

**PLACE OF SPEECH, IDENTITY POLITICS AND ITS REFLECTIONS IN
LEFTIST PRAXIS**

**LUGAR DE FALA, POLÍTICA IDENTITÁRIA E SEUS REFLEXOS NA PRÁXIS DA
ESQUERDA**

**LUGAR DE DISCURSO, POLÍTICA DE IDENTIDAD Y SUS REFLEXIONES EN LA
PRAXIS DE LA IZQUIERDA**

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ABSTRACT: The objective here is to think about the political-philosophical argument of the ‘place of speech’ and understand what the developments in this category are. We asked, how the concept diagnoses and impacts social representation in modern politics; who are the subjectivities that are there; and how the “place of speech” impacts action and politics of the leftist. We conclude that, what was intended to be a revolutionary strategy to overthrow interlocking oppressions, ended up acquiring a growing trend towards an individualism, the idea of an “us” is increasingly removed in a context where the leftist came to accept liberal democracy and capitalism as the ultimate horizon.

KEYWORDS: Identity politics. Place of speech. Leftist. Neoliberalism.

RESUMO: Visa-se pensar o argumento político-filosófico do ‘lugar de fala’ e entender quais os desdobramentos dessa categoria. Pergunta-se de que maneira o conceito diagnostica e impacta a representação social na política moderna; quem são as subjetividades que estão ali; e como o “lugar de fala” impacta na ação e na política da Esquerda. Conclui-se que, o que pretendia ser uma estratégia revolucionária para derrubar opressões entrecruzadas, acabou por adquirir uma tendência cada vez maior a um individualismo por via oblíqua, e afasta-se cada vez mais a ideia de um “nós” em um contexto em que a Esquerda passou a aceitar a democracia liberal e o capitalismo como horizonte último.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Política identitária. Lugar de fala. Esquerda. Neoliberalismo.

RESUMEN: El objetivo es pensar en el argumento político-filosófico del ‘lugar de discurso’ y comprender cuáles son los desarrollos en esta categoría. Preguntamos cómo el concepto diagnostica e impacta la representación social en la política moderna; Quiénes son las subjetividades que están allí y cómo el “lugar de discurso” impacta la acción y la política de la izquierda. Llegamos a la conclusión de que, lo que pretendía ser una estrategia revolucionaria para derrocar las opresiones entrelazadas, terminó adquiriendo una tendencia cada vez mayor hacia un individualismo a través de una forma oblicua, eliminando cada vez

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más la idea de un "nosotros" en un contexto donde pasa la izquierda aceptar la democracia liberal y el capitalismo como el horizonte final.

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Política de identidad. Lugar de discurso. Izquierda. Neoliberalismo.*

Introduction

To start this discussion, it is necessary to establish what we understand as an identity and what we understand as a left. We adopted Haider's (2019) conception, in which “identity” is what he calls a real phenomenon, corresponding to the way the State divides us into individual subjects (in individuals). Here, moreover, identity is also the way we shape our individuality in response to a wide range of social relationships. In other words, it should not be seen as an abstraction (very common reading and employment in the category) that does not tell us anything about the specific social relations that constituted it. On the other hand, with regard to the “left” category, this, both in Brazil and in the world (and here the socio-historical and political specificities of each location are also important), is not a homogeneous group. On the contrary, there are several “lefts”, with differences and divergences between them (For example: social democracy, moderate left, liberal left, radical left, etc.), so the notion is better guided if faced by the adopted theory and practice, composing what is called the “left field”². Thus, the “left” here works as an umbrella term for these groups and to refer to several of these groups that address progressive agendas, associated (in the 20th century) with struggles for human and social rights, opposing conservatism, seeking social and political advances, a more plural democracy, valuing difference (remembering that the category also undergoes historical variations), etc.³

That said, we can bring two things that have a strong presence in the Brazilian militancy in recent years: first, terms such as place of speech, empowerment, blacks at the top, etc.; the second, much more recent, and perhaps we can understand it as a kind of reflection of the developments of the first: the controversy that occurred in some locations, such as in Goiânia, in the days before the acts of last Sunday, 7 June 2020, between anti-racism vs. anti-fascism. A false controversy, in fact, as Ygor Pena⁴ points out, master's degree student in philosophy and

² For a more detailed discussion, see the links: Available: <https://theintercept.com/2019/06/05/entrevista-sabrina-fernandes/>. and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lyhADZjmJwg>. Access: 10 June. 2020.

³ Available: <https://www.nexojornal.com.br/expresso/2018/08/01/O-que-%C3%A9-ser-progressista-segundo-estes-3-pesquisadores>. Access: 10 June 2020.

⁴ Available: <https://terrasemamos.wordpress.com/2020/06/10/ygor-pena-o-movimento-negro-despolitizado-e-um-movimento-conservador/>. Access: 10 June 2020.

a black activist. According to him, the coalition of struggles is delegitimized in favor of simply an insertion strategy; in collaboration with the status quo, metaphysical identities are emphasized. Ultimately, the emphasis on these terms ends up fragmenting even more what is already fragmented, that is, the Brazilian left.

It follows from the above, the first point, already mentioned, that serves as a start for the present article: the category place of speech. In fact, the limits and aporias of the uses of the place of speech. The systematization and definition of this most popular category has been carried out by Ribeiro (2017). She emphasizes, inspired by authors such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Linda Alcoff, the need to mark the place in order to understand realities that were considered implicit within a hegemonic standardization. The objective is the diversity of experiences for a consequent breach of universal vision. In this perspective, speech is not restricted to the act of emitting words, but of being able to exist. The place of speech is thought as a refutation of traditional historiography and the hierarchy of knowledge arising from the social hierarchy. Many interpretations understand, and the author herself points out, that this would not point to the category as an individual issue, but rather a structural one. That it would not be a question of recognizing the specific experiences of individuals as legitimizing any or all discourse. In reality, the idea of a place of speech is important when considering that social groups go through certain common experiences (even when they do not want or deny them), which is relevant to the way in which they contribute to reflection, criticism and construction of knowledge. Place of speech would also not serve, on the other hand, for the immediate delegitimization of speeches - but for the recognition that they are constructed from certain realities of their own⁵.

However, there are authors who disagree, with this understanding of the term coined and how it was disseminated by Ribeiro (2017). Douglas Rodrigues Barros, for example, author of the book "*Lugar de negro, lugar de branco?*" (Place of black people, place of white people?), Would remain in what we can call a "middle ground" between defense and criticism⁶. According to his reading, Ribeiro's work (2017) can be separated into two inherent parts, but it is better to treat it separately: place of speech and identity. In an attempt to give theoretical legitimacy to the concept, the author focuses on the need to rescue humanity from the black subject via speech. What is fundamental in a context of patriarchal-capitalist hegemony, contributing to an emancipatory dynamic. But Douglas points out that the work does not make clear the question of the need for a place. Based on Achille Mbembe, he points to the important

⁵ Available: <https://www.e-publicacoes.uerj.br/index.php/publicum/article/view/35205>. Access: 10 June 2020.

⁶ Available: <https://lavrapalavra.com/2019/03/11/lugar-de-negro-lugar-de-branco/>. Access: 10 June 2020.

perception that the territorialization and identification of spaces, delimitation and construction of profiles, is largely conniving with the forms of poverty management governed by neoliberalism, in addition to having an inherent police aspect. The notion of subject itself has geopolitical determinations that belong to the explorers of the international division of labor, already demonstrated very well by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in his book “*Pode o subalterno falar?*” (Can the subaltern speak?). Thus, this supposed need for the place would prohibit criticism. That is why he affirms that “the importance of his voice is gigantic, however, the content that this voice carries, his speech, needs to incarnate in any space”. The need to communicate is fundamental, but public speaking is a radical dispute. Douglas, continuing his reasoning, points out that identity is the constitutive failure of consciousness in the totalizing realization of the Self. Understanding this implies knowing that social spaces and the Other are responsible for establishing identification for the control of bodies, hierarchy of spaces and social division through fundamental inequality to maintain the system around capital. That is why he separates identity from identitarianism. The latter, according to him, would be the cult of defining violence. “Mythical attachment is the defining subordination regulated by power relations. [...] It is always tied to a place”. However, as he remembers the problem, it is only possible to really overcome a state of racialized inhumanity by destroying the symbolic space that structured the colonial world in its entirety.

Already pending for a more critical view, we follow here a different line of interpretation⁷, which does not exclude the merits, but which understands, in general terms, that Ribeiro's book (2017) is not an anti-capitalist book, but only intends in giving voice to those who do not have it within the system; and is limited to restoring denied humanities by listening to their silenced voices. It starts from liberal-reformist assumptions, a foundation of North-american feminism as a universal fact and racism being posed as a moral issue. This last point is also addressed by Haider (2019), when the author points out that the identity policy⁸ divided

⁷ Exemplified and worked with greater depth in the master's dissertation of the author of this article and also by other authors, as can be seen in:

Available: <https://lavrapalavra.com/2018/12/05/o-lugar-de-fala-de-djamila-ribeiro-2/>. Access: 10 June 2020.

Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jo7CzbtyDBs>. Access: 10 June 2020.

Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTqYPuZnwbs>. Access: 10 June 2020.

Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jFzf3x8ZLX0>. Access: 10 June 2020.

Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jedLb_QCXik. Access: 10 June 2020.

⁸ According to Asad Haider himself: “The concept of identity politics was originally created in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective, a group of black lesbian socialist feminists who recognized the need for an autonomous policy of their own, since they were confronted with racism in the women's movement, sexism in the black liberation movement, and class reductionism. It was essential for its emancipatory policy to bring to the center the way in which economic, racial and gender oppression materialized simultaneously in their lives”. (Available: <https://theintercept.com/2018/06/01/politica-identitaria-asad-haider/>. Access: 10 jun. 2020 - our translation). However, in its development, the category ended up becoming a kind of neutralization of movements

the left. For him, what was intended to be a revolutionary strategy to overthrow intertwined oppression, ended up becoming a nebulous slogan co-opted by the different poles of the political spectrum.

He argues that contemporary identity politics is a neutralization of movements against racial oppression, for example, and not a progression in relation to the grassroots struggle against racism, given that, before, the revolutionary visions of the black liberation movement saw the racism and capitalism as two sides of the same coin, see the party of the Black Panthers, but now they have been replaced by a restricted and limited concept of identity, an abstraction. This occurs, according to Haider (2019), because politics has been reduced to identity performance. A resumption of “insurgent universalism” is needed, where oppressed groups position themselves as political actors, not as passive victims. If we have an organization or a movement dominated by white men, for example, this is a political and strategic problem; so, if it is treated as a moral problem, there will be no way to solve it, defends Haider (2019)⁹. The belief in the possibility of racial ascension is mistaken in a system that invented the races, that invented a continent to divide, control and usurp its wealth. To deal with the racial issue is, therefore, to radically reflect its foundation in the colonial modernization structure that has driven capitalism since its beginning. In other words, the identity movement/guidelines does not summarize the struggles against oppression, they are just one aspect, a tactic and refer to the victory of the ruling class over the reality of exploitation and oppression.

As very well placed by professor Silvio Luiz de Almeida, in the preface to Haider's book (2019), a policy that adopts identity as a center without setting a horizon of radical transformation in the social structure that produces its own social identities, is to run in a hamster's wheel, it is a movement that results in a straight jacket, an infinite looping. This results in a trap, because the concept serves both for what we call “right” and for an “left” with an anti-revolutionary character. It serves the right because it falls on individualism, a mark of liberalism and neoliberalism, becoming an important factor for social division and atomization. Instead of breaking with a structure, it seeks only a better condition in terms of material and participation.

Thus, what we call identitarianism would affect the left in two lines: 1) when it refuses to speak of identity, a mark of an 'anti-identity', 'traditional' left, which poses the issue as a

against oppression. Therefore, today, it is better seen as an ideology that appropriates the emancipatory legacy and puts it at the service of the advancement of economic and political elites (HAIDER, 2019).

⁹ Also present in the interview: Available: <https://theintercept.com/2018/06/01/politica-identitaria-asad-haider/>. Access: 10 June 2020.

deviation from the economic plan, as something in the background because the agenda would divide the working class. The problem, especially considering the Brazilian context, is that this class, in its materiality, is not cohesive, undivided and without contradictions. To assume this idea is an abstraction. Therefore, this traditional classist left is equally identitarian and anti-revolutionary like the groups it criticizes. 2) When there is talk just about identity, the action is limited to the limits of the system, seeking to resolve claims in the form of rights. However, expanding rights is not a serious problem within capitalism, on the contrary, it tends to help its reproduction. When the left aims only to reinforce subjectivity, the social forms of capitalism are preserved. It is what Nancy Fraser called "left neoliberalism" (or progressive). This is an alliance of the main currents of new social movements (feminisms, anti-racism, multiculturalism, LGBTPQIA+ rights, etc.), on the one hand, and leading commercial, symbolic and service sectors (such as Wall Street, Silicon Valley and Hollywood), on another. In this alliance, progressive forces are effectively united with the forces of capitalism, especially with financialization. However, the first inadvertently lends its charisma to the second. Ideals such as diversity and empowerment, which could, in principle, have different goals, now reflect neoliberal policies (FRASER, 2017). This context has forged an alliance of entrepreneurs, middle class, new social movements, and young people, proclaiming their modern and progressive good faith in embracing diversity, multiculturalism and women's rights. As pointed out by Fraser (2017), the attack on social security was covered by a varnish of emancipatory charisma, borrowed from the new social movements. Over the years, when the industry produced social 'craters', there was talk of diversity, empowerment and non-discrimination. Identifying progress with meritocracy instead of equality.

Even with full awareness of the importance of discussing the first point presented above (effects on the left), this article is limited to proposing a deeper discussion on the second point. Due to the limits inherent to the article and the research, we will also not bring the full range of authors and discussions on that point. The focus here is to think about the political-philosophical argument behind the category 'place of speech', pointing out the character of reification, of an individualistic stance, of a liberal character, in which, many times, the use of this category falls. For this, we will mainly use the debates promoted by the American political scientist Dean (2009; 2016).

Communicative capitalism

Now, we need to unravel the context in which we find ourselves today. It is what Dean (2009; 2016) will call “communicative capitalism”. This, defined as the materialization of the ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment and communication technologies, intensifying global capitalism. Here, Web 2.0 and its tools, like social networks, provide the necessary infrastructure for a crowd that can see/watch, like and/or share; where various types of messages, including hate, circulate easily (example: fake news). Like other spaces, these tools are governed by the logic of capital and the fetish of merchandise, the emphasis on consumption, entertainment, marketing and competition. In communicative capitalism, opinions, manifestations and expressions of the most varied aspects are converted to the commodity form, where the use value contained in convincing the other gives way to the exchange value of “likes”, numbers of accesses, sharing, quantity of followers, etc. Specific discursive habitats (online) are created, filled with consumerism, personalization and therapeutization, implying fundamental changes in the conditions of possibility of credibility, as occurred in the last elections of 2018 for the Brazilian executive. Communicative capitalism is based on the fantasy¹⁰ of abundance that accompanies the reformatting of messages as contributions and the fantasy of participation that accompanies technological fetishism. It is a context that tends to move more and more away from the notion of "we" (DEAN, 2009). It focuses on performance and alterity faints; collective decisions, even democratic and inclusive, give way to figures such as revolt, catharsis, individual desertion, etc., anchored in the logic that each person can only represent himself¹¹.

Thinking from a social reality marked by communication, marketing, consumption and, consequently, with reflexes on the subjects' own psychological faculties, Dean (2009) points out that the political, economic and social changes of the last decades were accompanied by increasing emphases in the singular, individual and personal. Consequently, it is not possible to provide good reasons to support collective approaches to political, social and economic problems. The role of technology, recently, ends up covering a fundamental lack or absence in the social order: it protects the fantasy of unity, disseminates an idea of abundance and participation. Technologies are invested with hopes, with aspirations for something better. A fetish that leads us to believe that all we need to do is expand, improve a specific technology and then we will have a democratic or reconciled social order. These fantasies give people the

¹⁰ In the sense of illusion, of an illusory, false idea.

¹¹ Available: <http://blogjunho.com.br/por-que-perdemos-moral-crista-individualismo-e-espetacularizacao-nos-movimentos-de-protesto/>. Access: 10 June 2020

feeling that our online actions are politically significant, that they make a difference. Of course, the internet has its share of social importance there, especially due to the still wide reach and influence of the mainstream media (or traditional media), the author does not deny this. However, she points out that left-wing activists seem increasingly attracted to spectacular and performance events, which momentarily raise awareness, but do little to build the institutions necessary to sustain a new political order. Not to mention the difficulties and deficiencies in accessing these means in certain regions, considering the Brazilian context.

The role of neoliberalism

The left, to a large extent, ended up accepting and enjoying the values of neoliberalism, celebrating the imaginary freedoms and socioeconomic transformations offered by its rise from the 1970s (DEAN, 2009; 2016). For the aforementioned author, in recent years, scholars have produced significant analyzes of neoliberalism seen as a set of political assumptions that favor corporations, as inseparable from globalization and imperialism, as class restoration, as a specific form of governance (a example of the works of Michel Foucault and those of Wendy Brown) and as a new form of state. Freedom, rather than justice or equality, is the fundamental political value. Neoliberalism attributes to the State an active role in the defense of markets, in the production of subjects and conditions for markets, although it does not think that the State should, at least ideally, intervene in the activities of the latter. Inevitably, this brings us to the question of governance. This is where Dean (2009) proposes that, for neoliberals, one of the main objectives of governance is to build responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally evaluate the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other acts. In short, neoliberalism does not trust preexisting conditions, it creates new forms, reformatting social and political life in terms of its ideal of competition in the markets. Common sense prevails that there is no alternative outside this neoliberal horizon. And one of the bases of this ideology is another fantasy that the author presents: free trade.

Such an illusion promises that an unrestricted market benefits everyone. Why? Because markets would be the most efficient ways to ensure that everyone does what is most appropriate for them and gets everything they want. The fantasy of the free market is that everyone will win. To guarantee that everyone will win, the market has to be free, without restrictions, free to realize its and our full potential (DEAN, 2009). And more: the fantasy is manifested in our real practices, in what people do daily. Neoliberal ideology focuses on trade, that is, exchange practices. The common exchanges of ordinary people, taken and understood as rational

decisions and under ideal conditions. When neoliberals talk about free trade, most of us tend to imagine individual exchanges (small farmers and local businesses or how good it is to choose what we want from abundant and attractive consumer items in supermarkets and malls). We rarely focus on banks, credit cards, mortgages, public debt, currency, etc. The fantastic appeal of neoliberalism stems, in part, from the way in which individual exchanges replace global capital flows.

Another point that Dean (2009) maintains is that fantasy answers the question 'what am I of the other?'. In the United States, for example, the average citizen's response is 'free', a free people, a free nation. Neoliberalism affirms and expands this self-understanding in terms of freedom. Going hand-in-hand with this, there is the idea that we (at least in terms of the West) are the ones connected to each other through exchange, and with the internet we are even more free to buy anything from anywhere, anytime. Free trade supports, at the level of fantasy, what it seeks to avoid at the level of concrete reality: free trade between equals, equal participants with equal opportunities to establish the rules of the game, access information, distribution, and so on. On the one hand, this thinking emphasizes the need for competition, at the same time it clings to the notion that everyone is a winner. Notion that is at odds with competition, because competition is always marked by winners and losers (DEAN, 2009). To be successful, neoliberalism depends on organized political occupation and the direction of governments, on the use of bureaucratic, legal and security apparatus of the State in order to benefit corporate and financial interests. At the same time, in order to maintain its dominant position, it, as an ideological formation, has to offer something to the people whose lives it shapes, has to structure their expectations and desires so that it looks right and everything stays that it is. Identities, arguments or signs that are clear and convincing, in some contexts they gain little weight and in others they do not; they are limited in their power and reach, fail to be completely convincing in a variety of contexts and have different repercussions for subjects. There is a decline in symbolic efficiency. The symbolic is what counts as our everyday experience, our understanding of the role of names, our expectations in relation to references, etc. We can say that the symbolic here refers to what everyone learns. The spaces, logics, practices and norms previously gathered in social and economic institutions have collapsed and were separated. Space was opened for fluid, hybrid and mobile subjectivities as places of freedom, as if their uniqueness was a natural property, instead of being imposed, inscribed and technologically generated in the service of capitalism. In this context, systemic problems are treated as the effects of free, individual choices, preferences and luck. The illusion that the individual is, and

can be an object of action (and not a form of closure and containment), a central character hangs in the air (DEAN, 2009).

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, the categories of social inclusion and exclusion were politicized and mobilized. Social movements organized along the lines of race, gender and ethnicity have radically transformed everyday life. As a result of the critical work of these movements, as well as the consequent decline in the welfare state and the rise of neoliberalism (worldwide), the category 'we' seems to have been permanently questioned and, in its place, are imaginary, fluid, hybrid and mobile identities that have risen (DEAN, 2009), as if there were no deep interrelationship between these social markers and the question of class. Unlike the symbolic identity of the institutions (the place from which one finds oneself at work), this identity is the image one acquires from oneself and is shown to be extremely vulnerable and does not eliminate the emphasis on individual responsibility. Unable to fully determine what is right, we have to decide for ourselves. Corporations, institutions and the State continue to relieve social responsibilities, intensifying these on the shoulders of individuals (DEAN, 2016). We incorporate the fantasies of neoliberal ideology, have become part of the air we breathe, elements of our most fundamental assumptions about how the world works: everyone is an individual with a unique identity.

Post-politics and depoliticization

The so-called depoliticization is used as an excuse by a significant part of the left to say that they know that collective action is theoretically possible, but that they do not believe that it actually exists, says Dean (2009): the term would mark the gap between commitment to common approaches for systemic problems, constituting leftist thought for more than two centuries, and the isolation of individualism immersed in consumption and communicative capitalism driven by entertainment. The defense of a depoliticization means the withdrawal to cowardice by that left. In recent decades, political theorists have tried to analyze the contemporary situation as post-political or post-democratic¹². These theorists critically rewrite the orientation towards consensus, administration, and technocracy, conceived as post-Cold War benefits. The current situation would be post-political, according to some, because the spread and intensification of neoliberal economic policies subjected States to the demands of corporations and the seemingly inevitable logic of the market. As the authority of the State is

¹² See, among others: Available: <https://periodicos.ufpel.edu.br/ojs2/index.php/rsulacp/article/view/14824>. Access: 10 June 2020.

less and less able to restrict corporate power, politics would also be less and less important. This inability of democratic politics to produce viable solutions to social and economic problems resonates with the celebration of the individual in communicative capitalism. The individualization of politics into ‘lifestyles’ and opinions, where politics becomes individualized responses to individualized needs. With their eyes focused on their own performance and, therefore, deviated from the social space where the contradictions of individual existence are collectively produced, generating an effect where subjects are tempted to reduce the complexity of their situation (DEAN, 2009; 2016).

Therefore, post-politics and depoliticization, among other terms, would not be the most suitable for the task of theorizing this situation. Conservatives are not looking for individualized, therapeutic or administrative responses (see the example of Brazilian conservative politicians with guidelines related to gender). They want the law to intervene. They raise their claims for the status of the universal. They appeal to values of decency, morality, nation, unity, order and civility as universally valid principles. And neoliberals argue similarly in universal terms. Their claim is that the market is the best way to organize production, distribution and consumption, and not that it is the best way only for the privileged and wealthy. Democracy has long been a contested category in politics, subordinated to individual and state rights, less valued than the property and privileges of elites, easily overlooked in times of war, austerity, and other conflicts. At the same time, the expansion of new communication technologies reinforced the hegemony of democratic rhetoric, increasingly fetishizing speech, opinion, and participation. There is a tendency to materialize and reuse democratic ideals and aspirations to strengthen and support neoliberalism. Right and (to a large extent, in Brazil) left share the same rhetoric as liberal democracy¹³, a rhetoric merging morality and economics, discussion and competition so that each is a version of the other (DEAN, 2009).

Political subject and reduction of the left

Finally, and as already stated (MORAIS, 2019), all these notes fall on the political subject, the agency, the action. We learned to insist and to enjoy our difference, to intensify the processes of self-individuation, the celebration of personal uniqueness. We are obliged to discover, decide and express everything to ourselves and build political collectivity as nostalgia

¹³ Cooper (2017) has a very interesting and in-depth discussion on this topic too.

for the impossible solidarities of the distant past. The feminist idea of the second wave¹⁴ that the 'personal is political' has been distorted in the presumption that the political is personal (DEAN, 2016). However, individualism is not essential, it was naturalized and used as a means of fragmentation from a collective perspective. So, when the left echoes injunctions to individuality (present in categories such as place of speech and empowerment), when we emphasize unique perspectives and personal experiences (the self-truth of a speech through personal experience), we function as a means for the ideology of communicative capitalism. Making individual difference the basis of politics, we are unable to distinguish between communicative capitalism and egalitarian emancipatory politics. Worse, we have strengthened the ideology that prevents the cultivation of politically powerful collectives. Calling people to base their policies on personal experiences that set them apart from others is to reinforce the dynamics of individuation. The competitive pressures of capitalist processes are becoming increasingly displaced and concentrated on the individual. Concerns about the self, authenticity and personal growth that became prevalent since the 1970s are symptomatic of an individualism that collapses over itself (DEAN, 2016). Here, it is worth mentioning that the "individual" should not necessarily be seen as a single person or subject, but also as a group (mainly in political terms), a group that behaves as an individual (in terms of performance).

In the late 1980s, the dissolution of the welfare state in the global north, the emergence of information technology and, later, the collapse of the Soviet bloc, required the reconstruction of the left. The question, then, was what this reconstructed left would look like. A 'progressive individualism' was present and emphasized placing individual interests at the center of this strategy. To adapt to the new times, the left must look like the right. These new times demanded an identity policy (DEAN, 2016). In this context, such a policy must be at the center of a transformative policy, because it gives a sense of difference, of the many identities offered in and by contemporary culture. The fragmentation of left-wing politics into an increasingly larger matrix, populist, liberal, progressive, green, multiculturalist, anti-racist, radical democratic, feminist, identitary, anarchist, queer, autonomist, horizontal, anti-imperialist, insurrectionist, libertarian convictions, socialists and communists, etc., are symptomatic and fill discussions between activists and academics.

In this logic, the premise is that the collectivity is undesirable and impossible (DEAN, 2016). The collectivity is undesirable because it is suspected of excluding possibilities, erasing difference and imposing discipline. In place of this collectivity, the supposed realism on the part

¹⁴ For a definition of the term and a broader discussion, see: Available: <https://www.scielo.br/pdf/rsocp/v18n36/06.pdf>. Access: 10 June 2020.

of the left offers diversity, plurality and multiplicity. Such points of view proceed as if this multiplicity were primarily ontological, rather than also stimulated by capitalism. According to Dean (2009; 2016), this has led theorists and activists from much of the left, who criticize big and bad corporations and the growing extremes between wealth and poverty, to find it extraordinarily difficult to think of alternatives to the current configuration of power. In part, this would be because we were unable to give a strong enough voice to the values of collectivity, cooperation, solidarity and equity to combat neoliberalism's free trade fantasy. As much as many defend the claims of difference, uniqueness and fluidity of ways of being as radical postures, as a kind of vanguard, it is dangerous to ignore the relationship of this with neoliberalism, the impulse that this gives to diversity. It is good to be different and the right supports that too. It is a game of ideological disputes. When someone's enemy accepts a person's terms, the point of criticism and resistance is lost, the dimension of antagonism disappears. Other minor conflicts emerge, become places that attract and suck political energies (DEAN, 2009). Such a view by Dean (2009; 2016) is corroborated, for example, by Haider (2019). According to the latter, contemporary identity politics is a neutralization of movements against oppression, and not a progression in relation to the basic struggle against oppression. He argues that identity has been abstracted from our material relations with the state and society. Thus, when identity serves as the basis for someone's political beliefs, it manifests itself in divisiveness and moralizing attitudes, rather than encouraging solidarity.

Political implications

The conflicts over identity end up generating difficult questions: would it be necessary to transform the economic structure of contemporary capitalism in order to compensate for the economic liabilities of these oppressed groups? What exactly does 'economic structure' mean? Should the heteronormative regulation of sexuality be conceived as belonging directly to the capitalist economy? Or is it better seen as belonging to an order of status that is differentiated and complexly related to the economic structure? Do the relations of recognition in neoliberal society coincide with economic relations? Do the institutional differentiations of modern capitalism introduce gaps between status and class?

To think about these issues, it is important, for example, to return to the socialist-feminist view of the 1970s, where the family is part of the production mode to support the thesis that the heteronormative regulation of sexuality is central to the functioning of the political economy (COOPPER, 2017). The economic structure is the whole set of mechanisms and social

institutions that (re)produce people and goods. By definition, then, the family is part of this structure, as the main place for the reproduction and care of people. By extension, it is the gender order that standardizes the family's 'products' to suit two types of apparently natural, mutually exclusive people: men and women. The gender order, in turn, is sustained to presuppose a mode of sexual regulation that produces and naturalizes heterosexuality. This is a specific feature of capitalist society as a distinct and highly peculiar form of social organization. This organization creates an order of specialized economic relations that are said to be dissociated from kinship relations, when in fact, they are not. It is no wonder, therefore, that the main opponents of gay and lesbian rights today, for example, are not multinational corporations, but religious conservatives. In fact, some multinationals provoked the ire of such conservatives by adopting friendly policies for the LGBTQ+ community (FRASER, 2013), as was the case of Banco do Brasil and Boticário¹⁵ recently here in Brazil. This would lead to the belief that it is not necessary to overthrow capitalism to remedy these deficiencies, but we need to transform the existing status order and restructure the relations of recognition, in that old reformist logic of some strands of the left¹⁶.

This perspective leads Fraser (2013b) to the maxim that, for example, some feminisms have become servants of capitalism, that is, a movement that started as a critique of capitalist exploitation ended up contributing key ideas to its most recent neoliberal phase, providing the justification for new forms of inequality and exploitation. Against all expectations, it seems that some movements for the liberation of women have acquired a highly dangerous link with the neoliberal efforts to build a free market society. This fact would help us to understand how some feminist ideas that used to be part of a radical worldview are increasingly expressed in individualistic terms (like women entrepreneurs). According to Fraser (2013b), what would be behind this change, which reverberates directly in the questions addressed here about place of speech, is a radical change in the character of capitalism. State capitalism in the post-war era gave way to a new form of capitalism: globalizing, neoliberal, as we saw above. Second-wave feminism emerged as a criticism of the first, but it became a servant of the second. For the author, the women's liberation movement simultaneously pointed to two different possible futures. The first prefigured a world in which gender emancipation went hand in hand with participatory democracy and social solidarity; the second scenario, promised a new form of liberalism, capable of guaranteeing to women and men the goods of individual autonomy, increased choice and meritocratic advancement. Second-wave feminism was in that sense

¹⁵ Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4b8BMnolDI>. Access: 10 jun. 2020.

¹⁶ An example of this discussion is Rosa Luxemburg's book "*Reforma ou revolução*" (Reformation or revolution).

ambivalent, compatible with either of the two different views of society. However, such ambivalence has been resolved in recent years by opting for the second scenario: liberal-individualism.

Final considerations: place of speech as an oblique individualism

Starting from the premises that: 1) much of what is new in radical politics currently includes a reproduction of action logics that are not separate from the liberal status quo; and 2) the identity movements/guidelines are a tactic in the fight against oppression, but it has become an ideology that appropriates the emancipatory legacy and puts it at the service of the advancement of the economic and political elites; we come to the notes below.

Leftist movements had important victories, culturally and politically, in post-1968 and during the 1980s and 1990s, but the enthusiasm for diversity, multiplicity and the consumer agency that actively transforms their lifestyles has ended, according to authors as diverse as Nancy Fraser and Jodi Dean, uniting much of the left and capital. The identity politics, represented here by the use of the place of speech in the militancy groups, has been showing an individualism through an oblique path and with a dangerous tendency to shift the axis of the left politics, from the collectivity to the individual. We present the existence of an extreme valuation of the act of saying, sometimes more than the content of what is said and how it reverberates in the political dynamics (the self-truth). In a context of communicative capitalism, the notion of an “we” tends to be increasingly removed. The real political problem is that a large portion of what we understand as the left has come to accept capitalism and liberal democracy as its ultimate horizon, forgetting that capitalism's injunction to individualize is its most powerful weapon, as it makes it difficult for people unite around a common struggle. We live in a time when the individual is burdened with responsibilities and expectations and where the collectivity is undesirable because it supposedly excludes possibilities, erases the difference. Our notes throughout the text are in parallel with Haider's (2018) defense of the identity policy having divided the left. Thus, we have as a result: categories as a place of speech that, if taken to the limit, become a cemetery for otherness, the impossibility of solidarity, based on the primacy of pure experience over interlocution. The left's fragmentation is reduced to individualities and their unique experiences. Ultimately, nothing is more conservative than the reduction of humanity to the promotion of pain as a moral license and the exaltation of

individual experience as a political argument with intrinsic validity¹⁷. In other words, in addition to further fragmenting the left, making it difficult to form collectivities for political struggle in the face of oppression and exploitation structures (necessarily interconnected), what we call identity politics is also, oddly enough, conservative.

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