

In defense of freedom of expression Cristina Costa

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Abstract

This article searches to demonstrate that human culture is characterized by the confrontation between individuals' subjectivity and the collective culture to which we belong. This opposition is strained as that society becomes more diverse and complex, witnessing the emergence of censorship mechanisms. Through them, we seek to silence all opposition to a particular way of interpreting the world trying to gain hegemony in society. This article is a result of research conducted at the Observatory of Communication, Freedom of Expression and Censorship, of the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil (OBCOM-USP), which studies contemporary and classical processes of censorship and defends freedom of expression as an ethical value which has become increasingly important throughout history.

Keywords: v!13; Censorship; Freedom of expression; Culture.

We, human beings, are cultural and symbolic animals. This means in short that in our recent past, and for various reasons, we had to renounce our natural way of living, growing up and reproducing. We have adopted new ways to exist which had in common not to be pre-determined by our genetic background, our instinctive knowledge, nor our biological baggage. Instead of this instinctivity inherent to all animals which enchants us as we observe the slow and logical weaving a spiderweb or the building of a beehive, we adopted artificial (non-natural), conventional ways of living. Such ways of living require to our descendants a long and costly process of internalization through education or acculturation. This transformation process is understood by some anthropologists as the passage from a *state of nature* to a *state*

of culture. It has been constituted in the great saga of humans on Earth, consisting of merging our animal nature with complex and diverse cultural processes, under constant and never-ending construction. This painful process leaves important marks on human culture, expressed in the myths that report the moment we lost our integration with nature. The prime example here is the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the earthly Paradise, from which we would have found ourselves naked and mortal. Leaving Paradise and integrating a particular and diverse culture has been the challenge of humanity, which seeks to live together with two opposing trends: individuality and personal identity on the one hand, and collective life on the other hand. Within this struggle we build our history and seek our place in the world. As a result ways of life have proliferated as well as the typical diversity of the human, acclimatized to the a wide variety of spaces and times.

This text deals with freedom of expression and censorship with such remote assumptions because without them one can not understand that we are beings of behavior not fully pre-predetermined by biology. In order to react to the stimuli of reality, we can choose different paths that meet both our individuality and our needs, even though such choices are influenced by the context and by our instincts. In this exercise of our power of choice, although very limited, we can recognize what we call *free will* or the ability to exercise *freedom*.

Freedom is the feeling and the sense that we do not need to act in predetermined ways and can project our desires and needs, and to evaluate our conduct, anchoring it in a possible temporality. From this point of view, freedom is what feeds our existence and leads all the progress of humankind, making us radically different from other animals. This historical and anthropological process was only possible because the development of communication allowed the weft culture to become a space of struggle and negotiation between, on the one hand, the individualities composing the collective and, on the other hand, the strength and the necessity of legitimate and conventional forms of behavior and interpretations of the world. Exposing oneself, to express oneself and to intervene in culture has become a predominant form of affirmation of our personal identity and social transformation. Conservative collective forces and existing life systems turn against it.

The ancient Greeks or Hellenes first identified this human condition, valuing and defending spaces of freedom and of individual statement, either by creating participatory political models, or by conceiving freedom as a human essential value. Socrates, who was sentenced to death for refusing to be unfaithful to himself, said that "the greatest good of a man is daily to converse about virtue, and all that concerning which you hear me examining myself and others". And the philosopher continues: "the life which is unexamined is not worth living" (Platão, 1981 [*circa* 428-347 a.C.]). Centuries later, we live a story of progress and setbacks in the search for defense and enhancement of our individuality and freedom, still fresh and constantly threatened goods.

Between dialogue and silence

We refer to the classical heritage because it inspired, in Western Modernity, the social movements that led to the Republic in defense of a society that values participation and affirmation of its freedom. Acting in a plural society, much more diverse than the Athenian world, contemporary social movements have also led to the idea of defending opinions, wishes and expressions of all, however different, combative and dangerous these opinions are or appear to be. That plurality, a diversity of ways of

understanding and interpreting the world in a society guided by the conviviality of differences, has made the struggle for spaces and ways of saying every day more important. The media development and increasingly powerful machines regarding the possibility of transmission and circulation broadened, on the one hand, the importance of words, gestures, images, and secondly, the control mechanisms of the expression of critics, complaint and opposition. A daily struggle started being fought between those who fight for their views and those who seek to relegate these latter to silence. The last few centuries have succeeded in this fierce dispute between the right of every citizen to speak out and oppose, and the resources that society, particularly governments, creates for those who seek to interdict dialogue, confrontation, dissidence and criticism.

The agencies of official censorship, state maintained in a number of political systems, allow us to understand how the struggle between expression and silence met the interests of those in power seeking to remain there. And in an increasingly extensive and diverse society, censorship, silencing and gagging become efficient resources of domination and manipulation. They seek to avoid, by different arguments, the examination of public life and a participatory society that Socrates, so many centuries ago, died defending.

Defending the freedom of expression

The Observatory of Communication, Freedom of Expression and Censorship of the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil (OBCOM-USP), is dedicated to the study of these issues and this history. It was created around the Miroel Silveira Archives [1], a set of 6,137 cases of prior censorship to theatrical works, from 1930 to 1970, in the State of Sao Paulo, and are now under the custody of the Library of the USP' School of Communication and Arts. About a hundred of researches have been studying reasons, justifications and consequences of censorial acts thus recovering the history of censorship in Brazil, which began before the appearance of press, universities, education, theatrical arts, literature, and the country itself. Throughout our long journey of research, we have noticed an increase in censorship resources to all criticism and dissidence, whether in periods of dictatorship such as the Getúlio Vargas' New State (Estado Novo) and the military dictatorship of the 1960s and 1970s, or during periods seen as democratic as Juscelino Kubistchek's Government. The manipulative ban against thought, from science to cultural and artistic production, has been a constant, giving rise to a censorial culture that resists the winds of freedom and political participation that sometimes blow through the lands of our country.



Fig. 1: Miroel Silveira Archive, 6137 processes of previous censorship to teatrical arts, between 1930 and 1970, in the São Paulo State. Source: OBCOM, 2016.



Fig. 2: Miroel Silveira Archive, 6137 processes of previous censorship to teatrical arts, between 1930 and 1970, in the São Paulo State. Source: OBCOM, 2016.

Studies of prior censorship processes to theatrical arts produced by classical and institutional censorship, as well as the analysis of current resources for control and restriction of freedom of expression, such as the indicative classification, lawsuits, the boycott of unauthorized biographical works, economic censorship promoted by funding agencies, show tendencies that resist to time, succession in power and social transformation. Here are some of them:

- 1.** Although freedom of expression is an unquestionable ethical and moral value, almost unanimous in general public opinion, people tend to resist and want to silence dissenting views, criticisms and oppositions.

B E N - H U R O U (PRINCIPE DE HUR)

DRAMA MUZICADO

EM 2 ACTOS E 12 QUADROS-VERSÃO-COORDENAÇÃO DE *adaptação*
de HILARIO DE ALMEIDA

PRÓLOGO 1º Quadro

-(Deziluzão)-Scenários-Fundo de um jardim Alegre-envolvido em columnatas,
estillo Romano.A esquerda uma larga porta com escadaria de marmore-
-Soldados .da Guarda Romana!

Scena Ia

Soldados-Cantam/

Roma!Roma!
És a mãe dos Romanos!
Patria!Dilecta!
Muza dos anjos Arcãos
Até na judea
Vem seu Imperio
Fôrtes a mais fôrte
Em todo emysphério
Hozannas!Hozannas!
As forças Romanas.

1º

Ser Romano, é ser Grande!
É ver correr nas veias,
Sangue de uma raça
Valente e varonil!

2º

Ser Romano!É ser senhores!
Donos das Artes!...Das terras
E dos Mares!...Ser Romano,
É ter nas mãos acorrentado
Um mundo de sebedorias!

CENSURADO

~~-O Romano... é o Pherol da humanidade.~~

3º

-Um judeu que se aproxima! (vee espreitar)

1º

-Que virá fazer?

2º

-Com certeza que vem beber nas fontes da nossa lei o regimen de sus

CENSURADO

3º

-Tem ár de fidalguia...

1º

-Dos antigos ignorante, porque fidalgos como romanos, ainda estão para nascer.

Scena 2a

Judá

-(entra)-(um cumprimento de saudação judaica)-Salve!Romanos!

1ºSoldado

-Hein!...Que cumprimento são estes?Então é um judeu tem a ousadia de cumprimentar aos mantedores das leis quando se aproxima um judeu de um romano, põe o joelho em terra e beijalhe os sapatos.

Judá

-Perdão senhor!Sou judeu!E na minha raça,todos cumprimentos são respeitaveis.

1º

-Que procuras aqui?

Judá

-Sou Judá!Fidalgo de antiga estirpe,filho de Ben-Hur e unico varão de sua familia.

Todos

-Ah!Ah!Ah!Fidalgo...Ah!Ah!Ah!

1º

-Não pergunto, senhor fidalgo...(fazendo venias exagerada dentro de certa comicidade)-dixit...pela sua gerarchia;queremos simplesmente saber o que veio cá cheirar? (saem alguns soldadso)

Judá

-(sacóde a cabeça)(ap.)-Onde fostes,oh educação?...Que estes orgulhosos não te encontraram em seus principios.

2º

-Não ouvistes?

Judá

-Senhores!Não venho aqui insultar ninguem e tão pouco desrespeitar principios para que me queiram destructar.Venho tão só procurar um amigo dos tempos de adolecencia.

1º e 2º

-Um amigo?...

1º

-Quem poderá dentre os Romanos, ser amigo de um judeu?...

Judá

Messala

-Óra meu caro. Continuas a ser creança sem perceberes que os annos passados, não podem trazer ~~aos~~ futuros, novidades; pois que novos horizontes vão se abrindo, para Judeia desde que aqui pizam os filhos da ~~grande~~ Roma!

Judá

-Grande tambem é a Judeia! Tão maior talvez, que Roma!... Que aqui vem roubar socego e encher seus cofres, hirtos de ouro que não possuem.

Messala

-Óra meu caro, Judá! Os vossos ouros serve-nos apenas para ladrilharem as ~~as~~ nossas avenidas... Assim mesmo só borilado para não sujar as solas das nossas Sandalhas.

Judá

-Cinco annos! Lembra-me perfeitamente como se fosse hoje, quando nos despedimos. Tú voltavas para Roma. Eu te vi partir e chorei!... chorei porque te queria como a um irmão. Os annos se passaram e tú viestes cheio de orgulho e poder... porem sem aquelle coração que bem dizia a minha terra aquelle coração que tanta vez commigo elevou-se ao nosso Deus! Quando baixava-se ao acaso por traz dos montes, o só! Levando commigo as horas sagradas do dia!
-Oh! Como mudam os tempos... ~~mas~~ como podes tu, concentir, Oh! Deus!... Que assim mudem tambem as creaturas?!

Messala

-Heis o que é ser judeu! Tudo muda. A terra, o ~~Ceu~~, as leis, o tempo. Mas o judeu não muda. Para elle nem recuar nem progredir. Continúa a ser o que foram seus antepassados e morrem não sendo mais nada! No entretanto sinto-me penhorado por me ~~Haveres~~ vindo ver e tentarei reatar a nossa amizade de infancia.
-É verdade que mudai, porem sigo apenas as palavras do meu mestre de Retórica.
-Ide, procurae ser grande, lembrae-vos de que Marte reina e de que Eros lançou fora a venda. Queria dizer, que o futuro nada vale e que a Guerra é tudo neste mundo. É assim em Roma. O casamento, o primivo ~~caso~~ para o divorcio.
-A virtude não passa de uma ~~ilha~~ ~~segurança~~. A deshonra passa pelo ouro, para tornar a apparecer mais honrada. e assim vive o mundo, meu amigo. viva Marte e abaixo Eros! Bem por isso tenho pena de ti... Se segues ~~nesta~~ virtude de angelidade... que poderás vir a ser?... Do Collegio á sinagoga; de lá ao tempo... Depois como bem supremo, como ultima Gloria... uma cadeira, talvez... no synhedrio...

Judá

-Então... nada mais julgas de mim?

Messala

-Sim, se ~~tornares~~ Romano... Ou pelo menos aos seus costumes. Olha... ~~A vida passada em Roma é o estado de completa~~ A riqueza, as mulheres, o vinho, o jogo, os folguedos, ~~as postas canzitas que nos abajalam~~, o amor... Um céu de mil deuses a adorarem-nos cá na terra!

Judá

-Adeus, Messala!

Messala

-Te vaes? Por ventura tudo quanto te disse nada te serviur

Judá

-Buscava aqui reviver ~~uma~~ saudade do passado e matei-a mais depressa a ~~illuzão~~ ~~do~~ presente!

Fig. 3 a 6: Censored text from the play Ben-Hur. Source: Archive, 2016.

2. Censorship is a process spread in society only comprehensible if related to its political and historical context. In 1943, prior censorship promoted cuts in the theatrical play *Ben-Hur* [2], by Hilário de Almeida, on the Canticles with which Roman soldiers extolled Rome. The censors of Getúlio Vargas, who was then ahead of the New State, interdicted these manifestations that could suggest, in their opinion, a special appreciation of Brazil towards Mussolini's Rome. At that time, Vargas was trying to approach United States and their allies in international relations. It is thus evident that particular interests of the one who rules interfere in censorship and the veto historical conditions.

(J)

CENA V.

Os mesmos, Rosa e Anacleto

ANACLETO - (Entra com Rosa, furioso) - Então, senhor meu genro! O senhor, apenas com tres meses de casado, já com um amante! Ela é bonita? (Á Rosa) Deixa-lo por minha conta, minha filha! Eu o ensino!

FABIANO - Meu sogro... Eu me explico...

ANACLETO - Não quero saber de explicações! O senhor é um grande tratante! O senhor é o ultimo dos genros! Casado ha tres mezes e já se preocupando com amantes! (confidencial) - Diga-me uma coisa: ela é loira ou morena? (Alto) - Grande patife! Miseravel!

FABIANO - Meu sogro!

ROSINHA - Deixa-lo, papai. A minha resolução já está tomada.

ANACLETO - Descance, minha filha. Eu ensino esse "Barba Azul" ! (A Fabiano) - O senhor fique sabendo que essa historia de amante vai lhe custar muito caro! (Confidencial) - Onde ela mora?

FABIANO - Ah! O senhor quer o endereço?

ANACLETO - Fale baixo, cachorro! (A Rosa) - Eu me encarrego dele, minha filha! Eu sou homem!

ROSA - Vamos para casa, meu pai. Deixa esse ingrato!

ANACLETO - Vamos minha filha. Já lhe dei uma boa lição! (vai sair e volta a ele) - Infame! Perverso! (confidencial) - Onde ela mora, bendido!

FABIANO - Rua Florinda 988. Mas ela não ^{VRE} com a sua cara, velho.

ANACLETO (Á Rosa) - Vamos, minha filha. Lá em minha casa nada te faltará. (Confidencial a Fabiano) - Eu vou levar minha filha, mas só por tres dias, hein? Depois tuvais busca-la porque eu não tenho dinheiro para sustenta-la. (Á Rosa) - Vamos, minha filha! (Saem)

ANACLETO (A Simplicio) - ,Estás vendo, grande animal, o que fizeste? Eu vou sair e quando voltar não quero encontrar-te aqui! (Sai)

CORTADO PELA CENSURA

9

CENA IX.

RABANETE E ANACLETO

RABANETE (Só) - Com essa foi fácil. Comigo é assim! Ordem é ordem.

ANACLETO (Entrando com uma capa) - Onde está o cachorro do tenente!

RABANETE - Esse é o alfaiate. (Alto) Olha aqui, seu coisa: o tenente saiu, mas deixou-me um recado para o senhor.

ANACLETO - Que recado? Diga logo! Vamos!

RABANETE - Ele mandou dizer ao senhor, que, si o senhor quiser deixá-la, pode deixá-la e si não, pode levá-la, porque o tempo de friu já passou e ~~o~~ já está furada.

ANACLETO (Aparte) Ele disse isso ^{acapa} de minha filha! (Alto) É verdade o que me acabas de dizer?

RABANETE - Verdadinha da Silva.

CORTADO PELA CENSURA

ANACLETO (Saindo furioso) - Ah! Ele me paga! Vou á policia! (Sai)

CENA X.

Rabanete, Fabiano e depois Angelica

RABANETE (Só) - O alfaiate não gostou do recado. Enfim, eu não tenho nada com isso. É ordem do patrão...

FABIANO (Entrando) - Veio alguém?

RABANETE - Vieram sim, senhor tenente. Primeiro a Angelica, que conforme suas ordens, pu-la na rua.

FABIANO - A Angelica veio aqui?

RABANETE - Sim senhor. Logo em seguida veio o alfaiate. Dei-lhe o seu recado e ele saiu daqui furioso!

ANGELICA (Entra chorando) - Patrão... Patrão...

RABANETE - Olha a Angelica novamente aqui! (Empurando-a) - Fôra ! Fôra daqui! Rua!

Ilmo. Sr. Diretor da Divisão de T. e
Diversões Publicas do Departamento Estadual de Im-
prensa e Propaganda.

CENSURE-SE

184

Ao Sr. *Sen. Pedro Leavacho.*

São Paulo, 19-1-1942

Capital.

Handwritten signature: Paulo Leavacho

Fonseca & Cardoso Ltada, abaixo assinado requer
a V.S., se digne mandar censura a peça intitulada -
Duas Angelicas, em um ato de autoria de Abelardo Pin-
to.

P. Deferimento.

Handwritten: São Paulo, 16 de Janeiro 1942
Handwritten: Fonseca & Cardoso Ltda.



1653
17-79

9.º TABELLIONATO
Rua Dr. Miguel Couto, 46-48 - S. PAULO

Reconheço a firma *signa*

S. Paulo, 16 de Janeiro de 1942

Em teste *Handwritten signature* da verdade

RECONHECIMENTO
EMOLUMENTOS
TESOURO DO ESTADO

Fig. 7 a 9: Censored text. Source: Archive, 2016.

3. The reality that censorial processes claim to defend against the dangers of knowledge, information or enjoyment of an artistic work seems not to exist. It is a stereotype of society that censors would like triumphant and strongly defend as if it was universal. Among the more than six thousand cases of the Miroel Silveira Archives, the most cut word is "lover", always referring to a woman who maintains sexual relations with a married man. Censors' statements justify such cuts as in defense of Brazilian family. We know however how diverse have been family arrangements in our country since always, and how current are extramarital relationships. The Brazilian family advocated by censors is rather an ideal than a reality.

4. Censorship expresses a quite outdated trend in Communication Sciences: the belief that words have the power to institute realities. Cultural Studies and research work on reception processes outlines that between the author's intention and the appropriation by the receptor of the meaning of a text there is a complex process of mediation through which new meanings emerge complementing the communication process. Furthermore, cutting words does not change the whole text that is expressed, at a theatrical play, in gestures, physiognomic and facial expressions, and by the dramaturgical narrative.

5. New media are making easier and more agile the society control on its behavioral and communicational manifestations. They make obsolete and unnecessary traditional resources of censorship, such as prior censorship of texts. New features such as censorship promoted by the managers of social networks control our forms of expression. On the other hand, digital technologies allow the common citizen individual expression as never before in History.

Good news for hard times

As seen, we are living in hard times within the fields of Communication Sciences and censorship studies. We must recognize that, as shown in the beginning of this text, censorship is as old as human culture. It comes from our peculiarity to develop a special way of being in the world, mediated by complex subjectivity and the required belonging to a plural and diverse culture, which continuously we oppose. In this struggle, censorship appears as the possibility to a certain worldview to become hegemonic and establish itself as the dominant form of interpreting reality. So censorial resources survived and improved in theocracies, monarchies, dictatorships and even in the republican most libertarian times.

Individual freedom and the right to free expression in Western World are far more recent and are becoming a growing important, desired good. Over the past centuries, they have emerged as an ideal, an ethical value to be defended, achieved and improved. By creating more efficient ways to give voice to people, social groups and institutions, technological development meets the wish Socrates already recognized as able of giving meaning to life.

Related to what I sought to expose, I thank the journal the opportunity to express results of our research, our questions and our wishes that hopefully are not only ours, but of the entire community.

[1] Miroel Silveira was author, translator, producer, poet, director, besides drama teacher at the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (ECA-USP). He lends his name to this documentation rescued, in the 1980s, from the Division of Censorship of the Department of Public Entertainment where it was waiting to be incinerated.

[2] Ben-Hur is a dramaturgical text adapted from the eponymous movie based on the Lew Wallace's book. It tells the fight of a revolutionary Jewish man against the Roman Empire which occupied Palestine.

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