

## "I am a tragic optimist," says Boaventura de Sousa Santos at a

### Ali speakers in Salão de Atos were taken to listen to the researcher at the cycle of debates 'University of the Future'

The Portuguese intellectual and Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) held the conference "The epistemologies of the South and the reinvention of democracy" on June 18 at UFRGS' Salão de Atos. After dedicating his words to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire and to the young people from the Esteio Hip Hop Culture House, Sousa Santos delivered his speech in two parts. First, in the theoretical part, he pointed out democracy's contradictions and tensions in today's world and mapped out elements for the reinvention of democracy. Afterwards, according to his perspective on the diversification of epistemologies, he performed, together with other participants, the scenic reading of the poem "Sou um criador" ("I'm a creator").



Image: UFRGS - Archive

#### Democracy in tension

"Living in a democratic regime does not guarantee that we live democratically," pondered Sousa Santos, when he mentioned that the democratic regime took the scene in the 20th century, however, contradictorily, it was also the century which saw bloody dictatorships and authoritarian regimes and of the two world wars. For him, during this period three definitions for democracy have been established: the *real* democracy, with the universalization of suffrage; the *ideological*, with the elites adapting to the system; and the *utopian*, the desire for a true democracy still unachieved, a radicalization of the understanding of democracy. In his reading, capitalism starts to control democracy, which continues to exist as long as it is functional to this system, creating weaknesses: "With such an emptying of democracy, it can come to seem very much like a dictatorship," he ponders.

Before presenting the "elements for reinvention", Sousa Santos asserted that he is "a tragic optimist" and listed contradictions that attack democracy, such as the globalized aspect of the market facing the continuity of politics in its national status; the logic of the market influencing countries' internal politics; the insertion of autocratic elements in democratic systems; radicalizations in hate politics; the crisis of the institutions and the expansion of individualism; the context of a metric society, with numbers and rankings gaining more value; the colonialism still present nowadays; and others.

#### The reinvention

On the "reinvention of democracy", the Portuguese intellectual points out that: "It makes no sense to restrict democracy to the political sphere; it should be present at school, inside the family, etc. The existing political parties do not seem to be capable, they need to be reinvented for a radicalization of democracy." His speech was also about the necessity of self-criticism for the intellectuals, the universities and for social entities and movements, in an effort to dialogue with other fields of study. And he invited: "Our knowledge and our university make up conformist personalities. And when they are rebellious, they are incompetent rebels. It is time to raise competent rebels!"

In alignment with the proposal of dialogue with other languages and other fields of study, the final part of the conference was the scenic reading of the poem "Sou um criador" ("I'm a creator") from his book "Rap Global"

("Global Rap") together with representatives from social and cultural movements: MC Negra Jaque, Carla Menegaz, Nina Fola, Rafael Rafuagi, Renan Leandro, Diego Kurtz and Atena Beauvoir. The performance was organized by Fabiana Menini. Boaventura took the occasion to promote the second edition of "Rap Global". After the performance, there was an autograph session.

This afternoon's event integrates the cycle of debates "University of the Future", held by the Latin American Institute of Advanced Studies (Instituto Latino-Americano de Estudos Avançados [ILEA]) and by the Inter-municipal Union of Faculty Members of the Federal Institutes of Higher Education in Rio Grande do Sul (ADUFRGS Sindical). UFRGS' President Rui Vicente Oppermann and Vice-President Jane Tutikian were at the opening session, which was also attended by ILEA's director José Vicente Tavares and by ADUFRGS' president and vice-president, Paulo Machado Mors and Lucio Vieira.

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