

2nd OPEN LETTER OF THE COLLECTIVE OF WOMEN VICTIMS OF HARASSMENT, IN RESPONSE TO THE ARGUMENTS PRESENTED BY BOAVENTURA DE SOUSA SANTOS IN HIS PUBLIC DEFENSE

EXPOSING THE VULNERABILITY OF THE ACCUSERS IS NOT PROOF OF INNOCENCE

We present ourselves as a collective of women who have suffered different types of violence as a result of the pattern of abuse of power that has become naturalized in the work teams led by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and considered inevitable by the people who have occupied positions of authority in the *CES* (*Centro de Estudos Sociais* - University of Coimbra) for many years [see our initial letter attached to this one].

Our collective is focused on pushing for the creation of a commission that is focused on the protection of the victims and not on the defense of the aggressors. The necessary investigation of cases must ensure a space where victims can testify without fear of retaliation. We know that power is unequally distributed and that is why many women are silenced.

The response circulated by Boaventura de Sousa Santos to the accusations made by Mapuche Indigenous activist Moira Millán (to which she has also responded - https://www.instagram.com/p/Crbt78YPTZJ/?img_index=1) addresses some of our concerns. We would like to clarify that we do not know the activist in question and have never contacted her. We do, however, take her story very seriously.

If every criticism has the right to a response and every accusation has the right to a defense, it is necessary to break with the academic pact of truth production based on hierarchies that give the stronger side the power to define what is rational and what is irrational, what is probable and what is improbable, what is true and what is a lie, and what are the important questions to ask and, above all to answer.

In the narrative he adopts as proof of his innocence, Boaventura uses a logic of truth production that reproduces the structural problems of the academy: the professor chooses who and what to answer; he defines the terms of the debate; he disqualifies the victim and assumes that his word is more valuable.

In the abusers' defense playbook is the use of evidence of warmth or even friendliness from women after the traumatic abusive behavior they report. Even if the entire email exchange purporting to prove continuity in the relationship between Moira Millán and Boaventura was true (which Moira Millán denies), it does not prove the absence of abuse.

It is common for women to suffer abuse and still be obligated to be polite to the abuser. We all know this because we were also raised to hide our feelings in order to avoid general discomfort, whether at a Christmas dinner or a work meeting. Failure to do so results in classifications well known to the patriarchy and to women who challenge it: insubordinate, conflicted, difficult, emotional, hysterical, crazy, desperate, and selfish.

There are so many possible reasons for maintaining cordiality that we can only give examples: abusers are manipulative and can disguise as insensitivity and lack of empathy what was a rejection of the abuse; the guilt that women historically carry often makes them question what they said, what they wore, how they moved, before they can name what they experienced as violence; the power of the abuser to slander is exponentially greater than the power of the victim to report; abusers can be leaders of projects and work for causes that victims see as more important than their individual plight of suffering.

At the end of his response, Boaventura de Sousa Santos states, "I cannot accept that false accusations are being made against me, as the facts well demonstrate," but the facts he presents can only be understood as proof of innocence by those who have no idea what it is like to suffer harassment in a society that has always known how to protect the perpetrators better than the victims.

“I wish I didn’t have to take legal action to resolve this issue” is the kind of phrase that works in so many situations and that we recognize so well: the threat in a soft, condescending, patriarchal tone. Moira knows that the battle will be hard if she does not give up, and Boaventura hopes that his threat will be enough. He has grown accustomed to this over the course of his life.

First of all, Boaventura assumes that the graffiti that appeared on the walls of Coimbra with accusations of sexual violence referred to the attack on Moira. We all know this is not true. The best known case was the sexual assault of the current Brazilian deputy Isabella Gonçalves, then a young doctoral student at the *CES*. Boaventura erases this case as if it never existed and there was no real complaint.

We know it did exist. But Boaventura is used to define which questions and cases are relevant, as well as the valid and invalid interlocutors, because that is the power that the academy has attributed to a full professor, and it is this validation system that must be questioned.

Boaventura takes as proof of the absence of harassment the fact that his house does not have a security system, as Moira claims. It turns out that it is common in Portugal for buildings that rarely have doormen to be protected by a common door for residents that can be opened from the outside with a code or key. None of this is necessary to exit, but for anyone who knows anything about interculturalism, or who has simply felt unsafe in places where they don’t know the rules, it is easy to understand how these doors could be perceived as a security system for those who come from a very different place.

We insist that all these allegations must be investigated, and we know that the accused have the right to a defense, but it cannot be based on the same rules that have silenced us for so long. The perpetrators do not get to choose the questions they answer, and they do not have the right to choose and (dis)classify the victims.

By trying to defend himself, Boaventura showed that he knows well the rules that protect the patriarchy and that he knows how to use them. He did not

convince us. With this letter, we send a message of solidarity to Moira Millán: we believe you, because we recognize the pattern.

Finally, we remind you that the email address querocontarminhahistoriaem23@gmail.com remains available to all those who have been affected by Boaventura de Sousa Santos' abusive practices and who need a safe space to share their stories.

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