

The Redpill Movement in Brazil: Straining a Re-Thinking of Identity Politics under Neoliberalism

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Abstract

This paper examines the Redpill movement in Brazil within the broader framework of identity politics, colonial legacies, and neoliberal governance. This movement, composed primarily of cisgender men, challenges feminist ideals and promotes rigid gender hierarchies through online platforms, forums, and private groups. By applying concepts from decolonial studies, symbolic violence, and neoliberalism, the paper explores how the movement enforces traditional norms and perpetuates misogyny. The analysis highlights the ways in which colonial and patriarchal legacies can be intertwined with contemporary digital cultures, which shapes power relations and restricts the agency of both women and non-conforming men. Drawing on decolonial and critical feminist perspectives, the essay emphasizes the need to rethink identity politics address the structural and symbolic forces that reproduce gender inequality. Ultimately, it argues for cultivating inclusive and equitable understandings of gender and sexuality that resist oppression and promote social justice.

Keywords: Redpill movement, online misogyny, identity politics, neoliberalism

Introduction

Identity politics has played a significant role in shaping discussions around social justice and human rights, allowing historically marginalized issues to come to the forefront. However, it is essential to critically examine the complexities and implications of identity politics, particularly in the context of gender and sexuality. This essay explores the relationship between the Redpill movement and identity politics in Brazil. It contextualizes the Redpill movement within identity politics, contributing to the broader discussion on identity politics, colonialism, and gender inequality and highlighting the pressing need to reconsider our understanding of gender and sexuality.

The Redpill movement, rooted in misogyny, has gained prominence globally, including in Brazil, through its online presence and influence on social media platforms and podcasts. This movement, composed primarily of cisgender men, challenges established identity

structures and aims to liberate individuals from the constraints of the modern state. By examining the relationship between the Redpill movement and gender identity, this paper explores how the movement perceives traditional notions of heterosexuality.

In order to examine The Redpill movement's emergence in Brazil, it is crucial to situate it within the overall political context of the country. The emergence of the movement was marked by rising conservatism and a backlash against feminist ideals. By delving into the complexities of the Redpill movement and its implications for identity politics, this article seeks to shed light on the ways in which gender inequalities are perpetuated. It calls for a rethinking of identity politics, emphasizing the importance of cultivating a deeper understanding of gender and sexuality. Ultimately, this exploration aims to contribute to a more just and equitable society, where diverse gender identities and experiences are recognized and valued.

Identity Politics: Do the Boxes Free or Control?

When considering political identities, I enjoy engaging in a creative and abstract exercise of imagination. I close my eyes, envision the world map, and draw a red line to divide the global north and south. Along this line, I imagine red pins labeled with categories such as beautiful, civilized, cultured, white, black, and rich or poor. I contemplate where the majority would place these pins to represent different identities. This exercise prompts reflections that I will explore in this text. One of the initial reflections is that the location of these identities varies depending on the cultural, social, and economic context. Another reflection is that, despite the different locations, the majority tend to place their positive pins in the global north. While bodily, economic, social, and legal identifications are diverse, the exercise of drawing this line reveals a clear pattern. At the end of the exercise, I always make it clear that these lines are called "Abyssal Lines" (Santos, 2014), as used in decolonial studies. Santos (2014) uses the concept "Abyssal Lines" to describe the figurative lines, produced by the imperial project, that divide the world's population between humans, not-fully-humans, and non-humans. These lines also serve as our first reference to identity politics. Understanding that this line was drawn a long time ago and stems from a violent and colonial past is crucial for comprehending the current crisis of identities and the complexities of many social movements. Despite the violence inherent in this process of identity formation, we persist in perpetuating them, remaining completely unable to break free from the need for social categorization.

There are numerous examples that highlight aspects of social issues. These include the racial struggle in the United States, the complexities of racial mixing in Latin America, racialized nationalism processes, and the socio-economic concepts that perpetuate a colonial perspective of "first world" and "third world" countries. Recognizing that categories or identity policies have their colonial legacy becomes essential when we talk about gender. The legacy of colonialism can still be seen in the ways in which gender is constructed and enforced in many societies today. Colonialism has profoundly impacted the ways gender is understood and practiced. The systems of power under colonialism were used to impose Western norms and values on colonized societies, including ideas about gender and sexuality. The imposition of these norms often resulted in the erasure or marginalization of non-Western gender identities and practices (hooks, 1984; hooks, 2015).

To think critically about gender, it is necessary to recognize the ways in which power operates in society. This means acknowledging the ways in which colonialism and imperialism have shaped the way we understand gender and sexuality and recognizing the diversity of gender identities and practices that exist outside of Western norms (Spivak, 1988). Hence, contextualizing identity policies with their roots in the colonial period is not just

about highlighting a historical moment when social denominations were used to justify oppressions. It is also about recognizing the effects on identity.

Philosophy and Identity

The formulation of thought, philosophy, and modern science can be traced back to the famous phrase by philosopher Descartes (2004), “I think, therefore I am.” However, author Goethe (1862) directly opposed the wave of rationalism that accompanied the Enlightenment period. In his renowned work, *Faust*, Goethe draws a comparison between the character “Evil Genius” and “Flesh-and-blood Man,” with Descartes representing the “Evil Genius” limited by methodical reason, while “Flesh-and-blood Men” are those guided by their emotions. For Goethe, reason can only grasp what is logical and can be proven. The process of emotional suppression that occurred during the Enlightenment period in Europe can be traced back to years of oppression and emotional suppression in the early colonial period in the global South. Goethe’s critique of Cartesian thinking, which is a mode of thinking derived from the writings of René Descartes, sheds light on other forms of knowledge, such as popular, indigenous, and native wisdom. These forms of knowledge are not solely based on pure rationality found in books, but rather on an emotional, oral, ancestral, and collective process.

When referring to a decision made regarding identities during the colonial period, I am referring to the various identities that were created and imposed. The first identity decision took place during a public debate in what is now known as Spain. The debate aimed to determine whether the “bodies” found in the Americas were human or non-human. This event is known as the Valladolid debate, which occurred from 1550-1551. Two prominent philosophers, Bartolomé Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, were summoned for this debate. Many consider this debate as part of an identity process that justified the annihilation, subjugation, and enslavement of the native peoples of the American continent (Santana, 2019). The debate consisted of two perspectives: de las Casas defended the position that indigenous peoples were human beings with rights and dignity. He argued against their enslavement or exploitation by Spanish colonizers, advocating for their evangelization and respectful treatment. He believed that violence and oppression towards indigenous peoples were unjust.

In contrast, Sepúlveda argued that indigenous peoples were “savages” and inferior to Europeans, thus justifying their subjugation and exploitation. In the Valladolid Debate, Sepúlveda justified colonization and conquest as a means to bring civilization and the Christian religion to indigenous peoples. However, Las Casas refuted these arguments, defending the humanity and equality of indigenous peoples (Andújar, 1997; Bell, 1925). Regardless of whether they were human or not, the process of evangelization was the common point of both philosophers. In other words, whether human or non-human, conversion to Christianity was mandatory, and with it, all internal processes such as belief, moral and social values, and ancestral knowledge had to be annihilated. I will refer to this identity process as “dehumanization identity,” meaning that in order to identify, it is necessary to dehumanize, and annihilate any emotions and desires related to the individual.

Goethe, defending emotions as an essential element of the rational process, highlights alternative forms of knowledge that stem from feelings. The debate with Descartes becomes central to comprehending colonial and decolonial epistemologies, as well as how the foundations of identity politics emerge from the dynamics of power and domination rather than liberation. Consequently, we must ask: What role does emotion play in discussions surrounding gender and sexuality identities? Are we genuinely deconstructing

hegemonic thought, or are we merely perpetuating colonial identity politics? Despite the colonial past, identity politics has taken on a leading role in the defense of human rights and has allowed historically marginalized issues to become visible. In this way, it is possible to affirm that identity politics has been a significant concept in discussions about human rights for several decades. It refers to the ways in which people's social and political identities intersect with their experiences of oppression and privilege. The concept is central to understanding how different groups may experience discrimination in unique ways. The development of identity politics has been influenced by several authors (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Young, 1990). Despite adhering to different definitions with similar paths, Crenshaw, Young, and Butler have definitions marked by polarization, oppressor vs. oppressed, and equality vs. inequality. According to Crenshaw (1989), "Identity politics refers to the ways in which people's social and political identities intersect with their experiences of oppression and privilege" (p. 139). For Young (1990), "Identity politics is a concept that recognizes the ways in which different forms of oppression can be compounded and highlights the interconnectedness of different social identities" (p. 102). For Butler (1990), "Identity politics involves acknowledging social differences and working towards creating a more just and equitable society that recognizes and values these differences" (p. 25).

The Redpill Movement in Brazil: Misogyny and Identity

Online misogyny is a significant aspect of the Redpill movement, as it fosters a culture of hate and harassment towards women. Online misogyny is a growing concern in contemporary society, with serious consequences for the management of a democratic society (Lima-Santos & Santos, 2022). Misogyny, hatred, and systematic discrimination against women persist both online and offline (Ging, 2019). The internet, with its broad reach and decentralized nature, provides a platform for the dissemination of misogynistic discourses and practices that can have lasting effects (Vickery, 2018). The internet's ease of information dissemination and anonymity amplifies online misogyny, posing a significant challenge to gender debates.

One prominent aspect of online misogyny is the development of a culture of hate in forums and virtual communities. "Incels" (involuntary celibates) exemplify this phenomenon. They express deep hatred and resentment towards women, justifying their hostility based on an alleged symbolic debt women owe to others (Witt, 2020). These individuals believe that women have "too many rights" and use their freedom to enslave and constantly humiliate them (Witt, 2020). This distorted view perpetuates gender inequality and violence against women. These attacks occur on various platforms, including social media, discussion forums, and private messages. The anonymity provided by the internet often emboldens individuals to spread hate speech without fear of consequences (Lawson, 2018). Unfortunately, women are frequently targets of these attacks simply for expressing their opinions or existing online (Medrado & Lyra, 2008). This form of online misogyny significantly impacts women's mental and emotional health, creating a hostile and unsafe environment for them. It is important to note that online misogyny is not a "traditional" form of misogyny. As highlighted by Lima-Santos and Santos (2022), it is a contemporary practice that adapts to new technologies and social contexts and where anonymity not only contributes to the level of psychological violence but also contributes to impunity. The dissemination of misogynistic discourses and online violence has tangible effects on women's lives, affecting their self-esteem, security, and overall well-being.

The political context in Brazil is crucial for understanding the emergence of the "masculinist" movement. The political disputes in Brazil in 2016 played a significant role in triggering these movements. Following the impeachment of the first female president, Dilma Rousseff,

in 2016, online spaces became flooded with hate speech and misogyny directed toward her (Marques, 2023; Silva, 2023). This backlash coincided with Jair Bolsonaro's campaign during the government transition years (2016–2018), and he would later be elected as the president of Brazil in 2019. The Redpill movement emerged in Brazil in this context.

The Redpill movement is an online community that originated from forums such as Reddit. It is primarily composed of cisgender men who espouse misogynistic ideologies and reject feminist ideals. The term “Redpill” is derived from the movie “The Matrix,” in which the main character is offered a choice between a red pill and a blue pill, symbolizing the choice between accepting the truth (red pill) or remaining ignorant (blue pill). The movement gained popularity in the early 2000s and has since spread to various online platforms, including social media and websites. It covers a range of beliefs and topics, including but not limited to dating, relationships, masculinity, and gender roles. The audience of the Redpill movement primarily consists of young, radical, heterosexual men who express frustration with new feminist ideals that emerged within some feminist circles. They often seek guidance and support from like-minded individuals within the movement. It is important to note that not all participants in the Redpill movement hold extreme or misogynistic views. Some individuals may join the movement out of curiosity or to explore alternative perspectives on relationships and gender dynamics. However, the movement has been criticized for providing a platform for the spread of harmful ideologies and reinforcing gender inequalities.

In the past six years, Brazil has experienced a rise in conservatism in politics. Controversial phrases such as “I will not rape you because you are too ugly” have gained popularity, particularly since the ex-president, Bolsonaro, became popular on TV. Similar ideas are also prevalent in the Redpill movement. Online posts often contain quotes such as “I will teach you how to beat your wife in a way that she will not be able to ask for help”; “Do you want to be a woman with value? Ask yourself how to please your man”; “Empowered women are the worst; they drink alcohol, are promiscuous, and forget about the family”; or “You will stop complaining about me. If you don't, I will sue you or shoot you in the face.” Due to the decentralized nature of the Redpill movement, it is challenging to gather accurate data on its exact size and reach. The movement has a significant online presence, with numerous websites, forums, and social media groups dedicated to its ideologies. However, the number of active participants or followers is difficult to determine.

At the Brazilian level, the numbers of interactions increase when searching for Masculinity Coaching, which refers to men helping other men develop their masculinity. One of the most famous coaching services in Brazil has become known for its misogynistic speeches, which are accompanied by tips on how to be a “masculine” man. The blogger's discourse follows the pattern of most other coaching services, warning men not to hire women or have friendships with them, emphasizing that their relationships should be strictly physical and sexual. Threats of death or physical violence are also common (Correa, 2023). These coaching programs and channels are distributed across various chat platforms such as WhatsApp, Telegram, or Discord. It is important to note that these groups are private, and entry is typically limited to those who already know someone within the group. Based on this data, several important observations can be made about the movement. Firstly, despite having a public presence on online platforms, the primary communication and interaction among members occur in private groups. Secondly, when using the search algorithm, members, content producers, or those interested in the topic tend to seek information through the produced content rather than referring to the movement by its name, classifying it as political information.

Outside of Brazil, the main form of communication among these groups is through Reddit. According to Van Valkenburgh (2021), the platform serves as a repository for the community's core philosophical beliefs and concepts. The sidebar prominently features economic discourses that seamlessly intertwine with the seduction ideology of The Redpill movement, including notions of meritocracy, rationalization, quantification, and market-based exchange. Through a meticulous and critical examination of the sidebar, the author argues that these components effectively commodify women, reduce sexual relationships to mere market transactions, and erode the essence of intimacy in human connections. Also, the neoliberal logic is applied to the movement. The Redpill movement applies economic principles to the realm of sexual relationships, presenting women as "sellers" and men as "buyers of sex." This perspective introduces the concept of the "sexual marketplace," wherein men seek to acquire sex from women by offering various resources in exchange.

The market-based approach to sexual relationships propagated by The Redpill movement draws significant inspiration from neoclassical economics and rational actor theory. It builds on sex economics, which is the economic value of attractiveness and social skills in sexual relationships (Hakim, 2011). For instance, the sidebar introduces the concept of Sexual Market Value (SMV), which quantifies individuals' worth in the sexual marketplace based on their perceived attractiveness. Consequently, women are portrayed as actively enhancing their SMV through means such as physical appearance enhancements and conforming to societal expectations of purity. The economic dynamics that emerge within the discourse of sex commodification and among these hegemonic radical groups continue to adhere to the same logic as the colonial movement and the epistemological debate I alluded to earlier in this text. By reducing bodies to mere economic value, we also engage in the disfiguration of humanity. We undermine the inherent complexities and emotional lives of individuals. Consequently, this neoliberal economic process directly contradicts the processes of emotional engagement and existence. This epistemological colonial choice was made by many European academics, politicians, and philosophers during that era.

Considering the current context, The Redpill movement can be considered as an example of neoliberal governance, given its impact on identity politics. Neoliberalism, characterized by the prioritization of market mechanisms and individualism, has significantly shaped how gender identities are constructed, negotiated, and perpetuated in society. Neoliberalism provides valuable insights into how it transforms citizenship and politics into market-oriented practices, fostering a culture of competition, self-interest, and commodification of identities. This commodification of identities not only reinforces traditional gender norms but also strengthens the power dynamics that sustain gender inequality (Fraser, 2013; Brown, 2015). These Foucauldian power dynamics are insightful and essential in understanding the Redpill movement's perpetuation of misogyny. According to Foucault (1978), power is not solely a repressive force but also operates through productive mechanisms. In the case of the Redpill movement, its reactionary nature is not only a response to feminist progress but also a strategy that serves to consolidate power and maintain existing hierarchies. This highlights the complex interplay between power, identity, and resistance within the movement.

Re-Thinking Identities

The Redpill movement in Brazil represents a reactionary response to feminist advancements and challenges to traditional gender norms. Drawing on Butler's (1990; 1993) groundbreaking concept of performativity, it becomes evident that the Redpill movement seeks to reinforce and perpetuate rigid gender roles through the construction of identity. By adhering to misogynistic ideologies, members of the Redpill movement attempt to reclaim a sense of power and control, aligning themselves with patriarchal structures that

perpetuate gender inequality. This reactionary stance is not only a response to feminist progress but also a strategic and productive force that serves to consolidate power and maintain existing hierarchies. It is important to recognize that the Redpill movement's adherence to rigid gender roles not only harms women but also restricts the freedom and self-expression of men who do not conform to these norms.

When describing The Redpill movement, four key terms can be utilized: money, identity, power, and violence. While money and economic language may objectify women, they also serve as a reflection of the identity associated with the projected heterosexual man, the power that accompanies it, and the perpetuation and fueling of online violence. Among these various processes, violence remains the overarching theme that permeates them all. By acknowledging the decolonial process within the binary framework, we also gain insight into the violence inherent in identities. This extends beyond the dehumanization resulting from the repression of emotional experiences, encompassing the symbolic violence perpetuated by words and discourses as well.

In relation to the Redpill movement, Žižek (1993) concept of symbolic violence provides valuable insights into the dynamics at play. Symbolic violence refers to the subtle mechanisms through which power and domination are exercised, shaping individuals' perceptions and behaviors without explicit coercion. Within the Redpill movement, symbolic violence manifests through the dissemination and internalization of misogynistic ideologies and beliefs. The Redpill movement perpetuates symbolic violence by promoting and normalizing harmful gender stereotypes, objectification of women, and the devaluation of feminist perspectives. Through its online platforms, the movement creates an echo chamber that reinforces and validates these ideologies, exerting symbolic violence on its members and beyond. Žižek concept of symbolic violence helps us understand how The Redpill movement influences individuals' subjectivities and perpetuates gender inequalities. By accepting and internalizing the movement's ideologies, individuals become complicit in the reproduction of oppressive power structures. Symbolic violence operates through the manipulation of language, discourse, and social norms, shaping individuals' perceptions and limiting their capacity to challenge the status quo.

The examination of symbolic violence by Žižek also highlights the fact that colonialism not only relied on physical violence, but also employed a form of symbolic violence. This involved the imposition of colonial culture, language, and institutions on the colonized populations. The unequal symbolic order enforced by colonialism subjugated and devalued the culture and traditions of the colonized. Symbolic violence served as a tool for domination and control, perpetuating inequality and oppression. The proposition here is to acknowledge, question, and challenge the power structures that sustain it.

Conclusion

The emergence of the Redpill movement in Brazil can be seen as a reactionary response to feminist advancements and challenges to traditional gender norms. This online community primarily comprises cisgender men who espouse misogynistic ideologies and reject feminist ideals, seeking to reinforce and perpetuate rigid gender roles that restrict the freedom of both women and men. The movement manifests itself through the dissemination of hate speech and the promotion of a culture of hostility towards women, both online and offline. It exerts a significant impact on broader societal dynamics, including relationships, power structures, and gender equality.

Online misogyny, a pressing concern in contemporary society, poses significant challenges for the management of a democratic society. It involves the systematic discrimination and

hatred directed at women, and persists across digital platforms. The internet provides a platform for the dissemination of misogynistic discourses and practices, which can have profound and lasting effects on individuals and communities. The Redpill movement exemplifies this phenomenon, as it fosters a culture of hate within online forums and virtual communities. Participants within the movement harbor deep-seated animosity toward women, justifying their hostility based on an alleged symbolic debt women owe to them. This distorted view perpetuates gender inequality and contributes to the prevalence of violence against women.

The impact of the Redpill movement in Brazil can be observed within the political context of the country, where political disputes and the rise of conservatism have played significant roles. To effectively challenge and dismantle gender inequalities perpetuated by the Redpill movement, it is crucial to engage in re-thinking identities. This requires a critical examination of the rigid binary frameworks that sustain traditional gender norms. Recognizing the coloniality that permeates these identities is essential in deconstructing the symbolic violence and power dynamics that underlie them. Fostering a culture that values diversity, inclusivity, and equality is paramount, enabling individuals to express themselves authentically without conforming to restrictive gender roles.

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