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VANGUARDAS NA AMÉRICA LATINA: MANUEL BANDEIRA NO LOCALISMO UNIVERSAL
AVANT-GARDE IN LATIN AMERICA: MANUEL BANDEIRA IN THE UNIVERSAL LOCALISM
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Abstract

Aiming to reflect on the avant-garde movements from a continental perspective, this paper analyzes the specificities of the Modern Movement in Latin America from a local and universal perspective (Candido, 2006), which is a differentiation factor in terms of European modernism. With the Latin American continent as a subject, but concentrating on a specific Brazilian author, we will analyze this process based on the Brazilian writer Manuel Bandeira's chronicles. They were written along with the 1920s and 1930s and selected for the book *Crônicas da Província do Brasil* [Chronicles of the Province of Brazil, our translation], from 1937. We will articulate the chronicles with the author's path and some modern movements, both in Brazil and on the continent. Bandeira's texts are a powerful source of analysis and understanding of universal Latin American localism. They allow us to understand aspects of this movement, which was not specific to Brazil but spread throughout Latin America, and how it could reflect in our language, architecture, cities, and culture. Such reflections highlight how this path is still being taken, how geographic, literature, and language barriers are being overcome in Latin America.

Keywords: Latin America, Modernism, Manuel Bandeira, Traditions, Avant-garde

1 Modernism: avant-garde movements

This leads us toward another kind of account as to why Modernism is our art; it is the one art that responds to the scenario of our chaos. (Bradbury, McFarlane,

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In Europe, between 1890-1930, modernism was established as an avant-garde movement, expressing the 20th century, society, and modern consciousness (Bradbury; McFarlane, 1986). As an art that represented a new society, modernism proposed a break, the independence from previous aesthetic proposals. Requiring new environments, modern art attacked the old conventions, opposing existing aesthetic assumptions, while exalting the new ones (Bradbury; McFarlane, 1986). Cities like Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Prague, London, and Moscow were described as “the cities of modernism” (Bradbury, 1986), as cultural capitals that attracted intellectuals and writers from different parts of the world, by creating an urban atmosphere of cultural and intellectual exchange.

In its plurality, modernism became an international trend with a cosmopolitan and urban character, an art of cities. The artist had to be in the city to be modern. Soon, the city turned into an object of interest, a character, a metaphor in the modern writer’s texts, such as Baudelaire, Dickens, and Dostoyevsky. Living in a metropolitan environment was essential to be modern, to express and write as a modern (Bradbury, 1986). By leading the working towards the new, launching themselves ahead, these avant-garde movements intended a critical art, free of conditioning, stimulating the experimental exercise of language and the updating of thought, breaking with all prior tradition (Belluzzo, 1990). Including all the factors, the renewal brought by modernism was not only aesthetic, but especially cultural, going beyond art and materializing new forms of language and expression in the various fields of culture – literature, painting, sculpture, music, theater, architecture, and cities.

2 Latin American Avant-garde

As an international movement, modernism expanded to different countries and continents, including Latin America between the 1920s and 1930s, where it found different meanings. The rupture with the past and history was necessary for modernity to establish itself as global discourse and hegemonic practice in the literary and cultural sphere (Sarlo, 1990). However, in contact with the European avant-garde, the Latin American intellectuals realized how this radical break with the past, promoted by artistic and cultural expressions modernization, would only make sense in countries with a strong national tradition (Fonseca, 1997). Countries of recent formation, such as Latin Americans, when joining the new, would be mischaracterizing the particularities of their own artistic production, losing both national character and universal value (Fonseca, 1997).

Moving in the opposite direction of the rupture with traditions and internationalism, the task of these avant-gardes was to build a tradition and national identity: to produce national modernity — in association with the State — and this concerns their sense of new, of avant-garde (Gorelik, 2005). Latin American avant-garde tried to align themselves with the Europeans, inserting themselves in this modern international circuit without, however, renouncing their own: “our deficiencies, supposed or real, are reinterpreted as superiorities” (Candido, 2006, p. 126, free translation). The modern movement was based on the affirmation of the local and the cosmopolitan as strands of the same process, a dialectic between them, inspired by the European example (Candido, 2006).

This vision of universal localism, defended by Candido, was incorporated into the perspective of the Uruguayan critic and writer Ángel Rama. By seeking greater cultural integration between Latin American countries, Rama realized this common and dialectical rhythm between the process of modernization and recovery of the traditional, the primitive, and the regional in Latin American cultural production in the 1920s. This tension between modern and tradition would be overtaken through the transculturation process (Aguiar; Vasconcelos, 2001), a cultural transformation through the contact between different cultures. Seeking to build an identity, these intellectuals looked to the past and chose elements in it that constituted a certain national tradition that made sense within a modern international framework. This identity was a project and not a return to the past (Martins, 2010). They sought to make known a Latin America produced by Latin Americans themselves and no longer based on European representations, produced by Europeans, in which their points of view and culture prevailed (Schwartz, 2008).

There were two fields where this movement was stronger: literature and architecture. Regarding the construction of a national language, literature played a crucial role in this project. In Brazil, but also in Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Cuba, for example, the renovation of existing languages was sought. There was the necessity to value the spoken language in opposition to the distance that separated it from academic writing: “The way we speak. The way we are” (Andrade, 2007, free translation). Modernism proposed a confrontation between the traditional and mechanized academic aesthetic, of conventional ideas and hardened forms of expression.

The abandonment of regular poetic forms, for example, changed not only the formal elements of the poems but also their plot and characters. The conservative and conventional social order was occupied by everyday

life and by the popular. With this, what was devalued by the predominance of European cultures, such as the black, the primitive, the folklore, the popular, comes to assert us culturally, accentuating a nationalist sphere with particularities and specificities (Candido, 2006). This moment can be read as a hinge movement (Manrique, 1974), where art looked, at the same time, outward — Europe — and inward — themselves. It was necessary to look at its own reality, to define oneself in front of the other.

In this context, it is not possible to leave out the indigenous movements, which occurred with more intensity where the indigenous population was still very numerous, such as Mexico, Bolivia, and Peru. This movement sought to integrate the indigenous populations into these countries' plans for nationhood, that is, they could no longer be excluded from the culture, economy, and society, they must take their place as subjects of history. Faced with the inequality and oppression of the indigenous peoples in Peru, names like Mariátegui — one of the main intellectuals of the Peruvian avant-garde — participated in this awakening to the oppressive reality of these peoples and their role in history and national culture. The indigenous became material for artistic and cultural production. The avant-garde muralist art in Mexico can also be read in this key. The indigenous became a character in these representations that portrayed the Mexican people and history, dialoguing with the new State project of post-revolution Mexico. Art, when presented in public spaces, also became public, incorporating characters once excluded from national history and culture.

Nationalism, a look at its own reality, was on the agenda of the various celebrations of the centennial of the independence of Latin American countries that took place in the first decades of the 20th century. With truly diverse independence processes and differences from Brazil, the independence of Hispanic American countries was celebrated amidst nationalist and critical actions that sought to rethink the nation. In Argentina, such commemorations (1910), took place among discussions around the issue of nationality, due to the thousands of immigrants who arrived in the country at the end of the 19th century. Concerned with the affirmations of national values and its traditions, the "Generation of the Centennial"¹, with the State, promoted, due to these celebrations, projects of patriotic education and affirmation of nationality, identity, and the "authentic" Argentine tradition (Néia, 2018).

In the 1920s, there was a series of artistic movements impelled by this environment: Mexico (*Manifiesto del Sindicato de Artistas Revolucionários*, 1922), Brazil (*Semana de Arte Moderna*, 1922), Argentina (*Movimiento martinfierrista*, 1924), Chile (*Montparnasse* group, from Santiago, 1928), and Cuba (movement headed by Victor Manuel, 1924). The question of identity, national roots, rethinking culture and society by themselves and others, was already on the agenda of these countries, being discussed by the intellectuals who composed the avant-garde movements in the 1920s on the continent. Besides the Brazilian avant-garde in which Manuel Bandeira, Oswald de Andrade, and Mário de Andrade, Tarsila do Amaral, among others, took part, we had César Vallejo and José Carlos Mariátegui in Peru, Leopoldo Marechal and Jorge Luis Borges in Argentina, Vicente Huidobro in Chile, Diogo Rivera and José Orozco in Mexican muralism (Schwartz, 2008). These are some examples among an extensive group. These Latin American intellectuals and artists united the "new" intellectual awakened by modernism with the construction of national history and the search for their national identities. Nationalism and cosmopolitanism went together (Schwartz, 2008).

More than an aesthetic movement, modernism was consolidated as a cultural movement, a movement of ideas. When speaking about the movement in Brazil, Candido (2006) highlighted how modern literature brought the best expressions of Brazilian thought of the time, playing a powerful role in its social expression. From this comes its character as a cultural movement. Through its new interpretative and expressive resources, literature cooperated with other sectors of intellectual life. The avant-garde magazines illustrate well this avant-garde in movement². Through them, cultural proposals were perceived more clearly, ideas were propagated, and boundaries were overcome (Marques, 2013). In the magazines, the authors were more radical, audacious, and combative in literary and critical experimentation. Even published in few copies, these magazines had a considerable impact on cultural transformations, mainly because they were read by an influential elite in political and cultural decisions of the period (Schwartz, 2008)³.

Years earlier, in a letter to Mário de Andrade, in May 1928, Bandeira wrote:

I got Alberto Ramos' book and your articles about Argentinian literature. I know almost nothing about it. [...] Gironde seems very superior to me, despite the sportive taste for metaphors that frame me so much. [...] The one I have read nothing and need to read is Borges. Once Ronal told me he was the strongest there. [...] (Moraes, 2000, p. 389, our translation).

From such complete and deep works from the 1940s and 1950s on Hispanic American literature, and the little knowledge about them in the late 1920s, it is possible to see how the author approached other Latin American writers in the following years, and how the modern movement, and the exchanges between avant-garde intellectuals it provides, may have contributed to this process.

The renewal of the means of artistic expression and the rupture with traditional language — aesthetic project —, awakened the country's conscience, the desire for a national artistic expression — ideological project — going beyond literature and assigning a social function to art (Lafetá, 2000). The 1920s marked a certain "awakening to modernity" in Latin American countries while opening their eyes to their own social reality, which intensified in 1930, with the contribution of the State (Martins, 2010). In the same sense as literature, modern architecture in Latin America also turned to the past, to the interior of these countries, claiming the popular and the traditional of the provinces as a form of modern production, expressing a national aesthetic (Gorelik, 2005).

Modernists and the state were united in this project of building traditional and national culture. The vanguards, as intellectuals, legitimized the voice of the movement, and the state legitimized a history (Ballestrin, 2013). Looking at their own cultural heritage led these artists to explore the interior of the countries to discover them, at a time when affirming Latin American identity was no longer contradictory to modernity. The art produced here was no longer synonymous with backwardness when compared to that of European metropolises (Aravecchia, 2018). The very expression "Latin America" stopped referring to the European tradition and started to mean an entire cultural identity, a territory, its own tradition. This concern with national identity was fundamental to define modern architecture in the continent (Arellano, 2011), which erupted in the 1930s as one of the fields of action of the avant-garde, linked to the State:

It is simple historical evidence that, since the thirties, in the Latin American countries where some of the main expressions of architectural modernism emerged — Mexico and Brazil, especially, but in its own way also Argentina — a good part of the most important works were sponsored, financed, or directly undertaken by the State. (Gorelik, 2005, p. 26, our translation).

In terms of modernization of cities, under the sign of oil and the highway, the Argentine state in the 1930s led a modernization process that represented it, expanding the country's road infrastructure. With a strong symbolic character, the state placed itself not only against but more modern than the British-owned railway system that existed in the country, attributing enormous nationalist sense to the project (Gorelik, 2005). Analyzing the Buenos Aires of this period, Beatriz Sarlo (1990) observed how city and modernity were presupposed, the urban fabric was the scenario of changes, displaying ostentatious, brutalities, and contradictions of this modernization process.

In Mexico, after the Mexican Revolution in 1910, groups of radical intellectuals declared themselves on a mission to build a new country. Their nationalism aimed to enhance Mexican culture in the reconstruction of modern society through state action. Modernist architects such as José Villagrán García, Juan O'Gorman, and Juan Legarreta, designed popular housing, schools, and hospitals that represented this post-revolutionary state (Gorelik, 2005). There was, thus, an ideal of a city that represented national identity. This ideal was not only in the modern architecture, — as the examples of Argentina and Mexico — but also in the architecture that legitimized it as a continuation: the colonial architecture. In Brazil, the colonial, especially the baroque, was chosen as our traditional architecture. The local and the universal were not restricted to literature but were also incorporated into the architecture.

What this article intends to do is to think this specificity of the Latin American avant-garde between the local and the universal, based on a particular author: Manuel Bandeira, and his chronicles selected for the book *Crônicas da Província do Brasil*⁴ [Chronicles of the Province of Brazil (our translation)], 1937. Bandeira writes chronicles that move between these two fields of action of the Latin American avant-gards: language and literature; architecture and the city. This allows us to understand aspects of this movement that is not specific to Brazil, which spread throughout Latin America, establishing a dialogue between the author's book, the modern movement, and the discourses and actions of the State in this project of building a national tradition. Produced in this environment, Bandeira's chronicles present us with the aspirations and transformations of the modern movement in Brazilian culture and cities, the ways of understanding and interpreting Brazil from the everyday life scale, from the chronicler who lives in the cities. At the same time, as an intellectual committed to modernism, he dialogues with the intentions of the movement and the State in the construction of this national tradition. Moving between these dimensions, Bandeira's texts became a powerful source for analysis and understanding of this universal Latin American localism and how it transpired in our language, architecture, and cities, in our culture.

3 Tradition and modernity: national and universal

Regarding architecture, Lucio Costa was the main Brazilian architect who represented this movement that elected tradition as the base of the creation of modern culture (Wisnik, 2007). The growth of the interest for the "Brazilian things" was not only an aesthetic project but also a project of a nation. This brought a new

correlation between intellectuals, society, and the State (Candido, 1984). The creation of SPHAN (National Historical and Artistic Heritage Service) in 1937, by the MES (Ministry of Education and Health), which was commanded by Gustavo Capanema, can be analyzed by looking at the association of Estate and the modern objectives. The draft of the organ's creation was written by Mario de Andrade and modified by Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade — the first SPHAN director —, all intellectuals inside the modern movement. The MES's headquarters, located in Rio de Janeiro, was designed by architects such as Affonso Eduardo Reidy and Oscar Niemeyer, who were led by Lucio Costa. The Ministry's building had panels painted by Candido Portinari, one of the main artists of modern painting. It became a mark of Brazilian modern architecture, a symbol of a modern State toward progress.

This movement shows how the state made the decision to elect modern architecture as the national architecture, at the same time, that modernity has not broken with tradition instead was its continuation. As the Director of SPHAN's Heritage and Studies Division, Lucio Costa, with a modern architect's vision, actively contributed to the election of colonial popular architecture as our national heritage, in opposition to erudite, connecting modern and popular tradition (Wisnik, 2007). Manuel Bandeira, a close friend of Mário de Andrade and Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade⁵, was a member of the Advisory Council of SPHAN. Bandeira wrote the chronicle *A Moderna Arquitetura Brasileira* [The Modern Brazilian Architecture, our translation] for the Pernambuco's newspaper *A Província*, in 1930. The chronicle was reproduced in the book *Crônicas da Província do Brasil*, 1937, with the title *Arquitetura Brasileira* [Brazilian Architecture, our translation]. In this chronicle, the author defended modern architecture as the one which symbolized Brazilian tradition, in opposition to neocolonial architecture, seen by the author as a copy of the past:

It is necessary to repeat to these people Lucio Costa's words, one of the few new architects who feel the architectural past of our land: our architecture is robust, strong, massive; our architecture has calm, tranquil lines; everything in it is stable, severe, simple — nothing pedantic. It is to this character of austere and robust simplicity that those who intend to resume the thread of Brazilian tradition in architecture should aim. (Bandeira, 2006, our translation)

The change of the title from *A Moderna Arquitetura Brasileira* to *Arquitetura Brasileira* may symbolize an affirmation of modern architecture as the true national architecture, years before SPHAN was created. The state's actions after 1937 in SPHAN were the result of a process that was conceived and matured by modern intellectuals; it was theory materializing in practices in the city.

In the chronicle, *De Vila Rica de Albuquerque à Ouro Preto dos estudantes*⁶ [From Vila Rica of Albuquerque to the Ouro Preto of the students, our translation], Bandeira (2006, free translation) wrote: "For us, Brazilians, what has the power to move us are those heavy townhouses, those baroque frontages, where something that is ours has begun to take hold." This chronicle was written after Bandeira's trip to Ouro Preto. In it, what stands out are the references to the architecture of Minas Gerais's city still preserved: "Ouro Preto is the city that has not changed, and in this lies its charm." (Bandeira, 2006, our translation). The baroque architecture defended as "our thing", creates a link of national identity between present and past. It was the materialization of our past, of our history. It is this landscape, unknown by many, that the avant-garde intellectuals elected as the true historical Brazilian architecture, the one that would be internationally known as ours.

What Bandeira wrote in 1930, was propagated by Lucio Costa, by the MES, and by the organs that emerged from it, such as SPHAN, years later. Moved by the aesthetic transformations of the avant-garde, which encouraged us to look at our past and build our tradition, these intellectuals prepared what would be their field of action and from the State as well in the following decade. The creation of the heritage protection organ is seen as a state strategy for nation-building through the invention of national heritage, the materialization of history through SPHAN (Chuva, 2017). Thus, the city and modernity as assumptions, not only meant the literal construction of the new but also of the traditional, of the national heritage, which was still newness inserted in the city.

After being in Salvador, Bandeira wrote in the chronicle *Bahia*, published in April of 1927, in *O Jornal*, from Rio de Janeiro:

I have never seen a city so characteristically Brazilian as "good land". Good land! That's right. We barely set foot in the lower town and already feel so at home as if that was the great dining room of Brazil, the intimate family retreat of an old manor house with heavy and noble jacaranda trees. There we feel more Brazilian. I confess that stronger than ever, those deep racial roots that fasten us to the extinct past, to the most remote present, trembled. Roots in-depth and surface. (Bandeira, 2006, our translation)

For Bandeira, Salvador was an example of a Brazilian city, which sheltered our roots and tradition, a feeling aroused by the urban environment. The author talks about "roots in-depth and surface", these deeper roots take us to history, something longstanding, which comes from a time that is not the present; while the surface roots take us to the city, to the urban environment, to what is in the landscape, in the city's everyday life, and that also belongs to tradition. During his stay in the city, Bandeira sent a letter to Mário de Andrade talking about the trip:

Mario, I am in love with Bahia! It is a stupendous land: THE BRAZILIAN CITY. Hundreds and hundreds of beautiful townhouses made of 4 floors and terraces. If I could, I would take one for me and one for you. Houses with strong and sober manor lines, with doors of carved and emblazoned stone, hardwood doors with cushions [...]. (Moraes, 2000, our translation)

It is evident that what makes Bandeira see Salvador as "the Brazilian city" are the physical and architectural aspects of the city. The "old houses" of Bahia are made of colonial architecture, like those from Ouro Preto. The identity of being Brazilian was associated with a specific architecture and specific city form. Bandeira completed:

Pelourinho's square is the urban view that a Brazilian can show a French without getting any ache from the perspective of the Champs Elysees or the Opera Avenue. What beautiful old houses! (Moraes, 2000, p. 332, our translation)

What was ours — our national history and roots — was not inferior to what existed in Europe. At the same time, in that the colonial was taken as our architecture, it was placed next to what existed in Europe with the same value, and no longer as inferior. Brazil now had a historical national architecture and a modern architecture that continued it.

Bandeira also sent a postcard from Salvador with the image of the Plano Inclinado Gonçalves Dias (Inclined Plan Gonçalves Dias, our translation) to Mário de Andrade with the following: "It is not a modernist painting, it is the old Bahia so close to us" (Moraes, 2000, p. 333, our translation). The phrase reveals the "old city" as an expression of the new, the modern. The traditional and the modern, the local and the universal, came together in this discourse that expressed Bandeira's thought at that moment, beyond the aspirations of the modernist project. What the modern pictured was this traditional Brazil, of old houses, colonial past, which came to be observed and appropriated as our own. The modern was legitimized by tradition, which attributed to it a historical charge, building a deep national identity. The new was supported by the old, the modern had in its base the tradition, and the city was where the avant-gardes and the State produced their national modernities (Gorelik, 2005).

Ouro Preto, the center of Salvador, and other churches and spaces discussed in Bandeira's chronicles were protected years later as Brazilian's national heritage by SPHAN. In his chronicles, Bandeira legitimized — even before the legal protection, and ten years before the foundation of SPHAN — the attribution of historical and national value to these buildings by intellectuals involved with the modern avant-garde in the country. It was in Rio de Janeiro, Minas, Bahia, Pernambuco that most of the protections were made in SPHAN's first year, prioritizing colonial and religious buildings. The national heritage was represented through the colonial period, consecrating this period as the founder of the nationality. Our heritage had a shape constructed by the State and the modern intellectuals behind this project (Chuva, 2017):

The State assigned itself the role of memory agent of the nation, holder of the tutelage of the national historic and artistic heritage — and also as a part of history. It was under this view that the choice of the goods to be preserved took place, to which a whole series of meanings were attributed in an effort to select what should not be forgotten, what, for the consolidation of the nation, should remain in the memory, materializing in the protected goods. It was about ending choices of a past that represented the entire nation. (Chuva, 2017, p. 176, our translation)

The city was not a reflection of this process of building nationality and modernity, but an agent (GORELIK, 2005). Architecture became a key in governmental projects, representing modernity and national tradition that legitimized it. Our modernity required a national tradition — not a break with it — to be universal.

4 Final considerations

Latin American modernism was plural. The search for tradition, the movement between the local and the universal, the national and the international, built the specificity of the modern movement in the continent.

Dialoguing with the aesthetic transformations of the European avant-gardes, we looked at our own reality and tried to understand ourselves, to define ourselves according to what was particular to us, and to export this traditional national production, consolidating it as international and modern. Through the analysis of some of Manuel Bandeira's chronicles and his own trajectory in the modern movement, in dialogue with the continent, it was possible to see how this effort to build national roots and insert Latin America into the universal cultural circuit, was part of the imaginary and ideas of modern intellectuals and was later associated with the State's project of nation.

It was a moment of construction: of languages, national histories, histories of colonialities, of cities and architectural styles, and exchanges between the continent itself. All these questions still confront us today, stimulating us to better understand the cities, the society, and our Latin American culture, especially when we look at its representations and how they are configured, understanding its agents and processes. It is evident how this path is still being followed, how barriers of geography, literature, and language are being crossed when regarding Latin America, where we are.

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1 A group of intellectuals committed to affirming the authentic traditions of the country, in the face of the immigrant "threat". In this milieu emerged names like Ricardo Rojas, Leopoldo Lugones and Manuel Gálvez (Néia, 2008).

2 In this paper, we have chosen to prioritize newspaper articles, that is, the chronicles. Although the fundamental role of magazines is acknowledged, they would open another range of reflections, which is why they were not deeply studied, but rather cited to illustrate the exchange between avant-garde ideas and intellectuals in Latin America.

3 To name a few, we had in Brazil the magazines *Klaxon*, *Festa*, *Antropofagia*, and *Estética*; *Martín Fierro*, *Proa*, and *Sur* in Argentina; *Amauta* by Mariátegui, and *Labor* in Peru; *La Pluma* in Uruguay, *Repertório Americano* in Costa Rica, and *Contemporáneos* in Mexico. It is important to note the plurality of content and ideas of these magazines, as well as the cities in which they were published.

4 *Crônicas da Província do Brasil*, was published in 1937 as a tribute by Editora Civilização Brasileira to Manuel Bandeira's 50th birthday. The book is a collection of 47 chronicles written by Bandeira between 1927 and 1936, for newspapers and magazines that circulated in the cities of Recife, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Belo Horizonte.

5 *Crônicas da província do Brasil* was dedicated to Rodrigo Melo Franco de Andrade.

6 The chronicle, published for the first time in 1929, in *O Jornal*, from Rio de Janeiro, is the first text of the *Crônicas da Província do Brasil*