DISCOURSES AND PROJECTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract: In this article, written to present the dossier "Crisis, political discourses and social change projects", the organizers seek to construct the theoretical-methodological frameworks within which the other articles should be read. The work begins by differentiating between Discourse Analysis – the theoretical-methodological perspective adopted in the project – and Content Analysis, and the consequent distinction between discourse and text. It then seeks to deconstruct the discourse according to which there is a direct and unmediated relation between words and things, denying therefore the impossibility of an objective analysis. Next, it seeks to show the centrality of discourse in the relations of power, in forming hegemonies and resisting them. Finally, even though it recognizes the eminently political character of any discourse and its consequent and necessary connection to different social projects, the article seeks to define and characterize several discursive genres: political discourse, legal discourse and media discourse.

Keywords: Discourse analysis. Political discourse. Legal discourse. Media discourse. Social change projects.

1 Introduction

The "Crisis, political discourses and projects of social change" dossier is the result of the IV International Seminar on Legislative Studies, with the same title, which was organized by a research group composed of professors from the Chamber of Deputies and the University of

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Brasilia that for more than a decade has been studying the Legislative Power, and was held together with the VII Conference of Research of the Chamber of Deputies in September 2016.

The dossier is also the result of a Discourse Analysis effort by the members of the research group and the guest speakers/authors. We start from the theoretical assumption that "Discourse Analysis" is not to be confused with "Content Analysis". While Content Analysis seeks to extract meanings from texts by answering the question "What does this text mean?", Discourse Analysis, which does not seek to cross the text to find a meaning on the other side, sets out to answer the question "How does this text mean?". Unlike Content Analysis, Discourse Analysis starts from the understanding that it is not through content that one reaches the understanding of how a symbolic object produces meanings. The content of the text serves only as an illustration of some point of view already affirmed elsewhere (ORLANDI, 2007).

The social, of which texts and discourses are elements, is a significant, hermeneutic social. It does not appear as something to be simply unraveled, unveiled, but understood, from many forms, of the various possibilities of reaching multiple truths always contingent and precarious. Therefore, the real, as something to be scrutinized, truly known, as a transparent positivity, is an impossibility, since it is meant in different ways, from the various lenses of the subjects. It is clear that there is an object outside the discourse, but only within discourse does the object have meaning (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 1985; LACLAU, 1996; 2000).

Just as Discourse Analysis differs from Content Analysis, "discourse" is not confused with "text". Text is the unit that the analyst has before him and from which part. But it is his duty to refer the text to a discourse, which in turn is made explicit in its regularities by its reference to one or another discursive formation, which, in turn, makes sense because it derives from a game defined by the dominant ideological formation in that structure. "Discursive formation" is defined as what in a given ideological formation - that is, from a given position in a given socio-historical conjuncture - determines what can and should be said (ORLANDI, 2007; MAGALHÃES, MARTINS; RESENDE, 2017).

A text can be traversed by various discursive formations, which are organized in it by a dominant formation. Discourse is a scattering of texts. The university discourse, for example, is a dispersion of texts of teachers, students, administrators; of scientific texts, bureaucratic etc. But discourse is not simply a set of texts. Rather, it is a set of texts that can be reproduced according to the constraints of a discursive formation (ORLANDI, 2007). discourse is a category that unites words and actions, is practice, discursive practice, since any action undertaken by subjects, identidades, grupos sociais é significativa (LACLAU; MOUFFE, 1985; LACLAU, 1996; 2000).

discourse Analysis is, therefore, the program of studies that takes the text as a unit of analysis centered on the concepts of discourse as practice, power and ideology (MAGALHÃES, MARTINS; RESENDE, 2017). It studies primarily as the abuse of social power, domination and inequality are produced, reproduced and resisted by the text in the social and political context.

Through this "dissident research," analysts take an explicit stand: they want to understand, expose and, ultimately, resist social inequality (VAN DIJK, 2005).

At this point, it should be noted that the organizers and authors of this dossier assume that there is no objective analysis, if by objective one wants to qualify that analysis that simply describes what is "there", without being "contaminated" by the subjectivity of the analyst . As Fairclough (2003) points out, critical social sciences are motivated by the purpose of providing a scientific basis for critically questioning social life in moral and political terms, ie in terms of social justice and power. On the other hand, many social studies can be seen as motivated by the purpose of giving more effectiveness and efficiency to the existing forms of social life, without taking into account moral or political issues. Neither approach is objective. Both are based on specific interests (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003).

In this sense, the dossier, as well as the theoretical-methodological perspective from which it was generated, tries to avoid establishing a simplistic relationship of determination between texts and social. It takes into account the premisses that discourse is structured by domination, that each discourse is historically produced and interpreted, and that the structures of domination are legitimized by the ideologies of the groups that hold power. The theoretical-methodological perspective adopted, therefore, allows both the analysis of vertical pressures and the possibilities of resistance to unequal relations of power that stabilize and naturalize (WODAK, 2004).).

The Gramscian concept of power as "hegemony" converges, therefore, with the dialectical proposal of Discourse Analysis to think of social practices as essentially contradictory and in permanent transformation. For a group to hold itself temporarily in a hegemonic position, it is necessary to establish moral, political and intellectual leadership in social life, through the diffusion of a particular worldview by the fabric of society as a whole, thus equaling the very interest of a group in alliance with that of society in general. The sphere responsible for this ideological diffusion is civil society, where classes seek to win allies for their projects by maintaining leadership and consensus (GRAMSCI, 1988).

One of the reasons Discourse Analysis focuses on discourses as an element of social practice is that it allows an oscillation between the perspective of social structure and the perspective of social action or agency, both necessary for research and social analysis (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003).). It is the function of critical science to try to reveal aspects considered negative of the hegemonic "new world order" and to show that they can be changed by human agency, since they are not natural. Before, at least in part, they are the result of particular strategies engendered by political decisions in accordance with determined interests (CHOULIARAKI, FAIRCLOUGH, 1999).

Indeed, one of the objectives of discourse Analysis is to demystify discourses by deciphering ideologies. Language is not powerful in itself - it acquires power by the use that the

agents that hold power make of it. This explains why discourse Analysis often adopts the perspective of those who suffer, and critically analyzes the language of those in power who are responsible for the existence of inequalities and have the means and opportunities to improve the general conditions (WODAK, 2004).).

2 Discourse and Power

Access to and control over discourse is an important symbolic resource. Most people only have active control over everyday discourse with family and friends, and passive control over the media. In many situations, ordinary people are "more or less passive targets" of texts or discourses from their teachers or bosses, or from authorities such as police officers, judges or prosecutors, who simply tell them what to believe or do (VAN DIJK, 2005).).

On the other hand, the more powerful members of social groups and institutions, especially their leaders, have more or less exclusive access to one or more kinds of discourse and control over them. Teachers control school or academic discourse, journalists control media discourse, lawyers and judges control the legal discourse and politicians control the political discourse. The more they control the discourse, the more powerful they become (VAN DIJK, 2005).

The discourse lies between the text and the social context (events, practices and social structures) (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003). Controlling the context involves defining the situation, the place and the time of the events, who can participate and in what role, what knowledge and opinion can have (VAN DIJK, 2005).

Members of powerful groups can define the possible discursive genres for an occasion. A teacher or a judge may require a direct response from, respectively, a student or defendant. One can therefore analyze how broadcasters abuse their power in such situations, such as when a police officer makes use of torture to obtain a confession or when a male publisher prevents a female journalist from writing about economics. It is also very important to know who controls topics and topic changes, such as when the editor decides what subjects will be covered and the teacher what content will be covered (VAN DIJK, 2005).

In discussing this relationship between power / domination and discourse, van Dijk (2005) points out that, unless it is inconsistent with their personal beliefs and experiences, individuals and groups tend to accept beliefs (knowledge and opinion) through their discourse which they see as authoritative and reliable sources, such as experts, experts and professionals, including the media. The author stresses that in some cases, participants are required to be receptors of discourse, as is often the case in teaching and work situations. In other cases, there are almost no discourses or media from which alternative beliefs can be drawn. Worse, recipients often have little access to the knowledge or beliefs they need as a basis for challenging the discourses to which they are exposed (VAN DIJK, 2005). In any case, it is necessary to keep

track, we believe that there will always be discourses against hegemonic ones, some with greater visibility and accessibility than others.

In order to understand the processes of control through discourse, according to van Dijk (2005) it is necessary to make a distinction between "personal or episodic memory" and "social memory". Personal memory is the storage of experiences or subjective representations, that is, specific knowledge and opinions that people accumulate throughout their lives. Social memory, in turn, are social representations or more general and abstract knowledge, attitudes and ideologies that members of a group share with each other. Thus, a day-to-day story is usually based on personal experience, whereas a partisan program or racist slogans usually express the beliefs of a social group (VAN DIJK, 2005).

3 Political discourse

Political action and, consequently, political discourse are defined by context, that is, in terms of events and practices whose functions are, if not exclusively, at least primarily political. This excludes statements by politicians outside the political context and includes those of other groups, institutions or citizens when engaged in a political event (VAN DIJK, 1997).

In fact, most political actions are discursive. Thus, in addition to parliamentary debates, bills, laws, decrees and administrative regulations, political discourse includes political propaganda, pronouncements, interviews, partisan programs, among other genres (VAN DIJK, 1997).

For Van Dijk (1997), whenever a discourse or part of it is directly or indirectly functional in the political process, it should be categorized and analyzed as political, which may include off-the-record conversations of politicians and actions of any other group that , explicitly or tacitly, tends to influence the political process. In this dossier, however, such actions are excluded from this category when perpetrated by lawmakers or by journalists, and are classified as legal and media discourses, respectively. Although all discourse is political in the sense that the social is politically constituted, we will distinguish political discourses proper of others as legal and media discourses.

In reality, the structures of political discourse are rarely exclusive, but van Dijk (1997) highlights some that are quite functional to the proper conduct of political actions within political contexts.

In the first place, the author points out, most political discourses are reflexive, that is, they deal with topics related to politics itself. It hardly appears in the political discourse a subject that is not political, powerful or influential. When someone does not belong to the elite, it is to give a special rhetorical effect to the discourse, as in stories about expulsion of immigrants, in which a politician or party takes pains of a person or family to show their humanitarian goodwill, positive self-presentation that often masks anti-immigration policies (VAN DIJK, 1997).).

As with subjects, predicates are usually reflective: they talk about what politicians have done or will do, their deliberations and opinions about political issues. Rarely will they deal with personal, private, trivial or daily actions. Predicates tend to be forward-oriented. References to the past are often negative (VAN DIJK, 1997).

Topics are usually modified: events and actions are represented as necessary, probable or possible, allowed or required, wanted or hurt. Assessments are customarily polarized: WE are democratic, NOT them; OUR soldiers are defenders of freedom, DELES are terrorists (VAN DIJK, 1997).

Arguments ad hominem and vox populi are well recurrent at a more global semantic level. Good policies can be discredited through attacks on opponents (ad hominem), just as bad policies can be hidden by focusing on the good qualities and intentions of their advocates. In addition, democratic values such as tolerance are often attributed to themselves and imputed to others by disrespect for the will of the people (vox populis) (VAN DIJK, 1997).

At a more local semantic level, polarization strategies usually include explicitness / implicitness (explaining the good qualities of OUR group, and vice versa), generalization / specification (describe OUR good deeds in rich detail, and vice versa) and (treating OUR failures as an exception or incident, and vice versa) (VAN DIJK, 1997).).

At the lexical level, opponents and enemies are usually described in more negative terms, whereas OUR bad habits, properties, products and actions, when they are, tend to be described by euphemisms, as occurs when OUR killings of civilians between our war enemies are called "collateral damage" (VAN DIJK, 1997).).

Synthetic manipulations are less obvious and more subtle, such as the use of pronouns, variations in word order, active and passive constructions, nominalizations, among other ways of expressing implied meanings (VAN DIJK, 1997).

As far as rhetoric is concerned, repetition operations at the phonological level (alliterations and rhymes), morphological (parallels) and semantic are very recurrent. Politicians often describe in rich detail actions that are beneficial to them and horror stories about their enemies, and vice versa. Hyperboles and euphemisms are commonly used strategies. Deletion and substitution operations (irony, metonymy and metaphor) are also quite frequent (VAN DIJK, 1997).

In the next article in this dossier titled "Ernesto Laclau: From Radical Democracy to Populism," Céli Pinto examines the relationship between the concepts of hegemony, radical democracy and populism in Ernesto Laclau's work. Pinto argues that populism can not be fully realized as a political project in scenarios of democratic competition. For the author, populist governments find themselves in the difficult situation of either losing power or advancing projects that, by the given conditions of populism, tend to approach authoritarian experiences.

Especially interesting in Pinto's analysis of Laclau's work is the perception that, in crisis

scenarios of the hegemonic group, the differences between the various struggles tend to fade, constituting a "chain of equivalence." The chains of equivalence, Pinto continues, have two characteristics: each of its links has a particularity and all of them, a common antagonist that makes them equivalent. But for the chain of equivalence to become a discourse capable of disputing hegemony, it is still necessary that one of the links undergoes a displacement that allows him to represent all the others. The "empty signifier" is thus a link in the chain of equivalence which, by means of a process of displacement, is not itself but all. It is empty because it accepts all other links in the chain.

Laclau, however, does not face the question of maintaining the chain of equivalence or the hegemonic pact or the ability of the empty signifier to continue to contain all the demands of the chain of equivalence after the takeover, notes Pinto. If the democratic plurality of the hegemonic process materializes in the autonomy of the links, its radicality is concretized in the maintenance of the chain of equivalence and, consequently, in the limitation of this plurality, which can result in authoritarian and even totalitarian solutions.

4 Legal Discourse

Although born of political discourse, the legal discourse was differentiated in the midst of a process of specialization. It is possible to say that legal discourse is a sophistication of political discourse. Whereas in the political discourse the ideas of "popular sovereignty" and "majority" (dominion of the will) stand out, in the legal discourse the notions of "primacy of the law" and "respect to the fundamental rights" (dominion of the reason).

If in its origin it is impossible to separate the legal discourse from the political discourse, to the extent that law is the product of the will of the majorities, in its practical development has been tried to avoid the interference of political power over the judicial action. In order to do so, we have tried to create mechanisms such as the prohibition of the publication of retroactive laws, aimed at reaching concrete situations.

In an attempt to demarcate the limits of legal discourse in relation to political discourse, Ronald Dworkin (1985) sees the field of law as a "forum of principles." For the author, in a democratic society, some issues should be treated as questions of principles (moral and political) rather than issues of political power or majority will. Dworkin cites as examples the issue of racial and gender equality, sexual orientation and reproductive rights, as well as the question of the right of the accused to due process (DWORKIN, 1985).

John Rawls (1996), in turn, sees in "public reason" this distinctive feature of legal discourse. According to the author, only public reason can justify political decisions on essential constitutional issues and questions of basic justice, such as fundamental rights. Only it is able to express arguments that people with the most diverse political and moral formations can accept. Rawls excludes, therefore, from public reason, and consequently from legal discourse, those very

broad topics, such as those of a religious or "ideological" character (RAWLS, 1996).

However, the distinction between law and politics, even in its practical development, is not as easy as some theorists claim. There is almost a consensus today that the interpretation and application of law involves cognitive and volitional elements. The definition of what is law in a concrete case requires the exercise of political power.

Both the creation and application of law depend on the performance of a subject (in fact, always more than a subject, even when the legislator or the interpreter is physically alone). Legislation, as an act of human will, will express dominant interests or, at least, the public interest as perceived by the majority at a particular time and place. Jurisdiction, which is the final interpretation of the law applicable to a particular case, will at best express the understanding of one or more judges as to the meaning and scope of the rule. This is because, in the real world, there are no impartial and apolitical judges, magistrates who, free from external influences, draw from a system of rules and harmonic principles, adequate solutions to concrete problems. Judgments almost always reflect judges' personal preferences (FISHER, 1993), are political (TUSHNER, 1991) and influenced by multiple extra-legal factors (MILES, SUNSTEIN, 2007).

It is urgent, therefore, to overcome the fallacious negation of the relationship between legal and political discourses. All the energy expended in building the unsustainable wall of separation between the discursive practices of law and politics should be channeled in another direction: in building a greater understanding of the mechanisms of this intense and inevitable relationship, in order to preserve, in what is essential, the specificity and the integrity of the law (Barroso, 2013).

However, if on the one hand the values, preferences and ideologies of judges can not be dismissed as explanatory variables of the outcome of judicial cases, on the other, legislation and jurisprudence, elements and methods of interpretation will always play a limiting role important in judges' decisions.

Possible political preferences of judges will also be contained by extrajudicial factors, such as interaction with other political and institutional actors and the perspective of effective enforcement of judicial decisions. The Judiciary, unlike the other state powers, does not have weapons, nor do they hold the keys to the treasury. All you have is the strength of your discourse, which for this very reason can not lose legal density. Other extrajudicial factors that interfere with judicial decisions include the structure and functioning of collegiate bodies such as public sessions and live radio and TV broadcasts, the personal and intellectual leadership of some magistrates over others, and public opinion.

In the third article of this dossier entitled "Is Lady Justice blind? Reading Brazil's 2012 affirmative action decision through the struggle of gender equality, "Travis Knoll analyzes the decision of the Federal Supreme Court of Brazil that unanimously maintained the quota system of the University of Brasilia rejecting the claim of the Democratic Party that such a system

violated the fundamental precept of the Constitution. For the author, the decision is surprising both because of the breadth of the ideological consensus it represents and because of its explicit support for racial quotas in a country that, for the most part, does not recognize its own racial tensions and prejudices.

Knoll explains the unanimity of the ruling over the ministers' use of what he calls the "constellation of metaphors and constitutional philosophies." According to the author, such metaphors and constitutional philosophies, sometimes in a relationship of tension, converged to the recognition of the rights of minority identity groups and the duty of the state to protect them. In fact, Knoll points out, ministers used concepts of "difference" and "equality", which are recurrently found in feminist discourses, in order to arrive at a decision favorable to racial quotas, converging lines of affirmative action that hitherto followed separate paths.

Knoll's analysis is especially interesting in his consideration of extra-juridical factors, such as the political preferences of ministers, indicated even by the circumstances of their appointment, their gender and racial identity, as well as the structure and functioning of the Court, its decision-making process and broadcast live on radio and TV.

5 Media discourse

At this point it is worth repeating Gramsci's (1988) observation according to which it is in the sphere of civil society that the ideological battles are fought that the classes seek to win allies for their projects. And more and more this happens through the media.

Many authors have already emphasized this centrality of the media or cultural production in the political configuration of contemporary societies, including Habermas (1984 [1962]), Castells (1999), Charaudeau (2006), Manin (1997), Gomes (2004), Gomes and Maia (2008), Miguel and Biroli (2010). According to Brazilians Miguel and Biroli (2010), for example, the media changes the forms of political discourse, the relationship between representatives and representatives and also access to political career. The authors emphasize that the presence of the media in politics is felt in four main dimensions: a) the media is the main instrument of contact between the political elite and the citizens and replaces some functions of the parties; b) political discourse has adapted to the forms preferred by the media; c) the media is primarily responsible for the public agenda, a crucial moment of the political game; and d) the management of visibility becomes a major concern even for candidates for positions of prominence in politics (MIGUEL; BIROLI, 2010).

In contemporary Western societies, the media also play an important role in assisting government agents in their administrative tasks, as Cook (2005) observes. Despite the risk of negative exposure, political actors make continuous use of the media because they are useful tools to govern. In the first place, because the words themselves, in the case of politics, are actions, that is, politics is formed by a series of performative acts, which means that political actions are carried

out by words (COOK, 2005). The media also help establish a common agenda, that is, it helps the actor to persuade other actors by revealing their preferences and also mobilizing public opinion in their favor (COOK, 2005). Finally, the media creates a favorable climate for certain decisions, functioning as an element of persuasion in the political process (COOK, 2005). Therefore, some authors argue that a crucial dimension of power is the ability to create public events, obviously, with the help of the media.

However, the relationship between the media and political fields is rather ambiguous, always characterized by collaboration and antagonism at the same time, and by the incorporation of mutual values. The "media policy", or, more precisely, the politics made visible by the media, ends up becoming one of the systems by which the dispute for power is realized in the present societies, being the media communication a privileged place for the political word (GOMES, 2004), although not the only one. As Charaudeau points out:

> Também as mídias se encontram em uma situação contraditória. Elas estão estreitamente ligadas ao mundo político na busca de informação: os jornalistas são, de um lado, dependentes das fontes de informação, oficiais ou não, que se impõem a eles; frequentam jantares, banquetes e outras reuniões públicas – e mesmo privadas – que reúnem políticos; estabelecem e utilizam redes de informantes e se dotam de agendas de endereços que lhes permitem obter instruções mais ou menos secretas; suscitam confidências etc. Entretanto, as mídias, por razão de credibilidade, procuram se distanciar do poder político. Diversificam as fontes, realizam pesquisas e investigações de todas as ordens. Revelam os subterrâneos de certos negócios; na verdade, interpelam os responsáveis políticos para provar ao cidadão que são independentes e estão imunes à influência política, pois existe sempre a suspeita do jornalista a serviço do poder estatal (CHARAUDEAU, 2006, p. 29).

If the media is essential for political work itself, especially for gaining public visibility in societies where reality and media coverage coincide (GOMES, 2004), on the other hand it can disrupt and even render government actions unviable. The information it conveys. For this reason, Cook does not characterize the media as the "Fourth Power", but as an intermediary institution between the powers, functioning more like the parties or the interest groups with the government (COOK, 2005).

In Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "field", it is interesting to analyze the relations between political discourse and the mediatic discourse. In Bourdieu's formulation, the field is a "structure of symbolic relations of force "expressed, at a given moment, by means of" a certain hierarchy of legitimate areas, works and competences "(BOURDIEU, 1987, 118). The principal action by which relations of force - or "competition for the monopoly on the legitimate exercise of violence" (BOURDIEU, 1987, p. 118) - express themselves.

Bourdieu's hypothesis is that social discourses are always produced from the position that the enunciators occupy in the determined field from which they speak (2005) and from the relations that the fields themselves structure. In short, the agent's position confers legitimacy so that he can utter certain types of discourse.

As symbolic systems intended to structure the social world, political and journalistic discourses are communication relations and both dispute with social science the power to impose the legitimate view of the world, which consists in defining the dominant principles of vision and division of social reality (BOURDIEU, 2005). Bourdieu points out that.

> [...] as relações de comunicação são, de modo inseparável, sempre, relações de poder que dependem, na forma e no conteúdo, do poder material ou simbólico acumulado pelos agentes (ou instituições) envolvidos nessas relações (BOURDIEU, 2006, p 11).

The power of the Mediafield, therefore, resides in the condition of the media as a great mediator of the different social fields, that is, as the actor that gives visibility to the social and that produces, projects and legitimizes senses, conveying the various voices that constitute a certain historical time (TRAQUINA, 1993; MCCOMBS-SHAW, 1993; SCHUDSON, 1993; BERGER, 1996). In this way, the media is a key actor in the process of creation, dissemination, visibility and hegemony of political discourses.

In the fourth article in this dossier titled "Media discourses and the Delegitimation of Politics," Sylvia Moretzsohn focuses on this central role of the media in the political processes of our day. More specifically, the author seeks to show how the hegemonic journalistic discourse has effectively contributed to the formation of a climate conducive to the overthrow of a government, the "destruction" of a party and the delegitimation of politicians and politics itself, pushing Brazil to the threshold of fascism.

For Moretzsohn, today's communication is mediatized and controlled by large corporations. The author argues that this fact extends to the flow of information over the Internet, despite the new possibilities of dissemination of alternative voices offered by this medium.

Moretzsohn also seeks to deconstruct the discourse that, behind his idealization as the "Fourth Power," the essential role of the media is placed above "real-world contradictions," as if it actually acted as the prosecutor of the institutions on behalf of interests of society. According to the author, although she exerts political activity, the media acts in the interests of the great corporations that control it.

Moretzsohn also observes that the media is part of the political struggle, in the Gramscian sense of "great politics", precisely because it exerts political activity. The problem, the author points out, is when it engages in "small politics" and becomes an advertising tool, opposing the government instead of overseeing it.

6 Social Change Projects

Discourses not only represent the world as it is or as it appears to be. They are also projective, imaginary. They represent other possible worlds, different from what is there. They are linked to social change projects (FAIRCLOUGH, 2003).

In fact, it can be said that social change projects are inherent in every discourse.

According to Laclau (1996), a discourse is constituted seeking to fill all the senses that allow its complete universalization. The total and eternal discursive universalization is, however, an impossible situation, either due to discursive precariousness or contingency, or by the antagonistic cut, which limits the expansion of its contents (LACLAU, 1996).

Like Laclau, the organizers of this dossier and its authors do not propose any "recipe" for a "better-ordered" community, nor a projection of a future specific emancipatory scenario or formula for a fully reconciled society. Rather, the analysis starts from the premise that any historical project, although successful, has an end because it has a beginning. That is to say, it originates in a particularity that intends to incarnate the university, but that, to this end, it must exclude non-hegemonizable alternatives and, sooner or later, it will be confronted with its impossibility to interrupt the course of history (LACLAU, MOUFFE, 1985).

In other words, this dossier is a theoretical effort that assumes that there is no possibility of considering any structure as a closed totality, constructed from foundations that transcend its own historicity. In this framework, totalizing projects, be they Marxists or liberals, are outside the horizon proposed in this work.

In any case, social change appears on the scene in social possibilities as an ethical and political imperative in favor of disadvantaged individuals and groups. But the struggle and its results are not only about the capacity of the social actors involved, but also about other conditions in the social process. To mediate all this is the discourse as an essential domain of social reality. Its conscious and instrumentalized management is the main transformation front in a society increasingly marked by the presence and dominion of the symbolic.

In the closing article of this dossier entitled "The Abolition of Misery: Challenges from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First Century," John French presents a historical panorama of slavery in São Paulo and the crisis that led to its late abolition in Brazil, from articulated discourse by a generation of reformist intellectuals, among whom he highlights the lesser known Andre and Antônio Rebouças.

For French, the understanding of Brazil will not be complete until the discourse articulated by these two brothers, the grandchildren of a Portuguese tailor married to a black woman from Bahia, liberated from slavery in the eighteenth century, and sons of a hero of the independence of Brazil in the Bahia in 1822 and, later, prominent politician of the Empire. Formed by the Military School of Rio de Janeiro in 1860 and with advanced studies in Europe, the Rebouças were the best prepared engineers of the Empire, the author.

In the 1880s, André Rebouças was one of the main articulators of the abolitionist movement and of the first truly urban mass movement, French says. Imbued with a democratic vision for Brazil, Rebouças attacked not only slavery, but also its origin in the monopoly of latifundia, notes the author. Reboucas also condemned "the aversion to pay fair wages and the refusal of equal distribution" of the wealth derived from "slavery and servitude," French cites.

Although his discourse could easily be associated today with that articulated by the MST and the PT in its heroic phase, Rebouças was not what could be called a "leftist man", French argues. On the contrary, the author goes on to say, Rebouças was an adept of Adam Smith and defended the adoption of the American democratic model in the organization of a capitalist society in Brazil, although later it would come to recognize as a misunderstanding of youth its idealization of the United States .

One year after the end of the "tri-secular" crime of slavery, Reboucas explained his extreme skepticism about the new republican regime by saying that it was "easier to democratize a king or a queen than an assembly of opulent owners," French records. The author adds that Brazil "remains deeply marked by the powerful authoritarian traditions nourished by 350 years of African slavery. The ruling class of the country has been incredibly successful in protecting its privileges and in conserving its extraordinary concentration of wealth, keeping Brazil in the third worst place among 150 countries in terms of income distribution".

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