

The mythologies resist / As mitologias resistem¹

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ABSTRACT

Starting from the importance of the book *Mythologies*, by Roland Barthes, for the understanding of the ideological aspects conveyed by the signs raised to a new meaning, and the repercussion that this book had in Brazil, through the work of many readers of Barthes, this article deals with the very concept of myth and issues related to its constitution as the *scam* or the *motivation*, to apply them to the analysis of the Brazilian context, more specifically regarding the statements of the Brazilian ruler on various subjects that, from the point of view of Barthes's work, they strengthen stereotypes that try to make the rhetoric of contemporary capitalism seem natural.

KEYWORDS: Roland Barthes; Mythologies; Myth; Scam.

RESUMO

Partindo da importância que teve o livro *Mitologias*, de Roland Barthes, para a compreensão dos aspectos ideológicos veiculados pelos signos alçados a uma nova significação, bem como da repercussão que teve este livro no Brasil, através do trabalho de muitos leitores de Barthes, este artigo trata do próprio conceito de mito e de questões ligadas a sua constituição como a farsa ou a motivação, para aplicá-los à análise do contexto brasileiro, mais especificamente no que diz respeito às declarações do governante brasileiro sobre assuntos diversos que, segundo o ponto de vista da obra de Barthes, fortalecem estereótipos que tentam fazer parecer natural a retórica do capitalismo contemporâneo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Roland Barthes; Mitologias; Mito; Farsa.

“«Reassemble the time suffered:
elevate your anger up to a thought, your thought
to the height of an expression, your expression
to the height of a glance (...)disassemble your order,
Reassemble its hidden coherence (...)”
G. DIDI-HUBERMAN

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When I read or reread Leda Tenório, Leyla Perrone-Moses, among so many other readers of Roland Barthes in Brazil, I wonder how they would today see what is happening in the culture and politics of our country, when a part of society speaks and screams in the streets: “Myth!”

How do we demystify this discourse, while stuck to the concept that not even Levi-Strauss or Barthes, or any other mythologist or semiologist, could think of the use of the word “myth” in the working class or in the middle class in conversations, manifestations, on social networks, etc.? It is needed to arm the eyes, and not just open them, so it can be seen when the “humiliated looks the humiliated” (DIDI-HUBERMAN, 2018, p. 206)!

How do we read from the use of the word *myth*, the cry of part of a population that has their eyes shut? How do we understand the gestures and thinking of/about power? To open the visible, from Barthesian thought when analysing the images of the world and barbarism. To go back in time, 1960s, 1970s (when we read Barthes) and, at an assembly table, set up images and speeches in newspapers, on *twitter*, on *Instagram*, ..., from *Mythologies*, a work that resists the time.

In a profusion of texts that go down the drain of history, readers are amused by what is said by the “head of the nation” and do not observe or know that the joke seriously talks about forbidden things.

Power calculates everything and does not hide the outgrowth of speech acts. The boss’ *mise-en-scènes*, with his tense humour, are some of the vectors of the political spectacle: jokes - are they jokes?

The boss, the “captain”, is thus a celebrity, much to the taste of the hats and boots of cowboys, western caboclo, countryside singers of the mass culture and “fake blondes”. Everything smells of arrogance. I remember Barthes, who tells us of a kind of arrogance - that of Doxa, of public opinion, the petty bourgeois *consensus* and the violence of prejudice.

And the scam? Barthes also tells us:

Lively impressed, once impressed forever by Marx’s idea that, in history, tragedy sometimes returns, *but returns as scam...* The scam, in turn, returns lower; it is a metaphor that tilts, withers, and falls (what a mess) (BARTHES, 2003, p. 103. Author’s emphasis) ⁱ²

² Vivement frappé, autrefois, frappé à jamais par cette idée de Marx, que, dans l’Histoire, la tragédie parfois revient, *mais comme farce*. [...] La Farce, elle, revient plus bas; c’est une métaphore qui penche, se fane et choit (qui débande) (BARTHES, 1995, p. 85-86. Autor’s emphasis).

But what about the myth? Is myth depoliticised as Barthes states in *Mythologies*? Can myth in this present moment be considered politicised? When they take advantage of the remains of an electoral speech and repeat, as in a script, gestures and lines that they build, in a true mythological hearsay underlined by a kind of angry emotion, the myth, which is being planned and managed by the constituted power.

Out of the shadows of the National Congress, into the lights of the head of state, the owner of the power seems to believe that the political world is a *reality show* when playing with the resources of surprise and emotion. True political *kitsch*, anachronistic discourse benefits from a stream of rehabilitation of the dictatorship's discourse of the 1960s. Barthes himself reminds us of motivation, an element of meaning: it is "not 'natural', it is history that gives form to its analogies". Further on: "The press devotes itself to demonstrating every day that the reserve of mythical signifiers is inexhaustible" (BARTHES, 1987, p. 148. Quotes from the author)³.

"Everything can be a myth," says Barthes (1987, p. 131)⁴, and who produces it? If we think of the signifier of myth, it is inexplicable with respect to the meaning and form. It is an ambiguous significance, as Barthes himself indicates. Reading a myth engendered by the mass culture, via social networks or TV, shows us no example, not even a symbol, but a fetish, as Maria Rita Kehl (2004) tells us in *Videologies, essays on television* (in fact beautiful tribute to R. Barthes).

How do we deconstruct this mythical formation from the discourses produced by the media about it? Consuming the myth, according to its own figure.

When one thinks that "myth is a depoliticised speech", one also thinks about the ideological question that it engenders. What Barthes tells us is that "bourgeois ideology [...] transforms the reality of the world into an image of the world" (BARTHES, 1987, p. 162)⁵. What we have seen and heard from the speeches of power is a constant disconnect between signifier and signified. The senses shift all the time. At a certain moment, it is a sense and, right after, the denial happens.

Everything is fleeting, only it is not. Ideology builds myth and sense effects. The other is "communist", or rather "leftist"! Between the seriousness and the ironic laugh that permeates the photos, everything is being "naturalised". As Barthes himself indicated, mythical speech is built on

³ [...] elle n'est pas "naturelle": c'est l'histoire qui fournit à la forme ses analogies. [...] la presse se charge de démontrer tous les jours que la réserve des signifiants mythiques est inépuisable. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 839-840. Quotes from the autor.)

⁴ Tout peut donc être mythe? (BARTHES, 2002, p. 823)

⁵ [...] l'idéologie bourgeoise [...] transforme la réalité du monde en image du monde. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 853).

theft, the appropriation of language. Stolen from a popular speech, as we recall from the case of “pooping day in, day out” - a suggestion given by the president of the nation, in response to a reporter, as a measure to reduce pollution.

Not knowing what you are saying is also part of the displacement as Barthes referred. Popular expressiveness? or investment in building and self-promoting the image of a ‘person of power, but “simple” like the people’? or worry about the disease itself that often leads to surgery?

Another aspect to note: “the bourgeoisie as an anonymous society”.

Barthes tells us that “history conditions myth on two points: in its form, which is only relatively motivated; and in its concept, which is historical in nature” (BARTHES, 1987, p. 158)⁶. When we think of myth and political order, today we go into our history - full of mythical meanings.

As much as our society is given another name, it bears traces, signs, signifiers of a bourgeois society. “[...] several types of bourgeoisie succeeded each other in power; but the profound statute remains: a defined property regime, a defined order, a defined ideology” (BARTHES, 1987, p. 158)⁷.

Unlike France, in Brazil, parties are bourgeois, even if they do not recognise themselves as such. What is commanding is the game of interests that intensify in plain sight. “[...] the bourgeoisie has erased its name from what is real to its representation, from the economic man to the mental man” (BARTHES, 1987, p. 158)⁸. The mental man to whom Barthes refers to fills his individualism, his denial of others, his ghosts, his fascination with commodities, privileging appearance and humiliating the different.

The words of the “Order” speech are those of financial capitalism in a post-savage phase, where the nation is diluted, raising it in its use. The political vocabulary of the middle class and the elites is tied to an “anonymous” ideology, which is constructed in normalised ways.

But “is myth a depoliticised speech”? It seems contradictory to Barthes’s speech. Let us see, he tells us: “[...] the function of myth is to transform a historical intention into nature, a

⁶ Le mythe se prête à l'histoire en deux points: par sa forme, qui n'est que relativement motivée; par son concept, qui est par nature historique. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 849).

⁷ [...] plusieurs types de bourgeoisie se sont succédé au pouvoir, mais le statut profond demeure, qui est celui d'un certain régime de propriété, d'un certain ordre, d'une certaine idéologie. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 849).

⁸ [...] la bourgeoisie a effacé son nom en passant du réel à sa représentation, de l'homme économique à l'homme mental [...] (BARTHES, 2002, p. 849).

contingency into eternity. Now this process is the very process of bourgeois ideology” (BARTHES, 1987, 162-163)⁹. Then immediately clarifies:

[...] politics in the deep feeling, as a set of human relations in their real, social structure, in their power to construct the world; It is above all necessary to give an active value to the suffix *dis*: it represents here an operative movement, it updates a desertion. (BARTHES, 1987, p. 163)¹⁰.

Defection, that is, voluntary and conscious abandonment of an obligation or commitment towards a person, institution, etc., a desertion, an abandonment of the nation. Further on “Men do not keep the myth of truth, but of use: they depoliticise according to their needs” (BARTHES, 1987, p. 164)¹¹.

The “political insignificance” of the myth is such that it is not consistent, even if the middle class, or rather the bourgeoisie, forges it and builds it tirelessly. “Statistically, the myth is located on the right. Here it is essential: well-fed, sleek, expansive, talkative, and continually invented” (BARTHES, 1987, p. 168-169)¹².

Another aspect of the myth shown by Roland Barthes is that “the collective imagination is immunised through a small inoculation of a recognised evil” (BARTHES, 1987, p. 170)¹³. Now the evil recognised by myth is the “leftist,” as he calls all those who do not think like him.

Such is the “deprivation of history,” this is how it “evaporates.” Social achievements fall apart and authoritarianism sets in. Powerless to imagine and criticise autonomously, the society manipulated by “fake news” - aided by the media, which raises him as “the myth” - becomes blind, ignoring and denying any discourse other than the “Order” it qualified.

These are some aspects indicated by Roland Barthes between 1954 and 1956 in his book *Mythologies* (first published in France in 1957 by the publisher *Les Lettres Nouvelles*) when he analysed French bourgeois culture. It is an ideological critique of the language of mass culture. Barthes’s concern in that decade was with the mystification that transforms political culture into a universal nature. Aspects that I tried here to approach our real, with the changes

⁹ le mythe a pour charge de fonder une intention historique en nature, une contingence en éternité. Or, cette démarche, c’est celle-là même de l’idéologie bourgeoise. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 853).

¹⁰ [...] *politique* au sens profond, comme ensemble des rapports humains dans leur structure réelle, sociale, dans leur pouvoir de fabrication du monde; il faut surtout donner une valeur active au suffixe *dé*: il représente ici un mouvement opératoire, il actualise sans cesse une défection. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 854).

¹¹ Les hommes ne sont pas avec le mythe dans un rapport de vérité, mais d’usage: ils dépolitisent selon leurs besoins [...]. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 855).

¹² Statistiquement, le mythe est à droite. Là il est essentiel: bien nourri, luisant expansif, bavard, il s’invente sans cesse. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 859).

¹³ On immunise l’imaginaire collectif par une petite inoculation de mal reconnu [...]. (BARTHES, 2002, p. 861).

that the Brazilian historical moment allows and the displacement that contemporary capitalism, through its production of images and rhetoric, establishes the political myth.

Whether it is valid or not, I take responsibility from where I write, which is the place of semiology or of semioclasm.

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