

BIOPOLITICS AND AGONISTICS: FROM FOUCAULT TO NEGRI AND HARDT*

BIOPOLÍTICA E AGONÍSTICA: DE FOUCAULT A NEGRI E HARDT

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ABSTRACT *This paper reconstructs the discussion about biopolitics in the thoughts of Foucault and of Negri and Hardt, in order to emphasize the importance that can be acquired, in this context, by the notion of agonistics. At first, we approach Foucault's concepts of biopower and governmentality in an introductory way, as well as their relationship with liberalism and neoliberalism. We also examine the ambiguities that mark the practices of freedom and the possibilities of resistance in a world governed by biopower. Then, we explain the meaning of the concepts of cognitive capitalism, Empire and multitude in the works of Negri and Hardt. In this point, we seek to fill a gap in their analysis, which is not found in Foucault, regarding the question of agonistics: the multitude's willingness to fight intensifies itself when we realize that life as such is agon. Finally, we argue that, in principle, in the neoliberal work*

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environment, it is possible to convert self-entrepreneurship processes into micro-experiments of resistance and non-alienated freedom.

Keywords: *Empire. Freedom. Government. Multitude. Neoliberalism. Resistance.*

RESUMO *O artigo reconstrói a discussão acerca da biopolítica nos pensamentos de Foucault e de Negri e Hardt, a fim de ressaltar a importância que pode adquirir, nesse contexto, a noção de agonística. De início, abordamos de maneira introdutória os conceitos de biopolítica e governamentalidade em Foucault, bem como sua relação com o liberalismo e o neoliberalismo. Também examinamos as ambiguidades que marcam as práticas de liberdade e as possibilidades de resistência em um mundo governado pelo biopoder. Em seguida, explicitamos o sentido dos conceitos de capitalismo cognitivo, Império e multidão nos trabalhos de Negri e Hardt. Nesse ponto, procuramos preencher uma lacuna de suas análises, que não se encontra em Foucault, relativa à questão da agonística: a disposição para a luta da multidão se intensifica à medida que se percebe que a própria vida é agon. Por fim, argumentamos que, em princípio, é possível, no ambiente de trabalho neoliberal, converter processos de empresariamento-de-si em microexperimentos de resistência e liberdade não alienada.*

Palavras-chave: *Governo. Império. Liberdade. Multidão. Neoliberalismo.*

If philosophy has a Greek origin as far as we want to say, it is because the city, unlike empires or states, invents the *agon* as the rule of a society of “friends”, the community free men as rivals (citizens). (Deleuze, Guattari, 1991, p. 14)

Introduction

Not long ago, the notion of biopolitics became fashionable. If, a few years ago, the term was only employed in experts’ circles, today, it cuts across disciplines as diverse as medicine and economics, biology and political theory, geography and media studies. Indeed, we can find the word biopolitics in diverse discourses, referred to different problems. Let us mention some

examples, with no necessary order. First, the spreading out of a surveillance *dispositif*, legitimated on the terms of the republican-democrat policy of war on terror, which begins with 09/11. Second, DNA mapping and production of cells, organs and organisms, as well as the limits of bioengineering, especially when applied to human life. Third, the demographic transformations and population displacement, transportation infrastructure and social fluxes, tourism, immigration, exile, refugees, clandestinity. Forth, the crisis of the protection system of licenses, patents and copyrights, in a moment in which knowledge does not only becomes capital, it becomes common vital knowledge. In some sense, all these questions are biopolitical. Therefore, not strangely, beyond specialists, the notion is attracting the attention of the media and can reach, now and then, even the main audience. For some time now, the use of the term seems to have been inflated.

The expansion of the usage of concept of biopolitics did not lead to more understanding because, instead of attempts of synthesis, frequently, the approaches conceive themselves as innovative perspectives. As a result, the divergences do not cease to reproduce and no systematization seems to be possible. Instead of it, we witness a kind of theoretical dilution. However, there is also a positive side in the proliferation of this literature. The multiplication of perspectives on what may be biopolitics certainly proves the power (*puissance*), the capacity of producing effects and the vitality of the conceptual apparatus that mobilizes biopolitics as one of its central conceptions, especially regarding political and social theory.

In what follows, with no encyclopedic pretensions, we try a minimal reconstruction of one of the lines that emerges from the debate on biopolitics, namely, the one that goes from the work of Michel Foucault to the cooperation between Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. In general, we believe that a zigzag reading of their writings on biopolitics can provide an accurate description of the processes of production of life (which is no longer only human), over the last decades, in capitalist societies. At the end of the day, this is our conducting question, a problem for a historical ontology of ourselves: what does it mean to live in present times? What are the powers that subject us? What are the possibilities of resistance?

Let us get started being acquainted with a general, yet provisional, definition. In a large sense, biopolitics is the set of technologies used by life to produce and reproduce its own forms of existence, in force correlations, which change from time to time. In other words, the idea is that life produces itself in a political way, through conflicts and agreements, dissent and consensus, negotiation, bargain, deliberation, decision processes, which ultimately

determine what lives and what dies. The concept of biopolitics explains that the struggle between power and resistance is inherent to life in its movement of repetition and differentiation. Then, our thesis, as the exposition that comes next should stress, is that this is struggle or, rather, life is agonistic.

In general, our understanding (Mota, 2013) of the notion of “agonistic” (from the Greek, *agon*) is based on notions such as *polemos* (Heraclitus, 2003), will to power and perspectivism (Nietzsche, 1999), forces and becoming (Deleuze, 1962), and agonistics of language and differend (Lyotard, 1979; 1983). The work of Foucault (1997) in which the agonistic aspect appears most clearly is *Society Must Be Defended*, precisely due to the articulation of what he calls the “Nietzsche hypothesis”, that is, war as a conceptual operator for the analysis of relations of power. Subsequently, Foucault (2004a, 2004b) replaces the conceptual operator of the war with that of government. However, the agonistic element is not lost, as the tension between power and resistance presents itself now as a tension between the governor and the governed, or more specifically, between government and counter-conduct. Our hypothesis is that, in Foucault, the *agon* is ontological, or even vital. It is the *agon* of life with itself, power and resistance, in a disjunctive synthesis. At least, this is what the analysis of biopower leads to.

Differently from Foucault, Negri and Hardt (2000; 2004) seem to overlook, at some point, the agonistic aspect. On its turn, this “forgetfulness of the *agon*” seems to be linked to the way that the notion of *love* (Schwartz, 2009) is introduced to think the relations between the individuals within the multitude. Thus, the decisive question: is love the opposite of *agon*? About that, we should not underestimate an argument of Deleuze and Guattari (1991, p. 9-10) according to which the greatest invention of the ancient Greeks was not direct democracy, that they despised as a tyranny of *doxa*, demagogy. The great invention of the Greeks was the hybrid form of *friendship in rivalry* that they called *agon*. Thus, we could ask: is it really possible to experiment friendship in rivalry? Or, to put it more radically: is it possible a kind of “agonistic love”? Which would be the relation of that with what Negri and Hardt have been calling “love”, for over a decade?

From the standpoint of political economy, it is interesting to observe that biopolitical production is not only about products (goods, commodities) production, but, above all, it is about producers (workers, employees) production. As well as Foucault, Negri and Hardt show that, from some point in time on, the process of subjectivation, that is, the production of subjects as economically useful living beings coincides with the process of capitalization, that is, the reproduction of capital. After all, relations of power and relations of

production are the two sides of the same coin: the political and the economical are inseparable. Now, for a certain reading of Foucault, Negri, and Hardt, the analysis of biopower links itself to a critique of capitalism. We follow this perspective in what comes next.

1. Biopower, Governmentality, and Liberalism

Foucault introduced the concept of biopolitics in his analyses in the second half of the 1970s. Therewith, he studied historical processes by which life as such has emerged as the center of political strategies. For him, biopolitics is a specific form of exercising power. Its emergence signals a rupture in the history of political practices. The main idea is that the “birth of biopolitics” transformed the core of politics. This corresponds to the moment, in the 18th century, when natural as well as human sciences constituted the large epistemological assemblage that has outlined, ever since, the aims of politics. In the final text of the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, entitled *Right of Death, Power over Life*, Foucault (1976, pp. 142-3) offers a definition of biopolitics:

For the first time in history, the biological is undoubtedly reflected in the political [...] we should speak of “biopolitics” to designate what makes life and its mechanisms fall into the realm of explicit calculations, and makes the power-knowledge an agent of transformation of human life [...] what could be called a “threshold of biological modernity” of a society is situated at the moment when the species enters as something at stake in its own political strategies.

Therefore, we are dealing with the advent of a calculating power, which targets the life of human beings, in a biological sense. In other words, life (of the human species) is what is at stake in the political strategies of life (of the human species) itself. In a way, human life has always been the object of politics. Now, however, politics becomes a calculating strategy of power and its target, the human life, becomes a biological object, the different human beings as the “human species”.

Undoubtedly, this definition is clear and makes sense. However, due to its generality, it does not apply only to the specific phenomenon of biopolitics, but, more broadly, to “biopower”, a term that Foucault (1976, pp. 142-3) also employs in the same text. We can say that, in a broader sense, he is talking about biopolitics *lato sensu*. Naturally, biopolitics *latu senso* and biopolitics *stricto sensu* do not confuse. But, in these terms, the distinction is not very clear. This is why we propose to designate “biopolitics *lato sensu*” as “biopower” here. Biopower (which distinguishes itself from sovereign power) is the genus, from which one of the species is biopolitics (which, in turn, distinguishes itself

from discipline). Of course that, in his texts, Foucault does not work with such rigid distinctions. Sometimes he seems to exchange them, sometimes to separate them, sometimes to confuse them. However, in order to privilege understanding, in this text, we propose to work with a stricter distinction between biopower and biopolitics in Foucault's thought.

Thus, the advent of biopower points out the moment when human life explicitly became part of the political calculations. Beyond the regime of sovereignty, oriented by a logic of repression, that is, a power to make die or to let live, emerges a new regime, oriented by a logic of production and control, that is, a power "to make live" or "to let die". The birth of biopower means exactly the inversion of this formula. As a response to the injunctions of the development of capitalism, which seeks to produce economically useful life at always-increasing levels, a series of government techniques, a whole new technology of power is born. Therefrom, the idea of a birth of biopower. About the end of the 18th century, power ceases to be only negative and repressive, that is, a subtraction mechanism, which constitutes the sovereign right to punish, to violate and, ultimately, to kill. In addition, it becomes a power that is also positive because it is productive and is always searching for the optimization of life, since this is productive force.

New technology of life production and control, the biopower has two basic forms, both intrinsically bound to the necessities presented by each moment of the development of capitalism (industrial capitalism and post-industrial capitalism), namely, discipline and biopolitics *stricto sensu*. Both seek the optimization of human life through normalization, but while discipline applies itself on the life of the individuals, biopolitics finds its incidence surface on the life of the population. On the one hand, the disciplinary power, which is born already in the end of 18th century, is a political anatomy of individual bodies. By means of surveillance and punishment procedures and within a series of institutions (prison, military, hospital, school, family, industry), discipline formats subjects, always aiming their integration to the mode of production and trying to assure the elevation of their performativity (Foucault, 1975). On the other hand, the biopolitical dispositif, which is born in the middle of the 19th century, implies another subjectivation strategy, the control and regulation of the population outdoors. Instead of discipline rigidity, biopolitics is flexible; the former punishes, the latter awards; in an epistemological perspective, the former is disciplinary, the latter is "in-disciplinary". Despite all the distinctions, the aim of both mechanisms of power is to increase the productivity of the global economic system through the government of its human element, at population level as well as at individual level (Foucault, 1976).

In the lectures *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-1978) and, specially, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-1979), Foucault shows that the biopower is inseparable from a specific series of techniques or art to govern, which emerges at the end of the 18th century: liberalism. Under the biopower there is a kind of matrix of governmental rationality that is liberalism as well as its development in the 20th century: neoliberalism. The notion of government plays a decisive role here. We can say that, eclipsing the notion of power, the notion of government comes to the foreground; the genealogy of power becomes a history of governmentality.

In Foucault's approach, the term "government" has a broad meaning. He returns to the 18th century to show that, in this context, not only political, but also philosophical, religious, medical, and pedagogic texts addressed the question of government. Certainly, it had relations with the administration or management of the state, but it also concerned problems as the education of the children, orientation of the families, home economics, direction of the soul, and self-control. Taking in account the polysemy of the term government in the 18th century, Foucault (2004a, p. 4) speaks about governmentality to refer to the series of practices of government and to the almost empirical reflection connected to these practices:

"Government" therefore in the strict sense, but "art" also, "art to govern" in the strict sense, because by "art to govern" I did not understand the way in which the governors effectively ruled. I did not study and I do not want to study real governmental practice, as it developed, determining here and there the situation we are dealing with, the problems that have been set, the tactics chosen, the instruments used, forged or remodeled, etc. I wanted to study the art to govern, that is, the thoughtful way of governing the best possible, and at the same time, the reflection on the best possible way of governing. That is, I tried to apprehend the instance of reflection *in* the practice of government and *on* the practice of government. [...] what I have been looking for and I would like this year to try to grasp is the way, in and out of government, in any case, as close as possible to governmental practice, an attempt has been made to conceptualize this practice of governing. I would like to try to determine the way in which the domain of government practice, its different objects, its general rules, its overall objectives were established in order to govern in the best possible way. In short it is, say, the study of the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty.

First of all, an art to govern is an "art", that is, a technique, or a series of techniques, which constitutes a technical or productive (poietic) knowledge. This is expression of an intelligence capable of subjecting practical experience to a reflection, which, nevertheless, is as close as possible to the concrete exercise of government. On the one hand, it is not a theory of government, but, on the other hand, it is not a purely empirical history either. Rather, it is a method or set of practical rules that give rise to a knowledge inscribed

somewhere between these two poles, that of theory and that of practice. There is, in a certain sense, a knowledge that inscribes itself, at the same time, below the nobility of a political philosophy and above the villainy of the mere experience of governing. It is the rationality of governing, the reflexive governmental practice, which Foucault designates as art to govern or as governmentality. In *Security, Territory, Population*, he offers an explicit definition of the notion of “governmentality”.

By this word, “governmentality”, I mean the set of institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations and tactics that allow us to exercise this very specific, though very complex, power that has as main target of the population, as main way of knowing the political economy and as essential technical instrument the security dispositifs. (Foucault, 2004b, p. 111)

In general, governmentality is a political rationality, a practical reason of government, which presupposes a series of analyses, reflections, and calculations, but also of techniques, procedures, and institutions. We should note that what is defined in the passage quoted above is not the general concept of governmentality, but a specific art to govern, that is, liberal governmentality. It has a target, a form of knowledge and a technical instrument, respectively: the population, the political economy and the security dispositif. To say that liberalism is a kind of governmentality means that it is a mode of assemblage of these three elements. It is a complex of technologies of power, based on an economic rationality, in order to enable, but also to limit, the exercise of the government over human beings. Foucault (2004a, p. 323) writes:

What should we understand by “liberalism”? I relied on Paul Veyne’s reflections on historical universals and the need to test a nominalist method in history. And, picking up a number of method options already made, I tried to analyze “liberalism”, not as a theory or as an ideology, still less, of course, as a way for society to “represent itself ...”; but as a practice, that is, as a goal-oriented “way of doing” and regulated by continuous reflection. Liberalism must then be analyzed as the principle and method of rationalization of the exercise of government – rationalization, which obeys, it is its specificity, to the internal rule of maximum economy.

Thus, liberalism is neither a social representation, nor a theory, nor an ideology. In Foucault’s meaning, the term “liberalism” designates a discursive practice inserted in a strategic game of power. It is not something that claims to be true, although it produces effects of truth, which are, at the same time, effects of power, for different reasons.

First, according to Foucault, liberalism is not a social representation, that is, it is not a narrative that society would have spontaneously constructed

about itself and which would have been transmitted by a customary tradition. Liberalism is neither a myth, nor a legend, nor folklore. It is also not a religion, although in many respects it resembles an initiate worship. In some degree, we can say that liberalism is a kind of proselytism, which offers the laymen a utopia that can be shared by the common sense. However, it is not a religion. It is also not a representation made by society about itself, precisely because it raises a pretension of enlightenment, understanding, rationalization. It bears a claim of constituting itself as a scientific theory.

Nevertheless, second, liberalism is neither a theory, nor a science. Foucault does not deal with liberalism as a trend or school of thought, which would be part of the history of political ideas. Traditionally, it is said that this history begins with the political idealism of the ancients, passes through the theological idealism of the medievals, heads to the political realism of the moderns, and finally arrives at the contemporary dispute between liberals and socialists. In Foucault's sense, liberalism is not a stage of the evolution of the systems of political thought. Or rather, perhaps, liberalism is a science, a theory, and it is possible that its hypotheses, theses, and laws truly represent reality. The point is that we cannot answer these questions in a genealogical approach. We cannot even lift them, simply because this is not what interests this type of research, which seeks to break with the regime of the true and the false. The genealogical procedure consists precisely in bracketing the question of truth, in order to concentrate the analysis of liberalism on the problem of the effects of power that it is capable to produce. What is relevant is that liberalism is a formation of knowledge and, as such, it is inseparable from a determinable series of relations of power, which take place in a certain strategic context. In short, for purposes of the genealogical analysis, liberalism is a strategic-discursive practice, a *dispositif* of power-knowledge, and not a theory.

Third, for analogous reasons, according to Foucault, liberalism is not an ideology either. If he does not affirm that liberalism is true, then he will not hold that it is false either. Therewith, since it is not important to know whether liberalism is a theory, it will also not matter whether it is an ideology. Indeed, the concept of ideology is subject of a lot of criticisms by Foucault (2001). One is that this concept admits as valid a certain regime of truth and presupposes a certain division between true and false. In these terms, the critique of ideology can differentiate between, on the one hand, a true science, which is by no means a utopia, nor is it a prophecy, but effectively a science (the scientific socialism) and, on the other, a false science, a pseudoscience, a science of ideas that do not represent reality, that is, an "ideology", of which liberalism would be the exemplary case.

In opposition to that, the genealogical approach is a perspective that recognizes that plays with, fights for, disputes the word, the space and the time, the truth and the power, with other perspectives, in a kind of cognitive battlefield. It is in this field, which is, at the same time, of the order of discourses and of the order of things, struggles, confrontations, duels take place. From these struggles, what is called knowledge is produced. In sum, knowledge is “a spark between two swords” (Foucault, 2001, p. 1417). Therefore, the genealogical approach presupposes a necessary immanence of the method options to the strategic field, in which knowledge is born, develops itself, and dies. This implies a rejection of the idea of a disinterested search for truth and universal validity. In turn, the critique of ideology, from a given moment on, loses the strategic sense that it shows at first, since it cannot perceive itself as one of the perspectives at stake. Ultimately, the criticism of ideologies is made from a point of view that maintains a claim of universality, that is, a discourse that speaks in the name of the integrality of the human race. Marxism is a humanism that ignores the fact that man is about to disappear “like, on the edge of the sea, a face of sand” (Foucault, 1966, p. 398). In short, the concept of ideology has no use for the genealogical analysis.

However, if liberalism is neither a social representation, nor a theory, nor an ideology, then what is it? According to Foucault (2004a, p. 323), liberalism is a practice, that is, a way of doing (*manière de faire*). It is a practical knowledge, a know-how (*savoir-faire*). Moreover, it is a reflected way (*manière réfléchie*) of doing, that is, a way of doing guided by a continuous reflection and that is capable of self-criticism, self-correction, and improvement. Liberalism is a reflexive practice or scheme that, at the same time, conditions and makes possible actions of government. This type of reflexive practice of government is not based on a rationality that would be external or transcendent to it, imposed from the outside on the practices of government. Liberalism is based on a rationality that is internal or immanent to these practices. Indeed, the instance of reflection that springs from such practices results from a process of rationalizing the performance of this form of power that is the government. In other words, liberalism is an art to govern, a political reason, a governmental rationality.

2. Liberalism, Neoliberalism, and Alienated Freedom

Governmentality is an art or technology of government. It defines a specific frame or matrix of rationality, whereby a determined set of governmental practices can be analyzed. On its turn, liberalism is neither an economic theory, nor a political ideology, nor a social representation, but a matrix of

governmental rationality, the type of governmentality, within which biopower develops itself. Underlying this matrix of rationality, which is liberalism, is the idea of a nature of society, which would be the object of a new science, born in the middle of the 18th century, namely, political economy. In contrast with the approach of mercantilism, which is based on a moral rationality, liberal political economy works with the idea of a spontaneous capacity of self-regulation of the markets. This self-regulation capacity clearly expresses itself in the mechanism of the so-called natural prices. From there, the economists cease to conceive price variation, whether it rises or falls, as a phenomenon that stems from the virtues, character, and dispositions of the traders and start to understand it as dependent on the natural mechanism of supply and demand. For the founders of political economy, as well as it governs the prices, the natural mechanism of the market should govern the governmental practices, guiding the operation of governments, under the basic premise that they must respect the economic nature. Moreover, with political economy and liberalism, the principle of power limitation becomes internal to the governmental practices. Therewith, the governmental action is no longer object of judgment in terms of legitimacy or illegitimacy, but in terms of success and failure. The political problem is no longer arbitrariness or abuse of power, but ignorance, that is, the lack of scientific knowledge on the economic nature of society. In this sense, the birth of political economy corresponds to the introduction of the scientific truth as principle of self-regulation of power, in the field of politics.

The liberal art of government does not defend a maximization of the state power. On the contrary, liberal government is economic in this sense. It performs only where and when it is useful or necessary. Obviously, this idea constitutes a forerunner of the neoliberal theory of minimum state. However, it does not imply a simple decrease of the power of the state. According to liberalism, we should respect nature, but not conceive it as a sacred and unalterable reality. Nature is a domain of intervention, the permanent correlate of governmental practices. Thus, on the one hand, governments should be aware that the nature of social events constitutes a natural limit to the state action. On the other hand, they also have to consider the nature of the population, which is precisely the object of transformations guided by the governments. In the middle of the 18th century, liberalism introduces a brand-new modality of social intervention, which is not repressive. Under the aegis of *laissez-faire*, incitation, and stimulation will become more important as artifacts of power.

Even freedom becomes one of these governmental artifacts. In the classical liberal conception, there is no contradiction between freedom and security. Rather, more freedom presupposes more security. Freedom is conceived as

the counterpart of a technology of security, which conditions its possibilities. Here, Foucault (2004b) supposes a distinction between legal interdictions, disciplinary mechanisms, and technologies of security. Legal interdictions work with the codification of conducts in the terms of law. They are relative to a kind of power, sovereign power (the law), which establishes the distinction between permitted and forbidden conducts, repressing the latter. Disciplinary mechanisms individualize and hierarchize, establishing a separation between normal and abnormal behaviors. It is another type of power, disciplinary power (the discipline), which defines a line of normality and then employs procedures and techniques to adjust the individuals to this line, normalizing them. Instead of adjusting reality to a norm, technologies of security have a massifying effect, considering reality itself as norm. Going beyond the normalizing hypothesis, Foucault (2004b) shows that they do not separate the abnormal from the normal, but rather describe an optimal middle in a series of variations. In the last case, more than with repression or discipline, we deal with management of the population, which grants the individuals a certain margin of freedom, always within a secured environment. In this way, one of the core problems for liberal biopolitics is how to govern a population composed by free subjects. Foucault (2004a, p. 323) writes:

It seemed to me that these problems could not be dissociated from the scope of political rationality within which they appeared and acquired their acuity. Namely, “liberalism”, since it was in relation to it that they acquired the aspect of a real challenge. In a system concerned with the respect of subjects of law and with the freedom of individuals, how can the phenomenon “population” with its effects and specific problems be taken into account? In the name of what and according to what rules can it be managed?

The shift of focus of Foucault’s analyses from power to government still has another important consequence. Biopolitics is not only a power technology that affects population by means of technologies of security. With liberalism, biopolitics will invest, in addition to the population phenomena, in individual subjectivation processes. A large part of the lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* deals with the problem of the subjectivation of the *homo oeconomicus*, which is a fundamental presupposition for both the liberal and the neoliberal rationalities of government. Neoliberal biopolitics implies the use of practices of self-government. Above all, it seeks to produce needs and desires, governing the individual as a supposedly free subject. Indeed, the subject becomes an “autonomous alienated” agent, who is the only responsible for his own success or failure. It is enough to mention that neoliberalism conceives this self-managed subject as the holder of a certain human capital to foresee that the consequences of this reconstruction of the biopolitical rationality are enormous.

We can summarize saying that, in its liberal and neoliberal versions, biopolitics has, on the one hand, a totalizing aspect, which affects the population body, and on the other hand, an individualizing aspect, which affects the individual body and soul.

On the one hand, the neoliberal government of the living aims the *entrepreneurship of the society* (Foucault, 2004a), which means the insertion of any form of social life into the logic of the company and market. Any social group must take the form of an enterprise, which should be managed according to liberal principles. Even the State is submitted to this process of governmentalization: the State as corporation. At stake is to make the logic of private management overrule the logic of public management. For neoliberalism, there is an obsolescence of the private/public distinction. Ultimately, the State becomes apolitical (Brown, 2015). It becomes nothing but an instance of assurance for the market and responds to its injunctions with neoliberal policies and laws. Thus, the rationality of political economy extends its reach until the most distant borders of social life.

On the other hand, neoliberal governmentality penetrates in the most hidden intimacies of the human life. Within this framework, a specific process of formation of labor, of production of producers, takes place. The subject conceives himself as a micro-enterprise, an *entrepreneur of himself* (Foucault, 2004a). As an individual, he deals with his own cognitive, emotional, and motor capacities and skills, as they were capital, on which he should invest, in order to avoid stagnation and decadence. This conception of the human being as capital (human capital) plays a very important strategic role in the legitimization arguments of neoliberalism. Governmentalized and entirely apolitical, the individual is fully included in the logic of the market. In short, the genealogical analysis of the neoliberal subject reveals a highly insidious form of exercise of power over oneself: self-government as political economy of oneself, as neoliberal self-governmentality.

However, practices of resistance and non-alienated forms of freedom also compose the contemporary scenario. For Foucault, every expansion of the incidence surface of power incites new and different forms of resistance, which, in the case of biopower, articulate their claims targeting life. We can say that biopower is an agonistic concept precisely because it allows seeing that, as long as it is the privileged object of both power and resistance, life itself is political struggle: agonistic conception of life. According to Foucault (1976, pp. 190-1),

[...] against this still new power in the 19th century, the resisting forces rested exactly on what it invests – that is, in life and in man as a living being. Since the last century, the great struggles that call into question the general system of power are no longer

made in the name of a return to the old rights, or because of the millennial dream of a cycle of times and a golden age. We no longer expect the emperor of the poor, or the kingdom of the last days, or even the reinstatement only of the justices believed to be ancestors; what is claimed and served as purpose is life, understood as the fundamental needs, the concrete essence of man, the realization of its potentialities, the fullness of the possible. It matters little whether or not it is a utopia; we have a very real process of struggle there; life as a political object was somehow taken to the latter and turned against the system that tried to control it.

In other words, controlling individuals and the population, biopower eventually produced, as side effects, new political struggles that, despite their differences, seem to turn around the right to life. For Foucault, especially since the late 1960s, a new battlefield appeared, namely, the field of the struggles against the forms of individual and social subjectivation. Examples of these struggles are the anti-psychiatric movement, the prisoners' movement, the women and sexual minorities' movements, and the ecological movement. A general characteristic of these movements is that they oppose the adjustment of individuals and populations to the supposed universally valid pattern, which is the base for the control of forms of life. In this way, Foucault shows that there are forms of resistance against the governmental technologies and that life situates itself at their core. We can say that, against biopower, his analyses show that life itself is what resists, and this precisely because of its agonistic character.

3. Empire, Cognitive Capitalism, and Biopower

Twisting the notions introduced by Foucault, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt develop a different approach to the question of biopower. For them, biopower constitutes a new phase of capitalism, whose main feature is the collapse of the borders separating production from reproduction, capitalization from subjectivation, economics from politics. In the trilogy *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009), they build an analytical framework that assembles influences from the philosophies of difference, however with another methodological strategy.

However, it is also important to highlight the differences between the two approaches we are dealing with. Instead of the Foucauldian historical genealogy of power relations, which steams from Nietzsche and the *École des Annales*, the works of Negri and Hardt trigger a reconstruction of the political and legal theory, through the prisms of the so-called post-workerist Marxism and Spinoza. Furthermore, Foucault (2004a) refuses to work with historical universals such as “modernity” and “post-modernity”, studying his

contemporaneity only in his lectures on neoliberalism. Instead, Negri and Hardt are not shy to use these notions, as well as that of “globalization”, and so on. It is also not evident, in Foucault’s thought, the constataion of the existence of a power focus on life (*puissance de la vie*), with which Negri and Hardt identify what they call “biopower”.

Their aim is to use these diverse conceptual bases in order to draw a map of the present global correlations of power, as well as of the existing forms resistance. After the publication, the discussion about the books *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Commonwealth* (2009) has quickly trespassed the academy walls. Activists from around the world, especially the ones involved in the anti-globalization movement, interested in new conceptual tools to understand the recent reconfiguration of capitalism, celebrated them. Together, the three books constitute one of the essential cartographies of the contemporary world.

At the dawn of the 21st century, Negri and Hardt (2000, p. XI) studied the new order of the world, which they call Empire, characterized by an intimate connection between the economic and the legal-political structures. In their vocabulary, “Empire” means a new regime of sovereignty, an unprecedented global configuration of the power relations. In this new constellation, the nation-State goes into crisis, at the same time that multinational corporations, international organisms (United Nations, IMF, WTO, European Union etc.), and also nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), become stronger than never. Therewith, Negri and Hardt also highlight a series of governmental practices that can be qualified as police state, which are replacing the old policies, whose operation and procedures must be constitutionally limited. In other words, the Empire works as a state of exception.

We should be aware that Empire does not confuse itself with imperialism. In the sense of Negri and Hardt (2000, pp. 186-90), Empire functions in a decentralized and globalized, that is, a deterritorialized way. If the old kind of sovereignty clearly drew a border and demarcated a center for power, in the new form of sovereignty, power has neither a center nor an exterior. For Negri and Hardt, it is a network of deliberative unities that constitutes a new form of sovereignty. It simply breaks through the borders of nation-States, operating horizontally, networking, with flexibility, mixing itself within the heterogeneity of the social tissue. In addition, the exercise of imperial power does not require outside intervention. On the contrary, the imperial logic is deeply rooted in the individuals, groups and cultures, which are capable of reflexive control (self-government) at different levels. The automatic machine of biopower is in

charge of the controlled production of life as a whole and is able to continually produce, on a global scale, alienated autonomy.

From the economic point of view, the Empire represents a new phase in the history of the modes of production, in which capitalism becomes global, effectively connecting every part of the world. The basic assumption here is that not only the market, but also the social integration in general, in contemporary capitalist societies, are expressions of an unlimited process of exploitation. Then, Empire is a regime of power that invests not only in the old forms of capitalization, but also in subjectivation, that is, in the production of subjectivities, bodies, souls, and affects.

Let us take a closer look in this shift in the history of the modes of production. According to Negri and Hardt (2000), a cognitive capitalism has replaced industrial capitalism. In cognitive capitalism, production is globalized, networked, and informationalized. Knowledge, language, creativity, and even emotions become highly important. Thereby, the working subject also changes. The reorganization of production in networks and its informatization cloud the distinctions between manual and intellectual, collective and individual labor. To analyze it, Negri and Hardt (2000, p. 293) employ the concept of immaterial labor, which presents three basic types:

The first is involved in an industrial production that has been informationalized and has incorporated communication technologies in a way that transforms the production process itself. [...] Second is the immaterial labor of analytical and symbolic tasks. Finally, a third type of immaterial labor involves the production and manipulation of affects and requires (virtual or actual) human contact, labor in the bodily mode.

Cognitive capitalism basis is the extraction of surplus value from immaterial labor. Instead of material labor, which implies physical or corporal energy expenditure by the worker, immaterial labor involves the use of intellectual (perception, communication, imagination, reason) and affective (irrational feelings, emotions, passions) energies. If imagination, communication, learning, emotions, passions, affects, are more produced and more consumed than ever, it is because they have become commodities, value, capital. In this new stage, for the logic of market, the intangible elements of the vital process are at stake. Spreading everywhere and penetrating even in the most intimate, cognitive capitalism operates a new real and integral “subsumption” (*Aufhebung*) of social life. The change of the mode of production also implies a change in the forms of exploitation. Nowadays, exploitation focus primarily on the prospection of the intellectual, affective, and cooperative skills of the subjects. Empire’s main objective is to produce surplus value unlimitedly, by

means of recruitment of huge quantities of individual and collective capacities. The general rule of axiomatization captures all life, nothing dodges money, and there is no outside (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 32).

Therewith, Negri and Hardt retake the concept of biopower from Foucault, in order to reformulate it radically. On the one hand, they speak about a biopolitical production, which is “the production of social life itself, in which the economic, the political, and the cultural increasingly overlap and invest one another” (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. XIII). On the other hand, biopower becomes “the *real subsumption* of society under capital” (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 225). Here, we should remark the influence of Gilles Deleuze (1977), for whom a transition from disciplinary societies to control societies occurred in the end of the 20th century. Deleuze clearly distinguishes between two species of power: discipline and control. On the one hand, discipline functions within institutions, for example, prisons, hospitals, and factories. On the other hand, control operates extra-institutionally, by means of flexible networks. The bet of Negri and Hardt (2000, p. 24) is that this state of biopower is not discipline, but “control that extends throughout the depths of consciousnesses and bodies of the population – and at same time across the entirety of social relations”. Thus, biopower is massifying, since it targets the whole of society, but it also has an individualizing feature, for it scrutinizes the maximum of the existence of each individual.

The point is that capitalism is not only an economic mode of production, but also a mode of life production, a mode of subjectivation. Therefore, it is not only about the reproduction of capital, but also about the reproduction of subjects, the effective producers of economic value. In this respect, it is necessary to discern certain aspects. On the one hand, in industrial capitalism, lives were produced, by means of disciplinary dispositifs (an anatomic-politics), according to the model of the machine. Thus, the subjects were mechanized. On the other hand, with the transition to a post-industrial and cognitive capitalism, lives are now being produced through regulatory strategies (a bio-politics), according to the model provided by the computers. We can say that, today, subjects are computerized or digitalized. The information and communication technologies (TICs) are now inseparable parts from them.

We should not mistake these parallel transitions. Indeed, the transition from disciplinary society to control society and the one from industrial capitalism to post-industrial and cognitive capitalism overlap each other. The different types of society as well as the diverse species of capitalism distinguish from each other, in the measure that the emergence of a new forms of life implies an aggregation with the old forms, never its abolition. Thus, for example, the

uprising of cognitive capitalism, that is, the post-industrialization of capital does not imply that industry, or agriculture, has ended. Obviously, they continue existing, but in order to keep alive, they tend to be post-industrialized. We started to practice agriculture and industry according to a new logic, which is no longer the logic of machines (hardware), but rather the logic of computers (software) or the “logic of production of logic”.

According to Negri and Hardt, the concept of biopower has two sides. On the one hand, it points to a new phase of capitalism, in which the separation between politics and economics disappears. Thus, life is no longer limited to reproduction or subordinated to work. On the contrary, it governs the production. As a result, the distinction between production and reproduction becomes disposable. Biopower is not solely a guarantee of reproduction of the relations of production; it is also part of the relations of production. We can say that the Empire is a “regime of biopower” (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 41), in the sense that in it, economic production and political constitution overlap each other.

Production becomes indistinguishable from reproduction; productive forces merge with relations of production; constant capital tends to be constituted and represented within variable capital, in the brains, bodies, and cooperation of productive subjects. Social subjects are at the same time producers and products of this unitary machine. (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 385)

On the other hand, putting in perspective a specific relation of nature and culture, the concept of biopower also refers to the process of civilization of nature. According to Negri and Hardt (2000, p. 32), nature “has become capital, or at least has become subject to capital”; life has become material of an unprecedented capacity of technological intervention. In that way, industrial and trade interests have captured natural processes, which on their turn became material of legal regulation (environmental law, which is now constitutionally guaranteed). In simple words, political economy incorporated nature. And, with the ecological discourse of “sustainability”, what comes at stake is no longer the exploitation of nature, but the conversion of natural resources within the economic growth.

In general, for Negri and Hardt, the breakdown of the binary oppositions between economics and politics, nature and culture, is characteristic of the transitions from modernity to post-modernity, from industrial capitalism to cognitive capitalism, from disciplinary societies to control societies.

Biopower is a form of power that regulates social life from its interior, following it, interpreting it, absorbing it, and rearticulating it. Power can achieve an effective

command over the entire life of the population only when it becomes an integral, vital function that every individual embraces and reactivates of his or her own accord. (Hardt; Negri, 2000, pp. 23-4)

Indeed, one of the reasons of the success of the perspective of biopower is that it eliminates many binary oppositions, which social theory frequently presuppose, such as nature/culture, economics/politics, production/reproduction, science/ideology, infrastructure/superstructure, mind/body etc. This is why we can say, for example, that Empire not only repress the subjects, exploits nature, and suppress freedom, but also produces them. Empire is an “autopoietic machine” (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 34), which produces what it consumes and generates justifications for itself. Entirely immanent to itself, it produces the world, within which it develops.

4. Biopolitics, Multitude, and Agonistics

The unlimited and all-comprehensive system of command, which is Empire, does not eliminate the possibilities of freedom and resistance. If capital subsumed all the society, the revolutionary possibilities also present themselves everywhere. For this reason, Negri and Hardt refuse the static, one-sided conception of biopower, and opt for a conception that highlights its productive and dynamic aspects. They introduce a sharp distinction (which is not in Foucault) between biopower and biopolitics. Then, biopower constitutes social relations, inserting individuals and populations in a circuit of value, obedience, and utility. However, doing so, it also prepares the emergence of a new revolutionary subject, which is precisely “multitude”. Thus, biopolitics stands for a series of forms of social cooperation that reject the capitalist injunctions.

Empire creates a greater potential for revolution that did the modern regimes of power because it presents us, alongside the machine of command, with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and subjugated, a multitude that is directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them. (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 393)

In one word, multitude is what opposes Empire. Negri and Hardt retake the term “multitude” from Spinoza (2001). It refers to the assemblages of different agents, which circulates through relations of power, without having a preeminent authority or a fixed identity. The configuration of multitude is parallel to that of the globalized machine of biopower: both are borderless, decentralized, and deterritorialized. We should not confuse the multitude with the classical concept of people, which is endowed with a general will, or with

the crowd (or mass), which is homogeneous in everything. In the sense of Negri and Hardt (2004), multitude is a twisted aggregate, an assemblage of singularities, pure multiplicity, headless, heterogeneous, and centrifuge. The multitude of creative globalized subjectivities constitutes alternative forms of life inside the Empire. The cognitive, affective, and interactive skills, which the market now valorize, also destabilize the old structures of power and production. In the use of these skills, the subjects spontaneously reject exploitation and monopolization, nourishing an aspiration for egalitarian and autonomous forms of work and life. Multitude is a changing force, because it refers to singular identities that provide a deacceleration or even destitute the imperial post-modern way of governing (a government of life, as a multiple and molecular power) (Hardt; Negri, 2004, p. XIV-XV). In short, multitude is a global force of resistance; it embodies the possibility of liberation and of the construction of new forms of life.

For Negri and Hardt (2000; 2004), biopower is power (command) over life, while biopolitics is power (potency) of the life. Thus, the biopolitics of the multitude opposes itself to the biopower of the Empire, as well as anti-globalization movements oppose globalization. The basis for both exercise of power and practices of resistance is life. Then, Negri and Hardt hold that, ontologically, biopolitics precedes biopower. In other words, biopower struggles with a living force, which it tries to regulate, but which is always escaping. Somehow, the line of flight is prior to capture (just as, in psychoanalysis, the object of desire, that is, ‘a’, is always lost, because it has been “precluded”, that is, put out of the game). The perception that the Empire has no exterior is what provides a basis for the multitude strategy. According to Negri and Hardt, multitude

[...] knows only an inside, a vital and ineluctable participation in the set of social structures, with no possibility of transcending them. This inside is the productive cooperation of mass intellectuality and affective networks, the productivity of postmodern biopolitics. (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 413)

Biopower is paradoxical; it is the expression of the *agonistics* between power and resistance. The forces that protect power also have the capacity to break it down. We can say that, wherever is power, there is also resistance; wherever is Empire, there is multitude. The larger is the reach of biopower, the higher are the risks for itself. “Since in the imperial realm of biopower production and life tend to coincide, class struggle has the potential to erupt across all the fields of life” (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 403). Micro or molecular revolutions are about to hatch everywhere. And it is part of the role of critique to activate and to potentialize them.

If the Empire absorbs everything, having no exterior, the multitude that resists is also not external to it. There is a tense immanence between power and resistance, Empire and multitude. They constitute together a conflictive field. There would be no technologies of power without practices of resistance. Indeed, the latter comes first: ontological precedence of resistance over power. In other words, it can be said that there seems to be an ontological precedence of the multitude over the Empire, biopolitics over biopower, resistance over power. The underlying assumption of this ontological politics is *agonistic*. What we have in the horizon is not reconciliation, but struggle, that is, the struggle between power and resistance. Precisely in this struggle, the agonistics of life affirms itself. As Nietzsche would put it: “life is what affirms itself even when it denies itself”. And this is neither a paradox, nor a contradiction.

To summarize, on the one hand, the Empire constitutes an unprecedented system of power over life, which reaches all human relations, groups and individuals, bodies and consciousnesses. It is unlimited and cuts across the usual binary oppositions (economics and politics, nature and culture, production and reproduction etc.). On the other hand, biopolitical resistance is also, at the same time, political, economic, cultural, and so on. Resistance is not only contestation or blockage of the established order. The conflicts are obviously destructive, but they also have a productive aspect. The struggles are also capable to produce alternative forms of collective life: “[...] they are biopolitical struggles, struggles over the form of life. They are constituent struggles, creating new public spaces and new forms of community” (Hardt; Negri, 2000, p. 56). In other words, we can say that, as resistance, biopolitics is not only a power of destitution but also a constituent power (Negri, 1993), since it creates norms, institutions and forms of life, always in the name of life. In general, between biopower and biopolitics, there is a struggle, which is life itself, in the broad sense. In this sense, life is agonistic; it is the result of the struggle between power and resistance.

Conclusion

In search of a line of flight from this omnipotent biopower and inspired by Foucault, Negri, and Hardt, we would like to propose, as conclusion, an experiment. The most of the time, imperial biopower captures practices self-government and capitalize them as micro-enterprises. Nevertheless, these practices also sustain a liberation potential. This can assume the form of a practice of resistance performed in the same place in which these micro-enterprises, financed with human capital, are developed. The underlying

hypothesis is that it is possible to destabilize the micro-enterprise through learning and transform it into a micro-experiment. However, this will only mean an advance if the micro-company subject can count on a safety net, which is, at the same time, affective and economic. Thus, it is possible to practice real resistance and actual freedom, that is, a non-normalizing practice of autonomy.

We can measure the price of this kind of freedom in terms of quality of life or financial security. Naturally, manifestations of resistance, in and out the working place, threaten considerably the possibility of full employment. In any case, a micro-entrepreneur prepared to pay the price can produce a great destabilizing effect on himself. His manifestations of resistance may trigger a kind of “intra-individual guerrilla”, which can change radically the coordinates of his own process of subjectivation. This would be a biopolitical form of self-government against neoliberal self-governmentalization. About that, we should observe that this kind of counter-conduct requires an *agonistic willingness* – a *streitsuchtige Befindlichkeit* (Mota, 2013). And an advertence should be made here: we cannot simply discard the possibility of contagious effects during the whole process.

As we argued at the outset, the *agon*, both in its destructive and constructive aspects, is an inseparable part of life. Then, how do we make so that the constructive aspect can predominate over the destructive one? Even though we have nothing against any of the “sweet barbarians” (which are very rare), we need to ask: how can we prevent or at least suspend, slow down, the eternal return to barbarism? As long as this is a conflict between the richest and the poorest, the class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, capital and labor, Empire and multitude, in short, between power and resistance, continues, we cannot give any step forward. Thus, any appreciation will correspond to a devaluation, any progress towards civilization will represent a step back towards the abyss. In this way, everything flows to the problem of the *agon*: what to do with it, if it seems to be, at the same time, destructive and constructive, negative and positive? We cannot ignore it, because it seems to function as a kind of propelling spring, it seems to produce a variable discharge of energy, which sets everything in motion. So, how to do this partition?

As described here, the twists in the concepts of biopower and biopolitics, in Foucault, Negri, and Hardt, allow us to judge that the *agon* should not be left out from the analysis of the Empire and of the multitude. It must find a way to return to both in a different way, specially to the analysis of biopower. It is in this context that the *agon* discharges the exact measure of energy, which finds its simplest and most effective form in *love*. Therefore, we could ask what would happen if the biggest and the smallest made a pact in secrecy, so that the

agon could occupy precisely the middle, the center, which is the void? About that, it is worth remembering that, for Foucault (2008), the first step towards a new government of oneself and of the others is a sort of primordial gesture of revolt, that is, a first counter-conduct: the agonistic courage to tell the truth (*parrhesia*).

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