Discriminatory discourse and identity across time and space in online posts about Haitian immigrants in Brazil

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For a long time, Brazilians were known for migrating both within and outside their country in search of a better life. However, although the very history of the country’s formation is laid upon several migratory movements, nowadays the simple mention of a reverse path in their country’s direction has stirred intense and polemic debates. Brazil’s current, relatively favorable, economic situation and the opportunities that it has spurred, have attracted international attention to its job market, and a consequent current of migrants, including legal and illegal workers. One of such migratory movements involves the border crossing (between Brazil and Peru) by Haitians, since the earthquake of 2010. This paper analyzes online posts, spanning one year (2012-2013), published in Portuguese, in response to newspaper articles about Haitians illegal migration to Brazil. Drawing on previous studies on immigrant and discriminatory discourse (De Fina, 2003; Wodack, 2001; van Dijk, 2009) and on work on identity and community in a digital age (Erstad and Sefton-Green, 2012), it seeks to uncover the linguistic strategies used to legitimate opinions against the Haitian immigrants permanence in the country. In addition, it discusses processes whereby the identity attributed to the illegal Haitian immigrants is constructed, and how the group is portrayed as undeserving of humanitarian help, and/or staying in Brazil. Overtime, the online posts are characterized by 1) overtly prejudiced discourse, which includes reference to skin color and origin; 2) the identification of the immigrants as unworthy of admittance, because they are ”unqualified”, likely ”to integrate drug trafficking gangs”; and 3) nationalism, as the government is ”forgetting its own people” to help another. This paper will consider the discourse strategies revealed through the analysis of 300 posts in three different Brazilian newspapers to understand prejudiced discourse across time and space, in face of a new reality in Brazil.

Keywords: identity, discriminatory discourse, immigrants.