

The women of the dictatorship represented in *Cova 312*

As mulheres da ditadura representadas em Cova 312

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the way in which Brazilian literary journalism represent women, especially considering the issue of violence. For this, a critical reading of reportage books in the Jabuti Award is presented. After attesting to the small number of female authors and the lack of representation of violence against this group, an analysis of *Cova 312*, by journalist Daniela Arbex, is developed. Despite focusing on the representation of the Brazilian military dictatorship and exposing a male protagonist, the reportage books emphasizes women who belonged to that context, showing the most different possibilities of struggle and confrontation the female figure experienced in that context.

Keywords: Literary journalism, violence, women, Cova 312

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RESUMO

Este estudo investiga como se dá a representatividade da mulher no jornalismo literário brasileiro, considerando, especialmente, o tema da violência. Para tanto, apresenta-se a leitura crítica dos livros-reportagem em destaque no Prêmio Jabuti. Após verificar o pequeno número de autoras mulheres, bem como a falta de representação da violência contra esse grupo, é desenvolvida uma análise da obra *Cova 312*, da jornalista Daniela Arbex. Apesar do foco estar na representação da ditadura militar brasileira e expor um protagonista homem, o livro-reportagem atribui destaque às mulheres que fizeram parte daquele contexto, evidenciando as mais diferentes possibilidades de luta e enfrentamento que a figura feminina vivenciou durante o período.

Palavras-chave: Jornalismo literário, violência, mulheres, Cova 312



A

NARRATIVES, OF THE MOST distinct natures, play an important role in society: journalistic texts, for example, have the main mission of informing, in addition to bringing to light important aspects about humanity, stimulating discussion and social criticism. Literary texts, on the other hand, despite not having information or a commitment to truth as their foundation, often use fiction to also promote reflections on socially relevant issues.

When combined, in what we call literary journalism, the two types of narrative have great power of recollecting events that truly occurred, that is, it is not fiction, but the use of aspects of literature to, by detailed and broad language, provide interpretative experiences that contribute to promote critical thinking on relevant topics, leaving an important legacy for social and collective memory. From this perspective, Mateus (2022) emphasizes that a society devoid of historical knowledge linked to shared memory is capable neither of reflecting on the present, nor of drawing important lessons for the future.

When representing the world, these narratives that preserve memory permeate the idea of otherness, as they give voice to subjects, generating a sense of empathy, since, from these readings, the “I” begins to have a broader meaning that is inserted into the social context through artistic representation. In this way, literary journalism can expand the construction of meanings before individuals, since it explores narratively the most diverse profiles, including, for example, socially vulnerable groups, such as Black, poor, Indigenous, LGBTQIAP+ people (lesbians, gays, bisexuals, *travestis*, transsexuals and transgenders, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual and other variations) and women, among others. When these subjects are represented not only they have their existence and identity valued, but also become known from a perspective that goes beyond the traditionally constructed stereotype. Furthermore, when a narrative represents social phenomena, such as violence, it problematizes, reinterprets, narrates, and encourages immersion in the understanding of realities.

Understanding that violence, especially that practiced against socially vulnerable groups, is part of the Brazilian context, I elaborated this article to investigate how literary journalism produced in Brazil promotes narratives that contribute to social criticism. To do so, I analyzed the representation of women in Brazilian news stories highlighted in the “Reportage” category of the Jabuti Prize – one of the greatest literary awards in the Americas –, from 2000 to 2017.

With this in mind, the methodology used to conduct this research is based on the premises of Comparative Literature, which, according to Tania

Carvalho (2003), aims to compare literature with other objects of study in order to obtain broader results about the topic under investigation, in this case, the intersection between literature and journalism. Based on this, I mapped the works awarded by the Jabuti Prize in the “Reportage” category, from 2000 to 2017, and selected, from among the three works awarded in each year, those that referred to violence against minority groups in a more emphatic manner. Aiming to understand the phenomenon, I analyzed in particular the work *Cova 312*, by Daniela Arbex, published in 2015 and awarded in 2016, and, among the socially vulnerable profiles, I chose to investigate the way in which the women are represented.

THE VIOLENCE IN REPORTAGE BOOKS

Hannah Arendt (1985, p. 6) states that “No one engaged in thought about history and politics can remain unaware of the enormous role violence has always played in human affairs”. Muniz Sodré (1992) claims that violence is growing in the country in direct proportion to the increase in population in urban centers and the deterioration of the population’s living conditions, which faces problems such as food, health and education deficiencies, unemployment, and others.

Scenes of violence are broadcast daily by the media and are often trivialized, considering historical and social aspects. Therefore, it is necessary to question which works are capable of stimulating interlocutors to have a new perception of this universe that involves violence. Thus, I understand that by combining journalism—with its informative nature—and literature—with all its linguistic and humanizing contribution—it is possible to provide readers with new ways of viewing certain events, while the author of this type of text has the possibility of choosing how to approach the facts, arousing, to a greater or lesser extent, critical sense and permeating values from which it becomes possible to create a new perspective on situations of cruelty.

In considering the objective of this investigation to verify how violence is represented—especially that against women—in literary and journalistic productions, in order to understand whether the reports promote social reflection, I carried out a critical reading of the reportage books awarded by the Jabuti Prize, from 2000 to 2017. The following works were part of this mapping: *Estação Carandiru* (1999), by Dráuzio Varella; *A família Canuto e a luta camponesa na Amazônia* (1999), by Carlos Cartaxo; *Meu casaco de general: Quinhentos dias no front da segurança pública do Rio de Janeiro* (2000), by Luiz Eduardo Soares; *Eny e o grande bordel brasileiro* (2002), by Lucius de Mello; *Abusado* (2003), by



Caco Barcellos; *Viúvas da terra* (2004), by Klester Cavalcanti; *Operação Araguaia: arquivos secretos da guerrilha* (2005), by Taís Morais and Eumano Silva; *O nome da morte* (2006), by Klester Cavalcanti; *O massacre* (2007), by Eric Nepomuceno; *O sequestro dos uruguaios: Uma reportagem dos tempos da ditadura* (2008), by Luiz Cláudio Cunha; *Conversas de cafetinas* (2009), by Sérgio Maggio; *Assalto ao poder: o crime organizado* (2010), by Carlos Amorim; *O espetáculo mais triste da Terra* (2011), by Mauro Ventura; *As duas guerras de Vlado Herzog: da perseguição nazista na Europa à morte sob tortura no Brasil* (2012), by Audálio Dantas; *Holocausto brasileiro* (2013), by Daniela Arbex; *A casa da vovó: Uma biografia do Doi-Codi (1969-1991), o centro de sequestro, tortura e morte da Ditadura Militar* (2014), by Marcelo Godoy; *Cova 312* (2015), by Daniela Arbex; *Nazistas entre nós: A trajetória dos oficiais de Hitler depois da guerra* (2016), by Marcos Guterman.

The observation regarding the authorship of the award-winning reportage books since 2000 allows reaffirming what already occurs in other artistic fields in general, that is, if the majority of filmmakers, musicians, fiction writers, painters, etc., are men, this also occurs in the field of literary journalism. Among the 18 works mapped, there are only two female writers, one of whom wrote two of the award-winning books, and the other is an author who writes in partnership with a male author. It is not possible to know whether men are more engaged with literary journalism than women, but considering the entire context—not only artistic, but also social and cultural—what is evident is that men hold a greater space in the production of these works or, at least, in their awarding. In addition to this fact, it is known that it took a long time for women to assume prominent positions in the world of journalism. In fact, there is still less editorial segmentation today than before, that is, specific subjects that are investigated and developed mainly by men.

In the field of Literature, researcher Regina Dalcastagnè conducted a study on the representation of the central characters in Brazilian novels from 1990 to 2004, published by *Companhia das Letras*, *Record*, and *Rocco*, Brazilian publishers. As revealed by Dalcastagnè (2005), the possibility of creating female characters is linked to the sex of the person developing the work, since books written by women present 52% of the characters as female, with 64.1% as protagonists and 76.6% as narrators. In turn, when the authors are men, female characters account for 32.1%, with only 13.8% as protagonists and 16.2% as narrators. Furthermore, the research also reveals data on the authors of the novels, indicating that 72.7% of Brazil's writers are men.

According to the author's analysis,

female condition has evolved in many ways, but literature—or at least novels—continues to be dominated by males. It is not possible to say whether women write less or whether they have less ease in publishing with the most prestigious publishers (or both). Evidence suggests that the ratio of male to female writers is not exclusive to the largest publishers. (Dalcastagnè, 2005, p. 31)

Dalcastagnè (2005) concluded, in her mapping of Brazilian literature, that regarding the characters in these novels, among the protagonists 62.1% are men and 37.8% are women, with only one case in the “other” category. The disparity in representations is further evidenced by the result that shows female characters occupying the position of protagonist or narrator to a lesser extent. Their main occupations in the novels are, in this order: housewives (25.1%), artists (10.2%), unemployed (9.6%), and housekeepers (7.4%), among other activities such as students, teachers, sex workers, journalists, or writers. Thus, the dominant character’s profile in contemporary Brazilian novels is that of a male white heterosexual adult, and more successful than female characters.

These findings allow inferring that, also in other arts, it is uncommon for these groups to be represented with an active voice. Women, children, Black and LGBTQIAP+ people, for example, are not given preference at the center of narratives. From this perspective, researcher Lizandro Carlos Calegari (2013) conducted a study on the representation of women, gays and Black people in the literary canon and concluded that “these groups, along with others, because they have been placed on the margins of society, history and literature, denounce their condition of exclusion, but mainly of suffering” (Calegari, 2013, p. 30).

Based on the mapping and critical reading of the award-winning reportage books, I concluded that the people affected by violence, represented in the works, are mostly political activists or victims of an authoritarian system. Next to them are rural workers, some of whom also being political activists. Furthermore, people in general are affected by violence and represented in contemporary reportage books, including individuals from the less privileged classes, such as prostitutes, children, adolescents, and homosexuals.

Based on this, one sought to understand the profile of those attacked; however, as most of the works present a very wide diversity of characters, the profile identification was similarly varied. For gender, 14 works present both male and female victims; two demonstrate cruel acts committed only against men; another two—those referring to sex workers—show violence specifically

against women, and one highlights women's suffering after the loss of their husbands, who were murdered.

In this sense, I note that there is a lack of representation among the award-winning literary journalism works in the period analyzed, particularly regarding violence against women. When this specific representation occurs, it is directed at women in the context of prostitution or considering the daily difficulties stemming from the loss of their husbands. This issue requires attention, given that in 2020, the Brazilian Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MMFDH)¹ registered 105,821 reports of violence against women, but it is clear that this number could be even higher, considering victims who do not report violence for various reasons. Moreover, in the first half of 2020 alone, 648 women were murdered because of their gender. Cases of this nature could constitute relevant themes for the production of contemporary pieces of literary journalism; however, they are not represented in the award-winning reportage books in the studied period. Despite this, most works, at some point, mention the acts of cruelty directed at women, always within the broader sense of the narrative.

Considering what I mentioned earlier about the lack of representation of vulnerable groups in the artistic field, especially regarding sexual orientation, skin-color, and social status—people who are affected by violence on a daily basis—, it is possible to observe that this is not the focus of the works mentioned either. Although these groups are represented, there are no specific narratives aimed at them among the award winners. For the same reason mentioned above, the outcome of the mapping, in terms of sexual orientation, color and age, is also quite ample. Although at least five of the works include violence against LGBTQIAP+ individuals, there is no exclusive mention of the topic, even though Brazil holds one of the largest figures of LGBTQIAP+ homicides worldwide.

Based on these results, I thoroughly analyze one of the few award-winning pieces of literary journalism in the period from 2000 to 2017 written by a woman, the book *Cova 312*, by Daniela Arbex (2015), whose perceptions are exposed in the next subtitle of this article.

THE WOMEN REPRESENTED IN *COVA 312*

Daniela Arbex is an investigative journalist dedicated to defending human rights. At the age of 49, she worked for 23 years as a special reporter for the *Tribuna de Minas* newspaper in the state of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Arbex is one of the most awarded journalists of her generation, with more than 20 national and international tributes.

¹ Available in Portuguese at <https://www.gov.br/mdh/ptbr/assuntos/noticias/2021/marco/canais-registram-mais-de-105-mil-denuncias-de-violencia-contra-mulher-em-2020>

As part of her award-winning career, Daniela Arbex published, in 2015, *Cova 312* [Grave 312], a reportage book whose investigation began much earlier, in mid-2002. Her investigations, which made several headlines in *Tribuna de Minas*, were expanded as new facts came to light and, with the visit to the deceased activist Milton's family, in 2013, the journalist finished gathering all the information about the case and concluded her revealing work. *Cova 312*, published by *Geração Editorial*, won the Jabuti Prize in 2016 in the reportage book category.

The 342-page book tells the story of how the armed forces killed political activist Milton Soares de Castro, faked his suicide, and disappeared with his body. Arbex reconstructs the story and not only reveals the path the young man faced but also discovers the location of the grave where his body was buried: the previously anonymous grave 312 that gives the book its name. In addition, it presents other episodes from the time of the Brazilian military dictatorship, based on the stories of more than 20 characters who experienced the struggles of that time.

Cova 312 is made up of three parts, divided into sub-chapters. In addition to the written language, the work includes images of various documents that prove the information gathered, archive photos that allow visualizing the characters during the dictatorship, and the representation of current places such as the *Linhares* Penitentiary and Milton's grave.

Notably the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship began in 1964, after the coup d'état led by the Army, and lasted until 1985. Before that, the country was already suffering from political instability, stemming from a weakened democracy and the remnants of the *Estado Novo* period (1937–1945), marked by violent repression practices.

Arbex's work breaks down the details of this period characterized by authoritarianism and daily wars. The entire narrative is marked by the strong presence of literary language; the book is, exactly as stated in the introduction, written as if it were a novel. These particularities, in certain situations, provide a light tone, as they cover the author's own trajectories in the search for information and the explanation of moments of relaxation between characters. However, at the same time, on many other occasions, this form of narrative, with literary characteristics, allows for an immersion in the memory of this tragic period in Brazilian history in an extremely realistic manner. In other words, it is a book that provokes true discomfort, leading both to feelings of empathy for the pain of others and to very deep reflections.

All of these aspects are discussed in detail in the reportage book and deserve a specific study. However, considering the selection I made for this



article, I describe below the way in which the female image was represented based on Arbex's work. Although the narrative deals broadly with the Brazilian dictatorship period and has as its central character a man, the guerrilla Milton, the journalist presents very clearly the women's role in this context.

Throughout *Cova 312*, Daniela Arbex brings to light the representation of many women who experienced the Brazilian dictatorship. Not all of them participated actively in some movement fighting against the regime, but there are several female figures who played extremely important roles, beyond the front line of militancy, considering that many acted as support for the maintenance of family needs, including the prisoners' ones. Excepting one story, the women highlighted in the narrative are not placed in an exclusive chapter; their trajectories are told in line with the reports about the guerrillas, torture, and imprisonment.

Based on the results obtained from reading the reportage books that were part of the mapping, I understand that Arbex's view of women who experienced the dictatorship period may be related to the fact that she herself is a female author. This aspect is in line with the information provided by Dalcastagnè (2005), when she reveals that the representation of female characters is much more significant when a work is written by a woman.

Having made these reflections, I will cite some excerpts in which the journalist attributes prominence to female figures in her work. At the beginning of the reportage book, before even delving into the issues related to the dictatorship period, Daniela Arbex (2015) introduces Milton's family: his sister Gessi and his mother Universina.

Universina, a healer, is portrayed in the narrative as a strong woman who care deeply for the well-being of her family. She had 10 children from her first marriage with the policeman Marcílio, and five more from her second, however, as Arbex (2015, p. 41) reports: "unlike her first husband, the police officer brought violence and the uncontrollable desire to sexually abuse his stepdaughters into their home." This short excerpt is imbued with a vast meaning, because it is possible to perceive another form of violence represented in the work, in addition to the cruelties of the dictatorship, this time aimed at the women of a family who were forced to submit to the orders of someone they could supposedly trust.

The journalist says that when Universina managed to free herself from that relationship, she reunited with her children, since many had scattered to other places to get away from their stepfather. "She didn't mind suffering any hardships, as long as she was with the 15 offspring she had given birth to" (Arbex, 2015, p. 41). These descriptions about the mother show the strength of the woman

who, in addition to giving birth to several children, working selling bread and dedicating herself to her family, suffered violence and later looked for everyone to unite the family.

Still regarding the Soares de Castro family women's trajectories, Arbex dedicates pages of her narrative to talk about Gessi, the guerrillas' sister. She would have been the last person Milton was with before going to *Caparaó*.

The green-eyed woman who had once been a beauty queen was also beautiful on the inside. She always had a good word to say and, in addition, she was a great baker, just like her mother. She was also a healer. Unhappy in her marriage, she fulfilled both father and mother roles, raising two children on her own with the help from a sewing machine. To support her offspring, she worked night and day listening to the needle pierce the fabric to thread the dresses she made. — Bro, stop with these ideas of equality. Mom already told you: “you’re going to be crushed like a worm.” Milton was always trying to harmonize, and Gessi continued: — I so wish you had a girlfriend, a family. If you had someone, you wouldn’t screw everything up. The big always step on the small, and against force there is no resistance. (Arbex, 2015, p. 64)

From the excerpt, I notice that the narrator highlights a saga that, by representing the guerrillas' mother and sister, also shows a female profile that has the fate of experiencing an unhappy marriage and, later, of fighting alone to support her children. Although she begins by talking about Gessi's physical beauty, what follows in depth is the beauty “on the inside.” Thus, strength and suffering go hand in hand, almost romanticized in a description that reveals exactly the opposite of the adjectives related to frailty, historically attributed to women.

Nevertheless, even experiencing marriages that had painful outcomes, traditional thoughts regarding the importance of family formation are still part of women's discourse, as Arbex explained in the aforementioned excerpt. By mentioning her mother's thoughts, Gessi tries to convince Milton to replace his life of activism with the search for a family. This may be established precisely by the sense of protection of these women, accustomed to struggle to provide the basics for their children.

It is also important, in the fragment in which the sister tries to convince Milton to change his mind, Gessi's understanding of relations of domination, when she emphasizes that the great prevails over the small is a natural behavior, indicating hierarchical issues, with emphasis on the phrase “against force there is no resistance,” which basically summarizes the reasons why militant struggles



during the dictatorship period were often weakened by the political discourse of militarism and, later, erased.

In *Cova 312*, there is a reference to a night when, while Gessi was sewing, her brother went to visit her, who gave her a hug, without telling her where he was going, but gave her a note and a small photo with information that could help if she needed to maintain some contact. When Gessi received the note, “pressed the paper to her chest and thought about Mrs. Universina” (Arbex, 2015, p. 64). This reference to Gessi thinking about the mother demonstrates almost a solidarity between the women in the family who understand each other. Furthermore, it once again highlights the maternal feeling, since the immediate thought was about the mother’s concern. Sometime later, Gessi reported never having had the courage to open the note, regretting not having known what was written.

Just like Milton’s mother, countless other mothers suffered the uncertainties of the dictatorship period. Arbex (2015, p. 75) describes that, since Milton’s arrest, Mrs. Universina “reported almost daily to the soldiers of the 3º Army, in the capital, seeking information about her son. She had heard that he had been taken to a small Brazilian town whose name she did not know how to pronounce.” In addition to the physical and psychological violence suffered by her husband, the mother, who represents so many others, ended up, albeit indirectly, suffering the dictatorship violence for not having access to the slightest information about a son who was in prison.

Another moment in the work that represents these relationships between mother and children is the episode in which the journalist describes a confrontation, with the possibility of death, in which one of the guerrillas, Nilo, thought of his mother, Filomena: “at that moment, he remembered the gaunt face of his mother, a primary school teacher who had lived for years in a loveless marriage” (Arbex, 2015, p. 148). In addition to once again representing the idea of unhappy marriages to which women were destined, the journalist reports that the last time Nilo saw his mother was at Christmas, in a simple moment of celebration. “With lack of money, there was no plentiful table, only a few sweets made by his mother so that December 24, 1968 would not go by unnoticed. Remembering Mrs. Mena gave the young man more courage” (Arbex, 2015, p. 148). Here, once again, we have a demonstration of the traditions that permeated women’s lives: loving mothers with difficult marriages, doing everything for their children.

Psychological violence plagued countless women during that period, many anonymous, who ended up facing the dictatorship horrors, even

without direct involvement. Arbex (2015) tells the story of Érica Meyer, who lived in Rio de Janeiro and welcomed her nephew Marco Antônio into her home, who was being sought by the military. The aunt was 60 years old and was captured in her nephew's place, imprisoned for 35 days, accused of being an accomplice to the militant, and was also considered a suspect of espionage. Arbex (2015, p. 131) says that Érica did not understand how "law enforcement representatives could subvert the basic principles of individual rights to threaten people, especially someone who hadn't taken part in any action against the government." The journalist adds that the woman never got over the humiliation she suffered at the DOPS, "when she was forced to stand naked in the presence of several strangers. She felt blemished. She had been morally violated" (Arbex, 2015, p. 131).

With this account, it is possible to see the story of yet another woman who, although having not chosen to directly combat dictatorial ideas, questioned the political stance of the time, since she perceived as inconceivable the idea of the government producing acts of humiliation and cruelty against human beings. The injustices of that period are also highlighted in this book excerpt, as there is an increase in accusations against a person who had little or no involvement with the militants' actions. Although it is not clear whether Érica suffered any other kind of physical torture, the psychological violence she suffered is notable, in a hierarchical relationship of domination that is symbolic, coercive, and political at the same time.

As for Marco Antônio, he was later captured and suffered various forms of torture by the military so that he would denounce the names of the other militants. "In September 1969, he had his arms and legs tied to an iron bar for simple revenge" (Arbex, 2015, p. 131). His mother was also represented in *Cova 312*, when the journalist recounts that, unhappy to see her son's physical state, Maria Luiza de Azevedo Meyer "arranged a meeting with the wife of the commander who was presiding over the investigation to ask for clemency." After this appeal, and "shaken before the widow who had practically raised her 10 children alone, the officer's wife tried to intercede with her husband, but the effect was the opposite. The student was harshly persecuted" (Arbex, 2015, p. 131). In addition to the unfortunate retaliation against the militant, I can see in this fragment the idea of empathy between women, almost as if they could understand each other's pain in a more sensitive manner. Again, another mother, with several children, crying out for the life of one of her own.

Concerned mothers, aunts and sisters with a painful past were, for the most part, hidden by history and forgotten in the collective imagination, yet



they played an important role in that period, precisely by maintaining as much dignity as possible for their families and, even without direct combat, acting as bases of resistance against the dictatorship horrors. Ana Maria Colling (2015, p. 380) states that, in Brazil, there are “countless examples of maternal courage and determination to free their imprisoned offspring. In defending the lives of their offspring, mothers have become fierce militants who know no limits.” The author also points out that this is the reason why they were feared by the repressive forces.

Arbex (2015) corroborates this idea by emphasizing that the political prisoners’ mothers played a fundamental role in preventing the murder of many, as they had an important role to play in combating the torture and violations committed, looking for ways to sensitize the law enforcement. “Although she wasn’t part of the political movement against the regime, she was forced to fight. She had to resist in her own way,” says Arbex (2015, p. 164), referring to Ângela, an important figure in the mobilization of families whose members had disappeared.

In addition to the mothers, Arbex’s narrative also includes those women who, dissatisfied with the country’s situation, worked on anti-government missions. These women were even more hated by those in power. Colling (2015) affirms that, for the Brazilian military dictatorship, militant women were not only regime opponents, but also subversive figures in the face of established values, since it was not up to women to think and participate in politics. As such, women who took up political activism in parties opposed to the dictatorship “committed two sins in the eyes of repression: of rising up against the coup policy, opposing it, and of disregarding the place destined for women, breaking the social standards established for both sexes” (Colling, 2015, p. 378).

Some of these female figures who dismissed the possibility of keeping quiet in order to be included in the standard were represented in Arbex’s work. The author recounts, for example, an action in which the militants, in a form of protest, orchestrated a bank robbery:

Witnesses reported that one member of the group of robbers stood out from the rest. The descriptions given to the police were of the only woman in the group. According to the *Mercantil* bank victims, she was wearing a blond wig, a thin green dress that fluttered in the wind, and boots. She was student Maria José Carvalho Nahas, from UFMG School of Medicine. Although she had straight black hair and never wore a disguise during her actions, just a discreet

pied-de-poule skirt, the guerrilla woman caught the popular imagination. Decades later, Maria José became known as the Blonde with the Machine Gun. (Arbex, 2015, pp. 144-145)

The aspects cited by the historian in the sense of escaping standards are clear in this fragment, as it shows a role that was out of the ordinary for a woman who, besides being a medical student at a time when more prestigious studies and professions were for men, became a militant, taking part in a bank robbery, in an action that was much more political than economically motivated.

Another reference to Maria José, also known as Zezé, is exposed in the same confrontation in which Nilo remembered his mother Filomena. In this excerpt, one describes that the activist, at gunpoint, thought about the poem “Morte do Leiteiro,” by Carlos Drummond de Andrade, which deals with the inequalities of Brazilian society. Arbex (2015, p. 149) describes some verses from the poet’s work and analyzes the situation: “she resorted to Drummond’s poetry to try to keep her sanity.” The journalist strives to show that sensitivity, based on art, was part of the guerrillas’ lives, indicating that, even at a time of conflict, literary references could be allied to a certain level of relief. This also occurs at other points in the book, when the narration emphasizes poetry, music, and other expressions that accompanied the militants, and which were often strongly repressed under the dictatorship, as well as the books that political prisoners hid so that they could read and have contact with artistic expressions.

Despite the poeticism, the dictatorship suffering was felt by everyone, and probably it was even more humiliatingly by women. Maria Amélia de Almeida Teles (2014, p. 14) highlights that both women and men were tortured, but women were systematically the target of sexual violence. “The practice of rape and forced abortion was commonplace in torture sessions when it came to violent political repression against left-wing militants.” The researcher explains that both men and women were forced to undress in front of the torturers; if they did not comply, their clothes would be ripped off and torn. “In many cases, electric wires were inserted into the vagina and anus. Some women were raped. Others suffered forced abortions due to kicks in the stomach. . . .”

In addition to physical attacks, women were humiliated. simply because of their gender. As historian Colling (2015, p. 380) explains, “when dealing with politicized women, the military immediately tried to disqualify them as autonomous subjects. Her characterization is as an appendage of men,



incapable of making political decisions,” and adds that “for the repression, women do not have the capacity to decide on their entry into the political world; when they appear there, it is because they have been introduced by a man,” and for this reason, their affiliation to left-wing parties would have no political importance, since it was necessary to identify the figure of a husband or father, for example. These questions show that, besides suffering for militating against a regime they disagreed with, women also had to deal with relegation due to their gender.

The torture committed against women is represented in the reportage book. Maria José was a victim of one of them, and her friend and fighting companion, Carmela, explained what she saw. Daniela Arbex described the statement:

Several days passed without a more precise signal to guide me. Who would be there? I later learned from the prison guard that my friend Maria José Nahas had been thrown into that hell. *Surda* [deaf cell] was the name given to that cubicle where the only noises were those of rats and cockroaches, surrounded by webs and spiders that lightly wove their lives. *Surda* was a one-to-six-foot space, where the prisoner, in order to survive, would always have to be in horizontal position on a cement bed, and there was a pit at the cell backside. (Arbex, 2015, p. 186)

Upon realizing Zezé’s apparent frailty, a new guard from *Linhares* commented to a veteran: “I feel sorry for these girls trapped here. They must be scared. – Scared? These women have more courage than men – Veiga replied. . . .” (Arbex, 2015, p. 192). When making a connection between the path taken by Maria José, and her participation in actions against the government, her escape and the situation in the so-called “*surda*,” and the comment made by the guard, it is notable the attempt to maintain the stereotype of the frail, frightened and weak woman, an argument refuted by the other guard, but not without comparing them to men, highlighting it how something that would be out of the ordinary. This stereotype is also clear at another point in the narrative, when Zezé meets a common prisoner who was known to his family:

I’ve already told these people that you come from a distinguished family and isn’t involved in this political mess. You were just used by these troublemakers, since girls like you don’t get involved in these things. The young woman smiled, thinking about how wrong that man was about her. There was no point in arguing back. (Arbex, 2015, p. 192)

He was a hitman and, when he was released, he visited Zezé's mother, taking pride in having given the "girl" good advice. Despite the impressions regarding women's frailty or even incapacity in the face of political and social issues, Carmela and Maria José came to be known as two of the most dangerous guerrillas of the period. Arbex (2015, p. 190) also portrays moments in Maria José's personal life: "against conventions, the 23-year-old bride got married in a lilac-colored *laise* dress," breaking, once again, the expected standards.

Arbex's book has a sub-chapter entitled "The woman who faced the regime," which tells the story of Ângela Pezzuti, whose two nephews and the sister were imprisoned by the military regime.

Wednesday, 6 a.m., downtown Belo Horizonte. The alarm clock rang on that November 19, 1969, waking Ângela Pezzuti, 36 years old, for another day of cross-bearing journey: visiting, almost 300 kilometers away, the children she did not give birth. Even without carrying them in her womb, she felt like a mother to Ângelo and Murilo. Ângela dedicated part of her life to caring for the children of Carmela, her sister, who had also joined the resistance against the dictatorship. Since the boys were arrested for the first time, in January of that year, she began to tirelessly watch over the survival of her nephews and her own sister during the many times she was imprisoned. If it were not for her crusade to locate and monitor her relatives in prison, they would certainly have succumbed to all the violence which they were exposed to. (Arbex, 2015, p. 163)

With this excerpt, it becomes clear that each woman played a leading role: one acted in the fight against the regime, and the other also joined the struggle, playing the role of protecting the family and maintaining everything necessary for everyone's survival. This aspect becomes even more striking when the journalist reports that Ângela and Carmela met during a visit to the political prisoners in Linhares, and the sister told them that she was going to flee the country to avoid her fourth time in prison: "But Carmela, are you going to leave your children imprisoned in *Linhares*?, Ângela, everyone has a mission in life. I am a revolutionary. I leave my children with you. Your mission is with my children" (Arbex, 2015, p. 165). In this conversation, which also showed that it would be the last time Carmela would see her children, it is remarkable the idea of each woman's mission, contributing to the struggles of the time. Still on the subject of Carmela, Arbex (2015) briefly recalls an event in which she took part in a meeting with the then militant Dilma Rousseff, who was later elected as Brazil's first—and up to now, only—female president.



On more than one occasion, Ângela did not know the whereabouts of her sister and her nephews, Ângelo and Murilo. On these occasions, she was the protagonist in seeking out the authorities and trying to locate her family, mobilizing other people to do the same. The author reports that, on a certain occasion when everyone disappeared again, every Friday Ângela left from Belo Horizonte to Rio de Janeiro in search of news. She even went personally to the house of Colonel Ari Pereira de Carvalho, who had given her permission to visit her nephews at the *Vila Militar*, where one has told they were being held: “What are you doing here?— he asked, embarrassed by the fact that he was shirtless and without the uniform that made him more powerful than other mortals” (Arbex, 2015, p. 176). This passage is a strong sign that the authorities of the time needed to maintain their position of power.

Returning to Carmela’s story, Daniela Arbex explains that, a month after her escape, the activist was captured in Rio de Janeiro and subjected to countless sessions of violence at the Army’s military police unit. When she arrived in Linhares, “the exuberance of her personality and the permanent sparkle in her eyes had disappeared. She was an undead. She was dirty, broken, looking much older than her 44 years” (Arbex, 2015, p. 13). The journalist says that, to pay homage to Carmela, the political prisoners began to sing and the women’s gallery responded by singing together, which was precisely the form of communication between men and women at the prison. When analyzing this episode, it is important to infer that gender differentiation, in the sense of demeaning women as if they were in inferior conditions, was much lower among the militants, men and women, who had similar ideals.

In one of the moments of the reportage book, Arbex (2015) recounts that the women prisoners were transferred from the “Girls’ Gallery” in Linhares, without any warning to those who remained, and many of the prisoners remained for a long time without knowing where the people who were their sister-in-arms, wives, fiancées and friends were, also causing the group to separate. The journalist relates that there was a garden that the women took great care of; they gave the prisoners flowers on certain visits, so the inmates tried to keep it very carefully to preserve the idea of keeping the women close in some way. The soldiers, however, destroyed the garden several times, and the inmates always planted again until, finally, the army decided to lay cement in the courtyard, putting an end to the garden. Despite this, the plants resisted and sprouted in unlikely places, for example in the middle of the damaged concrete. A clump of *sempre-vivas* [a flower species endemic to Brazil] emerged

from there, which was later uprooted and thrown to the ground so that the inmates could witness their death.

No one gave up on replanting the seeds. For every plant that was cut down, another one appeared in the political prison. The rebirth of the *sempre-vivas* fed hope in a period of human desertification. At no other time has the country faced so much pain. (Arbex, 2015, p. 237)

This pain is represented quite emphatically in *Cova 312*, which seems to be able to capture the suffering of those involved as far as the understanding of someone who has not experienced similar situations can reach. Thus, in this work, Daniela Arbex transforms what was a number into private, real stories of people who had their lives and, in many cases, put them aside for a greater ideal, since, in that context, “the loss of freedom itself was the price to pay for keeping ideas free” (Arbex, 2015, p. 111).

In this way, by representing these identities and bringing to light the stories of the women who lived through the Brazilian dictatorship, the reportage book gives voice to female figures who are often hidden from different narratives, including the historical one, thus reinforcing the possibility of humanization through works characterized by literary journalism. ■

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