

Brazilian Popular Music: the soundtrack of the political opening (1975/1982)

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AN AD for a high-tech stereo system published in *IstoÉ* magazine on June 23, 1977, read: “To listen to protest songs against the consumer society, nothing better than a Gradient paid in 24 installments.”

This publicity ‘teaser’ in a way expressed the paradoxical condition of Brazilian popular music during that decade marked by authoritarianism: focus of the resistance and cultural identity of a civilian opposition to the military regime, the songs labeled as part of ‘MPB - Brazilian Popular Music’ were highly valued by the Brazilian music industry (Napolitano, 2001). This scenario would become even more contrasting after 1976, with the consolidation of the ‘political opening policy’¹ of the military regime, as the distention strategy (and political rapprochement) between the military regime and the liberal sectors of civil society implemented by the last two military governments (Ernesto Geisel and Figueiredo) became known. Acclaimed as an expression of civil resistance still back in 1960s, MPB gained new creative impulse along the most repressive period of dictatorship, becoming a sort of soundtrack of both the ‘leaden years’ and the ‘political opening’. In the period 1975-1982, the artists linked to MPB affirmed themselves as harbingers of an increasingly widespread feeling of opposition, fueling the beats of a ‘civilian heart’ that insisted on pounding during the dictatorship. MPB became synonymous with ‘committed songs, valued in the aesthetic and ideological spheres by the more educated middle class, which drank from the cultural well of this opposition and was both producer and consumer of a leftist culture (Miceli, 1994).

In 1970, under the impact of exile and censorship, Caetano Veloso told *O Pasquim* newspaper in a foreboding tone: “The sound of the 70’s perhaps is not a musical sound. Anyway, the only fear is that this may turn out to be the decade of silence.”

In 1980, however, music critics realized how much the authoritarian context and the mystique of the previous decade had jeopardized a more direct evaluation of the Brazilian music scene: “A curious decade, these ‘70s. After the growing fermentation of the ‘60s, we started it in a climate of expectations: What now? And then? And we were so drenched with anxiety that we didn’t even see the decade go by” (Bahiana, 1980, p.151).

In between speeches, located at both ends of the 1970s, we felt the difficulty to understand the specific historicity of the Brazilian music scene, pressed

between the exuberant creativity of the previous decade and its political demands that turned Brazilian music into one of the strongest expressions of thought in the public sphere, although permeated by the logic of the market (Napolitano, 2001).

The academic reflection proposed still during the period of consolidation of the democratic transition does not seem to know how to define the music scene of the period either:

The '70s showed the consolidation and maturing of the highest-caliber idols of the previous decade, but did not add any really new data to the tradition of MPB. Less for the songs and more for the positions of our two most important songwriters (Chico Buarque and Caetano Veloso), the discussion throughout the period was marked by 'ideological patrols' [...] a dark decade, few joys and much political struggle to democratize the country. (Aguar, 1994, p.152)

In this line of reasoning, rock n'roll should have been the paradigmatic musical genre of the political opening. My proposition is a little different. Perhaps Brazilian rock was the music of the democratic transition of the "Nova República" (1985) and not of the political opening in the strict sense, i.e., that proposed by the military regime. Therefore, the image of the period both in memory and in history is that of a music scene marked by the constant threat of silence imposed by censorship, by the rule of market formulas and by the predominance of the political over the aesthetic.

In this article I will try to map the great complexity that involved the music scene of the 1970s, particularly the MPB genre. Far from being a mere passive unfolding of the political struggles of the period or of the musical movements of the previous decade, the MPB of the 1970s experienced the pinnacle of popularity and creative maturity, elements which, in turn, have failed to directly translate both a universal penetration in popular audiences and an idealized aesthetic autonomy meant for a few. Committed songs in all their variants not only conversed with the authoritarian context and the struggles of civil society, but also helped, poetically and musically speaking, to build a meaning for the social experience of resistance to the military regime, turning 'civil courage' in dark times into poetic-musical synthesis. The dilemmas and contradictions of music in general and of MPB in particular express the dilemmas and contradictions of that same civil resistance within the Brazilian middle class, which tended to gravitate towards *radicalism* rather than yielding to *revolutionary* impulses (Candido, 1990). These dilemmas could be translated into equations of difficult normative solution: how to keep the 'good word' circulating in dark times? How to expand the range of interlocutors and supporters in the aesthetic-ideological field? How to reconcile the benefits of modernization and access to markets with the critical attitude towards the policies of the authoritar-

ian government? How to talk to the grassroots, seen as subjects of history by the leftist culture that ballasted MPB, without proper codes and channels?

We can say that the popular music of the 1970s, within the currents identified by critics as being part of MPB, was divided into two well-marked periods of expression: between 1969 and 1974 we could name it 'music of the leaden years'; between 1975 and 1982 we would have the 'typical songs of the political opening'. Evidently, these chronologies and labels are merely approximations and subject to generalizations, which are always dangerous. If the 'music of the leaden years' markedly exalted the experience of fear and silence in view of a triumphant authoritarianism in politics, the 'music of the political opening' will be marked by tension between the awareness-raising imperative of the left and the expression of new desires and attitudes by the younger sectors of the middle class. The collective craving for a new era of freedom which, however, had not yet arrived, becoming therefore an urgency, a limit experience between two impulses not always reconcilable in critical tradition: the ethical-political and the erotic. The era of extreme violence was over, but the era of freedom had not yet begun. This leads to a first hypothesis about the music of the political opening, based on the perception of an 'inter-place' that will manifest itself as a poetic-musical expression and historical experience. Throughout the article, without intending to perform an analysis of any kind, including because of the limits of this paper, we will provide a map of songs taken as indices of these issues, symptoms of the malaise and expectations from the experience of this historic inter-place.

In Brazil, even before the emergence of MPB in 1960, music had already consolidated its position in the market of cultural assets and in the daily cultural life of Brazilians. Social and political issues were always present in the themes addressed by music. Popular committed songs have, at all times, been concerned with:

Singing love, surprising everyday life in lyrical-ironic snapshots, celebrating collective work or escaping its imposition, bearing with drunkenness, dancing, playing with words in playful meaningless configurations, 'carnavalizing' the image of the powerful. (Wisnik, 1980, p.14)

It was within this tradition, even before the emergence of committed songs in the strict sense, that the MPB of the 1970s outlined the so-called 'network of messages' against dictatorship, messages which expressed the awareness and pent-up desires of the collectivities which, by becoming a song become aware of themselves. For Wisnik (1980, p.8), the 'message' of popular music in times of dictatorship is neither order nor word or "watchword". As put by the author it was about:

A pulsation that includes flexibility, a culture of resistance that would succumb if it lived only on meanings and that, therefore, works simultaneously with the rhythms of the body, of the music, of the language [...] popular music is a network of messages, where the conceptual is but one of its movements: that of ascending to the surface. The base is only one and is rooted in popular culture: the affinity with the soul, the adherence to deep telluric, bodily, social pulsations that gradually turn into language.

The main strategies and poetic-musical forms for the implementation of this *network of messages* take different shapes, according to the two historical moments mentioned here. In the music of the leaden years the prevailing expression was that of a kind of symbolic counter-violence of civil society in view of the state terror, an operation that translated into poetic sublimation of fear and the maintenance of the lyric- subjective word and expression in circulation in a society threatened by the silence of censorship and the hegemonic voice of the authoritarian power (Napolitano, 2009). In those years, listening to a song even within the limits of a private space could be an act of civic and critical awareness, through which some sort of ritual of belonging to the critical part of civil society and denial of the values inculcated by the regime was performed. Some personal styles of authorship and performance can be clearly recognized, despite the richness and diversity of the personal repertoire of those same artists. Among the songwriters we have the presence of some lines of poetic expression that summarized the poetic and political concerns of their works at that time.

In Chico Buarque politics emerges as an existential condition and permeates all spheres of private and public life, synthesizing an experience of time that oscillates between critical melancholy and ironic euphoria. In the two albums that synthesize the music of the political opening in Chico Buarque - *Meus caros amigos* (1976) and *Chico Buarque* (1978) - the songs seem to oscillate between these two expressive poles. From the first we have “*Corrente*”, “*Meu caro amigo*,” “*O que será (A flor da terra)*,” “*Cálice*.” From the second, “*Homenagem ao malandro*” and “*Apesar de rocê*.” By the way, the latter, forbidden during the leaden years, was socially recognized in the political opening period, achieving the status of a civic samba theme for a carnival that would never come. In Milton Nascimento and his main partners in poetry (Fernando Brandt, Ronaldo Bastos, Marcio Borges), lyricism and subjectivity are linked to engagement, expressed in the form of interpersonal encounter and in a humanistic and affectionate assertion. In Gonzaguinha the ‘good word’, the ethical imperative that should mark political consciousness, explodes in an agonized poetry that verges on melodrama. Ivan Lins and Vitor Martins were acclaimed especially for the ability to create poetic, allegorical or metaphorical figures that synthesized individual and collective experiences under authoritarianism. Moraes Moreira, a name often overlooked when it comes to the MPB of the 1970s, created true elegies to popular joy as the basis for a wisdom and legitimacy that could not be hampered by repression. Aldir Blanc and João Bosco, authors of one of the most striking (and consistent) works of the 1970s, merged social chronicle and poetry to depict the daily life of the popular classes under authoritarianism, sometimes affirming the dignity and others the critical irony ability of the ordinary citizen. They also succeeded in recycling the epic tone in order to portray the great popular struggle against the oppressive power. Paulo César Pinheiro and Maurício Tapajós sometimes used whispering as a poetic weapon and others adopted the forceful and epic style, though more allegorical than that of the Bosco/Blanc duet (as in “*Nação*” and “*Canto das três raças*”).

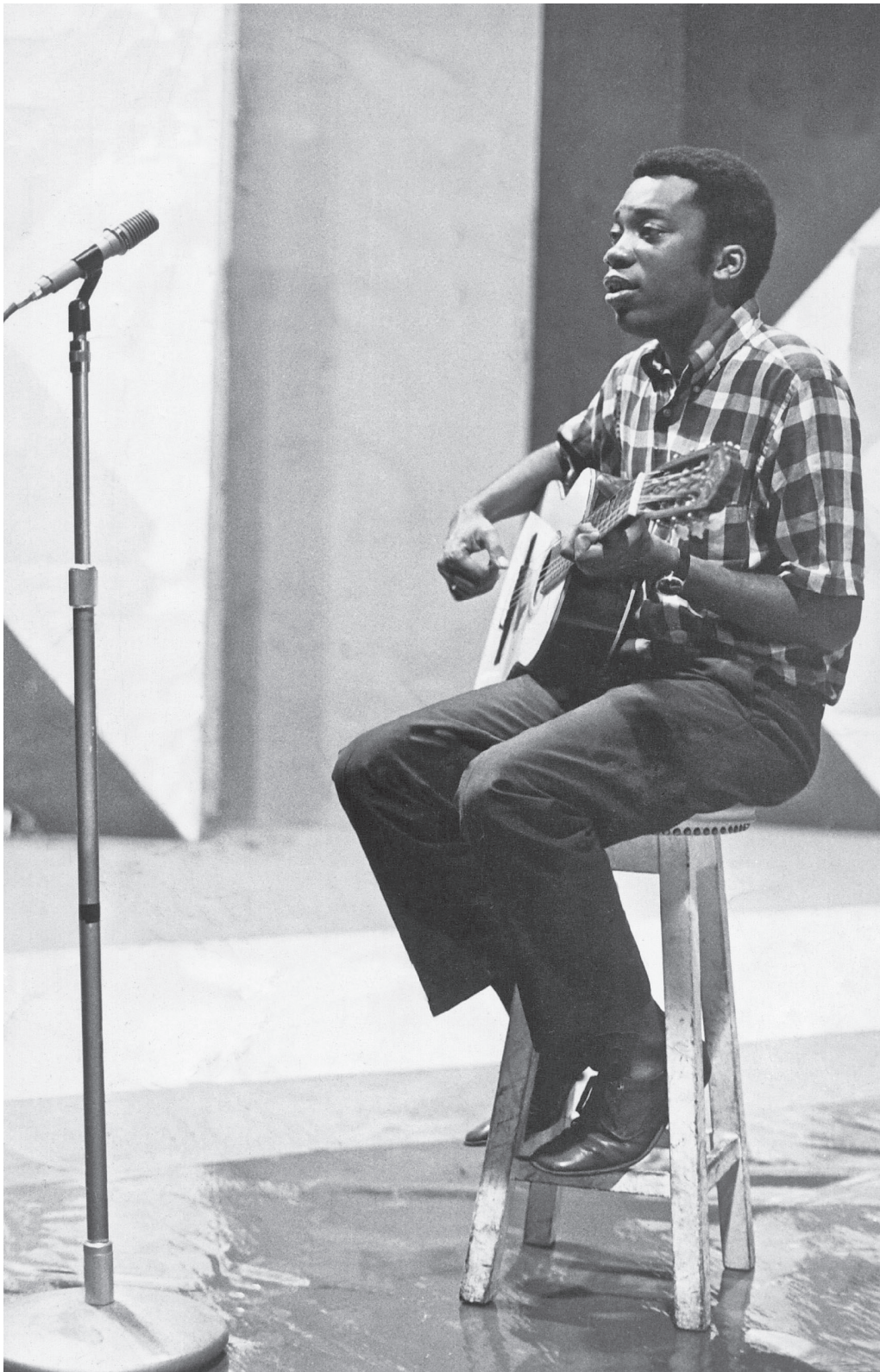


Photo archive/ State Agency

Musician and songwriter Milton Nascimento.

Another group of songwriters was characterized by the musical and poetic reflection on the dilemmas of Brazilian modernity and the tensions between the archaic and the modern reinforced between 1960 and 1970. Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil reflected on the otherness, the modernity, the new behaviors and the new body culture that emerged amongst the youth in the 1970s. Gil added to Brazilian music the issue of the black Diaspora experienced under the impact of cosmopolitanism and modernity. Songwriters from the Northeast like Belchior, Ednardo, Alceu Valença, and Zé Ramalho among others reinterpreted the youth culture and merged regional elements from the Northeast with pop, in a critical and creative operation about the impact of the modern on the traditional. In turn, names linked to samba, such as Martinho da Vila and Paulinho da Viola reworked the urban tradition of Rio de Janeiro, taking the samba to the living rooms of the middle class, without leaving the backyard of tradition.

Performers - and especially female performers - given the absolute predominance of female voices in MPB - were critical for the effective social dissemination of popular music, materialized in performances of high social resonance. In the case of performers like Elis Regina, Gal Costa, Maria Bethânia and Clara Nunes, their power of communication and vocal talents marked the meaning of the song to such an extent that we could even speak of a second authorship, a highly complex and still under-addressed problem in the historiography of Brazilian music. The most popular singers of the 1970s, contrary to what happened in the early 1960s, were not characterized by the intimate styles of Bossa Nova. In a sense, they were closer to the traditional performances of the radio era, in renditions that valued the assimilation of the melody, with a certain amount of ornaments, in voices of great volume and range. Elis, Bethânia and Clara Nunes were among the most popular singers of the time, and much of their repertoire was identified with the MPB genre.

Notwithstanding the great diversity of composition and performance styles, which merit specific and in-depth analyses, two basic trends are observed in the poetic themes addressed by the *music of the political opening*. One that heralded new prospects of freedom and recovery of full freedom of expression, and another that reflected on the experience of the recent 'leaden years'.

In the first trend, the language of the *feast* gradually replaced the cryptic 'language of the slit' (Vasconcellos, 1976), the themes of encounter and hope outweighed the themes of loneliness and depression. The recurrence of lyrics expressing an imminent uncontrollable, individual and collective, political and erotic movement, like a violent outburst of a long pent-up energy became common. Musically speaking, these songs did not exactly have an identity, except for the quest for melodic-harmonic and timbristic expression that translated, in a festive or mournful way, the images of popular hope and popular dignity. *Samba de partido*, *samba-enredo*, *samba-choro*, *frevo*, all of them marked by a fast and sharp rhythm were being used again to express the language and sociability of

the feast. *Samba-canção* and *toada* prevailed when the theme was ‘love’, a motto that often served as a metaphor for the reunion of the individual with freedom. Some songs could be mentioned along this line. By João Bosco/Aldir Blanc: “*Samba plataforma*”, “*O mestre-sala dos mares*”, “*O bêbado e a equilibrista*”; by Chico Buarque: “*O que será*”, “*Meu caro amigo*”, “*O cio da terra*” (in partnership with Milton Nascimento); by Gonzaguinha: “*Não dá mais pra segurar (Explode coração)*”; by Paulo César Pinheiro and Mário Duarte: “*O canto das três raças*”; by Milton Nascimento and partners: “*Maria Maria*”, “*Coração civil*”; by Vitor Martins and Ivan Lins, “*Abre alas*”, “*A bandeira do Divino*”.

The year 1979 witnessed the emergence of some classics of the *music of the political opening*, songs that sought to define a new historical period, the threshold between trauma and hope: “*Começar de novo*” (Ivan Lins and Vitor Martins) and “*Sol de primavera*” (Beto Guedes). Besides these, the hymns of the amnesty movement marked that year: “*O bêbado e a equilibrista*” (Bosco/Blanc) and “*Tô voltando*” (Pinheiro/Tapajós).

The other expressive line of the music of the political opening sought to give a heroic and sublime meaning to the experience of the recent leaden years. The poetic-musical climate of these songs was darker; melancholy and tension prevailed, opposed by a movement to overcome the collective traumas generated by the ‘circle of fear’ imposed on the most critical sectors of society in the days of the AI-5 (Institutional Act No. 5). Some songs are paradigmatic of this line: “*Nos dias de hoje*” (Ivan Lins and Vitor Martins); “*Nossos filhos*” (Lins/Martins); “*Velha roupa colorida*” (Belchior); “*Angélica*” and “*Pedaço de mim*” (Chico Buarque); “*Genesis*” and “*Tiro de misericórdia*” (Bosco/Blanc); “*Cruzada*” (Tavinho Moura/Márcio Borges); “*Não chore mais*” (Gil, from Bob Marley’s original song “*Woman don’t cry*”). In these songs, the experience of the historical time was defined as a time-limit between the past of repression and the present of pulsion.

We could also define a third line, characterized by the songs of Gil and Caetano. In them the songwriters synthesized the dilemmas, contradictions and, why not, the new cultural possibilities and perspectives generated by the contradictions of Brazilian modernization, from a subjective perspective in which the new post-1968 body and behavioral culture set the tone.

This kind of poetic subjectivism, more focused on the debate on behavioral issues anchored in procedures of allegorical collage, distinguished the two Bahians from the songs of Milton Nascimento and Clube da Esquina, in which the new youth culture was recycled under the sign of intimacy and lyricism. The political meaning of the work of Gil and Caetano in the 1970s is guided more by this set of issues than by an affiliation to committed classical music.

There are numerous examples of this approach to Brazilian modernity: “*Pipoca moderna*”, “*Tigresa*”, “*Qualquer coisa*”, “*Refavela*”, “*Jeca total*”, “*Marracatu atômico*”, “*Super-Homem*”, “*Realce*”, “*Sampa*”, “*Terra*”, “*Um índio*”,

and “*Trilhos urbanos*” among others. In these songs, the critical adherence to the of pulses and tones of pop music, the exercise of rupture in poetic language and the daring and innovative performances as body postures on stage merged in the exercise of a song that wanted not only to express the threshold of a new era, but also affirm it as a totalizing experience of the ‘here and now’.

In all musical and poetic trends, the songwriter/performer sought to attain a poetic and sentimental education of the citizenry and the cultural consumer supposedly critical of the military regime, a group that made up the basis of civilian opposition. Importantly, rather than playing a traditional political role of *protest* songs - that is, to maintain the vitality of direct criticism and the belief in the inexorable future and urge direct action against a situation of oppression - the music of the political opening, even seen as a variant of committed songs, moved in a different direction: the poetic sublimation of freedom and of the trauma of the recent repression.

Reiterating, therefore, the central hypothesis of this article, it can be seen that the music of the political opening was situated in a kind of historical experience: it sang the freedom that was not *yet* full and final and that *no longer* prevailed. The song “*Aos nossos filhos*” captured this time gap like no other, whether in the music sphere or in the poetic sphere which, strictly speaking are inseparable in the experience of music. The voice of the singer, in a melancholic and dragged pitch confirmed by shorter tones in a harmonic structure, apologizes ‘to our children’ for the “*cara amarrada / pela falta de ar / pela falta de abraço / pela falta de abrigo...*” (frown/lack of air/lack of embrace/lack of shelter ...), trying to find an alibi: “*os dias eram assim*” (that is what the days were like). In the second part, the voice that apologizes for the past, as if the repression were internalized as guilt by the repressed for not fighting the oppressive regime effectively, turns to the future: “*e quando passarem a limpo / e quando lavarem a alma / [...] e quando lavarem a água / [...] e quando colherem o fruto [...] digam o gosto pra mim*” (and when you wash away the dirt / and when you redeem your soul / [...] and you wash the water / [...] and when you reap the fruit [...] tell me what it tastes like.” The defeat of the past becomes the impossibility of building and living the future. Consciousness seems to be stuck in a peculiar situation caused by the trauma of authoritarianism and repression: the bad conscience of the past and the impossibility to act in the present and enjoy the future. This feeling of a historical time gap was very recurrent in the references to the 21 years of the military regime and to its impact on Brazilian history. The novelty is that this song raises a dark doubt, which is not very common in the music of the political opening: Would it be possible to recover the capacity of experience, or would the shock of repression have caused a mixture of bad conscience and affective bluntness? In this sense, there was nothing left for ‘the children’ of repression, since the historical time gap was also a historical generational gap. The one who speaks in the song seems to be a ghost of

oneself, enduring the hard times, unable to return to the normality of (civil) life. However, the hope in the future is present in the knowledge that his children will “wash away the dirt / redeem the soul / reap the fruit”, and unlike the normal course of tradition, will teach their parents the new democratic utopia.

The overall effect of this peculiar sociopolitical situation, this historical inter-place, was much more the sublimation and catharsis than actually the mobilization and exhortation to direct protest political action. However, this tendency toward poetic sublimation should not be seen as a reduction of the political role of the music of the political opening, although it may have diluted its mobilizing effects. The form and the political function of a song should be included in the analysis of situations of concrete listening that enable further stretching the game between the author’s intent, the form of the work and the appropriation conditions of the audience.

These ‘situations’ point to a reflection on the problem of social realization of the song, as a cultural object appropriated by concrete listeners in well-defined circuits that materialized the ‘network of messages’. Beyond the obvious and problematic mediation by the market, it would be necessary to consider some forms and spaces of reception still little studied and yet much recollected. It requires a retrospective sociology of the popular music from the 1970s to better understand the effects of each listening paradigm.

Firstly, there was the individual listening to the phonograms (‘records’) in the domestic and private space. The situation of the isolated consumer and of the lonely and private musical audience is one of the most difficult to be mapped sociologically, as it depends largely on oral testimonies. It is no exaggeration to say that this type of audience was important, especially in the toughest period of repression and censorship, because in addition to facilitating a deeper assimilation of the song (the ‘attentive listener’, an ideal defined by Adorno), it maintained the mystique of critical awareness surpassing surveillance by the oppressive power.

The collective listening to phonograms in the domestic and private space leads to another type of audience that may have been important from the point of view of an assertion of values and critical awareness, also important during the leaden years. In this type of listening, complicity and reunion, which were fundamental for the implementation of the network of messages against dictatorship, could reach a maximum degree of achievement, especially within a young, markedly formative sociability.

The listening of performances mediated by the media (sound and audiovisual: unlike the active consumer who bought the phonogram and listened to it individually or collectively, the *mediated* forms of listening tend to be more relaxed and uncommitted (Eyerman, 1998). But this should not be taken as a rule, especially in the case of Brazilian Popular Music. The audiovisual media, in this particular case the television, enabled the contact with the image of the

committed artist, pop idol and intellectual reference all at once. The gestures, the facial expressions, the ‘body language’, the clothes, the inflections, ultimately the performances themselves were as important as the content of the songs, leading to the dissemination of a set of sound and visual references among fans, thus enhancing the political meaning of the songs, which was not always explicit. In the case of the MPB of the political opening, although it was less present on TV than other more popular genres, the important and understudied cycle of musical programs that emerged in the 1970s should not be overlooked. Of these, two deserve to be highlighted: a long-lived *MPB Especial / Ensaio* series shown on TV Educativa (RJ)/TV Cultura (SP), started in 1970 and produced by Fernando Faro; the cycle of music programs on TV Bandeirantes between 1974 and 1980, peaking between 1976 and 1978, which attracted an intellectualized middle-class audience and was an option to the programming of Globo TV, which was seen as “pasteurized” and “massified” (Scoville, 2008). In turn, the music festivals broadcast from large auditoriums went into decline in the 1970s, not only by the action of censorship but also by the exhaustion of the television formula of these programs (Morelli, 1991; Napolitano, 2001).

Live performances, in turn, can be seen from two different though complementary perspectives.

There was the listening of live performances in small and medium size enclosed spaces (theaters), which facilitated the complicity and reunion of a particular social group (e.g., young students): this type of music audience situation/space was also very important, especially in the *leaden years*, when the occupation of the massive and monumental spaces that marked the era of song festivals was hampered by the new political situation. Since approximately 1972, the country witnessed the consolidation of a circuit of small and medium size theaters, which kept MPB close to its more paradigmatic listeners: students and the young leftist middle class.² Some theaters became true ‘MPB temples’: TUCA (São Paulo), João Caetano (Rio de Janeiro), and Paiol (Curitiba) among others. Other larger spaces also marked the 1970s: Canecão (Rio de Janeiro), Anhembi Conventions Palace (São Paulo), as well as various public and private gymnasiums that seated over a thousand people, were important venues to absorb the extension of the MPB audience to broader ranges of the middle class itself, which occurred between 1976 and 1981. Even in that context, medium size theaters (between three hundred and five hundred seats approximately) continued to be important in the circuit of shows of the genre. In the 1980s they began to be increasingly used by artists from the alternative music circuit, with smaller and more concentrated audience niches.

Another important type of *live* listening was experienced in open (public places), large (stadiums, monumental parks, university campuses, etc.) venues: this type of circuit was one of the most important of MPB and of the political opening and is still little studied by the historiography and historical sociology

of music. In most cases, big shows in monumental venues were linked to civic, trade union or political campaigns (rallies), which became frequent from 1978.³ MPB was part of the soundtrack of the Amnesty Campaign (April-August 1979), the trade union movement (not just during the events linked to the strikes of the period but especially in Labor Day concerts), the students' movement, the MDB rallies (Chico Buarque and Milton Nascimento were loyal to the party and remained as such when it became the PMDB in 1979), and PT rallies (from 1980). The numerous musical events that marked the public activity of the organized opposition to the military regime attracted a very specific type of audience, whose aesthetic and political reception occurred at a totally different level than that of the other audiences mentioned. In this case, it is assumed that the songs played a much more mobilizing and exhortative role, consolidating the ideological values that informed these entities, campaigns and events. Incidentally, public MPB shows on university campuses and public places were the most watched by the political police of the military regime (Napolitano, 2004).

This mapping is not intended to establish hierarchies of audiences or reflect on them in a impervious and inflexible way. For example, the tendency towards the expansion of public, massive and monumental audiences, which was visible in the late 1970s did not preclude the importance of isolated and private audiences. All these socio-musical experiences could lead to the sentimental and political education of the civil heart of the opposition to the regime.

As for the standard sociological stratum of this audience, one could assume that the social memory is correct by electing the 'leftist middle class youth' as the standard MPB audience. But this sociological phantasmagoria should not be hyper-dimensional whether positively or negatively. Album selling figures collected by IBOPE, the ratings of radio and TV musical programs, the importance of names like Chico Buarque and Elis Regina in the Brazilian public sphere do not allow one to say that MPB was a product for a few university students (at the time, about 1 percent of the population), as it is often stated. At least between 1977 and 1982, concrete and quantifiable evidence points to a great audience increase, limited, obviously, rather by the purchasing power and restricted access to cultural facilities and assets by popular urban classes than by their taste.⁴ But the socio-cultural impact and breadth of the musical audience cannot be restricted to the analysis of absolute sales of phonograms, at the risk of limiting the concept of 'public sphere' to its merely quantitative expression.

In this brief article, which is more prospective than analytical, we have sought to question the current notion that sees the music scene of the 1970s as 'the decade of silence'. From this perspective, Brazilian music has not been marked by mere reaction to censorship and censorship does not triumph over music. It is plausible to affirm that popular music had some responsibility for the expansion of the ideas and values of civil resistance by allowing the whispering of poetic conspiracies into the circle of fear built by repression. Furthermore, mu-

sic had a great role in the ‘battle of memory’⁵ around the authoritarian period, subject that is beyond the limits of this article.

Music neither took the place of politics nor was its mere instrument. Both were (and are) different spheres of social life. However, in that specific context, the politicization of popular music allowed politics to stay sheltered in the heart, transmuting into an art form the utopian experiences, the defeats, the hopes and the projects cradled by politics.

Notes

- 1 The official political opening (*abertura política*) agenda was guided by some liberalization measures coming from the top, which sought to partially meet the demands of civil society, such as the end of the AI-5, the end of censorship, amnesty for prisoners and exiles, end of restrictive bipartisanship and direct elections for state governors.
- 2 University students were considered the epitome of the ‘middle class in its upper stratum’. As put by Ana Maria Bahia (1980, p.25): “Music comes from the middle class and is guided and consumed by the middle class.” For a definition of middle class and its role in that context see Saes (1985).
- 3 For a deeper understanding of the role of the experience of live music as political expression of a community see Mattern (1998).
- 4 An example of this pent-up demand can be seen in the show *Falso brilhante*, by Elis Regina. It premiered at Bandeirantes Theater, in São Paulo, in December 1975 and was seen by an average of 1,500 people a day. In February 1977 *Falso brilhante* ended its season after fourteen months, 257 shows and a total audience of 280,000 people (data from *Última Hora* newspaper, SP, 2.18.1977) (Source: *Cronologia Elis*).
- 5 The ‘battle of memory’ is an expression that refers to the struggle involving various social actors around the meanings, to Brazilian society and political history, of the events linked to the military coup and the military regime. This battle, initially, was paradoxically “won” by those defeated in 1964, as part of the left managed to imprint its historiographical and memoirist perspectives in the assimilation of the events of that period.

We believe that the well-known resentment of the military responsible for the coup against the non-recognition of their ‘feats’ by civil society stems from the defeat at the symbolic level. Another hypothesis is that the vicissitudes of liberal segments - initially supporting the coup and the regime and then moving away from the core of power - has contributed to the isolation of the military.

This is a complex and ongoing process that cannot be explored in detail in a footnote. In the context of this article, it is important to say that my hypothesis is that the ‘cultural hegemony’ of the left during the authoritarian military period contributed to the triumph of a critical and progressive memory in relation to the military regime that, *until recently*, prevailed in textbooks, in reminiscent publications of the press, in the most active and heard voices of civil society. This hegemony apparently wants to recede in the course of a liberal-conservative historiographical revisionism, still in progress.

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ABSTRACT – The idea of “liberalization”, a central element of the political agenda of the Brazilian military regime in the second half of the 1970s had a major impact on the cultural scene, which had previously been dominated by the civil opposition to the regime. The phase of “decompression-opening” coincided with the commercial and cultural highpoint of Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) that, since the 1960s, played an important role in the culture of the political left. With the easing of censorship, this musical genre became even more a privileged area of artistic expression, a mouthpiece for the ghosts, desires and utopias of the middle class that was critical of the regime. In this work, we analyze the variables of the Brazilian music scene of the second half of the 1970s, the various readings transmitted by the songs of MPB and its main socio-cultural settings.

KEYWORDS: Brazilian music: history, Brazil: music and politics.

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