

Youth and Human Rights in Contemporary Brazil: The Possibilities of Theater in the Affirmation of Rights

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Abstract— This article discusses the theater as an instrument that contributes to human emancipation, as it allows the subjects who practice it to analyze their reality through a different perspective from the one proposed by the current order. Glimpsing the impact that human rights violations have on the lives of young people in contemporary Brazil, especially those who are marginalized and have their identity made invisible by society, we analyze theater as a possibility for the recognition of their totality. In this way, the objective of the article is to treat the manifestation of the artistic expression of the theater as a way for the youths to recognize themselves in the realities put on stage, in a sense of affirmation of their rights.

Index Terms— Contemporary Brazil, Human Rights, Theater, Youth.

I. INTRODUCTION

At the current conjuncture, the predominant sociability around the globe is capitalist. Such a system is anchored in the unbridled production of profit, raised through the exploitation of a large part of society to the detriment of another. This social sphere that imposes itself on the others, the bourgeoisie, is supported by the working class to achieve the production surplus that is configured as Surplus Value, and even if it is smaller in quantity, the owners of capital manage to spread their ideology, in defense to its interests, with so much tenacity that it became imperious.

In this context, despite being surrounded by contradictions, human rights are relativized, mainly by this part of society, which downgrades them to legitimize the intense exploitation of the working class, which favors them. As a result, these rights are the target of attacks that seek to re-signify them, popularly associating them with something negative, which supposedly acts with the purpose of validating criminality.

Linked to this panorama, driven by the historical process of omission by the State, young people have been strongly affected by the invisibility of their identity. Even though the theme has already been covered more frequently, much of the research carried out only deals with the way in which the young person is inserted in the system and the legislative institutions present in their life, not bringing the way in which they live and critically elaborate thoughts on these situations. Furthermore, in Brazil, there are few public policies and state apparatuses that propose to address the particularities and needs of this population, with the intention of recognizing them as an active part of our society.

In this direction, thinking about art, specifically theater, as cultural expressions, both have the potential for political emancipation, as they are configured as a space in which those who practice it can rehearse a new reality, beyond what is commonly post. In addition, spectators who encounter this artistic expression experience a break from everyday life, which is massified by work and concerns about survival within the capitalist system.

Crossed by this scenario, Brazilian youths find themselves surrounded by stigmatizations that end up distancing them from the understanding of society, in addition to being left aside by the State in terms of public policies, so that they are made invisible by society. When we reflect on this issue, considering the various problems that permeate Brazilian youth, and when we understand theater as an artistic manifestation that contains the capacity to contribute as a way of looking at reality from another angle, we envision the possibilities that this cultural expression has for this population. In this way, this work aims to relate the artistic expression of theater with the process of recognition of youth in contemporary Brazil, in the sense of affirming their human rights.

To this end, the work was carried out through bibliographical research, with a qualitative approach, using texts, books, and scientific articles by scholars in the area to theoretically support the debate that will take place next. Furthermore, understanding that, when dealing with issues that affect our society marked by the class struggle, we need to see it as a whole, apprehending its past to glimpse the present, we will use the dialectical historical materialism method to dwell on the objects approached in their totality.

II. HUMAN RIGHTS AS A SUBJECT OF DISPUTES

Created on December 10, 1948, because of the Second World War, which afflicted the world between the 1930s and 1940s and subjected groups of people to unjustifiable atrocities, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed by the General Assembly of Nations to consider that:

“(…)Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world,

Considering disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law (…)” [9].

In this direction, this declaration proposes to ensure in law, enforced on all nations, the basic and natural rights of human beings, in the quest to guarantee a dignified and full life for all. Although they seem obvious to us, these rights have been disrespected throughout history, so that 30 articles were created seeking to ensure to all citizens of all territories, the ideal to be followed and defended by countries - Members of the UN (United Nations).

However, it is necessary to emphasize that dealing with Human Rights is a complex debate, since its proclamation took place in a context that the bourgeois order is hegemonic, in a way that it is crossed by ideological disputes. These conflicts are exemplified by the fact that the Human Rights have already been used by countries to carry out arbitrary interventions on other nations, as well as a justification for repressive actions by the State, claiming to combat urban violence.

In addition, inserted in the logic of capital, several rights considered basic are imposed in a sense of “facilitating” life within the capitalist mode of exploitation, only “softening the effects inherent in economic development” [4]. Thus, the freedom so often cited in this document boils down to that defended by the bourgeoisie, which is configured as freedom through private property, which accentuates social inequalities. Still, this issue opens room for the use of violence by the State, anchored in Human Rights as a justification.

In this sense, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is based on civil, social, economic, political, and cultural rights as intrinsic to the concept of democracy and citizenship [1], which conflicts with the socio-political and economic limits imposed by the system capitalist, since it is anchored in exploitation. In this way, it is only possible to achieve the guarantee of human rights for all, in fact, by overcoming this system.

On the other hand, it is necessary to expose that the recognition of human rights is an essential agenda of the working class, and the achievements that exist are derived from their struggles, configuring as an historical construction. There is a symbolic difference between human rights as based on the principles of universality, the right to a full life and freedom of thought, and those set out in the Declaration made after the Second World War, and the other changes that were made to it at conferences over the years, which has influences of bourgeois ideology. However, they still seek to situate a social and political recognition of the whole of society of what are the basic rights for all.

According to Scherer [8, page 42] “Human rights are understood as an ethical, legal, and political heritage, built by humanity in its libertarian and emancipatory struggles, and serves as a parameter to guide action in society, with a view to building and affirming human beings as subjects of law.”

Thus, for the purpose of this paper, the human rights raised here are those that value, according to Barroco [1 page 8] “the universality, rationality, the perspective of totality, history, the possibility of emancipation”, these are the values that sustain modern society.

III. YOUTHS IN THE BRAZILIAN REALITY

Linked to the scenario exposed above, in which society is based on exploitation and condemns part of the population to conditions of pauperism, there are many young Brazilians, so forgotten and marginalized in this system that commodifies its population, being directly affected by the expressions of the social environment that surrounds their daily life. In this scenario, the violation of their human rights is a daily occurrence, as the State's disregard for their social and economic situation, placing them in a condition of social deprivation. In addition, permeated by the alienating conditions that sustain the current system, which subjects individuals to non-recognition for the work they do daily, young people find themselves increasingly distant from understanding their participation in society.

When dealing with young people, it is necessary to start the debate by pointing out some questions. First, the Brazilian National Youth Policy (PNJ) classifies as young citizens whose age range is between 15 and 29 years old. In addition, it also subdivides them into three groups.

According to Pochmann [7, page 664], these groups are: “Young people aged 15 to 17 years, called young-adolescents;

young people from 18 to 24 years old, as youth-youth; and young people between the ages of 25 and 29, as young adults. Considering this division, the first group is already included in the current child and adolescent policy; however, the other two are not.”

This adequacy of age group differs from that indicated by the World Health Organization (WHO), which classifies youth as individuals between 15 and 24 years old. This change is not exclusive to Brazil and usually occurs when there is a concern to establish public policies aimed at this population, considering the difficulty they find in entering the world of work.

Another observation that we consider important to cover is the use of the term youths, in the plural, to be used in this text. Because it is a social category, formed by a group that, however cohesive, is also configured as heterogeneous [7], dealing with youth permeates several specificities. What classifies “being young” within the current capitalist society can differ in countless ways, when we consider that this phase is crossed by the socioeconomic condition of each individual's life. Thinking of it as plural is a way of recognizing its particularities.

In this scenario, there are several stigmas that surround this theme in the current societal order, which change according to the race and class conditions of these young people. Regarding youths in socially unprotected situations, who do not have access to consumer goods, and live in peripheral areas with high rates of violence, there is an association of youth as a problem. Constructing a view that is an unwanted period in which a series of conflicts are triggered, these young people are seen as generators of contrarities, and even “dangerous”. Thus, society starts to treat them as a “social problem”, a threat to the community, as there is the premise that this group must be fought and submitted to “order”.

About this issue, Scherer [8 page 31] says that “this ‘dangerous’ role constitutes a mask that makes invisible and humiliating, usually placed on the face of youths belonging to less favored social strata. In this way, everything that poor young people question and produce, as well as all forms of reaction, are socially interpreted as violence, even when it comes to mere transgressions and incivilities, since this is a resource triggered by the multiple powers of the bourgeois order, which associates poor and transgressive youths, belonging to dangerous classes.”

On the other hand, due to the logic of profit accumulation, capitalism sees, in a part of the youth, a great possibility of a consumer market, thus emerging the “youth market” [8], which triggers a new association: that being young is in fashion. There is a conception that youth is synonymous with power and beauty, and the industry commercializes this image, manufacturing needs driven by the logic of consumption. In this way, this “positive” premise is usually aimed at young white people from the middle and upper class, which exposes the different treatments and conceptions that surround youth within the same society, demonstrating that being young differ a lot when there are significant differences between income strata.

In addition, the process of alienation that permeates our society also affects young people, especially regarding their conception of the world around them, even in their various particularities. For that “youth in fashion”, what remains is the incessant search for a pattern and lifestyles, as well as the cult of the body, which leads to a feeling of insufficiency for the daily life they lead, that nothing is good, always looking for perfection. The intrinsic alienation of capitalist logic culminates in a simplification of life to the world of consumption, so that it is only possible to obtain what is considered “Ideal” through purchasing power.

In this sense, this issue also affects young people belonging to the lower economic classes, who cannot reach the association considered “positive” by youth. For this group, what remains is to be treated as invisible, summarizing them to a mere social problem, associating everything that permeates this population with criminality - as the forms of art to which they have more access, such as “rap”, “funk” and graffiti, being their forms of expression.

With this scenario, seeking to abandon the stigmas considered bad of youth, and aiming for the consumerist logic that makes social ascension possible, such young people often resort to crime, seeing it as the only possibility of obtaining the necessary purchasing power to carry out their wishes. In addition, the socioeconomic condition that permeates their lives and those of their families lead them to early entry the labor market, often abandoning their studies to do so, which results in fewer opportunities to skilled work. This fact becomes another one of the factors that make many of these young people feel like they have no way out, believing in illicit activities as the only alternative.

These issues are latent, especially when we consider that Brazil is one of the countries that most kills young people in the world [6]. It is necessary to understand that in the Brazilian reality, according to the “Atlas of Violence”, a survey carried out by the Brazilian institute IPEA (Institute of Applied Economic Research), young people make up 52.9% of the total number of murders in the country.

In addition, research carried out in 2020 by UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) in the country concluded that 35.000 children and adolescents aged up to 19 years died violently between 2019 and 2020. In the Brazilian cities and states, studies indicate that most of these homicides occurred in neighborhoods with high levels of armed violence, which generally occupy the outskirts of cities. Among the murdered youths, 80% were black, exposing how these murders

permeate issues of both class and race.

Corroborating these data, the “Atlas of Violence” also concluded that in 2019, 23.327 young people aged between 15 and 19 were victims of homicide in the country. Among them, 54.73% were through firearms.

This scenario points to the extreme disregard for human rights related to children, adolescents, and young people in Brazil. The homicides of young people are expressed as a result of a series of violations and precariousness that cross the life of this population in the country, which is marketed by the lack of access.

There are several international agreements that reinforce the importance of human rights as integral, ensuring the right to a full life of the population. But, somehow, these issues do not seem to reach young people who live on the peripheries of the world, especially black people who are immersed in socially unprotected situations.

According to Perondi and Scherer [6], although Brazil has already been implementing public policies aimed at children and adolescents since 1920, with the creation of the “Statute of the Child and Adolescent” in 1990 as a main milestone, young people above the age of 18 years for a long time were cornered by the laws, without any legislation that sought to apply on its particularities.

Following what is exposed by the authors, it was only in 2005 that the “National Youth Policy” was created, as well as the “National Youth Secretariat” and the “National Youth Council”, which proposed to elaborate, promote, and articulate public policies and research to meet the demands of this population. Furthermore, it has undergone advances over the years, such as the creation of the “Youth Statute” in 2010, which provided for the rights of young people and sought to highlight the country's concern with their social protection.

However, all these improvements that occurred in the legal sphere have professional qualification as their main concern, summarizing the violations of this social segment to the world of work and completely ignoring the intense precariousness that this sphere has suffered. This perspective fails to consider the Brazilian reality crossed by a labor market reform process based on outsourcing and weakening of the workforce, reinforcing social inequalities. In this way, in addition to minimizing the intense process of social lack of protection that affects young people, these laws do little to meet their demands.

In this context, as already discussed, many of these young people seek a job opportunity in illicit activities. Therefore, when we expose such an expressive mortality rate for young people, it is necessary to point out that the “war on drugs” launched by the Brazilian State, the extreme violence that permeates this labor market, and with governments face crime in general, have wide open how laws aimed at youth leave a gap when it comes to protecting these young people and reducing their mortality in the country.

In this manner, it is necessary to reflect on youth relativized by the current economic system, crossed by intense violations that create difficulties for them to recognize themselves as subjects of their own reality. This population has been mass murdered in the country, with their human rights being violated daily, and little is said about it, so they are made invisible by society. As a result, they cannot identify themselves as generic humans, but as a commodity, machines with the need only to produce and consume. This prevents them from critically analyzing and understanding their lives and the social processes in which they are inserted.

Due to this scenario, it is essential that young people become aware of their violation processes and seek instruments that enable the guarantee of their basic rights as citizens. For this, they need mechanisms that give them spaces where they can express their demands, that value their potential, highlighting all the processes that permeate their lives, as well as their real needs.

IV. THEATER AS A POSSIBILITY FOR THE AFFIRMATION OF YOUTH RIGHTS

When we stop to reflect on the exposed panorama, it is possible to analyze how much culture influences the lives of young people, and society in general. Thinking that culture carries a concept of production and creation of the world in its practices and values, what is seen as beautiful or ugly, as right or wrong [3], it is what determines, through the conceptions of the population, what are the laws that manage the order. Through it, alienating processes occur guarantying the hegemony of the bourgeoisie as a ruling class. It is through their expressions that the ideology of capital is disseminated, whether explicitly or subtly, as in the news or films and books that propagate lifestyles that are considered more “correct”, leaving peripheral youths aside.

Analyzing these facts, when we think of art as a form of cultural expression, which has the potential to guide subjects towards understanding themselves as intrinsic to the totality, relating it to the scenario of violations that permeates youth seems plausible. Considering that art has been present since the beginning of human existence and there were several concepts incorporated into it by the culture of each people, it is seen that its definition is not exhausted in a single sense, such as producing objects and provoking psychic states in the receiver, but as a totalizing process that leads the individual to investigate Art as a way for men to enter into relationship with the universe and with themselves.

Supporting this idea, Boal [2], a Brazilian theater practitioner, speaks of art as capable of reinventing reality from the artist's perspective, so that they can see the world from a different point of view than that dictated by the hegemonic society. With this, art can express the ideals of artists, representing their own way of seeing daily situations.

In this direction, art can become a counter-hegemony strategy of the prevailing capitalist logic, disseminated mainly through alienating processes. It opens space for individuals to rehearse, through their most varied expressions, new ways of understanding reality.

It is through this context in which the theater, one of the cultural expressions arising from art, emerges as an alternative mechanism that puts on stage the potential of youth, as a space that provides the possibility of portraying their daily life, interpreting social life in which individuals are inserted. The constitution of their social relations takes place through actions and observations about the processes that permeate their realities, and the theater allows young people to see themselves from an angle that differs from the common post. By standing on a stage and staging experiences that differ from their own, individuals can deconstruct paradigms and reformulate concepts, offering them a new way of understanding and intervening in their own reality.

This possibility is due to the enrichment of personality that art guarantees to the subjects, without neglecting the social context, but to relive the past and present of humanity. This question allows their understanding and enables the creation of perspectives that point to a "better future", in the sense of having a training that differs from that based on the unbridled achievement of profit.

By understanding the potentialities present in the theater and looking for ways to better explore them, Augusto Boal created the "Theater of the Oppressed", a theatrical technique that, through games and exercises, intends to strip the participants of the condition of spectator and make them protagonists, not only in theater plays, but in their own lives. Going through 4 stages, the proposal of this theatrical technique is to remove from the subjects the crossings of society, which even shape their bodies and the way they behave in everyday life, so that they are no longer "objects on stage" [2] and feel like the subjects with rights that, in fact, they are.

Through this technique, the playwright outlines ways of working with the urgent need to bring the oppressed classes closer to theater, as a way of appropriating critical thinking, that for too long has remained in the hands of the elite. In such a way, in the quest to achieve this purpose, such techniques aim to break down the barriers imposed on the theater, involving the audience in the show, diluting the relationship between spectator and actor, where everyone assumes the role of protagonist capable of transforming thoughts into actions.

Boal's technique elucidates how the creation and contemplation in theater and art encourage those who have access to them to break with the capitalist structure to which they are conditioned and see reality as it is, without the rules and prejudices that are imposed in your everyday life.

Art acts as a form of cultural expression that allows the subjects to understand their totality and themselves as a social being, capable of intervening in the environment in which they operate, by allowing them to recognize themselves in what they produce. Such a question helps in the human-generic consciousness, by suspending the reality of everyday life, and leading them to overcome the singularity. In this way, it focuses against the processes of alienation that condemn young people to tragic scenarios, whether as a mere consumer, an instrument used only to produce and reproduce the logic of capital, or as a danger to society, which needs to be subjected to bourgeois "order".

Thus, young people who are involved in art, culture and theater can discuss issues that are not included in their everyday lives, allowing them to recognize the violations of human rights to which their reality exposes them, and can be critical of them.

Within this perspective, theater, especially theatrical techniques such as Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed", can act as a social function that brings young people closer to human rights, in a sense of understanding themselves as holders of these rights, capable of intervening in the world that surrounds them. Thereby, young people can anchor themselves in artistic expressions to elaborate the conception of human rights that goes beyond the capitalist logic, in a sense of seeking to reach their fullness.

Especially when we consider Brazil permeated by a scenario full of violations, with a growing precariousness of the State affecting public policies and worsening the expressions of the social issues. Although there are public policies aimed at this population, these are still scarce, and cannot reach and suppress all demands, considering their many particularities. The latent number of murders that affect Brazilian youth is not random, exposing the intense situation of lack of social protection they experience.

In this way, the theater is an emancipatory possibility, even if the current Brazilian scenario, marked by disregard for the population in a situation of pauperism, seems to tend to become more intensified every day. Even so, either as spectators of theatrical plays, or as actors behind shows, this artistic expression breaks with concepts already rooted and can add to the struggles of social movements, which demand the realization of their basic rights, seeking a more dignified life within

a society that currently has an economic system based on the exploitation of man over man.

V. YOUTH IN PERIPHERAL COUNTRIES AND THEATER: A BREAK IN THE SCENARIO OF VIOLATED HUMAN RIGHTS

Through everything that was apprehended during this paper, it is possible to conclude that the theater is a way of elucidating a reality that is hidden by current society, which keeps subjects alienated and immersed in a capitalist system focused on unbridled obtaining of profit, allowing them to understand their reality. Thinking that such a scenario affects Brazilian youth a lot, whose stigmas attributed by common sense aggravate their distance from reality, such an artistic mechanism can favor a change of scenery.

Theater is a form of expression for young people, a means of voicing and understanding the expressions of the social issue present in their experience, strengthening emancipatory social processes, and acting as a way of coping with the conditions that annihilate their dignity. It allows them to manifest in a way that they can understand reality and recognizes themselves in what is reproducing, as holders of rights.

In this direction, although the conception that encompasses human rights is intrinsic to capitalist society, when capable of staging new worldviews, young people can envision it beyond the limitations of the current ideology. Therefore, when we think of theater as a possibility to affirmation of youth human rights, we are referring to rights that involve a process of political emancipation, seeking to move towards human emancipation, which goes beyond the bourgeois order.

Within these processes, reflecting about human rights without limiting ourselves to those defined by the Universal Declaration carried out by the UN also becomes a debate that demands urgency, when we think of ways to deal with stigmatized youths. The conception of human rights is the stage for ideological disputes, crossed by the interests of both the ruling class and the proletariat. Although the fruits of the workers' struggle, what the Declaration concerns is summarized in facilitating life inserted in a context of bourgeois domination, stripping itself of the search for a society based on social equity.

With this panorama, addressing this issue is essential to recognize the totality of reality, and it is urgent to point out that thinking about rights does not have to be limited to an easier life in a difficult context. When we think about reaching young people, constrained by the common sense of what is positive or not, breaking this limiting barrier can be an effective way of reaching them and establishing dialogues.

In this manner, thinking about alternatives such theater is crucial. Culture has been the main disseminator of bourgeois ideology, configuring the alienation that makes a large part of the working class faithful to a system that subjugates them. And breaking this hegemony and using it to contribute to emancipatory processes has been proving to be an effective possibility.

Therefore, bringing the population, especially young people, closer to this cultural expression becomes non-extendable, if we want to stop the advance of conservatism and follow a path towards a new sociability. Although the act of doing theater is configured as a way of producing criticism, and thus is endowed with a greater range of emancipatory possibilities, watching theater plays, and other artistic expressions, are also ways to break with an everyday massified life by hard work. In this way, any contact with the arts in general contains potential and can help in these processes.

It is no wonder that access to culture currently has a high cost. In a country where even basic inputs are increasingly financially distant from the population, thinking about contact with artistic expressions seems impossible. Not by chance, any possibility of thinking that differs from what is dictated by the dominant class is extremely frightening to them. In such manner, keeping the population immersed only in that inexhaustible cycle of consuming and producing is part of the necessary alienation for capitalist hegemony.

Despite these issues, art and theater alone cannot completely change the reality of youth, or of the working class as a whole. They can be configured as a possible suspension of a daily life of intense violations of rights, but it is still up to the State and its competences to deal with the expressions of the social issues, which are a consequence of its system that propagates inequalities.

When thinking about the Brazilian reality, it is urgent to create public policies that really meet the demands of young people and are concerned with their rights, seeking ways to socially protect them and keep them away from the intense violence that pervades their lives. The policies instituted by the state lack approaches that focus on all spheres of violations that affect this population and are integrated into the structure of society, so that they do little to remove them from the center stage of the mortalities that occur in the country.

In this way, the theater does not replace or strip the State of its responsibilities, nor is it configured as the great savior of humanity. This is not what we claim during this paper. What we seek to bring, supported by the theoretical foundation obtained in our research, is that the theater contains a vast bridge of possibilities that can break with the alienation that sustains capitalism. This can contribute greatly to the process of recognition of human rights by young people, in a sense of recognizing themselves as subjects endowed with particularities, and who constitute an active part of a collective. With

this, they can charge the State for effective responses to their situation of lack of protection, asserting their rights as Brazilian citizens.

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