

Brazil: cultural responses to tyranny

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In 1945, a group of writers was reunited in an important meeting called 1o. Congresso Brasileiro de Escritores (The First Brazilian Writer's Conference), in which the authors were discussing themes with a clear and certain objective, that is, they made a public declaration against fascism. The writers defended freedom of thought and an end of authoritarian regimes. It was end of second war, end of Estado Novo, fascist inspired government of Getúlio Vargas, and the beginning of a new era.

Unfortunately, this precious moment was lost in time. Although the public declarations of these writers should be known by everyone today, it is difficult to find people who knew what happened then, and specially to find the book with all the texts of the Conference, a very rare document, carefully preserved today at Fundação Casa Rui Barbosa, in Rio de Janeiro. The fact that this Conference is not often discussed nowadays is not surprising. We do not know much about cultural responses to tyranny in Brazil, and there is a reason for this. In Brazil, we have a serious and efficient politics of forgetting, because collective oblivion is very convenient in a conservative country.

Recently I have made some research, examining what is written in books about Brazilian literature used in schools all over the country, the best-sellers in the didactic field. There have not any meaningful changes in these books in the last 30 years. The criterion to define what is an important author is simply to follow previous canonization. All the contributions universities are giving with research, all purposes to criticize the canon, are not enough to change these books.

For example, the students are learning that José de Alencar was the most important fiction writer in the XIX century before Machado de Assis. This is stated in many books. Because the comments are mostly associated to his role in Nationalism, Alencar was consecrated. We all know today that Alencar was a racist. He defended slavery in the political arena. He has prejudices against women. It's easy to verify this in books such as *Senhora* or *Lucíola*.

The canon, specially as presented by these books to students in regular schools, is ethically indifferent. It is irrelevant to them if Alencar defended prejudices. From the perspective of these books, his contribution to our literature is bigger than any problem caused by his racism. As we see it, students, however, should read him and be exposed, with a passive acceptance, to the values he defended. It is time to think about this and associate literary criticism and ethics.

The title of this article refers to a book by David Foster, *Violence in Argentine literature: cultural responses to tyranny* (FOSTER, 1995). This book, a great example of associating literary criticism and ethics, was extremely important to me, in the first steps of my research project, Literature and Authoritarianism. This project had its beginning last year. Thus, my purposes here are: (1) present, in a synthetic way, partial results of this research; (2) analyze some examples of cultural reactions to authoritarianism, in literature, music and painting; (3) indicate the difference between the way authoritarianism was seen by social sciences in the 70s and how it is seen nowadays.

The project Literature and Authoritarianism is developed at Universidade Federal de Santa Maria, supported by the National Council of Science and Technology (CNPq), with a colleague, Rosani Ketzner Umbach. We are studying conditions of production and reception of literary texts in authoritarian regimes. We know that, when there is no freedom of speech, when institutional censorship works, writers and readers have restricted choices. Prof. Umbach is devoted to the German literature, and I am interested in the Brazilian literature. In our meetings, we try to compare the experiences of Germany and Brazil in the twentieth century.

In Brazil, the problem of censorship is not only restricted to periods known as authoritarian. We had Estado Novo, and the recent military dictatorship. But this problem began earlier. Both literary studies and sociology are at present dedicated to show a line of continuity, with origins in the colonial period. For example, *The Muffled Cries – The writer and Literature in Authoritarian Brazil, 1964-1985*, a book written by Nancy T. Baden, starts with a chapter named "We were born censored". The word "born" is used to emphasize that censorship cannot be seen as a recent fact, but a phenomenon with a strong presence since the very early activities in Portuguese colonization. The chapter starts with a part named "The colonial heritage". In this part, Baden quotes writer João Antonio, who said: "The country has always been censored". Portugal, through the Censura Ultramontana's work, defined what could be accepted as literature, what could be read and known. The systematic action of censorship had an important role in the social definition of aesthetic values (BADEN, 1999).

In social sciences, took shape in the 90s the idea that Brazil was never really a democratic place. Even in periods known officially as democratic, we have had authoritarian institutions, ideologies, and conservative values. When we consider the permanency of these elements, we understand that democracy was and is in Brazil a superficial image.

Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, José Antonio Segatto, Oscar Vilhena Vieira, Emílio Dellasoppa, José Vicente Tavares dos Santos and Cláudia Tirelli developed studies about the Brazilian society history emphasizing the constant presence of authoritarian elements. These elements are associated to violence and reinforcement of social inequalities. Our concept of authoritarianism includes both public and private dimensions. Thus, we call authoritarian a

regime that controls society, manipulates the different ways of political participation of citizens, and restricts the opportunities of popular mobilization. We also call authoritarian the patriarchal hegemony associated to repression mechanisms. Women, black and mulatto people, Jews, gays and lesbians have been victims of these mechanisms for centuries in Brazil.

According to Theodor Adorno, if we have conflicts in social relationships, these will appear in art as formal antagonisms. In the XXth century, some of our most important writers made a choice. Their works are complex, reading them is not an easy task.

One important example is a short story called *Os sobreviventes*, *The survivors*, written by Caio Fernando Abreu and published in 1982, in the book *Morangos mofados*, *Musty strawberries*. 1982 is a transition year. Military dictatorship is officially over, and intellectuals are thinking about new horizons. This short story has nothing optimistic. We can read it as a metonymy of the traumatic effect of dictatorship. Two persons have a dialog. The narrator does not indicate who is talking in each part of this dialog. The reader will have to make himself logical connections between the parts, connections not made by the narrator or by the characters.

In this short story, normal punctuation is suspended. In some parts, lots of words appear in a hallucinated rhythm. “Já li tudo, cara, já tentei macrobiótica psicanálise drogas acupuntura suicídio ioga dança natação cooper astrologia patins marxismo candomblé boate gay ecologia, sobrou só esse nó no peito, agora o que eu faço?” (ABREU: 1985, 15). This list presents options of ways to overcome the trauma. The characters lived under dictatorship, they were in contact with repression, one of them was politically active in underground movements. One woman and one man, they tried to make sex, but were not able to be satisfied, and both found out their preferences. The woman is lesbian, the man is gay, and after this attempt they are still very close, as friends. The narrator assumes one time the voice of the woman, another moment the voice of the man, but he does not tell the reader whenever he changes the reference. As readers, we will find many phrases we can attribute both to the woman or the man. Abreu builds such a narrative structure that to define gender would be a repression against polysemy, ambiguity and human complexity. It is important that we cannot define who is talking in many parts of *The survivors*. Is it the woman? Is it the man? Considering the fact that the woman is lesbian and the man is gay, the ambiguities are multiplied. Some sentences, as “Passa devagar a tua mão na minha cabeça” (p.17) (Put slowly your hand on my head), are written in such a way that one cannot define who said the sentences, and whether was or not emotional intensity in each sentence.

Why are these characters survivors? They survived the terror of dictatorship. They were alive in the 80s. Many people like them were not. Many people like them, with intellectual interests and deep reflections, had been tortured, killed, or had just disappeared, without any trace. The characters survived and they are extremely unhappy. Why is that? There is no sign of a way of life that could make sense. The times showed how vulnerable, how weak and uncertain their lives are. The violence of the past produced a deep doubt about what to do. There is nothing to be done with the hard pain they feel. The woman says what the problem is: I am not confused, I am lucid, and there is no way out.

She says: “As pessoas se transformavam em cadáveres decompostos à minha frente, minha pele era triste e suja, as noites não terminavam nunca, ninguém me tocava, mas eu reagi, despirei, e cadê a causa, cadê a luta” (p.16) (People became decomposed cadavers in front of me, my skin was sad and dirty, nights never ended, nobody touched me, but I reacted, I got my mind made up, and where is the cause, where is the fight). The times of dictatorship are seen in a melancholic perspective. All the destruction turned to nothing. When the character has strength to fight once more, there is no way to do it.

Someone can think there is a contradiction in this behavior. If in 1982 the dictatorship is over, why is the woman sad because she cannot fight? What is her enemy? Why

is she so upset? There are two things to consider. One is the painful fact that dead people will not come back. The cadavers are cadavers. Abreu's short story goes against the big movement of memory politics in Brazil.

While he is writing to make people remember the corpses and pain through his fiction, many politicians and intellectuals are working to make everybody forget. And, mostly, they were successful. Nowadays in Brazil, people born in the seventies and eighties know almost nothing about the complexity and the heritage of dictatorship. The second point is presented by Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, José Antonio Segatto, and other social science researchers: when dictatorship is over this does not mean the authoritarian regime is over. Truly, what happens is a superficial change. The authoritarian values and institutions continue to work in democracy. 1982 is not an year to celebrate. The problems were not solved. The woman asks where the fight is because she knows, as we do, that the enemy is still here.

Regina Dalcastagné, in the first chapter of her book about literature and dictatorship in Brazil, says – “they are still here, smiling at us, the knaves”. It is revolting to observe how our memory politics is developed to make us all forget responsibilities and state decisions. Her book, called “Pain space”, is marked by indignation with the politics of forgetting in Brazil.

The melancholy in *The survivors* is revolutionary. The discontinuity is a strong expression of the loss of references of the protagonists' generation. Melancholy tells us about pain in History. The human part in History. Not the numbers, the guns or the winners, but the human part, with all the pain, confusion, insecurity, doubts.

Why is this melancholic consciousness associated to sexuality? These characters are not defined as outcasts. The woman works in a multinational enterprise. Both of them read a lot, and went to disco dancing in the seventies. Their interest in drugs does not make them outcasts, this aspect appears as a generation sign. In *The survivors*, to be gay and lesbian is related to having a painful point of view. As in many other texts written by Caio Fernando Abreu, to be gay in Brazil in the eighties is connected to fighting against repression – both public and private repression. Being gay can mean to have at least two choices: fight against repression or accept it. These characters are in a third place: they go on without faith. They are not able to define who the enemy is, who are we fighting against. According to Pinheiro, it is hard to define the enemy because authoritarian repression is everywhere. How can you fight against the whole system, after military dictatorship is gone? What about trust, security? The woman asks “tem coisa mais destrutiva que insistir sem fé nenhuma?” (p.17) (is there a most destructive thing than going on without any faith at all). Who is the enemy now? At first, the enemy is trauma – it is the painful past, which has not been understood. And also the enemy is the system itself, with small and big strategies to preserve conservative values.

We can see images of similar problems in the works of an important Brazilian singer called Marina Lima. Most of her works were recorded in the eighties. She chooses works from different composers, and also records songs made by herself and her brother, poet Antonio Cícero. In 1986, Brazilians heard “Pra começar” – “Pra começar / quem vai colar / os tais caquinhos / do velho mundo / pátrias, famílias, religiões / e preconceitos / quebrou não tem mais jeito” (To begin with / who will glue / in the little pieces of old world / nations, families, religions and prejudices / once they're broken, there is no way at all). It was the opening theme of a soap opera presented by Globo Network, called Roda de Fogo (Fire circle), with a story about corruption, with some vague references to the dictatorship. Actress Eva Wilma played a woman who recognizes the man who tortured her in the past. “Pra começar” is a song about the impossibility to reconstruct the past. It also comments the breakdown of institutions and prejudices. The last sentences of the song are “descubra de verdade o que você ama / que o mundo pode ser seu” (find out what you really love/ cause the world can be

yours). One notices that the demolition of institutions and prejudices is associated to a revolutionary impulse to possess the world.

In her career as singer and composer, Marina Lima made choices that took her away from the mass media preferences. Her works in 90s, even better than the first ones, did not sell well. Her 1998 album, *Pierrot do Brasil*, has not had an impact on the media. Lima composed, without any partner, the song *Pierrot*. Some of its lines are:

Aqui cada cidade é uma ilha, sem laços, traços, sem trilha
E o medo a nos rodear
Então: bem vindos à minha terra, feita de homens em guerra
E outros loucos pra amar

Here every city is an island, without ties, traces, paths
And fear is around us
So: welcome to my place, composed by men in war
And other ones crazy to love

This is one of the strongest definitions of contemporary Brazil. The progressive fragmentation, the fear, the men in war, and the other ones crazy to love are a not harmonic ensemble of images, which marked by conflicts. As “Pra começar” showed, there is no way to make a harmonic unity of all this. In “Pierrot”, there is no space for synthesis. Taking Adorno’s theoretical perspective, this song tells us about anxiety, absence of references and omnipresence of fear. The expression “minha terra”, an old heritage from Gonçalves Dias, who wrote in “Canção do exílio”, “Minha terra tem palmeiras / onde canta o sabiá”, an idealistic image of perfect nature, is presented in the song with a rhyme with “guerra” (war). The rhyme articulates the two elements. My place is war. Brazil is defined by its conflicts and violence. No wonder that “Pierrot” was not a radio hit. The media, in the nineties, has become more and more conservative. Lyrics like those are considered too deep, inappropriate to be marketed.

How can Brazilian culture develop reactions against tyranny? How can it go against the politics of forgetting, bring lights to the darkness of dictatorship, and criticize social conservative values, prejudices, still present in our society? The subject is not only academic, but also a media problem. In the same CD, *Pierrot do Brasil*, Marina Lima records one of the most ostensive gay songs ever written in the country, *Na minha mão (In my hand)*. It’s a gay power hymn. She is responsible for the most important bisexual Brazilian song – *Não estou bem certa, I’m not really sure*, 1991. In Marina Lima, the social criticism is associated to a rupture with ideological conservative values, specially with patriarchal and heterosexual patterns. Verbalizing ideas from a gay point of view is an important way to fight. Marina Lima is famous for her record, in 1989, of Antonio Carlos Jobim – Vinícius de Moraes hit *Garota de Ipanema (Girl from Ipanema)*. Her interpretation has vocal details emphasizing the erotic interest.

One of the most important moves of her rupture was recording *Mesmo que seja eu, Even if it were me*, written by Roberto Carlos and Erasmo Carlos. She recorded it twice, once in the eighties and once in the nineties. This song was previously known by the recording made by its composer, Erasmo Carlos.

The lyrics are about a singer, whose voice is on the radio. He tells to the listener, defined as a woman, “sozinha no silêncio do seu quarto” (lonely in the silence of your room), to listen to him loudly – “aumenta o rádio” – and give him her hand – “me dê a mão”. The lyrics end with an advice: “Você precisa de um homem pra chamar de seu, mesmo que esse homem seja eu” (You need a man to call yours, even if this man were me). Since the woman is

very lonely, needing the presence of a man, ironically the voice of the singer can substitute the presence of a real man, and the woman is allowed to say: this man, on the radio, this is my man. This was a trivial song until Marina Lima recorded it.

The singer took away the most naive parts of the lyrics. To start with, she sings as if she were whispering. When she talks about loneliness, the voice becomes louder. Marina introduces a scream – vem! (come on!). And she repeats many times the lyrics - You need a man to call yours, even if this man would be me. The listener, in this case, is led to a new perspective. The man to call yours can be a woman. The gender limits are destroyed. Love is beyond these limits. To be a man or a woman now is not the point. To be loved is the point. The great thing about this is not only the perspective, anti-patriarchal and pro-gay and lesbian. Most important is to consider the origins of the material used. Roberto Carlos is known as a famous composer and singer. He was known as the king of Brazilian music, composing and singing conventional love songs and Catholic hymns, very often in partnership with Erasmo Carlos, during the dictatorship years. He sold lots of records.

Turning Roberto Carlos's song upside down, Marina Lima made an amazing gesture of social criticism. She treated the king of conventional love songs as an instrument to diffuse an intense erotic and gay perspective. In Brazil, this is really strong. And it is also somewhat of a contradiction. Roberto Carlos never wrote a gay line. His success is associated to his traditional values. On the other hand, Marina Lima is interested in bringing contradictions to the highlight.

Pseudo-blues, a song written by Nico Rezende and Jorge Salomão, says "O certo é incerto" (the certain is uncertain). The sense of contradiction is as constant as the presence of insecurity and fear, in songs like *Pessoa*, *Virgem*, *§ Cara*, *Admito que perdi*. When a possible solution is defined, which is rare, it points out the affective distances between persons and articulates it with a political perspective. This is what we find in the lyrics of *Fulgás*, a hit from the beginning of her career: *Você me abre seus braços / e a gente faz um país* (You open your arms to me / and we build a country).

Nowadays, Marina Lima is neither a central figure in the media, nor in academic discussions. Her more recent album, *Sissi na sua*, includes a quotation of a beautiful poem written by Carlos Drummond de Andrade in 1940, the times of fascism and Estado Novo, called *Os ombros suportam o mundo* (*The shoulders carry the world*). These are the sentences recorded:

Chega um tempo em que não se diz mais: meu Deus.
Tempo de absoluta depuração.
Tempo em que não se diz mais meu amor.
Porque o amor resultou inútil.

Alguns, achando bárbaro o espetáculo,
Prefeririam (os delicados) morrer.
Chegou um tempo em que não adianta morrer.
Chegou um tempo em que a vida é uma ordem.
A vida apenas, sem mistificação.

There comes a time when we don't say My God anymore.
Time of absolute depuration.
Time when we don't say My Love anymore.
Because love became useless

Some people, thinking the spectacle barbarian,

Would prefer (the delicate ones) to die.
There comes a time when it is useless to die.
There comes a time when living is an order.
Just life, without mystification.

Why say these sentences to the audience in the present year? Why to record this poem now? When Drummond wrote this, it was a strong reaction against dehumanization developed by political leaders. There was fascism, Mussolini, second war, Hitler, Estado Novo, Getúlio Vargas. Why now? According to Pinheiro's description of Brazilian authoritarianism and to Adorno's aesthetic theory, there are some similarities between the period Drummond wrote the poem and the present day, when Marina Lima records it.

Contemporary Brazil is marked by results of the social process of history. Violence had in Brazil a central role. As Karl Scholhammer says, violence has a constitutive role. It is the foundation of all our experience. Renato Janine Ribeiro affirms that we have two collective traumas in our history. The first one is the violence of exploratory colonization. The colonial period was not conceived as a planned system to structure a harmonic society. Everything, in this period, happened depending on profits obtained by the dominating group. The second trauma was slavery, extended to the Empire. Slavery is responsible for violence being made common place. We learned to watch black slaves mutilated and killed in the streets, to the eyes of the audience, and now we look at the violence around us as something trivial.

In Ribeiro's perspective, the concept of trauma is important. Trauma is an experience of aggression that we cannot have conditions to overcome. It blocks up free expression. The pain of a traumatic event is so hard, that is not possible to verbalize it properly. An ambiguous behavior is created. On one hand, there is an effort to remember the past, because the pain of the past must be known by the next generations. On the other hand, a person who had a trauma avoids the new meeting with the episode, because the memory of pain is hard to stand. It is like feeling all over again. Ribeiro takes trauma in a collective sense. As a population with search for identity, Brazilian society, specially the low classes, is not prepared to deal with the past. It is easier for the new generations to sing National Anthem at school, on Independence Day, than to be aware of who we really are.

Most of the times, when we watch TV, or when we read history books made for schools, the image of the country is positive or neutral. Reading Caio Fernando Abreu or listening to "*Pierrot*", Marina Lima's song, takes us to entirely different perspective. This has nothing positive or neutral. Fear, frustration, pain and sadness are the elements of a melancholic state of mind that anyone can feel. We lived through the violence of colonization, we lived the slavery, and as a society, because of educational and cultural politics – specially the contributions of dictatorship times, like Gustavo Capanema's work in Estado Novo – we have learned not to remember. As a forgetful society, we let the nightmare of trauma come again and terrify us everyday. Torture is still present in many police stations all around the country. Racism is still trivial. Social inequality still confronts our tired eyes.

Voices like the ones created by Caio Fernando Abreu and Marina Lima are important to make this forgetful society remember. That's why it is very important Marina's recording of Drummond's poem. We are living in a time when even suicide will not change things. It is useless. No transcendence, no mystification, no I love you, no Oh my God. Just plain life.

The aesthetic choices made by Drummond, recaptured now by the singer Marina Lima, are articulated in a way we cannot think in an entire, absolute constitution of subjectivity. Gerd Bornheim, in an important article, tells us, in brief words, what is necessary

to get there. What are the elements required from an individual to become a citizen? Bornheim, in his historical research about the development of modern patterns of individuality, defines the following list. The first element is autonomy. An individual should be able to think about himself independently of external models. The second, valorization of work. The modern human being believes that with his work he can get to a higher level in social relationships. The third is private property. Becoming a citizen means, in modern times, to say – this is mine, I am identified with this. Two other elements are present on the list. More than the choice between good and evil, the human being should be able to deal with freedom to act and think in modern times. This freedom is, above all, freedom of thought. Nobody should define what one person wants to think. The last element is a position in capitalism. To become a citizen, an individual should deal with money and understand what it means in economic and social relationships.

We could use different categories, let us take Bornheim's ones as reference. If a country is developed with violence and slavery as common place activities, the dominant values eliminate some of Bornheim's elements. A slave has no right to autonomy, his work has no recognition, it is a result of a violent exploitation. The slave has no freedom to act and think. No money at all. No private property. If violence and repression are elements systematically used by the State to control society, it is not true that we have freedom to act and to think. If inequality is conserved when we change political leaders, because of the authoritarian values, then the individuals cannot develop themselves in capitalism, or obtain private property. Poverty tends to grow, and the social structure to consolidate.

The elites, in Brazil, most of the times, were and are devoted to making sure the domination mechanisms are successful. Above all, educational and cultural politics are an important part of these mechanisms. This results in that the masses are excluded from the social important decisions. Mostly, the individuals in the masses are treated as pieces in a machine, as numbers in a mechanical system. They don't obtain the conditions to become a real human beings.

Brazil, as we see it, is a country where mostly the individuals cannot become able to build their own subjectivities. Atrophy of citizenship is the historical victory of the elites, making sure no great change can happen. Nothing at all. The efficiency of this authoritarian system depends on cooptation of intellectuals, a strong bureaucracy, military power and sense of social order (SCHWARTZMAN: 1988; LAMOUNIER: 1981).

Brazilian modernization improved urban and technological development and changed economic strategies. It happened within an elite politics, with a logic of domination. This expanded the low income class, and improved dehumanization. In the masses, the individual is fragile in front of the State. Between criminal violence, associated to poverty, and institutional violence, practiced by the State, Brazilian population has seen modernization with anxiety, has been submitted to ideological domination justified as an instrument to sustain the social order.

According to Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, one of the traces of the Brazilian case is the extraordinary longevity of authoritarian culture and practices, independently of changes of political regimes. Gerard Lebrun showed that here never happened a definitive rupture with previous regimes. The colonial absolutism changed simply into the elite's absolutism. The hierarchy between dominator and dominated Survived from the times of slavery: the civil order has changed, but in an unequal and disarticulated way. The company owner usually keeps many traces of the slave owner, and the free worker has lots of traces of slavery. Brazilian case shows that authoritarianism can persist even with democratic movements and constitutional changes. (PINHEIRO, 1991)

José Antonio Segatto says that there is a consensus in historiography now, considering our historic process has been very excluding and authoritarian. The State, in Brazil, independently of the compositions assumed in different moments (Monarchy and Republic), has had in its history an essential point: it imposes itself to the civil society. We never had revolutionary changes involving all parts of the national society. On the other hand, we had reforms, always evaluated and controlled and by high political levels, excluding the masses from the decisions. The dominant class has always wanted to rearticulate and reorganize the political domination and capital accumulation, to control social contradictions, and to hinder subversions (SEGATTO, 1999). Similar positions are taken by Oscar Vilhena Vieira, Emílio Dellasopa, José Vicente Tavares dos Santos and Cláudia Tirelli. All of them think that authoritarianism and violence are constant elements in Brazilian society history.

We will take again, as theoretical orientation, some ideas from the Frankfurt School. Adorno says in *Negative dialectics*, that History has an antagonistic reason. Its basis is not a continued process with winners, but conflicts. When we see History with Adorno's perspective, we have to accept that his dialectics does not come to a totality, as Hegelian does. In Adorno, dialectics does not have synthesis.

The aesthetic form, in this case, cannot be constructed as harmonic and ordered. Harmony would express synthesis, the overcome of conflicts. Formal disorder and fragmentation are necessary to make sure social conflicts are not just something that happened in the past. Their weight and effects are still around us. Promises of social harmony have never come true. Conflicts are still going on.

As *The survivors* does not have a happy end, the step to overcome conflicts, some other artists are devoted to expressing how synthesis never happened, harmony was and is not a reality. According to Walter Benjamin, we should look at History as an accumulation of catastrophes and ruins. That is exactly what the characters created by Abreu do.

There are other ways culture can express these difficulties. In some pictures, like *Família* (Family), by Lasar Segall, *Criança morta* (Dead Child), by Portinari, *Convite à greve* (Invitation to strike), by Goeldi, and *Tudo te é vazio e inútil* (Everything is empty and useless to you), by Iberê Camargo, made in different moments of XXth century, we see some important characteristics. One is the tension on the limits of human being. We can hardly say what a human being is. The space and the body have points of hybrid connection, one goes through the limits of the other. Following Rodrigo Naves's reflection, this is a "difficult form", a fragmented conception. We cannot classify these paintings, describe them with the usual resources provided by art history and criticism. There is an ambiguous point of suspension, between abstract and figurative, between presence and absence of definition. This tension on the limits of human being is an expression of the impracticability of the individuals to become absolute citizens, human beings in control of their subjectivities, their thoughts and actions.

The second point to be observed are the eyes. In these four pictures, we cannot have any secure definition about the eyes. Are these people blind? What is the object of interest of perception? Are the eyes empty, are eyes really there? What are they seeing? In which direction? With which feelings? The eyes are very important to define a subjectivity. Some studies in Brazil have proved that a good portrait can be a strong expression of power, class position, an instrument do define values. Our cases are not conventional portraits. Our perception finds out a strange pair of eyes in all these paintings, and we are demanded to ask ourselves what they can be looking at. After that, if we think about it, we ask ourselves what we can look at in Brazil. In an authoritarian country, to see is not easy or trivial. Seeing is a political act. There are many eyes in Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poetry. All these uncommon eyes are keys to the limits of perception, the repression, the control of knowledge.

Probably the strongest way to think about atrophy of citizenship in Brazil is thinking about torture. The creative process in Caio Fernando Abreu, Marina Lima, Iberê Camargo and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, many times, reminds aspects of the authentic language of victims. These people have been connected to traumatic experience. Talking about themselves, the ambiguity comes to language – remembering and forgetting, understanding and losing sense, trying to define a human being and fragmenting references. The point of view of a torture victim is something next to a sentence written by Walter Benjamin: “From the death’s point of view, life is the production of a corpse”.

When these people talk, two destructions are shown to the reader: the violence done to the body, in accordance to orders of the State; and the fragmentation of language, time references, and self-consciousness references, in the discursive flow.

“Vieram então socos de todos os lados. Insistiram na pergunta, com socos na boca do estômago e do tórax. Mal podendo falar, eu disse que meu nome estava na carteira de identidade. Aumentou a violência. Ligaram fios e vieram os choques. Fiquei muda daí para a frente. Quando paravam os choques, vinham as perguntas. Mas meu silêncio continuava. Eu só pensava que ali estava terminando a minha vida (...) Minha indignação cresceu violentamente quando resolveram queimar minha vagina e meu útero. (...) Não sei quanto tempo isso durou nem quantas vezes aconteceu esse ritual macabro.” (Relatório Azul, 307).

“Then punches came from everywhere. They insisted on the question, with punches in stomach and thorax. Barely speaking, I said that my name was on Identity Card. The violence increased. They connected wires and shocks came. I became mute then. When shocks stopped, questions were asked. But my silence stood still. I only thought that there was my life coming to its end. (...) My indignation increased when they decided to burn my vagina and my uterus. (...) I don’t know how long this sinister ritual took and often it took place.”

“Você nu, levando pancada, batendo com a cabeça na parede e tentando desloca o seu pescoço; depois foi derramado álcool no corpo todo com ameaças de incendiar. (...) Era um choque muito forte. (...) Daí perdemos a noção de tempo, não sei a que horas foi isso. (...) Mas você perde totalmente, não sabe se é de noite ou de dia, (...) Depois levam você para uma cela que é tipo uma geladeira. (...) Uma vez eu desmaiei numa dessas celas, tinha um ar muito gelado. Quando ouvi um deles gritando que desligasse senão eu viraria picolé, mas eu já tinha perdido o sentido.” (Memórias do silêncio, 122-4)

“You naked, being punched, beating your head in the wall and trying to move your neck; then there was alcohol in hole body with menaces to put fire (...) There was a very strong shock (...) Then we lost the notion of time, I don’t know what time that was. (...) But you lose completely, you don’t know whether it is night or day (...) then they take you to a cell that seems to be a refrigerator (...) Once I passed out in one of these cells, there was a very freezing air. When I heard one of them shouting to

turn it off, or I would turn to ice cream, but I already had lost consciousness”.

These people lost the conditions to talk about the past clearly. They were exposed to a kind of violence which is responsible for the reduction of a human being to a dimension where it is not possible to deal with time, space, the others, or even self-consciousness. In both speeches, we see doubts about time - *I don't know how long this sinister ritual took, Then we lost the notion of time, I don't know what time that was.*

The psychological effects of physical violence are heavy and complex. Punches, shocks and imprisonment take the human being to limit. According to Maren and Marcelo Vinar, in their book *Exile and torture*, the tortured loses the necessary definitions to keep one's ego. That is why, in the second example, the individual talks about himself not using ME, but using YOU - *You naked, being punched, beating your head on the wall and trying to move your neck.* There are no more conditions to preserve a subjectivity, because since, body and mind are deeply connected, and once the senses of the body are lost, the senses of mind become very obscure. It is necessary for the individual, to conceive himself as a complete image, to use the word YOU. This word both marks a distance between him and himself, an internal fragmentation, and causes an identification between the listener and the victim. We think about ourselves in the same situation, we think about the unthinkable.

The worst part in the first example is *My indignation increased when they decided to burn my vagina and my uterus.* It's not only the victim's life losing sense; also the possibility to generate other lives, motherhood, is destroyed in this violent attack. This is, for the victim, the painful part.

In the second example, we should notice the contradiction, coming naturally in discourse. *Once I passed out in one of these cells, there was a very freezing air. When I heard one of them shouting to turn it off, or I would turn to ice cream, but I already had lost consciousness.* If he already lost the senses, how could it be possible for him to listen to one of them shouting? This is not only a time discontinuity, but also a logic impossibility. Speeches of tortured victims are very often characterized by elements like these. The person is not able to tell us what happened in a logical sense. What could we expect? Torture is not an experience we should expect acceptance of. The perplexity is necessary, because it is the resistance we have against triviality. Torture cannot be trivial at all; if it does, we accept that it could happen all the time. As when mutilating and killing slaves in public places could be also trivial, as it was in the XIXth century. Sustaining perplexity, we still feel – this should not happen again.

The traumas in the past of the Brazilian society, colonial violence, slavery, the heritages of dictatorships, conservative institutions, prejudices, are still around us. Trauma, as we define, is something we cannot talk clearly about. It is not able of being represented. Collective traumas are not understood by the society who lived through them. Brazilian contemporary society, doped by the media and a very conservative cultural and educational politics, does not know, as a whole, what to do to make changes. The political system is inappropriate for the masses. By now, there is not possible, as it was in the early 40s or in the 70s, to define the enemy and to dream with a new government to turn all the things upside down, to make radical changes. In the 70s, the social scientists, including Juan Linz, O'Donnell and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, published, specially through Editora Paz e Terra, texts to explain how Brazil could make deep changes. It was simple, by the way: we should substitute a democratic regime for an authoritarian one. Social scientists in the 90s, as Paulo Sergio Pinheiro, Segatto and others I mentioned, do not agree with this. Now we know that democratic regimes can be very authoritarian and violent, even with elections and freedom to create political lines. In last ten years, Brazil has known lots of barbarian acts, not

punished by the law, some of them even promoted by the public system. Brazil is a champion in the violation of human rights.

The cultural responses to this situation are very often ambiguous and melancholic. Ambiguous, because, as the character of Caio Abreu's story says, where is the fight? We cannot define an enemy and go on. The whole system is contaminated. As the lyrics of *Pierrot* express, fear is around us, men are in war, how can we move against it? As the paintings of Segall and Iberê Camargo show, what are people looking at? What can our perception see at all? We should fight, but all the conditions had been taken away from us: perception, security, a definition of an enemy. Without these, we fade out, as negative dialectics indicates – we cannot move to a synthetic harmony, conflicts only becomes more and more complex. In our History, catastrophes and ruins are still being accumulated.

Melancholy is related to a feeling of loss that we cannot overcome. Tortured victims are deeply melancholic. They lost time, language, the possibility to say I am – they lost everything necessary to try to become a citizen. As a traumatized collectivity, and also a forgetful collectivity, Brazilian society has no conditions to overcome the pain historically accumulated. At some level, it is as if the population has been tortured for centuries by elites, and cannot talk clearly about history. There is no *Bildung* in Brazilian society: we are not a collectivity who overcomes limits, solves contradictions, to attain maturity.

Artists like Caio Fernando Abreu, Marina Lima and Iberê Camargo take ambiguity and melancholy as creative resources. According to Adorno's position, they are producing very important art, because the perplexity they produce in us can be associated to a perplexity pointed towards reality. That is how, nowadays, it is possible to fight. These cultural responses to authoritarian values are important to avoid the invigoration of tyranny.

Marina Lima's decision to record Carlos Drummond de Andrade's poem this year is a sign of a complex movement of reevaluation of the past. Although fascism and Estado Novo are part of the 40s, the fear, insecurity and atrophy of citizenship they promoted are still here. Torture is still here. Fear is around us. Melancholy can be a revolutionary way to contemplate reality. It takes us out from the condition of unconsciousness and takes us to a very healthy perplexity.

Nota do autor

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