



RESPONSES TO DICTATORSHIP, IN AND OUT OF LITERARY TEXTS

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Abstract: This essay aims to reflect on the most evident consequences of the dictatorship period on the cultural arena of Brazil, mainly focusing on literature. It briefly introduces, in dialogue with other authors, the legacy writers, the publishing market and readership received in the past decades, going beyond the censorship and the regime's acts of explicit repression. Specifically, the essay seeks to broach how this legacy can be translated in terms of literary construction, in the current state of Brazilian narrative, including the lyrical approach.

Keywords: Dictatorship legacy. Cultural responses to military repression. Contemporary Brazilian literature. Lyrical prose.

1 Introduction

The paths that contemporary Brazilian literature have been taking are much discussed in literary studies today. Plurality, heterogeneity, disruption, loneliness and the predominance of subjectivities in prose narrative are all topics usually found when it comes to debating the most recent trends of literature in Brazil.

The most common parameters in this discussion are linked to literary historiography, to great artistic movements that have always marked studies such as these, as guidelines with very distinct features: Baroque, Arcadism, Symbolism, Modernism, to name a few. The prevailing historical background focused on the idea of progressing in time and generations is usually a basis for comparison in literary studies – the discipline is accustomed to methodological approaches influenced by history.

To scholar and writer Carlos Felipe Moisés (2001, p. 162), for example, after the second half of the 20th century, nothing could remain the same in Brazilian literature. The supposed collapse of the concept of History brought, as a consequence, the impossibility of seeing literature according to a traditional linearity, conceived as a matter of the succession of generations. Contemporary criticism should be open to several *types* of history, to accompany the characteristic subjectivities of our times.

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In the field of the novel, fragmentary styles have generated several classifications for the strongest tendencies that could be recognized, for instance the journalistic, criminal, memorial, intimate (*intimista*, in Portuguese), regionalist-historical, satirical, and those related to mass media effects; as Flora Sussekind (1993) and Malcolm Silverman (2000) have pointed out. Sussekind even remarks on the proximity between prose narrative and essays, during the 1980s, a tendency Karl Erik Schollhammer calls “novel-essay” (*romance-ensaio*) – he indicates Silviano Santiago’s novel *Em Liberdade*, from 1981, as an example.

In this propagated moment of crisis, it seems to be difficult to go deeper into the haze to try to summarise the influence of the dictatorship period on Brazilian literature. This specific influence brought consequences for Brazilian culture as a whole, and has been studied by several scholars, with some excellent conclusions that need to be shared – even if briefly – along with some of its consequences over the literary construction.

2 Apathy, growth, adaptation

To concisely review the dictatorship and its effects over cultural life in Brazil at the time, it is worth remembering two emblematic texts from the period. “Vazio cultural” and “Falta de ar”, both by the journalist Zuenir Ventura, published in 1971 in *Visão* (an important weekly magazine with a critical editorial line), are until today regarded and cited as relevant portraits of the cultural atmosphere of the time. The texts – and a series of others following this theme – were based on opinion surveys of cultural producers. The panorama was grim, with quantity winning over quality, an absence of questioning in culture, a drop in sales of reading materials, a brain drain; all leading to pessimistic forecasts of the Brazilian cultural future (GASPARI; HOLLANDA; VENTURA; 2000).

One could mistakenly think that the main causes of these problems were the censorship and the Institutional Act n.5 (enacted in 1968), factors that in the end were always in the spotlight, causing in many artists, amongst other sequelae, self-censorship – a symptom that, for some authors, remains current. Nonetheless, the chief shift, perhaps not so evident at first sight, was Brazil’s entrance into cultural industrialization. Ventura (2000, p. 41) narrates:

Quase sempre sem levar em consideração que nos últimos sete anos o Brasil se afirmou através da franca adoção do modelo capitalista de desenvolvimento e que esse modelo determina formas peculiares de cultura, o nosso processo cultural ainda se desenvolve hibridamente: não se libertou completamente dos resquícios artesanais das épocas anteriores e vai incorporando características de uma cultura típica dos países industrializados. Sem ainda uma clara tomada de consciência de que vivemos o fim do velho liberalismo, do paternalismo e do mecenato, a nossa cultura se volta – como os operários se voltavam contra as máquinas depois da



Revolução Industrial – contra uma realidade que lhe exige novo comportamento, um comportamento subordinado às implacáveis leis do mercado. (GASPARI; HOLLANDA; VENTURA; 2000, p. 48)

Brazil's move into the internationalization of capital was a key economic facet of dictatorship that had a huge effect on the social and cultural sphere. To achieve this goal, the nation underwent intense planning and rationalization to create a modern society based within capitalist development. This led to several measures within the administrative and governmental area, having an effect in the cultural field. As Renato Ortiz writes,

A partir de 1964 são baixadas inúmeras leis, decretos-leis, portarias, que disciplinam e organizam os produtores, a produção e a distribuição dos bens culturais – regulamentação da profissão de artista e de técnico, obrigatoriedade de longas e curtas-metragens brasileiros, portarias regularizando o incentivo financeiro às atividades culturais, etc. (1985, p. 88)

Behind all the standardization, there was also another strong component: national integration, or, as Renato Ortiz puts it, “unidade na diversidade”, an *ideological formula* that condenses “duas dimensões: a variedade das culturas e a unidade do nacional” (ORTIZ, 1985, p. 93).

Renato Ortiz also accomplishes an excellent analysis of the overlap between the Doctrine of National Security, the ideologies of syncretism and homogenization through cultural products, and the importance to the military government of conserving Brazilian cultural patrimony – meaning here tradition, a set of national values to be safeguarded. The boom of Brazil's television networks can be recognized within this same strategic period.

With this complex situation briefly understood, we can look to the amount of cultural production at the time, increasing our view to all cultural areas: cinema, theatre and literature. Specifically, in the editorial production Zuenir Ventura (2000) tells us that despite the established law of previous censorship to books and booklets in the year of 1970, the publishing market grew with new titles, benefiting from the increasing level of literacy and the expansion of the school system. However, he informs us that the majority of new publications were related to erotic and other genres for entertainment (GASPARI; HOLLANDA; VENTURA; 2000, p. 102), besides didactic books and translations. There was even a proposal of the creation of a public institution destined to manage a better distribution of books, the “Embraliveiros”.

On the other hand, every publication out of these parameters – for instance, books what were judged to have left-wing characteristics – were considered dangerous, and



therefore, placed under suspicion. Sandra Reimão (2011) points out that the hardest period in censorship of books was between 1975 and 1980 (under General Ernesto Geisel presidency), when 50% of the submitted books were blocked. In contrast, one curious aspect about the censorship of books during the dictatorship is that, from 1964 until the AI-5 promulgation in 1968, there was no normalization in the repression, leading to several confused acts of seizure in an indiscriminate way, but conversely the situation provided an opportunity to publish some of the most interesting titles that were critical of the regime, such as *O ato e o fato*, by Carlos Heitor Cony (from 1964), and *Quarup*, by Antonio Callado (from 1967) (REIMÃO, 2011, p. 20).

This very brief discussion of the panorama of cultural life during the dictatorship attempts to mark crucial points that even now may affect literary production. I agree with authors as Zuenir Ventura, Renato Ortiz, and Tania Pellegrini, that I introduce here, when it comes to understanding the impact of the regime beyond censorship, procedures of repression and the Institutional Act n.5 (AI-5), always cited as the main harmful measures during the dictatorship. The construction of a new commercial market for culture, within a wider industrial basis, focused more on cultural goods than artistic development, and we may say it caused many consequences for the artists' creations, including a kind of apathy and bewilderment, followed by efforts of adaptation, creating new styles or even works of counterculture.

In view of this insertion of art into a new broader commercial context, and as parallel to institutional repression, self-censorship began to develop a major role. In one interesting observation, Renato Ortiz specifies that “são censuradas as peças teatrais, os filmes, os livros, mas não o teatro, o cinema ou a indústria editorial. O ato repressor atinge a especificidade da obra, mas não a generalidade da sua produção” (ORTIZ, 1985, p. 89). Censorship and self-censorship are the same issue, according to Zuenir Ventura: “As dificuldades desse choque têm produzido os mais variados efeitos na criação e nos criadores dos últimos tempos: desde a euforia cínica até a apatia quase quietista, passando pelo triunfalismo irresponsável ou pelo derrotismo apocalíptico.” (GASPARI; HOLLANDA; VENTURA; 2000, p. 65)

And so far it seems that the consequences of these reactions are still developing. In literature, the relationship between authors, editors and the market, guided by market forces, is still a controversial point when it comes to discussing the literary arena from the point of view of quality (from a critical perspective: what is considered good literature). Bringing the issue to today and only viewing the situation from the outside, the parameters of the cultural



market – now totally settled – seem to overwhelm and overly influence the writers’ creative work.

Silviano Santiago (1989) points out that, for example, the submission of Brazilian literature production today operates within the parameters of commercialization. Writers must follow the laws of the market to feel they are participating in the literary scenario – which means having a literary agent, being published by big publishing houses, publishing in the right magazines, participating in big literary fairs. The contemporary writer needs to have first an image, before a literary voice itself.

This problematic situation is not exclusively Brazil’s in a capitalist world, for sure, but the context becomes dramatic if the reading market is also analysed: there is a decrease of 9% in readership, from 2008 to 2012 – in a country where only half the population can read and understand a book.¹ In Brazil, with more than 190 million inhabitants, just 88 million (under half) actively read, and the annual average is four books per person. The main reason for this is not only related to prices or accessibility, but to lack of interest.

If an overview of literature – in any nation – is considered within a context of books, readers and writers, the absence of one element can be harmful to the entire chain, when it comes to attributing literary values. The reader’s feedback does not have the influence it should in a *healthy* literary panorama.

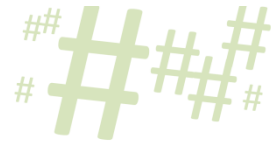
The journalist and writer Marcelo Coelho associates the literary movement with the trajectory of Brazilian cinema, especially during the 1980’s (the official political opening process continued until 1984), when the industry faced the need to adapt to market expectations.

Talvez o problema seja que a urbanização do país tenha levado a uma orfandade em relação aos grandes modelos literários do século – Graciliano Ramos, Guimarães Rosa –, e a necessidade de “ficção urbana” encontra mais facilmente modelos no cinema norte-americano do que qualquer outra coisa, já que, em geral, a experiência que o escritor de classe média tem da vida urbana é a de ir de carro até o cinema ou a de ser assaltado. (COELHO, 2001, p. 17)

3 In the literary construction

If we face this point of the industrial market consequences for literature using an inward perspective, the effects can be felt within literary construction. As mentioned,

¹ Data from the third edition of the research *Retratos da Leitura no Brasil*, launched in March 2012 by Instituto Pró-Livro.



plurality, diversity, rupture, solitude and the preponderance of subjective aspects have been the most commonly cited facets of Brazilian prose recently. These aspects are specifically seen as characteristic of the contemporary period, as a reflexion of life in Brazil's big cities.

Nevertheless, Tania Pellegrini (2014, p. 168) indicates these brand-new facets can nevertheless be related to the legacy of the dictatorship as well. She broaches the writers' adaptation in terms of continuity, rather than change, in their work. To her, the "new" literary themes [*author's emphasis*] are in fact a continuation of patterns of literary writings from the dictatorship era; appropriations of literary *matrices* – a term she uses to express lasting literary formations, abiding throughout the historical process.

The very themes of social exclusion and urban violence, so strong today, are cited by her with a possible foundation in authors such as Rubem Fonseca, as well as the technique of dispersion of the discourse, seen firstly in authors such as Ignacio de Loyola Brandão. And both of these authors are associated with the political resistance during the military regime.

Cada uma dessas matrizes citadas estabelece-se como continuidade no interior da série da literatura de ficção, sendo possível estabelecer sua linhagem desde que começou seu processo de formação; e é inegável que cada momento histórico a ela soma novos aspectos temáticos e formais, como influência interna e/ou externa. (PELLEGRINI, 2014, p. 168)²

If we follow this line of reasoning, the fragmentary construction used to expose urban violence and loneliness as themes – ordinary features in contemporary Brazilian literature at a textual level – could be considered in fact heir of these matrices.

The *disruption* in literary composition is marked by literary techniques that insert references from the writing of everyday life, such as newspaper articles, texts from diaries, screenplays, and narratives marked by the suspension of linearity or logical sequences. And the subjects of urban violence and loneliness show the lost human being – almost an anonymous individual, which is clear in the figure of the most recent narrators – suffering not only physical violence, but also the rush of the big cities, the fight for money, time and the confused crowd, guided by mass media. *City of God*, from Paulo Lins, in 1997, was a milestone in this style, and has definitely brought more opportunities to many others titles in

² It is interesting recall that books about violence were the most censored at the time of repression, according to Sandra Reimão accounts: "O traço que mais parece evidente entre estas obras literárias é a filiação a uma certa literatura da violência: violência física e psicológica das prisões e das torturas, a impunidade dos criminosos como mecanismo propulsor da violência, a violência ensandecida e sem rumo dos marginalizados e excluídos – violências essas que o regime militar propiciara e que se esforçava por ocultar." (REIMÃO, 2011, p. 56)

the same trend, as Beatriz Resende (2007, p. 113) observes in essay “Questões da ficção brasileira do século XXI”.

Resende adds an interesting perspective, going beyond the immediate evidence of violence, and points out that the inner side of violence presented in novels is based on the concepts of *presentification* (excessive preoccupation with the present, an urgency for the present, in a general definition) and the *tragic*. She suggests a return of the tragic in the post-globalized world. The urban violence in novels, therefore, could be the locus for a juncture of these aspects. We may interpret that urban violence is a modern form of tragedy.

A manifestação de forte sentimento trágico que aparece na prosa pode se reunir ao sentido de presente de que já falei, já que, nas narrativas fortemente marcadas por um *pathos* trágico, a força recai sobre o momento imediato, presente, em textos que tomam o lugar de formas narrativas que se tornaram pouco frequentes, como as narrativas históricas, épicas, ou as que se desenvolvem em um tempo mítico/fantástico de temporalidade indefinida. Cabe lembrar que, de todos os gêneros da poética clássica, o que se realiza sempre em um presente é o trágico. (RESENDE, 2007, p. 111)

Her considerations point out the strong sense of tragedy posed in prose today. Resende then contends that the tragic can open the paths again to types of narrative which carry, like in the past, a strong mythical/lyrical component. In my point of view this aspect adds one more new perspective about the development of Brazilian contemporary narrative, an unfolding feature linked to its reflection of Brazilian political and historical process, including the legacies of dictatorship.

Another interesting effect felt over the literary construction could be found in this argument presented by Flora Sussekind (2002). She asserts that the complex narrative shown in recent Brazilian novels does not come only “from explicit, documented representations of the urban, but rather from the production of non-representational spaces and liminal, ambivalent, transitional zones of subjectivity”. Indeed, this representational imposition would not merely arise from the documentary intention of contemporary narratives – something that has always occurred in Brazilian literature. It perhaps may be linked to the writers’ need to express the metamorphosis of an anguished new Brazilian citizen, the subjectivity of writers and readers.

Such an unstable zone of subjectivity also gains representation in poetry. Sussekind (2002) observes that many recent textual constructions of poetry are marked by defiguration and deterritorialization, as ways to express critically the urban experience. “Some defiguration and deterritorialization processes, which are structural to Brazilian contemporary



poetry, function, thus, as particularly critical interlocutors of an urban experience of violence, instability and segregation” (2002, p. 9).

Using the perspective introduced by Tania Pellegrini’s concept of literary matrices, it is possible to understand the lyrical approach of the narrative as another derivative of previous patterns of literary formations. In fact, hybridism in novelistic narrative has its origins in the early twentieth-century. Sited within the perspective of intimate or experimental narrative³, it has always existed, although it has not been properly investigated within Brazilian literature yet.

If lyrical prose is considered to be a rich resource of expression, capable of taking an active part in historical processes⁴, it seems valuable to propose a rediscovery and a reinterpretation of texts that may have passed unnoticed and underappreciated in studies of the military regime and its consequences for the cultural sphere in Brazil. After all, the weight of Brazilian writers as delegates of reality within national literature is still present – just to remember Antonio Candido’s statement about the role of Brazilian authors in helping the nation to recognize its own features (2007, p. 29). “O desenvolvimento do romance brasileiro, de Macedo a Jorge Amado, mostra quanto a nossa literatura tem sido consciente da sua aplicação social e responsabilidade na construção de uma cultura” (2007, p. 434).

This tendency, initiated as a common project of Romanticism, later characterized a large body of works, more intensely from the 1930s to the 1950s, and continued from the beginning of the period of military government, between the 1960s and 80s – throughout dictatorship.⁵ Preserving due proportions among the different periods, two useful examples can be, for instance, *Zero*, by Ignacio de Loyola Brandão, published in 1975, and *O que é isso, companheiro?*, by Fernando Gabeira, in 1979. On the other hand, one of the most acclaimed books launched within the same period, *Lavoura arcaica*, by Raduan Nassar, in

³ Accordingly to its theory, formulated by Ralph Freedman, in 1966. See *The Lyrical Novel – Studies in Herman Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf* (1966).

⁴ One of the aspects of the research I develop by now, as my doctoral thesis. The poetic appropriation of literary construction was almost never considered in Brazilian literary historiography; there is not much evidence of studies about lyricism in national novels. A search through the traditional sources of Brazilian literary historiography to date – works by scholars such as Alfredo Bosi, Nelson Werneck Sodré, Afrânio Coutinho, Antonio Candido, José Aderaldo Castello – bear witness to this fact. According to Alfredo Bosi, the local contours of Brazilian prose-poetry and lyrical novels are not clearly delimited, due to the prevailing vision and strength of the intimist novel, especially after the 1940s.

⁵ Another important path of investigation is the contrast between the presence of lyricism in Brazilian music, in contrast to the lyricism in prose, under times of repression in Brazil. Recalling Chico Buarque de Holanda, in the song *Agora falando sério*, from 1970: “Agora falando sério / Eu queria não cantar / A cantiga bonita / Que se acredita / Que o mal espanta / Dou um chute no lirismo / Um pega no cachorro / E um tiro.”)



1975, although being totally poetic, was ferociously critical of the regime, through the main metaphor between family repression and State repression.

Anyway, if the period is analyzed as a whole, not only lyricism but many other ways of deconstructing traditional narratives were already there, in an intense work of the writers over the realistic way of composing their accounts. The literary patterns developed during those decades have already been pointed out as thermometers for new possibilities of the language, including as political resistance, as Janete Machado Gaspar points out, about the literary output of the 1970's:

Os romancistas, optando por tal procedimento, transformam em conteúdo narrativo as questões teóricas sobre poética literária. Por ser este assunto uma questão de linguagem, ao ser colocado como matéria ficcional, obriga a uma reflexão sobre a própria linguagem, questionando, inclusive, a eficiência da linguagem institucionalizada e revertendo-se, por esta razão, em forma crítica ao contexto social. (GASPAR, 1981, p. 156-157)

5 Conclusion

Contemporary Brazil lives a reality much more integrated with the international scenario, 50 years after the military coup, or at the very least more open to transcultural dialogues. Although progress is still slow with regards to literacy rates within the country's population, it can be said within the field of the arts that the regime's goal to create a cultural market with an industrial basis has succeeded, and that this has given origin to a multitude of reactions that until now engender ever-new possibilities for the development of national identity.

Within this panorama, reflecting on the social and economic shifts that the country undergoes, contemporary Brazilian prose has been analyzed more for its multiplicity – although the term begins to be questioned by its broad and repeated application.⁶ After all, it seems the period of adaptation has not disappeared yet. The only certainty is the placement of Brazil in global urbanization, in addition to a narrative that now has the liberty to localize itself better than in times of repression. In 1988, Silviano Santiago saw this liberty as joy: “A alegre afirmação do indivíduo numa sociedade, no entanto, autoritária e repressora talvez tenha sido a ideia principal na boa literatura pós-64.” (SANTIAGO, 1989, p. 22)

⁶ A good analysis of this heterogeneity is made by Fabio Ackselrud Durão (2013), who emphasizes, among other aspects, the neutralization of conflicts and the incentive to cultural industry through this concept.



It seems the legacy is still in a type of open process, due to the unpredictable developments in very recent narratives. And, besides the new or not so new styles and literary constructions that now flourish in contemporary Brazilian literature, the idea of de-repression can perhaps bring even more new paths to explore in literature, including the Brazilian literary voices until now neglected in history, the *misplaced* ones.

Fifty years later, the responses to dictatorship have not ceased to unfold. As a historical trauma, its striking consequences suggest there is still much more to be discovered and analyzed within the literary field.

REAÇÕES À DITADURA, DENTRO E FORA DOS TEXTOS LITERÁRIOS

Resumo: Este artigo busca refletir acerca das consequências mais evidentes do período ditatorial para a área cultural no Brasil, especificamente no campo da literatura. Tenta introduzir sucintamente, em diálogo com outros autores, o legado que escritores, o mercado editorial e os leitores receberam nas décadas passadas, indo além da censura e dos atos de repressão explícita do regime. E procura abordar como este legado pode ser traduzido também em termos de construção literária, na atual conjuntura da literatura brasileira, incluindo uma abordagem breve sobre a prosa lírica.

Palavras-chave: Legado ditatorial. Respostas culturais à repressão militar. Literatura brasileira contemporânea. Prosa lírica.

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