

ARTICLE

MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY
The holocaust and the Brazilian
military dictatorship in *K. Relato
de uma busca* and *O irmão alemão*

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This article aims to point to the multidirectionality between the memory of the Holocaust and the memory of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship based on the analysis of two literary works written by Brazilian authors, namely Bernardo Kucinski's *K. Relato de uma Busca* and Chico Buarque's *O Irmão Alemão*. Such analysis requires a multidirectional approach to intersecting different histories so that the concept of multidirectional memory will be methodologically mobilized. The recognition of the Shoah in the collective memory offers a counterpoint to the forgetfulness and denialism that accompany the remembrance of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship. At the same time, fictional literature becomes a privileged means for the articulation of different memories and for the attempt to work-through the past in the face of the gaps inherent to trauma.

*Holocaust—Brazilian Military Dictatorship
—Multidirectional Memory*

ARTIGO

MEMÓRIA MULTIDIRECIONAL
O Holocausto e a Ditadura
Militar brasileira em *K. Relato de
uma busca* e *O irmão alemão*

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Este artigo tem como objetivo apontar a multidirecionalidade entre a memória do Holocausto e a memória da ditadura militar brasileira a partir da análise de duas obras literárias de autores brasileiros, a saber, *K. Relato de uma Busca*, de Bernardo Kucinski, e *O Irmão Alemão*, de Chico Buarque. O conceito de memória multidirecional é mobilizado metodologicamente uma vez que tal análise requer uma abordagem multidirecional para relacionar diferentes histórias. O reconhecimento da Shoah na memória coletiva oferece um contraponto ao esquecimento e ao negacionismo que acompanham a lembrança da ditadura militar brasileira. Ao mesmo tempo, a literatura de ficção torna-se um meio privilegiado para a articulação de diferentes memórias e para a tentativa de elaborar o passado face às lacunas inerentes ao trauma.

Holocausto—Ditadura Militar Brasileira
—Memória multidirecional

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this article is to show the intertwining of the memory of the Shoah and the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in two fictional works written by Brazilian authors. The books are Bernardo Kucinski's *K. Relato de uma Busca*¹ (2011) and Chico Buarque's *O Irmão Alemão*² (2014). The Holocaust can be seen as a topic alien to the Brazilian socio-cultural reality. Still, in this case, I show that literature can make it possible to unite the writings on the Holocaust and the Brazilian Military Dictatorship. To achieve this, the concept of multidirectional memory will be mobilized as coined by Michael Rothberg (2009). The concept of multidirectional memory makes it possible to establish a relationship between memories of apparently incompatible legacies, that is, it allows one to think about how different stories of victimization confront each other in the public sphere without necessarily taking it as a competition for space. Rothberg considers contemporary multicultural societies as a space where memory does not obey a logic of scarcity, on the contrary, collective consciousness is linked to a formation of group identities that emerge from interactions of different pasts. In this sense, what Rothberg (2019 4-6) calls multidirectional memory is an intercultural dynamic that does not draw a direct line between remembrance of the past and formation of identity in the present, but instead works through a bind with other's pasts that are often seen as foreign and distant. Methodologically, the concept allows me to perceive the interaction of different historical memories in fiction. Thus, the Holocaust can be seen as a paradigmatic event in a way that its pervasive presence and the struggles for recognition that accompany it can serve less as something that overlaps other memories and more as an interaction of different traumas in collective memory considering that collective memories are continually subject to negotiation, borrowing, and cross-referencing. Rothberg (2019, 6-7) even acknowledges that multidirectional memory is not a one-way street: not only the Holocaust memory can serve as a platform to articulate other histories of victimization, but also public memory of the Holocaust emerged in dialogue with postwar events seen at first as very dissimilar.

However, it is important to emphasize that simply transposing the vocabulary of the Holocaust to other catastrophes can be an exercise that leaves out the specificities of each case. This is what Sarah De Mul warns regarding Adam Hochschild's book on colonial violence and torture in the Congo. The book *King Leopold's Ghost - A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, originally released in 1998, aims to denounce the genocide carried out in the then Congo Free State under the rule of Leopold II. Hochschild starts from the idea that the atrocities in the Congo would be a holocaust like the Jewish Holocaust and tells this story using analogies, and even comparing psychological aspects of Leopold II and Hitler. The book was an important source of reported colonial crimes and, despite denouncing a past that many denied, it became a best-seller in Belgium, but, according to De Mul, it left out the African perspective, suffocated by the strategy of comparison with a memory already assumed from the Jewish Holocaust (De Mul 2011, 592).

¹ The English version of the book has been published under the title *K. alone*, but a possible translation of the complete Portuguese title would be "K. Account of a search".

² The English version of the book is published under the title *My German Brother*.

Thereby, without ignoring the various disputes that may involve different memory policies and without establishing a hierarchy of memories, the intention here is to point out how the articulation of multiple pasts in a heterogeneous present can say a lot about identity formations in realities that follow traumatic events and, at the same time, to show the extent of the memory of the Holocaust in the world literature. In this way, the object is the fictional literature with testimonial content (Seligmann-Silva 2022). To think about a literature with a testimonial content is to admit that the act of writing is, in a way, the act of bear witnessing, but, at the same time, without the commitment of trying to tell exactly what happened, as was the case with testimonies of survivors in trials or Truth Commissions. The traumatic in this case appears as something that resists representation and, paradoxically, in an attempt to reach the real, must resort to fiction. This recurrence to fiction is widespread and pertinent when historical traumas have not been properly confronted in the collective memory, as in the case of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship.

One cannot simply diagnose Brazil as a country without memory (Bentivoglio 2020). It is necessary to deal not with amnesia, but with the deliberate and often politically motivated forgetfulness that accompanies our greatest historical traumas, especially the Military Dictatorship. When one talks about forgetting, it is possible to imagine it in Nietzschean terms, a natural and even desirable forgetting against a supposed superlative historicism, after all, the past must pass and not dominate the present (Nietzsche 2007). The oblivion that accompanies the dictatorial period in Brazil, however, goes hand in hand with silencing, deliberate erasure, and, at the same time, with the irruption of distorted forms of the past into the present as typical of trauma. Furthermore, it is a present past, constantly revisited in political speeches and the target of the most diverse rhetorical inconsistencies (Bauer 2024). Erasure ranges from the destruction of evidence, documents, physical spaces, and bodies to the denial, not of the event itself, but of the crimes committed. In the Brazilian case, the apologetic tendency is linked to the strategy of the so-called New Right (Pereira 2015; Ávila 2021) of minimizing or denying the consequences of historical traumas, particularly the period of the Military Dictatorship (Nicolazzi 2020) after which the amnesty law prevailed and tortures and murderers were free from prosecution (Reis 2010). On other occasions, crimes are not even denied, torture is not hidden, but praised, made positive, in a way that the coup becomes a revolution to restore public order (Napolitano 2019). The narrative dispute focuses – not only, but particularly – on the massive disrespect for human rights in persecution, arrests, torture, and disappearances, even with those practices being witnessed, documented, and proven, such as in the report of the Brazilian National Truth Commission.

For LaCapra (1998, 23), in trauma, the past bursts into the present. What is repressed from memory does not disappear, it returns in a transformed way, sometimes in controlled artistic experiences, other times through dreams and hallucinations, as a disfigured return of the past that has not been critically confronted. For Freud (1946), whoever seeks to forget does not remember consciously, but the repressed memory is reproduced in dreams or actions without the repetition being consciously prevented. In short, trauma is something one does not want to remember, but you also can not forget. There is an impediment to working-through (*durcharbeiten*)³ the event, since working-

³ With Freud (1946), work-through appears to name the phase of exhaustive commitment that follows the decision to abandon resistance, since, even after renunciation, there are still

through requires remembering and transforming. There is a double path and it is related to narration/listening. Two active figures arise: the one who tells and the one who listens. In this universe, if interaction occurs, it is because both share something, despite not sharing the events. A collective experience, which transcends the individual, occurs in this sharing. What is denied, therefore, when one proposes to treat a traumatic event like any other, is not always the existence of the crimes – as done by many of the Holocaust denialists, for example – but the return of the trauma in collective memory and the need for working-through this trauma. Thus, the objective is to address the memory of traumatic events through fiction. Literary fiction, however, will not be treated as a possible substitute for history, but based on its own way of interpreting the past, a way that is not tied to what really happened.

K. RELATO DE UMA BUSCA

At the beginning of his book, Bernardo Kucinski warns us: “everything in this book is an invention, but almost everything happened” (Kucinski, 2016). In an interview with Luciano Gallas (2014), when asked about the fictional content of the work, he responds that “the raw material is autobiographical, the narrative is fictional”. The narrator of *K. Relato de um Busca* (2011), by Bernardo Kucinski, is involved with an imaginary projection of the memory of his Jewish immigrant father in search of a Brazilian daughter (the narrator’s sister) who disappeared during the dictatorship. We are confronted with the fictional and transgenerational relationship with the memory of his father. Not the immediate “I remember”, but a kind of “I remember through him” in which a parallel is built between the anti-Semitic persecution in Europe and the disappearance of revolutionary activists during the Brazilian dictatorship.

Ana Rosa Kucinski, daughter of Majer Kucinski and Ester Kucinski, was born in 1942 in the city of São Paulo. Ana Rosa was a professor at the Chemistry Institute of the University of São Paulo (USP) and married to the physicist Wilson Silva. Both were militants of the resistance group *Ação Libertadora Nacional* (ALN). Ana Rosa was the daughter of Polish Jewish immigrants and the sister of Bernardo Kucinski. She disappeared on April 22, 1974 (Brasil 2014). As implied by the use of the term “disappearance” to address a phenomenon common to victims of military dictatorships in Latin America, the family never received concrete answers about Ana Rosa’s death. Berta Waldman, in a comment included on the cover of one of the editions of *K. Relato de uma Busca*, defines Bernardo Kucinski’s book as “in addition to the testimony of a terrible period in our history”, also “the longed-for tombstone of Ana Rosa”.

In the book, references to the Shoah come from two distinct sources: from the place occupied by the Holocaust in global collective memory, which leads to almost inevitable references when dealing with other traumatic events; and also from the fact that the main character of the work, based on Majer Kucinski, is a Jewish immigrant, Yiddish speaker, who came to Brazil before the Second World War, in 1935.

difficulties in making repressions go back thanks to the power of the compulsion to repeat. Work-through, described as painful work and a test of patience, appears in the original as *Durcharbeitung* (noun) or *durcharbeiten* (verb), a combination of the preposition *durch* (through) and the verb *arbeiten* (to work), a work meticulously carried out.

The Yiddish language is in itself a character in the book: when K. notices his daughter's disappearance and his ordeal begins, he wonders if he should not have paid more attention to the living instead of dedicating himself to this "corpse language", this "dead language that only a few old people speak" (Kucinski 2016, 16-17). The author added a footnote explaining what he meant by "dead language". Yiddish developed from Ashkenazic culture, mainly in Central and Eastern Europe, had its peak in literature in the 20th century, and – being the characteristic language of diaspora Jews, uniting a Germanic syntax and the Hebrew alphabet – went into decline after the Holocaust and the death of a large part of its speakers and after the choice of the founders of the State of Israel to use Hebrew. Majer Kucinski was a great scholar of Yiddish literature and, in the book, this interest appears in an exacerbated and significant mode. It shows itself in the form of the character K.'s feeling of guilt, in the more attention that he supposedly should have given to his daughter, as she even tells in a letter later found by him (2016, 48). Devotion to Yiddish literature is the reason found by K. for not having realized that his daughter was joining political activism or not even knowing that she had gotten married. Thus, when he feels deceived by diverse informants, he can only conclude in Yiddish "ich bin gevein a groisser idiot" (I was a big idiot) (2016, 36).

A piece of Brazilian literature that illustrates the transgenerationality of trauma is the book *Mamelosbn: memória em carne viva* by Halina Grynberg (2004). *Mamelosbn* is the Yiddish word for mother tongue, a language that, for Grynberg, represented both origin and rupture with her past. This mother tongue is also a mark of her relationship with her mother, whose traumatic past penetrated her life, but as a past that she did not experience (Grynberg 2004, 30). That is why, like Bernardo Kucinski, Grynberg begins his book with a comment on the not-well-drawn boundaries between the factual and the fictional, saying that "where reality, where fiction/ in this narrative, it matters little to know".

K. also considered writing the strong impressions and thoughts of the search for his daughter, especially the remarkable moment in which he was so well received by a leader of the Catholic Church. To redeem himself for having paid so much attention to Yiddish literature, he would now write his greatest work "to deal with his own misfortune", but when trying to gather his sparse notes into a coherent narrative, "it was as if the essentials were missing", as if "words [...] hid or amputated the main meaning", "could not express his misfortune in the limited semantics of the word" (Kucinski 2016, 127) and so he wonders if this could be a limitation of the Yiddish language, if these people so mistreated were unable to express suffering in their own language (2016, 127). Finally, K. concludes that the impediment was of a greater order, moral and not just linguistic, that he would not be able to make his daughter's tragedy an object of literary creation. Therefore, he writes about the family tragedy not in Yiddish, but in Hebrew to his granddaughters in Israel (2016, 128).

In testimonies of the Shoah, the inability of language to correspond to what the survivors had to tell is a recurring theme. This apparent impossibility was extensively described by Primo Levi (1988, 182) when he stated that, if the extermination camps had lasted longer, "a new, harsh language" would have emerged. It could be that this language is precisely the non-language of Hurbinek, the child about whom they knew little, "a nothing, a child of death, a child of Auschwitz", whose first words everyone around tried to guess which European language it belonged to, but which remained secret (Levi 1997, 28-

29). Or it could be that the language is precisely that which defies classification as literary or historical, like Art Spiegelman's *Maus*⁴.

The memoir never composed by K. would be a possibility of what later becomes Bernardo Kucinski's book: a tombstone for Ana Rosa, a name never mentioned in the fictional book. There is an episode in which K. looks for a rabbi to place a *matzeivah* (Jewish tombstone) for his daughter in the Israeli cemetery of Butantã in São Paulo. But how could there be a tombstone without a body? For K., the lack of the *matzeivah* would be equivalent to saying that his daughter did not exist. He responded to the impediment of the lack of the body by arguing that in that same cemetery, there was a large tombstone in memory of the Holocaust dead without bodies, for which he is immediately reprimanded by the rabbi, because "nothing compares to the Holocaust", which is "one and only, the absolute evil" (Kucinski 2016, 59). K. does not disagree, but replies that, for him, his daughter's tragedy was a continuation of the Holocaust.

Eleven days after his daughter's disappearance, K. found himself extremely distressed and dreaming of references to his own past in particular and to the misfortunes of the Jewish people in general, such as the expulsion from Spain. The confirmation that not only was she not answering her calls, but that she was actually missing, came when he found the courage to look for her, starting at her workplace. On the thirtieth day of her disappearance, he learned of a meeting with relatives of missing people called by an archbishop. The term "disappeared", already very commonly used in the case of dictatorships in Latin America, sets the tone for how unusual the search by family members for their "disappeared" was. At this point, for the first time in the book, the direct comparison between the Shoah and the Military Dictatorship is made:

Even the Nazis who reduced their victims to ashes recorded the dead. Each had a number tattooed on their arm. With each death, a book was written off. In the first days of the invasion, there were indeed massacres, and afterward as well. They lined up all the Jews in a village next to a ditch, shot them, threw lime on them, then dirt and that was it. But the Goyim of each place knew that their Jews were buried in that hole, they knew how many there were and who each one was. There was no agony of uncertainty; there were mass executions, but it was not a sinkhole of people (Kucinski 2016, 16).

It is not surprising that the passage caused discomfort to a Holocaust survivor who might have read the work, or even to a researcher of Nazi persecution who realized the inaccuracy of the statement. Here comes the power of fiction: the author speaks on behalf of a character with a particular connection to the Shoah, not just as all Jews have, but as someone directly affected, despite not being a survivor himself. However, his tragedy at that moment was, for him, more distressing. The statement is rhetorical, it draws attention to the local reality, to the trauma that has not yet been faced, and to the memory of the

⁴ The book *Maus* is one of the examples used by Hayden White (1992, 41) to criticize any established basis for judging an account of the Holocaust as unacceptable. In the form of a comic book, he narrates, presenting the events as a satire, a story that is not a traditional history, but represents real events from the past or, at least, events represented as having truly occurred. Hence Spiegelman's (1991) discomfort at having his work included in the list of books classified as "fiction", after all, if by fiction one means that a work is not factual, then this could mean the disqualification of his father's memories in which he based his writing on. For LaCapra (1998, 146), Spiegelman's ironic suggestion that the book be categorized as "non-fiction" exploits the fact that the work is not made up, although it is obviously made. Thus, in relation to *Maus*, its hybrid state is attested, between genres, without actually being limited to any one of them.

trauma that, no matter how recurrently it arises, is still in dispute in the scenario of the Brazilian public sphere. Later, K. is outraged when he comes across the name Costa e Silva⁵ on the Rio-Niterói Bridge, and the question is raised in terms that in Germany, a street would never be named after Goebbels (Kucinski 2016, 113).

In an extended edition of the book, two extra short stories show that Bernardo Kucinski was not unaware of the aforementioned inaccuracy. The first of these stories is called *A Visitante* (The Visitor). The main character of the story, who is also its author, is at home, ten days after the release of the book, worried about the reception and the, at first glance, indifference from the public and critics. This is when an unknown lady knocks on his door and says that she wants to talk about the book. The lady, an elderly woman, carries his book in her hand and states that it is a “strong and well-written” book, but that it contains “a very serious mistake that needs to be corrected” (Kucinski 2014, 127). The error she refers to is that he wrote that the Germans registered all the dead when, in fact, only a minority had their names on a list, a fact that she tries to prove by showing the number tattooed in Auschwitz on her arm. The survivor cites the calculations made by Yad Vashem in the endless search to find more names and talks about how only in Auschwitz were people marked in this way and tells him about her sister and nephews who are not on any list. Her family could not be properly counted and identified, as there is no record of them.

Two central issues for this analysis are dealt with a very clear language in this short story: the issue of fiction and the relationship between the Military Dictatorship and the Shoah. The author argues: “Mrs. Regina, my book is fiction, I understand your complaint, but in fiction, we can make things up, my book is just about one girl, and her name does not even appear, it is all invention” (Kucinski 2014, 128). To which the lady responds, impassively, that “it’s not an invention at all, her name is not in the book, but everyone knows who she was, and the Holocaust, everyone also knows what it was, there’s nothing invented, they’re real facts” (2014, 128). The dialogue continues with him trying to explain that writers can sometimes twist the real facts a little, they use poetic license to give them more strength, that their intention was just to highlight the violence of the disappearance, and that the “book is about the dictatorship in Brazil, it is not about the Second World War” (2014, 129).

⁵ Artur da Costa e Silva was the second president of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship.

O IRMÃO ALEMÃO

The book *O irmão alemão* (2014) by Chico Buarque is also on the border of reality and fiction. In this case, Chico Buarque resorts to autofiction⁶, a concept used to refer to a text that, unlike autobiography, is freer regarding chronology and accuracy, but still deals with real events, pointing to a performative indeterminacy between empirical experience and artistic invention. This relation can be noticed by those who followed the news about the lives of Chico Buarque and his father, historian Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, both well-known public figures in Brazil. Sérgio Buarque de Holanda had a son with Anne Ernst in 1930. The boy, who was named Sergio Ernst, was born in Berlin and was later adopted and raised by another family under the name Horst Günther. As an adult, he learned the identity of his biological parents and took the name Sergio back. He died in 1981. The brothers Sergio and Chico never met.

The autobiographical tone is exposed in documents that are incorporated into the narrative. Some of these documents were precisely those discovered by historian João Klug, who helped Chico Buarque identify his lost brother in 2013 (Neher 2014). The identity of Chico Buarque's brother was revealed, but it was still a truth permeated with question marks. When the gaps are so large, a possible solution is precisely to imagine possible pasts, hence the use of fiction. Despite the undoubted veracity of what happened, Chico Buarque also makes it clear from the beginning that readers should not expect of him an attempt to faithfully narrate the facts. This non-correspondence is initially shown in very basic changes such as the names of the characters, the fact that the city in which the protagonist and his family live is different, and the inclusion of characters with no possible parallel to real figures, such as the other brother of the protagonist. Furthermore, while Chico Buarque is known nationally as an artist (as a musician more than as a writer) who was involved in the resistance against the Brazilian Military Dictatorship and who had to go into exile for that reason, his alter-ego Ciccio seems to be in denial in the face of the advance of authoritarianism.

The story begins when Ciccio, the narrator-character, finds in one of his father's, Sérgio de Hollander, many books, a letter written by a German woman. From this letter written in German, which he understands little, Ciccio recalls that his father lived in Berlin between 1929 and 1930 and that he heard a conversation about his father having a son in Germany. Ciccio soon sets out to discover the content of the letter with the help of a guy in a German immigrant bar. Then, based on a grotesque translation, the initial suspicion is confirmed that Sérgio de Hollander had conceived a child with an old girlfriend while he was in Germany, but that he had never managed to contact the child, due to restrictions of the Nazi regime. The narrative therefore focuses on Ciccio's incessant search for this German brother as he deals with his various family conflicts, particularly his relationship with his other brother Mimmo, with whom he competes for his father's admiration and the interest of young women. The German brother becomes, for the somewhat resentful young Ciccio, an

⁶ The concept of autofiction was first used in 1977 by Serge Doubrovsky. Doubrovsky (1928 - 2017) was a French writer and literary critic, who, in his novel *Fils*, started to use the neologism autofiction. The author created the term in response to Phillippe Lejeune, for whom a romance in which the narrator and the author had the same name, was unlikely (Grell 2013, 223). Among the themes of Doubrovsky's works are his childhood as a Jew living in hiding with his family in occupied France.

imaginary projection of his own traumas and desires, in a way that finding him would be to solve something that his father could not. In his search for his lost brother, Ciccio constantly fables about possible lives for this brother. His ramblings, therefore, are much greater than the concreteness of the clues he follows, which causes him to constantly dream of tragic fates for his unknown brother (Buarque 2014, 108).

It is amid these many projections and digressions that the Shoah enters the scene. Ciccio finds correspondence received by his father asking him to prove his origin, in order to confirm that Sergio Ernst (the German brother) was not Jewish and could therefore be sent for adoption. From this, Ciccio imagines a Jewish origin for his German brother and concludes that he may have been murdered in a gas chamber. In his utterances, what he fantasizes and fears is quickly taken for truth. While all these suggestions and nightmares begin to accompany and occupy him entirely, he demonstrates a constant indifference to what is happening around him: the increasingly violent repression of the Military Dictatorship. The direct comparison between the two events is rejected by Ciccio. When the character Christian equates the Brazilian police state with that of Nazi Germany, he thinks this is an exaggeration (Buarque 2014, 133).

This is how the relationship between the two events is established in the book: Ciccio refuses to deal with the frightening present events and ends up turning to the trauma already recognized historically. About the Shoah he has a lot of information, he can read it, as he reads so many stories in his father's endless books. Being able to know so much, he can imagine that in some way his story meets that history of recognized absolute evil. Meanwhile, in Brazil, in his city, another type of violence is unfolding in the shadows and he prefers not to look at these signs, represented, among other things, by the cockroaches that occupy the bookshelves at home. Unlike K., the narrator of *O irmão alemão* has no Jewish known ancestry but this not stop him from fantasizing about a Jewish past to his unknown German brother at the same time that his other and well-known Brazilian brother disappears during the dictatorship. In the end, he even considers the possibility of his brothers being the same person, bringing together both historical traumas.

Because it involves real situations, documents, and photos from the life of one of the most famous artists in Brazil, *O irmão alemão* leaves the reader with several suspicions and few answers: the more the narrator tries to clarify the story, the more doubts are created. If in K. one follows a father's incessant search for his missing daughter, in *O irmão alemão* one sees a man's obsession with a brother he knows very little about, but from whom he expects a lot. In the end, the reader can notice that Ciccio also knew little about his Brazilian brother, as he assumes that his brother was mistakenly arrested after getting involved with a woman who was an Argentinian activist. This puts forward the possibility that Ciccio was so involved in creating stories about his German brother and being jealous of his Brazilian brother that Mimmo's political activities were simply ignored by him. The German brother was not Jewish and was not killed in the Holocaust, so the hypothesis that most impressed Ciccio was not confirmed. The family's tragedy found echoes not in the enormous and distant memory of the Holocaust, but in a suffering of its own. A trauma that perhaps Ciccio would rather know nothing about.

Annette Wieviorka (2006) and Shoshana Felman (2001) called the era of the witness the time, especially since the 1970s, when testimonies went beyond the confined spaces of archives and there was an expansion of biographical space in the media, with the presence of countless written, transcribed, recorded and filmed testimonies. In the same sense, reflection on the very act of testifying and the function of testimony make up the “era of the witness”. There are, in Latin, two terms to designate the witness: the first, *testis*, refers, epistemologically, to the one who places himself as a third party in a trial so that a legal sentence can be given, who reports a fact that he saw or heard in order to attest the truth about something. The second, *superstes*, concerns the survivor, the one who went through an event and therefore witnessed it (Agamben 1999; Seligmann-Silva 2003, 40-41). Both meanings are found in testimonies from Shoah survivors, which can carry both the tone of denouncement – typical of descriptive reports made during or shortly after the events they deal with –, as well as the fragmentation of traumatic memory and the problematization of the limits of representation.

Using testimony to write history was not exactly a novelty introduced after the Shoah, however, these testimonies, in particular, were not confined to archives, on the contrary, they reached (although not immediately) the public sphere. Primo Levi (2016) is exemplary in writing about the limits of testimony: his narrative is the very attempt to work-through it, which involves the guilt and the failures of memory. In Chico Buarque’s fictionalization, the protagonist is not always able to reflect theoretically on his own limitations, but his journey illustrates very well the incessant search for answers that can accompany attempts to work-through traumatic historical events. In the last chapter, we discover that the story is narrated by Ciccio in 2013, many years after Sergio’s death and Mimmo’s disappearance, when he goes to Berlin in search of his German brother. This is not a novel that aims to elucidate a mystery, but rather the narrator’s search for his own identity, which he projects (even if as an opposite) onto his brothers and their father. When these answers are not found, they need to be created, as years after Mimmo’s disappearance, Ciccio invents stories about Mimmo’s location to ease his sick mother’s suffering (2013, 192-194).

In an interview, Chico Buarque, at the time of the book’s release, states that two stories happened simultaneously: that of the book, on the level of imagination, and that of the search for his brother in real life. This is a story that did not end, since the initial question “who was this brother?” remains open (Chico 2015). What is known about this mysterious brother is that he lived in a reality completely different from that of Chico Buarque and that, even with the help of documents and historians, any attempt to seize his existence can only be a fictionalization.

The role of the multidirectionality of memory in the book can also be shown by its reception in the German press. In a review published in *Die Zeit* about the book that was translated as *Mein deutscher Bruder*, Jens Jessen (2016) classified Chico Buarque’s work as *Weltliteratur* (World Literature). The term *Weltliteratur* was coined by Goethe to refer to an overcoming of national literature in the name of a literature with a cosmopolitan character of the emerging global modernity. Despite the complexities surrounding the definition of the term in a rapidly expanding world, the concept suggests that literature is more than just a representation or reflection of particular realities. In line with Koselleck’s own definition of a what a concept is (2006), *Weltliteratur* can be

understood as both a concept and the literature itself capable of creating worlds and shaping realities. Thus, if Chico Buarque's book represents a very particular national reality, it is also capable of reaching a much wider audience precisely because of its dialogue with memories that go beyond the national scenario and unite the Brazilian Military Dictatorship with the set of catastrophes in Contemporary History.

CONCLUSION

The Holocaust not only generates in historiography the need to reflect on representation in terms of making ethical narrative choices but also on how to deal with and incorporate other narrative forms and other modalities of relating to the past. The very concept of an *event at its limits* (Friedländer 1992) carries this duplicity. On one hand, it includes reflections on how ethical choices are incorporated into historiography, that is, on whether an event should be represented and what is the most appropriate way to do so. On the other hand, it also includes reflection on the challenge imposed by the Shoah on the categories and concepts usually used to represent an event, that is, on the ability to represent or not in certain ways.

It is through testimony that historiography inevitably has to deal with memory (Braga 2023). The invasion of the field of history by memory was admissible concerning the Shoah, this event evidenced the urgency for reconciliation between the demand for memory and the need for history. In short, testimony, as a modality of memory, came to a central placement after catastrophes and made it necessary to reconsider the relationship between narrative and reality (Braga 2022).

Testimonies of traumatic events constitute faulty and incomplete memories that can escape coherent reporting. This is why the testimonies of Holocaust survivors are embedded with the aforementioned reflection on the limits of representation and the place of imagination (Antelme 2013) in an attempt to work-through the past. In the so-called era of the witness, testimony has become the prevalent genre of nonfiction. Being based on memories, it has emerged as a privileged mode of access to the past and its traumatic occurrences (LaCapra 1998, 11). It turns out that the testimony is located in this in-between place that permeates history, memory and literature, in a way that highlights the unfeasibility of the radical opposition between history and fiction. The difficulties and impossibilities that accompany the representation of traumatic events require a new perspective from the historian and, in this sense, testimonies can be configured in particularly effective ways of getting closer to understanding the victims' experience and, at the same time, making us aware of our inability to fully understand it. The gaps left by the Shoah in the memory of the victims are also the lack of coherence in the history and this is precisely the essence of the trauma.

Each in their own way, both books covered in this article deal with the endless search for answers that accompany traumatic events. The impossibility of complete understanding is present in the very conceptualization of what trauma is. There is something that seems unspeakable about the catastrophe, but, as Susan Suleiman (2006) reminds us, it is something that, at the same time, we cannot seem to stop talking about. In the case of the Shoah, many of those who did not directly experience the events (the so-called second and third

generations), unable to remember what they did not experience, resorted without reservations to their imagination⁷. In the case of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship, countless people tortured during the regime testified to their stories, but it is through art, whether cinema or literature, that this story usually resonates (Dalcastagnè 1996).

Comparisons between other historical traumas and the Shoah run the risk of trivializing the Holocaust and also what Enzo Traverso defined as apologetic uses of the memory of the Shoah, as an excess of memory that would neutralize the critical potential of its memory (Traverso 2005). On the other hand, the place occupied by the Holocaust in global collective memory prompted discussions about it. One great example is the coining of the term genocide, which can be used to define many other cases⁸. The construction of the global memory of the Holocaust as a crime against humanity depended on the process that led to the experience of the extermination of European Jews from the original configuration of the event to that of a trope that should be capable of summarizing all the horror of the 20th century. At the dawn of the 21st century, the Holocaust emerged as a symbol of the massacre that allowed us to reflect on other genocides and massacres in various parts of the world.

According to Levy and Sznajder (2006, 4), the global spread of Holocaust discourse has generated a new form of memory, a “cosmopolitan memory” that harbors the possibility of transcending ethnic and national boundaries. Similarly, Jeffrey Alexander (2002) sees the Holocaust as a universalized symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic, racial, and religious justice in global conflicts. These views have been extensively discussed and accused of presenting an overly optimistic view of the consequences of the global dissemination of Holocaust memory. Assman and Conrad (2010, 9-11), for example, present how the Holocaust’s universality is received in many parts of the world as a form of Euro-American imperialism in the field of memory. As Huyssen (2003, 13-14) have noted, “it is precisely the emergence of the Holocaust as a universal trope that allows Holocaust memory to latch on to specific local situations that are historically distant and politically distinct from the original event”, what means that in the transnational movement of memory discourses, the Holocaust function as a metaphor for other traumatic memories and histories. Although the parallel may bring attention to discussions on traumatic memory, it may also serve as what Huyssen, using a Freudian term, calls a “screen memory”⁹ meaning that the Holocaust is remembered to repress other instances of historical oppression that are more immediate and closer to the immediate reality. In this sense, the concept of multidirectional memory shows, once again, its utility for this analysis. Rothberg notices memory as being

⁷ An example of this is the concept of post-memory as defined by Marianne Hirsch (2012). The notion of post-memory presupposes that descendants of survivors are connected in such a way to the memories of the victims’ past that the memory can be transferred to these next generations, while this memory and the recollection of witnesses are recognized as being of a different order.

⁸ Considering the importance of coining the term genocide is not the same as ignoring political disputes over the recognition of other historical traumas. It is not the purpose of this article to deal with the limits of the term genocide, but a reflection of this type has already been carried out in Braga; Garcia 2021.

⁹ What Freud (1962, 303-322) calls screen memories are fragmentary recollections that have remained in one’s memory from the earliest years of their childhood. These memories are based on displacement, as they can be seen as a compromise between repressed elements and a defense against them. In this sense, a screen memory can supply, denies and negate some aspects of some other aspects of the past.

inherently comparative, but without asserting that comparisons between atrocities inevitably erase the differences between them or imply a false equivalence. Therefore, the process is multidirectional, not unidirectional, which means that different and distant histories have affected the way Holocaust memory has circulated and even helped shape the way we think about the Holocaust.

Concerning the fiction produced about the Brazilian Military Dictatorship, the Shoah appears as the paradigmatic trauma, a path already followed by so many others and through which one could find ways of working-through one's own present trauma, in many ways so distant from Auschwitz. In the books analyzed, the Shoah appears as a platform for articulating and working-through the trauma and the still very present wound of the Military Dictatorship. This articulation does not necessarily resort to undue comparisons or a hierarchization of human suffering at the same time as it is not entirely conflict-free. This is possible precisely because we are dealing with fictional characters. If, in his pain and despair, K. makes an untenable analogy with the Holocaust, the author has to explain himself to an also fictional survivor. If Ciccio invents concentration camp stories for his unknown brother, he does so in an unconscious attempt to make sense of his own reality and not as a form of trivialization of the Holocaust. The Holocaust is not simply remembered in order to repress or block insight into specific local histories. Instead, its presence can be exemplary of the significance of remembering traumatic histories across cultural boundaries.

Subjective and testimonial explorations of memory in its fictional form generally do not have much to add to historical factual knowledge, but they can indicate how the past is shared and mobilized and how it impacts identity constructions. This indication can be better answered if we do not assume that the fictional implies the false, which allows us to realize that fiction may be the only way to communicate certain dimensions of historical experience, including the effects of that history on language itself. In this sense, fiction has its role in communicating the suffering caused by historical traumas and literature provides the narrative structure for an ethical and necessary reckoning with pasts that remain unprocessed. In this way, Holocaust literature can be considered a trope¹⁰ or archetype for trauma narratives. A trope that, unlike other examples, does not offer a familiarity through a defined beginning, middle and end, but precisely through the fragmentation of memory. This fragmentation can be understood in terms of what Aarons (2014) calls a “genre of rupture”. This definition comes from Berel Lang's (2000) assertion that Holocaust literature is fashioned by a “blurring of traditional genres”, meaning that this blurring of literary genre is the result of the failure of traditional language forms and structures to represent a traumatic event. This literature of destruction blurs literary genres, and it also places itself on the border between the real and the imaginary: verisimilitude with the historical event is sought precisely through absence and discontinuity in language. What emerges, therefore, is a literature of destruction, a literary

¹⁰ The word trope has two main interconnecting meanings: trope as a figure of speech, a deviation from the literal and conventional use of language; and trope as a narrative convention, a structure that, in language, expresses a particular genre or form. The two meanings come together if we consider the trope of traumatic literature as an attempt to work-through a past. For Hayden White (1986, 5), understanding is an attempt to make the *unheimlich* (Freud) familiar, that is, to place something in the domain of the familiar, to be known by association.

language of the Holocaust that, through multidirectional memory, resonates in the literature of different other historical traumas.

The two books analyzed evoke the extreme horror of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps to provide a counterpoint to the violence imposed by the Military Dictatorship in Brazil. The memory of the Shoah constantly resurfaces in other catastrophes of the 20th century, which can be shown in literary works for which the historical context of the Holocaust is of major significance. In this case, the consecrated place of the Holocaust in global memory is highlighted in contrast to the repressed and often silenced memory of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship. Far from attenuating the character of the Shoah as an event at its limits in favor of the Brazilian experience, the books seek to do something with the memory of both catastrophes in Brazil as a means of filling in the gaps in perception and history. The disappearance of victims and their bodies is one of the great unresolved post-dictatorial issues, not only in Brazil, but in Latin America, and a great example of the authoritarian barbarity of dictatorships. From this, what the authors seek is to construct alternative (hi)stories for this recent past, (hi)stories that, when told, oppose the hegemonic policies of forgetting and resist denialism.

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MULTIDIRECTIONAL MEMORY

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