THE CONTEMPORARY DEHUMANIZATION PROCESS AND ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH HYPERINDIVIDUALIZATION

O PROCESSO DE DESUMANIZAÇÃO CONTEMPORÂNEO E SUA RELAÇÃO COM A HIPERINDIVIDUALIZAÇÃO

EL PROCESO DE DESHUMANIZACIÓN CONTEMPORÁNEO Y SU RELACIÓN CON LA HIPERINDIVIDUALIZACIÓN

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ABSTRACT: This work aims to establish a parallel between the hyper individualization process of the contemporary society and the dehumanization of the other, which is represented by the figure of the immigrant, the foreigner or the different. Marked by private interests and unrestrained competition, this process instigates individuals to dehumanize the other due to their own fears and insecurities, their goals are essentially private, without commitment to society and the public, leading to the construction of the other as a competitor and potentially enemy. This entire process transforms the social space into a series of isolated islands in a voluntary and involuntary way, where the first concerns the atomized individual and the second, the dehumanized individual.

KEYWORDS: Hyper individualism. Particular interest. Dehumanization. Contemporary society.

RESUMO: O presente trabalho tem como objetivo estabelecer um paralelo entre o processo de hiperindividualização da sociedade capitalista contemporânea e a desumanização do outro, sendo este representado pela figura do imigrante, do estrangeiro ou do diferente. Marcado pelos interesses particulares e por um concorrencialismo desmedido, esse processo instiga os indivíduos a desumanizarem uns aos outros, devido aos seus medos e inseguranças, seus objetivos são aqueles de cunho essencialmente particular, sem compromisso com a sociedade e com o público, acarretando a construção do outro como concorrente e potencialmente inimigo. Todo esse processo transforma o espaço social em "ilhas" isoladas de forma voluntária e involuntária, onde o primeiro diz respeito ao indivíduo atomizado e o segundo, ao indivíduo desumanizado.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Hiperindividualismo. Interesse particular. Desumanização. Sociedade contemporânea.

RESUMEN: Este trabajo pretende establecer un paralelismo entre el proceso de hiperindividualización de la sociedad capitalista contemporánea y la deshumanización del otro, que está representado por la figura del inmigrante, el extranjero o el diferente. Marcado por intereses privados y competitividad desenfrenada, este proceso incita a los individuos a

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deshumanizarse entre sí, por sus miedos e inseguridades, sus objetivos son los de carácter esencialmente privado, sin compromiso con la sociedad y el público, lo que lleva a la construcción del otro como competidor y potencialmente enemigo. Todo este proceso transforma el espacio social en "islas" aisladas voluntaria e involuntariamente, donde la primera concierne al individuo atomizado y la segunda, al individuo deshumanizado.

PALABLAS CLAVE*: Hiperindividualismo. Interese privado. Deshumanización. Sociedad contemporánea.*

Introduction

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and, later, the end of the USSR, contemporary capitalist societies were taken over by a new rationality focused strictly on the economic, the private, the free market and personal satisfaction. It was the representation of the capitalist victory over the forms of life and social coexistence. The economic rationalization of life, together with the individual freedom propagated by this new dynamics, instigated individuals to seek greater attainment of wealth, progress and personal fulfillment, but also generated fears, insecurities and uncertainties due to instabilities and constant systemic crises derived from the globalization and also by the immigration process.

The objectives outlined by this rationality imply personal fulfillment, the maximization of life and generalized competition. The economic sector, having dominated most, if not all spheres of life, led to the transformation of the individual into a company of himself, which, if only the non-interference of external agents, such as the State, would have its success guaranteed. Self-confidence generated an individual who felt capable of being whatever he wanted to be. However, the deindustrialization, the precariousness generated in the world of work and the flexibilization of the labor laws have given rise to this individual, a series of uncertainties of his future that is no longer secure, is not possible to plan ahead, is uncertain.

With this process, there is the blaming of the other for their afflictions. However, this other is not configured based on capitalist economic domination, that is, it is not the elites who own big capital who are to blame for the uncertain future of this individual, but immigrants, foreigners and second-class citizens. They are those who are on the margins of the social fabric and who also suffer the consequences of this process of shifting from the public to the private, the economic rationalization of life, the flexibilization of labor laws and globalization.

Private interest, which has now become one of the social norms, has established precarious bonds between individuals. If before they were part of the same political community and shared their duties, now they have become competitors in the struggle for survival. When

there is frustration in this hyper-stimulated competition, and this is not uncommon due to various factors such as de-industrialization, blaming others also becomes the norm. Sometimes it is the immigrants who leave their territory to take the jobs of the natives, sometimes they are the marginalized who demand equal wages to those of others.

All this makes the process of dehumanization linked to hyper-individualism, which no longer corresponds to the individualism of the first modernity, but to a social configuration that encourages competition, freedom, the non-recognition of the public and its political institutions. It is a behavior that is entirely guided by private interest and personal satisfaction, which, when not achieved, trigger the process of withdrawing humanity from the other, which animalizes, criminalizes and attacks them, providing a society divided from physical spaces based on differences.

These "ghettos" are a direct consequence of the process of hyper-individualization and dehumanization. The first generates the insecure individual, uncertain of his future who, observing social changes, cannot give meaning to his life and isolates himself from the social body out of fear. Dehumanization occurs to the extent that ghettos provide the segregation of the different, something that is observed in large global cities and reflects part of the constitution of modern society. The fear and insecurity that create both voluntary and involuntary isolation are the objects of reflection in this work.

Hyperindividualism and the process of dehumanization

For the understanding of the phenomenon of hyperindividualism, the structural change of capitalist society is substantially important. It is with the end of the bipolar era between communism and capitalism that contemporary neoliberal society and the new rationality of the world (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016) become hegemonic. Despite its greater expression in this period, it was in the 1970s, with the failure of the welfare state, that this new rationality began to take shape. The governments of Margaret Thatcher in England and Ronald Reagan in the United States already highlighted the virtues of the individual isolated from the social body, of attention to private life at the expense of public life and the search for personal satisfaction without interventionism or restrictions.

It is this change in the valuation of the individual over the collectivity that establishes new social bonds and plays out the negative feeling of inadequacy, insecurity and fragility of that same individual. The exacerbation of private life propagated by this movement in the search for new arrangements for a delinquent society with high unemployment rates in the 1970s,

materialized the social dynamics of the individual without social commitments and without scruples in the search for success. However, it is this same movement that reproduces the political geometry of the individual who is free, while he becomes precarious and goes through a process of uprooting.

Such uprooting cannot be understood by the abandonment of old values and traditions, as they are present in dehumanizing discourses, but by the process of non-identification with the collective and with a society that was once seen as a protection network. The individual no longer moves in search of a certain future, he is guided by the present and social acceleration (ROSA, 2019). Whether for guaranteed labor rights, full employment or even assistance and social security measures for those who did not have a good living condition, it was society and the State that cooperated so that everyone could be citizens.

Therefore, it is neoliberalism's offensive on the welfare state that causes the uprooting of the individual, as it establishes itself as hegemonic and allows the creation of a new era based on negative freedom (BERLIN, 1958). Based on private law, negative freedom manifests itself in the passage from the universal to the particular, from the public to the private and from the *we* to the *I*. It is also in the sovereign individual that it manifests itself, in its maximization and unlimited freedom, as well as in the belief that everything is possible, as long as it is committed and not restricted by the collectivity or the State. This passage of the era delegates to the *public* the reason for the non-satisfaction of individuals.

The belief in the infinite possibilities generated by the end of the social protection system transforms the individual into a kind of company. Its tendency now is to maximize profits, personal satisfaction and competition with other *companies-individuals*. Dynamics are indistinguishable from market competition between rival companies offering the same products. Evaluation parameters through benchmarks reveal that the competition between individuals is measured according to their obtained results and those who have less income will be fired. Competition also integrates subjectivity. The desire to infinitely maximize starts from this premise. Be the best, the fastest, the most complete you can and measure that from the performance of the other.

Due to this process, distrust of the other tends to increase. The citizen with whom there were once citizen and consensual relations is now a potential competitor, an individual who wants to conquer his space and who, for that reason, also tends to maximize himself. Insecurity increases and with it, solidarity declines. This combination of insecurity and distrust of others generates disastrous consequences, as not everyone will be able to achieve this mandatory improvement to conquer their space in society. The consequence is a constant fear of the other

and of not adapting to new patterns, which in turn, develop psychological diseases in individuals, such as Depression and Burnout Syndrome.

> We could say that modern insecurity, in its various manifestations, is characterized by the fear of crimes and criminals. We are suspicious of others and their intentions, we refuse to trust (or fail to do so) in the constancy and regularity of human solidarity. Castel blames this state of affairs on modern individualism. According to him, modern society – replacing solidly united communities and corporations (which once defined the rules of protection and controlled the application of those rules) with the individual duty to take care of himself and to do for himself – was built on the shifting sand of contingency: insecurity and the idea that danger is everywhere are inherent to this society.
> As in the other transformations of the Modern Era, in this one too Europe played a pioneering role. It was the first to have to face the unforeseen and pernicious regular consequences of change: the stressful feeling of insecurity that, as it was said, would not have existed without the simultaneous occurrence of two "turns" that manifested themselves in Europe - to then spread, more or less quickly, to other places on the planet. The first, according to Castel's terminology, consists in the "overvaluation" (survalorization 4) of the individual, freed from the restrictions imposed by the dense network of social bonds. The second, which comes right after the first, consists of the unprecedented fragility and vulnerability of this same individual, now deprived of the protection that the old bonds guaranteed him.
> If the first revealed to individuals the stimulating and seductive existence of large spaces in which to implement the construction and improvement of themselves, the second made the first inaccessible to most individuals. The result of the combined action of these two new trends was how to apply the salt of the feeling of guilt on the wound of impotence, infecting it. This resulted in a disease that we could call the fear of being inadequate (BAUMAN, 2009, s/p, our translation).

It is in this double movement of the fall of the social protection network, which occurred with the transition from the welfare state to the neoliberal and hyper-individualized society, that the process of dehumanization, through fear and mistrust, gains more robust and is projected in individual and political actions. The contemporary dehumanization process is a result of modern fear. As far as it is concerned, it is based on the deregulation of society (BAUMAN, 2009) and on the increasingly fragmented and atomized individualism.

The feeling of threat, fear and mistrust leads to xenophobic attacks and forms of blaming the other, the foreigner and the different. The resistance to accept the new forms of social life and the attempt to preserve the bonds that solid modernity established, create, in the same way, the feeling of aversion to the different. The society projected as a fortress, is now faced with an imminent danger, invaded and with values such as solidarity, security and identity threatened.

Invasion, nowadays, no longer concerns the great barbarian invasions against the Roman Empire or the colonial invasions in the period of the great navigations. By invasion, we

understand the presence of someone who is not a native of the territory, who was not born or raised there, who did not establish his life under the values of that region, city or country. The contemporary invasion is the result of globalization and concerns the immigration of people to global centers in search of opportunities, jobs and a life far from conflict and misery. It is not established as an invasion for conquest, but an invasion for better living conditions. The composition of foreigners in cities creates an atmosphere of aversion, concern and disquiet about their intentions. If there was already concern, distrust and competition with the "similar", the aversion to foreigners is now potentiated, it becomes a war of values, of cultures, but above all, a supposed "economic" war for survival. The immigrant's presence in urban life gave new concerns to the city's inhabitants.

> A fixed component of urban life, the ubiquity of foreigners, so visible and so close, adds a notable dose of disquiet to the aspirations and occupations of the city's inhabitants. This presence, which can only be avoided for a very short period of time, is an inexhaustible source of latent – and often manifest – anxiety and aggressiveness (BAUMAN, 2009, s/p, our translation).

In this way, modern fear gains a new component already known to Western societies: the fear of the unknown. This fear projected on individual actions reveals that the expulsions of foreigners from social environments, the rhetoric against immigration and the political pressure for stricter laws to be enacted on the subject, would be of a strictly economic nature, and are, but also reveal, the fear of integration with the different (myxophobia). More than the economic insecurity caused by foreigners, the insecurity in the environment of competition for spaces is part of the instability experienced today. These spaces can be configured in the work environment, in the neighborhood, in the leisure area and in cultural spaces. The cause is the economic change of society towards the atomization of the individual who, because he feels out of place and does not identify with the values formerly placed, projects abroad the cause of his frustration and discontent. The consequence is the end of the era of rights and the recognition of all who belong to the human race. It is the end of universalism.

The distinction between foreigners and natives, in the process of bankruptcy of the Welfare State, results in the establishment of measures for their separation in social spaces, such as the enclosure of certain regions. The process of physical delimitation of a territory goes back to the 19th century, when the Spaniards surrounded their colonized territories to contain revolts and control the population. That said, the method of physically excluding the different or the one who threatens the social logos is not new in modern Western society, on the contrary, it represents an important part of its constitution. These spaces of concentration deny the

individual's autonomy, segregating him from the rest of the social body and imposing rules of conduct and behavior on him.

For Bauman (2009) global cities are beautiful examples of this new form of constitution of public and urban space. The ghettos formed in the big cities demonstrate the two faces of neoliberal capitalism. There are those spaces of extreme security, with electric fences, extremely high walls and armed guards, the "closed communities" - and closed condominiums also call their relationship with the outside world - that bring together the upper classes and make them have no relationship with the world around them, as it is composed of criminality and constant insecurity. These spaces are understood as "voluntary ghettos". The "involuntary ghettos", where the people gathered there cannot leave, either because of their financial condition or because they are not allowed, make up the other face of contemporary society. These spaces represent the exclusion of the other, the one seen as a threat, or the one who does not belong to the same category as those at the top of society. Exclusion is also the way to demarcate borders between differences, against supposed threats and, mainly, for the fear of losing social positions and ending up in the same precarious conditions as the other and the immigrant.

> Definitely, by imposing the rapid modernization of very distant places, the great world of the free market, of free financial circulation, has created a huge amount of "superfluous" people, who have lost all means of livelihood and cannot continue to live like their ancestors. They are individuals forced to move, to leave the places where they are considered refugees to become economic immigrants, immigrants who then go to another city. Once again it is the local resources that have to figure out how to accommodate them.
> They come to the city and become symbols of these mysterious – and therefore unsettling – forces of globalization. They come from who knows where and are – as Bertold Brecht says – "*ein Bote des Unglücks*", messengers of misfortunes. They bring with them the horror of distant wars, of famine, of scarcity, and they represent our worst nightmare: the nightmare that we ourselves, due to the pressures of this new and mysterious economic equilibrium, may lose our means of survival and our social position. They represent the fragility and precariousness of the human condition, and no one wants to be reminded of these horrible things every day, things we would rather forget. Thus, for numerous reasons, immigrants have become the main bearers of differences that cause us fear and against which we demarcate borders (BAUMAN, 2009, s/p, our translation).

This exclusion of the other, the foreigner, through spatial segregationism, as already pointed out, is not a new symptom in society, it is part of its structure and social engineering. Primo Levi (1988) discusses the issue of dehumanization from the concentration camps of the fascist and Nazi regimes. Individuals may think, consciously or not, that the foreigner is an enemy, in the same model as Carl Schmitt (2009), and from this construction, dehumanization

becomes the norm. Concentration camps are the extreme measures against the foreigner and against the *other*, representing the apex of the physical exclusion of others and the withdrawal of their humanity. In contemporary times, condominiums represent part of the construction of means of physical exclusion.

> These condominiums, the gated communities, which cannot be entered without being previously invited, which have armed guards 24 hours a day, closed circuit television, etc., are nothing more than a reflection of the involuntary ghettos in which the underclass, the refugees and recent immigrants were thrown. Our voluntary ghettos – yes, voluntary ones – are the result of the will to defend their own security, seeking only the company of their peers and pushing away foreigners (BAUMAN, 2009, s/p, our translation).

It is understood that the process of dehumanization in contemporary society is directly linked to the hyper-individualization caused by the new expression of capitalism. That individual who was once under social protection laws and now lives with the constant threat of losing his job or not adapting, projects in security, in all its senses, the way to protect himself from external dangers. Whether through voluntary ghettos or increasingly extreme measures of spatial and social segregationism, it is insecurity that determines the construction of the foreigner as an enemy and as non-human, devoid of rationality, animalistic, which brings with it misery and usurps the jobs of the local population.

The feeling of fear and insecurity corroborates the affirmation of national identity (BURGIO, 2010), being essentially excluding due to the affirmation of values and traditions restricted to a geographically delimited territory. The constant speeches about the affirmation of a "pure identity", which is now corrupted by the immigrant, with the threat of a safe life who has been losing ground, create forms of dehumanization, producing fear, anger and frustration. From these feelings, the search for culprits is naturally exercised and falls back to the figure of the foreigner.

It is the very crisis of modernity expressed in hyper-individualism, which conceives fear, insecurity and uncertainty of the future, as it can no longer be predicted, planned and thought about. It is the crisis of values, economy and identity that brings this search for security and stability. In this process, foreigners are the most affected, having to leave their countries or cities for the same reasons and, when they arrive in unknown territory, they are frowned upon, poorly regarded and represented as a threat to society and the cause of its crises. It is the foreigners and immigrants who are dehumanized. Those who are trying to build a new life are deprived of living.

Final considerations

From the reflection on the process of hyper-individualization caused by the fall of the welfare state and its relationship with the dehumanization of foreigners, we sought to bring to the center of the discussion the issue of fear, insecurity and the delimitation of space for protection. Even though all these aspects have been present in modern society since its genesis, it is in contemporary society that they gain new contours and establish themselves as the norm to, supposedly, establish a new order of things.

This new created order results in the establishment of different delimited spaces in order to segregate groups, which seen as enemies or potentially dangerous, are dehumanized, insofar as they are not seen as belonging to the human race. If in the 19th century concentration camps were seen as an extreme and emergency method to contain revolts, in contemporary times they have established themselves as a norm for social security, they are developed with a view to organizing a public and condescending urban space.

However, it is in this way of arranging society, through segregationist attitudes, that the construction of the other as non-human can be naturalized in the popular imagination and, with this way of thinking, the bankruptcy is not only of social protection, solidarity and of forms of coexistence, but also of universality and the human race. The hierarchy in contemporary society, between natives and foreigners, first and second class citizens, establishes precepts for the horrors of the past to happen again in the present, see the segregation of urban spaces, the division between friends and enemies built from a national identity and *mixophobia*. These are the questions that shape the dilemma of contemporary society.

In addition to these issues, the end of politics is also decreed to the extent that societal ordinances will no longer be guided by cooperation, but by competition and constant fear. The atomized individual without social commitment and the dehumanized individual represents the failure of democracy, politics and social justice. If, on the one hand, there are those without social ties and who see the community as a limitation for their satisfaction, on the other hand, there are those who, seeking better living conditions, are taken to an inferior position compared to others, having their rights and humanity withdrawn. Both are derived from the emptying of collectivity and solidarity, and with that, the very idea of society ceases to make sense.

Given this, it can be concluded that contemporary society, based on negative freedom and producer of the normativity of dehumanization, does not represent human progress, but setback. This term does not refer to conditions of technology, art or knowledge, it is related to the societal arrangement that is closer to a war of all against all, than to a stable and cooperative

social organization. Setback, as stated, concerns the end of universal emancipatory inclusive political consensus and war as a method for resolving social conflicts.

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