

Entrepreneurship as a neoliberal ideology

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Abstract

This critical essay has the general objective of understanding the neoliberal aspect of entrepreneurship's discourses and its function of camouflaging the reality of the relations between work and capital. This research analyzes the historical development of the concept and its field of study based on the assumption that these narratives are depositories of a neoliberal ideology. The research discusses the neoliberal nature of entrepreneurship and characterizes the theoretical apparatus that supports and disseminates entrepreneurship. Finally, the results critically point out that entrepreneurship's discourse exempts the state from the responsibility of guaranteeing minimum living conditions for workers, meaning they are responsible for their success or failure, regardless of the importance of social context variables.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship. Neoliberal ideology. Criticism.

O empreendedorismo como uma ideologia neoliberal

Resumo

Este ensaio crítico tem como objetivo geral compreender a vertente neoliberal dos discursos do empreendedorismo e sua função de camuflagem da realidade das relações entre trabalho e capital. Baseando-se no pressuposto de que os discursos do empreendedorismo são depositários de uma ideologia neoliberal, analisa-se o desenvolvimento histórico do conceito e do seu campo de estudo; qualifica-se o caráter neoliberal do empreendedorismo; caracteriza-se o aparato teórico que sustenta e dissemina o empreendedorismo. O estudo conclui, criticamente, que o discurso do empreendedorismo isenta o Estado da responsabilidade de garantir mínimas condições de vida para os trabalhadores, colocando-os como responsáveis pelo seu sucesso ou fracasso, independentemente da importância das variáveis do contexto social.

Palavras-chave: Empreendedorismo. Ideologia neoliberal. Crítica.

El emprendimiento como ideología neoliberal

Resumen

Este ensayo crítico tiene el objetivo general de comprender el aspecto neoliberal de los discursos del emprendimiento y su función de camuflaje de la realidad de las relaciones entre trabajo y capital. Partiendo del supuesto de que los discursos del emprendimiento son depositarios de una ideología neoliberal, se analiza el desarrollo histórico del concepto y su campo de estudio; se califica el carácter neoliberal del emprendimiento; y se caracteriza el aparato teórico que apoya y difunde el emprendimiento. El estudio concluye, críticamente, que el discurso del emprendimiento exime al Estado de la responsabilidad de garantizar condiciones mínimas de vida a los trabajadores, ubicándolos como responsables de su éxito o fracaso, independientemente de la importancia de las variables del contexto social.

Palabras clave: Emprendimiento. Ideología neoliberal. Crítica.

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INTRODUCTION

Semantically, the terms “entrepreneurship” and “entrepreneur” come from the French word “entrepreneur,” which comes from the Latin word “*imprehendere*.” Hoselitz (1951) searched for the meaning of this word in the French dictionary of E. Littré and found the following definition: “*celui qui entreprend quelque chose*,” that is, one who undertakes, takes charge, or is committed to something. Thus, an entrepreneur can be understood to be a person who is in charge of doing something, who constructs something, or do something else (Boava & Macedo, 2009; Hoselitz, 1951; Vale, 2014).

From a social perspective, an entrepreneur’s activity is as old as the exchange and trade between individuals in society (Landström, Harirchi & Aström, 2012). However, it was only in 1770 that the term was used to refer to someone who controls a company (Vale, 2014). According to Landström et al. (2012), the concept gained importance with the emergence of capitalist markets and as a result of the evolution of factories and manufacturing (Landström et al., 2012; Vale, 2014; Verga & Silva, 2014).

The evolution of the concept reveals a social transformation, reflecting the transition from a society previously characterized by manufacturing and agrarian production to commercial and industrial production, until it reached the contemporary models of production. The history of entrepreneurship is the history of institutions and customs, which have evolved according to new realities. Thus, the concept and definitions of entrepreneurship have been changing throughout history and are continuously being reframed (Hoselitz, 1951; Vale, 2014).

Over time, entrepreneurship has been investigated in several studies, leading researchers to strive to outline the perspectives of entrepreneurship and develop a conceptual framework. Although different perspectives on entrepreneurship have been outlined by different authors, the scientific community has not yet reached a consensus on the subject (Landström et al., 2012; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). History shows that the study of entrepreneurship has received contributions from various fields, which has resulted in complex and different definitions for the same phenomenon. Machado and Nassif (2014) consider entrepreneurship as a field of study that is still under construction.

Conceived as a landmark for the study of entrepreneurship since the 1970s, the concept was addressed in the field of management studies and has spread through discourses that indicate it as a solution to the unemployment crisis. This reasoning does not consider unemployment as a social problem but as a result of an individual’s failure to adapt to organizations (Gaujejac, 2007). This type of discourse, which attributes responsibility to the individual, has had greater prominence in Brazil since the 1990s when Fernando Collor was elected, and there were political and economic changes resulting from the transition from a reformist constitutional agenda to a competitive agenda (Cordeiro & Mello, 2006).

These political changes caused a significant increase in the rate of entrepreneurship in Brazil. In 2018, according to the Brazil Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), the total rate of entrepreneurship in Brazil was 38%, corresponding to approximately 52 million Brazilians, aged between 18 and 64 years, involved in some business as an entrepreneur, in an initial or established stage. Accordingly, of every five adult Brazilians, two declared themselves as entrepreneurs. In comparison, in 2002 this number was 14.4 million, corresponding to 13.5% of adult Brazilians. It is important to note that the GEM Report “[...] identifies as entrepreneurs the people who have established or are establishing any type of enterprise, even the simplest ones, established by the need for subsistence” (GEM Brasil, 2018, p. 9).

Subsistence entrepreneurship, supported by small businesses, is predominant in Brazil; about 82% of the initial and established businesses have no employees, that is, they involve only an individual entrepreneur. The estimated income of entrepreneurs supports this reasoning. According to GEM Brasil (2018), half of these businesses had a turnover of up to R\$ 12 thousand per year, which represented approximately the minimum wage per month. For Tavares (2018), entrepreneurship is a category of informal work, and the discourse of autonomy places the entrepreneurial subject as a boss and someone that is capable of climbing the social ladder.

However, from the perspective of the conflicted relationship between capital and labor that is characteristic of capitalism, entrepreneurship consists of an ideology of neoliberal rationality, whose form of dissemination, through discourses, imperatives, and rules of conduct, ends up naturalizing its form of domination. Neoliberal rationality destroys rules, institutions, and rights to produce certain ways of living and relating to others, thus manufacturing a new subject (Dardot & Laval, 2016). Therefore,

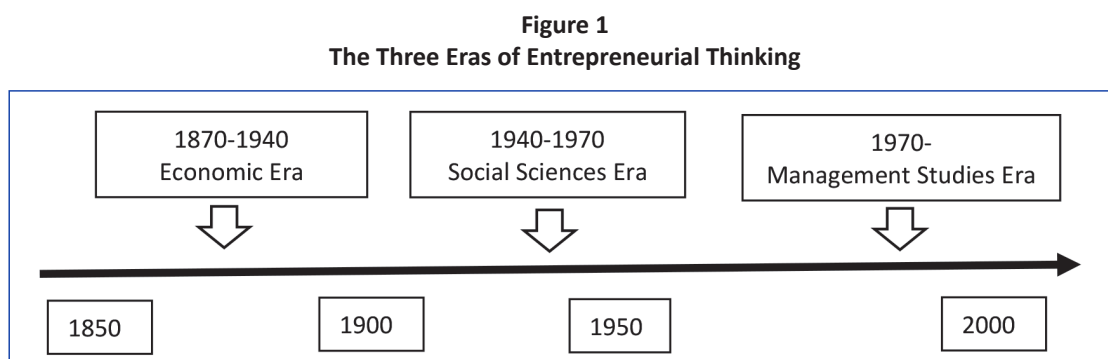
neoliberal rationality, which is derived from the new capitalist spirit, is based on two pillars: the generalized competition that transforms subjects into men-companies, able to behave according to market values; and the generalized conversion of means into ends by management, whose discourse turns men into mere productive instruments and financial results into ends (Gaulejac, 2007).

The conception of entrepreneurship as an ideology can be justified from different perspectives. One of them is represented by the inexorable harmonies of management theories addressed by Tragtenberg — this “harmony” between capital and labor has been disseminated since the classic studies of management by Taylor, Ford, and Fayol. From the 1970s, changes in the productive paradigm, influenced by the Japanese model of production, brought new configurations of profile to workers: flexibility, knowledge, self-control, and versatility; and together with these capacities, the idea of participation in company decisions. The most current form of this harmony in management theories is entrepreneurship, in which subjects are their own entrepreneur (Oviedo & Misoczky, 2017; Paes de Paula, 2002).

Thus, the general objective of this critical essay is to understand the neoliberal aspect of the discourses of entrepreneurship and its role in hiding the reality of the relations between labor and capital. For this, the history of entrepreneurship is analyzed and the evolution of the field is investigated in-depth, culminating in a critical look supported by the apparently harmonious discourses that spread around the idea of entrepreneurship.

The Ages of Entrepreneurial Thinking

The history of entrepreneurship can be distinguished into three major eras of thought, as shown in Figure 1.



Source: Landström and Benner (2010, as cited in Verga & Silva, 2014, p. 7).

The economic era (1870-1940) began with the studies of Cantillon and continued with Say, Knight, Schumpeter, up to the Austrian School. The era of social sciences (1940-1970) was marked by studies on the entrepreneur as an individual and received the contribution of psychologists and sociologists. Psychologists studied entrepreneurs’ personality traits, while sociologists focused on their role in social change. Then, questions on philosophical assumptions and ontological and epistemological principles arose (Verga & Silva, 2014). The era of management studies, which began in the 1970s and continues to this day, has been marked by political, economic, and technological changes, which makes entrepreneurship a topic widely discussed in society (Verga & Silva, 2014).

Most of the authors agree that Richard Cantillon and Jean-Baptiste Say were the first ones to use the term entrepreneur. Cantillon says that, like farmers and artisans, everyone who works at their own risk is considered an entrepreneur. He further describes that some get rich and earn more than twice what they need for their livelihood, while others end up ruined and broken (Cantillon, 1950).

Cantillon differentiates the entrepreneur from the capitalist, the former being someone who takes risks and the latter, the one who provides the capital. For Cantillon, the entrepreneur is a rational decision maker who takes the risk and runs his/her company with the objective of achieving profit (Carvalho & Costa, 2015).

For Say (1803), the entrepreneur is a mediator and a coordinator, who combines different factors of production to produce a certain good (Vale, 2014). Say further states that the entrepreneur is the one who transfers economic resources from a sector of lower productivity to a sector of higher productivity and higher income (Carvalho & Costa, 2015; Drucker, 1987). Say argues that the productive system is represented by three different functions: the specialist who produces knowledge, the entrepreneur who puts the knowledge into practice to produce new uses, and the worker who produces. Thus, the entrepreneur is considered a mediator between knowledge and execution (Dardot & Laval, 201).

In this sense, the entrepreneur plays a coordinating role between the production and distribution of a product or service, combining the factors of production to bring about new ventures. Defining the coordination function is considered one of Say's main contributions to the history of entrepreneurship (Carvalho & Costa, 2015; Verga & Silva, 2014).

Economy, as a subject, was consolidated in the middle of the twentieth century, which made it difficult to include studies on entrepreneurs in economic models. In the 1940s, a series of studies in economics and history once again focused on entrepreneurship, especially at the Harvard University Business History Research Center. The studies were based on the Schumpeterian approach, focusing on the modernization processes of societies worldwide (Landström et al., 2012).

The economist Joseph Schumpeter wanted to develop a new economic theory based on change and innovation. For him, economic growth is not the result of capital accumulation, but of new combinations, which are the innovations (Landström et al., 2012). From this perspective, he states that the entrepreneur's role is to reform or revolutionize the production system through new possibilities (Schumpeter, 1961). Schumpeter only considers entrepreneurs those who reform and revolutionize the productive system (Bruyat & Julien, 2001).

The Austrian economist places entrepreneurs at the center of the economic process, stating that they are responsible for "creative destruction" (Schumpeter, 1961), which consists of an organic process that is constantly changing and that "[...] constantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, destroying the old and creating a new structure" (Leite, 2012, p. 28).

In the 1960s, the fields of psychology and sociology began to study the profiles of entrepreneurs based on their behavioral characteristics. The main exponent of these studies was David McClelland, with his work *The Achieving Society* (1961; Fillion, 1999; Landström et al., 2012). McClelland (1961) stated that an entrepreneur is someone who produces more than what he/she personally consumes.

Based on Weber's work, McClelland suggests that the spirit of modern capitalism carries with it a value system that motivates individuals to search for self-fulfillment. The psychological mechanisms that intervene with these values are associated with Protestantism or modern industrialism, such as education and training for the independence of children (Leite, 2012). McClelland shows that the entrepreneur's behavior is fundamentally shaped by the environment and by the need for achievement; it does not stem from the individual's genetic aspects. For the author, the need for achievement that drives the economic development of a region is the result of culture, experiences, and learning. For McClelland, the entrepreneur is a product of the environment (Barlach, 2014).

Entrepreneurship since the 1970s

The 1960s and 1970s were characterized by major economic changes in society. The changes brought about by technology affected industries, large companies, and even small businesses. Changes in the United States of America and the United Kingdom, mainly influenced by politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, took place in the same period, affecting global dynamics. With these changes, entrepreneurship returned to the spotlight and became a topic widely discussed in society (Landström et al., 2012).

Based on the market logic that prevailed in the United States, the changes spread throughout the world, also arriving in Brazil from the beginning of the 1990s, when Fernando Collor de Melo was elected president. The reformist constitutional agenda was changed to a competitive agenda, which led the State to lose its strength in the regulation of the economy, opening ground for the rise of liberalism (Cordeiro & Mello, 2006).

The intensification of competitiveness, characterized by globalization, caused the dismissal of many employees, mainly in companies that were unable to remain in the market in the face of global competition. Given that these people did not expect much from the formal labor market, they ended up establishing their own businesses and became “entrepreneurs,” often informally (Dornelas, 2008). Such changes forced the development of policies in Brazil aimed at entrepreneurship (Natividade, 2009).

In Brazil, both offensive and defensive initiatives have emerged, targeting both individuals and small businesses (Colbari, 2015). The tendency for new jobs to be created by small and new companies has been previously observed in the United States. David Birch’s seminal work, *The Job Generation Process*, published in 1979, concludes that the majority of new North American jobs were created by small and new companies, which affected not only research on entrepreneurship but also political decisions, finally framing small companies in economic development analyses (Landström et al., 2012).

In the 1990s, there was an increase in the number of journals and conferences focused on entrepreneurship, in addition to an increase in education and entrepreneurship programs. There was a significant entry of new researchers in the field to understand the phenomenon better. This mobility inside and outside the field made research even more fragmented, mainly regarding the theoretical structure of entrepreneurship (Landström et al., 2012), a reason that led researchers Shane and Venkataraman (2000) to characterize research in entrepreneurship as a hodgepodge. Two types of entrepreneurship researchers can be distinguished academically: on the one hand, a group that focuses on management studies; and on the other, a dispersed group of scholars from different disciplines that conducts specific studies on entrepreneurship (Landström et al., 2012).

Entrepreneurship as a neoliberal ideology

How can one explain why suddenly there are so many people willing to work intensely for long years and face serious risks instead of having the security of large organizations (Drucker, 1987)?

There is evidence that the answer to Peter Drucker’s question can be found in the discourses of entrepreneurship as a neoliberal ideology. Boava and Macedo (2009, p. 2) define the term as follows:

Entrepreneurship is composed of entrepreneur + ship. An entrepreneur is one who undertakes. The suffix ship is currently used to designate social, ideological, political, opinionated, religious, and people movements. It is about taking a party, a position, a system, a philosophy, or a circumstance.

The discourse of entrepreneurship, guided by a neoliberal rationality, claim to stimulate competition and individualism, among other market values, as a way to achieve “success” (Dardot & Laval, 2016), hiding the work’s precariousness and flexibility. The capitalist system needs to renew itself constantly, and it does so through ideologies that give it meaning. These ideologies support the so-called “spirit of capitalism,” a set of beliefs that contribute to justify and sustain the capitalist order, legitimizing actions and lifestyles coherent with it (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2009).

Capitalism is inseparable from the history of its metamorphoses, its derailments, the struggles that transform it, and the strategies that renew it (Dardot & Laval, 2016). The current condition that underpins the capitalist system is known as neoliberalism. Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 17) understand neoliberalism as a “[...] rationality capable of structuring not only the action of the governors but also the conduct of the governed.” Neoliberalism is configured as a set of discourses, practices, and devices that determine a new form of government for men according to the universal principle of competition. The opposition between State and market emerges as one of the main obstacles to the detailed characterization of neoliberalism (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

Neoliberalism has profoundly transformed capitalism and society. Thus, neoliberalism is not just an ideology, but a type of economic policy, a normative system that has expanded its influence to the whole world, extending the logic of capital to all social relations and spheres of life (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

Thus, entrepreneurship is considered a strategy of capitalism, whose discourse places the entrepreneur as an agent of economic growth and social change. In the neoliberal view, “[...] entrepreneurship is a strategy by which the worker becomes responsible for creating jobs in order to guarantee capitalist ‘order and progress’” (Tavares, 2018, p. 110). The author adds:

The limited state or minimum state, in fact, constitutes hypertrophy; the market, in turn, becomes huge, being the only instance of mediation of society and individualism is an attempt to break with all social policies that do not pass through the mercantile relationship. In this reasoning, entrepreneurship is understood as one of the ways in which the market appropriates all the hours of the life of the subjects who are allied with this proposal. Our view is that it is a sophisticated label for skilled, precarious, and deluded workers, since the dream of freedom is objectively unfeasible (Tavares, 2018, p. 116).

The responsibility for ensuring dignified survival conditions passes from the political and social sphere to the individual level, which occurs mainly in developing countries. Entrepreneurship then emerges as a solution (Silva & Bassani, 2007) and the entrepreneur is conceived as the referential subject of neoliberal rationality. The market engenders its own subject, through a self-educating and self-disciplining process, and defines what the conducts are. The liberal individuals declare their autonomy but remains part of a cog in the great neoliberal mechanisms (Dardot & Laval, 2016). Capital, in turn, is favored in neoliberal ideology because it turns workers into companies (Tavares, 2018).

Factors that support the growth of entrepreneurship

Baron and Shane (2007) indicate three factors that have affected the way entrepreneurship has been accepted by today’s society:

1. Dissemination of exciting reports of successful entrepreneurs by the media,
2. Productive restructuring and changes in employment relationships, and
3. Change in values.

These three factors, as indicated by Baron and Shane (2007), can be explained based on the assumption that entrepreneurship is a neoliberal ideology. The attention received by entrepreneurs is not new. In the past, between the 18th and 19th centuries, entrepreneurs had already attracted social attention due to the great fortunes accumulated, including names such as John Davison Rockefeller, who revolutionized the oil sector in the 1870s and established the Standard Oil Company; Andrew Carnegie, an investor in the railroad and oil sectors who led the construction of the first bridge that connected America, crossing the Mississippi River, and several other constructions; and Cornelius Vanderbilt, who invested in the construction of railroads, in addition to other businesses related to the merchant navy (Baron & Shane, 2007).

The media had been used to disseminate the successful discourses of entrepreneurs, forming a stereotype of the entrepreneur and relating it to something positive and attractive. At a time when people needed political and military heroes, people looked for them elsewhere. Thus, they believed in entrepreneurship as a means to achieve success based on “ideal models” (Baron & Shane, 2007).

The neoliberal ideology relies on the management industry — represented by consulting companies, business schools, and management and business administration books and magazines — to disseminate these “ideal models.” This new industry sells the dream of social climbing, success, and recognition (Wood, 2013). Business values invade people’s personal lives through management’s ideology and its unwavering faith in market values, rational procedures, and the entrepreneurs’ personality (Wood, 2013), which is disseminated as something natural by entrepreneurship.

Ésther (2019) discusses the identity of entrepreneurs by integrating elements of the critical perspective with social psychology. The author considers entrepreneurship as an identity-structuring concept that assumes an ideological and fetishized character when defining a set of beliefs, behaviors, and individual characteristics that the entrepreneur must have and follow. They are stereotypes that dictate forms of action (Ésther, 2019).

Stereotypes are mostly represented by the stories of successful entrepreneurs, which constitute rich material for the dissemination of the ideology of entrepreneurship. Individuals become apprentices of great life trajectories. In these stories, successful personalities are constructed to outline a linear and cohesive sequence of personal history (Leite & Melo, 2008).

The discourses of entrepreneurship are used for the construction of identities aligned with this ideology, showing which patterns of behavior and action are accepted, as reinforced and reproduced by institutions and instances of socialization, which construct habitus in their various layers. Subjects who do not fit into these “models” tend to be excluded. For Ésther (2019), the ideology of entrepreneurship becomes even more perverse in attributing to the individual the responsibility for their success or failure, disregarding any reference to the socio-historical and political character of social life (Ésther, 2019).

The second factor is related to the productive restructuring and the new forms of employment contracts that have emerged. The new employer–employee bonding configurations have made employees less loyal to their employers. This intensified in the 1990s, when large American corporations cut more than six million jobs. Contrary to what was expected, the unemployment rate in this period fell to the lowest levels ever recorded, which can be explained by the new companies established by entrepreneurs—the workers who lost their jobs (Baron & Shane, 2007).

On this regard, Ésther (2019) states that the discourse of entrepreneurship and the figure of the entrepreneur were strengthened with the productive restructuring. The dismissal of large contingents of workers led people to seek new forms of survival as an alternative to formal employment. One of the alternatives, as mentioned, was the establishment of micro and small companies. However, this resulted in the precariousness of the work that has been present since the early years and that remains until today: “This process led to the formation of a new class, the precariat—a mixture of precarious and proletariat” (Ésther, 2019, p. 864).

However, the precariousness is hidden by the discourse of entrepreneurship, which places the entrepreneur in a position opposite to that of the formal labor market and sees the former as an oppressor of the individual’s creativity and autonomy. Entrepreneurship defends freedom, contradicting routine and bureaucracy (Leite & Melo, 2008). Thus, new values are now cultivated by entrepreneurial individuals, and this corresponds to the third factor that sustains the growth of entrepreneurship in recent years, according to Baron and Shane (2007).

This factor refers to the change in basic values. Seeking security — job security — and building a solid career in the same company are no longer expected by workers. The new values that have emerged, especially among young people, are based on the possibility of choosing, instead of certainty or predictability (Baron & Shane, 2007). The guarantees provided by higher education diplomas have decreased and pensions are threatened. Careers are also not guaranteed. A new spirit of capitalism that meets the new demands must emerge to guarantee its maintenance as the dominant system (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2009).

The fundamental characteristics of entrepreneurship as ideology

One of the main characteristics of entrepreneurship as an ideology is the issue of freedom. Although individual freedom is one of the fundamental components of the market, in this context, freedom without purpose is nothing; it is valued only in the system that gives it concrete goals, that is, opportunities for profit (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

According to Gaulejac (2007, p. 57), “[...] the issue of freedom does not arise under the same terms. It is not inscribed in the same space and temporality. For some, it represents an abstract concept in a globalized world; for others, it is part of their daily life.”

The flexibility demanded by neoliberal ideology in favor of progress are interpreted by workers as irregular hours, lack of regulation and protection, that is, flexibilization of work (Gaulejac, 2007). In addition to freedom—another fundamental characteristic of entrepreneurship as an ideology — is the idea of competition. The market is defined by its competitive character, leading individuals to believe that they are in a game. Each participant tries to overcome the other in an unremitting struggle to become a leader, and remains in this position (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

With capital crisis, the subject is made responsible for his/her life, career, employability, and well-being (Silva & Bassani, 2007). This transfer of responsibility is one of the doctrines transmitted by the neoliberal ideology, which, according to Gaulejac (2007), needs legitimacy to “[...] justify the inequalities it causes and erase the contradictions it raises.” The author adds:

[...] unemployment is not considered as the consequence of the structural gap between the number of jobs created by the economic system and the number of active people that can occupy those positions. It results from “employability failures” by the population and therefore, from their “lack of adaptation” to the needs of the company. In this perspective, the unemployment problem would be solved by encouraging or forcing the unemployed to better “manage their skills” [...] (Gaulejac, 2007, p. 184).

The power of neoliberal rationality arises from the establishment of situations that force individuals to behave according to the terms of the game imposed by it. The self-entrepreneur is a subject trained to win, to be successful. He is the high-performing competitive man. However, the company has two faces: on the one hand, the triumphant face of success without shame; and on the other, the depressed face of failure as a result of uncontrollable processes and renormalization techniques. In this game, everyone imitates the best and progressively becomes well-versed in entrepreneurship (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

Why it is an ideology?

The discourse of business management, which is formal and historical, global and local, mixes general precepts and paradigmatic examples, and currently constitutes the form par excellence by which the spirit of capitalism is incorporated and offered as something that must be shared (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2009).

Entrepreneurship as an ideology is addressed by Oviedo and Misoscky (2017). According to the conception of Lukács (2012), as presented by the authors, ideology is a form of signification that seeks to harmonize conflicting interests and that virtually implies the concrete world. Ideologies allow congruence between antagonistic interests, generating a type of fictitious equality. This prevents social struggles because they generate the false impression that reality is something harmonious.

In the same sense, Chauí (2014) presents ideology as a logical, systematic, and coherent set of representations (ideas and values) and rules of conduct that indicate, prescribe, and regulate social conduct. Ideology has a prescriptive and regulatory character, as it provides members of a society divided into classes with a rational explanation for social, political, and cultural differences, without ever attributing such differences to the division of society into classes and as a consequence, of divisions in the economic production sphere.

Ideology aims at hiding the social division of classes, economic exploitation, political domination, and cultural exclusion, and it does so by identifying references, such as humanity, justice, freedom, equality, and the nation. Chauí (2014) states that the ideology of competence has emerged in the 17th century as a result of technological advances. This means that power came to be associated with knowledge. The discourses considered valid are disseminated by specialists who occupy a position in the organizational hierarchy. The “competent discourse” guides people on how to eat, relate, and raise their children (Chauí, 2014). Ésther (2019) also considers entrepreneurship as an ideology and shares Chauí’s (2014) definition of competent discourse, stating that:

Entrepreneurship is a topic that increasingly gains more space and followers of its precepts, although not always in a critical and conscious way. This may imply the dissemination of an ideology, as entrepreneurship is seen as a kind of panacea for all economic and social problems in an uncritical way, constituting what Chauí (2007) calls competent discourse (Ésther, 2019, p. 858).

The ideology of competence is based on the inequality between those who have and those who do not have technical-scientific “knowledge,” giving rise to competition between individuals, with only a few having a place of success reserved to them. The experts state that there is only happiness in the competition and in the success of those who win (Chauí, 2014).

Critical theorist Tragtenberg, when discussing the harmony of interests between industry and society (raised by the classical management theorists) defines management theories as ideologies. Through management techniques, management theories provide devices that support the notion that men are purely economic beings and contribute to the reproduction of the capitalist system. Management theories have been renewed since the 1970s as a result of the changes in the forms of production, and now state that the “entrepreneur” is responsible for his own well-being. Given the above, entrepreneurship can be understood as an ideology linked to neoliberalism (Oviedo & Misoscky, 2017).

Paes de Paula (2002) takes up the ideas worked on by Tragtenberg in *Bureaucracy and Ideology* in the article “Revisiting Tragtenberg: the inexorable administrative harmonies and the flexible bureaucracy.” According to the author, Tragtenberg denounced the ideological character of management theories and analyzed Weber’s thought, giving rise again to the idea of bureaucracy as a form of domination. Management theories have already emerged with the objective of guaranteeing productivity in organizations, based on the idea of harmony between the capital and work relationship, despite being inherently conflictive (Paes de Paula, 2002).

In this way, management theories hide the natural tension between the interests of entrepreneurs and workers. In addition to favoring productivity and order, they facilitate the monopoly of power and relations of domination in the world of work, reducing the prospects for human emancipation in organizations (Paes de Paula, 2002). Based on Tragtenberg’s thought, Paes de Paula (2002) presents the four premises of management theories:

- (1) They are dynamic products of socioeconomic formations in a given historical context; that is, management theories can adapt to the current capitalist demands;
- (2) They are expressed in an ideological and operational way and ideology is manifested through ideas devoid of history that disguise the true nature of the situation. They operate through practices, techniques, and ideas;
- (3) Even though they are adaptive, they obey a principle, a cumulative inheritance that is responsible for their creation and re-elaboration; and
- (4) Bureaucracy is the ideological device that brings together management theories and is also a product and result of the historical and socioeconomic context in which it is inserted.

The supposed “harmony” sustained by management theories is characterized by the denial or manipulation of conflicts, frequently accompanying a positivist approach to social relations. According to Tragtenberg, as presented by Paes de Paula (2002), this occurs through direct or indirect mechanisms of social control.

Classical schools of management, represented by Taylor and Fayol, also use the mechanisms of social control. In a context of rationalization and intensification of work, conflicts are controlled by punitive mechanisms and strict methods, such as sanctions and threats, to guarantee discipline and avoid resistance. In this first phase of monopoly capitalism, harmony in labor relations is sought by the use of force. Such methods open space for individual and collective challenges, strengthening the union movement (Paes de Paula, 2002).

The human relations school emerged to solve the failures of the classical school, and according to Paes de Paula (2002), when analyzing Tragtenberg, it only contributed to the perpetuation of the ideology of administrative harmony. The human relations school continued to hide conflicts by replacing the use of direct containment with manipulation and followed Taylorism by maintaining the separation between planning and execution of tasks (Paes de Paula, 2002).

In Tragtenberg’s view, the human relations school reproduced, through the industrial relations and human resources departments, a “participatory ideology,” stimulating a false idea that employees are important for the organization’s decision-making process, when in fact, they only obey decisions already made. This school tended to blame the individual for the tensions arising from the relationship between capital and work, making it impossible for conflicts to be revealed (Paes de Paula, 2002).

Thus, it becomes clear how the two main management schools contributed ideologically to the maintenance of harmonization in labor relations, ensuring that the interests of capital were achieved. Moreover, Tragtenberg demonstrates how management theories are dynamic and how they inherit characteristics from their predecessors (Paes de Paula, 2002).

The Fordist model was too rigid to accommodate the new technologies that were emerging and the new demands of the consumer market, thereby coming into crisis; this led to socioeconomic transformations that affected the organization of work. Thus, capitalism moved to a new paradigm of accumulation, the so-called flexible accumulation. Subsequently, lean and flexible organizations based on the Japanese production model emerged, and the practices of reengineering, downsizing, outsourcing, organizational virtualization, and flexible jobs gained ground (Paes de Paula, 2002).

Paes de Paula (2002) draws attention to the fact that these new theories are not devoid of ideology: they continue to perpetuate the harmony in labor relations and consequently, productivity. Toyotism, a Japanese model of production, is based on ideas of cooperation, consensus, integration, participation, and prioritization of informal groups to perpetuate this ideology. Toyotism represents an adaptation of management theories and practices to flexible capitalism. This model combines classic techniques and participatory practices to achieve efficiency and productivity, which reinforces its ideological character and indicates that it is based on the old management schools (Paes de Paula, 2002).

In view of the current perspectives associated with technological progress and the difficulty in building a democratic society, the supposed freedom of the worker increasingly gained ground. In this context, ideas such as creative leisure and entrepreneurship increasingly gained followers who believe that it is possible to achieve freedom by abandoning organizations and self-managing their own careers as entrepreneurs (Paes de Paula, 2002).

This model takes shape in autonomous and temporary work and increasingly provisional and flexible relationships. In this way, an ideology of entrepreneurship that goes beyond the borders of organizations and intertwines with the social fabric is consolidated. Management techniques are no longer restricted to managers and are now common knowledge, since everyone must manage his/her own career. This reinforces the cult of personality and success, which, according to Tragtenberg, is an illusion of freedom that contributes to the increase of individualism, political demobilization, and distancing from democratic life (Paes de Paula, 2002). For Paes de Paula (2002), one of Tragtenberg's greatest legacies is this vigorous alert to the ideological traps that create an idea of harmony and divert subjects from the paths of freedom.

The classic notion of entrepreneurship, which alluded to the role of great entrepreneurs, is taken up by neoliberalism, to be used as a way of managing social conflicts (Puello-Socarrás, 2008). Unemployed individuals and those with precarious jobs are encouraged to become entrepreneurs by discourses that encourage entrepreneurship. This avoids the social conflict generated by the capitalist mode of production in its neoliberal phase. The new citizen becomes responsible for their participation in the productive activity and dedicates their efforts to ensure their livelihood, not having the initiative to claim their rights (Oviedo & Misoscky, 2017).

Neoliberal rationality is used by the State as a useful doctrine for the management of social conflicts, insofar as it alleviates the problem of precariousness by privileging the "self-" entrepreneur. Thus, entrepreneurship can be understood as an ideology, since it serves to harmonize social conflicts resulting from antagonisms between classes. Entrepreneurship, which is historically understood in various ways, generalizes the interests of capital to the social totality, leading people to seek their well-being individually (Oviedo & Misoscky, 2017).

Several strands of thought confirm that entrepreneurship is a neoliberal ideology. Hamann's work (2012) is based on the biopolitics of power — Foucault's work — and criticizes neoliberalism and the subjectivity constructed by it: the "self-entrepreneur." His work illustrates the relevance of Foucault's analysis of neoliberal governance for a critical understanding of recent transformations in individual and social life in the United States, particularly for understanding the public, private, personal, and political domains and their practices.

Neoliberal governmentality is translated by Hamann (2012) as "the conduct of conduct" through the strategic creation of social conditions that encourage and require the production of a neoliberal subject, a historically specific subjectivity, characterized by freedom and autonomy. For the author, while liberalism places the "economic man" as a "man of exchange," neoliberalism aims at "human capital" composed of individuals converted into "self-entrepreneurs" who judge and act based on market values. The "self-entrepreneur" is his own capital, his own producer, and the source of his own earnings (Hamann, 2012).

Although “conduct of conduct” promotes oppressive forms of individual behavior to be internalized by individuals, such forms fundamentally aim at achieving only the objectives of capital. Thus, the ideology of entrepreneurship seeks to ensure that each individual is responsible for the goals of reproduction of the capitalist system (Costa, Barros & Carvalho, 2011).

Although state and market have always been two relatively antagonistic modes of organization, neoliberalism turned them into compatible dimensions, with the preponderance of policies favorable to the market (Puella-Socarrás, 2008). For Hamann (2012), political decisions are influenced by private interests overlapping any public interest. In this way, neoliberalism obscures, reverses, or eliminates traditional distinctions between the public and the private, between the political and the personal. The author mentions the case of the United States to contextualize his theory: for many years the United States has privatized traditional public goods such as parks, water, hospitals, schools, and prisons, transforming them into profitable businesses, often with promises never kept, of serving public interests. As a result of the policy adopted, an increasing number of Americans do not have access to health care and quality education (Hamann, 2012).

Meanwhile, social ills are transferred to the personal domain: poverty, environmental degradation, unemployment, homelessness, racism, sexism, and heterosexism—all these aspects are reinterpreted as private issues that should be addressed by voluntary charity, by the invisible hand of the market, by cultivating personal “sensitivities” toward others, or by strengthening one’s self-esteem (Hamann, 2012).

The great contradiction lies in the distance between populist discourses of freedom, autonomy, individualism and the reality, which is that individuals worldwide are increasingly subject to the severe, unpredictable, and unforgivable demands of market forces, and are evaluated by impersonal cost-benefit calculations on economic risks, financial responsibility, productivity, efficiency, and convenience (Hamann, 2012).

Thus, although the subject can declare that their autonomy is irreducible, they remain only a cog in the great neoliberal mechanisms. It is now a matter of governing a being whose subjectivity must involve the company and the principles of the market (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

Organizations also encourage employees to become “self-entrepreneurs” through practices that promote workers’ full responsibility for their health and well-being, offering employees incentives to participate in physical training, lifestyle management, and diet programs. Moreover, the increase in self-help technologies disseminates techniques for managing everything, even feelings (Hamann, 2012).

Leite and Melo (2008) state that since the 1980s, the institutionalization of entrepreneurship has been favored by the commercialization of management packages that popularize academic theories in the media through books, newspapers, magazines, videos, lectures, training, reality shows, and games, whose contents aim at guiding the conduct of individuals, showing them how to behave correctly. The “advice” ranges from “how to do something” to imperatives like “be self-confident!” Conduct models are combined so that the public cannot distinguish between one and the other, absorbing them as a coherent whole of prescribing actions and values. Thus, a worldview is constructed and instilled in individuals (Leite & Melo, 2008).

These ready-made recipes contribute to the hegemony of ideal concepts, practices, and models, which present the entrepreneur as a hero capable of breaking new ground, incorporating risk in their actions, breaking rules, and seeing opportunities that no one else could do (Costa et al., 2012).

Different techniques and procedures are aimed at enabling individuals to achieve greater “self-control.” Although they are usually related to stories, theories, and institutions, they have the common objective of strengthening the self, adapting it better to reality, thus making it more operational in difficult situations. They present themselves as psychological knowledge, with a special lexicon, reference authors, and particular methodologies, to reinforce a rational argument and transform individuals through a set of basic premises. All of these methods are linked and serve to exclude the responsibility of the company’s rules on the individual performance of the worker, attributing them exclusively to individuals (Dardot & Laval, 2016).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The main objective of this theoretical essay was to understand the neoliberal aspect of the discourses of entrepreneurship and its function of hiding the reality of the relations between work and capital. We sought to analyze the history and criticism of entrepreneurship, reflecting on the type of neoliberal rationality conveyed by their discourses disseminated in the form of ideology as rules of conduct to be followed without questioning. In this way, conflicts related to being an entrepreneur and the growth of entrepreneurship are hidden.

Entrepreneurship reached its peak with the increase of global competition, which resulted in the bankruptcy of several companies that failed to maintain themselves under this new context. The consequences were dismissals (Baron & Shane, 2007; Ésther, 2019). Realizing that traditional ideologies would not be effective in this new scenario, capitalism was transformed and adapted, finding in entrepreneurship the solution to the unemployment crisis (Silva & Bassani, 2007). The idea of being the owner of one's own business has occupied the minds of many unemployed.

However, the discourses did not contemplate and do not contemplate the contradictions inherent to entrepreneurship. The discourses that support this ideology disregard the contexts and social realities of the entrepreneurs, placing them as mere instruments of capitalism (Dardot & Laval, 2016; Gaulejac, 2007). This is the conclusion of this study: the discourse of entrepreneurship focused on the neoliberal ideology exempts the State from the responsibility of guaranteeing minimum living conditions for these individuals, placing them as responsible for their success or failure, disregarding the importance of the social context in which these subjects are inserted.

Then, a question is raised: is there a solution to this reality? We recognize that the phenomenon needs to be investigated with all its social, cultural, and political implications, considering the entrepreneur as a subject immersed in a social context that influences, and is influenced by, him. The Brazilian context, for example, is characterized by entrepreneurship sustained by small businesses, largely owned by individual entrepreneurs focused on survival. When considering this aspect, how can successful models be imposed on these subjects as a way of being, living, and achieving success, considering that they are generally performing an activity to survive and are inserted in a context that does not favor them?

Contrary to what these discourses defend, the subjects do not live under conditions of equality to adopt a neoliberal ideology that defends that they are the only ones responsible for their success or failure. If so, what would success or failure be for a micro-entrepreneur who receives approximately the minimum wage per month? Although a great gap is observed between the reality experienced by this subject and what is defended by neoliberal ideological discourses; it is a hidden gap — an undermined conflict.

Considering the magnitude of the problem and the limits of this work, we recognize that it is impossible to propose practical solutions. Thus, we propose a critical reflection on the neoliberal characteristics of entrepreneurship discourses. Future studies should investigate the Brazilian situation of entrepreneurship from the perspective of entrepreneurs. Furthermore, future studies should critically analyze topics that have emerged in recent years, such as female entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, startups, and other initiatives that demonstrate the social context of the Brazilian entrepreneur.

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