NORMATIVE PERFORMATIVITY AND PRODUCTION OF INTELLIGIBILITIES: AN ANALYSIS OF THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND CLASS IN THE WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS ‘O BRADO’ AND ‘O ILHAVENSE’

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ABSTRACT
This paper presents partial results of an ongoing investigation on the discourse about intimate and private subjects in two regional weekly newspapers published during the twentieth century in the city of Ílhavo, Portugal. The research points to a deep gender normativity alongside a strong social cleavage. Therefore, in this work we present a reading of the intersections between class and gender normativity as they are set out in the two analyzed weekly newspapers.

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Gender; performativity; technologies of the body; local press; Estado Novo

Introduction
This paper presents partial results of an ongoing investigation on the discourse about intimate and private subjects in two regional weekly newspapers published during the twentieth century in the city of Ílhavo, Portugal. The noticeable presence of subjects from the private sphere in the pages of these newspapers indicates that they act as organs of normative power, not only watching behaviors but performatively enunciating acceptable intelligibilities within a given regime of truth. The research findings point to a deep gender normativity alongside a strong social cleavage. Therefore, in this work we present a reading of the intersections between class and gender normativities as they are set out in the two analyzed weekly newspapers.

In Ílhavo’s community the identity process is strongly anchored in a symbolic dimension which foundations are the sense of belonging to a territory, the belief in a mythical origin of that population and the sense of continuity of the social world (Baptista, et al., 2014). Furthermore, the city presents a very strong social cleavage built around the historical presence of an elite linked to the ceramic industry or fishing (with a progressive decay of the first, and a remarkable increasing of the latter, especially for the sectors related to cod fishing during the dictatorship regime of Estado Novo and, finally, the waning of both after the Revolução dos Cravos, in 1974) (Baptista, et al., 2014).

The primacy of the symbolic in the dimension of the past that is expressed in current discourses of the people of Ílhavo led us to query what normative - and eventually non-normative - performativities could have been reenacted throughout the twentieth century - in

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which the urban bourgeoisie of the captains of the cod fishing industry flourishes to its heyday and finds its subsequent decline – recreating in the social imaginary these identities so strongly anchored in the mythical past.

In order to answer these questions we proceed with a content analysis (Bardin, 2009) of the collections of the weekly newspapers ‘O Brado’ and ‘O Ilhavense’ which were chosen because of their continuity throughout the twentieth century, seeking to find the regulatory regimes and the categories of intelligibility which operate in the cultural process of Ílhavo.

The poststructuralist critique of the imaginary that demonstrates how they are performatively produced and therefore can be actively transformed (as precarious and unintelligible subjects may be transformed, due to their precarious nature) and from there, the rules are reversed and performativities of resistance and transformation are created. Thus, underlying this work are Judith Butler’s theories of performativity and normativity (2006 [1990]) (2004) (1997) (2009) and Foucault’s thinking on regimes of truth and on the production of intelligibilities by body technologies. (Foucault, 1996), (Foucault, 1996a), (Foucault, 1999 [1975]). The notion of performativity (Butler, 2011 [1993]), (Butler, 1997), (Butler, 2006 [1990]) is articulated with precariousness (Butler & Spivak, 2007), (Butler, 2009) since if the performative rules produce and reproduce the normal and therefore intelligible, at the same time they also produce and reproduce precarious or unintelligible people who are beyond the limits of norm.

For a historical background of the dictatorial regime of Estado Novo which coincides with almost the entire period analyzed here (excepting the first decades of the twentieth century) and for a better understanding of the Portuguese imaginary, we turn to authors such as Lourenço (2000), (Rosas, 2001) and Martins (1986); (1990); (2011). Some works on history of the Portuguese press have also been useful, such as the studies of Sousa (2008), Ferin (2004) e Barros (2005).

1. From the concept of public sphere to the normative performativity

Hannah Arendt (2012), and later Jurgen Habermas (1993) consider that in modern societies the clear distinction private and public collapses in the social sphere, characterized by a hybridism in which the National State shall legislate on the world of work and technological reproduction, previously subject only to the will of the lord and confined to the domestic sphere. With this border dilution, the power relations within the family become regulated by state law. On the other hand, when private interests begin to be discussed in the public sphere they begin also to interfere in it.

The social sphere is not public nor private, but politically conforms to a national state form of government that not only ensures public order, but also regulates the power relations in the domestic world. The guarantee of public order is in exchange for the establishment of rules and norms that not only must be followed by the subjects, but much more than that, these regulations establish who will and who will not be subjects and hence at the same time creates subjects and precarious people, those who will never be recognized by the nation state as subjects, in other words, those whose rights are not protected nor guaranteed by it.
Both Arendt (2012) and Habermas (2007) underscore the bureaucratization of the state and the replacement of the freeman’s political action in the polis by a technocratic rationality. Science and technology (Habermas, 2007) produce the justifications to legitimize state actions in the social sphere. So they become ideology or technocratic reason, deforming communication in the world of life and weakening free debate.

In nation states with totalitarian tendencies, such as Portuguese Estado Novo, technocratic reason is often associated with a mythical idea of nation and homeland, build around the idea of a deeply creased identity unit as opposed to an other who is not only strange but is symbolically produced as an antagonist or enemy of national reason.

At the same time, national reasons become sacred reasons and the bureaucratic apparatus of the technocratic system joins an ideological apparatus, which would include institutional arrangements such as schools but also non-state bodies such as social clubs and other associations, press and other media. In the Portuguese case, the ideology advertising apparatus was composed by state agencies created specifically for this purpose, as pointed out by Fernando Rosas (2001). On the other hand, the ubiquity of power noted by Martins (Martins, 1986) reveals that the mechanisms of ideological indoctrination and of reality building spreads up throughout all the social tissue sociality by means of a technology of obedience perceived as a system of rules capable of ensuring the common good.

In reflecting on the forms of power in modern societies, Michel Foucault places between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the establishment of an economy of the body operating according to a set of disciplines (1998 [1979]) in the context of a disciplinary society in which control is no longer exercised over meaning or language, but over the body itself. These disciplines carefully limit the activities of the body, rule the uses of time and space according to classes, and submit work to rational rules. In the eighteenth century the army, the school, the prison, the hospital and the factory became the main institutions for the exercise of this mechanics of power which seeks to make bodies docile and useful (1998 [1979]) (1999 [1975]), (2001)

To this first seizure of power over the body in the field of individualization a second would follow in the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century which Foucault called biopolitics (Foucault, 1999 [1975]) (Foucault, 2001) (Foucault, 2005). This time the technologies of the body are no longer addressed to the human individual but to the human species, to the population. Sciences are their strong allies providing the basis for the control of bodies through health, safety and birth control policies. The notion of population emerges at this moment as a problem at the same time both scientific and political, a problem of biology, but also a problem of power (Foucault, 2005).

Since biopolitics deals with collective and random phenomena, it endeavors to control this randomness, find social balance, establish standard from average. No more directed towards disciplining the individual body, but rather to regulate biological processes, the mechanisms of biopolitics bring the inversion of the old principle of sovereignty, the power to make die or let live. The power of regulation does not care about death, but rather life. Therefore its attribute is to make live or let die (Foucault, 2005).

The philosopher Judith Butler retrieves and develops this idea in her reflection on precarious subjects, the dispossessed and stateless, a recurring issue in her work. In a book written in partnership with Gayatri Spivak (Spivak & Butler, 2007), these authors critically discuss

According to Arendt, when the national states regulate citizenship by the law it produces the corollary phenomenon of precariousness or statelessness, for in creating the laws that determine who is in compliance with it, it creates consequently the outlaw, or, more than that, those who are not recognized as subjects by the state. In this sense, we can consider that the national state is based on a policy of production of intelligibilities and unintelligibilities, in other words, a policy of recognition and non-recognition.

Gayatri Spivak (Spivak, 2010), (Butler & Spivak, 2007), argues that national states produce unrecognizable or precarious subjects not as a corollary phenomenon to the production of recognizable subject, but as a necessary condition of its existence, as for every system recognition is based on the exclusion of what is not recognizable.

Still developing from Arendt’s thoughts, a reflection on possible forms of unsubordinated belonging or forms of belonging not directly conforming to the nationalist state, Butler highlights in Arendt’s theory an idea of collective agency, an action that can only be effective collectively and in conditions of equality (Butler & Spivak, 2007, pp. 56-57). Butler finds there an ontological claim and a political aspiration. At this point, it becomes possible to link the concepts of precariousness and performativity, which is at the same time what ensures the illusion of naturalness of the norm by means of repetition, and the possibility of resistance and subversion of the norm, for the repetition may fail and produce new, unexpected, deviant performances and, thus, change the framework of intelligibilities, forcing the recognition of non-normative subjects.

2. Regulatory Regimes and production of intelligibilities in the weekly newspapers ‘O Brado’ e ‘O Ilhavense’

2.1. Social and historical context, definition of the corpus and operational domains of analysis

Despite global tendencies of massification and industrialization that characterized the twentieth century, and although slowly, eventually reached the Portuguese press (let us not forget that in the years of Estado Novo, Portugal remained closed to modernization and industrialization) (Sousa J. P., 2008) (Sousa J. P., 2010), we can describe the journalism practiced by the two weekly newspapers analyzed in this study as a mixture of news, literature and opinion texts that doesn’t follows the tendency of national press of the twentieth century, being to a certain extent not so far from nineteenth century and even eighteenth century models of journalism.

We have analyzed a decade of ‘O Brado’, from 1910, and five decades of ‘O Ilhavense’, which replaced it in the 1920s, while maintaining the same editorial line as well as the editorial board and journalists. For sample selection, we applied the technique of constructed week (Riffe, Aust, & Lacy, 1993), (Hester, 2007).

Despite taking into account the dilution of the public and private theorized by Arendt and Habermas, we kept for - methodological and practical reasons - a division of the texts analyzed in two operational fields: the public and private. We believe this procedure will help us to understand the ways in which private matters are regulated by performative rules.
through which power is exercised introducing regulatory and precarious subjects. We know from Habermas that when the public and the private are diluted the power over the bodies is transferred from the domestic sphere to the sphere of society and that this acts normatively for the production and reproduction of the technocracy of the national states.

Thus, we grouped in the public operational field the texts dealing with internal or foreign policy issues and in the private operational field the texts dealing with issues related to business, social column topics such as weddings, deaths, baptisms, travels, leisure, festivals and religious celebrations. We verified that the private operational field is remarkable in our corpus, covering about 30% of the sample analyzed. The remaining 70% is occupied by the contents of the public operational field. This quantification excludes advertising content, which occupies as a rule the last page of the tabloids.

2.2 The performative dimensions of the private and the intelligible subjects

This study focuses on the analysis of the texts referring to the operational field of the private, and more specifically to journalistic texts, excluding the literary texts, which are the subject of a separate study. Nevertheless, is worth to note that a preliminary analysis of the operational field of the public reveals that references to women are numerically irrelevant, being restricted to the operational field of the private in which they appears less than men.

In the analysis of the operational field of the private, four major performative dimensions merged, which are based primarily on the intersection between gender normativity and class normativity: the world of work; the family world; the world of the street and the world of religion. Deepening the analysis of these dimensions reached a set of intelligible subjects distributed by them. These intelligible subjects are produced according to gender and class normativity and class and have been grouped according to the performative dimensions in which they appear.

2.2.1 The performative dimension of the world of work

In this dimension men prevail and between them the Men of the Sea (captains and sailors), followed by the Lords of Commerce, the Industry Lords, the Public Workers and the Professors, the latter are referred mainly in announces of job appointments or transfers. Work people without qualification, as small employees, workers or unemployed do not have a significant presence in this dimension. The few times in that they are referred they are not the subjects of any action, their names or addresses are not mentioned as it is the case of the lords of the upper classes.

The presence of women in this performative dimension is weak and in most cases they are related to commerce activities and public education, so we can find the rare Trader Ladies which as a rule are widows who took over the stores of their dead husbands and the Teachers, which are solely cited in the context of their job appointments or transfers from one school to another. Unlike Trader Ladies, Teachers appear unrelated to any male or female subject, or are not described within the family structure, which therefore excludes they from the performative dimension of the family world, but at the same time gives them an autonomous existence in the world of work.
The Impoverished Women are washerwomen, fishmongers or maids. Although they are described by their occupation, they appear less in the dimension of the world of work than in the family world or the world of the street, for the stories about them do not address their work activities, but their diseases, accidents or extreme poverty. They are never protagonists of this stories, rather they deserve pity or blame from wealthy classes. Also they mostly appear unrelated to a family environment. In one of the rare cases where these women appear, the article condemns the “noisy” conduct of washerwomen in public laundry tubs, treating them collectively, nameless, faceless, with no individual traits, reducing their identities to their labor activity.

Ao longo de todo o período estudado, esta dimensão pode ser caracterizada como predominantemente masculina e vinculada a uma divisão social do trabalho na qual os capitães e marinheiros da pesca do bacalhau detêm a centralidade simbólica, seguidos de longe pelos industriais da Vista Alegre.

Throughout the studied period, this dimension can be characterized as predominantly masculine and tied to class differences based on the social division of labor. The captains and cod fishing sailors hold the symbolic centrality, followed by far by the industrialists of ceramics of Vista Alegre.

2.2.2. The performative dimension of the family world

In this dimension the stories are about the stages of family life with marriages, births, baptisms, birthdays and deaths. The narrative is organized around the couple and their offspring. We can see a parade of lavishly reported events in brief notes of three lines, a kind of me carousel where at every turn passengers are at different stages of their lives all guided by the same goals, all recognized and valued by the same things.

In these carousel turns we see the Ladies and the Daughters of the Captains and, more rarely, the Ladies and Daughters of Vista Alegre. They are always accompanied by their parents, their husbands, their children, while boys and gentlemen, although they appear to accompany them, are designated not only for the place in the family hierarchy, but also for their profession or for the bonds of friendship and camaraderie that unite them to the editors of the newspapers. So if women are always daughters, wives, mothers or someone’s grandparents, men are the “dear friend of the editor”, “our much admired Dr., or “ the captain of the vessel X “.

2.2.3. The performative dimension of the world of the street

This dimension brings together the stories about arts and shows, leisure and entertainment, tourism, non-religious parties, sports, civic or charitable societies, urban violence (fights, murders, traffic accidents). The issues are recurrent and can be grouped into a few subjects: local and national theater production, books and newspapers, local and national sport (basketball, football, athletics), Carnival, with the balls in the halls and the gradual decline of the street carnival. In the first decades there are invitations and comments about youth groups’ walks that became rare from 1950s.
It is also in this dimension that technological changes in everyday life can be perceived although they are not reported prominently. We can keep track of automobile uses and accidents in the first decades by speeding on roads which were still narrow and poorly marked, as well as the inauguration of cinematography in the 1930s.

This dimension is dominated by young men, the Graduate Students and the Young Poets, although young women, Daughters of the Captains also appear. The latter are explicitly referred to in stories about sport, such as athletes, but implicitly in regard to parties and balls where their presence is only presumed. An analysis of texts reveals a moralizing content of speech that deals with youth behavior that focuses more often on women throughout the studied period but increasing in the 1940s.

In this dimension we can perceive the changes in behavior and customs, although often we have to unveil them from moralizing texts that speak normatively about undesirable behaviors and no recommended places, especially with regard to young ladies. This may mean that it is the younger generation that is more willing to break the rules and therefore brings a greater risk to the performative normativity and that concerns mainly focuses on single women.

2.2.4 The performative dimension of the world of religion

This dimension features the texts that deal with religious festivals and personal devotions that are expressed in the newspapers by the printing of prayers and gratefulness notices for a grace or a miracle. The Captains may appear but the dimension is largely dominated by the Pious Ladies, a category of intelligibility which includes the Ladies and Daughters of the Captains, the Ladies and Daughters of Vista Alegre and Trade Ladies.

The dimension of the world of religion plays an intermediary role between the family’s world and the world of the street, both associated with parties that take place in outer spaces and with personal devotions. The advertisement of the devotion to the saints in the newspaper reveals a need for social recognition of the faith of particular individuals, most often women from privileged classes.

3. Final Considerations

The analysis of these three performative dimensions reveals a set of categories which we call intelligible subjects, defined according to the expected performativity for each group. The gender normativity appears as fundamental, determining who may exercise what function in the social division of labor and what behaviors are acceptable thenceforth. The class normativity also features a lot of density, and its intersection with gender normativity is the key to understanding the regime of intelligibilities produced and reproduced in the pages of the studied newspapers.

The research findings point to a strong tendency to control the behavior of each segment, articulating the family as the basis of social cohesion, which is expressed in the endless repetition of the rites that make the intersection between the family world with the world of the street under the world of religion, such as baptisms, weddings, funerals. The upper classes are always described within a familiar framework, in which men stand out, for whom
a life beyond the family but not without the family is allowed, for one is expected to maintain
the sense of family belonging across generations.

Regarding women, the higher the social status, less space outside the family sphere is
assigned to them. Rare Trader Ladies are an exception forced by widowhood. In any case,
the possibility of including these women in the labor market indicates a relative openness in
the family hierarchy, when compared to the case of the Ladies of the Captains and of Industrials,
which never appear in the working world.

In contrast, working women, as well as the Teachers, are not mentioned within a family
framework. However, the former are more often collectively treated or described by their
profession and not by name, which brings them into closer proximity with the uneducated
male workers but distinguishes them from the Female Teachers, who are called by their
names. Nevertheless, although the individuality of Female Teachers is guaranteed by the use
of their full names, they no longer have any predicate. They are reduced to their labor activity,
as are the valets and maids. Their absence in any other dimension erases their individuality
as much as the absence of names of domestic employees.

But also the identities of the Ladies of the Captains and their daughters, as well as the
Ladies and Daughters of Vista Alegre and even the Traders Ladies are erased. The latter only
having a place in the working world due to widowhood, the need to occupy a normatively
masculine place. All these women occupy subordinated places in the family hierarchy in which
the men are central. What they can do, what is expected from them to do is no more than ac-
complish the rites of the familiar world, passing from their original family into their husband’s
family with the resulting maternity duties, all this completed with religious devotion.

For boys, youth can be a time of relative indolence and freedom, poetic impulses and
leisure travels, whereas the girls are closely monitored and, if it is expected of them to be
the objects of male desire, they are not allowed to perform their own desire. Thus, they must
be attractive to wooers, but nothing more. Once married, their fates will be led by men, they
will be wives and mothers, as their mothers have been. This is their horizon of intelligibility,
their possibility of recognition as subjects. However, one can hardly call subjects those who
have no voice, no choices, and no autonomy.

This study demonstrates that the intelligibility regime performatively produced and re-
produced in Ílhavo during the analyzed period and according to the analyzed corpus pro-
duces, on the one hand, men as subjects and women as their others, and, on the other hand,
produces the captains and sailors as central subjects and other male workers as peripheral
subjects and between them, the uneducated workers as the most peripheral.

Thus, this system can be understood as producer of men as central and wealthy subjects
at the expense of peripheral female subjects in all classes and peripheral male subjects in the
working classes. The intersection of gender and class finds the uneducated female workers as
the most vulnerable subjects, living in extreme poverty, followed by male uneducated workers.

Some possibilities of resistance and changing the category of Traders Ladies for the fam-
ily hierarchy in these cases seems to be forced to yield to the need to keep the business ac-
tivity in family and moving. The independent labor and relatively well paid activity is therefore
a possible way, though slow, for women’s emancipation in that society. Also the young seem
to bring some potential to break, if we understand the excessive regulation of their behavior
in the newspapers speech as a measure to prevent possible non-normative performativities.
Thus, we can conclude that by taking the private affairs to the public sphere, the analysis of newspapers contributes to the production and reproduction of a normativity and a system of exclusive intelligibilities based on gender normativity firstly and secondly on class normativity in which the intersections between gender and class highlights the process of production of intelligibility and unintelligibility.

References

