

# **PEOPLE, CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION: TROPICALISM AS RESISTANCE TO MILITARY DICTATORSHIP**

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## **Abstract**

*The political and economic crises faced today, evidenced by the manifestos of political parties and the texts published in social networks and in the press, point to Brazilian society the possibility of different directions, including that of an autocratic regime, with the return of the military to the public sphere. This article discusses the movements of acceptance and resistance to the military regime that was implemented in Brazil with the coup of 1964. It is observed that the military uprising received at that time the support of a large part of the Brazilian population, which sought ways to maintain its socioeconomic status to the detriment of a majority that perceived itself vulnerable in view of the forms of maintenance and expansion of power used by the regime. In this context, Tropicalism emerges as an example of a contesting movement. This text approaches the song "Culture and civilization" by Gilberto Gil, performed by Gal Costa, relating the ideas present in this composition with the understandings of politics and culture, in a multidisciplinary proposal, seeking to understand the resistance and counter-resistance movements that emerged in Brazil at the time.*

**Keywords:** Culture. Civilization. Dictatorship. People. Bourgeoisie.

## **Initial thoughts**

In the face of political and economic crises, violence, unemployment and other current social ills, it is observed that a significant portion of society has been occupying space in social networks, political parties and the media to ask for autocratic regimes. They seem to despise democratic values, while seeking someone to save them from the challenge of managing the public thing and thus their own lives. It is therefore important, in view of this situation, to reflect on the period of the Brazilian military regime, considering that "[...] history being the source of our problems is also the key to their solutions" (IAMAMOTO, 2006, p. 151).

Tropicalism, a cultural movement that emerged in the 1960s, especially with the song "Culture and civilization", the work of Gilberto Gil, in the voice of Gal Costa, provokes the challenge of thinking about cultural movements during the dictatorial period in Brazil. The song encourages us to understand, even in the face of the limitations of this work, how these concepts were constituted and what the meanings and intentions of the song lyrics would be. Why would Gal Costa sing "Culture and civilization to be unwell. Or not", in view of the sociocultural values instituted or sought to institute in the period? Considering tropicalism a protest movement, would it be isolated or would it compose a scenario of rebellion and resistance with several other segments of Brazilian social life? In the light of political theory, it will then seek to problematize the way in which the dictatorial regime, in the context of the April 1964 coup, sought its legitimacy or authorization, as well as the forms of social contestation produced in that period.

The dictatorial scenario is observed as conflicting and that the vision of culture is divided between cults and uncultured; whereas the former are defined as those who have access to classical arts in general and universities, while the others would be the working population limited to public schools, carnival and football; and that the objective of the regime may be to maintain this order as a form of economic development. For this qualitative and multidisciplinary analysis will be referenced some marxist critical theorists, especially Netto (2015) and Couto (2008), who will present the regime's strategies and the movements of rebellion and resistance. With Bauman (2012), Arendt (2015) and Freud (2010) we will shed light, considering the limitations of this space, on the movements of resistance and acceptance to the regime, as well as to the concepts of culture and civilization.

## **Culture and civilization in the brazilian context of 1964**

Men alone, with no others who oppose them, never have enough power to successfully use violence (Hannah Arendt).

In April 1964, with the Government Humberto Castelo Branco, there was the heyday of the dictatorial period with Institutional Act n° 5 (AI-5). The National Congress was closed, the dictatorial regime was legitimized in the country, and all constitutional guarantees were suspended. The scenario that was imposed was apprehension. People were tortured, exiled and others disappeared. The list is large and heterogeneous. Socialist deputy Rubens Paiva, who was described as "missing", was tortured, exiled and

subsequently killed in Rio de Janeiro; Geraldo Vandré, who had his song "Not to say I didn't speak of the flowers" censored, was also tortured and exiled. In addition to well-known names, also trade unionists, workers and students suffered from the authoritarian acts of the regime, among them "[...] the episode that occurred in March 1968 in Rio de Janeiro, when the student Edson Luiz was killed, after the invasion of the military police at a student restaurant" (COUTO, 2008, p. 123).

In this scenario, the regime propagated its ideal of prosperity with the intention of transforming Brazil into a world economic power. To this end, some populist practices gain strength. As an example, the Brazilian Legion of Assistance - BLA, founded in 1942, during the Vargas administration, stands out, which continued to control the working class, doing charity in order to ensure order by enabling the system's invalidated minimum necessary subsistence guarantee.

Also, the "S system": Social Service of Industry, Social Service of Commerce and National Service of Industrial Learning, which fed the factories with skilled labor. It is observed, therefore, that by force and persuasion, an autocratic State was sought to establish a culture of fear and work, associated with populism and clientelism, aimed to guarantee the subservience of the working class through the production, collective of an individualistic subjectivity where the foreign worker the reality that surrounds him assumes social ills for himself.

Also important was the institutionalization of working-class organizations and cultural manifestations. To this end, in 1966 the Federal Council of Culture (FCC) was created, through Law n° 74 of November 21, 1966. It would be up to this body, in the words of the then Minister of Education and Culture, Tarso Dutra, to formulate a national plan for culture (NETTO, 2015, p. 108). Article 2, which deals with the council's competences, point "a" "formulating national cultural policy", and, point "(c)" "deciding on the recognition of cultural intuitions" stand out. In this context, some political parties and trade unions lose legitimacy.

Law n° 4,330/1964 was also instituted, which regulated the right to strike. Law that implied the objective of hindering participation by defining who could or could not participate and the way in which this participation would take place, especially with regard to the way unions operate. Later, already in the Ernesto Geisel government, The Minister of Justice Arnaldo Falcão would create Law n° 6,339/1963, which went down in history as "Falcão Law", delegitimizing political parties and establishing bipartisanship, where the National Renovating Alliance (ARENA) and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) were the only authorized parties. Then, during this period, the ruling party and the authorized opposition have been allowed. The Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB), founded in 1958, acted in the underground, but incisively composed the political scenario of the period.

As for the concept of culture, it is observed as hierarchically divided between the popular and the scholar. In one of the poles is the cultured person, who has access to the theater, cinemas, the paintings, the latest fashion trends, the jockey club and the universities. In the other, popular culture, which watches football, participates in the samba wheels, in the patios of candomblé. The knowledge of the first group is positively valued. There are the military and other bourgeois who held public office, the media and ran the banks. In the second group, the working population of factories and crops, as well as the intellectuals, organic, represented an emerging artistic class that was available through popular art to question the values of the system. In the words of Santos (2006, p. 30):

Culture can on the one hand refer to "high culture", to the dominant culture, and on the other to any culture. In the first case, culture arises in opposition to savagery, barbarism; culture is then the very mark of civilization. Or, the "high culture" emerges as a mark of the dominant layers of the population of a society; opposes the lack of mastery of the written language, or the lack of access to science, art and religion of those dominant layers. In the second case, one can talk about culture about any people, nation, group or human society.

Those who set up cults from the uneducated were the dominant class by placing themselves as a parameter for the whole society. In this context it is the nationalist civic values that establish the limits and differences between patriots, who value and love the homeland and the family, and others, the strange, dispatiotic, anti-patriot, who threaten these values. "The offense of the stranger consists of him not sharing [...] basic assumptions have called into question almost everything that seems unquestionable to the members of the group considered" (BAUMAN, 2012, p. 244). Communism occupied the place perceived as essential in the affirmation of the regime, it was the enemy to be defeated, and should constitute a common goal between the ruling class and the workers.

With the expropriation of the word and the right to vote, associated with unemployment and the growing distance between the worker and the result of his work, resistance and contestation movements gained strength. Small bourgeois, dissatisfied with the regime, added to the resistance. This is the case of the National Union of Students, the NUS, which will play a leading role in the fight against the regime through the most varied forms of demonstrations. In the case of Edson Luiz's death: "The day after his death, 50,000 people took to the streets to protest. Three months later, 100,000 students held a huge march in Rio de Janeiro" (COUTO, 2008, p. 125). Also the movements of workers within which the "Peasants' League that forced the creation of the Rural Worker Statute in 1966" (COUTO, 2008, p. 114), a period in which several unions were created, threatening the capitalist logic, especially in relation to landowners, who also had, in the period, about 50% of the population in the rural environment.

According to Arendt (2015), power and violence go together. The author distinguishes the concepts of power and violence, but using the conjunction "e" exposes the use of violence as a medium activity and as a maintainer, which composes with other forms of domination the framework of totalitarian regimes. Domino's strategy that is observed even if in a quick look at the story. By the force of armies, money and/or persuasion, places and roles are accentuated. Even in The Greece of Aristotle and Plato, the cradle of democracy, the roles were defined by the owners of power. The foreign peoples, the barbarians, served as beacons, accentuating the differences between civilized and uncivilized.

Later, Nazism in Germany did not hesitate to point out the Jews for the failure of their economy and as a solution to establish a single corporate model, closing in on foreigners. In contemporary times, the United States spread its armies around the world in order to ensure the continuity of the capitalist corporate model. The dictatorial regime that was lived in Brazil follows this same logic. Transforming Brazil into a world economic power means annihilating communists and controlling the working class, making it believe to be part of the creation process: "There has never been a government based exclusively on the means of violence. Even the totalitarian client, whose greatest instrument of dominance is torture, needs a power

base" (ARENDR, 2015, p. 128).

It is an endogenous struggle that the regime establishes, against the Communists, against the way of being of the population, no less bloody, no less alienating. Like Greece, there are enslaved in factories and crops, the same desire for reverence for the regime and intolerance to the different that was visualized with Nazism, the same forms of persuasion that are now used by the Americans.

It is the holders of power that divide society between cults and uneducated, who establish the place and roles of each group. In this logic, it is up to the bourgeois to organize society in order to preserve under control the instances of power. To conserve means to remain in a place of privilege, having the hand of the socially produced riches. This place of privilege is alongside the military, a space of legitimation of exploitation, where it provokes the rural exodus in order to supply the factories and make way for the landowners, where the transamazon threatens the entire environmental balance, tearing down forests and invading indigenous reserves in the name of progress, where working conditions are precarious resembling slavery.

The place of the bourgeoisie in the dictatorial period was legitimizing the macaw wood and everything else that occurred in the steps of the regime: The center of this system was the National Information Service (NIS), an intelligence and information collection agency that functioned as the main nucleus of an information network operating within society and at all levels of public administration<sup>1</sup>.

The place desired by the ruling class to the people was inside the factories, or in their surroundings. Those inside should produce the riches necessary for the consumption of European fashion, afford the purchases made in the art galleries, the going to the theater and watching over the horses of the Jockey Club. Those outside served as a warning to those who might rebel against the system. It was as a wage earner in the crop, in the condition of semi-slavery, for the country to export, so that it had a high Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that gave it the status of world economic power.

To maintain the "Order and Progress", civility was necessary, which for the working class was as good manners, acting civilly, understanding social differences as natural or else as a condition imposed by some deity. In the logic of the system it was up to the worker to take responsibility for absences with regard to food, education, leisure, etc. It was sought to establish, then, the culture of the good young man, and humility being an indispensable attribute to the population, which should not question, only legitimize the authority of the boss. Being humble was placed as a higher quality for the Brazilian working class. In this scenario of formatting of a popular ethos, in the cinema are shown the films of Amácio Mazzarope (1912-1981), where Jeca Tatu (1959), character of Monteiro Lobato, made fun of the misery of the population. In sport, Pelé, the poor black man, achieves the status of King of football, a sport that is systematically placed, by the bourgeois media, as the national passion.

### **Resistance considerations**

Giving in my body, that air told me in cries of freedom. But freedom - I bet - is still just joy of a poor little way, inside the iron of large prisons (Guimarães Rosa).

If the regime's repressive and alienating strategies reached a significant portion of the population, the young artists of the time, based and inspired, perhaps, by others who, like Graciliano Ramos (1892-

1953) had already resisted prison during the Vargas dictatorship, or classics relaunched in the period, such as the fifth edition of *Grande Sertão Veredas*, edited in 1967, where Guimarães Rosa speaks of "cries of freedom", they also began to manifest themselves with an active posture of criticism and resistance to the regime. It is also during this period that the translation in Portuguese of "*O Capital*" (NETTO, 2015, p. 107) begins. It is the transformative human praxis producing through the new subjectivities arts. "Seen in its most general and universal characteristics, human praxis consists in transforming chaos into order, or replacing one order with another" (BAUMAN, 2012 p. 230). The scenery evoked the image of volcanic boiling, people who wanted to talk, create from writing, from music. People wanting to work and enjoy the result of the work. People wanting acceptance of a way of being that differs from the bourgeois proposal perceived themselves contained, castrated under military authoritarianism with their codes and moral values. The desire for freedom, the ontological foundation of the human being, overcomes fear, this is how criticism of the system arises in various forms, in various places and circumstances.

[...] the cultural panorama of the years 1965–1968 – in the social sciences, in theater, poetry, in cinema, in fiction – is entirely dominated by critical, democratic and progressive currents, with sensitive weight even of cultural matrices extracted from the Marxist tradition (NETTO, 2015, p. 106).

In this scenario of authoritarianism, resistance and rebellion, when televisions, under the watchful eye of censorship, promoted the great music festivals, tropicalism arises. A contesting musical movement, which questioned music itself, moral values and the understanding of culture. The very name "tropicalism" would be a label placed by the press because of the unrestrained rebellion of two of its main exponents, Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil. This movement differed from others, who made direct criticisms of the regime, or who allied themselves with it. It was a mixture of rhythms, a way of creating, that did not obey a pattern, that not having a target defined shoots in several directions questioning the current corporate model, provoking reflection. In 1968 the album "*Tropicália*" was released, considered by experts as one of the best Brazilian records. That same year Gil and Caetano were arrested and expelled from the country.

In 1969, a composition by Gilberto Gil won the audience in the voice of Gal Costa. In the song "Culture and civilization", Gal sings "what the fun of culture and civilization, telling me to let me keep my life in hand". It's quite explicit: "Culture, civilization. They're the ones who don't. Or not." The lyrics show how intentional, being defined as a cry of protest, a manifesto against culture, which seeks to make clear the place from which it speaks, and may be the place of resistance, rebellion, the popular folklore, food, along with "an old Bahian 100%". On the cover of the vinyl record the look, the *orixás* cords, the aggressive posture and the hair "my hair beautiful as a lion's mane". In the sound, the mixture of rhythms, from *candomblé* to rock and roll.

Therefore, traces of a popular culture that emerged in São Salvador, a cosmopolitan city, where the most varied cultural manifestations gained space. There was the scenario where young Bahians perceived themselves as threatened and sang their world in the face of the possibility of a unique model. In cities like San Salvador: "Strangers find themselves in a way suitable for strangers" (BAUMAN, 2012, p. 111). There were no cordialities, since there was no past, which made the relationship that began as a threat to the

future. In the oral, in the sound, in the visual and in the gestural, the young bahians claimed its authenticity, which seemed compressed by an overwhelming pole. Which made them say "culture and civilization that's a dare. Or not."

Culture is the most varied forms of constitution and social interaction, a diverse scenario constituted because of the ontological foundation of the social being. In view of this concept, its endless expressions and characteristics are perceived as legitimate socially constituted and in a constant process of mutation: "The discussion of culture always refers to the process, to the historical experience. There is no sense in seeing culture as a closed system" (SANTOS, 2009, p. 22). A unique, unique process through which humanity is walking. However, it consists of particles such as local, regional, religious cells or particularities, etc. Varying in accordance with the modes of one or the other society, but composing the entire human species. Culture can have a conservative bias where social practices turn into communities, seeking through tradition to maintain empirically established order. Or revolutionary forms that constantly question imposing the transformation of lived reality. The concept of culture, in this sense, is centered on the formator nucleus of a society driven by its contradictory.

As for civilization, it is perceived as the foundation of life in society, since it meets the practical needs of coexistence in daily life, constituting a constant exercise of acceptance, denial and tolerance, a dialectical process that aims at urbanity. According to Bauman (2012), civilized beings would be protected from each other through the civic values that guide society. The author states: "Civility, like language, cannot be "private". Before becoming individually learned and privately practiced art, civility must be a characteristic of the social situation" (2012, p. 112). In this way, it must make up, through moral values and a democratic spirit, a model of society so that citizens have a harmonious way of living. Without civility would be barbarism, social chaos to the extent that one would be subject to the strangest and most inconsequential acts.

Sigmund Freud (2010), in "The malaise in civilization", refers to civilization being the sum of the achievements, values and norms that distinguish human beings from animals, which protects them against nature and adjusts social relationships. There is a positive view of this concept here, however, in the song performed by Gal Costa one observes the denial of the way of being civilized in the context of 1964, and music can be considered a cry of freedom that makes Freud turn once again (2010, p. 47)

What is felt in a human community as a desire for freedom can be its revolt against some existing injustice, and thus can be favorable to a greater development of civilization; can remain compatible with civilization. However it may also originate from the remnants of its original personality who is not yet be tamed by civilization. The impulse of freedom, therefore, is directed against specific forms and requirements of civilization in general.

In "Incident in Antares", published in 1971, Erico Veríssimo creates a scenario of disputes for political power between two families, the Campolargo and the Vacarianos. In the novel, he declares, in 1963, a general strike in the city of Antares, which, being adhered to by the cemetery staff, provokes the revolt of the dead, bringing, again, to the life of *Dona Quitéria Campolargo*, who is as the guardian of the

norms and customs of that community. Jorge Amado, with "*Tieta do Agreste*" (1989), in a different geographical scenario, explores the same issue, with regard to daily life in a small town. With a similar character, in Santana do Agreste is Dona Perpetua who takes care of preserving morals and good customs.

There is in the genius of these authors a satire on the way social relations take place within small communities, it can be observed that since the kid of the day to day norms and ways of circumventing them are established, that the being itself lives in constant conflict with the social being. In this conflict, sometimes, the layer that covers the desires is thin and these arise even if before the norms and moral precepts, in others they remain imprisoned for a lifetime. Individuals who free themselves from moral bonds seek ways to transform the whole society and those who imprison them from consoling it. Social beings live these ambivalences, the endogenous struggle to the individual extends through society polarizing it and, in this way, giving life to the values that constitute them. These values will bring about political parties, religions and other forms of ideological and spiritual representation that will legitimize or question dictatorial or democratic regimes.

For the nazi party of Germany, civilization and culture were prerogatives of the Germans, "aryan race". The Republican Party in the United States of America, when ruled by Donald Trump, argued that the country could be closed to some peoples, that transsexuals who today served in the Armed Forces lost this right and, as the Democratic Party also argues, Free Trade should be extended to all societies leaving to the invisible hand of the market (or for money) the function of regulating social relations. It is observed, therefore, from daily life, reaching the macrosocial, atrocities committed due to sociocultural factors and/or in the name of a alleged civility. In the military regime the civilized and cult being is the one who has access to museums, art galleries, theater, cinema and universities, privileges historically reserved for those who have money. The non-cult or uncivilized would be the people who held only their capacity for the work.

Empirically, it can be observed that the term "people" appears in the official speeches in the third person, "we will do it for the people", "the people like carnival". The working class takes on this denomination and shouts "the united people will never be defeated." It remains clear, in these discourses, the differentiation between the people constituted by peasants, metalworkers, teachers and the non-people, the bourgeois elite where are the deputies, senators, landowners, owners of large companies. In this apartheid, typical of totalitarian regimes, the concepts of culture and civilization are linked to the owners of power, these do not belong to what is called a people, but who defines the necessary conditions for civility, who establishes the differences between worship and uncultured.

It is in this way that when one intends to establish what is culture and civilization by bourgeois autocracy, in the absentia of the people, these concepts immediately appear as strangers to the majority of the population that does not identify and thus reject them. Culture and civilization in the bourgeois way, Gal Costa sings in 1969, "what the hell", because I do not constitute and I am not constituted by these values. "Or not," because it doesn't belong to me, I don't identify myself, I'm indifferent, "as long as they let me have my life in hand."



## **Final thoughts**

There is no democracy without a people, nor is there a dictatorship without a people. It is observed, therefore, that at some point, for various reasons, but that revolve around the search for the guarantee of subsistence, happiness or because of pure alienation, the people are called to give legitimacy to a government that deposes against their interests. But that, even though the authoritarian government has been instituted, voices rise up against and small portions that begin gradually claiming and gaining supporters, who gain spaces coming to constitute force with real capacity for confrontations.

A song in this scenario threatens a whole warlike power and the moral values that constitute the society in question, due to its easy and democratic assimilation by segments of the population, which, hindered by the barriers of the system, are far from university spaces and other forms of learning. Culture and civilization to the bourgeois way of being constitute a threat to a chain rich in diversities, because by hierarchizing these concepts seeks ways to reduce the different in order to control and maintain inequalities that historically condition the working class to the place of producer of wealth for the enjoyment of the holders of capital.

In the music of Gilberto Gil, sung by Gal Costa, the proposal to make the population think is implicit. Here's the threat, the terror for autocracy. Reflective thinking questioning the order that one wants to establish. This is where the macaw wood emerges, but it is where the contesting movement also gains strength and the revolution can happen:

Culture, civilization  
Let them be damned  
Or not  
Only interest me  
As long as they leave me my genipap liqueur  
The chat  
From the nights of Saint John  
Only interest me  
As long as they make my hair beautiful  
My beautiful hair  
Like a lion's mane  
As long as they leave me  
Stay in mine  
As long as they leave me  
Keep my life in hand  
My life at hand  
My life  
Culture, civilization  
Let them be damned  
Or not

I really like  
It's to eat with coriander  
I really like  
It is to stay inside  
As I've been awhile  
In Claudina's belly  
An old Bahian woman  
A hundred per cent

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