

Misogyny and hate Speech in the Bolsonaro Government: Notes from Foucault e Butler¹

Misoginia e discurso de ódio no Governo Bolsonaro: Notas a partir de Foucault e Butler

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RESUMO:

Este artigo problematiza o discurso de ódio e misógeno do ex Presidente da República Bolsonaro a partir de alguns conceitos foucaultiano e butleriano, compreendendo, com Foucault, que o discurso não é uma expressão de um sujeito individual, mas expressão das relações de poder e decisivo nos processos de subjetivação. Com Butler, exploro o conceito de performatividade no discurso de ódio e suas consequências sobre o fortalecimento da violência de gênero. Os aportes teóricos para a análise remetem a passagens dos livros *A ordem do discurso*, *Arqueologia do saber*, alguns textos do *Ditos e Escritos* e do *Discurso de ódio: uma política do performativo*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Misoginia, Discurso de ódio, Bolsonaro, Foucault, Butler.

ABSTRACT:

This article problematizes the hateful and misogynistic speech of the former president of the republic Jair Bolsonaro based on some Foucaultian and Butlerian concepts, understanding with Foucault, the discourse is not an expression of an individual subject, but is a expression of the power relations and decisive in the subjectivation processes. With Butler, I explore the concept of performativity in the hate speech and its consequences on the strengthening of gender violence. The theoretical contributions to the analysis refer to passages from the books *A ordem do discurso*, *Arqueologia do saber*, some texts from the *Ditos e Escritos* and from *Discurso de ódio: uma política do performativo*.

KEYWORDS: Misogyny, hate speech, Bolsonaro, Foucault, Butler.

INTRODUCTION

¹ Part of this article was presented in the XIII Michel Foucault International Colloquium, event intitled The pokitics of ourselves: truth and difference in Michel Foucault, in the period of 15 and 18 of october 2024, in the Institute of Philosophy and Human Sciences of the State University of Campinas (Unicamp), organized by the Teacher Dr. Margareth Rago.

When defining the analysis of practices who neutralize racist and sexist interpretations, there were no concurrents for the misogynist, racist and sexist Jair Messias Bolsonaro. In general, the people attribute Bolsonaro's misogynistic speeches to his “spontaneous” personality “man of the people”, who “speaks with with the most humble people”. In other words, the misogynistic speech of Bolsonaro is seen as an individual expression, subjective, with the spontaneity of the common man.

However, in a Foucaultian and Butlerian perspective, the discourse is not only an expression of na individual subject, but rather that the discourse expresses its relations with power and with the processes of subjectivation. According to Bert, “[...] the discourses are only analyzable under a bundle of explanations that link the institutions, the economic and social processes, the manners of behavior, the systems of rules, the techniques and the types of classifications” (2013, p. 182).

As theoretical contributions for analyzing the hate speeches from Bolsonaro, I resorted to passages from the books of Michel Foucault: *The order of discourse*, *Archeology of knowledge* and some texts from the *Dits et écrits* and, I also used the book *Excitable Speech: a politics of the performative*, by Judith Butler, which I understand to be an elementary book for the present problematization. With Foucault, I seek to present the misogynistic discourse as na articulation articulation of facts in the composition of power mechanisms and also forming subjectivities. In Butler, I explore the concept of performativity in a hate speech, its consequences on the strengthening of gender violence and a factor in the continuity of discourses of exclusion of some segments of society. I will not comment point by point the misogynistic statements by Bolsonaro, but I will treat them in a more general way, presenting the causes and the consequences of these declarations from the theoretical perspectives indicated.

1- BOLSONARO, MISOGYNY AND HIS HATE SPEECH

It was not necessary having too much effort to find speeches and actions of this character to exemplify the analysis of the Foucaultian and Butlerian discourse, because, on several occasions, before, during and after his exercise as exercise as President of the Republic of Brazil, Bolsonaro made misogynistic statements in various public spaces and in different situations, in addition to committing physical attacks, always targeting women in his hate declarations and practices.

I will make so, a brief chronological retrospective, in which I revisit misogynistics speeches and actions by Bolsonaro as example and, right after, I will move on to theoretical analyses.

- In 1998, being a federal deputy, Jair Bolsonaro attacked a woman in public for a trivial reason. However, despite the physical violence suffered, that woman to the aggressor

when candidate to the Presidency, saying that he was the only one who didn't want anything bad for the family.

- In 2011, in the TV show *Custe o que Custar*, in the channel Band TV, his discourse was aggressive, misogynistic, sexist and homophobic. The victim was the presenter Preta Gil, who interviewed him. When asked how he would react if his sons got involved with a black woman, he then deputy fired: "I will not discuss promiscuity with anyone. I don't run such risk. My sons were very well educated and did not live in an environment like, unfortunately is the yours". In the same age, Bolsonaro also declared that never crossed his mind to have a gay son, because they had a "good education" and a present father. And, the same way, also would never go to a gay "parade", because would not promote "bad customs".
- In 2014 there was another emblematic episode, federal deputy Jair Bolsonaro (PP-RJ) uses a gender violence discourse against deputy Maria do Rosário (PT-RS), by stating that he wouldn't rape her because she didn't deserve it, because she was ugly. The attack took place at the podium of the Chamber of Deputies, during the celebration of International Human Rights Day and the delivery of the final report of the National Truth Commission (CNV): "She does not deserve because she is really bad, because she is really ugly, she is not my style, I would never rape her. I am not a rapist, but, if I were, I would not rape, because she does not deserve". Later, he even called the deputy a "slut".
- In another controversial interview given by Bolsonaro, already as a president, talked about the difficulty of being a boss in Brazil, because there is there is an excess of labor rights and, therefore, in order not to hinder productivity, it was better to avoid hiring women, since maternity leave would affect the gains of the boss: "When a guy is going to hire a young man or woman, what does the employer think? "Wow, this woman here has a ring on her finger, I don't know, she is going to marry, is married, will get pregnant, six months maternity leave, pretty as f*ck, pretty as f*ck". Who's going to pay the bill? Is the employee". It is clear that, for the politician, that the working women who decide to be mothers should earn less and, if they are not happy, they should look for another job."
- In 2017, In a lecture given at the Hebraica Club in Rio de Janeiro, Bolsonaro expanded the list of misogynistic phrases when talking about the gender of his children: "I have five sons. Were five men, then on the fifth I gave a weakness and a woman came". This same way, in 2019, this list earns one more reinforcement, but now in a way that wants to hide

the misogyny of its government: "For the first time in life, the number of ministers is balanced". From 22 Executive Ministers, Bolsonaro appointed only two women: Damara Alves (Woman, Family and Human Rights) and Tereza Cristina (Agriculture, Livestock and Supply). The "balance" referred to by Bolsonaro was justified, according to him, by the "energy" of the two ministers.

- Another time, still in 2019, the LGBTQIA+ community and women, were simultaneously, target of Bolsonaro's discursive insanity, when, in an interview about tourism in our Country, the then Presidente responds that Brasil could not be a country of gay tourism, but "... whoever wants to come here to have sex with a woman, make yourself at home". The offensive speech was received by feminist movements, quite rightly, as an apology for the sexual exploitation of women in Brazil, as well as an encouragement of rape and abuse of black girls and women, the most vulnerable, as the statistics show.
- In 2020, Bolsonaro comments the testimony of the accusation that Hans River made against journalist Patrícia Campos Mello, Folha de São Paulo, at the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry (CPMI) into fake news and government slush funds. The accusation was that the journalist would have offered sexual favors in exchange for privileged information. The comment was a sexualized misogynistic slur: "She [Patrícia] I wanted a hole. She wanted to get a scoop on me at any cost.". In turn, the followers of the president and supporters did not remain silent and raised the hashtag #FolhaPutinhaDoPT and, among other insults, they called the journalist a "slut whore".

2.1- FOUCAULT AND THE (DIS)ORDER OF DISCOURSE

It is imperative to comprehend that the speaking and misogynistic subject that is Bolsonaro is not the center of the problem, but rather the power relations that are intertwined in the constitution of this subject and how these power relations determine the social whole as a whole and also interfere in the production of subjects. In this sense, says Foucault (2001):

The discursive practices are not simply ways of producing discourses. They take shape in the set of techniques, institutions, behavioral schemes, types of transmission and diffusion, in the pedagogical forms that, in turn, impose and maintain them" (p. 662)

In this same year, Foucault explains that does not seek to find behind the discourse what power and its source would be, because it does not use a phenomenological description or any other

interpretative method, as it starts from the discourse itself. It is the phenomenological description that seeks to deduce from the discourse what concerns the speaking subject, their intentions and the formation of their thought. Conversely, the philosopher states:

The type of analysis I practice does not deal with the problem of the speaking subject, but examines the different ways in which discourse complies with a function inside an strategic system where the power is implied and by which power works. The power is not, because, outside the discourse. Power is neither the source nor the origin of the discourse. The power is a Thing who works through the discourse, because the discourse is, itself, an element in a strategic device of power relations” (Foucault, 2001, p. 464).

In the *The History of Sexuality* volume I, 1976, Foucault already affirmed “There is not at a side the discourse and in the other, the power, opposite to each other. The discourses are elements or blocks of tactics in the field of power relations” (p. 134). In turn, the Discourse as a process of subjectivation are also present in the volumes I and II of the History of Sexuality and in the Hermeneutics of subject. In them, Foucault deals with the function of discourse, always crossed by power relations, as a shaper of subjectivities.

In the early 1970’s, Foucault goes on to treat, more specifically and explicitly, about the power, which is clear from his approach during the Conference *The order of discourse* (1970) and in the *Lectures on the Will to Know* (1971), in which there is a knowledge analysis, and of the discourse from its strategic functions, in other words, and of the effects it produces (cf. Castro, 2014). However, “It would be wrong to think that at a certain point Foucault introduces a problem that was previously absent, as the power, and everything changes, the archaeologist suddenly becomes genealogist and previous investigations are left aside” (Castro, 2014, p. 74-75).

In the foucaultian universe, the validity of a discussion about political heterotopia, as a result of resistance struggles, involving the subjectivation processes in the perspective of an esthetics of the existence, is based on a critical ontology, historical and practical of ourselves, in which the transcendence and the metaphysical foundations are absent. Thus, it is possible to think this ethical-political agonistics within the scope of the critical ontology of the present, between knowledge and powers and between the discursive and non-discursive practices, between devices and standards, getting questioned, in Foucault, the essentialism of the universal idea of man and of cartesian subject.

In the disciplinary society, in the control society, in the biopolitical society, anyway, where power is exercised and spreads, the body is constituted as a capillarity, an stretchment of the exercise of power, a thread from the tip of the capillarity of power. for Foucault, however, the processes of identity

subjectivation can also make the subject the most extreme point of the exercise of powers, a kind of advanced arm of the biopolitical power in the skin of the disciplined, if the identity falls into an identitarianism, in other words, without recognition of the interdependence between identities.

The universe of power does not exist only as an exercise of economic power on the ideological structure, but acts directly on the subjectivities, from devices of subjectivity production. The intention to “capitalize on subjective power” is that the subject and its body are transformed in hinge of the exercise of power (Marinho, 2015). and it happens, clearly, in the context of the neoliberal governmentality, which has as centers of power exercise of the subjectivation processes.

In this direction, Foucault, with the ideas about the “discursive production of the subject”, agrees that there is a founding subordination in the process of subjectivation (*assujettissement* in french), despite the power and discourse being neither singular nor sovereign in their productive action. For Butler (2021), Foucault would have developed his notion of discourse to refute the sovereign model of linguistic discourse and the centralized figure of the State, including in the production of subjectivities.

In the text *The subject and power*, Foucault “highlights the history of how human beings become subjects and discusses the power that exists in the form of relationships permeated by discourses” (Fernandes, 2011, p. 4). This way, analyzing the discourse refers to the analysis of power relations, their statements and their production of reality, including subjective reality. In this direction,

It is in the social that the subject positions are defined, not fixed, marked by mutability, and the analysis of discourses must make these elements appear and make them explicit their historical formations and transformations, and also their implications and/or determinations in the production of subjectivity. It is not only about, fixed points characteristics of the subjects, trata-se de movement, of displacements and constant transformations in the constitution of the subjects and in the production of subjectivity by the discourses (Fernandes, 2011, p. 5).

In this regard, even Foucault having not treated explicitly about the performative of discourse, it is undeniable that he comprehends the capacity of the discourse in producing realities, including the subjectivation processes, as well as understands the discourse not only as spoken language, but also as a material language, like the institutions for example. And, in the foucaultian perspective, discourse always as element linked to the power relations. Butler takes up this perspective from Foucault and reshapes it in an analysis marked by the Austinian performativity, as we will see below.

2.2- BUTLER: THE PERFORMATIVITY IN HATE SPEECH AND THE HATE IN THE DISCOURSE

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In the book *Excitable Speech: a politics of the performative*, published in 1997, translated only 2021 in Brazil, Butler analyzes the hate expressed by the language and its performative materialization. In other words, the speech ends up happening and is never neutral. One of the questions treated by the philosophy, is pertinente to my discussion, is that the hate discuss seeks for constituting the subject in a subordinate position, opening the possibility that its subordination invalidate a critical response to hate speech. Prevailing then, the authority of the hate speech and the results desired.

The hate speech seeks to offend, insult, demonstrate prejudice, discriminate. And even so, it is defended by the people who believe that any discourse, including the hate speech, it is and must be had as the free thought expression, as a cultural product which is taken as true and tends to be neutralized. The hate speech is made with insulting words with the aim of offending and intimidating people, discriminating their race, color, ethnicity, nationality, sex or religion, with the aim of instigating violence and hate against these people. Wether, initially, the hate speech is driven to na individual to constrain and weaken, actually the political aim of the hate speech of the extreme right, is directed at a social group, aiming to instigate the hate of the society for this marginalized group.

My Reading key on the hate speech, in Judith Butler, comes from her interpretation of the speech act theory, performativity, by Jonh L. Austin, which belongs to the strand of Wittgenstein's pragmatic philosophy of language, which disagrees with the traditional idea that affirms having difference between idea and action, because it is the use of words that determines their own meaning. For Austin, diversely, the language is not a mere neutral transmission of ideas, because it interferes the physical behavior and detains a power of violence that it itself can resignify. In other words, the language becomes to be a performative activity that acts on the reality and changes it, depending on the will of its agent.

Butler interprets the hate speech a specific performative optics whi has the hate speech as a basis e, as a speech act, mainly, a kind of a verbal insult. The philosophy seeks to comprehend the existence of the hate speech and the strenght of violence in its language in the intersubjective relations. From this point, comes her comprehension of hate speech as a verbal insult, which makes possible also, its criminalization, seen that it is a crime to the dignity of the insulted. Hence, are also developed reflexions about ways of fighting against the insulting statements and highlights the controversial fact that the insult is also responsible for the recognition of the subject (Cf. Butler, 2021, p. 12).

Nevertheless, the author does not want only to know which words hurt, but actually to analyze what is the capacity of hurting that the language has. In the same way, her analysis is not restricted to the intersubjective relations only, because it i sat stake in the statement of the hate speech what Austin called “*total speech situation*”, in other words, the tradition in which the insult was historically conceived. Being

the insult the repetition from a remote past we mentioned (citationality), rebuilt and strengthen it from the hate speech directed to someone.

In the Butler's comprehension, from Austin, the illocutionary force (the word makes happen) of insult, comes from the historical space and time of hate that we recovered through rituals in which we offend with insults. And it is from the repetition of this ritual that we strengthen the survival of a given injury and reconstitute it. However, it is importante to remembre that for Butler, the situation of speech is not only a simple context for the insulted, the psychic aspect of the recipient of the injury is shaken and the insult said hurts also phisically:

Being hurt by the speech, is to suffer a loss of context, in other words, is not knowing where you are. [...]. Being called insultingly It's not just opening yourself up to an unknown future, but not knowing the time and place of the insult, being disoriented in relation to one's own situation as a result of the speech (Butler, 2021, p. 15).

Still, it is still essential to understand that for Butler, despite believing in the existence of a violent illocutionary language, present and expressed in the aggressive use of the interpellation, the hate speech has not Absolute effectiveness effective, in other words, it can fail. It is about affirming the linguistic vulnerability that, to a large extent, it is determined by the body and the threat brought by hate speech.

The linguistic vulnerability can result from the body absence of control, but also from its presence, because the hate speech it is a body act. Thus, an insulting statement is not necessarily, a linguistic threat to be executed, but makes possible its realization when presented next to the body. It is this body out of control, "blind spot" of speech, that makes possible the mistake of not reproducing the illocutionary force of the statement of tradition in ritualistic form, thus enabling failure in the discourse.

The other element that Butler brings to explain the linguistic vulnerability is regarding to the issuer of the injurious sayings, the subject. This speaker is not a sovereign, autonomous subject, with his own and authorial speech. Inversely, all he says is part of a ritualistic chain of historical context, repeated by the and which only reinforces the discriminatory and injurious power of the prejudices of tradition. However, this historicity of the hate speech, does not take the responsibility of the speaker, because he is not obliged to utter the insulting statements.

It is, precisely, the linguistic vulnerability formed by these events that enable: to resignify the hate words; to make a reappropriation of the injurious power; renew the acceptance of the heritage of tradition. In practical and political terms, the linguistic vulnerability also opens space for: the development of creation of resistance movements, as in the case of the performative politics in Butler; the social

movements; the public politics; the law and the legal issues; state or civil resistances; reappropriation of terms co-opted by the hate speech.

However, the performativity of hate speech has a wide reach and harmful consequences due to its destructive and controlling potential, increasing the the challenges posed for the constitution of genres, considering the formation of a heteropatriarchal society.

The major consequence of these discourses is the violence that follows the incitement to hate: physical violence, moral violence, political violence, ethical violence. However, the symbolic violence becomes concrete and leads to the physical death, as in the case of some groups discriminated against by hate speech and exclusion. In the case of the reinforcement of the patriarchy and a the heteronormative society, the hate speech is driven to the LGBTQIA+ groups, resulting in a high number of murders in Brazil, and the high domestic violence against women. Not mentioning that the verbal violence that the hate speech, as Butler says, is felt also in the body.

In the current digital conjuncture, the hate speech is used strongly in the field of social media, with the visual and technological resources specific to cybernetic language, strengthening more the power of the co-opting discourse and greatly expanding the audience to be hijacked for the anti-democratic manipulations.

CONCLUSION

The hate discourse in the Bolsonaro's speech, makes impossible or difficult the construction of a gender identity as an affirmation of freedom, such as for exemple, the access to public spaces of the institutions and freedoms in and of private life since it tends to subordinate the women and make them inferior. Beyond the emotional suffering, that brings a psychic pain, there is also the pain of the body violence, which could turn into femicide. Suffering and death caused by the diminishment of women by their inferiorization and invisibilization.

The hate speech acts on the subjectivation processes of women, belittling her to make her submissive. In the bolsonarist conjuncture, far from the democratic political alliances, it is possible to talk about an identity process of women who has a model of subjectivation linked to the neoliberalism that idealizes and requires the submissive woman, domesticated, but at the same time na entrepreneur. What means more domestic work without earnings and removal of women from public spaces, but also making, simultaneously, some work activity to supplement the family budget.

There is a cruel concomitance in this neoliberal framework. On the one hand, staying at home dedicated to taking care of children and doing housework, in general composes the production of

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reproductive capital, so necessary for the accumulation of Capital. On the other hand, the absence or reduction of public services by the State or the end of some public policies, characteristic of the neoliberalism, pressure women to work in small businesses for covering private services, such as health and education. Therefore, a burden for the woman.

Still in the Bolsonarist vein, morally, the female submission to men is justified within the framework of the neoliberalism linked to a certain evangelical trend, because there is nothing to question, seen that it is written in the Holy Bible. The woman must serve her husband, either by the inseparable union of bodies, or by moral obedience. Thus, a picture of total female submission and domestication is outlined.

I conclude problematizing the current status of the misogyny. Yes, because it remains. And, if it remains, it is because it comes from before, it is a continuation of something. If today we women still do not have access to certain public spaces to work, or simply enjoy the freedom of citizenship, or not being victims of femicide, or continue to be responsible for unpaid domestic reproductive work, or not being the owner of our own body and deciding about pregnancy, or not being a victim of sexual violence, or.... or.... or...

In short, what I am saying is that the current limits on the women's lives, exist because they have been defined for a long time, since the patriarchy. The naturalizations and deifications in which the women are sheltered need to be unmasked. The alleged truths proclaimed to explain the feminine are sets of truths invented by the interests of power relations, through discourses and performative action. Finally, we must understand the misogynistic words of Bolsonarism from the power relations and also the power of speeches as elements of subjectivation processes, in case of devaluation of female existence. This way, the hate and misogynistic speech of Bolsonaro must be comprehended from the key of performativity from Butler and Austin, the word makes happen, it is not merely a sound, but Creator of realities than can, including, hurt and kill.

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