

# Occupational therapy and the progressive neoliberal trap: challenges for an anti-oppressive praxis

## *Terapia ocupacional e a armadilha neoliberal progressista: desafios para uma práxis antiopressiva*

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**ABSTRACT:** To understand the contradictions that involve neoliberalism and its progressive pretensions, we need to ask ourselves about the possible traps that these social configurations can “build” to disguise their wickedness, trying to hinder a radically anti-oppressive therapeutic-occupational praxis, which in turn cannot be fooled by the hegemonic narratives that try to co-opt it. Part of these traps, for us, is designed regarding the phenomenon of *empty identity politics*. More explicitly, these articulated movements—progressive neoliberalism and *empty identity politics*—represent a risk for contemporary professional action, reducing the understanding of subjects to the immediate, visible, individual, and subjective, by an action that reads the path of identity recognition (placed as fixed and separate from social dynamics) via, exclusively, individual/empty/symbolic empowerment, being able to reaffirm a meritocratic discourse. Therefore, it is urgent to undertake the struggles for the recognition of identities in dialogue with the reading of the social subject in an unequal structure and along with the struggles for redistribution. Thus, the objective and concrete social dimension, which is consolidated in the social structure, takes place in the therapeutic-occupational praxis, and goes against the movements that try to deny (by force or consensus) our action committed to anti-oppression and social transformation.

**KEYWORDS:** Occupational Therapy/trends; Social Identification.

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**RESUMO:** Compreendendo as contradições que envolvem o neoliberalismo, e suas pretensões progressistas, é preciso se interrogar sobre as possíveis armadilhas que essas configurações sociais podem “construir” para disfarçar a sua malvadez, inviabilizando uma práxis terapêutico-ocupacional radicalmente antiopressiva, que não se deixe enganar pelas narrativas hegemônicas que tudo tentam cooptar. Parte dessas armadilhas, para nós, se desenha em relação com o fenômeno do *identitarismo*. De forma mais explícita, esses movimentos articulados—neoliberalismo progressista e identitarismo—representam um risco para a ação profissional contemporânea, reduzindo a compreensão dos sujeitos ao imediato, ao visível, ao individual e ao subjetivismo, por uma ação que lê o caminho do reconhecimento da identidade (colocada como fixa e separada das dinâmicas sociais) via, exclusivamente, o empoderamento individual/vazio/simbólico, podendo reafirmar um discurso meritocrata. Logo, é urgente empreender as lutas pelo reconhecimento das identidades em diálogo com a leitura do sujeito social em uma estrutura desigual e conjuntamente às lutas por redistribuição. Assim, a dimensão social objetiva e concreta, que se consolida na estrutura social, toma lugar na práxis terapêutico-ocupacional e vai de encontro aos movimentos que tentam negar (pela força ou pelo consenso) nossa ação comprometida com a antiopressão e com a transformação social.

**DESCRITORES:** Terapia Ocupacional/tendências; Identificação Social.

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## INTRODUCTION

What is the possibility of a therapeutic-occupational praxis that apprehends the multiple social injustices and is committed to fighting them? What are the traps in debates permeated by identitarianism\*, whose functionality takes place in a progressive neoliberal context? These were the questions that initially guided this essay and led us to problematize the processes that propose a false subversion of hegemonies, marked by discourses that are based on identity causes, under the aegis of a historical time in which we face the erosion of the common ground that founds social democracy and its universal policies. Focusing on the struggles of subjects for the recognition of their existences, their ways of life, the violence that crosses them, disadvantages of various orders, and access to opportunities and resources, we criticize progressive individualism, which, in our view, can make a radically inclusive, progressive, democratic, and anti-oppressive therapeutic-occupational praxis unfeasible<sup>1,2</sup>.

Paulo Freire states that: “My struggle against capitalism is based there, in its intrinsic perversity, in its anti-solidarity nature” (p.70)<sup>3</sup>. Thus, in Freirean terms, a neoliberal logic that is said to be progressive under capitalism, that is, aimed at a just society and based on humanization, is not possible. In other words, the author reaffirms that there is no humanization of capitalism, as follows:

The ideological discourse of globalization seeks to disguise that it has been strengthening the wealth of a few and verticalizing the poverty and misery of millions. The capitalist system achieves in globalizing neoliberalism the maximum effectiveness of its intrinsic evil (p.248)<sup>4</sup>.

Understanding the contradictions that surround neoliberalism and its progressive pretensions by a reading guided by several authors, we question the possible traps that these social configurations can “build” to disguise their wickedness, trying to hinder a radically anti-oppressive therapeutic-occupational action/thinking<sup>5</sup>, not disseminator of hegemonic narratives, which they try to co-opt at all costs. In this sense, we weaved the relationships of this process with the phenomenon of identitarianism<sup>6</sup>, as a logic that fixes identities to individualize and essentialize them, giving substance to the progressive neoliberal logic:

The ability<sup>(1)</sup> of ideology makes us sometimes meekly accept that the globalization of the economy is an invention of itself or of a destiny that could not be avoided, an almost metaphysical entity and not a moment of economic development subjected, like all capitalist economic production, to a certain political orientation dictated by the interests of those who hold power (p.142)<sup>4</sup>.

To answer those initial questions, one must break with discourses that naturalize realities, forms, and multiple paths, thinking about an anti-oppressive society (and professional) project, intended for freedom<sup>1,5</sup>. We want to announce paths that are constituted in favor of liberating structures and the universal ethics of the human being, aiming at breaking with a market logic framed by something that is said to be ethical, as Paulo Freire teaches us<sup>7</sup>.

### The progressive neoliberal trap and identitarianism

Fraser<sup>8</sup> points out that social justice, for a long time, was, for many, strictly based on the aspects of redistribution, in a society founded on the structural inequality of the means of production, that is, of property, and, thus, very focused on the social question and access to social rights, in a post-socialist context. This component of the social struggle began to give way to a vision of justice centered on recognition, placed, also for many, as antagonistic to the first. For the author, it is only possible to foresee social justice, in its economic, identity, and political spheres, if the struggle for it brings together redistribution and recognition.

Making this defense, however, the author has shown a contemporary phenomenon in the face of these issues, which makes the notion of social justice unfeasible, from the progressive neoliberal rhetoric, especially by the perverse appropriation of agendas focused on the struggles for recognition.

Fraser<sup>8</sup> states that progressive neoliberalism combines “an expropriative and plutocratic economic program with a liberal-meritocratic policy of recognition. The distributive component of this amalgam was neoliberal (p.46).” Such a social organization reconfigures a program that combines creative economy, in a government for the rich, with a meritocratic liberal policy of recognition, but that does not have any type of economic redistribution in the sense of social justice in fact<sup>9,10</sup>. From this contradiction, the bet of a neoliberalism that hides its perversity is consolidated, under

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<sup>(1)</sup> \* Haider<sup>6</sup> uses the term identity politics by criticizing those specifically emptied/individualistic identity politics based on neoliberal premises. Thus, they would be identity politics co-opted by capital. In Portuguese, some authors, such as Barros<sup>11</sup>, call this phenomenon *identitarianism*. In this article, we chose the term *identitarianism* to signal the difference between emptied identity policies and the debate around identity agendas in general.

the perspective of meritocracy aimed at a few people from some marginalized groups. Freire<sup>3</sup> helps us to understand this historical movement, which has imposed itself more strongly since the 1990s:

I draw attention to a certain implication present in a veiled way in neoliberal discourses. When they talk about the death of History, ideologies, utopias, and the disappearance of social classes, they assure me that they are defending a fatalism a posteriori...] now they defend the end of History, they welcome the “new time,” that of the “definitive victory” of capitalism as a future that was late but arrived to end History itself (p.33)<sup>3</sup>.

Under the bias of the “end of History,” announced by this neoliberalism, the path that has developed since 1990, which gained more shape in the 21st century, is the possibility of a “progressive” neoliberalism that, according to Fraser’s analysis<sup>9,10</sup>, brings the idea of conciliations that do not have as their center the social question in capitalist society, that is, social classes, focused on conflicts of race, gender, sexuality, religious creeds, etc. This is a perspective in which everyone can win and that it is possible to live a *humanized capitalism* (in full class inequality) - ideals fostered by the forces themselves, announced, even, by movements reduced to recognition, when they defend so-called identity politics as the only or the main means to compensate for historical social and democratic deficits.

The retreat of the provider Welfare State is reconciled, since the late 1970s, with progressive neoliberalism, of American origin, with the sharing of the remaining resources according to the relative power of social movements and political forces.

In the process, central recognition agendas, equally important<sup>8,10</sup>, are co-opted and “included” in this discourse, without also dealing with their limits within the scope of redistribution. Thus, a meritocratic and individualistic language emerges, even if speaking of groups or collectives, which then begins to shape discourses around social justice and the historical resistance of various groups.

In this context, there are important criticisms concerning the struggles centered on recognition, which end up being incorporated by progressive neoliberalism. In dialogue with Haider<sup>6</sup>, we understand the direct relationship of this process with identitarianism. Considering that this phenomenon dialogues with Fraser’s critique<sup>8-10</sup>, which problematizes the co-optation of the recognition agendas, the “identity” demands are consolidating in the systems, in an isolated, fixed, and individualistic way, only scratching, if so, an economic organization based

on expropriation, exploitation, and subordination. Recognition becomes an internal factor, from fixed and individual identities, which start to dialogue with the logic of capital—reduced to meritocracy:

The reduction of equality to meritocracy was especially fateful. The progressive neoliberal program to achieve a just status order was not aimed at abolishing the social hierarchy, but at “diversifying “it,” empowering “talented” women, people of color, and sexual minorities for them to reach the top. And this ideal was inherently class-specific: geared toward ensuring that “deserving” individuals from “underrepresented groups” could attain positions of prestige and purchasing power equal to those of straight white men of their own class. The feminist variant says so; but, unfortunately, it is not the only one. Focused on “asserting oneself” and “breaking the glass ceiling,” its main beneficiaries could only be those who already had the necessary social, cultural, and economic capital. Everyone else would be kept on the floor below (p. 47, emphasis added)<sup>9</sup>.

In this logic, taking the issues of gender and race, for example, were have more women and black people in places of power in large multinationals; thus, a capitalism has been built to dialogue with such agendas and bring some type of social justice. However, this is consistent with the maintenance of meritocracy, since it does not happen at the level of the collective relationship of social and economic dynamics, but rather in an identitarian perspective. Barros<sup>11</sup> argues that:

The exaltation of identity as something fixed, absolute, something given, pre-existent, and not relative, is the pure expression of the form of valorization of capital as an end in itself, which must ensure for some individuals a still viable colony of exploitation. It is this phenomenon that seeks an ideal and non-relative identity, an I=I, as an unconscious form of the realization of capital appreciation, which I call identitarianism (p.156).

The perspective that takes the identity data and places it as something fixed and absolute ensures its character of co-optation—even by understanding that fixed identities result from the contradictory social production itself, which permeates the relationship between capital and the disciplinary apparatus of the modern State, triggering this type of individuality. Haider<sup>6</sup> points out that identity is a real phenomenon, which represents the way in which the State deals with individuals, as well as a conformation that reflects

the complexity of social relationships in the constitution of our individuality.

Based on these movements, ideas such as “empowerment,” “diversity,” and “place of speech” become part of the vocabulary in business and commodity management<sup>9,10,12</sup>, as a bargaining chip in capitalism and the modern State, elevating the inclusion of some but neglecting the collective class struggle - of anti-capitalist base<sup>6</sup>. Thus, “proposals to set aside class concerns represent a special risk [...]. In this case, the result would be a new version of progressive neoliberalism - one that combines neoliberalism in the distribution front with militant anti-racist policies of recognition”(p. 56, emphasis added)<sup>9</sup>.

This bargaining chip is sustained in individuality, accentuating the contradiction that constitutes the mechanisms of the progressive neoliberal perspective, taking from identities the historical, political, and social data of their construction. In dialogue with Haider<sup>6</sup>, Costa<sup>12</sup> (p.49, emphasis added) states:

[...] the framing of identity politics, as it goes, reduces politics to what the individual says it is in the sense of obtaining their recognition as an individual and not as a “social subject” participating in a collectivity, in the collective struggle against an oppressive social structure, necessary for a new “insurgent universalism”.

Therefore, identities are fixed in a scenario that loses its constitution along with social, cultural, and political dynamics, in a close relationship with economic demands. The production of an identity desire starts to dialogue in a very strong way with the appreciation of capital, which is restricted, in many moments, to an underrepresentation, as Fraser states<sup>9,10</sup>, or to a “symbolic or individual representation,” as Fernandes argues<sup>13</sup>, based on consumer relations and the market. Thus, there is no dialogue between identity contradictions and the social structure, in search of a radical transformation. Given this:

[...] one must ensure that symbolic representation has content to emancipate the other people of each oppressed group. This concrete representativeness, with content, will make even more difference, because it requires collective coherence (pushing away individualistic perspectives on reaching the top) and because it must be in solidarity with all those who want to be heard and want to fight (p.116-117)<sup>13</sup>.

Haider<sup>6</sup> discusses that the movement of identity politics has as its framework the demands articulated by

the *Combahee River* Collective, a group in the USA in 1977, composed of women, black people, socialists, and lesbians. According to this author, these women stressed the socialist movements so that they would address the experiences of women, black people, and lesbians, aiming to strengthen the collective struggle and not break with it, moving towards the defense of building solidarity with other progressive groups, in favor of the fight against all logics of oppression. However, throughout history, Mohandesi<sup>14</sup> affirms that what began as a perspective to add greater inclusion to the socialist struggle, overcoming some of its limits in favor of a more diverse politics, ended up instrumentalized as “oppositions” and divisionisms.

In short, there is a process of colonization that focuses on this struggle, in the contingency of other historical events driven by capital and through the fixation in *identitarianism*, something that works, even, as a strategy of fragmentation of collective struggles<sup>6</sup>, or, in the words of Freire<sup>15</sup>, of the diverse oppressed people, who lose their unity in diversity.

Even with a distinct political, historical, and social consolidation, the USA<sup>6</sup> and Brazil<sup>11-13</sup> can be seen as articulators of a historical block<sup>16</sup> configured by an economic model of income concentration, combined with a certain recognition of the difference. In the Brazilian context, this is especially true in relations linked to the market, given that today in Brazil we have a modern State profiled by reactionary neoliberalism, marked by the (un)government of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro (2019 to 2022), which breaks with dialogues that have any progressive pretension, even those articulated by neoliberalism.

An important imbroglio lies in the dynamics to understand that identities also reinforce norms and ways of life in typically capitalist relations. For example, we have the identity of the conservative middle class that still remains the reference for parameters of exclusion and social damage to the oppressed<sup>6</sup>.

The State and the market take the middle class as a reference to parameterize “identity” exclusions, in view of the absence of the social class component in the analyses; therefore, the conservative middle class, white, and male identity would conform to what is desired, fostering the idea that overcoming exclusion is to reproduce the status of this identity, in some dimension. For this reason, we lose sight of the components of the real pretensions of political power and their differences in the lives of the oppressed, dodging a collective societal project. Thus, we consider that starting from the identity perspective, without dialogue with social structures, it is to run the risk of affirming the ideal of the white middle

class to think about social insertion, meeting a desire for homogeneity rooted in it.

This rooted and sought homogeneity concerns, above all, the fear of losing status and become simple working class. This was addressed by Marx on 18 Brumaire, in what he called the petty bourgeoisie; within the revolutionary processes, this set of subjects realizes that they would be poorly rewarded materially, and social democracy would be the way to avoid this, maintaining bureaucratic institutions for the administration of the two extreme poles (capital and wage labor), seeking a certain harmony. “No matter how different the measures proposed to achieve this goal, no matter how much it is embellished with more or less revolutionary conceptions, the content remains the same. This content is the transformation of society by a democratic process, but a transformation within the limits of the petty bourgeoisie” (p.63)<sup>17</sup>.

It is urgent to understand that identities cannot be situated in a naturalized way, as simple elements of subjectivity, since they are aspects related to the “social subject”; thus, perceptions about identities that refer to race, gender, sexuality, etc. live in a capitalist world. More explicitly, the desire of a man to relate sexually to other men is only a possibility of human relationships, but homosexuality is a socially constituted identity, interconnected to social structures, which fix this identity, either in subordination or in co-optation.

Haider<sup>6</sup> highlights the risk of losing sight of a universal project of a common space of struggle for all subjects inserted in various categories of oppression, in a unity in diversity<sup>3</sup>. The possibilities of ways for this were already debated by the Black Panther movement, created in 1966 in the USA, whose members, for example:

[...] they recognized that black people were oppressed on a specifically racial basis and therefore had to organize autonomously. But at the same time, to talk about racism without talking about capitalism, is to hide what is necessary for the people to actually have power in their hands. It just creates a situation where the white cop is replaced by the black cop. For the Panthers, that was not liberation (p.41)<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, the Black Panthers establish that the movements must place themselves in the collective struggle, considering the social structure, which goes beyond identities. This example can also be understood regarding all other movements, not only the antiracist, but feminism; those of people who are dissidents of gender and sexuality; social movements for the possession of land, urban or rural; movements of workers of the world, among others.

Fraser<sup>9,10</sup> also addresses this topic to think a feminism for the 99%, making a critique of neoliberal feminism (feminism of the 1%), co-opted by the logic of progressive neoliberalism and to which identitarianism refers, since it is necessary to formulate and fight for a feminism for the 99% of women who do not integrate the 1% of the rich population, that is, a movement that includes working class women.

We do not aim here to establish a hierarchical degree of importance between oppressions, since the identity agendas must come along with the debates on social structures, as they are part and say a lot about the class struggle; therefore, it is appropriate to weave an intersectional dialogue. According to Fernandes (p.117)<sup>13</sup>, “the talk of ‘class comes first, race comes next’ and the like, which still inhabits certain circles, ignores that, just because a certain oppression directly affects a group, it does not mean that its force does not impact all other social relations.” The author adds that identities are essential and completely linked to issues such as unequal structures, and it is therefore relevant not to neglect the common points of oppression as points of arrival of a collective struggle.

Still on the contradictions of the co-optations of agendas, Haider<sup>6</sup> reflects on the anti-racist movement:

In the academia and social movements, no serious contestation arose against the co-optation of the anti-racist legacy. Intellectuals and activists have allowed politics to be reduced to policing our language, to the questionable satisfaction of provoking guilt in white people, while institutional structures of racial and economic oppression remain (p.42-43)<sup>6</sup>.

Thus, what we affirm is that we must think/do going beyond what they want when assigning an identity debate restricted to the individual, empowerment, and simplistic reading of the place of speech.

One must form a mosaic of this struggle—unity in diversity with collective organization, moving towards a cultural revolution—, with history as a possibility<sup>7,18</sup>.

To oppose injustice, the project of universal emancipation, of a global revolutionary solidarity, can only be implemented by organization and action. I believe that it is possible to achieve this, to carry forward the struggle of those who came before. But the dominant ideology works hard to convince us that there is no alternative. In this shallow and hopeless reality, some choose the consolations of fundamentalism. But others choose the consolations of identity (p.26)<sup>6</sup>.

In fact, this is a path of (re)understanding the legacy

of the anti-racist struggle of socialists, lesbians, black people, intellectuals, and activists of the *Combahee River Collective*, being necessary not to allow their agendas to be reduced to the policing of our language and the individual promotion of blame to white people, for example<sup>6</sup>. In other words, it needs to be an inspiration for the transformation of functional structures of racial/patriarchal/social oppression.

Solidarity as a political project<sup>4</sup> between the movements is central so that the path of a revolutionary project is not lost. Freire and Oliveira<sup>19</sup> establish solidarity in antagonism to individualism, as a force of unity for the collective struggle against multiple oppressions.

Therefore, our technical-political action as occupational therapists should be directed to the occupational-therapeutic process not as a process restricted to individual identities, but rather as a reading that integrates the *social subjects*. The challenge is to locate ourselves historically and ask ourselves if we are managing to advance in this, in an anti-oppressive and intentional practice for freedom<sup>1</sup>, without losing sight of the specificities of different groups and people, without us only being distracted by the traps of identities.

### **Old acquaintances: traps on the way to an anti-oppressive and libertarian occupational-therapeutic thinking/action**

We understand that, in part, a nodal point of the dangers surrounding the praxis of occupational therapists in the contemporary context concerns the traps of identitarianism and progressive neoliberalism.

In this bias, to some extent, for us, this dialogues with the reflections already undertaken on the “myth of therapeutic activity,” in the elaborations of Nascimento<sup>20</sup> in a text published in 1990, defined as “the belief, still common among occupational therapists, that any activity can be therapeutic, as long as the professional uses it for this purpose, that is, if they know how to explore the intrinsic therapeutic properties in each activity in certain patients and situations” (p.17, emphases added)<sup>20</sup>.

In line with the contradictions posed in the previous topic, a therapeutic-occupational praxis that dialogues with identitarianism, therefore, with progressive neoliberalism, starts from the belief of a project and an intentionality that lies in the individual and in the “myth” of a therapeutic-occupational action, with its activities and resources, focused, reduced to the individual empowerment of the subjects of the intervention.

Such dialogues become even more evident from what Nascimento<sup>20</sup> understood as consubstantiating this new myth at the time, regarding the reduction of human action to

subjective, emotional, and expressive aspects of the individual. Not that these were not important aspects; however, their problematization was aimed at understanding the process only in the individualized dimension, something that reduced human action to this single dimension. In this analysis, again, concrete and practical life escapes, because the activity is the center of the process, neglecting the concrete needs of historically situated subjects, of excluded populations that occupational therapists have always encountered and continue to encounter—clinging redemptively to the myth of the “therapeutic activity” instead of therapy by work or occupation, and ignoring the social functions of institutions and professional practice.

Inspired by these reflections of Nascimento<sup>20</sup>, today, we are at risk in contemporary professional praxis, reducing the understanding of subjects to the immediate, the visible, the individual and subjectivism, to an action that reads the path of identity recognition (placed as fixed and separate from social dynamics) exclusively by individual/empty/symbolic empowerment, and can even affirm a meritocratic discourse. Therefore, it is urgent to undertake the struggles for the recognition of identities in dialogue with the reading of the *social subject* in an unequal structure and along with the struggles for redistribution.

Therefore, “with good intentions,” the therapeutic-occupational praxis can (re)produce narratives of progressive neoliberalism, of identitarianism, which stagnates the process in the affirmation of a fixed identity, not relative and allied to the appreciation of capital<sup>11</sup>, losing sight that identities are social productions and require professional projects that deal with these aspects, including the micro and macrosocial dimensions in a dialectical way<sup>21</sup>, with “the ability to understand the movement of reality, of history and life in their context” (p.102)<sup>22</sup>.

It is necessary to be careful with certain approaches that are reduced only to identity perspectives, that is, articulating the centrality of fixed identity and a work linked to a licentious spontaneity, taken by activity with identity. In this context, even when there is a positive (but naive) intentionality in the process, not focused on “adaptation” in a directly violent way, the disastrous consequences of alienation can take the field again, because, by neglecting the social reading about the subjects, paths of alienation about concrete lives and the place of professional action are reaffirmed.

Thus, occupational therapists co-opted by discourses of symbolic/individual empowerment, multiculturalism, place of speech, and symbolic representativeness, run the risk of conducting and believing in the sufficiency of a practice directed only to the subject, without situating them in all their complexity.

It should be noted that we understand this aspect as something already historically criticized by occupational therapists, but today, this is replaced from different conjunctural dynamics, making it necessary and requiring a rereading of occupational therapy before the dangers of a reductionist praxis.

Silva and Oliver (p.869)<sup>23</sup>, when discussing social participation and occupational therapy, argue that, in the professional field, “one must weave a critical analysis on the reductionist and individualized approaches that, despite considering participation as ‘being and being involved in social life,’ do not discuss that this life can be (and probably will be) immersed in macrosocial, political, and cultural conflicts”. Therefore, the debate on perspectives “taken” as progressive, but which retain reductionist logics to understand the subjects, is urgent.

The issue of social participation needs to be shifted from the private and individual sphere of subjects to public, historical, cultural, collective life and to power relations, to emancipatory and inclusion processes and opportunities for access to rights. This becomes urgent when society is inserted in the globalization process with a strong presence of neoliberal alternatives for the production and distribution of inequalities, as in the Brazilian case, because there is a centrality in economic growth, technological innovation, and austerity policies, which invest little in guaranteeing fundamental rights (p.869)<sup>23</sup>.

Therefore, this process is essential, given the task of the occupational therapist as an agent who seeks to expand people’s life possibilities and foster social participation<sup>21-24</sup>. The progressive neoliberal trap, along with identitarianism, are ideologies that have been strategic to blur a critical and macrosocial reading about the lives lived by the subjects to whom we direct our professional actions, demobilizing the production of a praxis that aims at social empowerment (not only individual) and concrete representativeness (not only symbolic), paths that dialogue with what Haider<sup>6</sup> and Fraser<sup>9</sup> point out.

Some time ago, Barros<sup>25</sup>, in the article *Operadores de Saúde na Área Social (Health Operators in the Social Field)*, put the importance of understanding occupational therapy in its technical action inseparable from political action, considering that the split between these actions leads to the neutralization of concrete conflicts, pathologization, and individualization of social problems—issues that converge with the perspective of identitarianism and the closely individual empowerment of the person (functional to adaptation and meritocracy), that is, that do not aim at the complexity of reality.

“We do not always perceive the set of values and norms that are implicit in technical-assistance procedures, when isolated from the historical context and class struggle that produced them and for which technicians must obtain a spontaneous consensus (p. 14, emphasis added)<sup>25</sup>”; thus, we clearly appreciate a dialogue with Haider<sup>6</sup>, when affirming the importance of understanding issues such as those that refer to the demands that bypass social identities, aspects of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc., highlighting the historical and social complexity associated with aspects of social class, redistribution, and social structure.

This does not mean that individual or symbolic empowerment is not an important aspect, necessary, but insufficient if reduced to it, parameterizing a praxis that individualizes social problems and does not put into play the importance of apprehending, understanding, listening, and dialoguing with the subject and their capacity for agency also in the face of macrosocial issues. Here we can draw another parallel, of what was already placed as criticism, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, to a humanistic occupational therapy, but far from everyday life and the ways in which it was lived<sup>26-28</sup>.

Specifically, it is very relevant to recall the elaborations of social occupational therapy, which affirm that the point of action takes place in history and in the search for personal and social emancipation, given that it is the “understanding of the indissolubility between man [human being] and the world and between personal and social history that will give its mark to social occupational therapy” (p.101-102)<sup>22</sup>. Farias and Lopes<sup>29</sup>, dialoguing with Freirean assumptions about awareness and empowerment, weave their relationship with a social occupational therapy that, being with the individual, both are directed towards the collective.

The progressive neoliberal trap, when reproduced by occupational therapists in their practical and theoretical productions, re-elaborates the perspective of activity (or occupational therapeutic action), turning to the production of an empowerment of identities in an individual perspective, discarding the social structures that permeate this experience and the essential dialogues for professional praxis. Identities should be understood as a point of departure and not of arrival<sup>13</sup>, in view of their power and importance to think/do the social struggle - denouncing logics of oppression that are central to destabilizing the social structural and announcing other possibilities to exist in collective life.

However, for this to occur, it is necessary to overcome questions such as: what is more important, race or class, gender or race, etc.? In a clearer way, one must understand

that carrying out an anti-oppressive praxis requires an analysis of the social structure and its articulations with the relations of oppression - to capture how and to what extent oppressions feed back into capitalist society<sup>1,29</sup>, how identity causes can be universal demands, and how particular agendas need to assume a vocation of radical struggle for rights for all<sup>30</sup>.

In the face of the progressive neoliberal perspective, which has infiltrated even among those who seek to modify reality, based on Basaglia and Basaglia<sup>31</sup> and on Paulo Freire<sup>3,18</sup>, we must observe that, as long as the action of professionals reproduce the logics of the dominant classes, without engendering and committing themselves to the consolidation of new structures and logics of care, the subordination of the dominated class will continue to be reproduced.

According to Nascimento<sup>20</sup> (p.21, emphasis added):

There are no recipes for a new practice. But the direction can and must be clearly assumed: it is the transformative

action of technicians and patients together, starting from and in the process of restoring the patient to the condition of Man [human beings], subjects of their own history, participants in their destiny; an intervention—at the same time technical and political—that directly faces the complexity of the problems and limits imposed on our clients and on our professional competence and discovers, with them, possible paths.

Finally, Lorde<sup>32</sup> states that “the tools of the master shall never break down the master’s house” (p.137). In this sense, progressive neoliberal rhetoric will never be able to bring concrete representativeness that rises above the level of underrepresentation or empty/symbolic and individualistic representation. Therefore, the objective and concrete social dimension, which is consolidated in the social structure, must take place in a therapeutic-occupational praxis that wants to be social and goes against the movements that try to deny (by force or by consensus) our action committed to anti-oppression and social transformation.

#### Authorship and Indication of Responsibility:

MN Farias and RE Lopes were responsible for the conception, writing, and review of the text and approved its final version.

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