

**THE CONTEMPORANEITY OF CLUBE DA ESQUINA'S CRITICAL SONGS OF THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP: SPECTACULAR TIME, REMEMBRANCE AND RESISTANCE**

**A ATUALIDADE DAS CANÇÕES CRÍTICAS DO CLUBE DA ESQUINA À DITADURA MILITAR: TEMPO ESPETACULAR, REMEMORAÇÃO E RESISTÊNCIA**

**LA ACTUALIDAD DE LAS CANCIONES CRÍTICAS DEL CLUBE DA ESQUINA PARA LA DICTADURA MILITAR: TIEMPO ESPECTACULAR, REMEMORACIÓN Y RESISTENCIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article intends to situate the group Clube da Esquina as a cultural producer of songs that were critical of the military dictatorship in the 1970s and to examine, in accordance with Walter Benjamin's concept of remembrance, their validity at the present time as resistance to the production of social amnesia about this regime, in the context of the spectacular time, as conceptualized by Guy Debord. The dialectical method of critical theory is employed, as the research examines the object in specific historical situations. In the songs by Clube da Esquina, resorting to the memory of the narrative subject about repression and the victims of the military dictatorship became a strategy to preserve the history of the country. Although the criticism of the regime was under censorship, avoiding the oblivion of what happened was a possibility to contest what was being done, to think about the transformation of society, and to project itself into the future as a historical document.

**KEYWORDS:** Clube da Esquina. Military dictatorship. Society of the Spectacle. Remembrance. Resistance.

**RESUMO:** Este artigo pretende situar o Clube da Esquina como produtor cultural de canções críticas à ditadura militar nos anos 1970 e examinar, em conformidade com o conceito de rememoração de Walter Benjamin, a validade delas no momento atual como resistência à produção da amnésia social sobre esse regime, no contexto do tempo espetacular, como conceituado por Guy Debord. Emprega-se o método dialético da teoria crítica da sociedade, pois se pesquisa o objeto em situações históricas específicas. Nas canções do Clube da Esquina, o recurso à memória do sujeito narrativo sobre a repressão e as vítimas da ditadura militar tornava-se uma estratégia de preservar a história do país. Ainda que a crítica ao regime estivesse sob censura, evitar o esquecimento do que passou era uma possibilidade de contestar o que estava sendo feito, de pensar a transformação da sociedade e de se projetar para o futuro como documento histórico.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Clube da Esquina. Ditadura militar. Sociedade do espetáculo. Rememoração. Resistência.

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**RESUMEN:** Este artículo pretende situar el *Clube da Esquina* como un productor cultural de canciones críticas para la dictadura militar en la década de 1970 y examinar, de acuerdo con el concepto de rememoración de Walter Benjamin, su validez en la actualidad como resistencia a la producción de amnesia social acerca de este régimen, en el contexto de un tiempo espectacular, conceptualizado por Guy Debord. Se emplea el método dialéctico de la teoría crítica de la sociedad, porque la investigación del objeto ocurre en situaciones históricas específicas. En las canciones del *Clube da Esquina*, el recurso a la memoria del sujeto narrativo acerca de la represión y a las víctimas de la dictadura militar se convirtió en una estrategia para preservar la historia del país. Aunque la crítica al régimen estaba bajo censura, evitar el olvido de lo que pasó era una posibilidad de cuestionar lo que pasaba, de pensar la transformación de la sociedad y de protegerse para el futuro como documento histórico.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Clube da Esquina*. Dictadura militar. Sociedad del Espectáculo. Rememoración. Resistencia.

## Introduction

In the society of the spectacle, historical consciousness is dismissed and the importance of the memorable is lost. In this society, those in power can establish their official history through the production of social amnesia. This is the case of current Brazilian society in relation to the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985.

This article seeks to reflect on the production of social amnesia in Brazilian society confronted with the notion of remembrance by Walter Benjamin (2012), reformulated, for this purpose, from the songs critical of the military regime presented by *Clube da Esquina* in the 1970s, in the context of spectacular time, a concept by Guy Debord (1977) rethought in contemporary times.

The dialectical method is used when examining the historical dynamics of Brazilian capitalist society in its articulations between the economic, political, cultural and ideological dimensions, and when aiming at the transformation of reality. It is the method of the critical theory of society, through which the obstacles to emancipation in the present reality are denounced and the potential for overcoming them is pointed out.

## The spectacular time

Guy Debord (1997, p. 87, our translation) states that “history has always existed, but not always in a historical form”, that is, in a way that the movement of time was consciously experienced by individuals.



It resumes the materialist interpretation of history carried out by Karl Marx – regarding the development of productive forces and the overcoming of previous social relations – for a social appreciation of time and its assumption in the consciousness of individuals, with a view to the possibility of construction and concrete experience of the lived. It exposes the relationship between the form of production and the way of living the time that each society has. This is because every social transformation implies a fundamental change in the intuition of time.

Debord (1997) explains that, with the destruction of the previous material bases of pre-capitalist production, mainly agricultural, linked to the seasons of nature and organized in a cyclical experience of time – through the forms of ritual and ancestral repetition: of the eternal return –, in modern society, conditions were created for a “historical” life, situated in a passing, linear and irreversible time. “Historical time means irreversible time, whose events are unique and do not repeat themselves. Hence the desire to remember them and transmit them, that is, the first forms of historical consciousness” (JAPPE, 2008, p. 46, our translation).

The triumph of irreversible time, however, is also its metamorphosis into the “time of things”, because the victory of the bourgeoisie was precisely the mass production of objects. Capitalism founds a historical time as an irreversible time of the mercantile economy. Time and history are reduced to the form of production time.

The modern economy, although formally cyclical as a movement of capital and thus immediately experienced in everyday life and in the entire course of individuals' lives, is a historical economy in the sense that it moves on a form of production whose time is irreversible and linear. Time is pseudocyclic. This pseudocyclic experience of capitalism constitutes what Debord (1997) calls “false consciousness of time”, because it generates spectacular time, in which everything is lived illusory. “The spectacle, as a social organization of the paralysis of history and memory, of the abandonment of history that is erected based on historical time, is the 'false consciousness of time'” (DEBORD, 1997, p. 108, our translation).

By submitting themselves to the laws that govern the exchange of commodities, men are, in effect, governed by the product of their labors. The worker himself believes that the value of a commodity is not a consequence of his socially necessary labor time for its production. In the capitalist system, the works that produce different goods end up being equivalent in exchange and are presented as abstract, generalized and impersonalized work due to their condition of merchandise exchanged for money. Therefore, the intrinsic quality of each worker, each job or each thing produced or exchanged is not considered. Instead of being worth in themselves, they are worth in exchange.



This rationality of the mercantile economy, with its abstract and quantitative time, organizes everyday life in such a way that it impedes the individual's conscious activity, by making him a spectator of his own life, also impeding the possibility that he may occupy himself with the threat of oblivion or with the importance of the memorable.

It is in the prohibition imposed on individuals of activity, language and communication of what is really lived, whose foundation is the very economic-quantitative expropriation of time and autonomous activity in capitalism, that Debord (1997) understands a true expropriation of history and memory. This is an expropriation of the very possibilities of the practical expression of individuals as a realization, as the production of their own history.

Thus:

Forgetting and remembering are, in the spectacular-mercantile society, functions of the “images” produced and “socially” permitted by economic and state rationality and this occurs because, before, the temporal experience itself develops only as “image consumption time” and “image of time consumption”, but not as an effective and qualitative use of time (i.e., “historical”). Individuals – who, thus, become spectators – do not assume their “time”, because their “time” does not belong to them; Likewise, their collective or individual memory does not belong to them, because, rather, it is not up to them the realization and communication (AQUINO, 2006a, p. 66, our translation).

The spectacle – alienation – confiscates the space of experience and the horizon of expectations, summing up to a perpetual present. The spectacle, given the pace at which the images are displayed, leaves no time for reflection; shut up everything that does not suit it. Everything he shows is always isolated from the environment, the past, intentions and consequences. Debord (1997, p. 178, our translation) states that the show managed to make “everyone forget the historical spirit in society”.

And, to fight against this shortening of temporal perception, against this kind of narcissism of the present, which runs after novelties that rapidly expire according to the law of consumption of new commodities, “one must invent other forms of memory and narration, capable of sustain a critical relationship with the transmission of the past, with remembering, and with the construction of the future and waiting” (GAGNEBIN, 2014, p. 221, our translation).



## **A produção da amnésia social em relação à ditadura militar**

Ecléa Bosi (2003) states that, when a political event stirs the mind of a given social group, the memory of each of its members is affected by the interpretation that the dominant ideology gives to that event; an examination is always necessary to clarify the ties that unite memory and ideology.

In current Brazilian society, in relation to the memory of the dictatorship implemented after the civil-military coup d'état of 1964 (DREIFUSS, 1981; IANNI, 1981), there is an active production of social amnesia. This is a story in which events are cut and interpreted from the perspective of those in power. The official story.

An official story that tries to deny or minimize the repression of a dictatorship – and some call it a “soft dictatorship” – that prevented citizens from the right to freely express their ideas and opinions critical of the regime, otherwise they would be persecuted, threatened, arrested, tortured, killed or disappeared (ARNS, 1986); who kept the arts under the control of the authorities by imposing cuts and bans on plays, films, books and songs; who subjected the press to self-censorship or prior censorship; banned and extinguished political parties; kept the unions under intervention; made student organizations illegal; repressed public demonstrations with excessive violence, etc.

A dictatorship that issued Institutional Act no. 5 (AI/5), in 1968, in force for ten years, which granted the president full powers to close all the Legislative Power for an unlimited time, intervene in states and municipalities, suspend for ten years the political rights of any citizen and revoke elective mandates, dismiss or summarily retire civil servants and judges, suspend the guarantee of “*habeas corpus*”, carry out arrests without a court order and declare a state of siege.

The institutional acts were inspired by the ideology of national security, under the motto: “Security guarantees development”. The propagated “economic miracle” was based on slogans typical of dictatorial regimes: “Brazil, love it or leave it”; “No one hold back this country!”. There was, however, no income distribution for the less favored strata, as the model was one of wage squeeze and social exclusion (OLIVEIRA, 2013, p. 107-119, our translation), whose strategy was “Make the cake grow and then share it”, in an exclusionary modernization process.

Even during the announced slow, gradual and safe process of distension towards redemocratization, which began in 1974, an example of an explicit crime was committed against journalist Vladimir Herzog, “Vlado”, in 1975, the victim of an offensive by radical sectors of the army on militants of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) (GASPARI, 2014).



Adorno's criticism (2006), in the elaboration of the past in relation to Nazism, is that of intending to close the issue, if possible, erasing it from memory. “The gesture of forgetting and forgiving everything, exclusive to those who suffered injustice, ends up coming from the supporters of those who practiced injustice” (ADORNO, 2006, p. 29, our translation).

This intention to close the issue guides the elaboration of the past in relation to the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985 in Brazil on the side of those in power. A willingness to deny it, try to erase it from collective memory, or minimize its occurrence is well known, however difficult it is to understand that there are people who are not ashamed to use an argument such as that only a "few more exalted rebels" would - deservedly - have been tortured, murdered and disappeared. It is sometimes said, although with reservations about the repressive character of the dictatorship, that “the country has grown”: a symptom of the ideology of safe development.

It must be remembered that, although Brazil has signed international treaties against torture, international jurisdiction is ignored when it comes to punishing torturers and murderers of the dictatorship (PIOVESAN, 2010). This under the pretext of the “national reconciliation” policy promoted by the military and guiding the 1979 Amnesty Law.

Ideology manufactures imaginary stories that legitimize class domination, always narrated from the point of view of those in power, so that there are no records of actions taken by and against opponents of the military dictatorship, and no traces of them can remain in social memory.

An ideology, of course, because the repressive action of the military dictatorship produced concrete effects in Brazilian society.

For, behind each persecuted person there was a family, a circle of friends, a group of colleagues and companions, often a category or an entire community. All ended up being directly or indirectly affected by the impact of the arbitrariness, truculence and crimes of the dictatorship. They somehow experienced fear, dismay, impotence, submission and terror, as well as indignation, solidarity and revolt (MARTINS, 2015, p. 17, our translation).

Currently, “a certain form of forgetting operates, a turning of the page, a non-permanence in resentment and complaint” (GAGNEBIN, 2009, p. 98, our translation), in the sense of commemorating the past to the detriment of the present.

There are manifestations of the authorities in the mainstream media in the sense that, today: the intention is to re-establish the ideology of the “internal/communist enemy” of the doctrine of national security from the military dictatorship; the police-repressive apparatus in general – inspired by images of the ruler with his hands gesticulating – is preparing for a





situation of permanent civil war against the migrant, the indigenous, the black, the street child, the slum dweller, the trade unionist, organizations fighting for rights, the unemployed, the homeless, the landless; a nationalism of “us” versus “them” is established, suggesting that those who are uncomfortable leave the country; it is intended to restore in the country what existed fifty years ago: the state of exception and its repressive nature, with censorship of cultural productions, persecution of government critics, use of excessive violence in public demonstrations, etc. Torturers are praised for their deeds.

However, a “duty of memory” or “active remembering” is imposed, so that the way in which the past is made present is important, in order to prevent “something similar” from happening from now on.

An enlightening democratic pedagogy is needed, whereby remembering the past is not just remembering for the sake of remembering: a kind of cult of the past. It stems from “a demand for clarifying analysis that should produce – and this is decisive – analytical tools to better clarify the present” (GAGNEBIN, 2009, p. 103, our translation).

### **The recollection and actuality of the critical songs of Clube da Esquina**

Walter Benjamin (2012) and Debord (1997) are influenced by Lukács both in relation to the refusal of a purely scientific – objective, deterministic – explanation of history, and the expansion of the limit of the concept of commodity fetishism in that of reification, as a kind of a condition of alienation that affects all social manifestations; a “ghostly” objectivity of the commodity (LUKÁCS, 2003, p. 222) that is intended to be logical/rational/“natural”, but which conceals the real background human and social relations that underpin it. The transience, the incessant novelty, the distracted reception of events involves all merchandise, “creating and recreating a 'ghostly epiphany' [Benjamin], which Debord, in turn, designates in the expression 'society of the spectacle’” (MATOS, 2010, p. 74, our translation).

It is observed that:

Memory is always a contemporary category... Memory and historical consciousness are not categories of traditional communitarian societies. In these societies of transmission, of tradition, which do not assume, for Benjamin and Debord, historical forms, but rather mythical ones, memory need not have any “active” role to play, but only passively receive and transmit contents through which the past organizes the present. Only for those who fight to free the present from the past and the archaic, and in this way, to establish a historical life unimpeded by the memory of unfinished struggles – because they were defeated – can, in fact, be important; not, however, as officers and dead “places of memory”, but rather as attention to the present,



as an update of past struggles. In other words, as historical consciousness (AQUINO, 2006b, p. 11-12, our translation).

For the process of collective elaboration of the past, Benjamin's (2012) concept of remembrance – recollection – is a form of memory and narration that does not enclose the image of the past in a “single observation”, but allows for its modification, as open story.

This notion of remembrance can be reformulated to reflect on the production of social amnesia in the country, from the songs critical of the military regime presented by Clube da Esquina in the 1970s.

Clube da Esquina is the denomination for the gathering of artists predominantly from Minas Gerais and their cultural production gathered around the singer and composer Milton Nascimento. Throughout his artistic trajectory, he was characterized by the production of collective works.

In many of Milton Nascimento's productions, criticisms were made of the military dictatorship, when dealing, albeit metaphorically, with issues such as: exile – *Nada será como antes* (M. Nascimento/R. Bastos); assassination – *Menino* (M. Nascimento/R. Bastos), tribute to high school student Edson Luís de Lima Souto; corruption – *Saudades dos aviões da Panair* (talking at the bar)” (M. Nascimento/F. Brant); censorship - the album *Milagre dos peixes*; students – *Tudo que você podia ser* (L. Borges/M. Borges); indigenous people – *Promessas do sol* (M. Nascimento/F. Brant); black people – *Casamiento de Negros* (adapted from Chilean folklore); women – *Maria, Maria* (M. Nascimento/F. Brant); Latin America – *San Vicente* (M. Nascimento/F. Brant) etc.

In Brazilian Popular Music (MPB), there is a form of composition called “critical song”, in which the composer's role is also to express his indignation and his denunciation regarding cultural and political-social issues, in an articulation between art and life.

The popular composer began to operate critically in the composition process, making use of metalanguage, intertextuality [...] operating doubly with the text and with the context, with the internal and external planes. Internally, [...] the composer began to act as a critic in the composition process itself; externally, criticism addressed the cultural and political issues of the country, making composers articulate art and life [...] And by extending the critical attitude beyond the formal aspects of the song, the popular composer became a thinker of culture (NAVES, 2010, p. 20-21, our translation).

The compositions of Clube da Esquina express this articulation between art and life, through “critical songs” of the military dictatorship. “The varied rhythms and lyrics that celebrated corners of Minas evoked a certain countercultural climate and at the same time



protested against the oppressive political moment that the country was going through” (NAVES, 2010, p. 121, our translation).

The song *Nada será como antes* (Milton Nascimento/Ronaldo Bastos), recorded on the 1972 album *Clube da Esquina*, was considered “an authentic libel of opposition to the current regime”, as it was released during the most perverse period of the entire military government: the of the “years of lead”, between 1969 and 1974. The verses expose the drama of those who were concerned with the unpredictable fate of those exiled by the dictatorship, among whom was R. Bastos' own brother. The tomorrow that his verses talk about would depend on an action to be taken in the present moment, with a view to transforming the current order. The idea for the lyrics came when R. Bastos read an article about the issue of “tomorrow” in (MPB) and transferred the focus from the musical area to politics (SEVERIANO; MELLO, 1998, p. 176).

*Eu já estou com o pé nessa estrada/Qualquer dia a gente se vê/Sei que nada será como antes, amanhã/Que notícias me dão dos amigos?/Que notícias me dão de você?/Alvoroço em meu coração/Amanhã ou depois de amanhã/Resistindo na boca da noite um gosto de sol/Num domingo qualquer, qualquer hora/Ventania em qualquer direção/Sei que nada será como antes amanhã/Que notícias me dão dos amigos?/Que notícias me dão de você?/Sei que nada será como está/Amanhã ou depois de amanhã/Resistindo na boca da noite um gosto de sol* (Lyrics of the song *Nada será como antes*. CLUBE DA ESQUINA, 1972)<sup>2</sup>.

In this song, R. Bastos consciously expresses his relationship with the movement of time for a social appreciation and his concrete experience for the transformation of reality. He expresses himself to put into practice an individual action as the production of his own history and to put in the world a work of art to be inscribed in the Brazilian collective memory. This is in line with what Debord (1997) and Benjamin (2012) draw attention to regarding the configuration of “historical time” and the memorable.

R. Bastos wants to move and expand. Of his brother and friends, all exiled, there is no news. He does not intend to stand still and wait for these: he's going to “set foot on that road”, and “we'll see each other any day”. And the trip will take place “on any given Sunday, at any time”, with “wind in any direction”, but it is certain that “nothing will be like before tomorrow”, after this experience. It is a path of no return because “nothing will be as it is”.

<sup>2</sup> Free translation of the lyrics: I already have my foot on this road/One day we see each other/I know that nothing will be like before, tomorrow/What news do they give me from friends?/What news do they give me about you?/Rush in my heart/Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow/ Resisting a taste of the sun in the mouth of the night/On any given Sunday, at any time/Wind in any direction/I know that nothing will be the same as before tomorrow/What news do they give me from friends?/What news do they give me about you?/I know that nothing will be as it is / Tomorrow or the day after tomorrow / Withstanding in the mouth of the night a taste of sun

Waiting for this experience causes an “uproar in my heart”, says the lyricist, and the event must happen soon, “tomorrow or the day after tomorrow”. The excerpt “Resisting a taste of the sun in the mouth of the night” refers to the expectation of the subject of the song to act soon, so that the new happens. As much as the days pass, each nightfall, “in the mouth of the night”, a taste of tomorrow remains, “a taste of the sun”.

Ronaldo's songs are always about a future. Something that we do not quite know what it is, but which announces itself as a moment of mutation in the order of things, a mutation that does not happen naturally, but with the affirmed performance of the subject of the song. The future announces a “tomorrow” like an uproar in the heart, a taste of the sun that resists in the mouth of the night and that needs to be. In order to be, it needs, however, the impulse of the subject who places himself as the place of affirmation of being. Affirmation of the being that is also an affirmation of himself (LACERDA, 2019, p. 24, our translation).

In the 1970s, the typical figure of speech was the metaphor for the existence of censorship. It was a way of being able to talk about things that were literally forbidden to be mentioned. And the great metaphor of that time was the “day to come” or “the tomorrow that will be better than today” (BORGES, 2003, p. 168).

The lyricist, in addition to speaking of his need to move – assert himself – in pursuit of changes, metaphorically also speaks of the need for everyone to move against the current regime in order to achieve a democratic future. In each dusk this hope remains, that is, “a taste of the sun resists in the mouth of the night”. This song is classic because it persists in time; its message of freedom can be retrieved – recalled – in a later historical moment than its specific context.

The album *Milagre dos Peixes*, from 1973, it is a work of art that survived the censorship attacks in the “years of lead” of the military dictatorship. There was a cut practically in full of the lyrics of the songs *Os escravos de Jó* and *Hoje é dia de El-Rey*, and in full of *Cadê*. However, in the inserts it is possible to notice the protest, as it is clear that the songs had lyrics, since the technical sheets brought the credits (“lyrics of”) to the respective lyricists: Fernando Brant, Márcio Borges and Ruy Guerra. In *Hoje é dia de El-Rey*, the maintenance of the expression “my son/son of me” makes it clear that there was censorship.

The lyrics of *Os escravos de Jó* (M. Nascimento/F. Brant) submitted to the censor, inspired by children's games, was considered a “Political contestation. Satire and protest. Pornographic cord” (DINIZ, 2017, p. 149).

*Dizem que está bom/Dizem que está bom/Difícil ver um troço pior/Mas dizem nós estar na melhor/Se viver, eu sou réu/Se morrer, é só véu/Melhor é colher*



*favos de mel/Saio do trabalho ei/Volto para casa ei/Não lembro de canseira maior/Em tudo é o mesmo suor/Ó, bela Rapunzel/Seu jovem menestrel/Precisa de um pouco de amor/Mas que não faça muito calor/A vaca Vitória lambeu, lambeu/Mexeu, mexeu e remexeu/Quem falar primeiro, quem falar primeiro/Vai ser aquele que comeu/Gritos de alegria, de histeria/E luzes e bombas/Bomba cai do céu/(Que fedor!)/Saio do trabalho ei/Volto para casa ei/Não lembro de canseira maior/Em tudo é o mesmo suor* (Lyrics of the song Os escravos de Jó. MILAGRE DOS PEIXES, 1973)<sup>3</sup>.

The lyrics are, in fact, satirical, mainly due to the analogy of “Yellow cow” (a children's game in Brazilian folklore that consists of a challenge to see who stays silent the longest) to the political regime – “Cow Vitória licked, licked/Moved, moved and stirred/Whoever speaks first, whoever speaks first/It will be the one who ate/Screams of joy, of hysteria/And lights and bombs/Bomb falls from the sky/(What a stench!)” –, although the “pornographic song” by the use of the word “cow”. The contestation appears at the beginning of the lyrics: “They say it's good / They say it's good / It's hard to see a worse thing / But they say we're in the best / If I live, I'm a defendant / If I die, it's just a veil / It's better to reap honeycombs”.

Its record was instrumental, because only the last stanza was allowed by the Federal Police's Public Entertainment Censorship Service to be sung by Clementina de Jesus (“I leave work and/I come home and/I don't remember any greater fatigue/In everything it's the same sweat”). The music gained sound consistency, even noisy, and continued to be provocative by uniting the choir, vocal effects – such as screams and falsetto – and the high volume of the percussion.

Years later, the song was recorded with different lyrics and a new name, *Caxangá*, by Elis Regina, in her album *Elis*, from 1977.

*Sempre no coração/Haja o que houver/A fome de um dia poder/Morder a carne dessa mulher/Veja bem, meu patrão/Como pode ser bom/Você trabalharia no sol e eu/Tomando banho de mar/Saio do trabalho e/Volto para casa e/Não lembro de canseira maior/Em tudo é o mesmo suor//Luto para viver/Vivo para morrer/Enquanto minha morte não vem/Em tudo é o mesmo suor//Luto para viver/Vivo para morrer/Enquanto minha morte não vem/Eu vivo de brigar contra o rei//Em volta do fogo todo/Mundo abrindo o jogo/Com tudo que tem pra contar//Casos e desejos coisas/Dessa vida e da outra/Mas nada de assustar/Quem não é sincero sai da brincadeira/Correndo, pois pode*

<sup>3</sup> Free translation of the lyrics: They say it's good / They say it's good / It's hard to see a worse thing / But they say we're in the best / If I live, I'm a defendant / If I die, it's just a veil / It's better to pick honeycombs / I leave work hey / I'll be back home hey / I don't remember a greater fatigue / Everything is the same sweat / Oh, beautiful Rapunzel / Your young minstrel / Needs a little love / But not too hot / The cow Victoria licked, licked / Moved, moved and stirred / Whoever speaks first, whoever speaks first / It will be the one who ate / Screams of joy, of hysteria / And lights and bombs / Bomb falls from the sky / (What a stench!) / I leave work hey / I come home hey / I don't remember any greater fatigue / It's all the same sweat



*se queimar/Queimar//Saio do trabalho e/Volto para casa e/Não lembro de  
canseira maior/Em tudo é o mesmo suor* (MACIEL, 2012, p. 24-25)<sup>4</sup>.

The content remained very strong against established standards. At first, subjectivity/emotion is opposed to objectivity/reason, as it is said: “Always in the heart/No matter what happens”, with prevalence of the instinctive/natural: “The hunger for one day to be able/To bite that woman’s flesh”. Then, the radical change in the exploratory relationship between boss/employee: “Look, my boss/How good it can be/You would work in the sun and I/Bathing in the sea”. Then, the opposition to the current regime: “I fight to live/I live to die/Until my death comes/I live to fight the king”, in which this “king” is the general in power, and the fight goes on a regime that kills the “subversives”. On the battlefield, “Around the whole fire/The World opening up the game/With everything there is to tell”, there are “Cases and desires things/This life and the other/But nothing to scare”, as an expression of religious syncretism (the music has African rhythm). Finally, the reference to the title of the song, the game “*Escravos de Jó*”: “Whoever is not sincere leaves the game/Running, because they can get burned/Get Burned”, alluding to the fact that every game has its own rules, and the dictatorship broke the rules of democratic rule. About this, both the work and the resistance to the system impose a “greater fatigue”, and “Everything is the same sweat”.

The album differs from the marketing standard of the phonographic industry at the time, so that the artists preserved the intrinsic quality of the work of art produced by them so that the public – present and future – could get in touch with the country’s history regarding censorship during the military dictatorship. The song presented does not establish itself in “spectacular time”, in the sense of confiscating the space of experience and the horizon of expectations: on the contrary, it is critical, as it makes one reflect on the historical moment lived: the artist was responsible for assuming his era/time. And the song, recorded in the artwork as a historical document, can be recalled by future generations as a paradigm of struggle by opponents of the military regime so that something similar does not happen again.

*Fé cega, faça amolada* (M. Nascimento/R. Bastos), recorded on the album *Minas*, from 1975, is another song of opposition to the military regime, as an unfolding of *Nada será como*

<sup>4</sup> Free translation of the lyrics: Always in my heart/No matter what happens/The hunger for one day to be able/To bite this woman's flesh/Look, my boss/How good it can be/You would work in the sun and I/Bathing in the sea/I leave work and/I return home and/I don't remember any greater fatigue/In everything it's the same sweat/I fight to live/I live to die/Until my death comes/In everything it's the same sweat/I fight to live/I live to die/While my death doesn't come/I live by fighting the king//Around the whole fire/The world opening up the game/With everything there is to tell//Cases and desires things/This life and the other/But nothing to scare/Who It's not sincere, get out of the game/Running, because you might get burned/Get burned//I leave work and/I come home and/I don't remember any greater tiredness/Everything is the same sweat



*antes*, by the same authors. In much more aggressive writing, we have: “Now I no longer ask where the road goes / now I no longer wait for that dawn / it will be, it will be, it will have to be, it will be a sharpened knife / the blind glow of passion and faith, sharpened knife”.

The sound result is also aggressive.

The relatively simple and insistently repeated melodic sequence in “Blind faith, sharpened knife” would not be enough to achieve the brilliant result shown on the record. To obtain this result, Nivaldo Ornelas' chopped soprano sax notes must also be credited, creating a nervous atmosphere in perfect harmony with the song's objective, the decidedly pop musical interlude, Milton's convinced voice, using falsetto to perfection, and the high-pitched voice of Beto Guedes, which sometimes sounds like an echo of Milton's singing (SEVERIANO; MELLO, 1998, p. 210-211, our translation).

Márcio Borges (1996, p. 317) explains: “Bituca really wanted to do something, to react in some way to the arbitrations of censorship, in our particular case, and of Institutional Acts, which spread so much evil throughout Brazil [...]”. He sang Ronaldo's ripped verses with great authenticity of feelings.

The verbs in the infinitive – “let”, “shine”, “be”, “grow”, “happen” etc. – reveal this proposal for confronting the here and now.

A notable feature is the metaphorical use of words normally belonging to the domain of the Catholic religion.

*Deixar a sua luz brilhar e ser muito tranquilo/Deixar o seu amor crescer e ser muito tranquilo/Brilhar, brilhar, acontecer, brilhar, faca amolada/Irmão, irmã, irmã, irmão de fé: faca amolada/Plantar o trigo e refazer o pão de cada dia/ Beber o vinho e renascer na luz de todo dia/A fé, a fé, paixão e fé, a fé, faca amolada/O chão, o chão, o sal da terra, o chão, faca amolada* (Song excerpt of Fé cega, faca amolada. MINAS, 1975)<sup>5</sup>.

The word religious is resignified. “Passion” and “faith” refer to the missionary crossing of Jesus and to the hope in the future life, respectively. Bread and wine express being reborn in the body and blood of Christ. “The salt of the earth” means fulfilling the mission with determination and lightness (“to be very calm”). “Blind faith”, although it seems to refer to an irrational belief, is, in reality, a reasoned hope. What is believed is understood.

This song no longer refers to the uncertain future of “the day that will come”, as in Nothing will be like before, but to the certainty of conscious action in the present time for a

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<sup>5</sup> Free translation of the lyrics: Let your light shine and be very still/Let your love grow and be very still/Shine, shine, be, shine, sharpened knife/Brother, sister, sister, brother of faith: sharpened knife/Plant the wheat and remake the daily bread / Drink the wine and be reborn in the light of every day / Faith, faith, passion and faith, faith, sharpened knife / The ground, the ground, the salt of the earth, the ground, sharpened knife

better future. There is no longer any need to know where the road you were on is going, nor to wait for the dawn before tomorrow, but to move forward in fulfilling the transforming mission with determination and tranquility. The sharpened knife is ready to cut, to break; for the lucid decision about something important in life. It is time to fight; not to remain passive.

The composers:

[...] propose the immediate construction of “tomorrow” through the direct intermediary of human action. To achieve this goal, the historical subject should, however, be aware that it is necessary to have, in his hands, the “sharpened knife”, making use of its “blind brilliance” to open the way of the future with lucid and safe blows. This new era would in no way be a daydream or a blurred vision of reality, but the result of a look full of audacity and imagination. Its foundation would be in the engagement of the political actor with the very present in which he performs his actions (MARTINS, 2009, p. 73-74, our translation).

In reality, poetry “does not paralyze itself looking at the 'day to come': instead, it sets itself entirely, and in motion, in the time it is” (WISNIK, 2004, p. 184, our translation).

This song is exemplary for remembering the struggles of the past in the present and for reflecting on an immediate intervention by contemporary resisters in a situation that is close to that experienced during the military dictatorship.

For Benjamin (2012), a historical-materialist – dialectic – analysis demands that, in the present, one pays attention to what lies in the events and works of the past as a promise or protest. In this respect, instead of opposing culture – or civilization – and barbarism as two mutually exclusive poles, or as different stages of historical evolution, Benjamin (2012) presents them dialectically as a contradictory unit. See his thesis VII of *On the Concept of History*:

There is never a document of culture that is not, at the same time, a document of barbarism. And just as he is not free from barbarism, neither is the process of his transmission, the transmission in which he passed from one victor to another. Therefore, the historical materialist, as far as possible, distances himself from this transmission. He sees it as his task to *escovar a história a contrapelo* (brush history against the grain) (BENJAMIN, 2012, p. 245, our translation).

Brushing history “against the grain” and critical reflection on the present coincide. It is necessary to reveal the true rule of historical progress: oppression, barbarism, the violence of the victors – owners of power. Benjamin (2012) refers, above all, to the emancipation of the oppressed classes, but his general critique of oppression and his appeal serve to “conceive



history from the point of view of the victims – of all victims – [who] give their project a more universal scope” (LÖWY, 2005, p. 153, our translation).

For Löwy (2005, p. 74, our translation), “brushing history against the grain” has a double meaning:

Historical: it is about going against the grain of the official version of history, opposing the tradition of the oppressed. From this point of view, the historical continuity of the dominant classes is understood as a single and enormous triumphal procession, occasionally interrupted by uprisings of subordinate classes.

Political (current): redemption/revolution will not happen thanks to the natural course of things, the “sense of history”, inevitable progress. It will be necessary to fight the current. Left to its own devices, or caressed in the furry sense, history will only produce new wars, new catastrophes, new forms of barbarism and oppression.

Brushing history in the opposite direction means considering it from the point of view of the vanquished, the excluded, the victims in general, as a counterpart, because if there is a side to the coin called official history – conservative, however, there is another side of it called history unofficial – transformative.

It must be remembered that civil society demonstrations in opposition to the military regime were intense from 1974 to 1978. Social discontent was not restricted to what was expressed, when possible, at the ballot box. There was a reorganization of the student movement – the invasion of the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) in 1977 had an impact on the country –, the action of progressive sectors of the Catholic Church, the action of organizations such as the Order of Lawyers of Brazil (OAB, Portuguese initials) and the Brazilian Press Association (ABI, Portuguese initials) – in favor of human rights, amnesty, the end of torture and censorship –, pressure from relatives of political prisoners and missing persons, the mobilization of workers for a new unionism – the strike of metallurgists in São Bernardo do Campo in ABC Paulista in 1978 had great general repercussions.

That's what the first song on the disc is about. *Clube da Esquina 2*, from 1978, *Credo* (M. Nascimento/F. Brant):

*(... um sabor de vidro e corte/ coração americano/ um sabor de vida e morte/ à espera na fila imensa/ e o corpo negro se esqueceu/ estava em San Vicente/ a cidade e suas luzes...). Caminhando pela noite de nossa cidade/Acendendo a esperança e apagando a escuridão/Vamos, caminhando pelas ruas de nossa cidade/Viver derramando a juventude pelos corações/Tenha fé no nosso povo que ele resiste/Tenha fé no nosso povo que ele insiste/E acordar novo, forte, alegre, cheio de paixão/Vamos, caminhando de mãos dadas com a alma nova/Viver*

*semeando a liberdade em cada coração/Tenha fé no nosso povo que ele acorda/Tenha fé no nosso povo que ele assusta/Caminhando e vivendo com a alma aberta/Aquecidos pelo sol que vem depois do temporal/Vamos, companheiros pelas ruas de nossa cidade/Cantar semeando um sonho que vai ter de ser real/Caminhemos pela noite com a esperança/Caminhemos pela noite com a juventude (... estava em San Vicente/a cidade e suas luzes/estava em San Vicente/as mulheres e os homens/coração americano...)* (Lyrics of the song Credo. CLUBE DA ESQUINA 2, 1978)<sup>6</sup>.

The song exposes the journey through the “night”, the dictatorship, but already “kindling hope and erasing the darkness” towards democracy, even if the government does it slowly and gradually, maintaining its repressive face. It takes “faith in the people”, resistant and insistent for better/sunny days to “wake up young, strong, happy, full of passion”. And the people “frighten” because they are united – “hand in hand with a new soul”. Living “sowing freedom in every heart” and with companions who are “warmed by the sun that comes after the storm”.

The artists join the people when they say: “Let's go, fellows, through the streets of our city/Singing sowing a dream that will have to come true”, and more: “Let's walk through the night with hope/Let's walk through the night with youth”, when reporting to the student movement that returned to the streets. The generation of 1968 showed exactly this urge to manifest itself in the public space. The street became a place of clashes and barricades.

The song begins and ends with snippets of *San Vicente*, song also by M. Nascimento and F. Brant, from the album *Clube da Esquina*, from 1972, referring to the oppression that occurred in other Latin American countries. It presents *San Vicente* sung by several people as in a Catholic procession and begins *Credo* (belief), with the word “walking”, merging the two tracks sonically and poetically.

The position of the censorship was contradictory. Submitted to the Federal Police's Censorship and Public Entertainment Service – without incorporating, for that reason, the mention of *San Vicente – Credo* aroused antagonistic opinions among the censors.

<sup>6</sup> Free translation of the lyrics: (... a taste of glass and cut/American heart/a taste of life and death/ waiting in the immense queue/and the black body forgot/it was in San Vicente/the city and its lights...). Walking through the night of our city/Igniting hope and erasing the darkness/Let's go, walking through the streets of our city/To live pouring youth through hearts/ Have faith in our people that they resist/Have faith in our people that they insist/And wake up anew, strong, happy, full of passion/Let's go, walking hand in hand with a new soul/Live sowing freedom in every heart/Have faith in our people that they wake up/Have faith in our people that they scare/Walking and living with an open soul/ Warmed by the sun that comes after the storm/Let's go, companions through the streets of our city/Singing sowing a dream that will have to be real/Let's walk through the night with hope/Let's walk through the night with youth (... I was in San Vicente/the city and its lights/I was in San Vicente/the women and men/American heart...)



On 9 June 1978, the lyrics were vetoed in full: “The verses are summed up as a false alert or invitation to the people inciting them against the regime. Therefore, I opt for the veto according to the article [...]”. Sent for review by another censor on 13 of June the lyrics were not only released but also received a complimentary opinion: “The lyrics under examination are a hymn of hope and faith in walking towards the best, in a strong, joyful and decisive way, sowing dreams and hopes in the passage. It does not seem to us, in any way, to constitute an incitement against the current regime or any type of subversion to the established order, so we suggest its release” (DINIZ, 2017, p. 203-204, our translation).

The position of the author of the letter – F. Brant – is critical of the regime:

In 1974, with the election of opposition parliamentarians, people regained a little hope. But in 1977 came that April package from Geisel. We fell back into the hole. The lyrics of “*Credo*” are also from 1977, a year in which Brazilian society started to move again, especially students. There were rallies and protests across the country. Here in Belo Horizonte there was the 3rd ENE (National Student Meeting). It was the political movement of the youth that inspired me to write the lyrics of “*Credo*” (MATTOS, 2006, p. 73, our translation).

The song *Clube da Esquina n.º 2*, by M. Nascimento and Lô Borges, with lyrics by Márcio Borges, mentions the streets and corners of Brazilian cities where youth clashed with the regime's military police repression bodies.

*Porque se chamava moço/Também se chamava estrada/Viagem de ventania/Nem lembra se olhou pra trás/Ao primeiro passo, aço, aço, aço.../Porque se chamavam homens/Também se chamavam sonhos/E sonhos não envelhecem/Em meio a tantos gases lacrimogêneos/Ficam calmos, calmos, calmos.../E lá se vai mais um dia/E basta contar compasso/E basta contar consigo/Que a chama não tem pavio/De tudo se faz canção/E o coração na curva/De um rio, rio, rio, rio.../E lá se vai mais um dia.../E o rio de asfalto e gente/Entorna pelas ladeiras/Entope o meio-fio/Esquina mais de um milhão/ Quero ver então a gente, gente, gente.../E lá se vai mais um dia* (Lyrics of the song *Clube da Esquina n.º 2*. CLUBE DA ESQUINA 2, 1978)<sup>7</sup>.

M. Nascimento and L. Borges composed the instrumental theme *Clube da esquina n.º 2* for the record *Clube da esquina*, from 1972. The lyrics by M. Borges are from 1979. They were written in spite of Milton and Lô, who only discovered that the instrumental music had become a song after it had been recorded by Nana Caymmi, who asked M. Borges to write the lyrics.

<sup>7</sup> Free translation of the lyrics: Because they were called young man/They were also called road/A windy trip/They don't even remember if they looked back/At the first step, steel, steel, steel.../Because they were called men/They were also called dreams/And dreams don't grow old/In in the midst of so many tear gases/Stay calm, calm, calm.../And there goes another day/And all you have to do is count the beats/And all you have to do is count on yourself/That the flame has no wick/A song is made of everything/And the heart on the bend/Of a river, river, river, river.../ And there goes another day.../And the river of asphalt and people/ It spills over the slopes/ It clogs the curb/ More than a million corners / So I want to see us, people, people.../ And there goes another day

This is the letter that Márcio Borges most liked to have written: “I think it's the best done of all the almost two hundred I've written [...]. I think I was really possessed by something then, because I wrote those lyrics in one sitting. It seems like she was always on my mind, all the time” (MATTOS, 2006, p. 163-164, our translation).

She evokes the participation of young people in the 1968 demonstrations, by emphasizing that the struggle had not been in vain, so much so that she refers to the student movement in Brazil in the same period and to what had been re-establishing itself at the time when she wrote the lyrics. Márcio Borges had connections with the student movement and was a friend of José Carlos da Mata Machado, former president of the National Union of Students (UNE, Portuguese initials) and leader of the Marxist-Leninist Popular Action (APML, Portuguese initials). He hosted him at his home and covered him on his journey from Rio de Janeiro to São Paulo, while he was pursued by repression. In October 1973, José Carlos was declared dead, with later clarification that he had been murdered under torture in the Internal Operation Detachment (DOI, Portuguese initials) and Internal Operations and Defense Center (CODI, Portuguese initials) in Recife-PE (MARTINS, 2015; BORGES, 1996).

In these two songs, one can see the importance of the process of collective elaboration of the country's past. Remembrance is collective and political, but it is by no means an official commemoration, obligatory, organized with flags, parades or fanfares to remember a victory. It establishes a living relationship with the past; awakens the past to save the future from the stagnation of the present; it contains the latent meanings (the aspirations, the dreams, the spirit of the time) that constitute the past, in a way that it restores not only the past as it would have been, but the possibilities of the future that had been inscribed in it – even if not preformed.

The concern to save the past in the present thanks to the perception of a similarity that transforms them both: it transforms the past because it assumes a new form, which could have disappeared into oblivion; transforms the present because it reveals itself as being the possible realization of that earlier promise, which could have been lost forever, which could still be lost if we do not discover it, inscribed in the lines of the current (GAGNEBIN, 2012, p. 16, our translation).

The stagnation of society in the perpetual present of empty and homogeneous time – spectacular time – makes individuals in general passively accept the commemoration of the day of the civil-military “revolution” of 1964, in order to preserve in the collective memory a “single observation” from past. This can establish a legitimizing conception of time for thinking about historical becoming independently of human action, which must be to rescue from oblivion what could have made our history another history, to fight to remove from silence a past that



history official does not tell. Hence the need to brush up on the history of Brazil against the grain so that a living relationship with the past can be established, not just “remembering for the sake of remembering”.

Only a democratic pedagogy will allow society access to instruments of analysis of the past to better clarify the present. The works of art by those who resisted the military dictatorship are instruments of rational clarification about what happened, in order to avoid forgetting: the contents of the metaphors are made explicit – suffering and misery in an authoritarian regime. With the possibility of returning to a dictatorship, a model seen as paradigmatic for the current government, this need for clarification is essential, which does not mean that it is omnipresent.

It is possible to verify the actuality (for Benjamin it means “to become an act of a power”) (GAGNEBIN, 2008, p. 2) of the cultural production of *Clube da Esquina* in the 1970s through its songs critical of the military dictatorship, such as resistance to the active production of social amnesia in Brazil.

The songs of *Clube da Esquina* presented this mark of the subjectivity of the composers who, through metaphors, reached the reception of the public, in a sharing of desires, expectations and actions in order to make one reflect and seek means of transformation of the authoritarian society and of consumption in which they lived. A critical stance.

The remembrance of the works of opponents of the military dictatorship, such as the cultural production of *Clube da Esquina* in the 1970s, can serve, from now on, as a basis for resistance to the manifestations of the authorities regarding the return of acts practiced in that regime.

## **Final considerations**

We live under the empire of spectacular time, as a result of which historical awareness and the memorable lose importance.

If, in modern society, on the one hand, time becomes irreversible, whose events are unique, allow the memory of them by their transmission and, thus, give rise to the consciousness of history and the memorable, on the other hand, becomes the time of mass production of goods, time of things, of alienation, this being the loss of control over social life by those who produce them.

In the society of the contemporary spectacle, time is not only irreversible and for the mass production of goods, but also for the production and accumulation of images that guide social behavior towards their consumption. Time loses its qualitative character and becomes



more and more only quantitative, which makes it impossible for individuals to build their own lives. These have a “false awareness of time”, as they are expropriated from the production of their own life, their history and their memory.

As mere spectators of a “perpetual present”, with the emptying of historical knowledge and collective memory, individuals are also prevented from reflecting on who they are and how the owners of power – State/companies – act. These produce ideology about what suits them, and instances contrary to the maintenance of the status quo do not interest them and must be eliminated, whether from the past or the present.

As for the military dictatorship in Brazil from 1964 to 1985, there is currently a social amnesia with a view to building an official history. Identified with the world's conservative and reactionary wave, the government has manifested itself on the use of police force to repress social demonstrations and censorship and persecution of its critics. The military dictatorship is even praised for one of its most nefarious deeds: torture.

In view of this, if there is now an attempt to produce an official history, emanating from the State apparatus, about the period of the military dictatorship to legitimize the construction of a new dictatorship, in a context of emptying the meaning of the past, it is necessary to its immediate “counter-grain brushing”.

The critical concept of remembrance can be reformulated and rethought in relation to the new historical conditions of Brazilian society. There is a need to remember the cultural productions in opposition to the military dictatorship, as a possibility of resistance to the active production of social amnesia, typical of the spectacular time, in order to rule out the possibility that something similar to what happened will be repeated in the present. Historical awareness and active social memory must be produced today.

In the critical songs of *Clube da Esquina* produced in the 1970s, the use of the memory of the narrative subject about repression and the victims of the military dictatorship became a strategy to preserve the country's history. Even though criticism of the regime was under censorship, avoiding forgetting what happened was an opportunity to contest what was being done, to think about the transformation of society and to project oneself into the future as a historical document.

The members of *Clube da Esquina*, in the production of their songs, aimed to awaken the historical awareness of their people about the possibilities of transforming society, amid a dictatorship, by being in tune with their disappointments and hopes.

The critical theory of society, through its dialectical method, seeks to understand the present time with a view to overcoming its logic of domination. The memory of the works of





the opponents of the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985 in Brazil, therefore, can serve as a basis for the resisters of the present, by rescuing the meaning of the struggles of the past for the emancipation of the form of domination in the current historical moment.

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