these opposing views in the form of dichotomies and to understand how people struggle with the immigrant issue in Brazil and make sense of it. It clearly shows us the oscillation between a desire for a hardening of immigration control on the one hand and an empathetic view in talking about immigrants. The analysis therefore offers a reading of a number of dichotomies as they arose in the interviews.

#### 3.1 Dichotomy 1: Classification of immigrants – All welcome

It was common to find the 'All foreigners are welcome' discourses in the collected interviews. Statements like the one below were common:

Informant: 'As a country with an enormous cultural plurality, there is no reason not to take in immigrants from abroad...'

Most participants gave positive answers to general questions such as, 'What if a foreign family moved into the house or flat next door?'

Or

'How would you behave with a foreign colleague at work?'

The answers we got to these questions show that Brazilians do like to emphasize that Brazil welcomes everyone from anywhere in the world, without prejudice or fear. However, when we reached a rather personal, intimate and more concrete dimension in the interview, the opposite of this welcoming tone began to surface. After analyzing the answers we could clearly identify that Brazilians categorize foreigners based on their country of origin, in a hierarchical manner. During the interview we heard the following statements from the participants:

Informant: 'It depends on where these immigrants come from...' and

Informant: 'People who come from neighboring countries, particularly from the Argentine, are not very well regarded [...]. 'For instance, an Arab, may be that would disturb, yes.'

All participants made statements that reinforced the existence of hierarchical categorization based on the national or ethnic origins of the immigrants. None contested this categorized way of thinking. Other forms of failing to welcome immigrants reveal various common

phobias on the part of the host community. What these phobias have in common is that they are all based on a false belief that, as citizens of a country, they are the owners of the resources of that country, and that if a foreigner enjoys those resources, since they share the same geographical space with immigrants, all is not well. Therefore the non-welcoming reception by the host country surfaces in the following manner in discourses:

Informant: 'The case of Bolivians who come here to do semi-slave work..., we have workers here in Brazil, Brazilians who are unemployed...'

Thus the participant believes that before any foreigner gets work in Brazil, unemployed Brazilians should be hired.

Informant: 'Brazilians are super controlled and guarded, and the others who come here....?'

This participant tends to feed the belief that foreigners think that in Brazil everything is possible, while the participant feels that Brazilians themselves live under rigorous rules.

### **3.2 Dichotomy 2: Third-person Effect – Personal Experience**

The third-person effect – or discursive projection – is a semantic pattern whereby people are able to find an excuse for distancing themselves from a quoted example, case or situation. This means that the person is able to refer to a potentially humiliating, embarrassing, or ideologically and morally prohibited case by putting the blame on other people who are not present at the time of the actual telling of the story. According to Michael Billig (1997, 2006), when people use third-person-effect structures they, in reality, claim indirectly that others have this opinion or that thing that has happened to them, but I don't, that I can resist, I don't share these views, I won't have such a negative experience.

During our fieldwork the following narrative occurred:

Informant: 'During the class some said that they were prejudiced [...]. Yes, they say that because foreigners take our work and I say it is not like that...'

Here we could see that the participant wanted to present herself in a positive light by putting her unacceptable thoughts in the third-effect format. Contrary to this rhetoric, most people who work with personal subjective experiences in the 'I' format are able to develop a more sincere narrative and a higher level of empathy in their interactions and communications. Most studies indeed show that 'knowledge of, and experience with, other cultures should facilitate ethno-cultural empathy' (Eklund, 2011). In fact we found that those looking for examples in their own lives while trying to answer our interview questions performed better in expressing empathy during the interview. For instance, the participant quoted below showed a better understanding of, in this case, the linguistic difficulties of foreigners than those who did not have personal experience of such things, or who did not try to look for examples in their own life.

Informant: 'I think it must be very difficult to live in a place where one is obliged daily to express oneself in a language that knows little; also for those who live or work with language difficulties it must be hard. Look, I work with people who are considered different, with deaf children. And also my ex-girlfriend was almost blind, so I am used to difference. Their language is different from Portuguese, and so I know what it means to be a foreigner...'

We could see a very sensitive account here in this narrative and its care and understanding stem from the fact of the participant's having had prior personal experience that he could call on in the form of reimagination in order to empathize with a similar situation that a foreign person would live through. He practiced this ability through the personal experience format and through its verbalization.

### **3.3 Dichotomy 3: Praising – Fears**

There are several ways in which participants created a sympathetic approach to the presence of immigrants in Brazil. Such approaches tend to approve the presence of immigrants in the country on the grounds of the economy. These views present a more benign image of immigrants in the country and argue that they are good for it because they contribute to its economic development.

Informant: 'Foreigners are very useful for the country, because for instance in various collaborations, they discover things that help Brazil to advance, and we discover useful things for them. So after all we help them and they help us.'

Informant: 'It is very good for Brazil that foreigners come here to work; they invest here or bring their technologies... Brazil really needs it.'

Another sympathetic discourse is the humanitarian discourse that claims that foreigners who are in need and looking for a place to survive can come to Brazil. This version includes an emphatic account of immigrants trying to understand foreigners with difficulties and show care.

Informant: '[...] so one part talked about the Bolivians who come to Brazil and work as semi-slaves, I think it was the Zara shops these days practicing this. Foreigners come to Brazil with huge difficulties, including with the language [...] they live in subhuman conditions, do not have a home, friends, parents; many of them have no documents, and they end up living such experiences here.'

On the other hand, many fears and even social phobias surfaced during the interviews that considerably affect the social thinking and behavior of Brazilians about and with immigrants. The main fears in the imaginary of the participants were of some form of threat, such as a threat to the Brazilian identity, a threat to the Portuguese language, the threat of taking jobs and other goods from Brazilians – in general a threat that immigrants will receive more than they contribute.

Informant: 'Well, generally they do not speak Portuguese well but still they receive scholarships to study in Brazil and so they end up taking the places from talented Brazilian students'.

Informant: 'Yes, some say that foreigners take the jobs of Brazilians, in an era when there are so many Brazilian unemployed.'

These fears show very complex constructions of immigrants and a strong tendency to 'otherize' both psychologically and materially. Thus, as Stephen Frosh put it, 'Racism is a social-psychological complex engendered at the level of social and political relations, but also sustained and experienced deep in the individual psyche' (Frosh, 2006: 266).

### **3.4 Dichotomy 4: Rivalry – Sympathy**

A motif that was strongly present in the discourses was rivalry when talking about immigrants, in particular in the context of Argentines in Brazil.

Informant: '[...] there is resistance, most of all with Argentina. We have this difference with our brothers, we do.'

It appeared that Brazilians feel a certain rivalry with Argentina. Rivalry is typically associated with competition; it is the drive to win or defeat one's opponents. Contemporary rivalry psychology emphasizes the relational context of rivalry situations as opposed to isolated competition processes, and identifies four main factors that create and increase sentiments of rivalry. The first condition is the existence of active interaction between rivalries. The second is the existing antecedence of such interaction. The third is geographical proximity, and finally there is a similarity in general terms (cultural or other) that creates a – in one way or another – similar identity of the two rivalries. These four conditions are clearly present in Brazil–Argentina relations.

In contrast, according to earlier research, non-rivalrous and sympathetic feelings occur in people when empathy is present between two people or groups (Håkansson and Montgomery, 2003). Empathy occurs within a shared reality (Hardin and Higgins, 1996) where the empathizer and the other person cooperate to the other person's advantage. Having said this, the main condition that influences empathy is knowledge of, and experience with, similar situations. In our research context it means that understanding similarities between other cultures and experiences in one's own culture makes empathic perception possible. At a general, universal level, experiences in two different cultures are similar to each other. For example, if a person has been discriminated against because of his mother tongue, for instance (speaking a minority language), he can understand a minority-language-speaker's situation. Or if one has children one can understand concerns regarding parenting (Eklund et al., 2009). From this perspective we found that people who found some similarities between situations or conditions in their own life and the ones studied in this research did better at feeling and expressing empathy, like the participant below:

Informant: 'For me, to go out with a foreigner or with a Brazilian is the same. I am used to diversity. I work with deaf people as I mentioned earlier and my ex-girlfriend was almost blind, so I am used to such differences, to different people.'

Then he tells a whole story to testify to the discrimination experienced by his ex-girlfriend, and adds angrily:

Informant: '[...] So, I told the guy in the shop. Who do you think you are to prejudice people? I will call your boss now to make a formal complaint!'

Thus we can capture empathy, as a feeling of and understanding of what someone feels in a certain situation, by recalling similar life situations from people's own experiences.

But empathy is also something that can be learnt, that develops during conversations. For instance, we observed that in cases when the participant expressed an inadequate opinion about a case, because of a lack of information or knowledge about the case discussed, when the participant receives a new piece of information it can work in an empathetic

manner. The new piece of information is able to put the same case into a different light and this, if the new information has a more sympathetic approach, could lead to a change of opinion as a result of the internal work of empathy.

Informant: '[...] this story for example with this Italian... who killed... I do not know whom in Italy and was not sent back for trial...'

Interviewer: 'Oh, yes, the one from the Left, who killed a politician many years ago. Is this the one you are talking about?'

Informant: 'No, he was not a politician; a criminal...'

Interviewer: 'The Battisti case?'

Informant: 'Yes, so I do not agree with the view of the Brazilian government. I think as he committed a common crime in Italy, he should have been condemned in Italy.'

Then the interviewer gave more precise information to the informant on the case, explaining its political nature and the danger of partiality in the home country. After this information the informant changed her attitude and opinion, and showed a sympathetic understanding toward the case (narrative below).

Informant: 'I see. I did not know these details at all; I have not followed the case; I thought he was just a common criminal and therefore I did not understand why he was treated differently. Now that you tell me it was a political case, I see. I have actually changed my opinion about it, and would like to learn more of the case.'

It can be seen from this that knowledge is crucial for the evoking of empathic feelings: with the increase in knowledge of a case and of its context, the empathy increases.

### **3.5 Dichotomy 5: Similarity – Difference**

The link between similarity and difference, in other words, the contrast to oneself, has been studied within 'mainstream', 'traditional' or 'experimental' social psychology with different kinds of theory often sharing some cognitive emphasis. Festinger (1954) looked upon comparisons with others as a form of 'reality test' which provides information regarding one's opinions and proficiencies. Tajfel's (1982) categorization identity comparison theory and the subsequent social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) argued that comparison and contrast are crucial aspects of identity. Contrasting one's own group with other groups is an antecedent of a sense of positive or negative identity for individuals within groups, and of potential conflict between groups. Turner and his colleagues' (Turner et al., 1987) self-categorization theory develops this theme by stressing that the group identification through which one constructs one's identity is activated by the perception of similarities and differences between and within groups. From a discursive perspective the issue of contrast and comparison between self and others suggest three discursive categories.

First, Sacks' (1992) comments on 'things we don't do' is drawn upon to suggest the activity orientation of such talk. Second, mention is made of Buttny's (1993) work on consensus, in which similarity rather than difference between self and others is stressed. Third, McKinlay and Dunnett's (1998) work, which has started to explore contrast between self and others, is

considered. Turning first to Sacks' work, we found several narratives mentioning what we Brazilians do not do, and what foreigners might.

Informant: 'So, for instance, the Arabs, it is really a question about values. We Brazilians do not accept women's submission to male power'.

It is interesting to see the way this discursive structure works. Firstly, the 'things we don't do' discursive form sheds a positive light on the speaker and a negative one on the Other. Secondly, the speaker is in complete denial over female submission in Brazil, even claiming that such problems do not occur among Brazilians.

Buttny's work also illuminates our findings. It was not rare at all participants emphasizing how similar they (as Brazilians) are to any foreigners and also the support of similar public policies for both foreigners and Brazilians, not separate ones, as in most cases.

Informant: 'Because in Brazil it is always 8 or 80 (meaning that extremes are typical). For instance if they say let's create a policy to control the immigrants, then they start to combat crimes committed only by immigrants, and crimes committed by non-immigrants is not a matter for them; I think we should have the same rules to follow independently of whether one is an immigrant or a Brazilian. We are all human beings and share the same geographical space...'

Finally, McKinlay and Dunnett's work is very important from an analytical point of view in this work, as it suggests that people are able to contrast themselves with others without being hierarchical. Thus contrasting oneself with others and reaching a conclusion is complementary. In this discursive structure the foreigner complements the host society and is portrayed positively.

### **3.6 Dichotomy 6: Receptivity – Xenophobia**

Receptivity is present here in positive self-representation, which is an important ingredient in daily discourse and should be understood as the argumentative denial of accusations of xenophobia and racism (van Dijk, 2002; Billig, 1997).

Informant: 'People do not comment on this topic, immigration, much as the Brazilians are very receptive. They receive people well from all over the world.'

Informant: 'As I said, Brazilians do not have difficulties with accepting foreigners; we are very receptive.'

We can see in these excerpts how the positive self-presentation of the history of immigration to Brazil has constructed an image of Brazilians as more permissive and receptive people than they really are, and this all leads to in-group favouritism among Brazilians. Thus positive self-presentation is fundamental to the denial of our bad side and their good side, and it shows a tendency to denigrate the other and praise and glorify one's own history, background and past. As Teun van Dijk put it, 'All these different structures at different levels [...] contribute to the overall strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. We have seen that precisely such structures may derive from and be geared towards the construction of similar mental structures, that is, negative attitudes and ideologies on minorities and immigration' (van Dijk, 2002).

One of the many aspects of xenophobia is the desire to create obstacles and rigid rules for foreigners coming to Brazil, or, if they are already here, to make their lives difficult and limit their rights. It appears almost as retaliation, as the way it justifies itself is by the fact that other countries have a considerably more bureaucratic and rigid immigration policy. Most references were to the US.

Informant: 'I think that Brazil does not pose any difficulties for foreigners coming to our country and I think they are treated in a different manner. I think it would be important to make it harder for foreigners to enter our country, as other countries create many obstacles for us in going elsewhere. Just think of how difficult it is for us Brazilians to get a visa to go to the US.'

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The main finding of this study was that Brazilian school workers think and talk about contemporary immigrants in dichotomies. The dichotomies we found are fed by both the socio-political sphere (media, public discourse, politicians, etc...) and individual minds. The dynamics of the discourses reveal that the dichotomies essentially contain an inner fight between what the speaker considers to be good and bad. Therefore, the discourses found can be considered as false dichotomies justifying this moralized and ideologized thinking. The two opposing forces of the dichotomies map out to us the main grounds on which this psychosocial war is carried out. These grounds are as follows: classification of immigrants – all welcome, discursive projection – personal experience, praising – fears, rivalry – sympathy, similarity – difference, receptivity – xenophobia. What we essentially found is that all contain a rather sympathetic view and confronted with a hostile one on each abstracted ground. A more sympathetic discourse always had its roots in the practice of empathy, in our context – between people from different culture or country; this is called ethno-cultural empathy. However, ethno-cultural empathy is not an easy notion in practice since, as Halpern and Weinstein put it, 'The work of empathy is precisely trying to imagine a view of the world that one does not share, and in fact may find it quite difficult to share' (2006: 581). In fact, all the positive angles of these dichotomies – the all-welcome discourse, the potential for linking others' experiences to one's personal life experience, the ability to recognize the other and praise her for her success and merits, a sympathetic feeling in understanding and supporting the other, finding similarities between oneself and the other and the capacity to be receptive, to accept the other well and interact with her – all these are fruits of the successful practice of ethno-cultural empathy.

However, in most cases the practice of empathy fails or is not even considered in intercultural relationships, and in such cases we face a paradoxical contemporary phenomenon. The paradox of this phenomenon lies in the nature of contemporary societies. Since WWII the values of Western countries ideologically and discursively support multiculturalism, tolerance and solidarity and prohibit feelings and actions that go against such values. Therefore, we can say that all those who have sentiments, views and prejudices that oppose these values, such as extreme nationalism or racism, intolerance, xenophobia and related aggression, would discursively deny the existence of such states of mind. Thus, as Dimitrina Petrova put it, denial is, ironically, 'a product of the progress of the struggle against it' (2000:28). The study shows that when the practice of ethno-cultural empathy fails, forms of denial take the place of empathy. Xenophobia, emphasizing difference between one and the other, rivalry, fears, discursive projection and the categorization of people all hide in its denial: denial of recognition to the other. These denials

take various semantic forms, and structures, such as mitigation, positive self-presentation, and disparaging the other, as previously listed in this study.

Thus the study suggests that contemporary emotional and discursive work on immigration in Brazil shows that attempts are being made to reach a more empathic view; there is a dynamics of ethno-cultural empathy and the denial of recognition. However, it seems that denial is still widespread and most participants showed that there is a serious problem in finding ways of recognizing and truly meeting the other. As Bruna Seu put it, 'What matters is finding ways of recognising the difficult work involved in truly meeting the "other".'

In concluding this paper we would like to suggest that a more harmonious coexistence with the other is achievable by means of the practice of acknowledging the problem of denial of xenophobia in Brazil and by replacing denial with more effective practices of ethno-cultural empathy.

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## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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