

Conservative intellectuals, sociability and practices of immortality: the Brazilian Academy of Letters during the military dictatorship (1964-1979)

Intelectuais conservadores, sociabilidade e práticas da imortalidade: a Academia Brasileira de Letras durante a ditadura militar (1964-1979)

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Abstract: This article is part of a broader study about the Brazilian Academy of Letters under the military regime (1964-1979) and the behavior of its members during this period. The central question that guided this research was to determine to what extent this officially “apolitical” institution could serve as an agent of legitimization for the dictatorship. The aim of this paper is to look at politics through what I am referring to as “practices of immortality”. This study seeks to know whether the “House of Machado de Assis”, through its supposedly apolitical daily activities, contributed in some degree to legitimizing the regime implemented in 1964. The swearing in, the visits received by the academics and the way in which the official memory was established by the “immortals” are examined in this paper. The results reveal a close relation between the Brazilian Academy of Letters and the military dictatorship evidenced by the recruitment of its members and their social networks. They also show that the political, military, and cultural elites shared values that were remembered and praised at the events of the Brazilian Academy of Letters: good citizenship and patriotism; the idea of an “authentic culture” and a national identity based on a common language and on the Christian religion; as well as myths such as the cordiality of the Brazilian people and the absence of violence in the country’s history. Besides being a place where a conservative discourse was developed and where conservative men and ideas circulated, this cultural institution was associated to the military dictatorship and, consequently, to a supposedly “national” memory, culture, and identity by the “immortals”.

Keywords: military dictatorship, Brazilian Academy of Letters, conservative intellectuals.

Resumo: Esse artigo é parte de uma pesquisa mais ampla sobre a Academia Brasileira de Letras (ABL) e o comportamento dos “imortais” durante o regime militar (1964-1979). A questão central que guiou nossas investigações foi a de saber em que medida essa instituição oficialmente “apolítica” pôde servir como uma instância de legitimação para a ditadura. O objetivo desse artigo é pensar a política através do que chamamos de “práticas da imortalidade”. Interessa-nos saber se a “Casa de Machado de Assis”, por meio de suas atividades cotidianas, supostamente apolíticas, contribuiu de alguma forma a legitimar o regime implantado em 1964. Examinamos as cerimônias de posse, as visitas recebidas pelos acadêmicos e a forma como a memória oficial era elaborada pelos “imortais”. Os resultados das nossas análises revelam a proximidade entre a ABL e a ditadura militar

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evidenciada através do recrutamento dos seus membros e de suas redes de sociabilidade. Revelam também que as elites políticas, militares e culturais compartilhavam um conjunto de valores que eram lembrados e enaltecidos nos eventos da ABL: o civismo e o patriotismo; a ideia de “cultura autêntica” e de identidade nacional fundada numa língua comum e na religião cristã; e mitos como o da cordialidade do povo brasileiro e da ausência de violência na história do país. Além de ser um lugar de elaboração de um discurso conservador e um lugar onde circulavam homens e ideias conservadores, essa instituição cultural foi associada pelos “imortais” à ditadura militar e, conseqüentemente, a uma memória, a uma cultura e a uma identidade supostamente “nacionais”.

Palavras-chave: Ditadura militar, Academia Brasileira de Letras, intelectuais conservadores.

Introduction

In April 2014, the 50th anniversary of the occasion when the military, with the collaboration of civilians, overthrew President João Goulart and installed a dictatorship in Brazil was celebrated. On the occasion of the celebrations, a number of events took place that aroused an unheard-of debate in society about the last Brazilian authoritarian experience. Publications, colloquiums, weekly magazine covers and television debate programs dedicated to the topic showed that, more than for other periods of history, Brazilian society still finds it difficult to deal with this recent past.

As already suggested (Aarão Reis, 2000), this difficulty is mainly due to the support given to the coup by a considerable part of civil society and their participation in maintaining the regime. Since those who chose to resist were an infinitely small minority, the rest of the Brazilians accommodated to a dictatorship that suppressed civil liberties, murdered opponents and adopted torture as a policy of State. Beginning in the mid-1970s, as part of society distanced themselves from the regime, a collective memory was progressively established in which “resistance” was exalted and “collaboration” demonized.

We know, however, that groups, individuals and institutions became accommodated between these two poles, be it for reasons of need, or because they were interested in doing so². Even though a lot remains to be researched, revealed and publicly discussed – in brief, although there is a *devoir de mémoire* to be performed – the way the topic has been approached indicates that we are possibly going through a period similar to the one Henry Rousso, using Freudian concepts, identified in the relationship

of French society with the memory of the Vichy regime. Namely, a “repression” phase, that saw a memory of the resistance triumph, was followed by a phase of “return of the repressed”, in which this same memory was slowly demythologized (Rousso, 1987).

The main people responsible for this demythologization work, in the case of Brazil, are professional historians, since conventional wisdom still maintains the image of a society that was the victim of an authoritarian regime that was supposedly imposed by the military alone. Thanks to research performed over the last decade regarding various individuals, groups and institutions, enabled by the access to sources about the period and by the consolidation of the democratic regime, we now have a greater understanding of the military regime and the foundations of Brazilian authoritarianism.

We can cite, among others, the work by Kenneth Serbin, who studied the relationship between the Church and the regime of the “Bipartite Commission”, secret meetings between the Catholic hierarchy and representatives of the dictatorship; Denise Rollemberg analyzed the Brazilian Bar Association (Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil – OAB) and the Brazilian Press Association (Associação Brasileira de Imprensa – ABI), and deconstructed the idea that they acted as “pillars of resistance” of civil society against authoritarianism (2009 and 2010); Beatriz Kushnir exposed the networks formed by journalists, censors, entrepreneurs, police and the military and how they circulated among the supposedly opposite “fields” of collaboration and opposition, showing the complexity of the roles played by newspapers, journalists and censors during the military dictatorship (2012).

However, intellectuals and, in general, the culture during the 1960s and 1970s were studied only

² Here we use the notions proposed by Philippe Burrin to think about the forms of accommodation of French society with the German occupants during World War II. The Swiss historian coined the terms “Accommodation by need” [Accommodation de nécessité] and “Chosen or voluntary accommodation” [Accommodation choisie ou volontaire], to which he added collaboration defined as “a kind of accommodation elevated to politics” [Accommodation élevée en politique] (Burrin, 1995).

in part. Since the famous article by Roberto Schwarz about culture and politics in the second half of the 1960s (1978), a certain type of intellectual, namely the left-wing intellectual, and a certain sector of cultural activity, namely the one dominated by left-wing artists, have been prioritized. The “specialist intellectual” and their milieu, the university, had been discussed only in the last segment of the book by Daniel Pécaut (1989), before Rodrigo P. S. Motta filled this gap (2014). The conservative intellectual of the 1960s and 1970s, in turn, is still marginalized. Renato Ortiz was, for a long time, an exception by evoking, even if very briefly, the importance ascribed to culture by the authoritarian State and its relationship with conservative intellectuals (1985). Recently, Tatyana Maia presented a thesis about the Federal Council of Culture, revealing the actions of a sector of conservative intellectuals in designing the cultural policies of the military dictatorship (2010).

This article is part of a broader study about the role of the Brazilian Academy of Letters (Academia Brasileira de Letras – ABL) and the “immortals” behavior during the military regime. In this study, a central issue guided our investigations: To what extent could ABL, an officially “apolitical” institution, serve as an agent of legitimization for the military dictatorship? While politics in the sense of ideology or party politics was excluded from the speeches and conversations in the “upper room”, it was present in other ways since the Academy’s foundation. We believe that the ABL, because of the composition of its members, mostly conservative, and the mission it ascribed to itself as “guardian” of traditions, literary or not, disseminated a conservatism and conformism that played a symbolic but effective role in the political sphere. It continued to be close to the authoritarian regimes of the 20th century and, as far as it could, took a position against new political or intellectual ideas. In this sense, literary conformism and political conformism went hand in hand.

The purpose of this article is to think about politics through what we call the “practices of immortality”. We are interested in knowing whether the “House of Machado de Assis”, as ABL is also known, through its everyday practices, which were supposedly “apolitical”, helped legitimize the military dictatorship. When dealing with this specific aspect of the study, we discuss the relations between this group and a few sectors of the regime through their networks of sociability and the defense of certain values that they believed to be those of an “authentic” Brazilian culture. It is a more complex perspective, in our opinion, than supposed statements of support and repudiation. Before this, however, we sketch a profile of the conservative intellectual of the 1960s and 1970s, based on the figure of the “immortal”.

The ABL and the profile of conservative intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s

The academies played an essential role in Brazil as a place of sociability and literary practice. The first of them, created in the 18th century, were short-lived. The ABL, founded at the end of the 19th century, managed to affirm itself, be acknowledged as an authority for the Portuguese language and become the place of intellectual acclaim par excellence during a large part of the 20th century. However, the writers who met at the editorial office of the *Revista Brasileira* to create and maintain an academy of letters played for high stakes, and there were quite a few initial difficulties. After two attempts – by Medeiros e Albuquerque and Lúcio de Mendonça in 1889 and 1896, respectively – the ABL was founded in 1897, and Machado de Assis was unanimously acclaimed its president.

The extremely precarious situation of the ABL in the first years is amazing. It lived on donations and had to share the expenses among its members. The institution also did not have a building of its own and there was no fixed venue for the sessions. The situation began to change in 1905 thanks to help from the government which allowed them to use a room, called “Silogeu Brasileiro” by the “immortals” (El Far, 1997, p. 79). It is likely thanks to the effort and dedication of Machado de Assis that the ABL survived. Because of the initial difficulties, Joaquim Nabuco proposed opening the institution to elect what he called “grands seigneurs”. The famous abolitionist was referring to “major representatives” of other fields who would give the ABL prestige: politicians, ambassadors, lawyers, journalists, physicians etc. A source of conflicts and divisiveness, the “theory of major representatives” ultimately managed to impose itself beginning in 1912, when Oswaldo Cruz and Lauro Müller were elected. In El Far’s view, the entry of major representatives brought closer relations between the “immortals” and the politically and economically privileged strata, transforming the ABL, a provincial institution, into one of the most prestigious in the country (El Far, 1997, p. 84).

The institution was very prestigious and had important social visibility in its first decades. After the death of Machado de Assis, it was the celebrated Rui Barbosa, the “Hawk of The Hague”, who became president of the institution, a position that he occupied until 1919. From then on, the sessions were held regularly on Thursdays with the presence of most of the academics. Besides, all the events of the ABL or involving the academics began to be published in the newspapers (El Far, 1997, p. 102). Other events helped relieve the initial difficulties of the institution. In 1917, it received an inheritance from

bookshop owner Francisco Alves, which considerably reduced its financial problems. In 1923, when the French government donated the *Petit Trianon*, the “immortals” at long last had their own place.

On the eve of the 1930 Revolution, the ABL was the institution of letters par excellence in Brazil and the official “mouthpiece” of Brazilian literature. The absence of works on the institution after Getúlio Vargas came to power is a gap in the Brazilian intellectual history. Indeed, it became less important as the intellectual field became more complex – increase and diversification of cultural institutions, universities, publishing houses, consumers of intellectual goods – particularly from the 1950s onwards. However, the institution founded by Machado de Assis remained, during the military dictatorship, a place of intellectual acclaim and intellectual and political sociability among the conservative elites.

Over more than a century of existence, the ABL shaped an ethos that guided and guides the “immortals” behavior. It is made up of elements such as the value of tradition, conservation, “capacity for modernization”, ritualism, formalism, elitism, self-veneration, among others. This ethos was examined in the study done by anthropologist Valéria Torres da Costa e Silva (1999); therefore, we will not go further into this issue here. It is important, however, to evoke one of its constituent elements, possibly the most complex and fundamental: the Academy’s supposed apoliticism. As we saw, since the institution was founded, politics was taboo. Indeed, this is typical of traditional models of academies. In the words of Daniel Roche (1988, p. 159), “seeking politics in an academy would be paradoxical, because, as we know, it does not cross its threshold”. Therefore, the matter of its “political innocence”, suggests Roche, can be described in other terms. For instance, on the basis of the way in which politics is re-introduced in the “upper room” through habits and behaviors.

While there were no speeches from the academic tribune in favor or against the military regime, there were swearing in ceremonies and celebrations with the presence of representatives of the dictatorship, visits, homage ceremonies, expressions of condolence and the value ascribed to a certain memory and political view of Brazilian culture. We agree with Roche when he claims that the exclusion of politics actually defines a real policy. We might say that the ABL, as an agent of construction of the nationality, helped disseminate a view of life founded on the acceptance of the established order, on social integration and erasure of conflicts.

It remains to be known who was a member of the ABL at that time. Although the “immortals” came from different careers, it is possible to trace a profile of them. In our study we performed a prosopographic analysis of

the ABL members between 1961 and 1979. In the course of these years, 71 people held a chair in the “House of Machado de Assis”. They formed a network of conservative sociability that included, besides the intellectuals, members of the political and economic elite. In order to trace the profile of an “immortal”, which to a great extent corresponds to that of a conservative intellectual, we prioritized aspects such as social origin, what they studied, the impact of 1922 – considered as a founding event –, activities performed, places where they socialized and political commitments. The limits of this article prevent us from reproducing this analysis in detail, but we will outline a few conclusions that, we hope, will contribute to a better understanding of the conservative *intelligentsia* that was overshadowed by the “cultural hegemony” of the left.

The “immortal” of the 1960s and 1970s was born between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, and the Week of Modern Art in 1922 had the impact of a founding event on them. The dominant concern for this generation was to know what defined something as national. The political commitment of the intellectual who was a member of the ABL during the dictatorship, in turn, reflects this concern, and its corollary will be the support to regimes that they considered most “adapted” to Brazilian reality and most capable of “organizing the Nation”, whether the regimes were democratic or authoritarian. The academic of the 1960s and 1970s “passed into immortality” at a mature age, and almost all those whom we analyzed were known and respected in the intellectual and political world at the time they were elected to the ABL.

Originating in a political aristocracy, usually in decline, the “immortal” had the privilege of good schooling and of having gone to Law School. The latter, where the political and intellectual elites of the country were recruited, was their first place of sociability, where they made their first friends, participated in political debates, wrote in journals and were active in student associations. The members of this intellectual generation further increased these ties of friendship by participating in some of the many associations, academies, institutes and literary societies, from the smallest and most ephemeral to the most prestigious of the country, such as the Brazilian Historical and Geographic Institute (Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro – IHGB). At the same time as they attended undergraduate Law School, the “immortals” wrote in newspapers, which often became their main activity. Finally, they were politicians, who took on responsibilities that could range from positions of political appointees to ministries or state governments. The conservative intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s were, at the same time, writers, journalists and politicians.

Almost all the academics that we studied have a right-wing political itinerary: they formed the conservative groups after the week of 1922, especially during the 1930s; they occupied positions of responsibility during the Estado Novo; they were in the UDN [political party] or in the conservative sectors of the PSD [political party] after the redemocratization. Although most of them remained silent at the time of the 1964 coup and during the dictatorship, it is difficult to imagine that they did not rejoice in the military intervention.

Sociability and politics in the practices of immortality

The ABL participates directly in official politics through its members, but *intramuros* this politics must operate differently. Like the French Academy, the “House of Machado de Assis” claims to be one of the symbols of national continuity beyond regimes and political changes, playing a role in the reproduction and perpetuation of the “national conscience”. We mentioned previously that the institution is a place of acclaim for the national elites and that, despite its apparent diversity, during the period studied it performed a relatively homogeneous social recruitment. As a representative of the official culture, the ABL acted during the military dictatorship as a conveyor belt, disseminating a conservative discourse as a neutral and “apolitical” discourse. Another aspect is crucial: the sociability networks between the academics and military or civilians close to the regime could, in our opinion, have an effective political impact. For instance, the presence of high dignitaries of the dictatorship at commemorations or swearing in ceremonies, including the President of the Republic himself, could be more effective to legitimize the regime than a newspaper article.

Here we analyze how politics can operate “apolitically” between the walls of the ABL, be it at the level of discourse, or at the level of practices. An extremely rigorous selection process was necessary to operate the analysis. Three “practices” are examined based on specific cases: the swearing in ceremonies, the visits and the way in which an official memory was established within the institution.

Swearing in ceremonies and the “Austregésilo de Athayde Palace”

The swearing in ceremony is one of the moments when academic life is most visible. The speech by the

newly elected must exalt the preceding occupants of the chair, and the values of the institution must also be praised: tradition, conservatism, “apoliticism”, cordiality. Only rarely do the swearing in speeches refer to some immediate political situation. Let us next look at two ceremonies that occurred during the military dictatorship: that of Adonias Filho and of General Aurélio de Lyra Tavares.

On January 14, 1965, writer Adonias Filho, “one of the most prestigious personalities in the hierarchy of the revolution” (Jornal do Brasil, 1965), was elected to occupy chair 21. It was unarguably the most political swearing in speech ever made during the military regime. What made this ceremony even more interesting to analyze is that the “immortal” who welcomed Adonias Filho was no less than Jorge Amado. This shows that the right/left cleavage is not always applicable in the intellectual world, in which friendships and disagreements play a more important role than political positions.

Although Adonias Filho was a well-known writer, we do not find much biographical information about him. He was born in 1915 in the south of Bahia, studied in Salvador and moved to Rio de Janeiro in 1936. At that time he became involved in the Brazilian Integralist Party (Ação Integralista Brasileira), before he began to hold positions in the bureaucracy linked to the cultural sector: Director of the National Theater Service in 1954; Director of the National Library between 1961 and 1971; member of the Federal Council of Culture (CFC) appointed in 1967, and President of the same institution between 1977 and 1990; President of the Brazilian Press Association (ABI) in 1972, to which he was appointed already in the 1960s. His novels are characterized by a profound relationship with the land and regional culture. Adonias Filho was one of the Brazilian intellectuals most involved in the conspiracy that threw over Goulart. Rachel de Queiróz said that it was through him that she established her connections with the military involved in the coup: “Our Adonias was a kind of civilian general and he had contact with all uniforms” (Queiróz and Queiróz, 1998, p. 203).

Adonias Filho personally invited Castelo Branco to his swearing in ceremony (Jornal do Comércio, 1965).³ Already at the beginning of his speech, he talks about the role that should be played by the intellectual and the ABL. The latter, according to him, allows the meeting, through time, of different generations of men who get together around the same affinities and the same values. Among them, freedom should be the great concern of intellectuals, and its advocacy is precisely what makes of intellectual work a “public act”. It should be “at the center of the great

³ The newspapers used in this article were researched in the archive of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, where they only keep clippings of the stories. In some cases, therefore, we do not have the full reference.

problems of the world”, and it is this freedom that allowed his encounter with the preceding occupants of chair 21, creating a “bastion of revolutionary fermentation” on the “academic square” (Filho, 1965, p. 1159).

Adonias Filho then mentions each of them to show how each of them had fought for freedom. According to the new “immortal”, for the writers who preceded him freedom was not only a central topic of reflection, but a determination:

Our message, this permanent claim for freedom in a state of struggle or theoretical manifestation, this acknowledgment of freedom as a social condition essential to life, belongs both to us – as a consequence – and to the Academy. If the academic spirit, democratic in the choice of its members and in the impartiality of all its debates, reflects wisdom, it is precisely because it adopts freedom as a norm. Chair 21, as can be seen, does not subsist as an island. But, in this way, integrated into academic behavior – an active behavior because of freedom itself, which allows a creative vocation – a revolutionary behavior in preserving the innovative and reforming work that characterizes culture – Chair 21 becomes greater, almost a battle front in its intransigent defense of freedom (Filho, 1965, p. 1161).

Adonias Filho then takes a close look at the occupants of his chair. First the patron, Joaquim Serra, chosen by the founding member José do Patrocínio, who participated in the abolitionist movement. In Adonias’ view, he had begun to “reveal the determination of chair 21 as a bastion of freedom” (Filho, 1965, p. 1162). This struggle was the same carried out by José do Patrocínio, he himself also a well-known abolitionist. The two other occupants of chair 21 are mentioned briefly: Mário de Alencar, who had likewise “understood abolitionism with all of its cultural consequences” (Filho, 1965, p. 1162), and Olegário Mariano, before he dedicates himself to talking about his predecessor, literary critic Álvaro Moreyra.

He believed that in the latter there was an “existential freedom”, in the sense of a kindness that also revealed itself in daily practices, and that he “personified freedom” (Filho, 1965, p. 1164). Chair 21 was henceforth occupied by Adonias Filho: “It is my chair” (Filho, 1965, p. 1167). Thus, for him his predecessors consolidated freedom as a tradition. And also according to the new “immortal”, fate then wished it to be occupied by a writer and literary critic who “knows that intelligence as an intellectual function is found in freedom”. And as a writer of his Age, he could not avoid what the work of his predecessors required:

“they require the struggle against ideological censorship, against the control of the single party in arts and science, against the cultural blockade – that I attempted to study in one of my books – which still today repress peoples and humiliate men” (Filho, 1965, p. 1168). And he concludes:

Ideological fanaticism, responsible for wars and revolutions, above all responsible for the return of totalitarian brutality, did not destroy man’s trust. And when it was no longer capable of measuring the results and consequences, the conclusion that established itself did not become alienated from the problems of the world: freedom, as a function of human behavior and in its political use in the democratic process, remained a decisive value. This freedom, which so concerned the writer in his relations with receptivity, would be found by him – less as a motivation and more as an element – but would be found by him again in Chair 21. I now know that between us there is no distance or conflict, debate or crisis. The shadow that comes from above gives us all shelter. Belonging to Chair 21, the Chair of Freedom, is a gift from God, for which I am grateful (Filho, 1965, p. 1169).

News that the ceremony was to take place was widely disseminated in the press. On the same day *Diário de Notícias* announced that it would take place in the evening, in the presence of President Castelo Branco and Minister Luís Viana Filho, the latter himself an “immortal”. The newspaper advanced the information that the new academic would talk about freedom in his speech. A freedom, Adonias Filho said to the newspaper, “guaranteed in Brazil by the revolution that did not forbid books and arrest writers as in Russia” (*Diário de Notícias*, 1965). He also stated that the “Manifesto of the Intellectuals”⁴, disseminated one month earlier, was an “imposture”, before saying that “the revolution ... as a phenomenon of the renewal of the social process, will influence and enable the emergence of a literary cycle, but it is still early for that” (*Diário de Notícias*, 1965).

A Notícia informed that writer Jorge Amado had reaffirmed his “status as a man of the left” in the speech in which he welcomed Adonias Filho and that “the two immortals were agreed about the apology of freedom and interaction, characteristic of the Brazilian people”, in a story with the suggestive title of “The left and the government share freedom in common” (*A Notícia*, 1965). The way *A Notícia* told about Adonias Filho’s swearing in ceremony, as well as his welcoming by Jorge Amado, conveying the idea of a supposed agreement between “the

⁴ This is a manifesto signed by several left-wing intellectuals and published on March 14, 1965 asking for the return of democracy.

left” and “the government” around freedom, incites us to ask about the relationship between intellectuals with different political positions.

In his welcome speech, Amado couldn't help but mention this strange situation: that of a man of the left, like he was, welcoming one of the most celebrated intellectuals of the Brazilian far-right, an enthusiastic conspirator of the 1964 coup:

Forgive me, Mr. Adonias Filho, if I lose myself in adjectives and do not criticize, analyze, eruditely evaluate your books, if I almost forget to call attention to your activity as an essayist, be it as a political essayist, so distant from my way of seeing the problems and the solutions, be it as the excellent literary essayist you are. ... If it were your wish to hear, today, here on this festive evening, your festive evening, the analysis of your admirable work and its well-deserved reputation, the precise measure of your importance in our Letters, you would have chosen to welcome and greet you one of the several masters of literary criticism who have a seat in this house You chose with your heart your fellow countryman, the childhood friend, the boarding school mate, the colleague in Letters, the fraternal friendship that was never shaken, be it by the literary differences, be it by the political differences, since both of us know, Mr. Adonias Filho, how little the gossip of Literature and the intrigues of Politics are worth in comparison with the integrity of man, of his dignity (Amado, 1965, p. 1187).

And then he adds:

There were those who small-mindedly tried to create malice with the fact that I, old and proven man of the left, was to welcome you here, this evening, due to the differences that separate your and my political action, your and my political thinking. As though the fact of being your adversary in the terrain of political ideas might influence my opinion and my esteem for your work as a novelist, as though we could not be friends with a fraternal friendship because we disagree about political views and solutions. These sectarians and dogmatists of any position, party or ideology, of any sect, be it of the left or the right, are fools. As political men I believe that we have in common more than our ideological differences, something of the utmost importance, Mr. Adonias Filho. It is our horror, our total lack of esteem for all and any sectarianism, for this narrow view and action which is the denial of intelligence and the only and miserable capital of certain political men, their only way of doing politics. To the latter, politics

is only hatred, injustice, persecution, denial of culture and of humanism (Amado, 1965, p. 1189).

This passage says a lot about relations between the members of a small group. Often friendship or disagreements play a more important role in their relations than ideological and/or party divisions that separate the political field into right and left. Jorge Amado himself gives us proof of this when he mentions his friendship with Adonias Filho. Within the ABL, this proximity between academics of different political lines is presented as “proof” of their “apoliticism”. We believe, however, that the adherence of men from the left to the practices of immortality, reinforcing the idea of “apoliticism”, helped disseminate a supposedly “apolitical” conservative discourse.

The second swearing in ceremony that we wish to analyze is that of General Aurélio de Lyra Tavares. Not only because it was the election of one of the main names of the dictatorship, but also because it provides a major element to think about the relationship between intellectuals and political regimes: the possibility of financial advantages. We think that the election of the General in 1970 and the defeat of Juscelino Kubitschek in 1975 are closely related to the donation of a building for the academics by Medici, as well as the funding to build a modern almost 30-floor skyscraper. This donation illustrates how the possibilities of material gains may be at the center of these relations.

The history of this donation is long and complex, and covers almost exactly the period of the military dictatorship. It begins in 1956, when then President Juscelino Kubitschek visited the ABL to announce that he had just signed a law that allowed the institution to print its publications at the Editora Nacional. However, the academics had more ambitious plans in mind: to demolish the *Petit Trianon* so that in its place they could build a large, modern building. In order to do so, they needed a large loan. Kubitschek then promised to have the loan approved by the Caixa Econômica Federal [savings bank]. But this promise was forgotten (Sandroni and Sandroni, 1998, p. 533).

Four years later, when Austregésilo de Athayde was already the president of the ABL, a new proposal was made to Kubitschek: since Athayde himself was against demolishing the *Petit Trianon*, he asked the President of the Republic to donate an old building that stood next to the ABL. He planned to demolish it and, in its place, construct a building to be used as a cultural center. In 1960, during his last year in Office, Kubitschek fulfilled the request of the “immortals” and signed the decree of donation. However, less than a year later, the new President of Brazil, Jânio Quadros, revoked it.

The next attempt occurred already during the military regime. One month before he handed power over to Costa e Silva, Castelo Branco signed the decree of donation of the English pavilion. But there was a clause forbidding the academics from modifying anything in the building, which frustrated the plans of Austregésilo de Athayde. The ABL president again began to campaign so that the authorities of the dictatorship would donate the English pavilion without any legal barriers. It was only in September 1970 that Médici signed the decree of donation without any conditions. In the meantime, Athayde had to go a long way, and during this process Aurélio de Lyra Tavares was elected.

In August 1969, when the Military Junta that he headed came to power after Costa e Silva fell ill, academic Múcio Leão died. In December Lyra Tavares presented himself as a candidate, “although he had never made his peace with grammar” (Gaspari, 2001, p. 265), and defeated poet Lêdo Ivo. In his memoirs (1977, p. 253), Lyra Tavares says that he had never thought of reaching “the glory of immortality” and that it was a committee of academics who came to him and asked him to become a candidate. According to the general, the “immortals” argued that since the death of Gregório da Fonseca there had been no representative of the Armed Forces in the ABL (Lyra Tavares, 1977, p. 254). We do not know who the members of this “committee” were, but it is likely that the sponsor of the initiative was Austregésilo de Athayde. In fact, the suspicion that the president of the ABL articulated the general’s candidacy led him to deny his involvement through the *Tribuna da Imprensa* (1969). According to Lêdo Ivo, there was no doubt:

There is information that I could give you, for instance about the case of Lyra Tavares. Because relations between the Brazilian Academy of Letters and the Brazilian dictatorship were ambiguous. At the same time as Austregésilo went to the military to defend Carlos Nejar, he needed the military. For instance, this building where we are was given by Médici, right? Médici gave it. The Head of Cabinet was Leitão de Abreu, the brother in law of Lyra Tavares, Minister of War elected by the Academy. So the Academy placed... I mean, Austregésilo placed his ambition – right? – of being a great president etc., to build, to make this Academy here. I have the feeling that in the world there is no other Academy like this one, since I have travelled worldwide and there are Academies in old palaces, but not with this financial, monetary vigor, all those things. So that I, for instance, was the candidate to the Academy at that time, to the place of Mucio Leão. My election was a sure thing. I was going to have 25 votes

or more to win. All of a sudden my situation changed in the last weeks, it changed suddenly. A rumor began that the Academy urgently needed a place to give General Lyra Tavares, who had been Minister of War and that the government wanted to send him to be Ambassador in Paris ... Years later he [Lyra Tavares] told me that in the time when he was Minister of War a delegation of the Academy went to the Ministry to appeal to him to accept becoming a candidate to the Academy. He recalls that the delegation included Peregrino Junior, it seems Josué Montello and Ivan Lins, who was the one who welcomed him. So that, without knowing about it, I, a poor poet from Alagoas, became involved in one of the greatest conspiracies ever in the history of the Academy during the dictatorship, right? And several of my close friends voted for the General, since the Academy has its conveniences, right? (Ivo, 2011).

Between the declaration of General Lyra Tavares’ candidacy on December 30, 1969 and the approval of Médici’s donation by the National Congress on December 3, 1970, several letters were exchanged between Austregésilo de Athayde and Minister of Education Jarbas Passarinho, and also between Athayde and the new “immortal” Lyra Tavares. They show the tenacity of the ABL president regarding the acquisition of the building. On February 17, 1970, i.e. before Lyra Tavares’ victory, Austregésilo de Athayde wrote the Minister of Education asking to modify the 1967 decree, signed by Castelo Branco:

Minister:

By decree of February 28, 1967, the late lamented Marshal Castelo Branco, then President of the Republic, donated to the Brazilian Academy of Letters the buildings and respective annexes next to the seat of this Institution, belonging to the Patrimony of the Union ... The buildings are in precarious conditions and any renovation project would be extremely expensive ... The Academy wishes to build the greatest Center of Culture in Latin America on that land, perfectly in accordance with the aims of the President of the Republic, General Médici, and of Your Excellency, to give absolute priority to education and culture during this Administration. In addition, the Academy wishes to associate itself to the commemorations of the Sesqui-centennial of the Independence of Brazil, in 1972, by inaugurating its Classical Theater, to which it will invite notable people from the International Theater. All of this, Minister, can be done by modifying the Decree of President Castelo Branco of February 26, 1967, to allow the Brazilian Academy of Letters, considering the very objectives of the donation, to

construct two large buildings on the land donated and, to do this, have the possibility of transferring ideal fractions of the land and renting offices, with which it will have the necessary funds to build and maintain its Cultural Center. Since there are no third party interests involved and what we intend, both the Academy and the Government, is to serve Brazilian culture, I believe, Minister, that the cooperation that I am now requesting will prove a first rate contribution to the literary and artistic prestige of our country, and President Médici and Your Excellency will also have the merit of this achievement (Athayde, 1970a).

Lyra Tavares' swearing in ceremony was held shortly after this letter, on June 2, 1970. The *Diário da Tarde* published a photo of the ceremony in which Médici and Rademaker occupied the center of the table formed for the occasion. Under the title "Médici and Rademaker saw Lira [sic] sworn in at the ABL", the newspaper published the guest list for the ceremony, made up of the top leaders of the dictatorship (*Diário da Tarde*, 1970). Although the swearing in speech claimed to be "apolitical", as appropriate on such occasions, politics is present everywhere:

I finally decided to dispute the privilege of your company and the comfort of the activities of the spirit that it gives us, after the disappointments, fatigue and lack of understanding that wear down or even sacrifice the lives of those who, by fate, participate in the serious responsibilities of governing in the framework of a Nation like Brazil, which has already suffered so much from so many accumulated errors, that disturb its harmony, rationality and the march of development. ... It is also easier to think about oneself, one's self-interest, and always cry for new rights, including the right of not complying with duties, which are commitments to the Fatherland, when it is certain that the requirements of its progress and its security will indistinctly be the responsibility of all citizens (Lyra Tavares, 1970, p. 221).

The General relates the idea of harmony to those of security and development, which are watchwords used by the military regime, and uses key notions of official propaganda, such as "ultraconservative optimism" (Fico, 1997; Reis, 2009) and good citizenship, which he reinforces through other values historically connected to the right, namely, order and duty:

At the Academy we are certain that we will not encounter politics ... This is my way of seeing our House of Machado de Assis, although the words that I now use to refer to it do not belong to me ... It was thinking in

this way that I decided to become a candidate to a chair among you. My spiritual education is not in agreement with intolerance or with the irremovable rough edges of intransigence and radicalist ideas in the interaction of studies among men of culture, since interaction means harmony and understanding, aiming at the same superior and impersonal purposes, which implies each person's respect for the ideas of the others. That is what happens in the Nation itself, as a social community, whose security and whose progress do not occur without the predominance of postulates of law and freedom. These postulates, however, can only predominate within order and when the citizens, classes and social groups are guided by the altruistic understanding of the interests of the Fatherland, which we must place above our own interests and viewpoints ... Colors, like ideas, live with each other in forming the shades, the work of the creative intelligence that is peculiar to man, without, however, ceasing to exist in their essentiality, no matter how sharp the predilections become and how much they confront each other in the debate of different ways of thinking and conceptions, which will never be extinguished by violence and force, means that are incompatible with the realization of collective happiness (Lyra Tavares, 1970, p. 223).

There is a notable discrepancy between this speech, talking about harmony, happiness and understanding, and the social and political situation of the country in 1970: a year and a half after the AI-5 was decreed, the regime had adopted torture as a policy of State and was preparing to enter the most violent period of the 15 years in which it existed.

This election was only the first stage of the trajectory that led the dictatorship to donate the building to the ABL. Five months after the above cited first letter sent by Athayde to Minister Passarinho, the ABL president wrote to the by then "immortal" Lyra Tavares, Brazilian ambassador to France, and mentioned the problem of modifying Castelo Branco's decree. The letter is dated August 3, 1970:

My dear Lyra Tavares, it is a pity that so shortly after our relationship began you had to leave, after, like Cesar, having come, seen and won. Even the hardest are now your great admirers and do not hide their sympathy for your presence at the Academy. I met Passarinho, who reaffirmed to me the news given by President Médici that the Decree had been signed. So far, however, it has not been published in the Official Gazette. The delay is detrimental to the rate at which the work should be done and to the realization of our grand plan (Athayde, 1970).

Two months later, after the project had been sent to the National Congress, the president of the ABL wrote again, this time in relief:

*My dear Aurélio ,
Our Gen. Médici sent a message to Congress asking approval for our Project ... The Academy was very happy with the President and well knows how effective his intervention was. At the right time we will show Gen. Médici our gratefulness at the way he understood the needs of the Academy, asking for the cooperation of Congress to complete the Decree-Law of our dear, late lamented Castelo Branco (Athayde, 1970).*

However, it was only in 1974 that Athayde was able to take the next step. He then used the occasion of a meeting with the new President of Brazil, General Ernesto Geisel, to talk about his project for the ABL. According to the “immortals” biographers, Austregésilo de Athayde mentioned to the General his intention of obtaining funding abroad to carry out his project of building a cultural center:

“Do not do this madness. God only knows how high the dollar will go in a few years’ time. Get the loan from our own people.”

Athayde answered:

“From our own people, I only see one way: the Caixa Econômica [savings bank].”

“Why not?”

“Because if I ask for a loan today, when they give a favorable answer, I’ll only receive the news in the Academy mausoleum.”

Geisel smiled and said:

“You are still very far from the Mausoleum. Go to the Caixa and I’ll help you” (Sandroni and Sandroni, 1998, p. 660).

The loan was authorized on May 15, 1975. One month later, on June 16, academic Ivan Lins died, and Juscelino Kubitschek immediately presented his candidacy to succeed him. This candidacy, during the four months that preceded the election, on October 23, caused an academic dispute that took on an unforeseeable political dimension. Some documents indicate the existence of pressure by the military to prevent the victory of the former President of Brazil. Both fields, the “juscelinistas” and the “antijuscelinistas”, were agreed on at least one point: Kubitschek’s victory

in his bid for the ABL would launch him back into the public eye and mean a defeat for the regime.

On the eve of Ivan Lins’ death, Josué Montello received a phone call from his “confrere”, Pedro Calmon:

“Is it true that Juscelino will present his candidacy to the Academy, the next time a place is free?”

And when I answer that, so far, the ex-President has said nothing to me, since there are no places free in the Academy, Calmon, always discrete about his vote, cannot hold back and says:

“If the place is not mine, I’ll vote for him in the four rounds.”

After a silence, he adds:

“I can feel, coming from above, that there are lots of nasty things being done against him. It seems that the Government is going to throw itself against the election if he becomes a candidate. That is what I heard yesterday” (Montello, 1991, p. 661).

Five days after this phone call, and after Kubitschek’s bid had been confirmed, Montello wrote in his diary:

To oppose President Juscelino in his bid for the Academy, a Babian writer presented himself, Bernardo Élis, also punished by the 1964 Revolution. Brilliant. Good maneuver. A maneuver by General Golbery in the Planalto Palace? It seems so. They say that Golbery has not yet forgiven the ex-President for having been overlooked by him in his military career. And as old hatred has no rest, it seems that Golbery, besides not having been placated in his vengeance as an astute wizard, has redoubled his conversations and initiatives, in order to use his powers as a revolutionary leader to prevent Juscelino from becoming an academic. The hawk appears to have its eyes on the hummingbird. Let’s see how the Academy will react. In the afternoon Juscelino comes to my office and confirms it: “Indeed, it is Golbery who is moving against me” (Montello, 1991, p. 665).

Threats and pressure continue to flow in. In his diary Montello tells details of the heavy atmosphere on election day. The former President was defeated on the third round of voting, by 20 votes against 18⁵. We do not know precisely who, among the “immortals”, carried out the campaign against Kubitschek, nor the level of pressure

⁵ Montello records something that is curious, to say the least. The minimum quorum in the ABL elections is 20 votes. The result of the first round of voting was 19 votes for each, besides one nil vote. In other words, there were 39 voters. In the second round Juscelino won by 19 votes against 18, which, adding the nil vote, is 38 voters. In other words, a vote had disappeared – the one which would have given victory to the ex-President? Finally, in the third round, Bernardo Élis was elected with 20 votes against 18 given to Juscelino. Montello in his diary noted that when leaving the *Trianon*, he had said to his wife: “Soon Bernardo Élis will be ashamed of his victory” (Montello, 1991, p. 697).

exercised by the military. We can only conjecture. But it is difficult to imagine that Austregésilo de Athayde, obsessed with favors from the people in power, did not play a decisive role. The former Brazilian President did not have any doubts about what Athayde had done, and the defeat depressed him profoundly. In his diary, on the day after defeat, he wrote:

October 24. I am crushed inside. I put great faith in my election. I ardently desired it, the prestige to compensate the huge disappointments of 1964. I have to cheer up in order to not become a depressing sight. I never imagined that a defeat could hurt me so (Bojunga, 2001, p. 689).

Juscelino Kubitschek attended Bernardo Élis' swearing in ceremony, held on December 10, 1975, and congratulated him. The loan from the Caixa Econômica Federal was not annulled as rumors from the Presidential Palace (Palácio do Planalto) had suggested, and the Cultural Center of Brazil was renamed "Palácio Austregésilo de Athayde" in 1999.

We might cite other intellectuals close to the regime who were elected to the ABL during the dictatorship. This was the case of Miguel Reale, elected in 1975 to occupy the chair that had been of Fernando de Azevedo. Two years later it was the turn of Rachel de Queiróz to succeed Cândido Mota Filho. She defeated the famous legal scholar Pontes de Miranda in a polemical election: at the time he declared that the government had won, more specifically, the Federal Council of Culture, the "branch of ABL" (Jornal do Brasil, 1977). Abgar Renault, Odylo Costa Filho and Américo Jacobina Lacombe (the latter actually directed the Army Library at one time) also became "immortals" during the regime. However, the ABL did not elect only right-wing intellectuals. Fernando de Azevedo, Hermes Lima, João Cabral de Melo Neto, José Honório Rodrigues and Antônio Houaiss were elected between 1967 and 1971. These cases show that we cannot establish a direct association between the institution and the dictatorship. The ABL has its own time, which is not the same of the immediate juncture, and its own history, which is independent of any political regime. The academics have their networks and their interests, which gives them a margin for action. It is necessary, therefore, to analyze these relations in a more complex sense, in which the negotiations, ambivalences, symbolic and material gains and losses occupy a primordial place.

Visits

Another current practice was the visits that the "immortals" regularly received. In fact, this is a much

more closed and less "solemn" event than the swearing in ceremonies. In the case of the visits, the degree of formality and the "weight" of the visitors were extremely varied. Sometimes the visit appeared to have been "improvised" at the last minute; at other times it was planned a long time in advance. The visitors could range from schoolchildren to the President of Brazil, and ambassadors, writers and journalists. During the dictatorship, many personalities visited the ABL. We will only look at one of the visits, by Senator Petrônio Portella, on January 18, 1973, which illustrates the close ties between the institution and the military regime. Athayde opened the session thanking for the medal commemorating the 150th anniversary of Independence that he had received from the Senate. "Now", said the ABL president, "the time had come for the House of Machado de Assis, the highest representation of cultural life in Brazil, to return the honor" (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 106). He gave the floor to José Honório Rodrigues, who made an ambiguous speech.

The historian began by saying that it was a pleasure to honor the representative of a branch of government that acknowledged the "value, the force of national thinking and culture at a time that was intellectually reduced to the search for material goals and threatened by the uncontrolled forces of technology" (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 106). According to him, the 20th century had done away with the idea according to which thinking and culture occupied a central position in people's lives. In the case of Brazil, the historian went on, there has always been a combat between the intellectual forces and the anti-intellectual ones. And he said – in a speech prepared for the representative of the military dictatorship – that "the attacks on intellectual influence, the ideology of anti-thinking, the loss of trust in the force of ideas, all of this was born in this century, with the attempt to destroy the democratic system". "Authoritarianism", said José Honório Portela, "is a destructive form of culture" (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 107). However, immediately after what appeared to be criticism of Brazilian authoritarianism, Rodrigues went on to praise Portela and, inevitably, the regime itself, stating that "at the time in which the highest representative of the people's sovereignty shows his trust in culture ..., there is a strong hope that it is not only economic success and the victory of technology that are the ultimate purpose of a nation" (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 108).

In his thank you speech Petrônio Portela discussed the complex relations of the ABL with politics. He cited Joaquim Nabuco, who had said that politics was inseparable from great works and that, thus, it could not be the purpose of the ABL, but, on the contrary, that it should "disappear in the creation of what it produced" (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 111). Almost a century later, the represen-

tative of the dictatorship said that, like Nabuco, he did not believe that politics could be dissociated from great works and that, therefore, “academics and political men should fight together to preserve the immaterial elements of our culture that make the Nation great” (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 111). For Portela, the ABL was the institution that could make the greatest contribution to this mission, since intellectuals and politicians “adapt themselves in communion” at a College where there is no place for what can “divide, separate, obscure the clarity of the immortals” (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 111).

The senator then spoke about the present, which, in his opinion, was a time of crisis. Man was being crushed, be it by the “totalitarian bureaucracy”, be it by the “gears of the profit-multiplying machine”. According to him, it was no different in Brazil, where “political fanaticism arms itself threateningly”, while Brazilians were a people “born to freedom”. “But”, he warned, “not a freedom that renders us inert before those who, as terrorists, attack the values and goods that we believe to be eternal, but that which never abdicates from its responsibility” (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 112). It should be remembered that Petronio Portela’s visit took place when the forces of repression were in full-blown combat against the armed struggle. The senator ended by exhorting the academics to work with the regime, because “freedom leads to Justice”.

And for this ideal to stimulate the laws, guiding and disciplining the Nation, it is necessary to have, in a fortunate reunion, the harmonious action and solidary struggle of intellectuals and politicians. Let us daily join those who, concerned, study and attempt humanizing formulas. We have the duty of pursuing them despite the certainty that it is difficult to implement them. And because I believe in you, in your creative talent and in the contribution that you can give to the improvement of our institutions, here I am, the President of the National Congress, to, in its name, in the year of the Sesquicentennial of the Brazilian Legislative Power, convey to your benevolent institution some of the immense admiration that we have for your brilliant, noble and fruitful craft (Revista da ABL, 1973, p. 112).

A national pantheon?

As mentioned, the ABL is an institution that played a role in the process of national construction, insofar as it attributed to itself the mission of “defending the Portuguese language and the Brazilian culture”. This role was reinforced with the contribution of the State that delegated to the institution the right to legislate

on matters of the Portuguese language. Thus the ABL organized lectures on the Brazilian culture, published works that were not of commercial interest, but considered essential for the culture of the country, and awarded prizes, intending to be a “guardian of the memory of the heroes of the nation”. It is what we have in Brazil closest to a national pantheon. This is the aspect that we discuss in this final section. We think that the academics strove to ascribe to the personalities they selected the values that were actually their own. They also made an effort to highlight the combats waged by these personalities in their time and that the academics thought were still current in the 1960s and 1970s, for instance the struggle for culture, for patriotism, for liberalism, etc.

These homages are the most frequent academic practice. Sometimes they were not even planned or prepared beforehand, and were done in the ordinary sessions. Every week, several personalities could be honored, ranging from a “confrere” who was returning from a diplomatic mission to the patriarch of Independence. We must not forget that self- veneration, as Madalena Diégues (1984) pointed out, was one of the mechanisms to legitimize this group as a cultural elite. When this veneration was directed to people who were not part of the group, it took on the form of a projection, i.e. the academics projected onto these individuals qualities and personality traits that they believed were their own (Diégues Quintella, 1984). The list of honorees is endless; therefore we will limit our analysis to the homage rendered to D. Pedro II.

This homage was rendered to the second Brazilian emperor on the occasion of the sesquicentennial of his birth, on December 11, 1975. Athayde opened the session saying that, throughout his reign, D. Pedro II had promoted culture. The ABL, whose purpose it was to promote culture, thus had the duty of rendering homage to him. The speaker of the session was historian Pedro Calmon, who spoke in detail about the emperor’s “intellectual passions”, such as the study of ancient languages and funding the publication of works that he appreciated – and also his support to the founding of the IHGB. According to Calmon, still in 1887, when the emperor was convalescing, he asked writers and poets to visit him (Revista da ABL, 1975, p. 237).

D. Pedro II was not able to found the ABL. However, according to Calmon, it had “the prestige and energy of the preceding [academies], sketched during the fruitful reign of D. Pedro II” (Revista da ABL, 1975, p. 239). Although no reference could be made to the emperor when the ABL was founded, because this would have irritated the new people in charge of the republican regime, the historian found a way of presenting the ABL as a kind of child of the emperor:

Dom Pedro II is not one of the patrons who were present at the Academy's "talk". But he floats in the jovial environment, he is in the conscience of the democrats who require tolerance and of the moderns who promise reform, he lives in the institution which is an extension of his ideals for union ... he would see the House that he did not create as the last of his emanations, consistent with his mandatory presence at the lectures at Glória and his serious advice in the conversations at São Cristóvão, consoled by the independence of those who came later and were informed by the experience of those who came from yesterday, these who were his subjects and whom he treated as his confreres; the best of national culture (Revista da ABL, 1975, p. 241).

The academic who delivered this praise, himself the author of a 5-volume biography of the emperor, ended this homage saying that, although D. Pedro II was not a member or part of the regulations of the ABL, the history of the institution could not be written without him. "For fifty years he taught Brazil to honor culture. He wished it, he imagined it and furthered it during half a century of intelligent government" (Revista da ABL, 1975, p. 241).

Several other "immortals" spoke next. Deolindo Couto added praise and spoke about the emperor's support to scientific and cultural enterprises, recalling the importance of the National Academy of Medicine. Although it was created before D. Pedro II was born, he was present at every commemorative session for the anniversary of the institution. Josué Montello and Odylo Costa Filho spoke next, but only to render homage to their "confrere" Calmon. They particularly praised the biography that the latter had written about the emperor and regarding which Montello said that "if Dom Pedro II could read his own biography [written by Calmon], he would not know so many events of his own life" (Revista da ABL, 1975, p. 243).

At the same occasion, Montello recalled that although Calmon was ill, he was able to do a good job of organizing the commemorations promoted by the dictatorship on the occasion of the Sesquicentennial of the Independence. For this reason, Montello asked that the homage be extended to "confrere" Calmon. This is only an example, among many others, which confirm Quintella's intuitions about self-veneration as a mechanism for the self-legitimation of this cultural elite. Thus, the homage that was supposed to be rendered to Dom Pedro II was extended to the "immortals" themselves: it is thanks to them, to their writings, that national heroes acquire their stature and are preserved from oblivion. Two

other "immortals" spoke on this occasion, Osvaldo Orico and Américo Jacobina Lacombe. Each of them evoked the emperor's role in promoting the national culture, the "symbolic" affiliation of the ABL to his figure and equally praised the work done by Pedro Calmon.

Final considerations

As we said, the separation desired by Machado de Assis at the time of founding the ABL, which was to be an "ivory tower", as opposed to the "street", the place of political involvements and conflicts, is real. However, this does not mean that the institution was apolitical, as the founder wanted, but that politics was performed in a less "conventional" way, that is, through the recruitment of its members, the values disseminated and the networks of sociability between academics and sectors of the political elite. This is the angle from which we tried to analyze it.

A look at the career of the personalities elected to the ABL between 1964 and 1979 shows that there was no break in the way the members were recruited: most were chosen among the conservative cultural elites who at that time were very close to the military regime. Through the visits, homages, commemorations, ceremonies, besides the closeness between the academics and the dictatorship – widely disseminated in the press – a set of values shared among the political, military and cultural elites were praised and disseminated: good citizenship, patriotism and anti-communism; the idea of the existence of an "authentic culture" and of a national identity based on a common language, Portuguese, and on the Christian religion; myths such as that of cordiality, a trait which was supposedly typical of the Brazilian people, or the absence of violence in the history of the country.

We believe that the exclusion of politics in the 1960s and 1970s denoted more than consent to the social order founded by the military after the 1964 coup; it was the cultural crowning of an authoritarian regime which had the support of a "conservative cultural structure" made up of three institutions: besides the ABL itself, the Brazilian Historical and Geographical Institute (IHGB) and the Federal Council of Culture (CFC). The "House of Machado de Assis" was an essential stone in this structure that promoted and circulated these values and myths. Thus we believe that the institution founded by the "wizard of Cosme Velho" at the end of the 19th century ultimately played, through its everyday practices, an important political role insofar as it legitimized the military regime, identifying it as a respected cultural institution and, consequently, connecting it to a supposedly "national" memory, culture and identity.

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