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THE LEFTIST POLITICAL PARTIES IN LIGHT OF SIMONE WEIL'S CRITICISM: THE WORKERS' PARTY CASE

Os partidos políticos de esquerda à luz da crítica de Simone Weil:
O caso do Partido dos Trabalhadores

Alexandre Andrade Martins *

To the Memory and Fight of Comandante Fidel Castro (1926-2016)

Abstract: Given the socio-political context of Latin American countries and their leftist and center-leftist parties that had governed some countries since the beginning of the 2000's, this essay will present Simone Weil's anthropology of a rooted people towards social justice guided by a spirituality of supernatural justice. This anthropology supports her criticism of political parties that this essay will use to examine the Brazilian context and its Workers' Party that governed the country for over thirteen years and ended its tenure after a process of impeachment. Although Simone Weil seems to be pessimistic as to whether multiparty or monoparty political systems are able to promote and maintain a social order able to lead people to find their rootedness, she develops a critical anthropology that allows us to understand when a political party abandons its commitment to develop social policies for the poor and working class. Consequently, the political party assumes an agenda of maintaining power, no matter the means that must be used to achieve this goal.

Keywords: Anthropology. Rootedness. Grouping of Interests. Grouping of Ideas. Political Parties.

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Resumo: Considerando o contexto sociopolítico dos países latino-americanos e seus partidos de esquerda e centro-esquerda que governaram alguns países desde o começo dos anos 2000, este ensaio vai apresentar a antropologia de um povo enraizado voltado para justiça social guiada por uma espiritualidade da justiça supernatural de Simone Weil. Essa antropologia fundamenta a sua crítica aos partidos políticos que este texto vai usar para examinar o contexto brasileiro e o Partido dos Trabalhadores que governou o país por mais de treze anos, terminando sua governança depois de um processo de impeachment. Embora Simone Weil demonstra certo pessimismo se sistemas políticos multipartidários ou monopartidário têm condições de promover e manter uma ordem social capaz de criar meios para o enraizamento do seu povo, ela desenvolve uma antropologia crítica que nos permite compreender quando um partido político abandona seu compromisso de criar políticas sócias voltadas aos pobres e à classe trabalhadora. Consequentemente, o partido político assume um programa de manutenção do poder, sem se preocupar com os meios que precisam ser utilizados para alcançar esse objetivo.

Palavras-chave: Antropologia. Enraizamento. Grupo de Interesses. Grupo de Ideias. Partidos Políticos.

Simone Weil (1909 – 1943) was exiled to England from November 1942 until her death, when the leader of French Resistance, General Charles De Gaulle, saying no for an extremely dangerous project proposed by this young philosopher of “nurses in the first line”, challenged her to write a proposal for the reconstruction of France after WWII. Certainly frustrated for not having permission to go to battles in France as a nurse, she accepted this challenge and wrote her only systematic book, entitled *L’Enracinement*.¹ Years later, Albert Camus affirmed that the European reconstruction would not be successful without considering Simone Weil’s requirements in *L’Enracinement* (“Simone Weil” in *Bulletin de la NRF*, June/1949). Perhaps, this explains many problems that not only European countries but also many other countries are facing today without sustainable resolution, such as increasing inequality, rising poverty, global warming, terrorism, and immigration crisis.

L’Enracinement is a complex book and I will not review it here. Instead, I will highlight the anthropology in this book and its relevance for reimagining political parties. The relevance of this work is still impressive and

¹ WEIL, Simone, “L’Enracinement: Prélude À Une Déclaration des Devoirs Envers L’Être Humain” in LUSSY, Florence de (org.). *Simone Weil: Œuvres*. Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999, pp. 1025-1218. It was written 1943, year of her death (October 24, 1943) and was published in 1949 by Gallimard Press in the collection *Espoir*, organized by Albert Camus. It is now in the WEIL, Simone. *Œuvres Complètes V 2: L’Enracinement*. Paris: Gallimard, 2013. I am using the edition that is in: *Simone Weil: Œuvres*, a selection of Weil’s texts edited by Florence de Lussy. From here, I will refer to this work as only *L’Enracinement* and quote my own translation from the original text.

it is fair to say that Camus' comment is still valid for our current time, going beyond France. Moreover, I offer an aperitif of this book from a specific issue, the crisis of left political parties, and use a specific context as a paradigm for this analysis: the situation of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party) in Brazil, the party that held the federal government for almost fourteen years, ending after a questionable process of impeachment. Adopting this option, I believe, it is possible to be more concrete, and this party serves as an example for what has happened with many left parties in democratic countries.

Therefore, this paper is divided into two parts. First, I will present Simone Weil's work, *L'Enracinement*, as a philosophical-theological anthropology towards a political society able to empower the unfortunates and open to an experience of transcendence that roots the human being. Second, I will show that this anthropology supports her criticism of political parties and applies it to the situation of leftist parties in Brazil.

1. Simone Weil's Anthropology of Social-Political Rootedness

Simone Weil's thought is a philosophy that begins from the real. In Robert Chenavier's words, "the awakening of the real is the starting point of philosophy for Simone Weil."² He argues that she has a philosophy that is an exercise of attention to what is real.³ It is a philosophy from reality, and, from what is concrete, she develops her understanding of the human existence and history. However, it is not a materialist anthropology, otherwise, she could be characterized as a person who had described material realities, that is her criticism of Aristotle and modern philosophy.⁴ It is an anthropology from the exercise of the human spirit illuminated by the transcendent reality.

The real begins to be real for an individual when he/she realizes the world as harmony between the earthly reality and the divine presence. This is a movement of openness of spirit to be affected by the love that is responsible for maintaining the order of the world.

² CHENAVIER, Robert. *Simone Weil: L'Attention au Réel*. Paris: Éditions Michalon, 2009, p. 35.

³ Attention to the real is an awakening from a dream to the human condition, its fragility, and the presence/dependency on God. She says: "We are in unreality, in a dream. Renouncing our imaginary central situation, and renouncing it not only through our intelligence, but also in the imaginative part in the soul, it is an awakening to the real, to eternity; it is to see the true light, to hear the true silence. A transformation operates then in the root of sensitivity itself, in an immediate way, to receive sensible impressions and psychological impressions" (WEIL, Simone. *Ceuvres Complètes IV 1: Écrits de Marseille*. Paris: Gallimard, 2008, p. 300.

⁴ WEIL, Simone. *Ceuvres Complètes V 1: Questions Politiques et Religieuses*. Gallimard: Paris, 2000, p. 120.

Simone Weil's anthropology of the human condition is, according to Emmanuel Gabellieri, a "radical ontology" of the human spirit rooted in reality.⁵

She interprets Weil's thought as a philosophy of the human condition raised from a radical ontological question. She does not begin from social reality, but from a question about the individual and his/her foundational desire, that is the existence of each one. This desire will become clear with the realization of social and political obligations toward all humans. This is clear in Simone Weil's personal engagement in philosophical studies and political activism. Committed to a deep social and political experience among the oppressed, she stresses that ontological and ethical rootedness is a light for social-political action. For Gabellieri, this movement in Weil's philosophy and life has a progressive coherence that expresses the unity of her thought.⁶

As an advocate for justice and a society where all humans can live in authenticity, Simone Weil – instead of beginning to think of a society by offering a perspective of human rights able to defend the inviolability of individual dignity – begins by stating that all humans have obligations to others. For her, the defense of human rights starts from the recognition of others and their condition, especially those who are suffering because of oppression, and needs. Seeing others in their suffering, recognizing their names and faces, and being aware that all share the same human condition, in which all have needs to be met, is the real way to begin a debate on human rights. This is Simone Weil's proposal in *L'Enracinement*.⁷ It is a forward proposal in which Weil argues for social justice embodying actions from a supernatural justice responsible to reveal the human condition and to assume the recognition of others as an imperative.⁸ Weil presents our obligations, our needs (especially the needs of the soul which connects their satisfaction as a mediation in the human condition between natural and supernatural), our condition as sharers of the same contingency, fragility, and limitations as part of a historical reality among a plurality of cultures.⁹

⁵ GABELLIERI, Emmanuel, *Être et Don: Simone Weil et la Philosophie*. Louvain – Paris: Éditions Peeters, 2003, p. 27-28.

⁶ Milko Vetö stresses the unity of Simone Weil's philosophy as a logic architecture in a thought in progress. See: VETÖ, Miklos. *La Métaphysique Religieuse de Simone Weil*. Paris: Librairie Vrin, 1971, 16-17.

⁷ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1025-1218. (See also footnote 1.)

⁸ I am here with Diogenes Allen and Eric O. Springsted's interpretation on what Simone Weil means about justice on *L'Enracinement*. See: ALLEN, Diogenes and SPRINGSTED, Eric O. *Spirit, Nature, and Community: Issues in the Thought of Simone Weil*. State University of New York Press, Albany, NY, 1994, p. 187-188.

⁹ Weil opens her book by saying: "The notion of obligation goes beyond the notion of rights that is subordinated and relative [to obligation]." She states that right does not support by itself, but it is an obligation that originates from human beings who recognize each other the rights of the other. Consequently, this leads to an obligation of respecting and promotion of rights. She adds: "Identical obligations link all human beings, although they correspond to different acts according to situations." The object of these obligations is the human being

So history, culture, and social reality must be ways to provide us with conditions to live as rooted beings. The human roots are connected to the natural (our social historical reality) and the supernatural (the transcendent reality, the grace that touches our condition). The supernatural reveals our obligation of recognition, inclusion, and justice for the other in an active compassion toward establishing a real participation in socio-political debate and goods. This is needed to promote human rights. Obligation to others, therefore, obligations of justice in compassion, is from the human condition as a reality of insufficiency shared by all.

In her radical ontology from attention to the real, Simone Weil argues for an active incarnation in social reality in recognition of others, the unfortunate in first place, toward their empowerment and promotion of dignity. The metaphor of rootedness may give the interpretation of a passive attitude in the world, but, actually, it is exactly the opposite. It is a very active and dynamic incarnation in the world from a supernatural power that defines this incarnation in society. Simone Weil's existential options, activism, and mysticism do not allow us to interpret her proposal in a different way. In this sense, even an argument for human rights from the metaphysical dignity of the individual, as Jacques Maritain was arguing at that time,¹⁰ is insufficient because this argument omits the human suffering in the midst of social conditions. A notion of inalienable rights, grounded on a metaphysic of inner, "fails to be of much help when dealing with the afflicted."¹¹ In addition, human rights only with metaphysical foundations seem to have a very romantic aspect that leads to a certain passivity of discourse without a practice that embodies it. Simone Weil wrote *L'Enracinement* before the International Declaration of Human Rights. She had before her the frustrated Napoleonic human declaration, oppression of workers, World War II, and a debate about defending human dignity. Today, more than a half-century after the Human Rights Declaration, it is possible to see how this has been present in many discourses without power to make people and nations have real obligations. It has been used according to what it is convenient for the "I" (that could be the interest of one person, a group, or a nation); even as an argument for military coups, invasions, and wars.

On the one hand, only a metaphysical foundation is insufficient because it opens to a romantic conception of human rights. On the other hand, a secular conception that dismisses the supernatural is unable to touch

who is an imperative for the other by the simple fact of being a human. This fact connects everybody in the same requirement of fulfillment obligations. Moreover, obligations are not limited by contexts and structures. They are eternal. See: *L'Enracinement*, p. 1027-1028.

¹⁰ For a short understanding of Maritain's account on human rights, see: MARITAIN, Jacques. *Os Direitos do Homem*. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio Editora, 1967.

¹¹ ALLEN and SPRINGSTED, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, p. 181.

the authenticity of human existence and to promote it, especially where social suffering is destroying lives. Simone Weil provides a synthesis in which the radicalism of social activism is guided by the radicalism of grace in an obligation embodied by an empty “I” rooted in the real. Her radical ontology incarnates the human in the world between necessity and good, that is, between natural and supernatural. Mediation is important here between creation and incarnation of the human as imitation of God’s humble actions of creating and incarnating. Being rooted is assumed to be a meditative function of participation in Jesus’ cross, the mediation between natural and supernatural.¹² In *L’Enracinement*, Weil proposes a society that creates conditions for individuals to become rooted in order to participate in Jesus, the mediator with roots in natural and supernatural realities. This becomes visible in obligations, practices of compassion, love, and justice upon others.

An uprooted country or people is a society where individuals cannot realize genuine social justice. Society does not root individuals; rather it creates conditions for “having roots that draw upon the supernatural.”¹³ Being rooted is a mediation between necessity and good, natural and supernatural. Simone Weil moves with much freedom between philosophy and theology to shape an anthropology with supernatural foundations and political implications. Gabellieri argues that *L’Enracinement* is a “theological-political treatise” that unifies “the lowest and the highest.”¹⁴ Let us see how Simone Weil achieves this unification by looking at some passages from her book, written while exiled in London and finished just before her death (1943).

L’Enracinement is divided into three parts. They shape a philosophical unity with strong anthropological, political, and theological characters. Simone Weil does not let herself be affected by modern divisions of disciplines, one of the huge issues of our society that have fragmented human existence generating an individualism disconnected from the other and the transcendent. Consequently, the relationship with people and God will be in accordance with interest in the “I” and mediated by false material satis-

¹² Emmanuel Gabellieri develops the importance of mediation in Simone Weil’s philosophy inspired in the Greeks and in her emphasis on Incarnation and its truth. See: GABELLIERI, E. “Simone Weil: Uma Filosofia da Mediação e do Dom.” In: DI NICOLA, G. P. and BINGERMER, M. C. L. *Simone Weil: Ação e Contemplação*. Bauru: Edusc, 2005, p. 187-214. See also the study on *metaxu* in Simone Weil as her main source from her conception of mediation, PUENTE, Fernando Rey. “A Metemática Como *Metaxu* Entre Grécia e o Cristianismo.” In: BINGERMER, M. C. L. *Simone Weil e o Encontro Entre as Culturas*. São Paulo; Rio de Janeiro: Paulinas e PUC-Rio, 2009, p. 147-158.

¹³ ALLEN and SPRINGSTED, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, p. 191.

¹⁴ GABELLIERI, *Être et Don*, p. 463-465. Fernando Rey Puente strengthens the idea of the political aspect of this work by affirming that it is a “treatise of justice” that it is coherent with Weil religious thought. See: PUENTE, Fernando Rey. *Exercícios de Atenção: Simone Weil Leitora dos Gregos*. São Paulo: Loyola; Rio de Janeiro: Editora PUC Rio, 2013, p. 113.

factions. A fragmented human being is a weak person who cannot resist the attraction of force. Here is the origin of oppression of others: wars, invasions for subduing other peoples, instrumentalization of workers, and economic power as mechanisms of exploitation. All these things destroy people and their roots.¹⁵ Weil affirms: "Who is uprooted uproots. Who is rooted does not uproot."¹⁶ Those who are uprooted have two behaviors: an inert soul that is a death spirit that cannot move beyond the materiality of things and people as instruments for satisfaction of the "I" and an activism for always uprooting.

Weil provides five historical examples of uprooted people and their forces: the Hebrews, who moved from being slavers to exterminating of other people in order to possess Palestine; the Romans and their empire of world domination, for her, the main example of force that has inspired any other forces of domination after Roman civilization,¹⁷ even the Catholic Church and its intolerance of other religions;¹⁸ the Spaniards and the English in their colonialism; the Napoleonic Empire; and Hitler, who, after 1918, founded an uprooted German people to be easily dominated. All these empires were uprooted people who had used force to oppress and destroy lives, to uproot people, even their own people. Weil stresses: "The uprooted is by far, the most dangerous illness of human societies because it multiplies itself."¹⁹

Her argument is that the human being needs a society in which he/she can be rooted. A society does not root people by itself, but rather, keeps an order of conditions that prevent people from being uprooted and, at the same time, allows them to be rooted. *L'Enracinement* purports to show how this society is possible in an impressive unity that connects anthropology, politics, and theology. The three parts of her book do not corres-

¹⁵ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1052-1053.

¹⁶ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1055.

¹⁷ For her, the Roman Empire has marked the entire Western world with the taint brutal force: "Today, science, history, politics, and the organization of work, even the religion seen marked by Roman taint, do not offer to the human thinking but brutal force. Such is our civilization." *L'Enracinement*, p. 1214.

¹⁸ Simone Weil wrote before the Vatican II in a time which the Catholic Church was close in herself as the owner of truth against the modern world and other religious traditions. S. Weil's love for the others and recognition of truth in other traditions were some of elements that hold her from officially becoming a Catholic by accepting the baptism, although her conversion to the Catholic faith. She affirmed to be a Catholic "of right", but not "of fact" because of institutional positions of Catholic Church regarding other religious traditions. See her letter to Fr. Perrin called "Autobiographie Spirituelle" in WEIL, S. *Attende de Dieu*. Paris: Le Colombe, 1950, p. 82. Perhaps if she were alive to see Vatican II and its development regarding to accept the present of truth in other traditions and its openness to dialogue with the modern world, Weil would have a different decision about her posture with the institutional Church and baptism. See: TEIXEIRA, Faustino. "Simone Weil: Uma Paixão Sem Fronteiras." *Convergência* v. 42, n. 411 (2008), p. 313-327.

¹⁹ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1054.

pond to these three areas. They cross the entire argumentation of Simone Weil who offers a way to be rooted as a return to the truth.²⁰ However, in the first part, she begins with an anthropology. Then she presents the uprootedness of the human being in the Western world referencing the situation in Europe, in the midst of WWII, and especially in France and its working class.²¹ Her analysis of France and Europe is much more than an analysis of social conjecture, but rather a study of the human fragility and vulnerability before force that leads to the uprooting. Finally, the third part, that is the largest, treats how people and nations can build a way to be rooted in the present, without denying people's tradition and openness to the future without being attached to a reality that does not yet exist, but rather living the present as the reality which occurs, the mediation between the natural and the supernatural.²² According to Robert Chenavier, this society of justice between natural and supernatural will be a society where work has a spirituality, so Weil proposes a spirituality of work in which each person fulfills his/her existence working, a natural burden, and thinking illuminated by the supernatural.²³

In Weil's anthropology, it is clear that rooted humans are individuals organized in society who recognize the other as an imperative to embody obligations. These obligations are those that meet "the needs of the soul." Simone Weil develops some important aspects of her anthropology in *L'Enracinement* in terms of needs of the soul. They are what the human being must find in a society in order to live its authenticity as a rooted being. Two things are important to mention in order to better understand Weil's anthropology in this book and the unity of her entire work. First, it is the concept of *soul*. Many will inadequately interpret Weil's thought as a dualistic philosophy, especially because of her love for Plato, who has been understood as a dualistic philosopher. She totally rejects this interpretation of Plato who is not dualistic, but a representative of unity between necessity and good in a spirit open to a transcendent light. This

²⁰ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1214-15.

²¹ This book was a project of the reconstruction of France after the war; she analyzes the reason that would lead France to collapse and to become an easy prey for Nazi domination. In one sentence, the reason was the uprootedness of France. (*L'Enracinement*, p. 1055-56.)

²² Weil argues against historical determinism and for the revolutionary power of traditions for building the future in a concrete realization in the present. See: *L'Enracinement*, p. 1057.

²³ CHENAVIER, *Simone Weil: L'Attention au Réel*, p. 99-100. Chenavier also dedicated one of his most important books to the relationship between work and spirituality in Simone Weil in which he affirms that all work of S. Weil has a philosophy of work. See: CHENAVIER, Robert. *Simone Weil: Une Philosophie du Travail*. Paris: Cerf, 2001. See also *L'Enracinement*, p. 1214-1218. Simone Weil concludes *L'Enracinement* saying: "Thenceforth, other human activities, leading by men, creations of technical plans, art, science, philosophy and so forth, are all inferior to the physical work in spiritual significations. It is easy to define the place that the physical work should be in a well-organized social life. It should be its spiritual center" (*L'Enracinement*, p. 1218). Weil argues for a spirituality of work many times on her book, see, for example, when she explains the uprooting of rural worker in *L'Enracinement*, p. 1086-1087.

made him a mystic with an integral vision of the human being²⁴ searching for salvation in a harmony between reason and mystery.²⁵ For Simone Weil, soul is closer to the Greek word *psyché* than to the Latin *anima* that has been seen as opposing the body since Descartes. Therefore, soul is the inner life of the human being in which the process of emptiness occurs to decrease in order to, eventually, be ready to receive God's grace. This soul is in the world, where the human being finds an obligation to incarnate. In a world organized in a political society, individuals are able to realize the needs of souls as integral persons between creation and incarnation, that is, as mediation between the natural and the supernatural. In this sense, Rey Puente suggests that Simone Weil has a Platonism essentially transcendental and political,²⁶ without assuming either the dualism of Neo-Platonism or Cartesian.

Second, *malheur*²⁷ is barely present in *L'Enracinement*, the foundational concept needed to understand Weil's anthropology and perhaps her entire philosophy. She opted to speak more about suffering, a broader concept. An uprooted person may have an experience of *malheur* as a result of force that has uprooted him/her. Living uprooted is a suffering, but can also be false joy because of the lack of the authenticity and consciousness of uprooted people. *Malheur*/suffering is a privileged experience of being crucified that identifies with Jesus' cross. What makes the experience of suffering reveals the human condition and becomes mediation between the natural and the supernatural. *Malheur* is not in the center of her anthropological exposition in *L'Enracinement*, but it is, alongside suffering, the central concept of her comprehension of the human condition. Although they are deeply connected, *malheur* and suffering have different meanings for Weil. They connect her previous work on oppression and force with the present one.²⁸

Simone Weil presents fourteen needs of the soul that begin with *order*, defined as "a texture of social relationships that do not coerce anybody to violate strict obligations to execute other obligations,"²⁹ and end with

²⁴ WEIL, Simone. *Œuvres Complètes IV 2: Écrits de Marseille*. Paris: Gallimard, 2009, p. 75.

²⁵ VETÖ, *La Métaphysique Religieuse de Simone Weil*, p. 11-12.

²⁶ PUENTE, *Exercícios de Atenção*, p. 139.

²⁷ *Malheur* is at the heart of Weil's account on suffering and grace. It is a word of difficult translation as Weil herself stated in her essay on "God's love and *malheur*" (see: WEIL, S. "L'Amour de Dieu e la Malheur." In: LUSSY, Florence de. *Simone Weil: Œuvres*. Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 693-716). Weil says: "*Malheur* is inseparable of physical suffering, but it is totally distinct... *Malheur* is an uprootedness of life, it is more or less equivalent to attenuated death" (WEIL, S. "L'Amour de Dieu e la Malheur," p. 693). I examined the concept of *malheur* in a previous study, see: MARTINS, Alexandre A. *A Pobreza e a Graça: Experiência da Deus em Meio ao Sofrimento em Simone Weil*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2013.

²⁸ See, for example, her previous work: "Réflexions sur les cause de la liberté et de l'oppression social" (1934) and *L'Iliade ou le poème de la force*" (1940-1941), in: LUSSY, Florence de. *Simone Weil: Œuvres*. Paris: Quarto Gallimard, 1999, p. 275-347; 529-552.

²⁹ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1031.

truth, the need “more sacred than any other. However, this is never mentioned.”³⁰ Order and truth seem to frame all human life in a society that supports conditions for rootedness. In other words, order creates these conditions and truth is the target to be rooted. Both require an action of attention to the order of the world, its beauty and truth that are the good present in creation, God.³¹ The social order is the place of realization of natural justice (or social justice) defined by supernatural justice (truth: Good/God).³² In the midst of natural and supernatural justice, the human being finds itself as a soul who needs order and truth. These needs are completed by others that show who the human being is: organized in a social political society. These needs fulfill the human will for freedom and responsibility, equality and participation, intellect and manual labors, risk and security, and the balance between private and collective properties.³³ Then, when Weil opens the second part of her book, she affirms rootedness as the most important need of the soul: “Rootedness is perhaps the most important and the most unknown need of the human soul. It is the most difficult to define.”³⁴ Weil operates in a dialectic anthropology in which, on the one hand, she presents very concrete elements that must be present in society. Governments and other institutions must protect and promote these elements because they are needs of the human being.³⁵ These needs are clearly defined, even truth present not only in a metaphysical aspect, but also in a practical way of human relationships, such as trials and judgments.³⁶ On the other hand, Weil does not categorically define rootedness because she knows it is connected to the cultural, traditional habits of peoples. Culture and traditions are not rootedness, but rather, a way to draw peoples to be rooted, that is, an elevation to touch

³⁰ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1049.

³¹ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1214

³² ALLEN and SPRINGSTED, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, p. 183-186. After explain Simone Weil's two forms of justices (social justice and supernatural justice), Allen and Springsted link it with obligations, rights, and culture in *L'Enracinement*: “She does this [her analysis is rights culture and supernatural justice] by proposing that we, indeed, see rights as specific cultural values, but as having a legitimacy – that is, a fundamental concern for the person – that ultimately derives from supernatural justice via an obligation each human being has toward others. Rights are then simply the specific historical and cultural specifications of this obligation, which actualize it but never exhaust it.” (ALLEN and SPRINGSTED, *Spirit, Nature, and Community*, p. 187.)

³³ Namely, all the needs of the soul are: order, liberty, obedience, responsibility, equality, hierarchy, honor, punishment, freedom of opinion, security, risk, private property, collective property, and truth. See: *L'Enracinement*, p. 1031-1051.

³⁴ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1052

³⁵ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1050-51.

³⁶ Weil says: “The population need to be protected from attacks against truth... There is no possibility of satisfaction of a people's desire for truth, unless for this end, we can find men who love truth” (*L'Enracinement*, p. 1051). In other writing, she says: “Under the name of truth, I also include beauty, virtue, and all kind of good in the way that is for me a conception of the relationship between grace and desire” (WEIL, Simone. *Attente de Dieu*. Paris: La Colombe, 1950, p. 71).

the supernatural reality and to see its presence in the world. Respecting the other – in the way a people is, including recognizing the beauty and truth of its traditions – is respecting its way of rootedness and access to the supernatural.³⁷ This is one of her arguments against any invasion of one country over another. For example, the uprooted Europeans destroyed the roots of peoples in the Americas.³⁸ Thus Weil states: “Who is uprooted uproots. Who is rooted does not uproot.”³⁹

This anthropology clarifies many of the risks leaders face when they lose their roots and their obligations toward others. For Simone Weil, a political party that does not create a society which addresses the needs of its citizens and fulfills its obligations does not have the right to exist. Rather a party can only exist if it is the expression of the real needs of human beings, primarily of those who are oppressed.

2. The Workers’ Party in Brazil and The Crisis of The Left

Simone Weil’s philosophical-theological anthropology reveals the kind of political party needed to lead a social organization able to allow people to find their roots. In addition, she shows that the attraction of force is the great enemy of parties and political leaders. This is clear in the current political scenery of many leftist political parties governing some countries. Controlled by force, maintaining the political power has become their main task. Let us see the case of Brazil and its Workers’ Party.

Partido dos Trabalhadores, or only PT as it is known, was founded in early 1980’s by workers gathered in unions, and many other people, such as intellectuals, community organizers, religious leaders (especially Catholic liberation theologians) who wanted to build a country based on social justice, free from liberalism, and favoring marginalized people. PT emerged from social movements and was grounded on socialist principles. According to its *Foundational Manifesto*, “The Workers’ Party was born from the will for political independency of the workers, whom are tired of being manipulated by politicians committed to the maintenance of the current economic, social and political order.”⁴⁰ In its creation, PT aimed to be a party of popular masses (*um partido de massas*) and unlike what happened in some other

³⁷ *L’Enracinement*, p. 1052.

³⁸ *L’Enracinement*, p. 1058.

³⁹ *L’Enracinement*, p. 1055.

⁴⁰ PARTIDO DOS TRABALHADORES, *Manifesto de Fundação do Partido dos Trabalhadores* (21 de outubro de 1980), available online: <https://www.pt.org.br/manifesto-de-fundacao-do-partido-dos-trabalhadores/> (access January 19, 2019).

Latin American countries, PT chose the democratic electoral way to arrive at power. Led by charismatic figures and after a few defeats, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, or simply Lula, a union leader of humble origin, was elected president of Brazil for two terms (from 2003 to 2010). His successor was also from PT, Dilma Rousseff who also was elected twice by the popular vote, but was impeached in the second year of her second term, in a long and controversial process of impeachment led by conservative leaders, parties, and groups. In Lula's administration, Brazil lived a time of economic and social development which took millions of people out of poverty. Rousseff's administration struggled to continue this development.⁴¹ Fed by scandals of corruption and economic recession, she faced a strong rejection by Brazilian citizens and a process of impeachment after being accused of fiscal irresponsibility and thus ending the PT's 13 years of leading Brazil.⁴²

Many, even within the party, have criticized that PT has forgotten its roots and needs a renewal. Strong PT supporters, such as Leonardo Boff⁴³ (a liberation theologian) and João Pedro Stédile⁴⁴ (an economist and one of the leaders of a social movement of rural workers without land, MST), affirmed that PT has changed from its plan of a new country to a plan of power and how to remain in power. In the last twenty years, PT has thought only about elections and how to win them, forgetting its base: social movements. Although Lula's administration achieved many benefits for the country, especially for the poor through social programs such as *Bolsa Família* (a social welfare program that removed millions of people from poverty and ended hunger in Brazil), the current administration has been ineffective and, of course, the poor are those who most affected. Frei Betto (a Dominican intellectual who had served Lula's administration in its first two years) stated that Rousseff's administration, in her second term, chose the wrong way to address the economic crisis by offering some "neoliberal solutions" and getting away from social movements. Many social movements and intellectuals linked to them have affirmed that the ways to leave the economic crises is through the left, that is, through socio-economic policies that guarantee the social achievement so

⁴¹ For analysis, from an economic perspective, about the economic development promoted by PT's legacy and its collapse, see: CARVALHO, Laura. *Valsa Brasileira: Do boom ao Caos Econômico*. São Paulo: Todavia, 2018.

⁴² This process of impeachment was very controversial and complex. Many conservative and pro-liberalism forces, helped by mainstream press and investments from private companies and their economic interests, acted to overthrow PT from power. Only this process is matter of a complex examination and I have no condition to do it here.

⁴³ BOFF, Leonardo. "O PT se renova ou se mediatiza de vez" in *Instituto Humanitas Unisinos* (August 15, 2015), available online at: <http://www.ihu.unisinos.br/noticias/545725-o-pt-ou-se-renova-ou-se-mediatiza-de-vez> (accessed January 10, 2019).

⁴⁴ Interview with João Pedro Stédile by Sul21 Portal in August 24, 2015, available online at: <http://www.sul21.com.br/jornal/faz-20-anos-que-a-esquerda-so-pensa-em-eleicao/> (accessed in January 10, 2019).

far and reject the neoliberal political adjustment.⁴⁵ Frei Betto argues that Rousseff's administration failed in dialoguing with social movements, with people at the grassroots, and PT must go back to its origins at the popular bases.⁴⁶ Political scientist André Singer argues that Dilma did exactly the opposite of what she promised in her re-election campaign in 2014. She adopted orthodox economic policies, such as fiscal adjustment. These policies distanced her from the social basis that supported her re-election that occurred in a very polarized political context with a tiny victory over her opponent from the PSDB (Party of the Brazilian Social Democracy).⁴⁷

It seems impossible for modern democracies to exist without political parties. At least, this is what we have been taught to believe now. However, this is not what Simone Weil suggests. In the *L'Enracinement*, she begins with a reflection on "the needs of the soul" and presents an anthropology that puts in first place the unfortunates. Although one of these needs is social order, Weil is pessimistic whether multiparty or monoparty political systems are able to promote and to maintain this order. Among her fourteen needs of the soul, one is *freedom of opinion*, where she offers a criticism to people's associations, especially of political parties. She begins this part by saying:

Freedom of opinion and freedom of association are usually mentioned together. This is an error. Except in the case of natural groupings, association is not a need, but an expedient employed in the practical affairs of life. On the other hand, complete, unlimited freedom of expression for every sort of opinion, without the least restriction or reserve, is an absolute need on the part of intelligence. It follows from this that it is a need of the soul, for when the intelligence is ill-at-ease the whole soul is sick.⁴⁸

She distinguishes *freedom of opinion*, that belongs to every human being as an individual who should never be limited to express his/her ideas, from *freedom of association*, that has limits because it might become arbitrary and absolute in a way that does not allow members to express something different.

Simone Weil is a defender of the clarity of the human spirit. This requires an intelligence that can work and express itself freely. *Freedom of opinion* "is a need of intelligence, and this intelligence resides only in the human being

45 The new federal administration has adopted a neoliberal agenda of socio-economic adjustment with policies that freeze social welfare expenditure, especially in public health, education, and social security. See the policies that limited public expenditure approved by the House of Representative and Senate, known as PEC 95, available online at: <https://www25.senado.leg.br/web/atividade/materias/-/materia/127337> (accessed January 10, 2019).

46 Interview with Frei Betto by the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* in August 9, 2015, available online at: <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2015/08/1666232-no-intimo-eu-temo-que-a-presidente-dilma-renuncie-diz-frei-betto.shtml> (accessed January 10, 2018)

47 SINGER, André. "Cutucando Onças com Varas Curtas: O Ensaio Desenvolvimentista no Primeiro Mandato de Dilma Rousseff (2011-2014)" in *Novos Estudos* 102 (Julho 2015), 44.

48 *L'Enracinement*, p. 1040.

considered by itself.” And she continues, in order to reject a possible absolute intelligence in associations, “there is no collective exercise of intelligence... Intelligence is defeated as soon as an expression of thoughts is preceded, explicitly or implicitly, by the little word ‘we’.”⁴⁹ In her context, Weil realized that political parties created this “we” that has made the fight of the people to be the fight of a political grouping. Consequently, contrary opinions are not tolerated, intelligence is damaged, and a myth of a collective intelligence governs individual’s minds. Honestly, she says: “The practical immediate solution for that is the abolition of all political parties.”⁵⁰

Using workers’ parties, as an example, she says that political parties became a grouping of interests that lost its commitment to empower workers toward social justice, by making them vulnerable to seduction of capital, and preventing them from the clarity of the human spirit. For example, this occurred in a workers’ strike in which they did not realize that they were acting only for better wages in an operation directed by parties, rather than having a consciousness of clear commitment to structural transformation toward social justice for all. Once in power, the party reproduces the same structural system of oppression. Workers will not have open ways to express their opinion because they lack the necessary consciousness of their real social condition will not exist. This consciousness occurs only when *theory* and *practice* work together, and workers know that they are doing inside social conjuncture. In an *agrégée* thesis *Science and Perception in Descartes* (1929), Weil affirms that oppression begins when the theory is divorced from the manual labor. This makes labor mechanical, passive, and servile, while the theory (understood in a platonic sense of contemplation of the truth) is a property of the few. Then she also criticizes social movements and political parties that use workers as a mass for revolution⁵¹ by denying theory, the knowledge and awareness of all social and historical conditions, to them. This lack of theory makes the workers to be manipulated by their leaders.⁵²

Finally, Simone Weil distinguishes two kinds of groupings: *of interests* and *of ideas*. Grouping of interests is an organization ruled by some discipline and with a common goal. It is a grouping of free people who want to defend its interests, e.g., unions for defending workers’ interests. However, this grouping must be monitored by public powers in order to retain its goal that must always be from the perspective of what is good for the poor. Grouping of ideas should be damned because it does not allow circulation of new and different ideas. It becomes an arbitrary ideology. This kind of grouping could only have authorization to exist

⁴⁹ *L’Enracinement*, p. 1043.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ WEIL, Simone. *Œuvres Complètes II 2: L’Expérience Ouvrière et l’Adieu à la Révolution*. Paris: Gallimard, 1991, p. 145-146.

⁵² *L’Enracinement*, p. 1044-45.

under two conditions: “no excommunication” of anybody and existence of “real circulation of ideas”.⁵³ The freedom of any grouping must not be above freedom of individual’s opinion. She said: “Associations must not be free; they are instruments, they must be submissive. Only the human being is fit to be free.”⁵⁴

In light of Simone Weil’s criticism of association and political parties, much can be said about political parties in our current time. A political party, especially those of social orientation, is a grouping of interests that is vulnerable to become a grouping of ideas. This is what has happened among many leftist parties around the world. Consequently, they lose their main goal of social policies for the poor and become intolerant to criticism.

Returning to our example of the workers’ party in Brazil, I want to understand what is happening in this party that, according to traditional supporters, abandoned a project of national structural shift to embody a project of retaining power.⁵⁵ First of all, PT moved away from its ground of social movements and organized civil societies *from* and *for* marginalized people. Once elected to the federal government, PT was able to raise many people from poverty to middle class, to increase income, and to make an excluded social class able to access personal goods. However, paraphrasing Frei Betto’s words, this administration has not been able to democratize access to social goods needed for human autonomous flourishing, such as education of quality, healthcare, security, and job security. In addition, being away from its basis, PT missed the opportunity to engage in a structural work of conscientization of the popular masses to guide them to socio-political autonomy and participation. Conscientization was a process that PT and social movements have historically promoted, but, once in power, PT began little by little moving away from this engagement. Consequently, PT’s administration became dependent on the partisan structure and its coalition with parties and private companies that had no commitment to the development of the popular masses, PT’s support base.

Moving from its basis, PT lost the main goal of a grouping of interests: the development of the poor. This kind of grouping tends naturally to become an association, as a political party. PT, as an association that achieved

⁵³ *L’Enracinement*, p. 1046.

⁵⁴ *L’Enracinement*, p. 1047.

⁵⁵ André Singer suggests that PT has two souls living in the same body. The soul of its foundation in 1980 that was strongly committed to the popular masses and structural changes, and the soul of the National Convention of 2002 where PT launched its platform for the 2002 presidential campaign that elected Lula president. With the Letter to Brazilian People, PT and Lula committed themselves to a platform with concession to capitalism. The party did not abandon its goal to create policies against poverty, but it accepted to do it inside of capitalism. See: SINGER, André, “*A Segunda Alma do Partido dos Trabalhadores*” in *Novos Estudos* 88 (Novembro 2002): 89-111. Following Singer’s analysis, PT opened space to distance itself from the popular masses, especially to social movements, to create and strengthen a partisan structure that could lead the country from the government.

federal power, moved from a free association grounded on people's social movements and their freedom of opinion to a restrictive association as a grouping of ideas. As such, PT seems not to want to dialogue with people at the bottom because they may disagree with PT's way of managing the country and its goal of returning to federal power. Once the power is lost, the goal becomes to return to it; the political party acts from its own interest and not from the interest of the people it represents. Now as a grouping of ideas, it is advantageous for PT to join other groupings which are able to support its ambition of power, such as other political parties, even if their interests are fundamentally different from PT's core values that made people vote for its candidates.

This shift in PT did not occur instantly; it has been the fruit of a long process that perhaps began with some political alliances made in the 2002 elections. Lula's presidential campaign in 2002, after three failed campaigns (1989, 1994, 1998) without touching PT's grouping of interests, made political alliances with parties characterized by different interests, such as the "Partido Progressista" of the liberal economic agenda. On the one hand, this made the socialist PT look less radical and more plausible for voters. On the other hand, it opened the doors for a process that has led PT to distance itself from the base and to become a grouping of ideas association. As this kind of grouping, PT made more alliances with groups of opposite ideology, repressed and expelled opposition inside the party (such as those who were more critical of Lula's economic decisions and founded the PSOL – Party of Socialism and Liberty), and was involved in a big scandal of corruption (known as *mensalão*) of buying votes in the Federal Congress.

Lula's administration was successful in many aspects, as I previously mentioned the social programs of combating hunger and unemployment. His foreign policy was outstanding and Brazil had significant economic growth. However, the progressive shift from a grouping of interests to a grouping of ideas led the party little by little to move away from the peoples' movements and its goal of structural change. This also opened to a process of uprootedness of Brazilian society led by a conservative elite and supported by the mainstream press. An uprooted people was easily manipulated by the interest of the capital against a government that was elected because of its social platform. But this government lost its platform and contact to social movements to remain in power through political alliances.

Just as Simone Weil said workers in Europe had no consciousness that they were striking only for raising wages directed by parties, PT has not promoted consciousness by its social policies, which allowed an ongoing process of uprootedness. Rather, it provided income for poor families and raised the income of other socioeconomic classes. As Frei Betto said, Lula's administration provided access to personal goods (if you go to a slum, for example, people there have new TVs, computers, laundry, and even a

car), but no access to social goods (families are still in a slum lacking basic sanitation, safe water, healthcare, and education). Without accessing social goods, people, especially the poor and the working class, are continually prevented from developing the human spirit of consciousness. Moreover, there is no structural transformation. Consequently, the divorce of theory from practice continues the substructure responsible for people's ignorance, passivity, uprootedness, and places them in the hands of those who hold the means of production. However, the illusion promoted by access to income and the ability to buy personal goods keeps the poor and the working class in false happiness through lack of consciousness.

As a grouping of ideas, PT has been moved by its project of keeping itself in power. In Rousseff's administration, this process became clear, especially in her 2014 presidential reelection campaign. Every criticism was an evil because the PT government had taken people from poverty. Unlike what she had promised in her reelection campaign, she detached herself from the people's social movements and introduced an economic policy much more aligned with the liberal market than with social programs. In addition, nothing was done to create avenues for people's freedom of opinion and consciousness. Nourished by a huge scandal of corruption involving the gigantic state oil company (Petrobás) and economic recession, Rousseff faced a chaotic political scenery led by Brazilian elites. Far from a dialogue with people on the ground (especially the poor and workers organized in social movements) and as a grouping of ideas, Rousseff fell and it seems that her party PT do not have alternatives, but try to rebuild itself returning to its origins close to social movements at the bottom to develop a new agenda able to address the political, economic, and social crisis. This movement of returning must mean, above all, a real commitment to the poor and the working class as a grouping of interests.

Many years in power led PT to develop a collective intelligence which is false, because there is no such intelligence. There are only actions to subdue people in an atmosphere of power. Following Simone Weil's words of: "Associations must not be free; they are instruments, they must be submissive. Only the human being is fit to be free," PT should not be free. It must be an instrument in bondage to people's interests from the perspective of the poor and their empowerment to have freedom of opinion and consciousness. PT's renewal must begin by breaking this illusory collective intelligence used as a practical way to keep itself in power and return to engage in dialogue with people on the ground. From this, perhaps some light can shine.

The 2018 presidential campaign of PT's candidate Fernando Collor pointed to a new era for the Workers' Party. This presidential election was marked by the raising of a far-right candidate who found an uprooted people with a political vacuum that center-right parties could not fill after

the fall of Dilma Rousseff. Haddad's campaign opened to self-reflection and criticism inside PT and to reconnected to the social basis that as the strength of the party and its ideology. Even losing the election, PT now has an opportunity to be reborn, to reconnect to its foundational commitment to the popular masses and their independency. However, the current context, marked by the raising of far-right leaders, presents extra and bigger challenges to any party that aims to be committed to people's interests on the side of the poor and to freedom of opinion and consciousness.

The changes and challenges faced by PT are present in the world and confront leftist parties from any country. Many leftist parties and governments, especially in Europe and Latin America (e.g. the former center-left government of François Hollande in France and the French Socialist Party; the left, and center-left governments of Latin American leaders: Evo Morales, Nicolás Maduro, Rafael Correa, Cristina Kirchner and Tabaré Vázquez), have experienced the same process from a grouping of interests association originated in people's social movements to a grouping of ideas association. Moreover, uprootedness seems to be a phenomenon that is spread throughout the world, allowing the raising of far-right leaders. I used the PT and Brazilian current situation as a case study. Simone Weil's analysis of freedom of opinion and freedom of association applied to political party provides a deep and critical perspective to look at the crisis of leftist political parties in democratic countries. This analysis can be applied in rightist parties as well, and the conclusion will be even more radical: these associations have no legitimacy because they are free from the interests of the poor, and slavers of interests of private companies. This will be a topic for another essay, but I conclude with a Simone Weil's quote:

As regards groupings of interests, their control would, in the first place, involve the making of a distinction, namely, that the word 'interest' sometimes expresses a need and at other times something quite different. In the case of a poor working-man, interest means food, lodging and heating. For an employer, it means something very different. When the word is taken in its first sense, it upholds and defends the interests concerned. When used in its second sense, the action of the authorities must be to continually supervise, limit and, whenever possible, curb the activities of the associations representing such interests.⁵⁶

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⁵⁶ *L'Enracinement*, p. 1046.