

BOOK REVIEW

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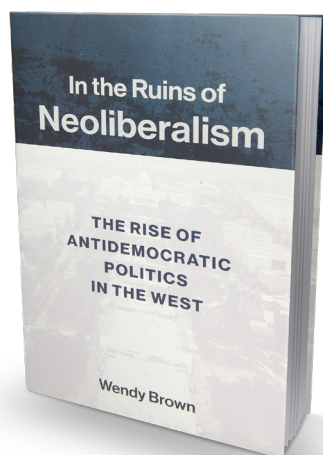
THE GAZE OF RUIN IN THE NEOLIBERAL ERA

IN THE RUINS OF NEOLIBERALISM: THE RISE OF ANTIDEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN THE WEST.

Wendy Brown. Columbia University Press, 2019. 264 p.

*“These stones know you, of the ruins
Wandering soul, you seem doomed
Contemplating your unburied bones.
These trees know you. and myself
I feel I don’t know how vague and numb.*

(Machado de Assis, 1870)



Recently, some authors have reiterated the need to insert Politics into the mainstream of Administration research to reflect on how politics creates and produces ways of managing and organizing (Bispo, 2021; Bresser-Pereira, 2020; Comin, 2015). Some of these studies problematized the deep connections between the nature of liberal and neoliberal theories and managerial practices, illuminating how these processes are intended to reshape subjectivities and social relations along similar lines as those prescribed by management (Hanlon, 2018). Wendy Brown (2019), in her most recent book, published in 2019, “In the ruins of neoliberalism: the rise of antidemocratic politics in the West”, helps us understand these processes by redirecting the gaze from ruin to the following question: after all, how did “neoliberal rationality prepare the field to mobilize and legitimize fiercely anti-democratic forces in the second half of the 21st century”? (Brown, 2019, p. 16).

Wendy Brown (2019) is a Political Science Research Fellow at the University of California, Berkeley. Her aforementioned book was released in Portuguese in the same year, 2019, by Politeia editor and put into perspective the rise of the extreme right in liberal democracies. For the author, neoliberalism produced effects very different from those thought by the Mont Pèlerin Society in 1947, and, even if the catastrophic neoliberal present moves away from this ideal, popular

enthusiasm for autocratic, nationalist, and, in some cases, neofascist regimes, amalgamates in the bases of this current organization that outlines the ruins of neoliberalism (Brown, 2019; 1993).

The book problematizes the neoliberal formulations that certify the extreme right and how it moves a discourse of freedom to justify its often-violent exclusions, which aim to “reassure white, male and Christian hegemony, and not just expand the power of the capital” (Brown, 2019, p. 20). These neoliberal formulations of freedom also emphasize the different nuances of the left as tyrannical, in its positions of social justice, responsible for the loosening of western borders, for rewarding the undeserving and for the fading of the moral fabric (Brown, 2019). To understand the roots and forces that characterize the current ruins of neoliberalism, Brown (2019) takes as a basis the look of the ruin and analyses the neoliberal political culture and subjectivity, and not just the economic conditions and persistent racism that generated it.

The gaze of ruin (Ipiranga, 2020) has always been present in different areas of knowledge, having been discussed by classic and contemporary authors, reflecting, for example, on the fragments of history and the time travelled in Hegel (2001); the great struggle between the will of the spirit and the need of nature in Simmel (1988); about the need to excavate the ruins contained in the unconscious (Freud, 1915). Hell and Schönle (2010), when discussing the “ruins of modernity”, also cited Ratzel (1891), who proposed the concept of “ruins of countries” that cross the planet through violent conflicts; Spengler (2003), who predicted the decline of Western culture, tracing an apocalyptic landscape of decaying global cities; the issues related to the process of ruination as a component of the dialectic through which the modern undermines itself by falling into its self-destruction, discussed by Adorno (1990). The concepts of Benjamin’s philosophy of history are also cited, among them, that of ruin, which problematizes the mistaken idea of categories such as progress and modernity (Benjamin, 2016). Other approaches proposed an extension of the discussion to the anthropological, environmental and management spheres (DeSilvey, 2006; Jay, 2022; Navaro-Yashin, 2009); the ruins of disaster organization and destruction planning (Sebald, 2004); the industrial and aesthetic ruins of transgression (Edensor, 2005); the ruins of persistent racialized imperial formations (Stoler, 2008); and, finally, Dillon (2011), who dealt with the historicization of the concept of ruin, and De Cock and O’Doherty (2016), who suggested different paths through which ruin can come to have meanings for Administration.

To reorient the gaze towards the ruins of neoliberalism, Brown (2019) considers as a premise that capitalism does not follow its own logic but is organized by forms of political rationality. In this sense, the author brings with her both the neo-Marxist approach, which presents neoliberalism as a new chapter of capitalism, and the Foucauldian approach, which discusses how governments, subjects and subjectivities are transformed during the restructuring of liberal reason into neoliberal (Brown, 2015, 2019). In the first chapter, entitled “Society Must Be Dismantled”, Brown (2019) expands on these discussions, analysing the “market-and-morals” neoliberal project of Friedrich Hayek, whose writings terrorized the very Ruins of Neoliberalism. Hayek’s project aimed to govern and discipline individuals, maximizing freedom through the demonization of the social and the democratic version of political life. Brown (2019) analyses movements that challenge current right-wing positions related to the social reproduction of gender, race, and sex hierarchies, and/or issues around class differences that are reflected as an offensive to freedom and morality (Brown,

2019, 2015). In the second chapter, “Politics must be dethroned”, the author discusses hostilities to democracy understood as popular sovereignty and shared political power: “the sharing of power that democracy implies is an exclusively political project that requires cultivation, renewal and institutional support” (Brown, 2019, p. 70). On the other hand, neoliberalism aims to control the “political”, distancing it from its sovereignty, rejecting its democratic forms, influencing neoliberal attacks on political life and the consequent rise of the right that ended up contributing to today’s anti-democratic rebellions. In the third chapter, “The protected personal sphere has to be expanded”, issues related to the expansion of the scope of traditional morality are outlined – “God, family, nation and free enterprise”, beyond the family and private spheres, reaching public and commercial life. In the fourth chapter, “Cakes talk; pregnancy centres pray”, the author analyses two US Supreme Court verdicts. The first related to the victory of the Christian right to the demands of LGBTQIA+ activists in the “Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission”, where the Colorado Civil Rights Commission evaluated the reasons of a bakery owner who refused to make a cake for the celebration of the wedding of a same-sex couple. The results of this action violated the free exercise clause, with the judgment being reversed on June 4, 2018. The second case, “Praying Pregnancy Centres” (National Institute of Family and Life Advocates, DBA, v. NIFLA et al. - Becerra, Attorney General of California), also decided by the Supreme Court in 2018, put to the test the constitutionality of the state law enacted in California in 2015 that establishes the right to privacy in relation to reproductive issues. Both verdicts expanded the implantation of a Christian morality in the social sphere, weakening the justice ensured by the State. The fifth chapter, “No future for white men: nihilism, fatalism and resentment”, is developed based on two concepts of F. Nietzsche, such as “nihilism”, which emphasizes the ruin of the main values when they are isolated from their foundations, and the concept of “resentment” formulated by “wrong victimization” with moral systems originating from “suffering”, “anger” and “grudge”, incapable of becoming creative (Brown, 2019). A final concept articulated by the author is H. Marcuse’s “repressive desublimation”, which occurs in a context of capitalist exploitation and “false needs”, causing an abundance of pleasure, but without emancipation. These concepts were the basis for a discussion about the ruins left by monetization and financialization by subjecting human existence to future investment calculations, such as entrepreneurship; and about the wounds of a white, dethroned, and angry masculinity, generating a freedom devoid of ethics (Brown, 2019, Kimmel, 2013).

Brown (2019) ends the book by describing the neoliberal ruins that organize different spatial displacements, as well as the theatre in which these actions take place. And we end by asking the question: how did these displacements reach the spaces and the theatre of actions in Brazil? Bispo (2021), considering that neoliberal rationality guides a good percentage of scientific production in Administration in Brazil, problematizes these issues. The author proposes to denaturalize the canons of the area, emphasizing that: “neoliberal rationality is incompatible with questions of ethics in business, sustainability, corporate social responsibility and that it is necessary to think of Administration under other paradigms oriented to the common good” (Bispo, 2021, p. 1).

Good reading!

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AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Ana Sílvia Rocha Ipiranga: Conceptualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing; Investigation.