

Scaling proximity to whiteness: Racial boundary-making on São Tomé Island

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Marie-Eve Bouchard 

The University of British Columbia, Canada

Abstract

In this article, I examine how scales are produced, stabilized, and challenged through communicative practices, and how these scales organize (since colonial times) the racial groups that form Santomean society. I argue that the historical distinctive status of the Forros and the prestigious status of the Portuguese language are influenced by different scaling practices that are intertwined and interrelated. I demonstrate that it is the Forros' imagined and historical proximity to whiteness that bestow them racial privilege, and that allows them to maintain their position of social and political power in the country. In other words, their power results from proximity to Whiteness.

Keywords

Raciolinguistic ideologies, scaling, whiteness, Portuguese, creole, São Tomé Island

Introduction

I first went to São Tomé Island to investigate variation and change in the Santomean variety of Portuguese. Although language was central to my study, it quickly became obvious that race was unavoidable. When I was living in the southern part of São Tomé Island near a palm tree plantation where many Santomeans work, race would sometimes come up during conflicts. One day,

Corresponding author:

Marie-Eve Bouchard, Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies, Vancouver Campus, #715 - 1873 East Mall, Buchanan Tower, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z1, Canada.

Email: me.bouchard@ubc.ca

Felipe, a mixed-race Santomean, chief of a group of workers on the plantation, explained to me how mixing workers from different racial groups is necessary to ensure work efficiency. That day, one of the Cabo Verdean workers got angry because he did not want to do the task that was being asked. He told Felipe that this would not happen if he was with other fellow Cabo Verdeans, because then they would have numeric power and would leave. Felipe explained it to me:

Excerpt 1. Racial affiliation at work

Felipe: *Há um que disse “se fosse só cabo-verdiano, isso já resolvia” quer dizer que todo mundo iria embora, mas como havia lá mistura de raça, havia angolár, tonga, forro lá a fazer trabalho, quer dizer que uns lá não dependia de outro, se cabo-verdiano tá a ir embora cabo-verdiano vai e forro continua a trabalhar ou seja angolár continua a trabalhar.*

‘One of the workers said “if we were only Cabo Verdeans, this would be resolved already” meaning that everybody would have left, but because there was a mix of different races, there were Angolares, Tongas, Forros working, so no one was depending on the other, if a Cabo Verdean leaves, he leaves but the Forro will keep working and the Angolar will keep working.’

This narrative indicates that race is significant in the structuring of the workforce on São Tomé Island and that racial affiliation is still important. It also implicitly suggests that the organization of the actual Santomean society is marked by its colonial past, and understanding it becomes clearer when we examine it from the lens of white supremacy as a historical system that has marked colonized people around the world.

In this paper, I examine the construction and maintenance of racial boundaries as perceived by locals on São Tomé Island through the lens of raciolinguistic ideologies (Rosa and Flores, 2017) and scale-making (Carr and Lempert, 2016). It is based on the fundamental idea that discourse practices are an important indicator of wider social and cultural structures. Language has a key role to play in the racial boundary-making processes, as it is a vehicle for the ideologies that get attached to racialized subjects. It is through language that racial ideologies are produced and reproduced, perpetuated and resisted (Schieffelin et al., 1998).

Most Santomeans use the word *raça* ‘race’ to refer to the different sociocultural groups that form Santomean society, as Felipe did in his narration. On São Tomé Island, the terms race and ethnic group have similar meanings (Areosa Feio, 2008). In the literature, the relationship between race and ethnicity is complex, and the boundaries between the two concepts tend to be blurred (Ericksen, 2010). Following the Santomean practice, I choose to discuss the perceptions Santomeans have about the different sociocultural groups that form Santomean city in terms of race. I do so by keeping in mind that Santomeans use the term race

in a way that correspond to ethnicity as defined by Barth (1969) and many other authors in the western literature (cf. Banks, 1996; Fought, 2006; Jenkins, 2008). Barth (1969) writes that an emphasis on ascription as the critical feature of ethnic groups is essential. The author considers ethnic groups to be the product of self-ascription and identification. In his view, ethnic groups are interdependent, and their identity lies in processes of inclusion and exclusion. The social boundaries of an ethnic group and their maintenance are key to understanding ethnicity and belonging.

The five main sociocultural groups in São Tomé and Príncipe (of which four appear in Excerpt 1) are Forros, the *filhos da terra* ‘children of the land’; Angolares, descendants of slave maroons who escaped from the plantations and formed their own community at the beginning of the colonization; Principenses, the natives of Príncipe Island; Cabo Verdeans, who came to São Tomé and Príncipe from the beginning of the nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century as *contratados* ‘contract labor’; and Tongas, the children of intermarriage between the foreign workers (coming mainly from Cabo Verde¹, Angola, and Mozambique) who also came to São Tomé Island as *contratados*. When discussing race with Santomeans, little was said about Principenses, mainly because they live on a neighboring island where most Santomeans have never been, and about Tongas, probably because they gradually assimilated to Forros after the independence of the country (Hagemeijer, 2018). Principenses and Tongas are also underrepresented in São Tomé City and its surroundings, which was the main field site for this research. Therefore, this paper focuses upon perceptions among Forros, the largest group of São Tomé Island, of the island’s three main groups of São Tomé Island (Forros, Angolares, and Cabo Verdeans). However, these taxonomies refer to a historical and static representation of the sociocultural groups of the island; in reality, the boundaries between these groups are blurred, mainly because of interracial unions and mobility in the country. Also, although the local discourse and the literature often represent Forros as a homogenous group, they are highly stratified in terms of social status. But even so, Santomeans continue to produce racial boundaries that divide their society into its main historical sociocultural groups and that represent each sociocultural group as homogenous. This paper is interested in the many ways that Santomeans create and re-produce ideas of racial separateness despite living in a context of social mixture and in a racially homogeneous society. Note that skin color is not necessarily a feature that makes it possible to distinguish sociocultural groups in São Tomé, and the Forros’ superior status is not related to a lighter skin color; in fact, most Forros are just as black as most Angolares, and have darker skin than many Cabo Verdeans, which are often characterized by their lighter skin color. Hence, this article explores the processes that favored the maintenance of Forros in a position of power, as well as their so-called distinctive racial status, in a country where most people are black.

To investigate racial boundary-making processes on São Tomé Island, I explore the contrast between Portuguese and creole languages, and the use of this contrast to scale the sociocultural groups that form Santomean society. By scaling, I refer to

a social practice and process that social actors rely upon to organize, interpret, and make sense of the world around them (Carr and Lempert, 2016). The social process of scaling is conceived and practiced through discursive practice. Scale-making is ideological and evaluative in nature (Gal, 2016); it is a relation procedure that necessarily involves comparison and may lead to scaled hierarchies. All dimensions of social life can be scaled, including people, race, and language. In the case of São Tomé Island, I focus on scales constructed through racializing discourses and the social value assigned to each sociocultural group through scale-making practices. In this article, I discuss Forros' characterization, categorization, and hierarchization of the local sociocultural groups according to different scaled dimensions. I demonstrate that Portuguese is produced as a cultural emblem (Agha, 2007) and that the circulation of that emblem perpetuates raciolinguistic ideologies and contributes to processes of social hierarchization. I argue that these linguistic resources enable Forros to circulate stances of intellectual, moral, and cultural superiority in relation to the other sociocultural groups. In other words, Forros use Portuguese to align with whiteness (a position of power that I describe better in the next section). I argue that the stances demonstrated by Forros show a parallel with the raciolinguistic ideologies held by the Portuguese during the colonial period. The negative evaluations held by Forros toward other sociocultural groups allow them to maintain their historical, political, economic, and social power. My objective is to unpack how scales of race and language become associated and serve as basic to position the Forros and the Portuguese language "on top" of scalar distinctions and processes.

Very few anthropological studies have been done on race and ethnicity in São Tomé and Príncipe. Exceptions to this include Areosa Feio (2008, 2018), Nascimento (2013), and Seibert (2006, 2015). The current study stands out by examining racialization, i.e. the processes of ascribing racial meaning (to people, languages, practices, etc.), rather than race, and does so from a raciolinguistic perspective. Pierre (2013: xii) stresses that Africa and its people are disregarded in the current discussions about race, although the continent "could not represent a more racialized location". Therefore, I seek to counterbalance this tendency by examining the Santomean practices of racialization as part of a global space that is marked by the legacies of European hegemony and white supremacy. This article is a contribution to the emerging literature on raciolinguistic ideologies, focusing on scale-making through racializing discourse in a post-colonial society.

The aim of the article is to answer the following research questions: (1) How are social scales assembled, reinforced, and contradicted in ways that allow the perpetuating of raciolinguistic ideologies and the production and circulation of a language as a cultural emblem? (2) What signs do people use to position themselves and others and to accomplish social actions, such as inclusion and exclusion, categorization, and racialization? (3) How is whiteness as a global historical and contemporary structural position being enacted and reproduced among non-white populations? This analysis demonstrates that the Portuguese language is used as a sign to mark a distinction between Forros and the other sociocultural

groups, paralleling raciolinguistic ideologies from the colonial times, and pointing to a continued rearticulation of whiteness as a structural position. Creole can also be used to create a distance between Santomeans and non-Santomeans.

The article is structured in four main parts. In the first section, I offer an overview of the complexity of sociocultural groups, social hierarchies, and power in past and current São Tomé and Príncipe, grounded in its colonial past. The second section briefly presents my fieldwork experience as well as the methodology used regarding research participants and data collection. In the third and main section, I discuss the ongoing processes of racialization and hierarchization on São Tomé Island. I do so by unpacking two scaled dimensions that contrast Portuguese with creole languages, and European-ness (or European-like) with descentance of slaves. I argue that the interrelation of these dimensions hierarchizes the local sociocultural groups and situates Forros as superior. Finally, the last section is a wrap-up of the most important findings and it discusses proximity to whiteness as a postcolonial reconfiguration of power.

Sequels of the Portuguese colonization: Examining Santomean society from a raciolinguistic perspective

Following Rosa and Flores (2017), I perceive whiteness as a historical position, and I emphasize that racial hegemonic perceptions can be enacted by both white and non-white individuals. This article takes interest in the reproduction of hierarchy via proximity to whiteness among non-white groups. Whiteness is a social construction that represents a position of power (Allen, 1975; Frankenberg, 1993; Hill, 1998; Trechter and Bucholtz, 2001). It refers to ideologies that result in an unequal distribution of power and privilege based on skin colour. But whiteness is not a fixed structure; it is constantly produced and reproduced, and it varies in its local manifestations. Trechter and Bucholtz (2001: 5) define whiteness as “a set of dynamic strategies that draw on available resources to achieve and maintain racialized power.” The narratives about being Black on São Tomé Island are situated in relation to whiteness. Most scholars interested in race situate their understanding of Blackness in terms of power relations and as being constructed intersectionally with class, gender, age, and other social identities (Collins, 2004; Dei, 2017; and many others). Throughout this paper, and in this section more specifically, Santomean society is examined from a raciolinguistic perspective in order to situate the construction of sociocultural groups in São Tomé and Príncipe within a broader literature on the consequences of colonization on creole societies (cf. Migge and Léglise, 2007; Vigouroux, 2017) and the internalizing of a colonialist privileging of whiteness by non-whites (cf. Fanon, 1967; Du Bois 1903).

Scholars in the United States have been developing raciolinguistics as a new field of inquiry (Alim et al., 2017; Rosa and Flores, 2017). A raciolinguistic perspective begins with the premise that language and race are inextricably interrelated. It seeks to examine how language and race are co-constructed, in a world

shaped by European colonialism and white supremacy. It explores the ongoing processes of racial and linguistic formations within a broader historical, political, economic, and sociocultural framework. According to Rosa and Flores (2017) and Flores (2013), the construction and naturalization of the concepts of race and language, and their hierarchical positioning, were part of a broader colonialism project that positioned Europeaness as superior to non-Europeaness. I believe that present-day raciolinguistic ideologies held on São Tomé Island must be situated within this colonial history. These ideologies privilege Europeaness over non-Europeaness, whiteness over Blackness, Portuguese over creole languages, and purity over mixing.

The islands of São Tomé and Príncipe, in the archipelago of the Gulf of Guinea, were taken into Portuguese control in the early 1470's and remained a colonial society during five hundred years (until 1975). During this rule, the Portuguese colonized the islands twice. The first wave of colonization was related to sugar production and slave traffic, and created the actual creole society. The enslaved Africans for the plantations were brought from Benin (Niger Delta), Gabon, and the kingdoms of Kongo and Angola (Hagemeyer 2011; Rougé 2004). This context of enslavement for the sake of capital accumulation led to linguistic contacts from which appeared the first forms of creoles in the Gulf of Guinea (cf. Ferraz, 1976; Hagemeyer, 2011). The prosperity of the plantation economy established by the Portuguese only lasted seventy years (Caldeira, 1997). The enslaved Africans who had been freed by their masters were called "forros". These Forros participated actively in the formation of the creole society. Around the end of the sixteenth century, the Forros climbed in the social scale of the São Tomé Island by becoming landowners and slave owners at a time when the Portuguese were losing interest in São Tomé and Príncipe. As a matter of fact, the Portuguese were practically absent from the sixteenth century (due to the decay of the sugar cane industry) to mid-nineteenth century, and the creoles of the islands had time to develop into full-fledged languages (Hagemeyer, 2018). During these two centuries, the Forros became the most powerful social group on São Tomé Island (Seibert, 2006). The Forro elite is still today in position of political and social power in the country.

On the return of the Portuguese to São Tomé Island during the second wave of colonization (1850-1975), which was associated to coffee and cocoa production, the native Forros held a position of power and refused wage labor on the plantations, which they considered degrading and beneath their free-man status (Seibert, 2006). This entailed structural changes that were significant for local developments, including the importation of foreign African workers. The Portuguese colonizers had to bring labor from abroad (the *contratados*), mainly from Cabo Verde, Angola, and Mozambique. Slavery had been abolished, but this was in effect a continuation of it in several respects. In Angola for example, slave traders were bringing caravans of slaves to the coast to be "freed", but then these slaves would be hired and sent to São Tomé Island (Hodges and Newitt, 1988). During the twentieth century, tensions between Forros and the Portuguese authorities were rising. These led to the creation of MLSTP (*Movimento de Libertação de*

São Tomé e Príncipe ‘Movement for the Liberation of São Tomé and Príncipe’) in 1972 and the independence of the country in 1975.

Nowadays, and most probably since the independence of the country, there is a growing awareness of a common identity, a national and unified Santomean identity (Bouchard, 2019). Race is not as openly and frequently discussed on São Tomé Island as it is in Brazil and the United States, for example. It does not come up in the news, racist comments are not frequently heard on the streets, and public racial conflicts seem non-existent. In fact, Santomeans often and proudly highlight how peacefully the sociocultural groups live together. The sociocultural groups on São Tomé Island are not as clear-cut as the existent literature suggests, and they are not as geographically separated as they might have been in the past. But traditionally, Forros live in and around the capital (São Tomé City) and in the northern part of the island, while the Angolares mainly live in the southern and most disfavored part of the island. Cabo Verdeans are more difficult to locate geographically, but many still live in the former plantations. Local discourse dissociates Cabo Verdeans from Forros and even from the Santomean society; but in reality, this is far from the truth, as racial mixing is a central element of Santomean society even if the local and racializing discourses keep the sociocultural groups apart.

Present study

One day, as I was interviewing a research participant in her backyard, a neighbor with her baby on her laps was observing us. When I approached them after the interview, the baby started to cry and seemed afraid of me. *É a primeira vez que ela vê uma branca?* ‘Is it the first time she sees a white person?’ I asked the mother, as I had been told this before. *Ela tem medo de pessoas de cor!* ‘She’s afraid of people of color!’ she answered, laughing. In a country where the majority of the population is Black, Blackness is unmarked, and whiteness is marked. “Person of color” refers to my markedness. As ethnographer, one wants to melt away into the masses, or at least, to avoid being an outsider. That did not work out, as there are few white people on São Tomé Island. According to the last census, the resident foreign population in São Tomé and Príncipe is 1.5% (INE, 2012). Among that 1.5%, 81% are Africans, 11.8% are Portuguese (n = 310) and 3.2% are Asians. Most white people in São Tomé and Príncipe work in embassies, NGO’s, United Nations, private and family businesses, schools, cultural centers, and churches. Whites on São Tomé Island have no political power, but most are economically comfortable from a Santomean point of view. Being a white woman on São Tomé Island was an important challenge that sometimes appeared to me as a limit. There is no escape from this, and I was constantly reminded that I am an outsider. But as a white woman alone, I was granted many privileges. White people are respected and well treated on São Tomé Island, and opportunities may arise more often and easily than they would for Santomeans. I was often called *branca* ‘white girl’ or *brasileira* ‘Brazilian’ (because of my accent) on the street – which did not bother me, as it was an opening door for me to stop and chat with the person. Being called

branca does not have a pejorative connotation, and most Santomeans are not resentful towards the Portuguese for colonization. In a conversation with me about his experience as a Black man in Portugal, Oscar confirmed the perception I had about my whiteness and explained to me that being called *branca* in São Tomé is usually positive: *Se um europeu me chama preto, eu me chateio. [...] No teu caso já notou que “branco branco branco”, mas sempre no sentido positivo. ‘If a European calls me Black, I get mad. [...] But in your case, you’ve heard them call you “white white white”, but always in a positive way.’* In this interview excerpt, Oscar positions (his) Blackness in relation to (my) whiteness, highlights my privileged position as a white individual in São Tomé, and stresses that being a Black individual in a white-majority country (Portugal) is a different experience – as his black body is not perceived as conferring upon him a privileged position in Europe.

Discussing the different local sociocultural groups during my interviews was easy and often led to interesting discussions. However, discussing the Black and white distinction was challenging; because I am white, my participants probably did not feel comfortable to discuss the stereotypes associated with whites, or to repeat what people say. But I also ask myself: Was I really open and comfortable to discussing the Black and white distinction with them? For them to open up to me, I tried to eliminate all possible barriers between us, so I might have unconsciously avoided highlighting the skin color difference between my interviewees and myself, conscious of the historical background of this distinction. I was also genuinely more interested in understanding the complexity of the native sociocultural groups of São Tomé and Príncipe than the traditional Black and white division. But a postcolonial society is invariably a racialized one (Pierre, 2013), and whiteness is unavoidable as it is central to the identity formation of the sociocultural groups of São Tomé Island. A lot of the information I got regarding whiteness comes from informal racializing discourses. In fact, discourses that do not focus on race are also important to the production and reproduction of racial marking (Dick and Wirtz, 2011). I can think of many instances where my whiteness was discursively constructed as a sign of privilege. The most obvious example come from children who would constantly ask for candies (*doce doce!* ‘sweets, sweets!’), and the ones who were a bit older and brave enough to ask for more would say things like *Ó branca, nada pa mim?* ‘Hey white lady, nothing for me?’, or *Dá cinco conto* ‘Give me five *dobras*’. Children in São Tomé learn at a very young age that being white means being rich and privileged. This belief is constantly reinforced by the white tourists who bring candies, school supplies, clothes, and gifts to distribute in the villages around the island. My race did have an important impact on my interactions and relations with Santomeans, and this impact needs to be taken into consideration.

This study focuses on the local sociocultural groups, which are Black, but the discussion is framed within the context of white supremacy. This article is a qualitative study of the Forros’ discursive strategies to construct sociocultural groups and maintain their distinctions in term of race. It is based on fifteen months

(between June 2015 and March 2017) of ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured interviews on São Tomé Island. I continued to live on São Tomé Island after my fieldwork research was completed, for a total of two years in the country. Observations made through participant observation were integral to this study in order to understand group dynamics as well as community and local practices that are important to participants. I did a total of 120 interviews around the country, but most of them were conducted with Santomeans who identify as Forros, born and raised on São Tomé Island, and residing in the capital or its surroundings. During the interview, I elicited comments on language, race, identity, and localness to arrive at a clearer picture of the ideologies underlying linguistic choices and racial perceptions within the speech community. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese. The framework I use combine a raciolinguistic approach with scale-making and discourse analysis. In societies where ideas of race are important and relevant to people, those ideas must be studied as part of local discourses on race, as it is in these discourses that the knowledge related to the construction of racial hierarchies and maintenance of inequalities lies.

Scaled dimensions of a racial boundary-making process

Gal (2016) considers that scaling entails the instantiation of models that are used for comparing all sorts of entities. She focuses on three models: taxonomies, standards, and fractal recursivities. Taxonomies refer to categorization, to “distinguishable, mutually exclusive kinds” (2016: 110). Example of taxonomy would be the classification of Portuguese and Forro as two different languages, or the classification of Forros, Angolares, and Cabo Verdeans as distinct groups. Standards refer to conventional units for measurement, and they are used for comparison and evaluation. An example of this is the use of European Portuguese as a written standard at school in São Tomé and Príncipe. According to Gal, taxonomies and standards are a-perspectival, meaning that they are so embedded in our everyday life that they are no longer considered to be measurement or evaluation. Fractal recursivities involve “the projection of an opposition, salient as some level of relationship, onto some other level” (Irvine and Gal, 2000: 38). In other words, the contrast that exists in some opposition between entities reappears or persists at some other level. Fractal recursivities are perspectival and have the potential to contradict the a-perspectival models. Instances of fractal recursivity, and how they reinforce or contradict the hegemonic taxonomies and standards, will be discussed to demonstrate the positioning of Forros on top of the social pyramid via their language use and alignment with whiteness.

Scaling of social status

Racial and linguistic affiliations are central to understanding social stratification and power on São Tomé Island, but they are also intertwined with other factors. Ascription of social status on the island is based on different factors, such as

sociocultural (or racial) affiliation, level of education, occupation, family name, nativeness, and neighborhood, among others. A raciolinguistic perspective is interested in the broader political and economic picture that the co-naturalization of race and language fits in, together with social classes. Rosa and Flores (2017: 638) argue for the adoption of a critical “raceclass” approach that places the co-constitution of racial and class hierarchies into the actual global political and economic world that have been benefiting the maintenance of a white elite through the marginalization of racialized populations since European colonialism. The actual Santomean society is in many ways a mirror of its historical and colonial society, as the local sociocultural groups reproduce practices associated with Portuguese colonizers. White supremacy is reflected among the black populations of São Tomé Island, and the construction and maintenance of the sociocultural groups needs to be understood in relation to this practice. Social status is scaled according to *proximity* to whiteness (and not necessarily whiteness): Forros are on a higher position than Angolares and Cabo Verdeans.

The choice of speaking Portuguese instead of creole to mark a higher social status, or a status closer to whiteness, might have come from a small class of Forros that people called *assimilados* ‘assimilated’ after the beginning of the twentieth century. This is what Tomás explained to me after I asked him about the origin of the undergoing language shift (from Forro to Portuguese) on the island:

Excerpt 2. The *assimilados* trying to be like whites.

Tomás: *Havia uma pequena classe. . . era chamada os assimilados. Os assimilados eram alguns atores da classe média*

Marie-Eve: *Uh huh*

Tomás: *que se assemelhavam aos brancos, procuravam assemelhar-se aos brancos, e não falavam. . . evitavam de falar o crioulo entre si, portanto procuravam falar. . . procuravam falar e comportar-se como os brancos.*

Tomás: ‘There was a small class. . . it was called the assimilated. The assimilated were people from the middle class

Marie-Eve: *Uh huh*

Tomás: mimicking whites, they were trying to be like whites, and they didn’t speak. . . they avoided speaking creole with each other, so they tried to speak. . . they tried to speak and behave like whites.’

In his story, Tomás has a discourse of inauthenticity; he talks about the *assimilados* “trying” to be like whites, and “mimicking” whites. However, he also points out to the use of the Portuguese language as a tool used by the *assimilados* to access, or to try to access, a social status similar to the one held by whites during the second wave of colonization. As suggested by Hagemeyer (2018), it is likely that Forros belonging to the higher social classes that had direct contact with the Portuguese were bilingual. But speaking Portuguese among Santomeans might have been read

as a mimetic practice at first, as “fake”. Bhabha (1984: 130) describes mimicry as “almost the same but not quite”, and specifies that mimicry in a colonial context might be described better as “almost the same but not white”. Realness and fake-ness are outcomes of social processes through which people and things get read as real or fake (Reyes, 2017). The linguistic practices of the *assimilados* as described by Tomás is formulated as inauthentic, but Portuguese then started to expand; it was the dominant lingua franca on the island in the twentieth century, and Forro parents started to speak Portuguese to their children. In the next excerpt, Hortância, a Forro from the upper-middle class, explains how the Portuguese language came to be associated with Forros. She does so in the middle of a long discussion in which she discusses the differences between the different sociocultural groups of the island.

Excerpt 3. Forros perceived as superior.

Hortância: *O Forro, sempre achou que é superior porque muit... o Forro lidou muito com portugueses, com branco, porque o escravo, o Forro não aceitou a escravatura, [...] automaticamente ele posicionou-se como... superior*

Marie-Eve: *Ok*

Hortância: *E ele posicionou-se como superior ele fala português como branco para o branco vê-lo em pés de igualdade. Falamos igual, somos igual, somos intelectuais.*

Hortância: ‘Forros always thought they were superior [ok] because a lo... Forros always dealt with the Portuguese, with whites, because the slave, Forros didn’t accept slavery, [...] automatically they positioned themselves as... superior

Marie-Eve: *Ok*

Hortância: If they position themselves as superior then they speak Portuguese as whites for whites to see them on an equal footing. We speak the same, we are the same, we are intellectuals.’

Hortância positions Forros as “superior” to the other sociocultural groups in São Tomé, and “equal” to whites. Such a discourse of superiority to describe the position of Forros in the society is very common among Santomeans. It usually refers to Forros as a homogeneous group, but the linguistic practices of the minority of educated Forros certainly differed from the vast majority of Forros. Here again, one way to show superiority to other groups on the island and equality with whites is the use of the Portuguese language, when Hortância says ‘we speak the same, we are the same’. In this sense, speaking Portuguese is a crucial sign of power; it shows equality with whites, it is a manifestation of whiteness. During colonial times and post-independence, the Portuguese language came to be construed as an emblem of superiority and whiteness. Therefore, speaking Portuguese

(and avoiding to use creole) was a way for Forros to set themselves apart from the other sociocultural groups, to establish and exhibit their privileged status. The internalizing of whiteness among non-white individuals in colonial and post-colonial societies has a long history (cf. Bhabha, 1984; Du Bois, 1903; Fanon, 1967), and this study of the Santomean society can be situated within this work.

Excerpts 2 and 3 present instances of fractal recursivity that fortify the indexical relationship between proximity to whiteness, the use of Portuguese, and social power. But it is also possible to develop scalar perspectives that reorient preestablished scales. On São Tomé Island, the processes that situate Cabo Verdeans (i.e., Santomeans that identify as Cabo Verdeans) at the bottom rungs of the social scales challenge the understanding of racial hierarchization. In fact, although proximity to whiteness is valued on São Tomé Island, lighter skin color does not mean higher social status. This differs from what Roth-Gordon (2016) has observed in Brazil, where people with lighter skin color can associate with whiteness and benefit from this racial affiliation. The fact that Cabo Verdeans are characterized by their lighter skin color and do speak Portuguese is mostly irrelevant to their positioning on the social scale of the island. These Cabo Verdeans are descendants of immigrant workers who came after the abolition of slavery, when Portugal needed a new work force on the islands. During colonial times, Cabo Verdeans were seen by Forros as the new slaves (Bouchard, 2017). This perception was maintained until today through racializing discourses that keep them apart from the sociocultural groups that were formed at the beginning of colonial times. Even at a political level, Cabo Verdean creole was included in the census for the first time in 2012, although there are more speakers of Cabo Verdean creole (8.5%) in the country than speakers of Angolar (6.6%) and Lung'ie (1.0%) (INE, 2012). This suggests that there is a discourse of authenticity and primordality – the original residents (Forros and Angolares) are perceived as the most authentic. In the same discussion with Hortância about the different sociocultural groups of the island, she explained how Forros viewed Cabo Verdeans after their arrival in São Tomé:

Excerpt 4. Cabo verdeans perceived as the “new slaves”.

Hortância: *Os cabo-verdianos se quer vinham mais da rota dos escravos*

Marie-Eve: *Uh huh, uh huh*

Hortância: *Passando por aqui, ficando aqui, então demarcam-se, pronto, eles são escravos, falam muito seu crioulo, trazem as suas origens, e por aí fora, pronto. [...] Cabo-verdiano que, era quê? Era trabalhador de roça, era trabalhador de machim, você era o quê? Não era nada!*

Hortância: ‘Cabo Verdeans came from the slaves’ route

Marie-Eve: Uh huh, uh huh

Hortância: Passing by here, staying here, so they were different, period, they are slaves, they speak their creole a lot, they bring their origins, and

all that, period. [...] What were Cabo Verdians? They were workers on the plantations, workers with a machete, what were they? They were nothing!

The raciolinguistic ideologies held and transmitted in the Forros' discourse position Cabo Verdeans as low in the social hierarchies of the island; as Hortância reports, they are being compared to "slaves" and considered to be "nothing". Being considered a slave in a society that broke free from slavery is charged of denigrating and depreciative meaning. This indicates that even if Cabo Verdeans are an important part of the formative populations of the actual society, there is a discursive effort to keep them apart, to keep their social status low, and to diminish their role in the development of the Santomean society. I consider that the fractal shift here is contradicted, or blocked (Gal, 2016), by a taxonomy of authenticity or nativeness. The non-native status of Cabo Verdeans (although they have been on São Tomé Island for more than a century now) blocks their social mobility, even if they have a light skin color and speak Portuguese. This process of blockage is comparable to Fanon's (1967) description of his experience in France, where speaking French was not enough to be considered a Frenchman.

Scaling of language choice

Language choice on São Tomé Island is hierarchically scaled, with the Portuguese language perceived as more prestigious and the creole languages, as less prestigious. According to Pontes (2006), during the second wave of colonization, not speaking Portuguese was considered uncivilized although access to this language was limited. Over time, the Portuguese language came to index the social identity of the colonizers; Portuguese became a marker of powerful, educated, and elegant people. Bouchard (2018) has demonstrated how, through a process of iconization, Portuguese became an icon of people with a higher socioeconomic status, and the creoles became an icon of the people with a lower socioeconomic status. These racial ideologies of the colonial slave masters have been reproduced on São Tomé Island among local groups since then, with the Forros choosing Portuguese to show their distinctive status.

Forros and Angolares are the two first sociocultural groups that were formed on São Tomé Island at the beginning of colonial times, when Africans were brought from the continent to work as slaves. Both groups have a similar African origin, but they believe themselves to be genetically different and emphasize their different historical, cultural, and linguistic background to mark their identity. Forros consider themselves to be superior, thanks to the blood of the Portuguese who cohabited with their ancestors and favored intermarriage unions in the sixteenth century. The Portuguese colonizers perceived Forros (and most probably all Santomeans) as linguistically deficient, although Forros were presumably highly competent in their native creoles. The creoles were spoken by enslaved Africans and their descendants, whom the Portuguese considered to be inferior. In parallel, the

ideas about the languages were transferred to the speakers of those languages. This perception of linguistic difference can be understood with the notion of listening subject (Inoue, 2003). Inoue (2003) and Rosa and Flores (2017) argue for a theory of indexical inversion: “rather than the common analytical use of indexicality to understand how linguistic signs index social categories, indexical inversion considers how language ideologies associated with social categories produce the perception of linguistic signs” (Rosa and Flores, 2017: 628). In other words, this suggests that raciolinguistic ideologies produce racialized language practices that listeners perceive as pertaining to racialized subjects. This means the listener is central to the evaluation of linguistic practices – what matters is not so much the linguistic competence of the speaker, but rather the ideologies held by the listener. Santomean participants have reported that during the colonial times, Portuguese colonizers perceived Santomeans to be linguistically deficient. This captures a phenomenon that was a common practice during colonial times: the hierarchizing of languages and marginalizing of speakers of the minorized languages, or of the languages not considered to be in power. In fact, colonial ideologies justified linguistic violence in the name of racial and language superiority (Phillipson, 1992). Portuguese disvalued Forro and the other creoles of the islands, and this belief was later on reinforced by Forros themselves. Starting around the middle of the twentieth century, Forro parents forbid their children to speak Forro (Bouchard, 2017; Hagemeyer, 2018). This initiated a language shift on the island, which is resulting today in the threatening of Forro (Simons and Fennig, 2018). According to the last census (INE, 2012), Forro is spoken by 36.2% of the population, and Portuguese, by 98.4%.

Colonialism in São Tomé created racial and language hierarchies that positioned whites (and their descendants) and European languages as superior to non-whites and non-European languages. A manifestation of these hierarchies is presented in Excerpt 5, in which Anita (the owner of the house where I was living) explains that she uses different language practices to communicate with the workers she hired to repair and renovate her house.

Excerpt 5. Marking hierarchies through the use of language.

- Anita: *Quando falamos com um... um grupo mais baixo do que nós, nós temos que ir terra a terra*
- Marie-Eve: *Uh huh*
- Anita: *Terra a terra como quem tá a educar uma criancinha pequeninha [...] arranjam frases pequenas mmhm*
- Marie-Eve: *Uh huh*
- Anita: *E claras não é, por exemplo quero falar com uma pessoa menos... com um trabalhador que acho que percebe pouco, não vou buscar uma linguagem muito difícil para lhe dizer “olha que... olha que tú estás lá encima mas se tú não segurar bem podes cair”. [...] Às vezes, quando quero qualquer coisinha assim digo logo “bô ká kiê” quer dizer “tú vais cair”*

- Author: *Ah, às vezes fala crioulo?*
 Anita: *Fal... é! Olha “bô ká kiêôô” “vais cair” hein*
 Author: *Ah, ok, não sabia que f...*
 Anita: *(risos) eu falo.*
- Anita: ‘When we talk to a... a group lower than us, we have to go *terra a terra*
 Author: Uh huh
 Anita: *Terra a terra* as if you were educating a small child [...] we make small sentences mmhm
 Author: Uh huh
 Anita: And simple, right, for example, I want to talk to someone less... to a worker that I think understands little, I’m not gonna use a difficult language to tell him “Look... look, you are up there but if you don’t hold yourself well you might fall”. [...] Sometimes, when I want whatever little thing, I just say *bô ká kiê* which means “you’re gonna fall”
 Author: Ah, sometimes you speak creole?
 Anita: I do... yes! Look *bô ká kiêôô* “you’ll fall” hey
 Author: Ah, ok, I didn’t know you speak Fo...
 Anita: (laughs) I do.’

Anita uses the expression *terra a terra* to refer to social positioning and alignment; this expression is used when one positions themselves at the same level as the other to transmit information. But it is only used when referring to alignment with someone from a lower class. This means that a construction worker, for example, who adapts to the speech of a house owner, is not considered to speak *terra a terra*. But as in Excerpt 5, when Anita (house owner, Forro from the upper-middle class) adapts her speech to align with the speech of the construction workers (Forros and mixed-race Santomeans from a lower social class), this is considered speaking *terra a terra*. Anita explains metadiscursively how she speaks *terra a terra*: she speaks as if she “were educating a small child”, she makes “small” and “simple” sentences, and she does not “use a difficult language”. She gives an example of a more “difficult language” to tell a worker to be careful, using what she considers to be proper Portuguese (‘Look... look, you are up there but if you don’t hold yourself well you might fall’). Then she switches to creole to explain how she actually speaks to workers when she wants “whatever little thing” to be done. Speaking creole with them is presented as a faster and simpler way to be understood. Note that these workers, with whom I spoke Portuguese all the time, are native speakers of Santomean Portuguese. By telling me that she sometimes speaks to them in creole, Anita accomplishes a social action of categorization and exclusion. She marks their (lower) social status, and marks hers at the same time. In this sense, Alice is taking a stance (cf. Jaffe, 2009; Kockelman, 2004); a social action that allows her to share her view of the workers with the listener (myself). In doing so, she positions the use of Portuguese higher on the social scale than the use of creole, and she reinforces the language hierarchy that has already been established.

Excerpt 5 is an instance of fractal recursivity. The contrasting categories “white speaker of Portuguese” and “Black speaker of creole” resulting from the colonial times are rescaled, and a new indexical relationship between the Portuguese language and power is created among Santomeans themselves. This scalar difference reinforces the high social status of the Portuguese language. However, here again, fractal recursivities can be used in ways that contradict or reverse the established taxonomies and standards. An example of this comes from an encounter with Vera, a Santomean from a lower socioeconomic class. I had just interviewed Filipa (Vera’s neighbor), and we walked together to a central place in the neighborhood where women wash their clothes. Vera, whom I had interviewed a few days earlier, was there. She asked me to give her money to buy palm wine. I said I did not have money on me. She then started to talk to me in Forro, even if she knew I did not speak creole. Filipa was translating for me. She said in Forro “A white woman without money, that doesn’t worth anything.” This short interaction, which was an amusement for the other women around but troublesome for me, contests the standard measures. By choosing to speak Forro, Vera does a social action that signals her association with the other Santomean women around as well as my non-belonging. Here, an indexical association between Forro and Santomean identity appears. It suggests that Forro is still associated to nativeness, authenticity, belonging, and Santomean-ness, even if Portuguese is spoken by the entire population. In this interaction, Forro is placed above Portuguese on the scale of social value of languages. At the same time, Vera underlines that I do not respond to what is expected from me: as a white person, I should have money. The fractal shift is blocked here again by a taxonomy of nativeness.

Proximity to whiteness as a postcolonial reconfiguration of power

In this article I connect scale-making and racializing discourse in order to develop a more robust understanding of the historical and structural processes that influence ideas of racial boundaries on São Tomé Island. The Forros on São Tomé Island rely on scale in their everyday life in order to maintain the boundaries between themselves and the others. Raciolinguistic ideologies held by Forros regarding Angolares and Cabo Verdeans (and whites) and their use of creole are part of the processes of categorization which contribute to the enactment of societal exclusion in relation to linguistic practices and racial categories. Angolares and Cabo Verdeans have been stigmatized by Forros for their origin and linguistic practices since colonial times (Hagemeijer, 2018). São Tomé could be considered a culture of monoglot standardization (Silverstein, 1996) in which speaking Portuguese (and ideally, “a good Portuguese” with no creole influence) is more valuable than bilingualism (in creole and Portuguese). In practice, the creole-speaking Angolares and Cabo Verdeans deviate from the idealized monoglot speaker of Portuguese, and their creole-influenced Portuguese does not correspond

to the idealized variety of Portuguese. I view this positioning of the Forro listener as enactment of whiteness. I suggest that it is the Forros' imagined and historical proximity to whiteness that bestow them racial privilege, and that allows them to maintain their position of social and political power in the country. In other words, their power results from proximity to whiteness. The boundary-making process through the positioning of Forros on top of the socio-racial scale involves the transmission of raciolinguistic ideologies that have been re-articulated since colonialism. I showed that Santomeans are perpetuating raciolinguistic ideologies from the colonial times and pointing to a continued rearticulation of whiteness as a structural position. Proximity to whiteness is viewed as historically being preferred, and as a market of privilege that has changed in meaning. In fact, there is a Santomean privilege that does not map on easily onto skin color. The Portuguese language is a characteristic that captures proximity to whiteness, while creoles capture distance to whiteness. In this view, the use of the Portuguese language is a way to embody whiteness. Yet in the process of identifying with Portuguese and using Portuguese, not all Santomeans are able to approach whiteness in the same degree. Santomeans who identify as monolingual Forros who live in the city are the closest to whiteness as a symbol of power, while Angolares and Cabo Verdeans who speak creole in their everyday life, and who live on a plantation are the furthest.

It is through scale-making and racialized discourse that Forros position themselves in relation to others, and constantly negotiate their status as superior. The instances of blocking of fractal recursivity brought to the surface important pieces of information: nativeness is a valuable social attribute, and speaking creole can be a marker of Santomean identity. In fact, people develop scalar perspectives that anchor (i.e. reinforce the established order) or reorient themselves (by contradicting and blocking the established order). These findings are important as they examine the relations between race and language in different ways, showing that the indexical relation between race, language use and social status is more complex than it appears and may be different in practice than in explicit understandings.

Through the analyses of discourses that perpetuate raciolinguistic ideologies, I have showed that the production and circulation of the Portuguese language as a cultural emblem that situates proximity to whiteness as superior contribute to processes of social hierarchization. I have also demonstrated in this article that whiteness can be viewed as a historical and contemporary structural position that can be enacted and reproduced among non-white populations.

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ORCID iD

Marie-Eve Bouchard  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0525-0821>

Note

1. Note that some Cabo Verdeans were part of the formative populations for the Tongas, while other Cabo Verdeans maintained a separate identity, an identity that persists to this day.

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Author Biography

Marie-Eve Bouchard is an assistant professor in the Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies at The University of British Columbia. She is an anthropologically oriented sociolinguist, and tend to enjoy the blurred space between these two fields. She completed her PhD in Linguistics at New York University in 2017 with a research project that investigated the emerging variety of Portuguese spoken in São Tomé and Príncipe. During her postdoctoral research at Stockholm University, she created new projects to include the Santomean diaspora to my studies. My main research interests are language ideologies, language contact, variation and change, language and national identity, and ethnicity.