

# AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN'S DISCOURSES IN PRISON CONTEXT: DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

ANÁLISE DE DIZERES DE MULHERES EM CONTEXTO PRISIONAL: DISCURSO E  
REPRODUÇÃO SOCIAL

ANÁLISIS DE LOS DISCURSOS DE MUJERES EN CONTEXTO CARCELARIO: DISCURSO Y  
REPRODUCCIÓN SOCIAL

Luciana Iost Vinhas<sup>\*</sup>

Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul | Universidade Federal de Pelotas

**ABSTRACT:** The present study analyzes the discourses of women in a prison context from the perspective of Materialist Discourse Analysis (MDA) in relation to Social Reproduction Theory (SRT). Grounded in historical materialism and Marxist feminist critique, the study seeks to understand the meanings of reproductive labor produced by women in situations of incarceration, paying attention to how gender, race, and class oppressions are reproduced within the Brazilian social formation. To this end, the research analyzes discourses of incarcerated women at the Madre Pelletier Women's Prison, one extracted from an interview conducted in 2013 and another from a text written during the 2022 pandemic. The analysis reveals how female incarceration is linked to the organization of social reproduction under neoliberalism. The signifier "bag" emerges as a central discursive element, signifying not only survival within prison but also the interdependence between oppression and subjectivation in the functioning of the prison system.

**KEYWORDS:** Materialist Discourse Analysis. Women in prison context. Social reproduction. Subjectivation.

**RESUMO:** O presente estudo analisa dizeres de mulheres em contexto prisional a partir da Análise de Discurso Materialista (AD) e em relação com a Teoria da Reprodução Social (TRS). Fundamentado no materialismo histórico e na crítica feminista marxista, o trabalho busca compreender os sentidos sobre trabalho reprodutivo produzidos por mulheres em situação de privação de liberdade, atentando para a forma como são reproduzidas opressões de gênero, raça e classe na formação social brasileira. Para tanto, a pesquisa analisa discursos de mulheres presas no Presídio Feminino Madre Pelletier, um extraído de uma entrevista realizada em 2013 e outro de um texto escrito durante a pandemia de 2022. É possível, com a análise, observar como o encarceramento feminino está relacionado à organização da reprodução social sob o neoliberalismo. O significante "sacola" surge como elemento discursivo

---

<sup>\*</sup> Professor in the Department of Classical and Vernacular Languages at the Institute of Languages at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS). Permanent faculty member in the Graduate Programs in Languages at UFRGS and at Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPeL). E-mail: lucianavinhas@gmail.com.

central, sendo significado não apenas como a sobrevivência dentro do cárcere, mas também como a interdependência entre opressão e subjetivação no funcionamento do sistema prisional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Análise de Discurso Materialista. Mulheres em contexto prisional. Reprodução social. Subjetivação.

RESUMEN: El presente estudio analiza discursos de mujeres en contexto carcelario desde el enfoque del Análisis del Discurso Materialista (AD) en relación con la Teoría de la Reproducción Social (TRS). Fundamentado en el materialismo histórico y en la crítica feminista marxista, el trabajo busca comprender los sentidos sobre el trabajo reproductivo producidos por mujeres en situación de privación de libertad, prestando atención a la manera en que se reproducen las opresiones de género, raza y clase en la formación social brasileña. Para ello, la investigación analiza discursos de mujeres encarceladas en el Presidio Femenino Madre Pelletier, uno extraído de una entrevista realizada en 2013 y otro de un texto escrito durante la pandemia de 2022. A través del análisis, es posible observar cómo el encarcelamiento femenino está relacionado con la organización de la reproducción social bajo el neoliberalismo. El significante “bolsa” surge como un elemento discursivo central, siendo significado no solo como la supervivencia dentro de la prisión, sino también como la interdependencia entre opresión y subjetivación en el funcionamiento del sistema penitenciario.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Análisis del Discurso Materialista. Mujeres en contexto carcelario. Reproducción social. Subjetivación.

## 1 INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

The oppressions to which women are subjected are part of a dominant historical and ideological process that spans several centuries and different social formations. However, academic engagement with these oppressions is relatively recent, and approaches that address differences related to race and class—among other categories that divide women—are even more recent. In this sense, much remains to be done within the academic field, which underscores the relevance of the present study.

Our investigation is grounded in the field of language studies, more specifically in Materialist Discourse Analysis (MDA), through which we seek to understand the mechanisms by which meanings related to the oppression of women are (re)produced in Brazilian society. The research focuses on the situation of incarcerated women and aims to analyze their discourse based on the theoretical framework of MDA, in dialogue with Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), a Marxist feminist theory. By taking social reproduction as an analytical foundation, we aim to examine how meaning is produced through the discourse of imprisoned women<sup>1</sup>.

In a socio-historical moment marked by the advance of capitalism in its neoliberal form, the segment of the population that most rapidly suffers its effects in Brazil is women—especially Black women. In this context, we bring into focus the relationship between subjectivation, enunciative position, and social reproduction, understanding that the process of meaning constitution, formulation, and circulation is determined by both the unconscious and ideology. Therefore, ideological interpellation is a necessary condition for meaning to be produced.

Subject and meaning are thus mutually constituted. From this perspective, we understand that the reproduction of relations of production within the capitalist social formation is an effect of the efficacy of ideological interpellation, through which meanings are established. For the subject to enter the process of reproducing relations of production, “freely” selling their labor power, ideology must produce its effects materially through language. In this operation, the reproduction of life also becomes a process that appears naturally tied to gendered identifications. This has to do with how words produce meaning, insofar as women’s “free” acceptance of their role in life reproduction occurs through the circulation of meanings that are themselves “freely” reproduced.

<sup>1</sup> This reflection is part of the research project *“On Social Reproduction: Enunciative Positions and Processes of Subjectivation in the Analysis of Discourse by/about Incarcerated Women,”* currently underway in the Graduate Program in Linguistics at UNICAMP.

This is how we seek to articulate Materialist Discourse Analysis with Social Reproduction Theory, as a theory of social relations under capitalism that does not confine itself solely to the category of class. From this articulation, we argue that meaning production is overdetermined by intersecting identifications of class, gender, and race<sup>2</sup>.

Thus, beyond the aim of analyzing the discourse of incarcerated women, this study also seeks, albeit in an initial and exploratory manner, to establish some connections between Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) and Materialist Discourse Analysis (MDA). We consider this articulation theoretically viable given the way the epistemological framework of MDA is structured. Since MDA is constituted by the articulation of different fields of knowledge, it draws on historical materialism as a “[...] theory of social formations and their transformations, which includes the theory of ideologies” (Pêcheux; Fuchs, 1997 [1975], p. 163). From this perspective, we understand that social formations and their transformations are constituted through processes of production and reproduction, which are only possible through ideology, reproduced via the process of ideological interpellation (Althusser, 2008)<sup>3</sup>.

We argue that this articulation is epistemologically consistent, as SRT takes Marx’s *Capital* as its foundational text for understanding the role of social reproduction in the capitalist social formation. Althusser’s (2015) reading of Marx leads to the premise that the “Marxist (or materialist) Marx” is constituted in *Capital*, a work in which Althusser (2008) finds the theoretical foundations for his concept of ideology<sup>4</sup>.

MDA, as a constitutively relational theory, as evidenced in its epistemological foundations, makes such theoretical linkages possible. At the same time, we underscore the centrality of Althusser’s reading of ideology and the reproduction of relations of production within our analytical approach.

As previously mentioned, among the current trends within feminist thought, this study adopts Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) as its central framework, as initially proposed by Vogel (2022 [1983]) and later developed by various scholars. Vogel’s contributions enable us to address the relationship between the process of meaning production and the question of gender, focusing specifically on the overdetermination of gender, race, and class in meaning production.

In this article, we define semantics as our field of analysis, and the materialist-discursive approach to semantics as our epistemological specificity. We understand that the networks of oppression that keep women in dominated positions within our social formation are tied to semantic configurations that are established through the process of ideological interpellation and materialized in language.

This is why our theoretical stance on how language produces meaning is grounded in Materialist Discourse Analysis, as developed by Michel Pêcheux and his collaborators in France between the 1960s and 1980s, and further expanded in the Brazilian context in recent decades.

To achieve our objective, we have divided this article into three parts. In the first section, we present key elements of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), outlining its central issues while also establishing connections with the process of meaning production.

<sup>2</sup> The relationship between Social Reproduction Theory and the Althusserian foundations of ideological interpellation is drawn from the work of Romé (2022), who offers an original contribution by foregrounding the primacy of relations of production through the lens of gender relations.

<sup>3</sup> A caveat must be made here. Within Marxism, the term “social reproduction” admits of different interpretations. As Arruzza and Bhattacharya (2023, p. 623) observe, “[...] in the Althusserian tradition, social reproduction refers not only to the reproduction of labor power, but to the reproduction of capitalist society as a whole,” encompassing what Althusser designates as the “conditions of production” for production itself, as well as the various circuits of capital. In Althusser, the term thus acquires a broader scope. In the feminist Marxist tradition, by contrast, “social reproduction” is more specifically employed to denote the reproduction of labor power—a formulation which, according to the authors, “[...] is not incompatible with the Althusserian perspective” (Arruzza; Bhattacharya, 2023, p. 623). Nonetheless, some authors, such as Johanna Brenner, prefer to designate the reproduction of the capitalist system as a whole (in the Althusserian sense) as “societal reproduction.” In the present work, we adopt the Althusserian tradition, without drawing a distinction between these two processes.

<sup>4</sup> In *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, an essay included in the volume *On the Reproduction*, Althusser (2008, p. 275) states that “Everything seemed to lead Marx to formulate a theory of ideology. In fact, *The German Ideology* does indeed offer us, after the *Manuscripts of 1844*, an explicit theory of ideology, but... it is not Marxist [...]. As for *Capital*, although it contains a great number of indications for a theory of ideologies (the most visible: the ideology of vulgar economists), it does not contain this theory in itself, which, to a large extent, depends on a theory of ideology in general.” On this basis, Althusser (2008) suggests that he himself must “run the risk” of proposing a sketch of such a theory.

In the second section, we briefly discuss the incarceration of women in Brazil and the functioning of the prison system. Finally, in the third section, we analyze two utterances by incarcerated women. The first excerpt comes from an interview conducted in 2013 with a woman deprived of liberty at the Madre Pelletier Women's Prison; the second refers to a written text produced by a woman incarcerated in the same facility during the isolation period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

After these three sections, we offer concluding remarks, aiming to outline possible directions for strengthening the theoretical articulation developed throughout this study.

## 2 KEY ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION THEORY

In seeking to establish a dialogue between Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) and Materialist Discourse Analysis (MDA), we find it essential to revisit the fundamental premise that *materialist semantics* (Haroche; Pêcheux; Henry, 2007 [1971]), as conceived by Michel Pêcheux and collaborators, is grounded in historical materialism as a theory of social formations. This grounding opens the possibility of relating this theoretical condition to SRT, which, according to Ferguson and McNally (2017), belongs to the tradition of historical-dialectical materialism and the critique of political economy.

The initial premises of SRT can be found in Vogel (2022 [1983]), and have since been further developed, most notably by Bhattacharya (2017). Our aim here is also to return to Althusser in order to understand the role of gender and race-based oppressions in the reproduction of relations of production within the capitalist social formation.

The articulation proposed here aims to recognize the role of reproductive labor—primarily carried out by women—within the Brazilian social formation as constitutive of the processes of social formation and transformation. In other words, it seeks to understand how historical materialism is inscribed in the epistemological configuration of Materialist Discourse Analysis (Pêcheux; Fuchs, 1997 [1975]). Based on Althusser's reading (1979; 2008) of Marx's *Capital*, we return to historical materialism in order to understand the effects of the process of labor power production on the constitution of the Brazilian social formation.

The epistemological framework, formed through the intersection of a psychoanalytically grounded theory of subjectivity with three domains: linguistics, historical materialism, and discourse theory, makes such an understanding possible. In this framework, the reproduction of the social formation is a process in which the relations of production are structured so as to produce the effect of a separation between production and reproduction. This separation, in turn, generates other forms of division that align class, race, and gender, constituting a process whose effects depend on ideological interpellation at the position responsible for social reproduction.

For this reason, it is crucial to consider the meanings attributed to labor, understanding that it is through the process of ideological interpellation that labor acquires its meanings. Our focus, therefore, is on how, within this social configuration, meanings of reproductive labor are sustained and, in doing so, produce concrete effects in the reproduction of oppression.

The capitalist mode of production, in its neoliberal form within our social formation, operates through relations of determination and overdetermination involving class, race, and gender. It relies on both paid and unpaid reproductive labor performed by different groups of women, thereby ensuring its continuity and stabilization as the dominant mode of production.

This dynamic has practical effects, by maintaining cis and trans women in subordinate positions, and epistemological implications, by foregrounding the role of signification processes in the relationship between mode of production, social formation, and class relations (Haroche; Pêcheux; Henry 2007 [1971]).

Our aim here is to problematize the specificities of how gender relations operate within the Brazilian social formation, a territory where capitalism was established through two collective traumas: the violent process of colonization and the system of slavery that followed it (Ribeiro, 1999). The class relations that sustain the capitalist mode of production are the result of a broad process of

exploitation and oppression that intertwines gender, race, and class. This dynamic points to the process of meaning production as shaped by these social, historical, and ideological demarcations, demarcations that give rise to a very specific form of gender relations, materially marked by the legacies of colonization and enslavement<sup>5</sup>.

It can be argued that, in Brazil, Black women are those who sustain our social formation, as they are positioned at the base of systems of oppression and exploitation. This occurs through their engagement in informal labor and in life-sustaining reproductive work, which is assigned to them as a legacy of the enslavement of Black people. We understand that gender relations in Brazil function in a highly specific way, discursively constructed through the country's particular social, historical, and ideological configurations<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, we return to Ferguson and McNally (2017, p. 27), who state that the commitment of Marxism lies "[...] with materialism, or, to be more precise, with a theory grounded in embodied human practices through which socio-material life is produced and reproduced." The body, therefore, is a fundamental element within the symbolic-political field that anchors meaning production. It is through the body that we can engage with the concepts of enunciative position (Zoppi-Fontana, 1999) and processes of subjectivation (Pêcheux, 2009 [1975]) in order to understand how words produce meaning, and how words structure the processes of determination and overdetermination that ensure the efficacy of ideological interpellation.

It is important to recall that labor power, a fundamental element of the productive forces that sustain the mode of production, cannot be disentangled from an analysis that considers its ambiguous, sensual, gendered, racialized, and unruly character within the economic process: that is, living human beings (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 19). In this sense, the working body is signified in our social formation through the very components identified by Bhattacharya (2017), which organize the social formation into productive and reproductive labor in accordance with the dominant ideology.

According to Bhattacharya, SRT reclaims human labor as an essential category for understanding capitalism, making it impossible to grasp class relations without also analyzing the sexed and racialized social division of labor. This division demands a particular organization of labor responsible for sustaining life and reproducing labor power. However, in our view, it is crucial to understand these relations as effects of the process of ideological interpellation in the reproduction of relations of production.

Labor, as historical practices through which subjects are constituted across different modes of production, is signified in ways that sustain the dominant mode of production. This process involves "[...] shaping people with the 'right' attitudes, dispositions and values, skills, competences and qualifications" (Arruzza; Bhattacharya; Fraser, 2019, p. 40). Such a process is inseparable from the mechanisms of ideological interpellation.

From this theoretical configuration, we address the situation of women within the Brazilian social formation through the articulation between Materialist Discourse Analysis (MDA) and Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), considering sex-gender identifications (Zoppi-Fontana; Ferrari, 2017) as well as racial identifications (Cestari, 2015; Modesto, 2021) as determining factors in the relations between enunciative positions and processes of subjectivation. These identifications shape the role of discursive memory—that is, they operate through the reactivation of implicit meanings and the naturalization of meaning effects (Pêcheux, 2007 [1985]).

The body emerges as a fundamental element for understanding these relations (Zoppi-Fontana; Cestari, 2014), functioning as a material testimony of the enunciative position, situated within the constitution, formulation, and circulation of discourse (Orlandi, 2005). Through its status as an object-to-be-read, the body establishes the constitutive dispute at the core of the dominant functioning of interdiscourse, between body and language.

<sup>5</sup> To understand this dynamic, we consider the work of Heleieth Saffioti and Lélia Gonzalez to be foundational, as both are precursors of a Marxist reading of the configuration of gendered and racialized social relations in Brazil, as discussed in Rocha et al. (2022). However, this article does not allow sufficient space to develop that reflection in depth.

<sup>6</sup> The effects of this process can be observed in the analysis conducted by Zoppi-Fontana and Cestari (2013).

Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) understands reproductive labor as foundational to the capitalist social formation. We can relate this premise to the way the bodies that perform such labor are tied to enunciative positions, ideological interpellation, and processes of subjectivation. When we consider reproductive labor in relation to enunciative positions, we are engaging with the contradictions that constitute different social formations.

This overdetermined configuration of relations of production generates effects on how meanings are constituted, formulated, and circulated. It is important to ask about the situation of women within the Brazilian social formation, and, more specifically, about women in conditions of incarceration, as this condition may be understood as the extreme expression of the neoliberal capitalist social formation. This is the point we aim to develop in our analysis.

Ferguson and McNally (2017) argue that it is not biology itself, but rather the biological processes of women that lead to their oppression and to the reproduction of the working class. The distinction between labor that produces value and labor that reproduces labor power constitutes different social formations and is maintained through the overdetermination of class, gender, and race.

It is essential to question these dichotomous and exclusionary relations that constitute the “semantically normal world” and to analyze the processes that render such relations as self-evident and naturalized. These dynamics affect Black women in conditions of incarceration in particularly specific ways, as we will demonstrate in the analyses that follow.

Thus, we focus on the situation of women within the capitalist social formation, drawing on the premises of Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) to understand how the capitalist formation, through its constitutive processes of contradiction and overdetermination, organizes productive and reproductive labor in embodied terms. Here, the body is not understood as a biological component, but rather as an effect of social, historical, and ideological relations.

We understand that the reproduction of relations of production is only possible through the way ideology operates to fix women to reproductive labor. It is therefore essential to conceive ideological interpellation as a gendered (Cestari, 2015; Zoppi-Fontana; Ferrari, 2017) and racialized (Modesto, 2021) process. In order for race- and gender-based relations of oppression to be reproduced within our capitalist social formation, women must recognize themselves in the position of reproductive labor. In Brazil, this process takes on a specific configuration of overdeterminations that shape our particular social formation.

This is why, in the present study, and still at an initial stage, we seek to understand how meanings are established in relation to the place of women within the social formation by articulating Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) with Louis Althusser’s theorization of the dominant relation in the constitution of the capitalist social formation. In this formation, relations of racial and gender oppression and class exploitation are reproduced through ideological interpellation. Reproduction (as well as transformation) is made possible through the process of ideological interpellation, understood as a decisive point in the constitution of subjectivity, from which meaning-making processes are configured (Pêcheux, 2009 [1975]).

We understand that the relationship between enunciative positions and processes of subjectivation provides the theoretical anchoring necessary for analyzing the effects of reproductive labor on the production of meanings by/about incarcerated women<sup>7</sup>.

### 3 ON THE INCARCERATION OF WOMEN IN BRAZIL

It is important to briefly mention data from the *INFOPEN Women* report (Brazil, 2017) concerning the situation of Brazilian women in conditions of incarceration. According to the report, Brazil reached a total of 42,000 women deprived of liberty, representing a

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that some articles have already undertaken initial approaches between SRT and DA: Tejada; Vinhas (2024); Vinhas (2023); Tejada, Caetano, and Vinhas (2022); and Vinhas (2021).

656% increase compared to figures from the early 2000s. This sharp rise in the female prison population is particularly striking when contrasted with the male prison population, which increased by 293% over the same period.

Moreover, according to data from 2022, Brazil became the country with the third highest number of incarcerated women, surpassing Russia (Mena, 2022). The top two countries in terms of female prison population are the United States and China.

Additional data from the *INFOPEN Women* report (Brazil, 2017) must also be considered: nearly half of incarcerated women (45%) have not yet been sentenced; 74% of prison facilities were originally designed for male populations, yet women are frequently placed in them; women receive fewer visits than men; and many prison units lack adequate facilities for pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as nurseries or mother-child units and daycare centers.

Regarding the profile of incarcerated women, the data show a predominance of women aged 18 to 24 (27%), Black women (62%), women with incomplete primary education (45%), single women (62%), and mothers (74%). The most common offense is drug trafficking (62%), followed by robbery (11%) and theft (9%).

In our social formation, the daily and generational reproduction of labor power is typically the responsibility of women. As previously noted, most crimes committed by women involve drug trafficking, robbery, and theft, indicating involvement in practices aimed at securing income, albeit through illicit means, for the reproduction of life. Among the many factors that must be considered in this context, one possibility is that the functioning of the neoliberal state, marked by increased repression and lack of investment in institutions of social reproduction (such as schools, hospitals, and community kitchens, for instance, fails to provide the necessary conditions for the daily and generational reproduction of segments of the population. This dynamic may be one of the factors driving women into criminal activity.

As Wacquant (2011, p. 9) states, “[...] neoliberal penalty presents the following paradox: it claims to remedy with ‘more state’ in the form of police and prisons the ‘less state’ in the economic and social sphere that is itself the very cause of the widespread escalation of both objective and subjective insecurity in all countries [...]”

Based on this, we now turn to an analysis of how meaning is produced through the relationship between enunciative position and processes of subjectivation, using texts produced by incarcerated women as our point of departure.

#### 4 ANALYSIS

As previously mentioned, the material analyzed in this study consists of two utterances produced by women in conditions of incarceration. The first is an excerpt from an interview conducted with a detainee at the Madre Pelletier Women’s State Prison in April 2013. The second is a written text displayed on a mural as part of an exhibition held at the Casa de Cultura Mário Quintana (a cultural center located in the historic downtown area of Porto Alegre) in 2022.

We begin our analysis with the first piece of material, as presented in (01).

(01) Excerpt from an interview with a woman in a condition of incarceration.

INF: não não era só um pensamento de um dia que eu tava olhando pela janela... ih aí de tanto eu chegar do trabalho e ficar olhando pela janela... eu acabei... é:... tipo assim... eu sei a rotina das pessoas do condomínio aqui do lado.

LOC: Ah...

INF: sabe...

LOC: dá pra enxergar?

INF: EH: tem umas pessoas que chegam... todo dia aí eu escrevi a respeito de uma senhora que chegava todos os dias às seis horas da tarde com uma sacola do nacional quer dizer que ela é sozinha... quer dizer que ela tem que comprar todo dia alguma coisa... então ela é uma pessoa sozinha ela não faz rancho né... e ela chega todo santo dia no mesmo horário com a sacola do mesmo

supermercado... ih aí eu tava escrevendo a respeito daquilo... que a vida das pessoas passa lá fora... ih que aqui a gente fica como se tivesse enterrado vivo... tu tá assistindo TUDO... um mundo passar... mas TEU mundo é aquilo ali... não existe mundo pra TI... porque a minha vida parou no instante em que fui presa né... eu tenho lembranças da minha casa do meu carro do meu filho da minha filha... ih a vida pros outros corre né... pra gente não... parou naquele instante.

She would look out the prison window when she returned from work. She worked inside the penitentiary and, through this labor, in addition to receiving payment (below the minimum wage), she was able to reduce her sentence. Unlike most Brazilian prisons, which are built in remote or difficult-to-access locations, the Madre Pelletier Women's State Prison is located in an urban area of Porto Alegre, in the Teresópolis neighborhood, where it is possible to observe the daily life of the city through the cell windows.

Upon returning from work, she would observe the routine of the people living in the apartment complex next door. Her gaze was drawn to an elderly woman who arrived every day at six o'clock in the evening carrying a *sacola do Nacional*. Watching this woman with her supermarket bag (from a supermarket named *Nacional*) prompted interpretations about her life, her routine, about something that takes place only outside the prison walls. From this observation emerged the following words about the woman: *eu escrevi a respeito de uma senhora que chegava todos os dias às seis horas da tarde com uma sacola do nacional quer dizer que ela é sozinha... quer dizer que ela tem que comprar todo dia alguma coisa... então ela é uma pessoa sozinha ela não faz rancho né... e ela chega todo santo dia no mesmo horário com a sacola do mesmo supermercado*.

The supermarket bag functions metonymically in relation to the woman's life, just as the scene of the woman with the bag operates metonymically as a representation of life beyond prison, a life that moves forward, that continues, unlike the stagnant life inside the prison: *a senhora faz isso todo santo dia no mesmo horário*. It is by placing the two lives in relation that the enunciating subject gives meaning to her own existence, through what the other is. In this way, we connect *uma senhora que chegava todos os dias às seis da tarde com uma sacola do nacional* with *quer dizer que ela é sozinha*.

The repetition of the scene reveals a ritual with gaps: not all citizens (*sujeitos-de-direito*) are included in this ritualized scene of capitalist social formation, a scene that involves not only going to work (the unspoken element), but returning from work and sustaining life in order to keep going to work (coming home with a bag of provisions). The position from which the scene is observed exposes a flaw in this ritual of repetition characteristic of the capitalist social formation, which encompasses both the moment when the worker sells their labor power and the moment when the worker builds the conditions to regenerate that labor power, to sell it again the next day.

What is said here does not form part of the "evidences" of capitalist social formation, which prioritizes the sale of labor power while disregarding the ways in which the worker regenerates themselves to keep selling it. This is one of the unspoken elements that underlie the reproduction of capitalist relations of production.

Thus, the scene in which *ela chega todo santo dia no mesmo horário com a sacola do mesmo supermercado* reveals the unsaid: the signification of the subject's insertion, of the solitary woman in the neighboring apartment complex, into the process of social reproduction. Life that "moves forward" means being inserted into this unspoken system, metonymically presented by the enunciating subject: *a vida das pessoas passa lá fora... ih que aqui a gente fica como se tivesse enterrado vivo*, which could be paraphrased as *as pessoas seguem trabalhando lá fora... ih aqui a gente fica como se não fosse parte desse sistema*, or even, *as pessoas seguem vivendo lá fora... ih aqui a gente fica como se estivesse morto em vida*.

Even while working inside the penitentiary for a spice company, measuring and packaging spices for sale, she acknowledges that for life to "move forward," to "go on" (with purpose), it must be connected to what happens outside prison walls. It is only outside that one is truly part of this system, able to move between home, work, the supermarket, and back home again; only outside, with a body in motion, does life continue. The supermarket bag, carried each day from the store to home, produces the effect of repetition outside prison, yet it is not the same kind of repetition as that experienced inside. This contrast constitutes the difference between a life that continues and being buried alive.

The repetitiveness of life outside is not the same as the repetitiveness inside, which is determined by the disciplinary operation of the penal institution. This leads us to yet another possible paraphrase: *as pessoas, mesmo sozinhas, podem fazer o que querem lá fora... ih aqui a gente só pode fazer o que eles mandam*.

By observing the woman who arrives every day with a supermarket bag, the same bag, yet different bags, with different contents each day, a meaning is produced: that she must go to the supermarket every day and buy only a few items, because only a person who lives alone would need to shop daily. A bag that is never truly the same bag. The bag is what remains constant in the repetition of the scene; it is the element that allows for the interpretation that the woman is alone. One bag, every day, from the same supermarket.

Arriving with a bag every day signifies that she is a solitary person who has to buy something each day, since someone who lives alone doesn't stock up. It is a scene that repeats *todo santo dia*. A scene that repeats *todo santo dia* for all those on the outside. The repetition of the scene produces the effect of life going on, life going on when one must, every day, go to the supermarket to buy items necessary for survival.

The bag functions as the signifier that produces the effect that life continues, a life in a different bag, not *your bag (jumbo)*, not the bag from inside the prison, the bag that incarcerated people can receive from those on the outside.

The solitude attributed to the woman with the *sacola do Nacional* appears at various points in the selected excerpt. When she says *então ela é uma pessoa sozinha ela não faz rancho né*, this could be paraphrased as: *she doesn't stock up because she is alone; she doesn't stock up because she has no children or family*.

When we establish these associations, we can observe that the solitude of the incarcerated woman and that of the woman with the *sacola do Nacional* converge: in the unsaid, we find the effects of the absence of children. Not *doing the rancho* (not stocking up) signifies, in relation to the position of the mother, a role that is taken away by the State within the prison context. The *rancho*, then, becomes a metaphor for the signification of woman-as-mother, a signification that persists even in conditions of incarceration.

Another important aspect to highlight concerns the sequence: *eu tenho lembranças da minha casa do meu carro do meu filho da minha filha*. The memories evoked by the enunciating subject pertain to social reproduction, a space permeated by affect, while productive labor serves as the counterpoint. When she says she looks out the window after returning from work, she does not consider productive labor (carried out inside the prison) as a space-time of life. Life feels stagnant because she is not engaged in reproductive labor, a relation that emerges through her observation of the woman with the *sacola do Nacional*.

The woman continues speaking about the bag: *a vida das pessoas passa lá fora; aqui a gente fica como se estivesse enterrado vivo; tu tá assistindo TUDO... um mundo passar... mas TEU mundo é aquilo ali... não existe mundo pra TI; minha vida parou no instante em que fui presa né; a vida pros outros corre*.

As a spectator of others' lives, the enunciating subject has no world; her life stopped (the movement of the bag ceased) the moment she was incarcerated. Being imprisoned means *não existe mundo pra TI*, it means living in a world where one is entirely controlled. We know that the effects of the state's repressive apparatus manifest across the entire social formation through laws and the judicial system, affecting both those inside and outside prison. However, in the case of subjects in conditions of incarceration, these effects are present on a daily basis, just like the *sacola* that appears *todo santo dia* carried by the woman from the neighboring building.

Opening and closing the gallery doors; going out for sun time; wearing and eating what is given; having breakfast, lunch, and dinner at predetermined times; waking early for daily roll call: all of these are part of a routine that does not match the routine of those on the outside. There is, therefore, no world of one's own: the world does not belong to the incarcerated. Life does not move forward for those who are imprisoned. To be imprisoned is to be without a world; it is to be an effect of state control. To have a world is to be outside, selling one's labor power and buying the items in the bag that enable the regeneration of one's own life.

We focus on the signifier *sacola* because it is precisely the term used in the prison system of Rio Grande do Sul to refer to the set of food and hygiene items delivered inside the prison by family members and friends of incarcerated individuals. These items are typically packed and handed over in a plastic bag, often a supermarket bag. The *sacola* is delivered on a specific day of the week. Those who receive a *sacola* gain access to items that are generally not provided by the prison institution, which ensures better conditions of survival for those inside.

*Sacola* is a key signifier within the symbolic network that sustains the processes of subjectivation for incarcerated individuals. From this enunciative position, we identify signifiers that mark the effects of imprisonment and the struggle for survival. *Sacola* stands as one of these signifiers, delineating the enunciative position of the incarcerated subject. The meanings it acquires, within the conditions of production shaped by the prison apparatus, are overdetermined by gendered, racialized, and class-based relations.

However, when related to the observed scene, the *sacola* inside is different from the *sacola* outside. The bag that arrives at the penitentiary may only contain food and hygiene products authorized by Ordinance No. 160/2014 of Superintendência dos Serviços Penitenciários do Rio Grande do Sul (SUSEPE), such as soap, hygiene and cleaning items (in transparent bottles and liquids), plain biscuits, and tea leaves, among others. The *sacola* entering the penitentiary undergoes strict inspection.

None of these procedures apply to the bag carried by the woman from the neighboring apartment complex (except for the bag itself, a supermarket bag, used both outside and inside the penitentiary). Even when it contains items necessary for survival, one *sacola* is the effect of the “free choice” of a *sujeito-de-direito* (legal subject), who carries it from the supermarket to their home with their own hands; the other is carried by someone else and regulated by agents of the state’s repressive apparatus.

In this way, having a *sacola* becomes a determining factor for survival inside prison, and for that reason, it is an effect of overdetermined social relations. The same relations of domination that structure life outside are reproduced within the prison walls.

We now turn to the second text analyzed in this article, written by a woman in a condition of incarceration during the pandemic. This text refers to the *sacola* that enters the prison, as we will observe below.

(02) Text written by a woman in a condition of incarceration during the pandemic.

Sem sacola

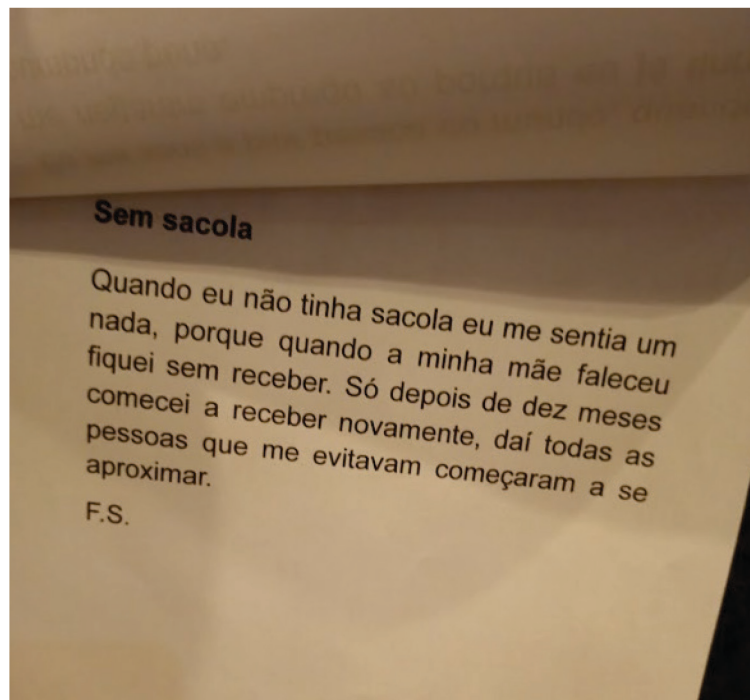
Quando eu não tinha sacola eu me sentia um nada, porque quando a minha mãe faleceu fiquei sem receber. Só depois de dez meses comecei a receber novamente, daí todas as pessoas que me evitavam começaram a se aproximar.

F.S.

As previously mentioned, the second text is not an excerpt from an interview, but a written piece displayed on a mural as part of an exhibition organized by *Balcão da Cidadania*, a collective that works in partnership with the Madre Pelletier Women’s Prison. Members of the collective carry out various activities with the women; the outcomes of these activities (including texts, embroidery, and sculptures) were selected and featured in the aforementioned exhibition.

The women’s texts were transcribed and printed in multiple copies that were placed on the mural. Many of the copies were organized in stacks and hung one over the other. In general, these are very short texts in which the women recount the hardships of life inside prison.

(03) Image of the text selected for analysis in the exhibition.



We do not know under what conditions the texts were produced, nor how the women were asked to write them. What we can analyze, however, is how the text produces meaning, and, more specifically, how meaning is related to the signifier *sacola*, which also appears in this piece.

Entitled *Sem sacola* (*Without a Bag*), the text, written in the first person singular, addresses a moment during incarceration when the woman stopped receiving a *sacola* due to the death of her mother. Her mother was the person who visited her in prison and, during those visits, brought the *sacolas* containing the items that helped her survive inside the cells. Only ten months after her mother's death did she begin receiving a *sacola* again.

During the period without the *sacola*, the woman says she felt like “a nothing.” To be without a *sacola* inside prison is to feel like a nothing.

Thus, we consider a signifying chain that begins with the reference to the incarcerated woman, the author of the text, and unfolds through other signifiers, such as *being without a sacola* and *feeling like a nothing*. To be a woman in prison may be associated with the absence of the *sacola*, while it may also be associated with its presence: on one side, *feeling like a nothing*; on the other, *not feeling like a nothing, feeling like someone, feeling worthy*.

We add to this signifying chain the phrase *todas as pessoas que me evitavam começaram a se aproximar* (*all the people who avoided me began to come closer*), and from this we can outline the following signifying articulations through which meaning is produced: (i) *being a woman in prison – being without a sacola – feeling like a nothing – being avoided*; and (ii) *being a woman in prison – having a sacola – feeling like someone with value – not being avoided – being sought out*.

These meaning relations show us that being a woman in prison depends on how the woman relates to people outside prison. This relationship determines whether she has a *sacola* containing essential items for her survival, for the reproduction of life, not only for the physical maintenance of survival but also for the preservation of social existence.

Inside the prison, having goods acquired on the outside functions within the symbolic economy of social relations, reproducing the relations of production that operate outside, within the spheres of production and circulation. Even under conditions of incarceration, the material forms that sustain capitalism are reproduced. This indicates that social reproduction, necessary for

women to stay alive inside prison, operates in relation to a process that establishes hierarchies and power relations within the prison system itself, thus shaping meaning-making processes.

The meanings of *being a woman in prison* are produced within these relations, and the processes of subjectivation are anchored in them so that words may signify. *Being nothing* means not having a *sacola*, a meaning that depends on the conditions of discourse production, the processes of subjectivation, and the enunciative position.

By relating the formulations in (01) and (02), we observe not only the *sacola* as a fundamental element, but also the expressions *a nothing* and *buried alive*. *Being buried alive*, in (01), is connected to the *sacola* observed in the hands of the woman outside the prison, while *being a nothing* is linked to the absence of the *sacola* once brought by the incarcerated woman's mother, a *sacola* that comes from outside the prison. In both utterances, meaning relations are established through the signifier *sacola*, which, within the functioning of the penal institution, is a fundamental element for ensuring the most basic conditions of life for incarcerated women.

To be without a *sacola* is to be dead while alive, in other words, to be a *nothing*. The relations between these formulations and their paraphrases allow us to understand that the sayings of incarcerated women reproduce not only gender relations but also class and race relations. Race functions as the unsaid within these relations: although not explicitly mentioned, it is present as a constitutive dimension of the process of ideological interpellation (Modesto, 2021). From this, the question of the enunciative position emerges.

We argue that it is through the relationship between enunciative position and processes of subjectivation that this occurs, there is an erasure of raciality in the sayings of the enunciating subject, both in relation to herself and to the woman from the apartment complex observed from prison. We understand that it is through the enunciative position that the unsaid of raciality becomes present.

## 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As developed throughout this study, the analysis of the signifier *sacola* in relation to women in conditions of incarceration in Brazilian prisons brings into circulation meanings tied to social reproduction. The way in which the *sacola* is signified is closely related to the subjectivation of women as those responsible for reproductive labor. This discursive process is necessarily linked not only to class relations, but also to overdetermined relations of race and gender.

In the excerpts analyzed, we also observe an affective bond among women, who identify with reproductive labor, labor that is signified as an important space of subjectivation. Even though unpaid reproductive labor operates as a mechanism of women's oppression and domination, it also contains processes of identification across gender, race, and class that are not exclusively alienating. The dimension of care produces meaning, and the subject who performs reproductive labor is not merely reproducing labor power but is also constructing social bonds between subjects. In other words, the subject cannot be equated with labor power alone.

Thus, in theoretical terms, it is well established that Materialist Discourse Analysis (MDA) is grounded in an epistemological tripod that articulates linguistics, psychoanalysis, and historical materialism (Pêcheux; Fuchs, 1997 [1975]). With regard to historical materialism, it is crucial to consider reproductive labor, given that capitalism, that is, the structuring of the social formation through commodity production, depends on this form of labor, which produces the most valuable commodity in the capitalist social formation: the worker.

In Brazil, reproductive labor is primarily carried out by women, both in paid and unpaid forms. Through Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), it becomes possible to generate new insights into how meaning production takes place. The theoretical justification lies in the argument that this articulation, between MDA and SRT, is both novel and necessary, not only for understanding labor relations within the capitalist social formation, but more importantly, for the epistemological configuration of Materialist Discourse Analysis itself

## REFERENCES

- ALTHUSSER, L. Contradição e sobredeterminação. In: ALTHUSSER, L. *A favor de Marx*. 2. ed. Tradução de Dirceu Lindoso. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores, 1979. p. 75-113.
- ALTHUSSER, L. *Sobre a reprodução*. Tradução de Guilherme João de Freitas Teixeira. Petrópolis: Editora Vozes, 2008.
- ALTHUSSER, L. Marxismo e humanismo. In: ALTHUSSER, L. *Por Marx*. Tradução de Maria Leonor Loureiro. Campinas: Editora da UNICAMP, 2015. p. 183-202.
- ARRUZZA, C.; BHATTACHARYA, T.; FRASER, N. *Feminismo para os 99%: um manifesto*. Tradução de Heci Regina Candiani. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019.
- ARRUZZA, C.; BHATTACHARYA, T. Teoria da Reprodução Social: elementos fundamentais para um feminismo marxista. Tradução de Camila Carduz Rocha e Clara Saraiva. *Contemporânea*, São Carlos, v. 13, n. 2, p. 619-651, maio/ago. 2023. Disponível em: <https://www.contemporanea.ufscar.br/index.php/contemporanea/article/view/1258>. Acesso em: 17 jun. 2025.
- BHATTACHARYA, T. (org.). *Social Reproduction Theory: remapping class, recentring oppression*. London: Pluto Press, 2017.
- BRASIL. Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública. Departamento Penitenciário Nacional. *Levantamento nacional de informações penitenciárias INFOPEN Mulheres*. 2. ed. Brasília: Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, 2017. Disponível em: [https://conectas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/infopenmulheres\\_arte\\_07-03-18-1.pdf](https://conectas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/infopenmulheres_arte_07-03-18-1.pdf). Acesso em: 19 jun. 2025.
- CESTARI, M. J. Vozes-mulheres negras ou feministas e antirracistas graças às yabás. 2015. 264 f. Tese (Doutorado em Linguística) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Linguística, Universidade Estadual de Campinas, Campinas, 2015. Disponível em: <https://repositorio.unicamp.br/acervo/detalhe/963234>. Acesso em: 17 jun. 2025.
- FERGUSON, S.; McNALLY, D. Capital, força de trabalho e relações de gênero. Tradução de Maíra Silva. *Revista Outubro*, n. 29, p. 23-59, nov. de 2017. Disponível em: [https://outubrorevista.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/02\\_McNally-e-Ferguson\\_2017.pdf](https://outubrorevista.com.br/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/02_McNally-e-Ferguson_2017.pdf). Acesso em: 17 jun. 2025.
- HAROCHE, C.; PÊCHEUX, M.; HENRY, P. A semântica e o corte saussuriano: língua, linguagem, discurso. In: BARONAS, R. L. (org.). *Análise do discurso: apontamentos para uma história da noção-conceito de formação discursiva*. São Carlos: Pedro & João Editores, 2007 [1971]. p. 13-32.
- MENA, F. Brasil passa a Rússia e vira 3º país com mais mulheres presas no mundo. *Folha de S. Paulo*, 2022. Disponível em: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2022/10/brasil-passa-a-russia-e-vira-3o-pais-com-mais-mulheres-presas-no-mundo.shtml>. Acesso em: 22 mar. 2023.
- MODESTO, R. Os discursos racializados. *Revista da ABRALIN*, Campinas, v. 20, n. 2, p. 1-19, 2021. Disponível em: <https://revista.abralin.org/index.php/abralin/article/view/1851>. Acesso em: 17 jun. 2025.
- ORLANDI, E. P. *Discurso e texto: formulação e circulação dos sentidos*. 2. ed. Campinas: Pontes, 2005.
- PÊCHEUX, M. Papel da memória. In: ACHARD, P. et al. *Papel da memória*. 2. ed. Campinas: Pontes, 2007 [1985]. p. 49-57.
- PÊCHEUX, M. *Semântica e discurso: uma crítica à afirmação do óbvio*. Campinas: Editora da Unicamp, 2009 [1975].

PÊCHEUX, M.; FUCHS, C. A propósito da Análise Automática do Discurso: atualização e perspectivas. Tradução de Péricles Cunha. In: GADET, F.; HAK, T. (org.). *Por uma análise automática do discurso: uma introdução à obra de Michel Pêcheux*. 3. ed. Campinas: Editora da UNICAMP, 1997 [1975]. p. 163-252.

TOLEDO, C. *Mulheres: o gênero nos une, a classe nos divide*. São Paulo: Cadernos Marxistas, 2001.

RIBEIRO, R. J. A dor e a injustiça. In: COSTA, J. F. *Razões públicas, emoções privadas*. Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1999. p. 7-12.

ROCHA, C. et al. Apresentação das tradutoras. In: VOGEL, L. *Marxismo e a opressão às mulheres: rumo a uma teoria unitária*. Tradução de Camila Rocha et al. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2022 [1983]. p. 11-54.

ROMÉ, N. La manzana de la discordia. Hacia um feminismo transindividual. In: ROMÉ, N. (org.). *Notas materialistas*. Para un feminismo transindividual. Santiago de Chile: Doble Ciencia, 2022. p. 51-100.

TEJADA, B. V.; CAETANO, V. B. L.; VINHAS, L. I. Eso que llaman amor: trabalho, arte e resistência no espaço urbano. *Revista Rua*, Campinas, v. 28, n. 1, p. 107-124, 2022. Disponível em: <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/rua/article/view/107-124>. Acesso em: 19 jun. 2025.

VINHAS, L. I. E se fosse ao contrário? Se o gênero nos une, a classe e a raça nos dividem. In: SILVA, D. S.; SILVA, C. S. (org.) *Pêcheux em (dis)curso: entre o já-dito e o novo. Uma homenagem à professora Nadia Azevedo*. v. 1. São Carlos: Pedro & João, 2021. p. 141-164.

VINHAS, L. I. Mulheres e trabalho na formação social brasileira: imagens em discurso. *Revista Leitura*, Alagoas, v. 1, n. 76, p. 63-78, 2023. DOI: 10.28998/2317-9945.202376.63-78. Disponível em: <https://www.seer.ufal.br/index.php/revistaleitura/article/view/14297>. Acesso em: 12 mar. 2025.

VOGEL, L. *Marxismo e opressão às mulheres: rumo a uma teoria unitária*. Tradução de Camila Rocha et al. São Paulo: Expressão Popular, 2022 [1983].

WACQUANT, L. *As prisões da miséria*. Tradução de André Telles. 2. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2011.

ZOPPI-FONTANA, M. G. Lugares de enunciação e discurso. *Revista Leitura*, Maceió, n. 23, p. 15-24, jan./jun. 1999. Disponível em: <https://www.seer.ufal.br/index.php/revistaleitura/article/view/7592>. Acesso em: 19 jun. 2025.

ZOPPI-FONTANA, M. G.; FERRARI, A. J. Apresentação: uma análise discursiva das identificações de gênero. In: ZOPPI-FONTANA, M.; FERRARI, A. J. (org.). *Mulheres em discurso: gênero, linguagem e ideologia*. v. 1. Campinas: Pontes, 2017. p. 7-19.

ZOPPI-FONTANA, M. G.; CESTARI, M. J. “Cara de empregada doméstica”: discursos sobre os corpos de mulheres negras no Brasil. *Revista Rua*, Campinas, v. 20, 2014. p. 167-186. Disponível em: <https://periodicos.sbu.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/rua/article/view/8638265>. Acesso em: 19 jun. 2025.



Recebido em 13/03/2025. Aceito em 11/05/2025.

Publicado em 02/09/2025.