

LANGUAGE, DISCOURSE AND TOTALITARIANISM: FROM THE REDUCTION OF THE OTHER TO THE DEMOCRATIC PATHS OF DIALOGUE

A CONSTRUÇÃO DA LINGUAGEM E O DISCURSO TOTALITÁRIO: DA REDUÇÃO DO OUTRO ÀS VIAS DEMOCRÁTICAS DO DIÁLOGO

LA CONSTRUCCIÓN DEL LENGUAJE Y EL DISCURSO TOTALITARIO: DE LA REDUCCIÓN DEL OTRO A LAS VÍAS DEMOCRÁTICAS DEL DIÁLOGO



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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the relationship between the constitution of language and the central role of discourse in the individual's participation within the social sphere, based on the hypothesis that the predominance of monolithic discourses fosters the emergence of totalitarian regimes. Such regimes systematically seek cultural and social homogenization, transforming all forms of alterity into threats to be eliminated, thereby contributing to the construction of exclusionary logics and potential social and political conflicts. The study adopts a hypothetical-deductive method, grounded in bibliographic research, and draws on the contributions of Michel Foucault and Ludwig Wittgenstein in the field of philosophy of language, particularly regarding the formation and functioning of language. With respect to totalitarianism and the construction of authoritarian discourse, the analysis is supported by the theoretical frameworks of Hannah Arendt and Claude Lefort. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of the inclusion of the other and the role of dialogue, from a Habermasian perspective, as fundamental elements for the preservation of democratic societies and for resisting the consolidation of totalitarian structures.

Keywords: Dialogue. Discourse. Totalitarianism.

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem por objetivo analisar a relação entre a constituição da linguagem e a centralidade do discurso na participação do indivíduo no âmbito social, partindo da hipótese de que a predominância de discursos monolíticos favorece a emergência de regimes totalitários, os quais buscam, de maneira sistemática, a uniformização cultural e social, convertendo toda forma de alteridade em ameaça a ser eliminada, contribuindo, assim, para a construção de uma lógica de exclusão e potenciais conflitos sociais e políticos. A pesquisa

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adota o método hipotético-dedutivo, com base em revisão bibliográfica, mobilizando, no campo da filosofia da linguagem, as contribuições de Michel Foucault e Ludwig Wittgenstein acerca da formação e funcionamento da linguagem. No que concerne à análise do totalitarismo e da constituição do discurso autoritário, recorre-se às reflexões de Hannah Arendt e Claude Lefort. Por fim, o estudo enfatiza a importância da inclusão do outro e do diálogo, a partir da perspectiva habermasiana, como elementos fundamentais para a preservação de sociedades democráticas e para a resistência à consolidação de estruturas totalitárias.

Palavras-chave: Diálogo. Discurso. Totalitarismo.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo tiene por objeto analizar la relación entre la constitución del lenguaje y la centralidad del discurso en la participación del individuo en el ámbito social, partiendo de la hipótesis de que el predominio de discursos monolíticos favorece la emergencia de regímenes totalitarios, los cuales buscan, de manera sistemática, la uniformización cultural y social, convirtiendo toda forma de alteridad en una amenaza que debe ser eliminada, contribuyendo, de este modo, a la construcción de una lógica de exclusión y de potenciales conflictos sociales y políticos. La investigación adopta el método hipotético-deductivo, con base en revisión bibliográfica, movilizándolo, en el campo de la filosofía del lenguaje, las contribuciones de Michel Foucault y Ludwig Wittgenstein acerca de la formación y del funcionamiento del lenguaje. En lo que concierne al análisis del totalitarismo y de la constitución del discurso autoritario, se recurre a las reflexiones de Hannah Arendt y Claude Lefort. Por último, el estudio enfatiza la importancia de la inclusión del otro y del diálogo, desde la perspectiva habermasiana, como elementos fundamentales para la preservación de sociedades democráticas y para la resistencia a la consolidación de estructuras totalitarias.

Palabras clave: Diálogo. Discurso. Totalitarismo.

1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language, discourse and social organization constitutes one of the central axes of contemporary reflections on democracy and power. Far from being limited to a neutral instrument of communication, language is configured as a space of symbolic dispute, in which meanings are produced, power relations are structured and the limits of social inclusion and exclusion are defined. In this context, the way in which discourses are constructed and legitimized plays a decisive role in the constitution of social and political practices, and can both favor democratic environments and enable structures of domination.

This study starts from the hypothesis that the predominance of monolithic discourses — characterized by the denial of plurality and the delegitimization of otherness — creates favorable conditions for the emergence of totalitarian dynamics. Such dynamics operate through symbolic uniformity and the reduction of the other to the condition of threat, which compromises the possibility of dialogue and weakens the foundations of democratic coexistence.

To develop this analysis, the article initially mobilizes the contributions of Michel Foucault and Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose reflections allow us to understand language not only as representation, but as a situated social practice, crossed by rules, uses and power relations. Then, we resort to the formulations of Hannah Arendt and Claude Lefort, in order to examine the mechanisms of constitution of totalitarianism and the centrality of discourse in the maintenance of authoritarian regimes.

Finally, from the perspective of Jürgen Habermas, the importance of the inclusion of the other and dialogue as essential normative conditions for the consolidation of democratic societies is discussed. It is argued that openness to the plurality of voices and the recognition of otherness not only strengthen the public space, but also act as forms of resistance to totalizing tendencies present in different historical and social contexts.

From the methodological point of view, the research adopts a theoretical-analytical approach, guided by the hypothetical-deductive method, based on a qualitative literature review. The investigation is structured from a conceptual and comparative reconstruction of the contributions of Michel Foucault, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Hannah Arendt, Claude Lefort and Jürgen Habermas, seeking to identify points of convergence and tension between their perspectives regarding language, discourse and forms of social organization. From this theoretical articulation, a critical analysis of the conditions that favor the emergence of totalitarian discourses is carried out, as well as the normative possibilities of overcoming them within democratic regimes.

2 LANGUAGE AS A REPRESENTATION OF THOUGHT

2.1 THE FORMATION OF LANGUAGE IN MICHEL FOUCAULT

The understanding of language, in Michel Foucault's thought, moves away from perspectives that conceive it as a mere instrument for the representation of reality, assuming it as a historically situated practice that is inseparable from power relations. In this sense, language is not limited to describing the world, but actively participates in its constitution, operating as one of the main means by which knowledge is produced, discourses are organized, and forms of domination are structured.

In his archaeological phase, especially in *the work Words and Things*, Foucault introduces the concept of *episteme* as the historical configuration that defines the conditions of possibility of knowledge in a given period. Language, in this context, is not understood as a neutral system, but as part of a broader order that delimits what can be said, thought, and recognized as true. Thus, knowledge is no longer seen as a simple progressive accumulation and is understood as an effect of historical structures that organize discourses.

Language, in this sense, is intrinsically linked to the world, not only as a means of its representation, but as a constitutive element of the ways in which it is understood and organized. Through language, concepts are constructed, at the same time that the processes of problematization and resignification of reality become possible. Furthermore, it is language that establishes the mediation between the subject and the world, configuring a field of experience in which meanings are produced and ways of understanding reality are structured.

It is important to note, however, that this relationship should not be interpreted from ontological categories alien to Foucaultian thought. Although there is influence from Martin Heidegger at certain moments of his intellectual trajectory, Michel Foucault does not directly adopt concepts such as *Dasein*⁴, privileging, in his analysis, the investigation of the historical and discursive conditions that make possible the emergence of knowledge and forms of subjectivation.

In this context, it is possible to identify two fundamental moments that influence Foucault's understanding of knowledge. The first refers to the period before the seventeenth century, in which knowledge was predominantly organized based on the search for

⁴ *Dasein* is a central concept in Martin Heidegger's philosophy, especially developed in *Being and Time* (1927), which can be translated as "being-there" or "being-in-the-world". The term designates the human being's own mode of existence, characterized by his openness to the world, his ability to understand the being and his insertion in a historical and relational context. Although he exerted an indirect influence on several thinkers of the twentieth century, including Michel Foucault in the early stages of his career, the concept is not adopted in a systematic way in his work, which privileges the analysis of the historical and discursive conditions of knowledge production.

similarities and correspondences between the elements of the world. In this configuration, knowledge was not structured by ruptures or rigorous distinctions, but by relations of analogy, in which discourses tended to reproduce and reiterate what they intended to explain (FOUCAULT, p. 57). Thus, even when there were attempts at interpretation or criticism, these remained strongly linked to the object analyzed, producing variations that, although distinct in appearance, maintained a structural proximity to the original discourse. In this way, language operated as a mechanism of continuous reiteration, in which meanings unfolded indefinitely based on relations of similarity, generating an interpretative chain that did not break with its point of origin, but reproduced it under new forms (FOUCAULT, p. 57).

The second relevant moment for the understanding of Foucaultian thought emerges in the twentieth century, especially from the 1960s onwards, when language began to be problematized not only as a system of representation, but as a constitutive element of discursive practices. In this period, Foucault shifts his analysis to the historical conditions that make knowledge possible, showing that what can be said, thought and recognized as true is conditioned by specific discursive structures.

In the following decade, a deepening of this perspective was observed, with the more explicit incorporation of the relations between knowledge, power and subjectivity. Language, in this context, is no longer conceived only as a means of expression and is understood as a practice that actively participates in the production of truths and in the constitution of the subjects.

It is in this horizon that the notion of *parrhesia is*⁵ inserted, developed by Foucault in his late courses, understood as the practice of true saying, in which the subject assumes an ethical relationship with the truth, expressing himself in a frank and responsible way, even in the face of possible risks. This concept reinforces the ethical and political dimension of discourse, showing that language can operate not only as an instrument of power, but also as a space of resistance and critical constitution of the subject.

In addition to the notion of *parrhesia*, the concept of *episteme*⁶ is also highlighted, through which Foucault establishes an articulation between language, culture and forms of knowledge. It is the historical structure that delimits the conditions of possibility of knowledge at a given time, defining the criteria from which something can be recognized as true. In this sense, *episteme* is not reduced to a specific domain, but encompasses different fields of

⁵ The conception of *parrhesia* occurs as an experience of truth-telling, which becomes relevant in the second part of the twentieth century, proposed by Michel Foucault, as well as by Pierre Hadot, and Martha Nussbaum.

⁶ *Epistémê* deals with a necessary order of knowledge, "a principle of historical ordering of knowledge prior to the ordering of discourse established by the criteria of scientificity (...) the configuration, the disposition that knowledge assumes at a given time and that gives it a positivity" (p. 148-149). MACHADO, R. *Science and knowledge: the trajectory of Foucault's archaeology*. Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1981.

knowledge — such as language, economics and biology — evidencing the existence of an underlying order that guides the production of knowledge in each historical period.

In this context, it becomes possible to understand the transition between the classical period and modernity with regard to the organization of knowledge about language. In the classical period, language was fundamentally conceived as a system of representation, structured by the relationship between signs and things, in which the search for an orderly and transparent correspondence between words and the world predominated.

In this horizon, the functioning of language was guided by principles of classification and ordering, in which the analysis of signs — often understood from the articulation between signifier and signified — aimed to guarantee the intelligibility of the real. It should be noted that part of the influences mobilized by Foucault in the analysis of this period refers to the rationalist tradition, especially to Port-Royal's General Grammar, which sought to establish universal foundations for language based on logical and cognitive structures⁷.

Furthermore, when advancing to the analyses developed by Michel Foucault from the 1970s onwards, a deepening of the articulation between knowledge, language and power is observed. In this context, knowledge is no longer understood as a neutral instance, but is conceived as the result of historically situated discursive practices, through which regimes of truth are established and power relations are organized.

Thus, language not only conveys knowledge, but actively participates in its constitution, becoming a central element in the production and legitimation of knowledge. Among the consequences of this perspective, the centrality of discourse as a space of dispute and production of meaning stands out, in which both the reproduction of structures of domination and the opening to critical practices become possible.

In this horizon, dialogue assumes a relevant role as a condition for the circulation of different perspectives and for the problematization of established discourses, configuring itself as a fundamental element for freedom of thought — an aspect that will be taken up and deepened in later sections.

From this perspective, when developing his analyses on the relations between knowledge and power, Michel Foucault shifts the focus from the understanding of knowledge as a merely normative or moral instance, starting to investigate it as a historically situated practice, crossed by power relations. In his late courses, especially in *The Government of Self and Others*, the author returns to ancient philosophy — with emphasis on the Socratic-

⁷ The Grammar of Port-Royal was published in 1660 with the purpose of presenting answers to the dissatisfactions with Renaissance grammar. It initially seeks scientific rigor, based on the foundations of French rationalism proposed by René Descartes

Platonic tradition — in order to examine the ways in which the subject constitutes itself in relation to truth.

In this reading, the emphasis falls on the modes of subjectivation, that is, on the processes by which individuals constitute themselves as subjects based on discursive and ethical practices. Truth, in this context, is not understood as absolute or universal data, but as something that is constructed in the relationship between the subject and the current regimes of truth, opening space for critical forms of positioning in the face of dominant discourses.

It is in this horizon that the notion of *parrhesia is inserted*, understood as the practice of saying truth, in which the subject assumes the commitment to enunciate the truth in a frank way, even in the face of risks. Inspired by the experience of Athenian democracy, Foucault shows that such a practice presupposes the possibility of confrontation between different perspectives, with dissent being a constitutive element of public life.

With the historical development of forms of social organization, however, there is a shift in this practice towards forms of discourse predominantly guided by rhetoric, in which persuasion occupies a central place. In this process, the discourse tends to dissociate itself from the ethical commitment to the truth, prioritizing argumentative efficacy to the detriment of the authenticity of the utterance, which contributes to the weakening of its critical potential.

2.2 NOTES ON LANGUAGE FOR LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

Having made the initial considerations about the Foucaultian perspective, we move on to the analysis of the conception of language developed by Ludwig Wittgenstein, especially from his work *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). In this context, the philosopher shifts the focus from an essentialist understanding of language to a pragmatic approach, in which meaning is not determined by a fixed essence, but by the effective use of expressions in concrete contexts of interaction.

Thus, language comes to be understood as a social activity, structured by practices shared within a community. Linguistic functioning, in this sense, is not based on abstract and universal rules, but on forms of use that are consolidated in everyday life, guiding mutual understanding among participants.

It is in this horizon that the notion of "language games" is inserted, through which Wittgenstein shows that to speak a language is to participate in a set of practices regulated by socially established conventions. Such games do not have rigid or completely fixed boundaries, but they present regularities that allow the recognition and intelligibility of the utterances, evidencing the dynamic and contextual character of the language.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein proposes a decisive inflection in the understanding of language by highlighting that the meaning of words is intrinsically linked to their use in specific contexts (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996). In this sense, the attribution of names or denominations is not carried out in an isolated or purely mental way, but presupposes the insertion of the subject in shared practices, in which one already knows how to use certain expressions.

From this perspective, language cannot be understood as an exclusive product of internal or subjective states, since its functioning depends on public criteria of use, constructed within a linguistic community. Meaning, therefore, does not precede use, but emerges from it, being continuously stabilized by social practices that enable mutual understanding among speakers.

In this context, Wittgenstein problematizes the idea of a private language, arguing that language necessarily presupposes the possibility of intersubjective sharing and verification. Speaking a language, therefore, implies participating in forms of life in which the senses are collectively constituted and recognized.

Furthermore, by developing the notion of language games, the author shows that linguistic practices are regulated by conventions that guide the use of expressions, without this implying the existence of rigid or absolutely fixed rules. On the contrary, such rules are subject to variations and may, in certain situations, reveal limits or tensions, as the author himself suggests when he observes that, when we follow previously established rules, we may face unforeseen difficulties in their application (WITTGENSTEIN, 1996, p. 74).

In this way, Wittgensteinian philosophy highlights the dynamic, public, and practical character of language, moving away from both strictly mentalist conceptions and models that presuppose totally closed normative systems.

From the propositions previously examined, it is possible to extract some relevant consequences for the understanding of language in the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein. In the first place, it is not a matter of denying the possibility of attributing truth or falsity to propositions, but of recognizing that such criteria do not result from a direct and immediate correspondence between language and reality. On the contrary, the validity criteria are linked to the contexts of use and the linguistic practices in which the utterances are employed.

In this way, Wittgenstein's analysis shifts the problem of truth to the realm of practices, showing that the meaning and intelligibility of propositions depend on the rules and ways of life shared by the speakers. Such a perspective does not imply the rejection of empirical knowledge, but questions the idea that it can be based exclusively on isolated sensory data, disconnected from the linguistic and social contexts in which they are interpreted.

In this sense, Wittgenstein's central concern lies in the clarity in the use of language and in the understanding of the rules that guide discursive practices, differing from Michel Foucault's approach, which emphasizes the relationship between discourse, power and the production of knowledge. While Wittgenstein seeks to elucidate the ways in which language operates within forms of life, Foucault investigates the historical and institutional conditions that structure the regimes of truth, without, however, reducing the analysis to mere formal clarity, but highlighting the effects of power implied in the circulation of discourses.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify points of convergence between the perspectives of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault, although situated in different theoretical horizons. In Wittgenstein, the notion of language games shows that meaning emerges from use in shared social practices, being inseparable from the forms of life in which language is inserted. In turn, Foucault, when dealing with the so-called truth games, analyzes the mechanisms by which certain statements come to be recognized as true in specific historical contexts, based on relations between knowledge and power⁸. Although they are not equivalent concepts, both authors converge in rejecting the idea of an absolute and timeless truth, highlighting that the criteria of validity and meaning are conditioned by social, historical, and institutional practices. In this sense, both language games and truth games show the situated character of the production of meaning, although under different approaches: pragmatic, in the case of Wittgenstein, and historical-discursive, in the case of Foucault.

From the convergences previously outlined, as well as the central elements that structure the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Michel Foucault, the theoretical bases for the development of subsequent analyses are established. In this sense, the articulation between language, discourse and social practices allows us to highlight the centrality of discourse in the constitution of social relations, as well as in the definition of the conditions of equality between subjects.

In this way, the valorization of discursive plurality and the recognition of the other as a legitimate interlocutor are fundamental elements for sustaining democratic environments, in which dissent and diversity of perspectives are not only admitted, but constitute an indispensable condition for the critical development of thought.

3 A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF TOTALITARIANISM

When starting a discussion about Totalitarianism, it is necessary to remember that there are several perspectives on this subject, for this reason, it is emphasized that the

⁸ Truth games are determined by the compilation of rules for the production of truth, and the individual who determines what can be declared as truth are free men, who agree among themselves and are immersed in a specific community, and its institutions, as Foucault teaches

guiding concepts of this topic will be based on the thought of the German philosopher Hannah Arendt.

From Hannah Arendt's perspective, totalitarianism has specific characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of political domination. In general, it is a regime marked by the pretension of total control over the lives of individuals, extending to all spheres of existence and operating through the integral submission of the population (ARENDR, 1989, p. 375). In this context, terror is not limited to a punctual instrument of repression, but assumes a structuring function, being systematically used as a mechanism of government and maintenance of the obedience of the masses (ARENDR, 1989, p. 26).

Furthermore, unlike traditional authoritarian regimes, in which power tends to manifest itself predominantly in the public and institutional sphere, totalitarianism advances on the internal dimension of individuals, seeking to shape not only their actions, but also their perceptions and ways of thinking. Such dynamics intensify the experience of fear, not only as a reaction to external threats, but as an internalized element, which guides behaviors and contributes to the reproduction of structures of domination.

Hannah Arendt draws a fundamental distinction between totalitarianism and other forms of political domination, such as tyrannies and dictatorships. Although these can also resort to fear and violence as instruments of control, in totalitarianism terror assumes a qualitatively different function, ceasing to be just a means of repression to become a structuring principle of the regime itself, operating in a continuous and comprehensive way over the totality of social life. In this context, the distinction between internal and external enemy is dissolved, since any individual can potentially be identified as a threat, which contributes to the generalization of insecurity and instability (ARENDR, 1989).

In addition, the author highlights a particularly relevant phenomenon: the internalization and reproduction of authoritarian discourse by the individuals subjected to the regime. Such dynamics are not limited to direct coercion, but involve mechanisms of adhesion, in which subjects begin to reproduce, in a mimetic way, the dominant ideological patterns, whether out of fear, the need to belong, or the search for recognition within the power structure.

Finally, the concept of totalitarianism in Arendt is not reduced to specific historical models, but is configured as a singular form of domination. In this sense, the author shows that, in such regimes, power does not necessarily manifest itself in the most visible instances of the state apparatus, and can operate in a diffuse and opaque manner, so that less apparent organizations concentrate greater capacity for control — a dynamic that expresses the complexity and depth of totalitarian structures (ARENDR, 1989, p. 453).

In Hannah Arendt's thought, it is highlighted that totalitarian domination is not sustained exclusively through direct coercion, but also involves forms of adherence that can take on the appearance of voluntariness. In this context, individuals are led to give up freedoms and rights in the name of a supposed protection offered by the State, which reveals the effectiveness of ideological mechanisms in the production of social conformity.

Such dynamics do not imply a fully free choice, but are inserted in structures that limit the real possibilities of action and political participation, producing a sense of engagement that often conceals the reproduction of dominant interests and discourses. The apparent participation in confronting threats — often constructed or amplified by the regime itself — contributes to the legitimization of practices that restrict plurality and weaken the autonomy of subjects.

In this sense, the consolidation of homogeneous discourses and the delegitimization of divergent perspectives are central elements of totalitarian structures, in which freedom is not simply explicitly denied, but progressively emptied in its practical dimension. As Arendt observes, the most disturbing character of these regimes lies not only in the direct suppression of freedom, but in the conception that it can – and should – be sacrificed in the name of a supposed historical development, whose course is intended to be necessary and inevitable (ARENDR, 1989, p. 51).

In the context of totalitarianism, as analyzed by Hannah Arendt, there is a significant rupture between the production of knowledge and the concrete experience of reality. This phenomenon is manifested in the construction of narratives that present themselves as coherent and self-evident truths, even if they are disconnected from the facts, contributing to the consolidation of closed ideological systems.

In this context, the formation of large masses that are socially and politically disjointed plays a fundamental role. According to Arendt, the viability of totalitarian domination is associated with the existence of populations considered "superfluous", whose elimination or sacrifice does not generate, in structural terms, immediate consequences that compromise the social order (ARENDR, 1989, p. 361).

Adherence to such dynamics does not result from a direct relationship with empirical reality, but from the internalization of ideological constructions that project future scenarios — often improbable — as a justification for maintaining power. In this way, discourses disconnected from concrete experience become socially effective, insofar as they offer totalizing explanations and mobilize collective action, even when based on fragile or distorted premises.

3.1 THE FORMATION OF AUTHORITARIAN DISCOURSE

After the analysis of the concept of totalitarianism developed by Hannah Arendt, we move on to the investigation of Slavoj Žižek's contributions about the constitution of reality within ideological discourses and the subject's submission in totalitarian contexts. To this end, the work *The Most Sublime of Hysterics: Hegel with Lacan is taken as a reference*, in which the author articulates elements of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Hegelian philosophy to understand the dynamics of ideology.

In this theoretical framework, Žižek proposes that the social bond in totalitarian contexts is not sustained only by external impositions, but by the internalization of ghostly structures that guide the desire of the subjects. In other words, ideology does not operate only at the conscious level, but structures the very way individuals perceive reality and relate to it. Thus, the distinction between social norm and subjective desire tends to dissolve, causing adherence to the system not only by coercion, but also by libidinal investment (ŽIŽEK, 1991, p. 157).

From this perspective, totalitarian discourse not only imposes an order, but mobilizes desire by presenting certain ideals as objects of collective identification. Power, in this context, is not limited to external domination, but is realized to the extent that it is recognized and desired by the subjects themselves, which evidences the centrality of the Other as an instance of symbolic validation.

In this way, the violence associated with such regimes is not restricted to the physical dimension, but also manifests itself in the form of symbolic submission, in which individuals come to identify with the very mechanisms that dominate them. Such dynamics compromise the critical capacity of the subject, who ceases to position himself as a reflective agent and starts to reproduce, in a repeated way, the discourses that sustain the power structure.

The central problem shifts, in this context, to the modes of legitimation of discourse, which are no longer anchored in argumentative processes guided by critical reflection and start to privilege rhetorical strategies aimed at obtaining adherence and imposing certain meanings. In this scenario, the success of the discourse does not result from its rational consistency, but from its ability to assert itself as dominant, even in contexts of argumentative fragility.

In this way, subjects aligned with discursive structures of a totalitarian nature tend to operate in the sense of restricting the field of dissent, seeking to eliminate or delegitimize alternative perspectives, in order to preserve the appearance of unity and incontestability. Such dynamics may imply the use of symbolic mechanisms and, in certain contexts, coercive practices, which aim to prevent the emergence of competing discourses.

In this process, the construction of the enemy — or the "Other" — plays a fundamental role. The systematic disqualification of subjects or groups, through their reduction to categories devoid of legitimacy or recognition, contributes to the erosion of empathy and to the naturalization of exclusionary practices. Thus, violence, both symbolic and material, is justified as a necessary response to the neutralization of a previously dehumanized otherness.

3.2 THE WEAKENING OF THE OTHER TO DELEGITIMIZE DISCOURSES

Equality between individuals is a fundamental condition for the existence of dialogue, understood not only as a communicative exchange, but as a practice that presupposes mutual recognition between the interlocutors. From this perspective, the parity dimension does not refer to the individual characteristics of the subjects, but to the attribution of value and legitimacy to their positions in the discursive space. It is in this context that ideology plays a relevant social function, by enabling the articulation of subjects around common references, structuring forms of belonging that constitute social and political practices.

The legitimizing discourse, in turn, is often linked to institutional structures, operating as a mechanism for justifying socially accepted norms, values and practices. Such discourse can manifest itself in different spheres, from everyday interactions to more complex formulations in the political and legal spheres, conferring meaning and validity to certain social orders based on historically situated references.

However, the mere existence of legitimizing discourses is not enough to characterize a democratic environment. Democracy presupposes openness to dissent, to the plurality of perspectives and to the confrontation of ideas, indispensable elements for the construction of a dynamic public space. It is precisely within these conflicts — especially on the ideological level — that it becomes possible to observe the mechanisms of delegitimization of the other, a phenomenon that intensifies in totalitarian contexts.

In these scenarios, the maintenance of domination often relies on the construction of narratives that produce the perception of threat, directing collective attention to external or internal enemies. Such discourses tend to have a more intense impact on vulnerable groups, whose identity is progressively deconstructed through processes of stigmatization and disqualification. By weakening the legitimacy of their voices, their ability to participate in the public space is also limited.

As a consequence, the imposition of a homogeneous discursive order contributes to the fragmentation of social relations and to the internalization of fear, leading individuals to adopt defensive and unreflective postures. In this context, the weakening of alterity

compromises the conditions for the possibility of dialogue, replacing plurality with hierarchical relations marked by the asymmetry between authority and submission. Violence, both symbolic and material, thus emerges as an instrument for maintaining this structure, often legitimized by the previous dehumanization of those who come to be identified as a threat.

4 TOTALITARIAN SYMBOLISM

After analyzing the mechanisms of delegitimization of the other and the consolidation of authoritarian discourses, it becomes relevant to incorporate Claude Lefort's contributions on the symbolic dimension of power and its implications for the understanding of democracy and totalitarianism (LEFORT, 1981). Dialoguing with the political tradition, especially based on readings of Machiavelli, Lefort proposes a reflection on the transformations that mark the passage from absolutist forms of power to the democratic experience. In this context, democracy is understood as a regime marked by a singular symbolic structure, in which power is not incorporated into a fixed figure or instance, but is presented as an empty place (LEFORT, 1981). This means that, unlike absolutist forms – in which power was identified with the body of the sovereign – in democracy there is no subject who can claim its definitive possession. This characteristic implies the permanent opening of the political space to conflict, dispute and plurality of perspectives. Based on this conception, Lefort criticizes the attempts to recompose a fictitious unit of the social body, often associated with discourses that intend to represent the "people" as a homogeneous entity — the so-called Povo-Uno (LEFORT, 1981). In these cases, there is a tendency towards the symbolic reincarnation of power, which moves from the figure of the sovereign to structures such as parties or political leaders that claim to fully represent the collective will, making room for totalitarian dynamics.

It is in this horizon that the notion of disincorporation is inserted, developed by Lefort to describe the process by which power ceases to be anchored in a central figure and becomes the object of dispute within society. Such transformation, associated with the fall of absolutist regimes, breaks with the symbolic unity previously guaranteed by the sovereign and inaugurates an order in which individuals are no longer bound by a unified political identity.

In this scenario, the introduction of mechanisms such as universal suffrage does not imply the formation of a homogeneous collective will, but, on the contrary, reinforces the contingent and provisional character of political representation. Thus, democracy is configured as a regime that does not eliminate conflict, but institutionalizes it, recognizing the impossibility of a fully unified social identity.

From this process, the emergence of a people is configured that can no longer be fully captured or domesticated by an instance of centralized power, coming to exist in a condition marked by indeterminacy. In this context, collective identity ceases to present itself as a fixed unit and begins to be continuously tensioned and reconfigured within the political space, in which dispute, conflict and plurality constitute structuring elements of the democratic experience (LEFORT, 1981, p. 118).

In this context, although the people are now recognized as the holder of power in the symbolic sense, there is a tendency to seek stable references that can reduce the indeterminacy inherent to the democratic experience. Such a movement expresses the difficulty of dealing with the absence of absolute foundations, a central characteristic of democratic societies, in which power is no longer anchored in a fixed instance.

In response to this indeterminacy, attempts to stabilize the social emerge through the valorization of certain institutional and cultural references, which are invested with strong legitimacy. Examples of this can be found in the centrality attributed to institutions such as the family, property and certain forms of cultural organization, often mobilized as elements of cohesion and social order.

Such processes do not imply a direct return to absolutist forms of power, but reveal the recurrent search for foundations that can provide greater predictability and security to social life, thus stressing the constitutive opening of the democratic space.

Furthermore, the symbolic void characteristic of democratic regimes should not be understood as a deficiency, but as a constitutive condition of their own dynamics (LEFORT, 1981). It is precisely this indeterminacy that enables the emergence of divergent perspectives, promoting the plurality of ideas and openness to dissent, fundamental elements for the vitality of public space. In this sense, the centrality does not lie in the elimination of conflict, but in the guarantee of egalitarian conditions of participation, which allow the confrontation of positions anchored in reflective processes.

The risk, however, manifests itself when this indeterminacy ceases to operate on the symbolic level and translates into a practical disengagement of individuals in relation to political life (LEFORT, 1981). In these cases, the weakening of citizen participation and the retraction of interest in public space contribute to the weakening of democratic structures, opening space for the emergence of discourses that promise to restore unity and social stability.

Such discourses are often organized around the construction of a homogeneous collective identity – the so-called Povo-Uno⁹ – which seeks to suppress the constitutive

⁹ Concept used by Claude Lefort to designate the ideological construction of a fictitious unit of the social body.

plurality of society (LEFORT, 1981). In this process, the figure of the other, as a legitimate interlocutor and bearer of different perspectives, is progressively delegitimized, being replaced by a logic of uniformity that reduces diversity to a threat to be contained.

This tendency to construct a fictitious unit of the social body is also observed in contemporary analyses of populism. As Jan-Werner Müller points out, populist discourses operate from the claim to represent the "true people", while excluding those who do not align with this identity construction. Such dynamics reinforce the homogenization of the political space and weaken the legitimacy of dissent, approaching, in certain aspects, the logics of exclusion characteristic of totalitarian regimes (MÜLLER, 2016).

As a consequence, a dynamic is consolidated in which difference is emptied and the reproduction of hegemonic discourses becomes predominant, compromising the conditions for the possibility of dialogue and criticism. In this horizon, totalitarianism can emerge under the guise of defending one's own democratic values, mobilizing discourses of protection and cohesion that, paradoxically, operate in the sense of restricting the plurality and freedom that constitute the basis of democracy (LEFORT, 1981).

5 THE INCLUSION OF THE OTHER IN HABERMAS AND THE EXCLUSIONARY TOTALITARIAN SYSTEM

Starting from Claude Lefort's contributions on the constitutive indeterminacy of democracy and the implications of the standardization of thought, it is possible to move on to the approach developed by Jürgen Habermas, especially with regard to the autonomy of individuals and the emancipatory dimension of communication in modern society. Inserted in the context of the second generation of the Frankfurt School, Habermas proposes a reformulation of the philosophy of language, attributing centrality to the role of dialogue in the constitution of social practices guided by understanding.

In this sense, the author distinguishes different forms of knowledge, among which those guided by technical, practical and emancipatory interests stand out (HABERMAS, 1999). The emancipatory perspective, in particular, is linked to critical reflection on the conditions of domination, and the understanding of these structures is the first step towards overcoming them. Thus, rationality is not conceived as a neutral instance and detached from the social context, but as a process intrinsically related to the interests that guide the production of knowledge.

From this conception, Habermas develops the idea of communicative rationality, according to which mutual understanding between subjects is achieved through the use of language in conditions of argumentation free of coercion. Although the so-called "ideal

speech situation" is not fully realized at the empirical level, it functions as a normative horizon that guides communicative practices aimed at the validity of arguments and reciprocal recognition between the interlocutors.

In this context, the notion of intersubjectivity — later deepened as "inclusion of the other" — assumes a central role, as it shows that the construction of legitimate consensus depends on the participation of free and equal subjects in the communicative process. Democracy, from this perspective, is not reduced to a set of formal procedures, but is based on openness to dialogue, the possibility of questioning and the willingness to consider different perspectives.

In the contemporary context, such issues gain new dimensions with the advent of digital technologies and communication networks. As Manuel Castells analyzes, the network structure of today's societies expands the possibilities of participation and circulation of discourses, but also enhances the dissemination of polarized narratives and the formation of fragmented communicative spaces. In this scenario, the challenges to the construction of a public sphere guided by dialogue become even more complex, requiring the constant reaffirmation of inclusive communicative practices (CASTELLS, 2013).

In convergence with Lefort's analyses, Habermas points out that the exclusion of the other constitutes one of the central elements of totalitarian dynamics. The denial of plurality, the construction of rigid boundaries between groups and the hierarchization of cultures compromise the interdependence between individuals and make the formation of an inclusive public space unfeasible. Thus, the absence of egalitarian conditions of participation in the discourse implies the erosion of democratic bases, since, where there is no mutual recognition among the subjects, there is no effective possibility of democracy.

6 CONCLUSION

As outlined throughout the article, it was not intended to exhaust the contributions of the authors analyzed, but to highlight the centrality of language and discourse in the constitution of social and political relations, as well as their direct implication in the maintenance or weakening of democratic regimes. From the reflections of Michel Foucault and Ludwig Wittgenstein, it was possible to understand language as a situated social practice, in which meanings are produced, knowledge is organized and validity criteria are established that guide the interaction between subjects.

In continuity, the analyses of Hannah Arendt and Claude Lefort allowed us to identify the mechanisms by which totalitarianism is structured, especially through the suppression of plurality, the construction of a fictitious unity of the social body and the delegitimization of the

other as a valid interlocutor. In this context, it was evident that the weakening of the public space and the internalization of homogeneous discourses compromise the conditions for the possibility of critical thinking and democratic participation.

In turn, Jürgen Habermas' perspective offered a normative horizon from which to reaffirm the importance of dialogue, intersubjectivity and the inclusion of the other as foundations of democracy. Communication guided by understanding, although not fully achievable in ideal terms, is an essential parameter for the construction of social practices based on mutual recognition and discursive legitimacy.

Thus, it is argued that the maintenance of democratic environments depends directly on the preservation of discursive plurality, openness to dissent, and the recognition of alterity as a constitutive element of social life. On the other hand, contexts marked by the homogenization of thought, the centralization of power, and the naturalization of exclusionary discourses tend to favor the emergence of authoritarian dynamics.

Thus, the valorization of dialogue and critical reflection is not only presented as a theoretical requirement, but as a practical condition for the strengthening of democracy, insofar as it enables individuals to recognize themselves as active political subjects, capable of participating in the collective construction of the public space.

In the final analysis, the defense of plurality and dialogue is not presented only as a theoretical requirement, but as a normative imperative for the preservation of the conditions of possibility of democracy itself.

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