Chapter #16

MILITANT STRATEGY AND ITS SUBJECTIVE CONSEQUENCES

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ABSTRACT

Using Michel Foucault's archaeological and genealogical tools, we reviewed texts, discourses, and practices developed under the planning and execution of the Russian Revolution. The main aim is to examine how this event has played a crucial role in the current subjectivation process of some protestors and social movement participants in Brazil. The analyzed data emphasize three anchor points in understanding the militant subjectification process: a) Government Democratic Centralism; b) economic Stakhanovism; and c) cultural Zhdanovism. We concluded that it is possible to establish a relationship between Soviet dictatorship practices at the beginning of the twentieth century and the rigid ways of feeling, thinking and acting of many contemporary subjects when they take militant action to change social norms in Brazil.

Keywords: subjectivity, militancy, social movements, Brazil.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since June 2013, crucial changes have occurred in the way Brazilian collective action to contest social norms presents itself. Some distinguishable characteristics of key players from the Protest Cycle started in June 2013 were: a) young actors living in big cities; b) preference for collective decision-making processes; c) independence from political parties, churches, and trade unions; d) primary concerns are local issues and problems of everyday life; e) mobilization of the participants using new communication and information technologies; and f) explicit collaboration with other movements in different cities in the country and also in other countries.

These actors refused to define themselves and their actions using the word "*militante*"; instead, they use the word "*ativismo*" to explain the kind of action they are taking. Most of the analyses of this Cycle underline the influences of anarchist principles and libertarian ideas as a prominent inspiration for these movements. Although some of these ideas and principles have already been present in Brazilian youth movements, they became widespread only after 2013. Alonso and Mische (2017) emphasize that the autonomists' influence has been discernible in protests worldwide since the events in Seattle in 1999 as well as in the Global Justice Movement and the Arab Spring. The authors consider the autonomist influence as being the distinguishable novelty of Brazilian protest movements between 2013 and 2017.

This research started with a narrative literature review aiming to determine the meanings of the words "*militância*" and "*ativismo*" in Brazilian academic journals. After this, it became possible to create and develop the hypothesis that, regarding the Brazilian case, these words are used to describe different methodologies used to gather people in

collective action, and that "*militância"* and "*ativismo"* could be related to socialist and anarchist political traditions, respectively. In this paper, I will discuss the term "*militância"* by examining some events that took place in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). By doing this, I intend to examine how these events still work as anchor points for the rigid ways of feeling, thinking and acting of many contemporary subjects who take militant action to change social norms. It is crucial clarifying that the aspects described may sound typical of ultra left-wing political parties for English readers; they were prevalent not only in political parties but also in a whole range of social movements in Brazil from 1980 to 2013.

2. BACKGROUND

This is a theoretical research which analyzes and interprets results achieved by a range of significant studies about collective action in Brazil from 1980 to 2015 and also examines documents, papers and historical facts from the USSR between 1914 and 1957. Brazilian studies about social movements and collective action were used to characterize the "*militante*". Data from the Soviet Union provided insight into experiences underpinning "*militante*" identity. The framework used to build the analytical model was Brazilian Social Institutionalist Psychology (BSIP).

Schizoanalysis, an ethic-aesthetic-political paradigm whose aim is to elucidate the fundamental relations between the capitalist system of production, the production of desire and the regimes of power exercises, was proposed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In close connection with the Schizoanalytic framework, BSIP is concerned with the public, shared and collective dimension of subjectivity. Its approach has contributed to the development of analytical tools that challenge the dualism between conceptions of the subject either as a self-centered and fully autonomous being or as one entirely governed and determined by structures such as language, culture, historical processes and social norms.

The field of Brazilian Social Institutionalist Psychology conceptualizes subjectivity as an unstable arrangement produced by each human being at the time he starts to deal with institutional, biological, cultural and other social determinants. As a result, subjectification processes will be characterized by tension and dispute involving conflictive dispositions, diverse desires, and multiple interests acting on human bodies as vectors in a dynamic field. BSIP employs Michel Foucault's notions of archaeology and genealogy to investigate the historical and path-dependent condition of human subjectivity. Archaeological investigations analyze the unconscious rules involved in the emergence of regulation discourses in human sciences. Genealogical studies examine the necessary relationship between a regime of truth production and a particular technology of power embodied in social practices. "Archaeology proceeds along the truth axis, analyzing discursive conditions of existence. Genealogy travels the power axis, examining culturally true discourses' insertion into institutional and other non-discursive practices" (Mahon, 1992 p. 105).

Brazilian Social Institutional Psychology combines these ideas and concepts to build a framework in which research on subjectivity occurs through the examination of forces, movements, intentions and historical facts, aiming to create a better understanding of how these elements produce specific modes of existence. The main point is making explicit how a range of social forces and intentions produce specific ways of being human and manners of life. In this sense, this chapter scrutinizes the history of the Soviet Union from 1917 to 1957 to look for facts, papers, documents, political decisions, habits, and concerns that could be related to the ways of being of Brazilian "*militantes*".

3. BRAZILIAN "*MILITANTE*"

The word "*militante*" (used to term something or someone, or to qualify something or someone) as well as its derivations "*militância*" (noun) and "*militar*" (verb) are frequent expressions in left-wing Brazilian political parties' discourses, in student movement speeches and even in papers from Brazilian Social Movement scholars. The most common practices in collective action and social movements in Brazil tend to value discipline, submission, the observance of rigid and hierarchic rules, and participants' docility in order to succeed in their strategic goals. Almost all these movements use the word '*militante*' when referring to themselves and their participants. Reviewing and analyzing papers from Sociology of Social Movements and Political Science journals published in Brazil between 1980 and 2015, the words "*militante*" and "*militância*" appear frequently. However, there is not much attention given to conceptualizing them (Sales, Fontes, & Yasui, 2018).

In Brazil, a "*militante*" could be described as someone who is articulate, has strong and clear views, and has the ability to talk others into following their own beliefs. A "*militante*" may also be seen as one who always stays in character and is, at all times, defending the causes of his militancy. This exaggerated image may well be why people generally think of militants as tedious, boring and annoying. Furthermore, militant persons are often portrayed as forceful, and in movies and songs appear as people who would die before denying their own beliefs.

In analyzing the relationship between the identity formation and commitment of militant persons, Naujorks and Silva (2016) conclude that "the militant identity uses the identity match as feedstock and the interpretative frames as the substance which give meaning to militant identity itself" (Naujorks & Silva, 2016, p. 148)[1]. This identity match includes a collective dimension related to the ideas, principles, and values shared with other militants as well as an individual dimension related to the manners in which these principles and values are used as models and life guides to be followed by the militants. Evaluating the role exercised by this rigid identity match, Rolnik (2014) argues that this rigidness works as a powerful force because it champions the militant in the place of a conscious and aware person who is able to work correctly in the direction of his cause. Another function of the identity match is to recognize those who do not share his beliefs as enemies and as people who need to be combatted or saved. Thoburn (2010) suggests that all this creates a paradox in the way militants perceive themselves, "to the degree that the militant body conceives of itself as having discovered the correct revolutionary principle and establishes its centre of activity on adherence to this principle, it has a tendency to develop hostility to those who fall short of its standard (Thoburn, 2010, p. 134). Montgomery and Bergman (2017) grasp consequences of this paradox when describing "rigid radicalism" as something that "nurtures rigidity, mistrust, and anxiety precisely where we are suppose to feel most alive. It compels us to reach ourselves and others ruthlessly for flaw and inconsistencies. It crushes experimentation and curiosity. It is hostile to difference, complexity, and nuance" (p. 20).

Understanding how some force vectors have shaped subjectivity can be useful to comprehend the reasons militant persons fight as they do. To look over some past ideas can provide a better understating about how certain "tendencies of thought, action and feeling can congeal into patterns" (Montgomery & Bergman, 2017, p. 189). In this work, it is proposed, genealogically, some anchor points in which militant subjectivity is underpinned.

4. THREE ANCHOR POINTS

A historical study carried out by Macedo and Silva (2009) concluded that regarding political militancy in Brazil, the Communist Militant was the perfect embodiment of an ideal militant. The results achieved by Valverde (1986) in a genealogical investigation about these issues not only support this conclusion but also point out the relevance of theories, ideas, and facts from the Soviet Union from 1914 to 1980 as crucial to understanding the construction of militancy and militants.

Expanding socialist ideas, values and principles, and fighting against capitalist social norms, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) exported a theoretical background and a methodology to contest social norms grounded in the ideas of Karl Marx, Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin), and Josef Stalin. The Communist Parties in many countries were used to disseminate and to design tactical aims, contestation repertoires, and fighting tools which have been acquired by nonconformists all over the world. In Brazil, the local Communist Party, created in 1922, was a prominent font of influence until 1990 and has helped to shape the ideal way of fighting for social change. It is crucial to recognize the relevance of Lenin's work in the "systematic building of a Marxist political theory of class struggle" (Anderson, 1976, p. 20), as this theory underpinned "an almost real character (the Marxist-Leninist militant) designed to live in an extraordinary world (the one governed by democratic centralism)" (Figueiredo, 1993, p. 210). To this day, protests and social movements in Brazil are influenced by these ideas.

Here the USSR experience is examined to better understand the militant subjectification process and to discuss significant forces that have continued to influence the ways of thinking, feeling and acting in current Brazilian militancy. The criteria used to determine which forces should be analyzed were: a) the role they had in preserving the Communist Party's governability; b) the influence exercised by them into daily activities in the USSR; and c) the function assumed by them in producing the will for a communist way of life: "ruled, guided, and corrected by the critical thought" (Trotsky, 2007, p. 178). This paper argues that militant subjectivity has its anchor points in: a) government Democratic Centralism; b) economic Stakhanovism; and c) cultural Zhdanovism.

4.1. Democratic centralism

Democratic Centralism is a term used to synthesize two distinct and contradictory wishes: a) unified strategy, tactics and goals and b) the right to disagree about strategy, tactics, and goals. In the report on the Unity Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, Lenin (1906) summarized the idea of Democratic Centralism as "freedom of discussion, unity in action". At that point, he claims that the Party's members must "seek the widest possible discussion of the decisions of the Congress" (Lenin, 1906, Section VIII, ¶12). However, at the same time, he was already worried about the inherent risks of the freedom to discuss when he states that: "in the united Party this ideological struggle must not split the organizations, must not hinder the unity of action of the proletariat" (Lenin, 1906, Section VIII, ¶11). In the period following the February Revolution of 1917, as the Bolsheviks became a broader revolutionary mass party, spaces to express disagreement were disappearing. Worried about the risks of too much divergence, during the X Congress of the Party in 1921, Lenin outlined the resolution which banned factions in the Party.

Through analyzing texts such as "The Russian Social-Democratic Party and its Immediate Tasks" (Stalin, 1901) and "What is to be done?" (Lenin, 1902), Sève (1999) explains that Democratic Centralism was the solution to the problem of the organization of the peasant masses. Democratic Centralism was produced once the Party leaders realized the "radical incompatibility between the proletarian revolution as a strategic goal and spontaneity as an organizational methodology" (Sève, 1999, p. 63). Whether it came in a democratic or an autocratic form, this strategy aimed to mobilize the Russian population, win State-power in order to establish the proletarian dictatorship and, then, make communism possible. The proletarian masses must be governed with rigor because unity and homogeneity are critical conditions to achieving victory. It should also be noted that this kind of governability is also a war strategy used to fight the capitalist system, and during a war, there is no room for dissident soldiers.

In a text written in April of 1918, in which he lists the immediate tasks of the Soviet government, Lenin summarizes his ideas about how to act in order to make communism possible: "unquestioning subordination to a single will is absolutely necessary for the success of processes organized on the pattern of large-scale machine industry" (Lenin,1918, Section VII, ¶12). Figueiredo (1993) considers the issues regarding will a crucial point related to militant subjectivity. "The common ground between distinct militancies is a concern about the will. De-alienating the will and/or raising the will? Commanding the will and/or interpreting it?" (Figueiredo, 1993, p. 211).

Once the space for dissension was constricted, and the supremacy of will was taken as a core condition for the Revolution, the primary subjective goal of Democratic Centralism was to produce homogeneity in subjectivity. The ideal revolutionary army was built of subjects that were fully aware of labor-work contradictions, free from any bourgeois cultural influence and educated in Scientific Socialist principles. Freethinkers, workers' coalitions not subordinated to the Communist Party and any individual needs were framed by Party leaders as manifestations of enemy power, as traps rooted in capitalistic norms or remaining vestiges from the bourgeois culture which must be eliminated. These traps were depicted as barriers to the time when each and every individual would receive what they want according to their needs.

Diverse Communist parties around the world followed similar principles and developed their own version of Democratic Centralism. Although each was shaped in close connection with local circumstances, all were influenced by the iron discipline that took form in the USSR. Analyzing the effect of this on the French Communist Party, Sève (1999) argues that this influence was responsible for the Party having ignored "emergent causes, from feminist to ecology and also new aspirations and desires as self-management and sexual liberation" (Sève, 1999, p. 75).

The Brazilian Communist Party and other political parties grounded in Marxist ideas not only were key actors in social movements fighting against the military dictatorship occurred during the second half of the twentieth century, but also inspired movements whose aims were to promote a welfare state in Brazil. Someone familiar with Brazilian militants can recognize the presence of iron discipline in the rigidity of their opinions and in the difficulty most militants feel when dealing with criticisms of their practices. The influence can also be noticed in the pyramidal organizational arrangements and centralized decision process routines that characterize Brazilian left-wing parties and unions. Democratic Centralism is still a significant model for understanding why they keep fighting in the way they do.

4.2. Economic Stakhanovism

Before October 1917, Russia's wealth was primarily based on agricultural goods. Moving this into a robust industrial economy and significantly improving the economy to create an environment favorable to full human development was another essential condition to establish a Communist system. At that time, in modern industrial cities in the capitalist world, Frederick Winslow Taylor's ideas about managing work scientifically were being spread. Moved by an urgency to make the USSR great again, and combating the deleterious consequences of wars, hunger and cold, Lenin, Stalin, and the Party Central Committee created a form of red Taylorism: Stakhanovism.

Stakhanovism was a movement that aimed to enhance work and workers' productivity. Although the movement supposedly had been developed among workers, it was quickly recognized, improved and spread by the Central Committee. The principles shared with Taylor's scientific management were: constant vigilance; scientific logic, rationality and efficiency in the labor organization; the standardization of labor routines; awarding the best workers; and making financial payments proportional to the items produced. This system was first implemented in the coal industry. Once it had been adopted as a central tool for the New Economic Politic, it was disseminated to the transport sector and implemented in agricultural activities. Despite Lenin's critical views of Taylorism expressed in "The Taylor System—Man's Enslavement by the Machine" (Lenin, 1914), some members of the Soviet intelligentsia perceived Stakhanovism as their best option to transform the USSR into a prominent industrial nation.

Stating that it was necessary to increase the production of industrial goods, Trotsky endorsed not only making labor a compulsory service for every Soviet citizen but also organizing labor activities in a way akin to the military. Augustin (2015) argues that the problem was how to use unskilled workers to enlarge industrial businesses, and create more industrial goods in a short period. Therefore "it may be convenient to use a management work model in which the unskilled workers only had to follow strict rules and to execute low-status duties" (Augustin, 2015, p. 8). Dividing labor activities into small and menial jobs according to the most advanced principles of scientific rationality to enhance productivity is one of the core methods used in industrial capitalism. Taylorism and Stakhanovism aimed to organize work while avoiding as much as possible any space for laborers' decisions or interference, and not even the rhythm of the work was under worker control. The jobs were repetitious, boring and alienating. However, members of the Soviet Central Committee did not see any contradiction in using these principles, as the State controlled the industrial activities, and the profits would be used to create collective goods.

In his speech at the First All-Union Conference of Stakhanovites on 17 November 1935, Stalin states loud and clear the relevance of Stakhanovism for proceeding into Communist society.

> The significance of the Stakhanov movement lies in the fact that it is a movement which is smashing the old technical standards, because they are inadequate, which in a number of cases is surpassing the productivity of labour of the foremost capitalist countries, and is thus creating the practical possibility of further consolidating Socialism in our country, the possibility of converting our country into the most prosperous of all countries (Stalin, 1935, Section 1 VII, ¶12).

Ruled by Stakhanovite principles: a) trade unions became part of the State administrative apparatus; b) labor started to be organized according to a precise topography; c) work and workers began to be continuously supervised and meticulously inspected; and d) work activities were now ruled by the most advanced bourgeois science. As it may be evident by now, due to the importance placed on increasing productivity, labor activities in the USSR were managed as a rigorous disciplinary power exercise (Foucault, 2005).

Aleksei Gastev, creator and director of the Central Institute of Labour, supported the idea of using an orthodox form of Taylorism not only in labor activities but also in other spheres of human life. Gastev "suggests that these principles and ideas should be used to construct social norms and Public policies covering all fields of human life, as studies, leisure and even the most essential and basic activities" (Miguel, 2006, p. 3). Beyond material goods, Stakhanovism's principles were also used to attempt to produce the Soviet worker as a compliant, subservient and engaged citizen able to give his best efforts to bring Communism into reality. Democratic Centralism and Stakhanovism share methodologies, tactical goals, and procedures. They were set up as part of a strict disciplinary regime whose ultimate purpose was to produce a very peculiar psychology in the proletariat.

> This psychology reveals a new working-class collectivism which is manifested not only in relations between persons but in the relations of whole groups of people with whole groups of mechanisms. Such a collectivism can be called mechanized collectivism. The manifestations of this mechanized collectivism are so foreign to personality, so anonymous, that the movement of these collective complexes is similar to the movement of things, in which there is no longer any individual face but only regular, uniform steps and faces devoid of expression, of a soul, of lyricism, of emotion, measured not by a shout or a smile but by a pressure gauge or a speed gauge (Bailes, 1977, p. 378).

"*Militante*" subjectivity was built in direct relation to this disciplinary regime that intended to exterminate any singular or personal characteristics in the peasants. The fact that the same principles were used to govern the State and to manage industries makes clear the intention of producing the revolutionary man as a perfect citizen-militant-worker-soldier able to fight for the continuity and expansion of the Revolution. This goal becomes even more explicit when one notes the Soviet guidelines for the cultural field.

4.3. Cultural Zhdanovism

In 1905, while writing about the Party's literature, Lenin classified this literature as a powerful tool to be used in the fight against bourgeois habits and traditions. "Literature must become part of the common cause of the proletariat, 'a cog and a screw' of one single great Social-Democratic mechanism set in motion by the entire politically-conscious vanguard of the entire working class" (Lenin, 1905, ¶23). According to Lenin's ideas, literature must be developed as part of the Party's work.

The task delegated to Soviet art was to eradicate every single vestige or influence of bourgeois culture over proletarian culture. Andrei Alexandrovich Zhdanov's model conceived all forms of art as educational and pedagogical tools which should be used to

spread the Party's ideas and to produce the revolutionary conscience. He reinforced Stalin's idea that artists are engineers of the human soul and, in a speech made in 1934, he summarized the premises and principles of socialist realism:

> We say that socialist realism is the basic method of Soviet belles lettres and literary criticism, and this presupposes that revolutionary romanticism should enter into literary creation as a component part, for the whole life of our Party, the whole life of the working class and its struggle consist in a combination of the most stern and sober practical work with a supreme spirit of heroic deeds and magnificent future prospects (Zdhanov, 1934, ¶31).

Socialist realism's role was to inspire men and women to fight for a communist future. The speech stresses the magnitude of the achievements of the Communist Party's leadership and the moral values and beliefs every citizen should pursue. Under this guidance, any individual, sentimental or poetic expression in literature was valued as petty bourgeois, and again, as an obstacle to revolutionary success.

The colors, shapes and topics which were deemed as necessary to build artistic expressions were: aesthetically simple, linear with naturalistic colors and showing a harmonious relationship between the elements of a whole and topics demonstrating the importance and magnitude of the achievements already made by the Revolution. There was no full adherence to these guidelines, and the ones who refused to follow it were accused of being insensitive to Soviet needs and were prosecuted for betraying the Revolution (Miguel, 2006).

In the field of visual arts, these guidelines resulted in large panels and poster boards praising Stalin's accomplishments. These productions were created using images from Soviet daily activities and painted using pleasant colors, eliciting identification, pride, and hope in the viewers. Most of these productions look like advertisements and their artistic value is questionable.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research provided theoretical facts and a general framework which allows one to understand central ideas underpinning the rigidity in the manners of think, feel and act of Militants in Brazil. Once the guidelines provided by USSR were followed by Communist Parties in different countries, it may be a fruitful field for future investigations to analyze how these guidelines were used and reorganized in distinct scenarios.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This research, proceeding archaeologically and genealogically aimed to explore and examine meanings, values, procedures, and beliefs that connect the USSR experience with current practices in left-wing social movements and collective action in Brazil. Many of the criticisms made by Brazilian "*ativistas*" to traditional "*militantes*" are concerned with excess or rigidity in organizational procedures, the lack of space for divergent opinions, the use of organizational systems that are akin to military forces, the preference for hierarchical organizational arrangements and the power and importance attributed to movement leaders.

The results of this historical investigation improve our understanding of the roots of some preferences for disciplinary, militarized, unified and centralized organizational procedures that characterize the way most people in trade unions, academic students' directories, and other left-wing social organizations in Brazil usually behave. If one considers the fact that most Brazilian left-wing political parties and social movements have been deeply influenced by Brazilian Communist Party moral values, it is possible to point out similarities to events that took place in the USSR in the construction and development of some subjective characteristics of Brazilian militants.

Understanding subjectivity as something shaped by historical facts, cultural traditions and strictly related to a regime of power, the paper argued that Brazilian "*militantes*" keep reproducing values, principles and beliefs that were fundamentals of the USSR experience and, by doing this, they are still being disciplined, ruled and shaped in ways similar to how people in the USSR were. The historical analyses made about the USSR experience highlight the excessive rigidness of the government and the utopia of full control of the soviet population as decisive points to understand the reasons that made the communism regime fail. Once Democratic Centralism, Stakhanovism and Zhdanovism were vital tools in the maintenance of the Stalinist regime, it is essential that nowadays "*militantes*" be aware of it.

There is no intention of providing the last word about this theme; in fact, the authors look forward for more studies concerned with these issues, and believe that "if our approach to the theme is not enough to catch all the complexity involved in it, the merit of this point of view is to allow an extensive understanding which can be used as a starting point for distinct analyses" (Figueiredo, 1995, p. 41).

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NOTE

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