

ARTICLE

THE “YOUNG BLACK MAN” IN THE PHOTO:

the production of meaning in reader
comments from the *El País* newspaper¹

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Brasileira de Pesquisadores em Jornalismo

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DOI: 10.25200/BJR.v15n1.2019.1149

ABSTRACT – The image of a shirtless black child in Copacabana watching the New Year's Eve fireworks, published by photographer Lucas Landau on his Facebook page, was a focus of controversy across social media and produced a number of different interpretations about both the photograph and the boy in it. The Brazilian edition of the Spanish newspaper *El País* produced two texts on the subject, both of which brought about varying comments from *Facebook* users. Using the French discourse analysis as a basis, this article analyzes interpretations expressed about the texts published in *El País*. The goal was to understand social perceptions of the current conception of childhood by analyzing the reactions conveyed in the comments. Our research showed us that the kid's individuality goes undisclosed and he becomes a platform for sociopolitical discussions. This is quite common in journalism and how it represents contemporary childhood: the role of children as active social actors is disregarded, and they are simply portrayed as being in need of protection.

Key words: Childhood. Journalism. Reader Participation. Reception. Discourse analysis.

O “MENINO NEGRO” DA FOTO:

A produção de sentidos nos comentários dos leitores do *El País*

RESUMO – A imagem publicada pelo fotógrafo Lucas Landau em sua página no *Facebook*, mostrando um menino negro, sem camisa, vendo a queima de fogos no réveillon de Copacabana, causou polêmica nas redes sociais, com diferentes interpretações sobre a fotografia e a criança retratada. O jornal espanhol *El País*, em sua versão brasileira, produziu dois textos sobre o assunto, os quais, por sua vez, também geraram vários comentários de usuários da rede *Facebook*, no perfil da publicação. Por meio da análise do discurso de linha francesa, este artigo analisa essas manifestações, que exprimem a recepção dos textos do *El País*. O objetivo foi compreender as percepções sociais da

concepção contemporânea de infância, por meio das reações dos comentadores. Pelo estudo, percebe-se que o garoto tem sua individualidade suprimida e se torna “palco” para discussões sociopolíticas. Isso reflete o que se tem visto de forma geral nas representações da infância no jornalismo: o papel das crianças como atores sociais ativos é ignorado, e elas são mostradas somente como seres tutelados.

Palavras-chave: Infância. Jornalismo. Participação do leitor. Recepção. Análise do discurso.

EL “NIÑO NEGRO” DE LA FOTO:

La producción de sentidos en los comentarios de los lectores de *El País*

RESUMEN – La imagen publicada por el fotógrafo Lucas Landau en su página del *Facebook*, mostrando a un niño negro, sin camisa, viendo la quema de fuegos en el año nuevo, en Copacabana, causó polémica en las redes sociales, con diferentes interpretaciones sobre la fotografía y el niño retratado. El diario español *El País*, en su versión brasileña, produjo dos textos sobre el tema, los cuales, a su vez, también generaron varios comentarios de usuarios de la red *Facebook*, en el perfil de la publicación. Este artículo hace un análisis de esas manifestaciones, que expresan la recepción de los textos de *El País*, por medio del análisis del discurso de línea francesa. El objetivo fue comprender percepciones sociales de la concepción contemporánea de la infancia, por medio de las reacciones de los comentaristas. Por medio del estudio, se percibe que el chico tiene su individualidad suprimida y se convierte en “escenario” para discusiones sociopolíticas. Esto refleja lo que se ha visto de forma general en las representaciones de la infancia contemporánea en el periodismo: el papel de los niños como actores sociales activos es ignorado, y ellos son mostrados sólo como seres tutelados.

Palabras clave: Infancia. Periodismo. Participación del lector. Recepción. Análisis del discurso.

1 The photo of the young black man

Television news and news sites often show similar images of New Year’s Eve celebrations: different colored rays of lights dancing across the night sky surrounded by smoke. These are the fireworks; they signal the beginning of a new cycle and are a tradition that many countries share across the globe. In Brazil, the lights that color the sky over Copacabana Beach, in Rio de Janeiro, have been said to be “the best celebration on the planet”², “a traditional New Year’s Eve celebration”³ and “the most traditional fireworks display in Brazil”⁴. But in 2018, images of the Rio de Janeiro water illuminated by fireworks were not the only images to share the headlines; there was another, which did not feature the fireworks display, but was equally prominent: a moment captured on a camera which was not focused on the fireworks, but on the crowds of people on the beach celebrating the countdown to midnight.

Lucas Landau, a photographer from Rio de Janeiro who was covering the event for the Reuters news organization, posted one

of the photos he took that night on his *Facebook* page⁵ depicting a young black man with no shirt, watching the fireworks with a look of admiration on his face. In the background, there were people dressed in white celebrating the turn of the year. Just above this photo was another image of the young man, his back turned to the camera (Fig. 1). Yet the first image was the one that attracted all the attention: more than 33 thousand *Facebook* users reacted with “likes” and comments such as “Love it” and “Wow” as it was shared more than 8 thousand times⁶. Landau wrote a small text about the photo saying⁷: “I was doing my job, taking photos of everyone watching the fireworks [...]. He was just as captivated as everyone else. I asked how old he was (9) and his name, but I couldn’t hear for the noise. [...] there is a truth, but I don’t even know what it is. They told me that if I found out who the young man was [...].”

Figure 1 – Post from Lucas Landau; below, the photo that attracted all the attention.



Source: Facebook (copy).

These reactions on social networks caught the attention of Brazilian media channels, such as the *Correio Braziliense* newspaper⁸, the *UOL* site⁹, the *Exame* magazine¹⁰, and even the American newspaper *The Washington Post*¹¹ published about the event. Another channel to report on this was the national (online) version of the Spanish newspaper *El País*¹². On January 3rd, it published an article called “The photo of a young black man which illustrates how young black men are perceived”¹³, and was accompanied by the subtitle “Image of young man watching New Year’s Eve fireworks at Copacabana raises debate”, also published on the newspaper’s *Facebook* page. This piece, written by María Martín, includes Landau’s words from the photo on his *Facebook* page, but comes at it from a different angle, one which most publications did not take: her text not only presents the many interpretations that the photo generated on social media, among which are social inequality and racism, it also discusses the reasons behind these interpretations.

In her article she writes that the impact of these interpretations led black movement leaders to question the stereotyped representation of black people in Brazilian society: “People who see that photo are preconditioned to see an image of a black person and associate it with poverty and neglect, when actually, it is just an image of a young black man on a beach”, says the writer Anderson França, for *El País*. His opinion is shared by Mayara Assunção, from the black women’s group Kianda, and by Suzane Jardim, teacher and historian, who said: “The question is about the realization that a black person’s body is not granted the individuality to become a symbol that dialogues with the guilt of people who, at first look, see it as inferior”. This same report also heard from psychoanalyst Tales Ab’Saber and Fernando Costa Netto, owner of the Doc Gallery of photojournalism and documental photography, who defend the many interpretations the image offers: “Photos have their own lives. The black movement is disturbed by the cliché attached to and the diminished role of black people, and the white (and black) leftists see this image as likely to cause a rift in Brazilian society, at a time when this is once again on the political agenda”, claims Ab’Saber in the article. Lastly, the article says that “this photographer was criticized for exposing the child without the parent’s consent and giving his email to whoever wished to buy the photograph”. Landau contests this: “I did not sell anything, nor will I do so without the consent of the child and of those responsible for him.”

On January 10th, *El País* published a new text: “The story behind the photo of the young black man in Copacabana”¹⁴, with the subtitle “Young man whose photo went viral on New Year’s seen with mother selling keychains on the beach. Family lives in slums overrun with drug trafficking, mother presses charges after photo is released”. This new piece, also written by María Martín and shorter than her previous one, tells the story of the young man in the photo:

[...] On December 31st the young eight-year old boy went out with his mother, they left the slums where they live and went to one of the most famous beaches in the world. They live in a building overrun by drug trafficking where they live with three other brothers. The father is absent. They did not dress in white and made the 17 kilometer journey to the beach to take part in the festivities. The mother, 35, is a street vendor and that night went to the beach to sell keychains to the 2.5 million people celebrating New Year’s. Once the fireworks started, the young boy left his mother’s side, went for a swim in the water, and then stood and watched the fireworks show. (María Martín, 2018, paragraphs 1 e 2).

No interview took place: the information was obtained from the photographer’s post on “his social networks” (explaining how he met the young man and his mother, but said that he preferred to treat this meeting as a “private moment”) and from the charges pressed by the young boy’s mother which were registered at the police station as Computer-Related Crimes (to which the newspaper has access). She “believed that the photographer was profiting from the image without consent, something which Landau has continuously denied. In fact, the police did not see any crime as being committed; there was no investigation and the charges were not filed”, as stated in the newspaper. The report said that “he tried to talk with the mother, but she refused. She wanted to protect her son”. This text was also published on the newspaper’s *Facebook* profile.

The first report was posted on *Facebook* on January 2nd, 2018¹⁵ at 7:18pm and, according to research we conducted on January 11th (at 9pm), generated 749 comments. The second report was published on January 10th at 6:20pm¹⁶, and generated, up until the writing of this paper, 182 comments. This paper focuses on these comments and uses the French discourse analysis (DA) in an effort to understand that meanings are created in these *Facebook* user posts. It is important to point out that our objective is not to analyze the photo even though we are aware of how it has triggered the entire

discussion that follows. Apart from the interpretations highlighted in the first *El País* report, the reaction from the comments is understood as revealing social perceptions about the contemporary conception of childhood, a theme which these researchers are dedicated to (Furtado, 2013; Doretto, 2018).

Our hypothesis is that the comments reflect the traditional representation of childhood built up by media over the years, where children are not considered to be active social actors, but beings in need of protection who are spoken for by those responsible for them (whether that be their parents or childhood institutions). We reflect on this issue and defend the position that children should be considered citizens with protective rights and the right to social participation (Buckingham, 2000). The Child and Adolescent Statute – CAS (Law No. 8,069, enacted July 13, 1990) is the legislation that provides full rights for children and adolescents in Brazil. It states that all “minors” have rights and should be able to participate in social life, in addition to being provided full protection.

2 Children and prohibited discourse

This paper begins with the claim that childhood is a social construct, from the Foucauldian perspective (1996¹⁷), built up from the many discourses that speak of and for children. In this regard, journalism itself is one of these discourses, and it is also a stage for legitimizing others. It is part of a system that controls the circulation of discourses that want to impose their “desire for truth” on society. In other words, they seek to be credible, important, to be considered noteworthy, at times concealing the reality they represent as there is no “truth” there, since the truth lies in the effect the discourse produces: “I suppose that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures that avert its powers and risks, cope with chance events, and evade its ponderous, awesome materiality” (Foucault, 1996, p. 9, our translation¹⁸).

It is important to remember that the discourse of children within this sphere is one of those which traditionally does not have a place in the fight for the “desire for truth”; there is an interdict against children, prevented from the right to have their discourse circulate among others as they are held to be incapable of full reasoning –

due to the cognitive growth at this stage of life (Doretto & Costa, 2012). Foucault reminds us that this discursive interdiction was built in ancient times, but studies on the representation of children in the press show us that, even though progress has been made, this exclusion is still prevalent today, especially concerning the discourse of children as consumers.

Prohibiting the words of slaves, children and women determines the place where discourse originates, a place that, in turn, will be built on its interests. The rituals of communication create a hierarchy (for example, we only treat speech as sovereign if we are challenged), and build the same system of interdiction in which the place of *truth* is recognized (legitimized) through the prohibition of other voices. The idea that all can and should speak is historically a recent one: it is born from the idea of human equality and the ideology that comes with it. (Gomes, 2000, p. 47, our translation).

This means that children are traditionally represented in journalism not through their own speech, but through the discourses of their parents and guardians, or through representatives of institutions that speak for them such as schools and health organizations. This form of representation gives the appearance that children are lesser citizens who participate in social life (unless as consumers), but as a dichotomous image: they are either innocent and pure individuals in need of protection (children from higher social classes, for example), or they are subjects under the responsibility of the State, either because they committed crimes (and then would have lost the idealized condition of innocence linked to infancy) or were in a vulnerable situation (and their condition of “being children” was put at risk)¹⁹.

This type of representation is not covered in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – approved by Brazil and a fundamental document for the CAS – which states that a child, in addition to having rights of protection and provision (materials good or not), is also guaranteed the right to citizen participation. This document, a product of political movements fighting for the rights of youths, is considered an example of the record of progress made in social awareness of children as subjects with rights, an active participant of the daily life they are a part of.

3 The place of reception

Berger (1996) recognizes journalistic discourse by the power to constitute, and not just describe, that which it represents. “This is a determining factor for working with journalism, it does not claim impartiality or neutrality when editing an event, and it recognizes news as a process of using language to build an event” (Berger, 1996, p. 189, our translation). Like a text which is published on the internet and shared across social networks, an event is also given new meaning through reader comments. So much so that the first text presented in this paper, “The photo of the young black man that illustrates how young black men are perceived”, the author shows the impact that initial event – the published photo taken by Lucas Landau – had on social networks, it led to new meanings being ascribed to it. Journalistic activity can therefore be understood as a process of producing meaning (Berger, 1996).

As stated earlier, we look to identify and understand the meanings expressed in comments, and we approach this by looking at how the *El País* text was received (in comments posted on social networks) and through the use of the French discourse analysis. We go beyond the attribution of meanings given by commenters (as in the first text published in the newspaper), and delve deeper into studies on the social conception of contemporary childhood, using the discourses circulated by the press that shape our understanding of what children are nowadays (for this case in particular, black and poor).

We believe discourse analysis to be an extremely important approach towards understanding journalistic discourse as it, like audience analyses for cultural studies, moves away from the understanding that the transmission of information is just linear: transmitter, message, receiver, all communicating in a serialized and ordered process. “In fact, language is not just a code between people, there is no separation between transmitter and receiver, nor do they follow a sequence where one speaks first and then the other decodes, etc.” (Orlandi, 2000, p. 21, our translation). The process of meaning occurs all the time at the same time.

We realize it is not enough to just look at what is said on social networks, we need to understand the cycle in which these comments are generated since receivers “are producers of meaning and of the story itself, even though they do not have complete control over this process. [...] after all, it is this cycle of production and consumption which we call reception” (Figaro & Grohmann, 2017, p. 156, our translation). In other words, by communicating, subjects are “negotiating” the meanings they

receive from journalism (like the text published by *El País*), accepting what they consider to be consistent, and dismissing or mistrusting meanings of the world that do not match their own, especially since this process is always marked by preferential meanings (or, as per Foucault, those meanings that assert their “truth”). In order to better understand this process it is important to look at the conditions behind producing (journalistic) texts which are released, to look at the technological matrices that shape them and allow for their circulation, to look at the cultural matrices in which the texts are produced and understood, and to look at the conditions in which readers interpret them: we are basically describing what Martín-Barbero (2001) calls the cultural mediations that give structure to the process of reception.

Considering the fact that trying to contact the commenters and learn about their daily lives, their points of view and world perspectives would be an almost impossible task, we shall take a brief look at the production process in order to get a better idea of the space of public participation that journalistic vehicles provide and readers assert. We use the aforementioned circuit of production and consumption as a guide, looking at discourses from receivers and paying special attention to the platform that allows for their creation and circulation.

One of the other reasons for moving away from reception as a place where researchers investigate the communicative process is the dynamic imposed by media itself, from the fading of borders between the call for production and reception from a constantly increasing number of receivers to participating in the sphere of production. In this way, they become protagonists of a variety of texts – from reality shows to reader letters, from journalistic material on ordinary subjects to internet blogs. (Escosteguy, 2009, p. 3/15, our translation).

In the next section we will reflect on this online space for public participation observed in contemporary journalistic production.

4 The place for comments on the young black man

Any reader who wishes to send in their opinion on a particular text published on the Brazilian site for the *El País* newspaper is unable to do so. There is no option for this. On the menu there is an option to “Follow us on *Twitter* and *Facebook*”. Of particular interest to us is *Facebook* and the 913 thousand users (or accounts) that “liked” the newspaper’s page. These users then see *links* to newspaper’s

articles on their social networks – provided, of course, that the social network’s algorithm that allows posts from other users to appear on their personal pages has been enabled. *Facebook* allows users to “comment” on what they see or read on these posts, this is where they post their comments about the text.

Carpentier (2012) holds that there is a difference between simply accessing and interacting. He believes that the former refers to a more equal decision process (in the democratic sphere, but also in media circuits), while the latter is just a condition to make this happen. Access, when referring specifically to media and journalism, is about the possibility of using technology that allows one to receive media content, or the possibility of offering this content through media or channels through which readers can speak their mind about what they find there. There is an idea of “presence” (or existence) here. As far as interaction, it is “sociocommunicative relationships within the media sphere” (2012, p. 174) which may be how the public interprets the content it receives (according to Carpentier, being understood in a complex fashion, such as how they defend studies on audience reception) and the audience-to-audience interaction that occurs while this content is being consumed (as is the case in this paper), even sharing this material between media institutions and the public across well-defined organizational circuits. Participation is understood to be structural in that everyone can create content and develop and put forth public policies on communication. Carpentier draws attention to the fact that, even though this maximum level of participation is a long way from being translated into daily life, it is important to recognize that social fights have made it so that some level of participation can be achieved.

The impact Landau’s photo has made on social networks is an example of this social fight as the public reaction it received led the newspaper to writing a piece on it, one in which readers were, to a certain degree, able to create media content. However, the messages analyzed did not show any response from the publishing institution to its readers. This is not exclusive to this Spanish newspaper; there are other works that have analyzed comments in the English (Graham, 2013) and Brazilian (Caminada, 2015) press showing that this does occur in other places, thus reinforcing the inexistence of structure in newsrooms for this kind of follow-up to take place. Yet this does not mean that this interaction (a word proposed by Carpentier) cannot interfere in the production-reception cycle of journalism studied in

this article: “[...] these competing voices were set within the context of public debate, producing a more deliberative type of information than one would typically receive from reading the news article alone. It is the type of deliberative information which is crucial to the public sphere” (Graham, 2013, p. 123).

There is an intense exchange of messages between readers in the comments analyzed for this paper, echoing what was stated by Graham. On the internet, this relationship between the newspaper, the Spanish journalist María Martín and the readers – who interact by commenting not only with her but also among themselves – strengthens the process of meaning analyzed in this paper. This process can occur in a number of ways: there are people who comment on a text as soon as it has been published and there are others who see the text at a later time and comment on it whenever they wish to. It is in this context that comments will be analyzed using the concept of discursive formation, which we shall expand on in the next section.

5 The young black man and discursive formations

Starting off with Benetti’s proposal (2007) that DA is particularly productive for two types of journalism studies – mapping out voices and identifying meanings – the analysis we present here uses DA to recognize meanings of discourse present in the texts, in this case, the reader comments on the two *El País* texts mentioned earlier in this paper. As previously mentioned, an analyst sees a visible layer (the text) and another discursive layer with a particular story and ideology which is only visible through analysis. In order to reach this discursive layer, however, a knowledge of the concept of discursive formation (DF) is required.

One of the first people to elaborate on the concept of DF was Foucault (1995²⁰), explaining that is based on certain regularities such as order, correlation, functionality and transformation. The rules of formation determine the conditions of existence, coexistence, modifications and the disappearance of a given discursive division. He goes on to say that a DF “presents the principle of articulation between a series of discursive events and other series of events, transformations, mutations and processes. It is not an atemporal form, but instead a schema of correspondence between several temporal series” (Foucault,

1995, p. 82, our translation). Discourse, then, is constituted by a set of enunciations that originate from the same DF system. An enunciation belongs to a DF in the same way that a phrase belongs to a text.

Pêcheux and Fuchs (1993) take Foucault's idea of DF, but reshape it according to principles of DA, relating it and submitting it to that ideology. In the first phase of discourse analysis, Pêcheux proposes that a DF was “[...] a closed corpus of selected discursive sequences, [...], in a discursive space [...] dominated by stable and homogeneous conditions of production” (Pêcheux, 1993, p. 312, our translation²¹). Here, discursive analysis was limited to building “places of identities with intersequential paraphrases”. In the second phase, Pêcheux begins to see the notion of DF in another manner, relating it to notions of meaning and of discourse subjects, calling them open and mutable. Pêcheux, then, conceives that meaning is derived from the relationships that linguistic elements hold with other elements of the same DF; it then becomes understood in another form. Pêcheux (1993, p. 314, our translation) concludes that “[...] a DF is not a structurally closed space as it is naturally ‘invaded’ by elements from other places (in other words, other DFs) [...]”.

In that regard, we can see that the meaning of words change according to the positions maintained by those who use them. Pêcheux (1995, p. 160, our translation²²) defines discursive formation as “that which, in a given ideological formation, that is, from a given position in a given situation of class struggles, determines what can and should be said”. Meaning, then, arises “from relationships that different expressions maintain with each other, and within each DF, which is determined by the ideological formation (IF) from which they come” (Indursky, 1997, p. 32, our translation).

For Orlandi (1996), speaking from a discourse analysis point of view, simply repeating (paraphrasing) has a different meaning as it introduces a change to the discursive process. When someone says the same thing two times, there is an idea that a different meaning is produced each time because it is dealing with two different events. At the same time, two different words can reassert the same meaning. The discursive processes are determined by the DF in which the speaker is inserted. The meaning of an enunciation can always wane and form a different meaning according to the discursive formation to which it is related. Words, expressions or propositions change meaning when moving from one DF to another. On the other hand, words which are letter for letter different can

have similar meanings if they are in the same DF. This means that a DF does not hold a literal meaning. Indursky (1997) says that a DF is the place where meaning is formed.

In practice, in order to analyze a text one needs to first identify the DFs within it. “We consider a DF as a kind of area of meaning, restricted by an interpretative limit that excludes that which would invalidate that meaning – this second meaning constitutes a second DF” (Benetti, 2007, p. 112, our translation). An analyst’s job is to identify and group passages of text together – around a core meaning. Each one of these core meanings forms a DF. “Thus, there are just as many discursive formations to be found in a text as there are core meanings” (Benetti, 2007, p. 112, our translation).

For this paper, we view all the reader comments from the two reports published in *El País* as texts produced by different enunciators. We considered both the original comments and the responses to those comments which established an interaction between readers. We then identified core meanings around the discursive sequences within these comments, thus identifying the discursive formations within them. Benetti (2007, p. 113, our translation) explains that an analyst locates “[...] distinctive marks of the meaning being analyzed, highlighting the more important ones”. An analyst will find the recurrent meanings (or paraphrases) which will then make it possible to identify the DFs.

The first *El País* text contained 749 comments, and the second had 182 comments. Overall there was a total of 931 comments. Out of this total we found 498 discursive sequences related to the first text, and 105 related to the second. Any comment which did not directly relate to the two *El País* texts, to the photo (showing other people’s names, *emojis*, links, etc.) or which were incomprehensible (unintelligible irony or cursing, etc.) were disregarded. The posts were collected using the OpsSocial Extractor tool²³, which places the publications in chronological order.

We identified 23 discursive formations in this process. Many of them were repeated in both texts, but others were not. We grouped these DFs into five main categories: 1) Social and racial; 2) Political; 3) The photo; 4) The text; and 5) The young man. The table below shows the identified DFs and the number of discursive sequences (DS) found in each DF. One DS may belong to more than one DF.

Table 1 – Discursive sequences found in discursive formations

Categories	DFs	DSs Text 1	DSs Text 2	Meaning of DFs
1-Social and racial	DF1 – Representation of social inequality	61	23	The photo represents social inequality in Brazil; social inequality exists in Brazil
	DF2 – Representation of racial inequality	32	0	The photo represents racial inequality in Brazil; racial inequality exists in Brazil
	DF3 – Interpretations of prejudice	51	4	Interpretation of the photo is of racism; there is structural racism in Brazil; blacks are stigmatized
	DF4 – Racial opportunism	8	2	There is no racism in Brazil; everything is racism; blacks are being opportunists; there is racism against whites
2-Political	DF5 – Against the left	19	1	The left is to blame; Lula is to blame; PT is to blame; Venezuela is a bad example; Cuba is a bad example
	DF6 – Against the right	27	0	The right is to blame; Lula was a good president; the left has no blame; Venezuela is a good example
	DF7 – Against politicians	9	0	Politicians are corrupt; corruption exists in Brazil; Temer is a bad president
	DF8 – Against the controversy	23	0	Everything becomes a controversy; everything is polarizing; one should not create controversy; one should not polarize

3-The photo	DF9 – Dishonesty	22	0	The photo is dishonest; the photo was set up; the photo was arranged; the photographer is dishonest; the photographer acted in bad faith
	DF10 – Defending the photographer	16	4	The photographer is great; the photographer did not act in bad faith; the photographer did his job; the photographer was just working; the photographer did not violate the CAS
	DF11 – Against commercialization	4	16	The photographer sold the photo; the photo should not be sold for profit; the photographer is profiting off the young man in the photo
	DF12 – Image rights violation	30	18	The photographer violated the right to the image of the young man; the photographer violated the CAS; the photographer did not ask the young man's family for permission
	DF13 – Beauty	63	13	The photo is beautiful; photos are art; the photo is poetic; the photo did what it was supposed to
4-The text	DF14 – Bad text	13	3	The text is bad; <i>El País</i> is a bad publication; <i>El País</i> is disingenuous; the media did not fulfill its role
	DF15 – Good text	22	1	The text is good; <i>El País</i> is a good publication

5-The young man	DF16 – Questions about the young man’s origin	16	0	No one knows who the young man is; no one knows where the young man is from; nothing is known about the young man’s family
	DF17 – Wealth	6	0	The young man is rich; the young man’s family is rich; the young man’s family likes him
	DF18 – Poverty	5	0	The young man is poor; the young man is teased about being rich
	DF19 – Family neglect	13	1	The young man is alone; the family does not take care of the young man; the young man is sad; the young man has been abandoned
	DF20 – He is just a child	58	1	He is just a child; children like fireworks; the young man is just mesmerized by the fireworks; children are naive, pure, innocent
	DF21 – Blaming the mother	0	7	The mother is to blame; the mother does not take care of her son
	DF22 – Defending the mother	0	10	The mother is not to blame
	DF23 – Blaming the father	0	1	The father is to blame
Total DSs		498	105	

Source: Own elaboration.

5 The meanings about the “young black man in the photo”

DSs and DFs are prevalent in three categories in the first text: social and racial inequality in the country (Category 1), intrinsic aspects of the photo (Category 3); and opinions about the young man (Category 5). In Category 1, the DSs that stand out are ones that state the photo is an example of social problems in Brazil

(DF1) – there are more of these than the others which state that the photograph portrays the current state of racism in Brazilian society (DF2). The DSs that dispute this declare that the photo generates bias and stigmatizes blacks across the country; a bias which has always defined them as marginalized individuals (DF3). Few DSs deny that racism exists in Brazil (FD4).

The following DSs are taken from the first category (original texts, translated from Portuguese) – although some are also part of other DFs as each DS may contain more than one meaning. For this reason the meanings related to DFs in the first category are highlighted in bold:

Daughter, you haven't even read the article. **It criticizes the system; this photo was just another example of that. The love that his family has for him will not end the social and racial segregation in Brazil.** (DF1 and DF2, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

This is Brazil: indifferent, unequal, concentration of income and of privileges... this is the image of Brazil (DF1, comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

We're serious. If it **were a young man whose parents were even slightly watching him** they would have been on TV, and they would have warned the photographer he was releasing a potentially invasive image, one that could have a negative effect due to its unauthorized release. **He is obviously a poor young man;** he is alone in a public place late at night, maybe hungry, **while economically stable, well-structured families and friends are partying around him.** We won't sugarcoat it, nor will we try to artificially placate our faults. (DF1, comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

"The photo of a young black man that illustrates how young black men are perceived" What the hell is that? I saw a child watching fireworks on the beach. This is the kind of thing that media does. Cutting down everyone. **Disgusting racists.** COWARDLY activist editorial! (DF3, comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

Imagine if it were a white child all alone in the water! Do you really think no one would help find the parents? In Santos, if there is a child by him or herself, everyone celebrates together! No one noticed him there. What I think about is that everyone thought he was alone because he was alone. I don't see him as a street child, and the text is very good, **sometimes racism is engrained in our minds and we need to realize this in order for us to break the cycle...** (DF3, comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

According to the young man's neighbor, his parents love him very much, he studies at a good school and his parents were worried about him, trying to find him, he had wandered off without anyone noticing. **And you are a racist leftist if you think all black children are poor and abandoned.** (DF3, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

This racism thing is sickening; everything nowadays is either racist or prejudiced. (DF4, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

In the third category, which talks about the photo itself, the DSs reiterate the potential that an aesthetically beautiful photo has for producing many different reactions (DF13). Nevertheless, the comments appear to relativize the discussion in terms of the aesthetic interest the image garners, as if this value attributed means more than the interpretations:

What's the problem with people understanding that **photography is art, it is meant to be interpreted in your own way. Yes, photography is symbolic, the whole point is not knowing the artist's idea behind taking it.** (DF13, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

Exactly. **A beautiful photo** of a young man mesmerized by the fireworks. That's what I see, too. But, like the wise man above said, it must be blindness, haha. (DF13, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

This photo is of unspeakable beauty, to me it shows a fascination that others ignore. As for all this debate, this is just art. I just saw a young man watching a fireworks show. (DF13, comment, Jan. 03, 2018, emphasis added).

In the fifth category, about the young man, there are DSs that defend the idea that the image represents the “innocence” and fascination of childhood (DF20), as illustrated in the DSs below:

When I saw the photo I just saw **a young man mesmerized by the fireworks.** (DF20, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

I didn't think about that, **I saw innocence in his expression... A childhood delight** watching fireworks on New Year's Eve. Stigmas really do suck, and I understand what you're saying. (DF20, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

There is nothing here. **A young man probably watching the fireworks. The rest is just pointless chatter.** (DF20, response to comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

These meanings we have identified are similar to the same discussion about social networks addressed by the *El País* text: the article talks about interpretations of social and racial inequality as well as the potential a photograph has to generate debate. But these interpretations also remind us of an analysis conducted by Ponte & Afonso (2009, p. 43, our translation)

on how children are portrayed in the Portuguese press. They found that one of the most common representations to appear is “mistreated children”, “from dysfunctional families and areas of social poverty”, or “other people’s children”, showing a link between Portuguese newspapers and the middle class, who are seen as their reading public. In this regard, Dubinsky (2012), shows how images of childhood are being used by social movements, national states or political parties to generate empathy for their struggles, and he states that weakness is one of the aspects attributed to “being a child” in contemporary times (i.e., the current social concept of childhood):

If it is true that children symbolize the sentimental, the common hope of humanity abstracted from adult-created social problems, this is because of the particular conception of “childhood” currently dominant. Many historians have documented how childhood in the West has been, for approximately two centuries, constituted as essentially vulnerable. (Dubinsky, 2012, pp. 10 – 11).

In other words, the DFs identified in the comments reproduce the way the press tends to represent childhood, both verbally and visually (apart from the representations in *El País*), which indicates, as Foucault shows us, the strength of the “desire for truth” in journalism discourses, even though certain comments (only 13 DSs) criticize how the newspaper covered the event, as evidenced in Category 4 in reference to Text 1.

Anyone who has a slight understanding of photography would agree: No one really knows who the young man is, nor do they know the context of the photo. (It’s beautiful, by the way). Apart from this, the photo only shows me a young man who is fascinated by the fireworks, at an angle which shows him better than the adults cheering and hugging. It doesn’t say any more than that. Why are us Negros always seen that way? **Stigmatizing the photo is something the article does.** Sorry. (DF14, comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

***El País*, as an extreme leftist publication, loves to create class wars...** Let’s move Brazil onto the road to liberalism and free us from the red! (DF14, comment, Jan. 03, 2018, emphasis added).

Consequently, for readers, the more obvious meanings that arise around the young man are of innocence and purity (DF20 with 58 DSs in Text 1) and of neglect and abandonment (DF19 with 13 DSs in Text 1). In other words, children predominantly appear

as weak. However, a positive result in relation to the first text is that at least 16 DSs speak about the question of the young man’s origin (DF16) and value the idea that knowing who is of importance and significant. But if we observe the DSs from DF 16 carefully, we can see that most of them speak about the question of who the young man is, not because they are genuinely interested in him – as appears to be the case when the photographer asked for the readers’ help in finding the young man – but because they want to “establish a discussion” with other readers; i.e., discussions related to social and racial issues, or even political ones. The following DSs illustrate this:

I hope this young man has a wonderful family and that he is a great student. That’ll shut a lot of people up. (DF16, response to comment, Jan. 03, 2018, emphasis added).

Maybe he’s one of those street kids who hang around Copacabana? A photo is a motionless moment! It often only shows half the truth! (DF16, comment, Jan. 03, 2018, emphasis added).

Many DFs disappeared from the comments in the second text. The political debates tapered off, and questions about the young man’s origin were non-existent as the article just talks about who he is. DF1 continues to focus on social inequality in Category 1 with 23 DSs, but the category about “the photo” appears more important according to the DFs that object to making a profit off the photo or that bring up the violation of the right to the image of the young man (DF11, with 16 DSs, and DF12, with 18 DSs). Just as in the first text, the meanings reflect the *El País* scenario: “[The mother] believed that the photographer was profiting off the image without her consent, something which Landau has always denied. In fact, the police did not identify that any crime had taken place, and there was no investigation. The charges pressed were just filed away”, reports the newspaper.

Here are some examples of DSs that illustrate the DFs relevant to this meaning:

Exhibiting a child in an image and selling that image without authorization is a crime. So he is to blame! (DF11 and DF12, response to comment, Jan. 11, 2018, emphasis added).

It’s going to be like that photo from National Geographic, the one photographer Steve McCurry took of the little Afghan girl, Sharbat Gula. He got awards for that and **everyone forgot**

about it. It appeared years later as a woman with a suffering face, running from country to country. (DF12, comment, Jan. 10, 2018, emphasis added).

I thought the same thing. **Did he by any chance “donate” the photo to the newspapers? I don’t think so, right.** (DF11, response to comment, Jan. 10, 2018, emphasis added).

The law is the law, and the CAS²⁴protects images of children. The photograph and the agency should have reached an agreement and paid the mother for the right to use the image. (DF11 and DF12, response to comment, Jan. 10, 2018, emphasis added).

Of further note is DF13 (with 13 DSs), highlighting the beauty of the photo and the many interpretations it provides in Category 3. The DF20 in Category 5, about the innocence and purity of children, gives way to other interpretations, one of which is the specific blame the young man’s mother received (DF21, with 7 DSs). Of note is that DF21 also conveys the meaning of weakness in children, associated with poverty and the mother’s neglect, make the young man appear to be an unprotected child.

Furthermore, the blame the mother received caught the attention of some people who felt the need to stand up for her (DF22, with 10 DSs), leading to new social debates defending women and feminism in the comments, something which has a lot of attention nowadays. DF21 and DF22 in the following DSs are examples of this:

I put myself in the mother’s position... Man, I won’t even say what I want because I’ll get a number of moral lessons...but **I can say that there is a lack of family planning there. Man... So many realities that should not be realities are accepted as normal!!!** (DF21, response to comment, Jan. 11, 2018, emphasis added).

That’s right, but the photographer should not be accused of crimes against children and adolescents, and **the one who should be is the mother herself, because he was alone and unaccompanied at the beach.** (DF21, response to comment, Jan. 11, 2018, emphasis added).

Funny that you don’t want to know about the young man’s father. It’s easy to blame the mother. Shame on you! (DF22, response to comment, Jan. 10, 2018, emphasis added).

6 Final considerations

After analyzing the DSs in the comments taken from the *El País Facebook* page, two posts (related to the first text) really stood out to us:

Did anyone think to ask who the young man was and what he thought about this image?

Everything in the text could be true, just as much as it could not be true.

A thousand speculations and no one asks about the main character...

Is this exactly what the photographer intended? (DF16, comment, Jan. 02, 2018, emphasis added).

One photo, it gets global attention, everyone can see it, and **no one knows the young man. Why is that?** (DF16, response to comment, Jan. 03, 2018, emphasis added).

Only these two comments, out of so many DSs, are actually concerned with who the young man really is and what he thinks about this, removing him from a position of weakness (so interlinked with the contemporary conception of childhood), bestowing the status of a human being with feelings and opinions on him. Out of all the DFs we identified, we did not see any concern for the well-being of the young man in the photo, for the various facets of his life history, for his right to play, to study and to benefit from the protection of the State. The child simply became the “young black man in the photo”, both in the newspaper (it is the title of the report) and the comments posted about it, which were not all directly related to him: he is the young man who takes “center stage” in order for us to discuss politics or political parties, feminism, the aesthetics of the photograph, critiques of the newspaper or to reinforce the general stereotypes about childhood or being black and poor.

It is worth noting that meanings are always determined by ideological configurations (Benetti, 2007), thus the discursive formations in the comments are associated to ideological formations. All of the identified meanings represent ideologies which are expressed through phrases, some of which are even opposites, about the two articles written on the same image. The discussions, the interpretations and the imaginations contained in the comments are directly related to ideological configurations present in Brazil today, including the contemporary conception of childhood.

Even though the newspaper's second text did make some kind of effort towards understanding the story of the young man (while still dealing with the social discussions it generated), the DSs found in the comments on this report were not much different from those in the first text. In both cases, the young man who lives, studies, plays and helps his mother make a living goes unnoticed and instead serves as a stimulus for other debates: a young man who "is" but is not "represented". The importance of the sociopolitical discussions that this event generated is not discussed here in this paper. What is discussed is the suppression of the young man's singularity and how he is reduced to just a "standard image". Or, as Dubinsky says (2012, p. 12), "Visual representations of children are rarely literal depictions of actual children, but they can be valuable tools to understand the full range of histories of different kinds of childhoods at different moments".

NOTES

- 1 A first version of this work was presented to the Reception Work Group: processes of interpretation, media use and consumption, XXVII Annual Compós Meeting, Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte – MG, June 5–8, 2018.
- 2 G1 Rio. (2017, December 31). Copacabana to receive 3 million this New Year's. *G1*. Retrieved from <https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/copacabana-se-prepara-para-receber-3-mil-hoes-neste-reveillon.ghtml>.
- 3 UOL. (2017, December 30). Anitta dá conselho de como não ser assaltado no Réveillon de Copacabana. *UOL*. Retrieved from tve-famosos.uol.com.br/noticias/redacao/2017/12/30/anitta-da-conselho-de-como-nao-ser-assaltado-no-reveillon-de-copacabana.htm.
- 4 Azevedo, E. (2017, December 31). Previsão é de céu limpo na virada em Copacabana. *O Globo*. Retrieved from oglobo.globo.com/rio/previsao-de-ceu-limpo-na-virada-em-copacabana-22243354.

- 5 Retrieved from www.facebook.com/lucaslandau/posts/10215003728268819?pnref=story.
- 6 Data from Jan. 26, 2018.
- 7 All of the citations from *El País* are our translations.
- 8 Correio Braziliense. (2018, January 3). Fotografia de menino no réveillon de Copacabana viraliza nas redes sociais. *Correio Braziliense*. Retrieved from www.correiobraziliense.com.br/app/noticia/brasil/2018/01/03/interna-brasil,651081/fotografia-de-menino-no-reveillon-de-copacabana-viraliza-nas-redes-soc.shtml.
- 9 Bezerra, M. (2018, January 2). Fotógrafo que retratou criança no Réveillon de Copacabana está à procura do menino. *UOL*. Retrieved from noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2018/01/02/fotografo-que-retratou-crianca-no-reveillon-de-copacabana-busca-o-menino.htm.
- 10 Fonseca, J. P. (2018, January 4). Sobre a fotografia de um menino em Copacabana. *Exame*. Retrieved from exame.abril.com.br/blog/joel-pinheiro-da-fonseca/sobre-a-fotografia-de-um-menino-em-copacabana/.
- 11 Kaiser, A. J. (2018, January 3). The New Year's Eve photo that shook Brazil. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/03/the-new-years-eve-photo-that-shook-brazil/?utm_term=.4dbd01e563b1.
- 12 The most popular daily newspaper, established in Spain, 1976, with an editorial line considered to be progressive liberal (brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2017/02/22/opinion/1487788532_309244.html). Its Brazilian version was established in 2013.
- 13 Martín, M. (2018, January 3). A foto do menino negro que fala de como vemos um menino negro. *El País*. Retrieved from brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/01/02/politica/1514924485_498274.html.
- 14 Martín, M. (2018, January 20). A história por trás da foto do menino negro de Copacabana. *El País*. Retrieved from brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2018/01/10/politica/1515601877_904004.html. Note that the website publication is dated January 11,

but the link is dated January 10 (“2018/01/10/”), the same date the article was published on the *El País Facebook* page (January 10, at 6:20pm).

- 15 Retrieved from www.facebook.com/elpaisbrasil/posts/1661865037206773. Access on Jan. 26, 2017. Even though posted on Facebook on the 2nd, it was published on the newspaper’s site on the 3rd; the text may have altered on this date, and the system may have registered this alteration as the final date.
- 16 Retrieved from www.facebook.com/elpaisbrasil/posts/1671111376282139.
- 17 Originally in 1970.
- 18 Translated from the Portuguese version.
- 19 See review by Doretto & Furtado, 2017.
- 20 Originally in 1969.
- 21 Translated from the Portuguese version.
- 22 Translated from the Portuguese version.
- 23 Available at: opsocial.com.br.
- 24 Article 17 of the Child and Adolescent Statute (Law 8,069) states that “the right to respect consists of protecting the physical, mental and moral integrity of children and adolescents, encompassing the protection of images, identity, autonomy, values, ideas and beliefs, and personal objects and spaces”.

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TRANSLATED BY: LEE SHARP

RECEIVED ON: 01/09/2018 | APPROVED ON: 12/12/2018