The internal tensions of the concept Political correctness (PC): an analysis from Brazilian contemporary aspects[1,2]

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Abstract

This article aims to reflect on the constitutive aspects of Political Correctness (PC) actions. It is mainly grounded on Norman Fairclough, highlighting the issue of decontextualization enacted by PC criticism when literally interpreting a linguistic expression. Based on this reference and presenting some examples, the article aims to point out that PC criticism develops in two senses: (i) a denouncement when literally interpreting the linguistic expression and (ii) an attempt to hide the denouncer behind the universality of the value defended. In this sense, the power of PC criticism would be connected to a movement of double decontextualization.

Keywords: Political Correctness; Discourse; Language.

As tensões internas do conceito Politicamente Correto (PC): uma análise a partir de aspectos contemporâneos brasileiros

Resumo

Este artigo objetiva apresentar uma reflexão sobre aspectos constitutivos da ação politicamente correta (PC). Apoia-se, basicamente, no trabalho de Norman Fairclough, com destaque para a questão da descontextualização operada pela crítica PC ao interpretar uma expressão linguística literalmente. Partindo desse referencial e apresentando exemplos, o artigo busca apontar que a crítica do PC se desenvolve em dois sentidos: (i) uma denúncia ao interpretar literalmente a expressão linguística e (ii) uma tentativa de esconder o sujeito agente da ação de crítica atrás da universalidade do valor defendido. Nesse sentido, a força da crítica PC estaria vinculada a um movimento de dupla descontextualização.

Palavras-chave: Politicamente Correto; Discurso; Linguagem.

Les tensions internes du concept Politiquement Correct (PC): une analyse basée sur les aspects brésiliens contemporains

Sommaire

Cet article vise à présenter une réflexion sur les aspects constitutifs de l'action politiquement correcte (AP). Fondamentalement, il s'appuie sur les travaux de Norman Fairclough, en mettant l'accent sur la question de la décontextualisation opérée par le critique CP lors de l'interprétation littérale d'une expression linguistique. Sur

la base de cette référence et en présentant des exemples, l'article cherche à souligner que la critique du CP se développe dans deux directions : (i) une dénonciation en interprétant littéralement l'expression linguistique et (ii) une tentative de dissimulation de l'agent de l'action critique derrière l'universalité de la valeur défendue. En ce sens, la force de la critique du PC serait liée à un mouvement de double décontextualisation.

Mots clés: politiquement correct ; Parole; Langue.

Las tensiones internas del concepto Políticamente Correcto (PC): un análisis a partir de aspectos brasileños contemporáneos

Résumé

Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar una reflexión sobre los aspectos constitutivos de la acción políticamente correcta (PC). Básicamente, se apoya en la obra de Norman Fairclough, con énfasis en la cuestión de la descontextualización operada por la crítica del CP al interpretar literalmente una expresión lingüística. Con base en esta referencia y presentando ejemplos, el artículo busca señalar que la crítica a la CP se desarrolla en dos direcciones: (i) una denuncia al interpretar literalmente la expresión lingüística y (ii) un intento de ocultar al agente de la acción crítica. detrás de la universalidad del valor defendido. En este sentido, la fuerza de la crítica al CP estaría ligada a un movimiento de doble descontextualización.

Palabras clave: políticamente correcto; Discurso; Idioma.

Introduction

The aim of this text is to reflect on the concept of Political Correctness (PC) based on some aspects of the debate in Brazil. Though old, the expression spread in the last decades of the 20th century, in the context of fights and social movements seeking to denounce prejudice and oppression against specific social groups expressed through language (Handke, 2001). The concept reached Brazil from the USA and started to be used in the country similarly to its original manifestation (Feres, 2017).

To build the argument, we are grounded on Weinmann (2014), Borjes (1996), and Neves (2012), mainly regarding the discussions on linguistic determinism, the understanding of language as univocal, the building of political positions through the change of words and the restriction of freedom of expression.

The article starts from the observation of the debate on PC in the academic environment and Brazilian public opinion, shown mass media and social media. Briefly, PC actions are a type of accusation that forces an inevitable justification response by the accused party, even if most people are not completely convinced of the fairness of the accusation. In this text, far from exhausting the theme, we highlight, on one hand, the intentional semantic analysis of language philosophy and, on the other, the defense of minorities and human rights, as a type of social learning. There is a great academic debate in Brazil, the *Revista da Universidade de São Paulo* (the most renowned Brazilian university) has even issued, in 2007, a dossier entitled "*Politicamente Correto*" (Politically Correct). We try to contribute to the debate from Norman Fairclough's (2017) thought, mainly his article "Political correctness: the politics of culture and language", in which the author recurrently states the issue of decontextualization operated by the PC criticism, when literally interpreting a linguistic expression, as well as other unfoldings to be developed.

The discussion on PC is current, complex, and polemic. The text seeks to establish a distance from these issues, though the authors, certainly, have a defined position on the debate. One of the complexity issues is the tension between PC criticism and the ethical values involved. In general terms, one cannot disagree with the defense of universal moral values, in the Kantian sense, in any context, and the authors agree with this defense. The definition of the PC object, itself, on its turn, is not clearly drawn in contemporary social reality. To avoid prolonging this debate, what could be little effective, the text attributes the perception of PC criticism to the own social subject who makes the denouncement, who, when denouncing, places it/him/herself in a political position, though not deepening a definition, even etymological, of its nature. In other terms, the impression is that the members of the field define themselves in a very pragmatic manner, recognizing themselves basically in the development of the common political practice.

We should also point out that there is a reflection on words having the power to hurt, injure, harm, and violate when used in a social context. It is interesting to separate here different theoretical ways to approach the

researched object. PC criticism, as the name points out, is political in the sense that it deals with groups in the scope of power relations. It is worth noting that the denouncer does not necessarily belong to the group defended by the denunciation. The discussion on verbal violence, present in intersubjective relations, is more frequent in the studies on moral harassment and *bullying*, normally dialoguing with studies in psychology, highlighting the individual social subject that suffers the violence. Both questions are related to the institutional field of Law, however, in our opinion, from different epistemological perspectives. The idea that these two theoretical fields can be approximated, based on a common paradigm, is a promising and interesting one. Nevertheless, this perspective extrapolates the limits of this text.

Finally, we conclude that PC criticism operates, in fact, in two decontextualization movements: first, when literally interpreting the linguistic expression; second, when hiding the subject that makes the criticism behind the universality of the value defended.

Some current polemics

The concept of PC has recently emerged in different media in a polemic fashion. Normally, part of an accusation that forces a justification. At the same time, it is a process that rapidly grows and reproduces in social media and electronic information systems.

As an example of this controversy, we can point out the article by Maria Helena de Moura Neves (2014), in which the author comments critically and very clearly on the discussion of the entry "gypsy" in the Houaiss dictionary.

With the great repercussion in the press, the case involving the gypsies refers to a request done in 2012 by the Public Prosecutors Office of Uberlândia (*Ministério Público Federal de Uberlândia*) to remove from market issues of the Houaiss dictionary, claiming it had 'prejudiced' and 'racist' references against gypsies. The document states that, among the meanings of the word gypsy in Houaiss, there is, as a 'pejorative use' of the term, the following definition: 'what or who cheats; scoundrel, scammer' and 'who is attached to money; loan shark, miser' (Neves, 2014, p. 139).

In Brazil there are two great dictionaries on the Portuguese language, normally referred to by the authors' name. Antônio Houaiss (1915-1999), one of the most important Brazilian researchers, philologist, literary critic, and translator, is the author of *Dicionário Houaiss da Língua Portuguesa*, finished after his death. The other work is *Novo Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa*, published in 1975 by Aurélio Buarque de Holanda (1910-1989), also a philologist and literary critic. Though Brazilian intellectuals normally prefer one or the other, both works and authors are profoundly respected in the academic world. It is worth reminding that, in the past, Brazil was a Portuguese colony, sharing its language and keeping a permanent dialogue, not always cordial, on the evolution and manifestation of the language. The creation of these works demanded an enormous dedication and discipline from their authors, especially considering that the cultural investment in the country has always been precarious. In this sense, the authors are seen with great affection and admiration.

Faced by the surprise, not to say bewilderment, to see an attempt to censor such a reference work, especially the Houaiss dictionary, Neves (2014) concludes:

> *The nature of the statements in a dictionary is, undoubtedly, another: what this work does is a meta-analysis of its linguistic uses, in a one-way direction, from the dictionary writer to the user. If a dictionary register meanings that may discredit a certain class of individuals — as in this recent episode — this does not open space or create a scenario to discussions that imply socio political evaluations of the content of the lexicographic work. (p. 158)*

Differently from Neves, other authors, such as Morato and Bentes (2017) defend that political correctness should be ideologically used as social pressure. To the authors, more than an expression, it is a "key political strategy to post-modern societies" (p.14).

On the polemics involving PC, we can also point out the discussion involving the black character *Tia Nastácia*, in the work of Monteiro Lobato, and the racist accusation against the author (Feres, 2013). First, a quick presentation, José Monteiro Lobato (1882-1948) was a writer and a political activist engaged in nationalist causes; he was also one of the precursors of the publishing industry in the country and the author of a body of work for children, whose characters, often inspired by the everyday life of a recent past and the national folklore, were extremely successful as children's TV programs, films, and adaptations. *Reinações de Narizinho* (1931), for instance, is considered the founding book of Brazilian children's literature.

The accusation of racism against the author greatly echoed in the press and in society, with exaggerated and, sometimes, not very rational reactions, as shown in the title of an article published in the weekly magazine *Veja*: "The stupidity of political correctness- Beware! STF will 'judge' Monteiro Lobato today, treated as a criminal. Or: would Minister Fux censor Shakespeare?". It is possible that part of the contrary reaction against the racism accusation, raised by PC defenders, was exacerbated by the own nature of the work: "*Histórias de Tia Nastácia*", edited in the 1920s, was part of the good childhood memories of many adults today. Another element to be considered is that, if in fact the character refers to an image of slave relations in Brazilian past, she also is associated with popular wisdom, or a wisdom from the people, to the survival of the cultural memory of Brazilian folklore, from the story she tells and delights the children.

More recently, the sociologist José de Souza Martins (2019) reinforces the discomfort with Monteiro Lobato works. He starts his article by saying "recently, the gatekeepers of political correctness 'discovered' that Monteiro Lobato 'would be racist' (p.1). The author continues:

> *The sectarism and intolerance that is spreading among us since the early 1960s has reached levels that surpass the limits of licit ignorance. Political correctness is incorrect when it strips our social awareness of poetry, typical of life and intelligence. The poetry of mediations and totality which unveils the mystery of appearances, to reveal the essence of who we are and what we know. Without the perspective of the whole, Lobato's work is incomprehensible, opening way for the unreasonable prejudice of a hasty and careless reader" (Martins, 2019, p. 3).*

The lack of historical perspective and decontextualization of the topic are questions that recurrently appear in the PC discussion.

It also received comments, though less passionate ones, the title change of the mystery book by British author Agatha Christie. Originally entitled in Portuguese "Ten Little Niggers" (*O Caso dos Dez Negrinho*) it became "And then there were none" (*E Não Sobrou Nenhum*), following the North American title. Adding up to the somewhat traditional criticism towards the interference of PC in the original work, the title "spoils" the end of the book, which is always an object of criticism, especially in a mystery book.

Resuming the academic discussion, in Neves' (2014) article, with the suggestive title "From 'Politically Correct' to 'Incorrectly Polite'", he raises aspects that can be important, such as the separation between right and left, or even conservatives and progressives. These disputes, as shown in the examples given, can often be taken to extremes. It is important to highlight that the discussions on PC are current and raise controversies. A contrary reaction of the press, or significant sectors of society, does not necessarily point to a negative judgment. In fact, it is common that new positions, advanced and committed with positive values and which will become a consensus in the near future, are initially received with criticism from part of the media and the population.

Considering this polemic, we propose to reflect on how this criticism takes place and its main constitutive elements, aiming to keep, as much as possible, the distance toward the value of PC criticism, as well as the criticism towards PC criticism.

Political Correctness and the criticism towards Political Correctness

Weinmann and Culau (2014, 36.) summarizes the main criticisms on PC. They write:

> *A continuous act, we are concerned with the three main criticisms towards PC in some revised works: 1) PC is wrong, in linguistic terms, as it presupposes a univocal relation between the world and the referent; 2) PC is politically naïve, as it intends to solve the problem of discriminatory social relation through the change of words; and 3) PC has an authoritarian vocation, as it leads to a restriction of the freedom of expression. The analysis of these criticisms show that the issue is much more complex than the Manichean approaches tend to point out.*

This set of criticisms, essentially correct, maybe do not reflect well the relative importance of each point. From the perspective of human sciences, perhaps one question comes before the others: the lack of rigorous contextualization of the use of the linguistic expression. The researcher in humanities, more than the laymen or even researchers from other areas, is strongly trained to always situate the studied object within its social relations, giving it meaning and coherence.

The accusations arising from the groups defending PC almost always prioritize the denunciation of the linguistic expression in itself. The cases previously mentioned show, at least in part, this characteristic. To a historian, a journalist, or a social scientist, it is quite strange to judge a dictionary entry, or part of a work written a century ago, without considering its specific nature within its original context.

In a similar line of thought, we can also quote Borges (1996):

> *There are many ways through which political correctness can be interpreted: a) a political (ecological) reaction to protect the rights of those that have been historically discriminated by the segments with more power; b) the fad typical of the 1980s -90s; c) censorship practice that highlights socially reprehensible behaviors; d) ethics that establishes itself from the insistence and reformulation of language, restraining certain naming expressions, literal or metaphorical, considered discriminatory (the term nigger, for example), and labeling sexist or ethnic jokes, etc. Nevertheless, when establishing itself as vigilance or patrolling, PC militancy silences, in the unsaid of its wording, the social-historical origins of what they so strongly wish to change. It establishes a discursive practice that condemns discriminatory attitudes and words, however without, normally, position itself on the historical conditions that that are in the 'inaugural position of the socio-history and social imaginary' (Castoriadis), and that provide an ideological support to these politically incorrect attitudes and words. (p. 110)*

We are faced here, once again, with decontextualization, or, in the terms of the author, a displacement of historical conditions. This is a recurrent perspective, normally associated with two different movements, though complementary. On one hand, it weakens the quality of the original criticism of PC, as it undermines its exposure and, on the other, opens space to accusations of authoritarian and persecutory positions assumed by PC defenders.

Maria H. de Moura Neves (2012), more assertively, takes part in this debate:

> *'Political correctness' is, nowadays, a motto raised to interpret everyday actions, a way of vigilance notably present in society, with a double influence and meaning: as it is well-intentioned, it creates the impossibility of any rebuttal, it seems intolerable to condemn it, i.e., it cannot be questioned; on the other hand, when poorly inserted in different activity, as it is been indiscriminately used, it is as intolerable as the political incorrectness themselves. . (p. 203)*

Even in this more direct language, the observation that PC denunciations are poorly or indiscriminately raised sends us, once again, to the accusation of non-contextualization of the discussion, as portrayed in the examples previously presented.

Norman Fairclough's contributions

Norman Fairclough is one of the founders of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In his article "Political correctness: the politics of culture and language" (2003), he places the issue of language in the center of the reflection. According to him, the PC controversy is only partially a language controversy.

The author sees PC as an attempt of specific groups, feminists and anti-racism, to change the behavior and the language used in specific spaces, as workplaces and schools.

> *'Political correctness' and being 'politically correct' are, in the main, identifications imposed upon people by their political opponents. But this in itself is also a form of cultural politics, an intervention to change representations, values and identities as a way of achieving social change (Cameron, 1995). And it has relied primarily on the complicity of sections of the media (Fairclough, 2003, p.21)*

Fairclough observes the issue of PC in a context of conflicts and highlights the importance of perceiving a direct identity between what is said and its meaning, turning the issue towards the decontextualization of discourse. The author presents a distinction among the three main ways discourse figures in social practices: (a) discourse as positioned representations, including a reflexive self-representation of social practices; (b) discourse as genre (for instance, interview, lecture, or conversation), and, in third place, (c) as style, in which the author points the discursive difference, for example, between a political leader and a business manager.

Let me distinguish among three principle ways in which discourse figures in social practices. It figures firstly as discourses (note the distinction between 'discourse' as an abstract noun and as a count noun — the latter is just one aspect of the former). Discourses are positioned representations (including reflexive self-representations of social practices) — positioned in the sense that different positions in the social relations of a social practice tend to give

rise to different representations. Secondly, it figures as genres – ways of acting and interacting in their discourse (more broadly: semiotic) aspect. For instance, interviewing, lecturing and conversing are genres. Thirdly, it figures as styles – ways of being, identities, in their discourse (semiotic) aspect. For instance, there are various ways of being a political leader or a manager, which are partly bodily and partly discursive. (Fairclough, 2003, p.23)

Fairclough seems to develop the perception of discourse decontextualization operated by PC criticism. When taking literally the used concept, one ignores, on one hand, the historical and social weight involved in its manifestation, and, on the other, internal aspects that constitute the discourse: (a) who speaks and the set of values this person carries, (b) the circumstances it was said, its place of origin, and (c) the way of expression and its effect on the broader context.

This typification illustrates, at least partially, the conceptual problems that the discussion on PC incorporates when defining some language as correct in contraposition with "incorrect" others. PC would be, then, generalizing different types of possible discourses. That is, Fairclough allows us to perceive deeper and with more complexity the process of decontextualization of PC criticism when compared with the previously mentioned perspectives. It is not only approaching the speech out of context, but also to weaken the semiotic complexity expressed in speech.

Fairclough (2003) alerts to an interesting issue: pointing out a way of speaking does not necessarily lead to a transformation of habits.

> *Moreover, relatively successful enactment does not guarantee relatively successful inculcation: there is a stage short of inculcation at which people may acquiesce to new discourses without accepting them – they may mouth them rhetorically, for strategic and instrumental purposes, as happens, for instance, with market discourse in public services such as education. (Fairclough, 2003, p.25-26).*

People, social subjects, can express themselves rhetorically with strategic and instrumental ends, presenting a theatrical behavior, as it happens, for instance, in the discourse in public services, in formal education, or in companies. Even PC defenders, when building strategies, such as the 2004 booklet of *Secretaria Especial de Direitos Humanos* (Human Rights Special Secretary) entitled "*Politicamente Correto e Direitos Humanos*" (Political Correctness and Human Rights), end up using the political system as a way to control language. There are advances, the main one is to alert for a series of expressions that promote stigma and stereotype. However, Fairclough's analysis points out the decontextualization of the discursive process and reiterates that societal transformation can take place by other means, for example, through informal education or spontaneous sociability.

In the perspective pointed out in this article, Fairclough raises the debate to a more complex level than the other positions. On one hand, PC criticism does not only decontextualizes the discourse but also weakens the reflection on the discourse, when directly connecting what is literally expressed with what it means in the context used. Besides this, it ignores different senses the discourse might assume (positioned representation, genre, and style).

The double decontextualization

Fairclough brings important contributions to advance the reflection regarding the nature of PC. Besides what the author points out, but following articulated reflection, it is important to highlight the relation between the accusation of the incorrect use of language and the social subjects involved in the confrontational process. Apparently, all the discussion about PC arises from the transgression of a universal value commonly accepted by the environment where all act and share.

The first issue is the definition of universal values. To avoid controversy and not deepen the debate on the ethical field of philosophy, we can consider, as a more or less consensual reference, the Bill Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations, in which the universal values are the respect to human dignity, freedom, equality, and solidarity.

The respect of those values is associated, therefore, to the respect of general values based on a broader social consensus. This "generality" of the value, however, cannot and should not be mechanically transferred to the social subject who defends it, in a specific historical and political context. Its correct interpretation goes by the need to contextualize where and how it concretely takes place. We will use an exaggerated example to illustrate that idea. When Hitler appears in a photo holding a smiling child, he is basing himself in a universal value, which

states that children should be protected and cared by society, considering its inherent fragility and inability to defend themselves. However, the photo has a political role, through which the German dictator tries to use a universal and true value to politically legitimize and strengthen a specific group and his project of conquest and maintenance in power. That is, regardless of the universal value we can immediately recognize in the photo, it needs to be contextualized to be correctly interpreted.

In the case of PC criticism, we find a double decontextualization. Let's resume the manifestations pointed out in the beginning of the article. Consider the example of racism accusation in the works of Monteiro Lobato. As stated by other researchers, the social relations the author describes are taken from their original context (historical, social, political, cultural), thus open to criticism from a contemporary viewpoint, to which the author, even because he is dead, cannot answer. This is the first decontextualization. But the process incorporates a second decontextualization: who, where, and why was the 'impropriety' denounced? What is its origin and political role? A denunciation of this nature does not take place in the void, even if the author hides behind the generality and legitimacy of a universal value, accepted without major resistance by most people. The acceptance of a value, as is the case of Hitler's photo, does not exempt the denunciation of its political dimension.

In the other example mentioned, the entry "gypsy" in the Houaiss dictionary, the denouncer was the Public Prosecutors Office of Uberlândia, a city in the countryside of the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil, but it is not specified if it answers the denunciation of some authority, social organization, or acts by its own initiative. In the discussion about writer Monteiro Lobato, the original source of criticism is not explicit.

It is important to clarify that the denouncers of political incorrectness might have good intentions and uninterestingly aim to incentivize ethical and fair social relations. However, this is not a given of the immediate reality, which should be accepted without a research that contextualizes the action of the social subject.

The own speech acts , which Austin (1990) debates in his most important work "How to do Things With Words", are important references to think about this process. Philosopher Danilo Marcondes de Souza Filho translated the work to Portuguese and wrote the presentation to the Brazilian edition, in which he comments:

> From the point of view of the ordinary use of language, as well as from the theory of language, Austin's perspective is always guided by the consideration of language from its use, that is, language as a form of action. One of the main consequences of this concept of language consists in the fact that the analysis of the sentence gives way to the analysis of speech acts, the use of language in a certain context, with a certain goal and according to certain norms and conventions. What is analyzed is no longer the structure of the sentence and its constitutive elements, that is, the subject and the predicate, or the meaning and the reference, but the conditions under which the use of certain linguistic expressions produces certain effects and the consequences in a given situation. (Austin, 1990, p. 11)

We do not seek here to deepen in the discussion on the philosophy of language or the linguistic turn, but it seems interesting to highlight, as Austin did in the late 1940s, the importance of the concrete conditions in which the language is used to correctly understand it. In this sense, we should mention that the legitimacy of a universal value is not mechanically transferred to its defensive spokesperson, in a specific historical and temporal context.

The conflict between values

Another problem of the criticism is that it always establishes a competition between two values of very different natures. On one hand, the value defended by PC criticism, that can have a fair position regarding gender or ethnicity, for example. And, on the other, the value regarding the inalienable right of free expression of ideas. The key question of PC criticism is not in the fairness of the denouncement, but on how to convince the target audience that the defense of this value justifies the aggression against another socially established one: the freedom of expression.

This aspect is well developed by Kohlberg (1973, 1992) when referring to the sixth and last level of moral development. In this level, decisions are taken through the comparison of the difference of relative importance between the two involved values. In a situation of conflict of values, for example, the respect to life is more important than the respect of property (because the property damage can be compensated later while a damage to life is irreversible). Habermas (1989) will dialogue with Kholberg structuring the ideas into two fronts: Moral and Law. These have a regulatory role on acting by understanding, be it as a way of social relationship (respect to moral), or as a way to defend oneself from an offensive action (legal resource). Society builds Law based on its

moral imperatives. This means that, to Habermas, moral and law ensure consensus, even when understanding is not reached. Habermas will quote Lawrence Kohlberg's work and highlight the theory of moral development stages to show that the flaws to reach a collective consensus are more connected to the formation of people than the effect of the complexity of the issue discussed.

In 1963, Kohlberg published "The development of children's orientations toward a moral order: sequence in the development of moral thought". In this work, the author points out that someone in a higher level of moral development, called post-conventional level, would act by principles, and their ethics would be turned towards the ethics of consciousness and responsibility. Law, on its turn, would be a formality that should be followed as long as it does not go against the other two pillars: principles and ethics. Habermas also participates in these debates, mainly in his text "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action" from 1989.

It is important here to highlight that PC criticism always (and the expression 'always' here has a strong literal meaning) contraposes the moral value present in the individual right to free expression. This question is even tenser because PC criticism tends to always (again in its strong sense) move in a grey area, or foggy, because when the relative relation between values (PC criticism and right to expression) is very clear, the action criticized is typified as a crime. Injury, defamation and verbal violence, public humiliation, discrimination due to gender or ethnical issues are not necessarily objects of PC criticism, but objects of legal proceedings punishable by law.

Comment on political incorrectness and the internet in contemporary society

PC ends up creating a reaction called political incorrectness, which aims to rescue, or prioritize, conservative and traditional values. This discussion had a strong social impact in Brazil, inspiring books that became, for a time, best sellers. We can name, for instance, *O Guia Politicamente Incorreto da História de Brasil* (The Politically Incorrect Guide of Brazilian History) by Leandro Narloch (2009), which was among the best-selling lists of non-fictional books in Brazil between 2010 and 2012.

Political Incorrectness differs from PC because, instead of focusing on the use of language and its transformation, it prioritizes a reconstruction of history and its social subjects, highlighting traditional and conservative values. What seems to matter is to point out that, though there is indeed a difference in the object and formal appropriation of PC and of political incorrectness, there seems to be a strong coincidence in the logic to treat the ideas, or even in the epistemological concept used by both. Political incorrectness seems to also enact a movement of double decontextualization to end up proving the correctness of its position.

Let's consider two examples from that book. The first refers to the origins of *feijoada*, a typical Brazilian dish, generally associated with the food eaten by the enslaved Africans in the country. Brazil is a continental country, made up of different regions, each one with a strong cultural and culinary tradition. In this context, *feijoada*, a stew of black beans with jerk beef and pork parts, emerges as a common dish in different regions, giving it a national characteristic. The author of *Guia Politicamente Incorreto* will defend that *feijoada* would not be a typical Brazilian dish, because among the black and indigenous population there was not the habit to mix grains with meat and because there are examples of this type of mixture in international cuisine.

The author also mentions the *quilombos* and its internal structure. Brazil is one of the last countries in the world to abolish slavery, in 1888. During the slavery period, there were settlements of runaway slaves (and other origins) who organized themselves, normally in distant regions, in social structures called *quilombos*. Despite different *quilombo* organizations, they are normally associated, in the political perspective and in the social imaginary, with the fight for freedom and resistance against the violence and unfair forms of oppression and exploitation. The author will question the theoretical characteristics of equality in the quilombos arguing that in Palmares, probably the most famous *quilombo*, there was a hierarchy and that its own leader, Zumbi, had slaves.

In both cases, there are aspects of double decontextualization, in the terms we previously pointed out. *Feijoada* emerges and expands in a certain region and moment, where different influences intercross, from the African cultural inheritance to the conditions of Portuguese colonialism in Brazil. Similarly, the *quilombo* organization is built, through the dialogue and the influences of its environment and moment it happens. Therefore, they cannot be explained by only one characteristic, especially when this characteristic is removed from its broader context.

Here, we can also perceive, as in PC criticism, a second decontextualization. The denouncer does not present itself politically. It is not explicit what group or ideological or cultural perspective profits from mischaracterizing the 'Brazilianness' of *feijoada* or the organizational progressiveness of Palmares. There is a clear political background hidden or at least not clearly established. In the first case, there is an apparent intention to delegitimize the

'Brazilianness' of a dish with popular origins or, more specifically, from African enslaved people forcibly brought to Brazil. In the second case, when highlighting that organizations founded on popular resistance reproduce the same forms of oppression against which they had revolted, the author establishes a conservative point of view within the field of political ideas.

Regarding the broader issue of PC, another question that seems important to highlight is how information disseminate through electronic media in contemporary society. There is an important and heated discussion about the internet, if it, in fact, democratized the access to information or, on the contrary, lowered the debate and allowed a legion of unprepared and misinformed people to give their opinions on everything. The important Italian philosopher Umberto Eco, in 2015, during the ceremony in which he received a *honoris-causa* in communication and culture in the University of Turin, made a now famous analysis. He said:

> *"Social networks give legions of idiots the right to speak when they once only spoke at a bar after a glass of wine, without harming the community. Then they were quickly silenced, but now they have the same right to speak as a Nobel Prize winner. The drama of the Internet is that it has promoted the village idiot to the bearer of truth".*

We do not seek here to develop a discussion on the characteristics of communication interaction in contemporary society and, even less, to debate with Umberto Eco. The intention is only to point out that the expansion of PC criticism seems to benefit from Internet characteristics, such as the speed of dissemination and author's anonymity.

Another aspect probably related with PC criticism and contemporary society is political fragmentation, the displacement of political action of politically strong and coherent groups, both in right and left fields, for more pulverized sectors of the public opinion. Though in a second moment there is a clear use of PC (and political incorrectness) accusations by political groups with more defined ideologies, at first glance, criticisms seem to emerge from individual subjects, or small groups, identified with a specific and delimited cause, as the questions on gender, for example, that do not necessarily have a clearer or more organic alignment with traditional politics. We can mention here some positions of post-modern theoreticians, such as Lyotard, and the discussions on identity pointed out Stuart Hall.

Final remarks (a strong fragility)

PC criticism is generally established from the defense of a universal value shared by the social environment it takes place and often even shared by the subject criticized. This provokes, in most cases, a response trying to justify that the real intention was not to depart from the value in question. Often, PC criticism uses the linguistic or artistic expression out of its original context, i.e., decontextualized, as pointed out in the initial examples of Monteiro Lobato and Houaiss Dictionary.

Fairclough develops the discussion bringing up not only that it can weaken the reflection on discourse when interpreting literally the speech term, but also the fact that the criticism ignores the different meanings the discourse might assume.

We have tried to highlight here, following this line of thought, the importance to know the subject that makes a PC criticism (and a politically incorrect one) and the context it takes place. Criticism does not emerge in a neutral space or in a social void. It can only be correctly understood when we know the characteristics of the social environment it comes from and the political knowledge that moves its authors. Habermas and Kholberg help realize the conflict between a specific value denounced by PC (or political incorrectness) and the right of freedom of expression.

Therefore, we consider that the PC concept can always be perceived as a manifestation established by internal tensions, considering its nature of double decontextualization, understood here as (a) a decontextualization of the speech term in relation with its historical and social original position and (b) a decontextualization of the author of the PC criticism regarding his/her identity, environment, and political interests.

In Brazil, this discussion seems to take place unoriginally, mainly reproducing similar movements from other countries, especially the USA, even engendering akin reactions and criticisms. Maybe the most original movement is the idea to rewrite its own history, in a somewhat reverse sense.

Finally, we point out the importance of, in another moment, deepen the reflection on these themes and their articulation with the impact of the internet in communication and the fragmentation of individual action and political groups in contemporary society.

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