

## ARTICLE

# Silence, silencing, and complicit silence as mechanisms for perpetuating racism in organizations

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### Abstract

This essay aims to interpret the processes of silence, silencing, and complicit silence as factors that contribute to the perpetuation of racism, inequalities, and exclusions that occur in organizations. From the presentation of theoretical references on silence, silencing, and complicit silence, the essay presents a complementary way of demonstrating how the echoes of historical processes of racism against Black people can still be responsible for structuring practices in organizations. Additionally, we demonstrate how studies on silence, silencing, and complicit silence can offer praxis alternatives for administrators and academics of organizational studies to change structural practices to break the cycle of structural racism in organizations.

**Keywords:** Silence. Silencing. Racism. Inequality. Exclusion. Organizations.

### *O silêncio, o silenciamento e o silêncio cúmplice como mecanismos de perpetuação do racismo nas organizações*

#### Resumo

O presente ensaio tem como objetivo interpretar os processos de silêncio, silenciamento e silêncio cúmplice como fatores que contribuem para a perpetuação do racismo, das desigualdades e exclusões que ocorrem nas organizações. Por meio de referenciais teóricos sobre silêncio, silenciamento e silêncio cúmplice, pretende-se apresentar uma forma complementar de se demonstrar como os ecos de processos históricos de racismo contra pessoas negras podem ainda ser responsáveis pela estruturação de práticas nas organizações. Adicionalmente, busca-se indicar como os estudos sobre silêncio, silenciamento e silêncio cúmplice podem oferecer alternativas de *práxis* para administradores e acadêmicos de estudos organizacionais, visando à mudança de práticas estruturais, de modo a quebrar o ciclo de racismo estrutural nas organizações.

**Palavras-chave:** Silêncio. Silenciamento. Racismo. Desigualdade. Exclusão. Organizações.

### *Silencio, silenciamiento y silencio cómplice como mecanismos de perpetuación del racismo en las organizaciones*

#### Resumen

Este ensayo tiene como objetivo interpretar los procesos de silencio, silenciamiento y silencio cómplice como factores que contribuyen a la perpetuación del racismo, las desigualdades y las exclusiones que se dan en las organizaciones. A partir de la presentación de referentes teóricos sobre el silencio, el silenciamiento y el silencio cómplice, se pretende presentar una forma complementaria de demostrar cómo los ecos de procesos históricos de racismo contra las personas negras aún pueden ser responsables de estructurar prácticas en las organizaciones. Además, pretendemos demostrar cómo los estudios sobre el silencio, el silenciamiento y el silencio cómplice pueden ofrecer alternativas de *praxis* para administradores y académicos de estudios organizacionales, con el objetivo de cambiar las prácticas estructurales para romper el ciclo del racismo estructural en las organizaciones.

**Palabras clave:** Silencio. Silenciamiento. Racismo. Desigualdad. Exclusión. Organizaciones.

## INTRODUCTION

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*“A carne mais barata do mercado é a carne negra  
[...]  
Que vai de graça pro presídio  
E para debaixo do plástico  
Que vai de graça pro subemprego  
E pros hospitais psiquiátricos  
Que fez e faz a história pra caralho  
Segurando esse país no braço, meu irmão  
O gado aqui não se sente revoltado  
Porque o revólver já está engatilhado [...]”  
(Yuka, Seu Jorge, & Cappelletti, 1998).*

If Brazil is an ethnically diverse country, in which racial democracy supposedly prevails (Freyre, 1981) and black people – who represent more than 55% of the population (*Departamento Intersindical de Estatística e Estudos Socioeconômicos* [DIEESE], 2021) – have equal opportunities for work, emancipation and personal fulfillment, why are black men and women a minority in leadership positions in organizations when they are the majority engaged in precarious work? (Pauli, Comin, Ruffatto, & Oltramari, 2021). The lack of black people in leadership positions is an important subject that has been addressed by several authors (Adamson, Kelan, Lewis, & Rumens, 2021; Arciniega, 2021; Ortlieb, Glauninger, & Weiss, 2021; Tyler & Vachani, 2021; van Eck, Dobusch, & van den Brink, 2021). An issue that attracts the attention of researchers in Brazil and abroad, however, is the attempt to identify the causes of this low representativeness rate (Rosa, 2014) in the socio-historical context of each country and region (Teixeira, J. S. Oliveira, Diniz, & Marcondes, 2021). Another important topic is related to possible corrective actions for increasing employment and income opportunities for these social groups and minimizing inequalities and discrimination inside and outside the organizational environment (van Eck et al., 2021).

Since race does not involve a biological discussion, but is rather a socio-discursive category (Rosa, 2014), it can be inferred that the contribution of linguistics and discourse analysis (Orlandi, 2012) to silence (Kurzon, 1998), silencing (Orlandi, 2011), the politics of silence (Freire, 2011) and complicit silence (Chrispal, Bapuji, & Zietsma, 2020) can broaden the debate on racism, inequality and exclusion in the organizational environment. We believe it is important to investigate contemporary practices and the discourse of silent exclusion that is employed by managers in organizations; such practices silence the debate on racism and exclusion, and their dialectical relationship with the echoes of slavery, violence and explicit silencing practiced against the black population in Brazil.

We could not critically address the subject of racism in Brazil without mentioning the deconstruction of the myth of racial democracy as divulged mainly by Gilberto Freyre, who stated that Brazil did not suffer from the same racial conflicts as those observed, for example, in North America. According to his idea of racial democracy, Brazil is a special case in the West, precisely because in it there exists a harmonious relationship between enslaved people and their “owners.” According to the author this alleged phenomenon dates from decades before the abolition of slavery, thus enabling a degree of cultural exchange and integration, even at the sexual level. These factors, according to Freyre, turned Brazilian people into some kind of “meta-race,” which has been key to overcoming discrimination (Freyre, 1981). According to Ferreira (2002, p. 75), the myth of racial democracy became “[...] a fertile ground for the constitution of silent racism, a peculiar Brazilian-style racism.” For the author, this silent racism still creates a negative image of the black population and, at the same time, works as a mechanism for denying this view, thus forming the identity of Afro-Brazilians. According to Sales (2006, p. 255): “The term ‘racial democracy’ is a *contradictio in adjecto* – a contradiction in terms – as the only form of democracy would be based on the condition that it was not ‘racial.’” We will present the problem of the myth of racial democracy in the second part of this paper.

The objective of this essay is to interpret the processes of silence, silencing and the politics of silence as factors that contribute to the perpetuation of the racism, inequalities, and exclusions that occur in organizations.

Before presenting the structure of this essay, it is important to ask: What can two white people contribute to this discussion on racism, inequality, exclusion in organizations and the processes for silencing black voices in the 2020s as echoes of black slavery in Brazil? This question may be misunderstanding the concept of the “place of speech,” as presented to the Brazilian public debate by Djamilá Ribeiro (2019a). A superficial understanding, which has become common sense on the subject in Brazil, states that a certain social group, such as white people, should not interfere in the narrative of another group, and assumes that this imposition could generate some kind of “theft” of the protagonism of these minorities (Ribeiro, 2019b). In the work *O que é Lugar de Fala?* (Ribeiro, 2019a), the author states that every individual has their place of speech, because everybody expresses themselves from a “social place,” and she sums up this argument as:

The absence or low incidence of black people in spaces of power do not usually bother or surprise white people. To denaturalize this practice, **everyone should question the absence of black people** in management positions, black authors in anthologies, black thinkers in the bibliography of university courses, and black protagonists in audiovisual. **And, in addition to that, it is necessary to think about affirmative action’s aiming to change this reality** (Ribeiro, 2019b, p. 16, emphasis added, our translation).

The observation we propose for this paper moves in this same direction and is inspired by the authors’ thinking, which challenges the reader to propose actions that go beyond the discourses and impact *praxis* in academia and the market, in order to imagine a new reality. We cannot forget that racism, as pointed out by Sales (2006), must be fought via the consciousness of the existence of a “pact of silence,” precisely because this discourse of silencing the subject of racism promotes the conditions required for racial segregation.

In this same line of reasoning, Professor Silvio Almeida (Roda Viva, 2020) mentions that “[...] it is not possible to overcome racism without white people, precisely because ‘white people’ are also a creation of racism.” He also points out that this fight will only happen through a collective effort to denaturalize racism. Other authors of the black movement also denounce the “narcissistic pact” by which “whiteness” is enclosed within a “discursive bubble,” in which the accepted discourses are those produced by “equals,” thus disqualifying black voices using silencing strategies (Bento, 2002). In addition to our position as “white” people – or considered as white in the Brazilian context –, we respectfully approach this topic of anti-racism together with all other authors of any ethnicity, to “burst” this discursive “bubble” and add more voices to denounce this system of privilege, our aim being to abolish it.

After this introduction, we briefly discuss the definitions of racism and how structural racism is considered to be a part of Brazilian organizations. We then deal with silence, silencing, and complicit silence from the perspective of discourse analysis, our aim being to explore how these forms of silence contribute to racism, inequality, and exclusion in organizations. Our final considerations and suggestions for future studies close the study.

## RACISM, INEQUALITY, AND EXCLUSION IN ORGANIZATIONS

It is not the objective of this work to detail the history of racism and the many attempts to erase the racist history that constitute a significant part of the collective unconscious and of the founding discourses in Brazil (Fernandes, 2017). It is important to remember, however, that this racist trait in Brazilian society, as described by Florestan Fernandes (2017), is opposed to the myth of racial democracy and the supposed harmony between whites, blacks and indigenous people that has been propagated since the 1930s (Rosa, 2014) by authors who have been especially influenced by the work of Gilberto Freyre (1981). According to Fernandes (2017), the reasoning behind racial democracy is extremely harmful to the efforts to emancipate black people, since the admission of complete harmony, as popularized in common sense discourses, would lead to the “decephalization” of the debate, thereby harming the capacity for social criticism using an argument that states that this issue is already outdated. The author states that the claim of a supposed integration by way of cultural exchange and sexual relations was of no benefit

to the black population, given that “[...] miscegenation did nothing to promote people of color, let alone racial equality. It did not promote the rise of mulattoes and black slaves, manumitted or free” (Fernandes, 2017, p. 118). For Almeida (2019), the discourse of racial democracy “[...] is still seen today as an element of the Brazilian identity” (Almeida, 2019, p. 110). Therefore, it is important to keep this rejection of the myth alive in the public debate (M. A. F. Silva & Saraiva, 2020) in order to prevent it from reclaiming its space as the denialists of structural racism in Brazil try to do.

The discourse of racial democracy, points out Sales (2006), has intensified and neutralized racial conflicts, thus creating an illusion of peace and social order based on an alleged cordiality, in which the exchange of favors and gratitude is a means of social obligation. This cordiality is also disguised as a possibility for social mobility and an apparent “standardization” of social ascension. For Sales (2006), this discourse, in fact, establishes a “pact of silence”, which maintains social inequalities and hierarchies, but is defeated in conflict situations, for example. He also considers that conflict breaks the established social order, which leads to racial slurs as a way of reestablishing it (racial social order). According to these studies, the effective role of racism lies not in what is said, but mainly in what is omitted from speech on a daily basis. In this line of research, silence, silencing and the politics of silence (as we exemplify further in this text) lead to reflection on the perpetuation of racism in organizations.

The illusion of a democracy or of natural racial harmony in Brazil is also not sustainable when confronted by the materiality, in which the wage inequality between white and black people is proportional to the absence of black people in top positions in the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches, in universities – especially on the teaching staff –, and on the boards of private organizations (Almeida, 2019; DIEESE, 2021; Ribeiro, 2019b). It is impossible to deny the fact, therefore, that Brazil suffers from structural racism, the roots of which can be traced back to the enslavement era, thus perpetuating a legacy of slavery that, according to Clóvis Moura (1988), consolidates the *status quo* in which opportunities for social ascension and a presence in spaces of power flow “naturally” into white hands.

While many sociologists say that the black population lives with the legacy of slavery, it lives, on the contrary, in the dominant classes that create discriminatory ideologies by which they are able, at the economic, social, cultural and existential levels, to curb the development of a critical black conscience that is capable of elaborating the idea of a new social order and of establishing true racial democracy in Brazil (Moura, 1988, p. 70, our translation).

The racism, which predates slavery and generated it (Ferreira, 2002), found new ways of operating after the abolition of black slavery in Brazil. The same racist ideologies that founded the period of slavery and prevented the social mobility of the black population (Almeida, 2019), “[...] inspired the creation of institutions (laws, policies public policies, standardized practices, etc.) that perpetuate discrimination without it being justified by explicitly racist discourse” (Campos, 2017, p. 5). As it was no longer possible to officially enslave blacks, colonizers relied on science (scientific racism and institutional racism) to justify the existence of second-class citizens who are subject to domination or neglect (Guimarães, 2004).

Gonzalez and Hazenbalg (2022) address the place of black people in Brazil, showing that racist ideologies have spread enough to become a central element in Brazilian society. They also point out that black people in Brazil occupy a distinct and opposite place to white people. The relationship between the dominant (whites) and the dominated (blacks) occupied spaces as its ultimate manifestation. While the dominant occupy spaces that are represented by big houses, upper class suburbs, and places of leisure and entertainment, the dominated occupy spaces as represented by slave quarters, slums, tenements and homelessness. This shows that in addition to the symbolic elements that integrate and determine racist conditions, places (the domination and occupation of spaces) also emerge as elements to perpetuate structural racism. This is one of the most perverse forms of racial segregation, because silencing this process imposes invisible barriers that define who can or cannot have access to certain spaces. This process of spatial segregation, in which places are predetermined, led Faustino and L. M. Oliveira (2022) to return to the concept of xenoracism, and show that black people in Brazil, or even residents of the north and northeast regions of the country, face episodes of racism that are perpetrated by groups that are constituted in the south of the country. This makes them “foreigners,” which prevents their recognition as equals in places that are dominated by whites.

The subject of the place of black people transcends the relationship between the main house and the slave quarters and can be observed in the place occupied by the black population in the entrepreneurial-industrial system. By analyzing some of the numbers obtained from the continuous studies carried out by DIEESE (2021), it is possible to understand the social abyss that exists between blacks and whites. While 6.6% of non-black men are in management positions, only 2.4% of black men are in positions at the same level. Among women, 5.3% of non-black women work in management positions against 1.9% of black women. Regarding compensation, the average monthly income of non-black male workers in the country is R\$ 3484, while that of black men is R\$ 1950; the average monthly earnings of non-black women and black women are R\$ 2660 and R\$ 1573 respectively (DIEESE, 2021), based on data from the second semester of 2020. Research carried out by the Brazilian Association of the Bicycle Sector (Aliança Bike, 2019), with support from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), to investigate the profile of people involved with precarious work delivering food in the city of São Paulo, shows that 71% of them are black (27% dark skin and 44% light skin). As Almeida (2019) points out, however, recognizing that this inequality is the result of structural racism should not be a reason for people engaged in anti-racism movements to give up, but rather they must find new approaches for fighting this form of oppression.

This updated perspective on the relationship between inclusion, diversity, and affirmative action in the face of the silent structural racism present in Brazil is shared by Teixeira, J. S. Oliveira, and Carrieri (2020), authors who denounce how the very concept of diversity and the inclusion of black people in organizations is unachievable, precisely because of the mistaken view of racial democracy that has taken root in Brazilian discourse. According to these authors, the myth of racial democracy blocks the implementation of affirmative policies. This myth also forces the discourse of diversity to use a meritocratic approach and not one of favoritism, making it impossible for a real transformation of the structured racist condition of the labor market. The authors point out that, in the current context, superficial actions, which result in depoliticization, lead to the co-optation of the inclusion agenda.

## LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE, AND THE “TRANSITIVIZATION” OF SILENCE

Approaching language as a starting point for addressing issues of diversity and inclusion requires understanding language representations and the discourse analysis connected to the phenomena of discursiveness and power. To do so we will resort to grammar (Lopes, 1999; M. C. P. S. Silva & Koch, 1994), discourse analysis (Ephratt, 2008; Kurzon, 1998; Orlandi, 2011) and, again, to the construct of structural racism (Almeida, 2019; Ribeiro, 2019b).

Based on linguistics, we can approach silence from positions that range from the smallest elements in grammar, such as morphemes, to broader linguistic devices, such as the repetition or absence of certain terms in large sets of data, as found in the linguistics of *corpus*. The concept of the “zero morpheme” (or null morpheme) in grammar (Lopes, 1999) demonstrates that silence and omissions carry obvious meanings for communication. According to M. C. P. S. Silva and Koch (1994, p. 23): “In the morpheme “*mar*” [“sea” in Portuguese], the absence of the plural mark /-es/ indicates the notion of singular [the plural would be “*mares*”]. [...] while with “*professor*” [“teacher” in Portuguese], the absence of the morpheme /-a/ expresses the notion of masculine [the feminine noun would be “*professora*”]. This observation enables us to understand how silence interferes with human perception of the meanings of language, even when silence is “heard” at the most basic level of language: the analysis of word classes. The zero morpheme draws our attention as a symbol of absence as opposed to a presence that would constitute meaning. Later in this paper we will address absence as a form of silence in discourse.

Discourse analysis is defined by Gill (2002, p. 266) as “[...] a careful, close reading that moves between text and context to examine the content, organization and functions of discourse.” Thus, the act of analyzing discourse is an investigation for identifying the voices and meanings that “speak” alongside the individual and comprise its enunciative act. This does not mean that discourse analysis aims to “guess what the other meant” – this challenge would be impossible for any other discursive agent and may be difficult even for the individual himself/herself (Orlandi, 2012). The objective of discourse analysis is to understand what is said, the origins of that discourse (discursive formation) and which implicit or explicit influences from people, groups or ideologies participated in constructing that statement: a phenomenon called interdiscourse by Fairclough (2001).



In discourse analysis language is not merely a “vehicle” that enables communication, because it is not “transparent.” In fact, it is through language that discourse influences the world and, at the same time, is influenced by it. We can say, therefore, that discourse is a social practice like any other (Batinga-Georgiana, Saraiva, & Pinto, 2019; Fairclough, 2001), embedded with a constitutive character (Orlandi, 2012). In other words, discourse is a creative force that shapes the way individuals socially construct the reality around them through the constitution of social narratives that are gradually adopted by society. As we will see later in this paper, the very processes of silence and silencing, powerful discursive forms though they are, constitute a reality that leads to the formation and perpetuation of a racist and segregated *status quo*.

Before analyzing silence as a constitutive discursive device, we need to differentiate these significant silences from the phenomenon known as “unsaid”. When Orlandi (2011) interpreted a seminal text by Ducrot (1972), he states that the interpretation of silence as implicit meaning – almost as a synonym of “ambiguity” – is a kind of “domestication” by semantics of what is not said. For our present discussion on silencing, we will not consider ambiguities and implicit, “between the lines” meanings as forms of silence, but rather as a means of encoding meanings in a discourse, since people who participate in the same discursive formation are able to interpret them. The unsaid, however, like the silencing of agendas, groups, and individuals – in this case black people – is intrinsically connected to the discussion in this study.

Orlandi (2012) points out that one of the functions of discourse analysis is to establish the relationship between what is said and what is not said. Thus, context, or even ideological relationships, determine what is said. The role of the discourse analyst, therefore, is to understand specifically what is not said within what is said; that means hearing what someone leaves unsaid in what they say. Given the proximity of Orlandi’s work (2012) to Pêcheux’s work, many of these “not said” elements are close to what Pêcheux called “forgetting.” For the author, there are two types of forgetting. The first is enunciative forgetting, in which there is a false impression of the integrity of each enunciation, that is, the enunciation is simply composed by the “voice” of the speaker. Coracini (2005, p. 39) exemplifies this forgetting as the “[...] illusion that the enunciator is the source of the meanings.” The second type of forgetting is ideological, in which there is also the false perception that the ideological element affects the discursive formations. Coracini (2005, p. 35) mentions that this “illusion” is the subject’s belief in a “[...] monosemic possibility of language, and the impossibility of producing meanings outside a given discursive formation.” These types of forgetting corroborate forms of silencing and complicit silence in discursive processes. That is why it is important for discourse analysts to reveal the two types of forgetting as they seek to understand what is not said in discursive formations.

Closing this section of this work, it is important to emphasize the condition of founding silence, considering that what was previously discussed refers to silence in the structure of language and discourse. There is also the condition of deliberate silence. Gurevitch (1989) defined three forms of silence in a conversation when writing his seminal article “Distance and conversation”: the ritualistic silence of dialogue – interlocutors taking turns in a conversation; involuntary interruption in communication that allows the conversation to “fall” into silence; and the voluntary silence of an individual when paying attention to their interlocutor, leading the subject to adopt the position of the “other.” The discursive practices of intentional silence were called “eloquent silence” by Ephratt (2008), which he defines as intentional silences, those voluntarily exercised by an enunciator as a defense mechanism in opposition to a point, or because they have no interest in the subject. This is the opposite of “silencing”, which is silence imposed by an external entity as a form of deprivation of the right to expression.

For Orlandi (2011), silences can be divided into two broader groups: founding silence – intentional, with its own meaning; and silencing – censorship, preventing people and groups from participating in the debate. Kurzon (1998) makes a similar classification, however, with an additional layer. For this author, the silence expressed by an individual can be: unintentional (represented by the noun “silence” – the absence of speech); intentional (represented by the concept of an intransitive verb “to silence”, in the sense of “I silence”); or external (“silence” as a transitive verb, indicating a process of intentional silencing by someone who has symbolic power over others – “The teacher silenced the student”). External, transitivized silence can also be called the politics of silence (Freire, 2011) or silencing (Orlandi, 2011).

At this point it is worth briefly returning to the theme of racial democracy, previously presented as a way of silencing black people through the strategy of silencing debate itself. For M. A. F. Silva and Saraiva (2020, p. 8) “[...] what is considered to be Brazilian society was built on a deliberate process of erasure and violent silencing of the black population, a social group that was, *de facto*, denied the *status* of ‘Brazilian people.’” This form of silence, which leads to the silencing of social groups as a whole, is directly associated with the myth of racial democracy, because it has generated a taboo, leading the whole population to avoid the issue of racism. After all, there is no reason to discuss something that has, presumably, been overcome – or that never existed at all. Along these same lines, Sales (2006) pointed out that the “not said” about racism, which creates a “pact of silence,” makes racist manifestations – which are only possible within a structural context –, eloquent. This means that the enunciation status of any racial insult, slur, or humorous speech (jokes, puns, etc.) is based on this “pact of silence.” It is the conflict generated by the victim of racism that brings out the manifest condition of racism, which breaks with the pact of silence and opens the hidden abyss to reveal racial segregation, hierarchization, and social inequality. In this context, silence must be understood as the crucial component for understanding racism, not only in society, but also in organizations.

## SILENCE AS A FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENT OF RACISM, INEQUALITY AND EXCLUSION IN ORGANIZATIONS

As previously discussed, one of the roles of academia and organizations is to reflect on the adoption of a transformation agenda, which will have the task of “denaturalizing” and “destructuring” these segregationist processes (Teixeira et al., 2021), thereby avoiding the perpetuation of a system of racial stratification in the organizational environment, which divides racial groups into castes of privilege and deprivation in the name of economic gains at any cost (Cox, 1948). In addition to all the forms of silence we have discussed and presented in this paper – and that are manifest in organizations –, it is still possible to observe another form of silence that tends to support the perpetuation of racism, inequality, and exclusion in organizations: complicit silence. Chrispal et al. (2020) conclude that the absence of discussion about the caste structure in India is a mechanism for ensuring the availability of low-cost labor. The authors also mention a possible relationship with issues of modern slavery and warn about the lack of studies in this area. They point out that this structure is a kind of domestication of castes that are considered inferior, which avoids the emergence of any additional conflicts in the organizational environment.

Administrators and scholars of organizational studies, therefore, are both complicit in the inequality practiced against Indian minority groups, because they remain silent in the face of the historical injustices committed against these minorities. Chrispal et al. (2020) also point out that administrators and academics are practicing the politics of silencing, because everyone involved in this process is aware of the structural inequality and most decide not take a stand against it. Ribeiro (2019b, p. 19) gives an example of this complicit silence, namely: “[...] when listening to a racist joke, people laugh or remain silent instead of reprimanding the person who told the joke – silence is an accomplice of violence.” In addition to the silence within organizations, we believe it important to keep our academic community aware of the issues so we can denounce racist practices, instead of remaining silent about them. From a historical perspective, Fischer (2020) recalls the existence of a pact of silence that favors whiteness: it is a form of “racial silence,” a practice that maintains a dialogic relationship with the myth of racial democracy as propagated by Freyre (1981), and which influenced him and was amplified by him.

M. A. F. Silva and Saraiva (2020) take up this indifferent silence – which we call complicit silence in this study – as part of the national culture, which reflects the above-mentioned myth of racial democracy. According to these authors, knowledge of racial matters is silenced in Brazil from preschool days, thus creating a taboo that prevents individuals from seeing themselves as black and claiming their rights as part of this “blackness.” E. J. F. Silva (2019, p. 9) echoes this conclusion, stating that the “[...] belief in a mixed and harmonious nation has, for a long time, sealed the racial debate under the auspices of racial democracy, thereby silencing any reflection on racism.” Racist practices in organizations in Brazil exceed the previously mentioned complicit silence, with consistent administrative practices of coercive silencing occurring regularly. In other words, there is an explicit application of “transitized” silence, a way of silencing people who try to denounce the practice of hate crimes within organizations (Lage & Souza, 2016). The “decephalization” of the myth of racial democracy in the debate on race in Brazil, denounced by Florestan Fernandes and mentioned in the work of M. A. F. Silva and Saraiva (2020), is addressed as an organizational issue because debate is being silenced, as Alves and Galeão-Silva (2004, p. 28) state:

Affirmative actions could become a movement to break domination, because they would break the standardization of the workforce carried out by the organization of production. In reality, this emancipatory potential melts into thin air by the force of the logic of diversity management diluted in technocratic ideology.

Gouvêa (2017) mentions this point and notes that the process of racial segregation within organizations has been largely silenced and that because of meritocracy and racial democracy, it is almost unbelievable that such segregation can still exist in them. This author also observes that “institutional silence” became a vector for the existence of what we discussed earlier: complicit silence, in which usual practices are not questioned. Gouvêa (2017, p. 924) points out that “[...] silence is often more powerful than any word.” Silence and silencing naturalize racial segregation practices, leading to the propagation of equality discourses in unequal contexts, not as a way to confront inequality *per se*, but to reinforce those “meritocratic” conditions that structure the same inequalities. Silveira, Nascimento, and Zalembessa (2021), however, indicate that, since modernity, the concept of meritocracy is nothing but an echo of the social Darwinism of the past, which is used to blame individuals for not being able to generate the wealth that would guarantee their own social mobility, when, in reality, structural issues prevent the low-income population from achieving this social mobility, a situation that particularly affects the black population.

The concepts presented in this work highlight four forms of silence that are analyzed by way of discourse: common silence, as a substantive; intransitive silence; silencing – or “transitivized silence” –; and complicit silence. All these forms of silence have a discursive capacity and, therefore, are constituted by and constitute the world around us. We also understand that the historical cycle of silence, silencing, and complicit silence in organizations might not be responsible for the historical and/or dialectic formation that composes structural racism, but omission and complicity have perpetuated this unacceptable situation. We now present our final considerations and offer some proposals for future studies and corrective actions that can remove Brazilian organizations from the complicit inertia caused by different forms of silence.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The text that introduces this essay is an excerpt from the song “A Carne”, written by Marcelo Yuka, Seu Jorge, and Ulisses Cappelletti (1998), and recorded by music icons who represent blackness in Brazilian culture, such as Elza Soares, Seu Jorge and Farofa Carioca. By stating that “the cheapest meat on the market is black meat”, the lyrics reflect the sad irony of a black population that is largely responsible for most of the manual work carried out in the country, for literally building the houses in which we live, and paving the roads on which we travel, and who also comprise the majority of those who are subjected to precarious working conditions and confined to prisons and mental institutions. This prophetic protest song can serve as inspiration and be echoed when studying discourse in organizational studies.

Our main objective was to present a discussion about silence and silencing through discourse analysis as a possible starting point for studies on prejudice, racism, and exclusion in organizations. In the light of this discussion, we have been able to understand how the politics of silencing is a fundamental part of maintaining a racial *status quo* that naturalizes inequality and exclusion in the organizational environment. Similarly, we understand that language can also be the means of perpetuating a culture of oppression in organizations and the mechanism used to mask this process with a merely cosmetic representativeness or diversity policy, which does not have real inclusion as its ultimate goal: in this case, the inclusion of black people in decision-making processes and in leadership positions.

Based on our research into forms of silence, which have been presented here, and with regard to the historical process of the erasure of the black population, we conclude that academia and organizations need to work actively on their anti-racist policies. We must expose and denounce this social structure as a way of promoting discussion, imposing an anti-silence policy, or even combating complicit silence in relation to the oppressive situations suffered by this silenced group. Studies on racism in organizations should not aim to praise discourse that is echoed in situations of organizational consensus, in which racial democracy and the “pact of silence” prevail. Aiming to balance the conditions of access to goods and positions – masked by the myth of meritocracy –, it is said that diversity and inclusion prevail in most organizations. In addition to discourses on



diversity and inclusion in organizations, research into racism must investigate the underlying structure of the pact of silence, making it clear to society that there is a perpetuation of white people in leadership positions, and that precarious work is carried out predominantly by black people. The data presented in the introduction to this essay were included precisely to reveal the structural racism in organizations. That said, the only possible way to denounce racism is by unveiling the silences, cordiality pacts, silencing actions, complicity, and silence of people in the face of racist manifestations, racial insults, jokes or any other situations that reveal racial segregation.

In view of this context of denouncing racism, in addition to research in organizational studies aimed at establishing a discourse on diversity and inclusion, it would be important to understand what is not said in organizations, their forms and pacts of silence, their silencing processes and their complicit silence. It may seem contradictory, but the central element is making the silence on racism in organizations, or even the “not said”, eloquent. Only then will there be a real and militant struggle to eliminate racism once and for all, not just in organizations, but in society as a whole. We cannot wait for racial insults, jokes, puns, proverbs, etc., which are the spoken and explicit forms of racism, to occur in order to form an anti-racist movement. If the myth of racial democracy, an apparent cordiality in social relations and a pact of silence about racial segregation are at the core of Brazilian society, then studies, research and denunciations must start by investigating silence, the “not said”, the silencing and the complicit silence in racial segregation.

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