

The body and the unburied past in 21st century Latin American fiction

VERA LUCIA FOLLAIN DE FIGUEIREDO

Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ) – Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

E-mail: verafollain@gmail.com.

ORCID: 0000-0003-0142-6938

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Abstract

The paper proposes a reflection on the configuration of temporality in 21st century Latin American narratives that, directly or indirectly, fictionalize recent historical events. We start from the hypothesis that, in these narratives, through a phantasmatic aesthetic that metaphorizes bodies, the past gains centrality as a temporal dimension that imposes itself on the present. To develop this hypothesis, contemporary cinematographic and literary works will be put into dialogue, such as the films *Aranha*, by Andrés Wood, *A Chorona*, by Jayro Bustamante, and novels, such as *O corpo interminável*, by Cláudia Lage, and *Degeneração*, by Fernando Bonassi

Keywords

Narrative; Body; Temporality; History; Latin America.

Introduction

Fiction keeps itself at a distance of both the truth prophets and the euphoric advocates of the false.¹ Juan Jose Saer

History, as narrated by the victors, throughout modernity, has always given the impression of a complete fulfillment of stages that followed each other in a chain, assuming the conclusion of one phase for another to begin. The history of the vanquished, on the contrary, was repeatedly perceived as a juxtaposition of incomplete stages, of interrupted processes that suggested new beginnings or returns to the starting point. In colonized countries, the perspectives operated by the violent imposition of colonizers' culture, created an abyss between the past/present of the autochthonous people and the project of the future brought by the conquerors. The possibility of a finished past, in which its effects would no longer govern the present, the belief in history as the path towards an optimal end, thus came into conflict with the reality of peripheral countries, with their trajectory continually marked by the abortion of projects. Hence the difficulties that these countries have always presented in the face of a linear and evolutionary view of history as conceived by modern Western cultures and, hence, a certain tendency, amid traumatic collective experiences, to value testimony, in detriment of historical narration, seen, many times, as the scientific illusionism of the elites. As Tulio Halperin Donghi states:

There is more. In Latin America, the acceptance of a Hegelian theology always produces contradictions since history presents itself as an inevitable development and a continuous process as a deformed or frustrated process. Not only that. Among certain writers this concept of history, not as progress to a better world, but a dead-end street, impacts on its own narrative. (Donghi, 1987, p. 284)²

This abyss between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation, to use the terms of Reinhart Koselleck (2006), gives rise to narratives in which the experience of time itself is lived in a traumatic way, in which the failure to overcome the past opens up space for a recurring question: how do we represent a past that insists on not passing, that is out there not only as a trace, but also as a full presence, even if under disguises that, in a simulated way, update it? The continuity of the past in the present constitutes, therefore, a central question, metaphorized, often, in the image of missing bodies or bodies that, although already depleted by time, refer to the permanence of reins of power always in the same hands – present issue, for example, in the film *Aranha* (Wood, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, 2019), by Andrés Wood, whose plot unfolds placing the axis of the past and the present in parallel to highlight the continuities in the midst of apparent changes.

Aranha focuses on the permanence, until today - behind the scenes of politics and in command of various spheres of power -, of that segment of society that, in the 1970s, conspired to promote the coup against Salvador Allende; and which preserves, wearing a neoliberal mask, the same elitist and violent worldview. The erasure of History allows the characters to live their mature lives comfortably and quietly without taking responsibility for the crimes committed in their youth, when they fought in the far-right terrorist group *Frente Nacionalista Patria y Libertad*, whose symbol looks like a spider (hence the name of the film). In an interview, Wood stated that he returns to the past in his films, because the shadows of dictatorship, influence personal relationships and the organization of governments in Chile till this day.

¹ Translated from the original in Spanish: La ficción se mantiene a distancia tanto de los profetas de lo verdadero como de los eufóricos de lo falso.

² Translated from the original in Spanish: "Hay más. En América Latina, la aceptación de una teología hegeliana siempre produce contradicciones, puesto que la historia se presenta no como un desarrollo inevitable y continuo sino como un proceso deformado o frustrado. No solo eso. en ciertos escritores este concepto de la historia, ya no como progreso a un mundo mejor sino como un callejón sin salida, impacto en la propia narrativa."

The director states:

The project was born from a few reasons. The first came as a result of a strike by truck drivers in Chile, who organized themselves in such a way that, in some cases, it was possible to see the symbol of the spider, admittedly a consequence of a far-right political organization. From that, we were able to reflect on this history and, with some pride, we built research on how the people of this organization were, which took us to its origins, to the actions in the 1970s, and how it remains today. We started to investigate the groups, which are ingrained in Chile in different social classes, and live free, without any consequences for the acts they did. (Wood, 2021, p. 2)

Wood's statement makes it clear that the main motivation for making the film was the resumption, by truck drivers, in the present, of the symbol of the far-right movement that emerged about 50 years ago, i.e., the perplexity in face of this remission to the past was the trigger for making *Aranha*.

In light of the progressive decline of modern temporal experience, historians like François Hartog (2019) have identified a dominance of the present over other temporal dimensions in the contemporary world, which they have termed "presentism" to describe this temporality ruled by the immediacy of market time. However, at least in the case of Latin America, the omnipresence of the present appears to be endangered by the resurgence of the past in the first decades of the 21st century. In the midst of a crisis of the future, the hegemonic center transforms the past into a malleable material that can be constantly adapted to serve present needs, sometimes even for the purpose of reparation. However, on the margins, the past is revisited as a form of reaction to the threat of setbacks. In many recent Latin American narratives, in both literature and cinema, the present is persistently explored in relation to the past, which remains alive and embedded in various spheres of public and private life. Films like *Hoje*, by Tata Amaral (Amaral, Brazil, 2013), based on the novel *Prova Contrária*, by Fernando Bonassi, *O Clube*, by Pablo Larrain (Larrain, Chile, 2015), *Cachorros*, by Marcela Said (Said, Chile, 2018), *A Chorona: é impossível fugir do passado* (Bustamante, Guatemala/France, 2019), by Jayro Bustamante, are works that demystify the present, revealing what is complicity with the past. Thus, as observed in a previous work (Figueredo, 2020), *O Clube*, as a film, not only denounces pedophilia within the Catholic Church, but also explores cover-ups and entrenched practices that extend beyond the corridors of power to the intermediate layers of society. These practices are used to conceal a range of crimes through the exchange of favors and mutual pardons, which create an inextricable network of guilt among its participants. Such practices are ingrained within the corporate dynamics of the institutions themselves. The effort to silence past crimes defines the atmosphere of *O Clube*, as well as that of *Cachorros*: in both, the complicit silence wins, the same that sustained and still sustains the violations of arbitrary governments in Latin America.

On the other hand, *A Chorona*, which has the expressive subtitle "you can't escape the past", going back in time takes on another meaning. It happens so that can be done, so that, at least in the world of fiction, those responsible for the massacre of the Mayan population, which took place in the 1980s, in Guatemala, are punished. Unlike *Aranha*, the permanence of the past, in Bustamante's film, is not only perceived in the social inequality that remains the same, or in the exploitation of work that does not change, but is also manifested through living memory, among the population, of the crimes committed during the civil war by the military: crimes that, in real life, went mostly unpunished as a result of the denialism of various sectors of state power.³ The film *A Chorona* reports the trial of José Efraín Ríos Montt, dictator of Guatemala, sentenced in 2013 to fifty years in prison for genocide, but whose sentence was annulled ten days later. In 2018, Montt passed away at the age of ninety-six. According to his lawyer's

³ Tens of thousands of Indigenous people – adults and children – were murdered and their villages razed by members of the army and collaborators during the civil war. Relatively few people were tried for the atrocities committed. The National Reconciliation Act of 1994 contributed to impunity. In August 2021, a Guatemalan judge ordered two high-ranking generals to stand trial for the genocide of Indigenous populations that took place four decades ago.

testimony, published in the newspapers, he died at home with a clear conscience, surrounded by the love of his family. This ending was quite different from what Bustamante's fiction had reserved for him.

Symptomatically, to give a fair direction to the thematized facts, the script of *A Chorona* deviates from History, resorting to the myths of the Indigenous tradition. Justice, which the State refuses to serve, will be carried out by evoking the living dead, either through the myth of the woman whose children were drowned and whose soul seeks them out crying at night, or through the presence of those who were murdered, four decades ago, in protests carried out in the 21st century, against the impunity of the powerful. The supernatural forcefully enters the general's house, the same person who ordered the crime against Indigenous people, disrupting the routine and imposing a different temporality on the elite. The family is now at the mercy of the protesters who have surrounded the mansion, among them the living dead victims of the massacre. They are no longer in control of events, and the past they wished to erase is now a concrete presence in their domestic life. The initially realistic atmosphere gradually dissipates, replaced by formal compositions reminiscent of the horror genre. By making use of the temporality of the myth, *A Chorona* confronts two pasts: the historical and the oral tradition. It is in the latter that Bustamante will seek the necessary strength to face oblivion, correcting the course of real history, but without failing to draw attention to the violence that intercepts the path towards the future.

Also in the literature, a considerable number of stories that refer to the past seem motivated by the uncomfortable presence of something that, not having been overcome, always threatens to return, or even by something that resurfaces defying the processes of concealment. It can be said that, in Brazil, at least between *Incidente em Antares*, by Érico Veríssimo up to *O corpo interminável* (2019), by Cláudia Lage, or *Degeneração*, by Fernando Bonassi (2021), the continuity of the past in the present constitutes itself as a central issue, often metaphorized in the image of the living dead. In the option for what can be called a “spectral aesthetic”, the missing bodies of leftist militants detained by the dictatorship are evoked, but also the decrepit bodies of those who were on the side of power, who collaborated with the repression, whose survival over the years contrasts with the short life span of murdered leftist youth.

Published in 1971, *Incidente em Antares* (Veríssimo, 2005) is set in 1963 and centers around a general strike organized by Antares' workers. The gravediggers join the movement, which leads to the dead bodies waiting for burial to come out of their coffins due to the lack of action. The strike is disrupted by the dead, who congregate at the city's main square bandstand and reveal compromising information about various community members, diverting the movement's focus - a parodic allusion to the past's weight in the country's political life, as the elite resists any changes that may impact them. At the square, the dead denounce everything from family betrayals, political swindles to torture inflicted on one of the city's inhabitants, who ends up dying, unfairly accused by the government of being part of a leftist movement. Faced with this situation, the strike movement, which had been resisting the pressures of power, retreated. It is defeated by what itself, in an unforeseen way, triggers – the strike of the gravediggers – i.e., the interruption of the work of those whose function is to bury what would have completed its life cycle, reached the end. With the show of strength of the dead, the past conquers the future. The strike is emptied, order is restored. Everything goes back to the way it was before: the corpses are buried and, along with them, also the secrets that must not come to light so that everything remains as it always was. The latest events, the disturbing facts, are erased from the official history of the city by the government's determination, although they do not fail to haunt the memory of the silenced people.

Érico Veríssimo's novel, defying the censorship established after the 1964 military coup, humorously parodies, through the living dead, the prevalence of the past over the present, immortalized by the policy of promoting oblivion, which denies confrontations and the violence practiced by the State against those who react to injustice. Denialism is the strategy of power to impose the official version of the past, aiming to silence the rumors, the little stories, the anonymous fictions, the testimonies that circulate by word of mouth. The truth revealed by the unburied bodies is covered up by the State's version, recalling

the following observation by Ricardo Piglia:

The state report constitutes an interpretation of the facts, that is, a system of motivation and causality, a closed way of explaining, a complex and contradictory social network. They are compensatory solutions, moralistic stories, didactic narrations, and also horror stories. (Piglia, 2001, p. 25)⁴

It is also using a spectral presence that, many years after the publication of Veríssimo's book, the novel *Prova Contrária*, by Fernando Bonassi, stages the late consequences of dictatorships, the impossibility of compensating for the lives and ideals reaped. After receiving compensation from the State for recognizing the death of the missing militant, the woman is faced with the return of her partner: i.e., exercising the memory will deconstruct the official closure of the militant's life story, the absence of the body creates a void that will not be filled by institutional determinations, that prevents the past from being buried, from moving forward.

The temporality linked to the past is also present in *Degeneração*, Bonassi's most recent work, published in 2021, whose plot unfolds over a long weekend: a time when the narrator character fulfills the numerous bureaucratic steps to be able to bury his father, who has run away from a retirement home and was found dead on the street. His father was a violent, dishonest man, tied to the repressive forces of the dictatorship – a despicable figure in the eyes of his son, who, however, cannot escape the obligation of burying him. The impossibility of quickly getting rid of the task of burying the father, the anxiety generated by the length of the process, seems to stretch chronological time. The character, as well as the reader, is kept in the hospital, in the morgue located at the basement, waiting for the release of the body: a situation that, paradoxically, grants the father a survival, through the movement of the son's memory, coming and going from the present to the past. *Degeneração* is a novel that, similar to the movie *Aranha* and the novel *Twice June* by Argentine author Martín Kohan, refers to the dictatorship but, contrary to what is generally expected, does not place the regime's opponents in the center of the plot, but rather its collaborators. The narrator's haste to get rid of the past that the father represents, which is also the country's past, is hampered by the old institutional gears, by outdated laws, by obsolete rituals, by the continuity of the father's mentality in the police friends who survive him and pay homage to him, as well as his son's own hatred. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the timeframe of the novel is set during the weekend of the election that culminated in the victory of Jair Bolsonaro as president. The narrator says:

Forty-two reais for parking in the Italians' emergency room (an open parking lot, with no insurance and no valet). Standing still was costing more than moving and it seems that the whole country had understood this message: next Sunday we will elect a retired army captain who misses the dictatorship. (Bonassi, 2021, p. 9)⁵

He adds: “We have a lot to walk backwards – I can hear you laughing. I laugh with due sadness, sadness of this time of mine that even makes my mouth bitter... But one thing is for sure: your timing was perfect.” (2019, p. 9) Later he adds: “Long live the dead to be reborn this Sunday – we drink and toast”. (2019, p. 278). Thus, in the last book, as well as in other works by Bonassi, the way in which time is experienced is fundamental. In *Degeneração*, the presence of the past in the present defines the atmosphere of the novel: “It is not a time tunnel, it is pure repetition – I suspect, I think, and I see that

⁴ Translated from the original in Spanish: El relato estatal constituye una interpretación de los hechos, es decir, un sistema de motivación y de causalidad, una forma cerrada de explicar, una red social compleja y contradictoria. Son soluciones compensatorias, historias con moraleja, narraciones didácticas y también historias de terror.

⁵ Translated from the original in Portuguese: Quarenta e dois reais o período de estacionamento do pronto socorro dos italianos (a descoberto, sem seguro e sem manobrista). Ficar parado estava custando mais caro do que se pôr em movimento e parece que todo o país tinha entendido esta mensagem: no próximo domingo elegeremos para o cargo de presidente da República um capitão reformado do exército que sente saudade da ditadura. (Bonassi, 2021, p. 9)

from them, from the cold cars and from the vehicles on duty, several armed men descend, all suspects, of course, but all of one and the same type: this one of ours, this (sic)...” The phantasmatic aesthetic that punctuates contemporary Latin American fiction, from different perspectives, is configured once again, as we see in the following passage: “How to distinguish the ghosts that are alive from those that are dead, in these times when we welcome, with nostalgia, the return of the old times and of outdated men?” (2019, p. 154).

Degeneração does not fail to be inserted, albeit in the opposite direction, into what has been called the “children’s narrative”, i.e., Latin American literature written by authors of the generations following the person who was an adult during the dictatorships of 20th century’s second half, whose narrators would be the children of those who opposed political violence. However, in Bonassi’s book, we are faced with the son of a collaborator, conniving with the crimes committed by the established power. Such a turn in the place of enunciation, which shifts the emphasis from the experience of the militants to the experience of the repressors, this going to the other, to the enemy, making him tell the truth of what he feels or what happened, would work, for Ricardo Piglia, as a condenser of experience, allowing to shed light on what is difficult to say (2001, p. 35). The corpse of the father triggers a trip to the family past, but also to the country’s past. The decrepitude of the body and the decrepitude of the country overlap, which is contributed by the coincidence between the death of the father and the forecast of the results of the presidential elections.

The son’s account of the collaborator’s private life does not mitigate his character:: we conclude, sadly, that the father is a man like so many others around us, whose values are shared by various segments of society and, therefore, will continue to prevail, they will not die with him, which brings us to the following statement by Andrés Wood, director of the film *Aranha*:

We tried to connect past and present, as well as the private and the political. The main thing for me is to show how our private life invades public life. That is why I show these characters who are caring grandparents, but they have done horrible things in the past. It is horrible for those who are close to them. Much of the impunity in Chile stems from this: you know the people, and today they are family members, we play soccer like them, we meet in the parks. That is why I wanted to focus a lot on the private aspects. (Wood, 2021)⁶

Returning to the past also ends up being compulsory, albeit for other reasons, for the younger generations, whose parents opposed dictatorships. Not having participated, as adults, in the traumatic events, resorting to the testimonies and statements of others, these authors give a different direction to the narratives, different from the one that guided the accounts of the parents’ generation, giving another status to the reverberations of historical facts in the present. The distance in time motivates the creation of characters that bend over the memory of close ancestors, seeking to piece together what happened, based on the investigation of traces of the past in the present. Hence the strong metalinguistic bias of these novels in which the narrators ask themselves, at all times, how to narrate their parents’ history, how to represent the facts they experience in the light of the present, the hopeless daily life of their own children. The narrator of the book *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva*, by Patricio Pron, says:

How do I narrate what happened, if they could not do it themselves; how do I share a collective experience individually; how do I explain what happened to them without

⁶ Translated from Portuguese: Tentamos fazer com que passado e presente fossem conectados, assim como o privado e o político. O principal, para mim, é mostrar como nossa vida particular invade a vida pública. Por isso mostro esses personagens que são avós carinhosos, mas fizeram coisas horríveis no passado. É horrível para quem é próximo deles. Muito da impunidade no Chile decorre disto: você conhece as pessoas, e hoje são pessoas de família, jogamos futebol como eles, nos encontramos nos parques. Por isso, quis dar bastante atenção aos aspectos privados. (Wood, 2021)

it looking like an attempt to turn them into protagonists of a history that is collective; and what place do I occupy in this story? (Pron, 2018, p. 135)⁷

Although, as Beatriz Sarlo has noted, all reconstitution of the past, to a certain extent, is "vicarious and hypermediated, except for the experiences that relate to the body and the sensitivity of an individual" (Sarlo, 2007, p. 93). However, when it comes to collective traumatic events, the relevance of time distance and different historical and political contexts from which the narrative of events takes place should be considered. Therefore, the revival of the past by the generation of children of those who were young in the 1960s and 1970s reflects, in some works, the decline of the utopian energies of modernity in the second half of the last century, as well as the loss of teleological references that guided their parents' struggles. As a result, the narratives of these children are typically marked by a subjective and family-driven dimension:

Thirty years later, after the military dictatorship ended, the children of these young people from the 1960s, many of them militants who disappeared and were murdered by state terrorism, adopt very different positions on their parents' past. In doing so, they also adhere to the norms of the time, which value the demonstration of subjectivity, recognize full legitimacy to personal inflections and place memory in relation to an identity that is not merely public. (Sarlo, 2007, p. 105)⁸

This can be seen not only in the aforementioned novel by Pron, but also in Julian Fuks' *Resistance*, and in Carola Saavedra's *O inventário das coisas ausentes*. Installed in the present, certain characters of contemporary fiction have their daily lives assailed by the ghost of a past whose meaning escapes them, since it is perceived from the perspective of individual circumstances, i.e., self-referentiality presides over the constitution of a memory that, after all, is also collective. Examining documents, old newspapers, letters, photographs, recording testimonies, loose data from family files, the children try to piece together their parents' past as if putting together pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, trying to bring order to heterogeneous materials. They seek to rebuild other people's stories, starting from a personal investigation: they do not tell the story as it was told to them, they do not pass it on as it was recorded in their parents' memory, they do not endorse a truth laid down in advance. Pron's character says: "Children are the detectives that parents launch into the world so that one day they can come back and tell them their story so that they can understand it themselves". (2018, p. 134)

Rereading historical events based on the values of the present, in the key of contemporary individualism, these characters are unable, at least immediately, to attribute meaning to the actions moved by the utopian aspirations of their ancestors. The motivations of the fight become an enigma, hence the investigative approach, bordering on the detective genre, which characterizes some novels. As noted earlier, fiction thus stages the difficulty, on the part of generations that grew up under the sign of the privatization of memory, to overcome the gap between the performance of parents in the domestic environment and the detached figure of the hero who seeks to transform the world. (Figueiredo, 2020). Both in *Resistance* (Fuks, 2015) and in *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva* (Pron, 2018), the narrators submit the texts they wrote to the criticism of their parents, referring to these criticisms within the fictional universe. The entire effort of the act of narration aims, in this way, to establish a trace of union between the two generations, since the greatness of the struggle of the ancestors is no longer extended

⁷ Translated from Portuguese: Como narrar o que aconteceu, se eles mesmos não conseguiram fazer isso; como contar uma experiência coletiva de forma individual; como explicar o que aconteceu com eles sem que pareça uma tentativa de transformá-los em protagonistas de uma história que é coletiva; e que lugar ocupar nessa história? (Pron, 2018, p. 135).

⁸ Translated from Portuguese: Trinta anos depois, encerrada a ditadura militar, os filhos desses jovens dos anos 1960, muitos deles militantes desaparecidos e assassinados pelo terrorismo de Estado, tomam diante do passado dos pais posições bem diferentes. Ao fazê-lo, atêm-se igualmente a normas da época, que valorizam a demonstração da subjetividade, reconhecem plena legitimidade a inflexões pessoais e situam a memória em relação a uma identidade não meramente pública. (Sarlo, 2007, p. 105)

to the younger ones.

This generational gap, however, is relativized in *O corpo interminável* (Laje, 2019) which, like the film *Aranha* (Wood, 2019), intersperses the axes of the past and the present, eventually intertwining these temporal dimensions, diluting their contours. The hidden past, as in *A Chorona*, invades the present, occupies its space, nullifying all the great effort made to erase it. The tortured, missing bodies are endless. In the temporal axis of the present, two young people, for different reasons, seek, in the books, information about the state violence unleashed with the military coup. The girl wants to understand her parents' alienation from the atrocities committed by the repressive forces of the time. The boy wants to find clues about his mother, a militant who disappeared during the dictatorship, and to record this research in a book. Once again, the generation of children stage their own difficulty in narrating the trauma:

Only later, much later, was I able to write. Still, I felt like I had made a mistake. A big mistake. As if I forced those people, so real, so alive within their struggles, disappearances, and deaths, to become mere references in a text, or worse, characters, as if I imposed on them, after all they had lived, something so fragile, capable of being dismantled at the slightest blow, the least insistence, a farce, a representation. (Laje, 2019, p. 24)⁹

On the axis of the past, all the suffering of young people involved in the fight against repression is staged in fragmented plots: synchronous clippings of life in hiding leave no room for a common thread with a beginning, middle, and end. Profiles of militant women are emerging, strong images are only sketched, outlining several faces of this female figure in whose body violence wrote its history of atrocities. The issue of motherhood, then, occupies a central place in the hazy stories of violated bodies, ruptured wombs, children torn from their mothers' arms, but also a bet on the victory of life over death.

Also, in Claudia Lage's novel, the past does not pass, and the son's attitude towards his parents is of an increasing reconnection. Thus, when initially choosing not to have children, the character says:

But how can I say that I would look at him without feeling anything without seeming insensitive, that for so many and for me times are not different, but the same, the same time, the same forces that annihilated my mother, that anesthetized my father are here, the same dynamics moving the world, the same reasons for revolt, for struggles, are here, I was born from it, I emerged from it. (Laje, 2019, p. 76)¹⁰

The intergenerational distance that could block the possibility of dialogue is overcome by the recognition that times have not changed – unlike the void created by the identity crisis of the character in *O espírito dos meus pais continua a subir na chuva*, who declares:

(...) but then I thought that I hadn't really fought, and that no one of my generation had fought; something or someone had already inflicted a defeat on us, and we would get drunk or take medicine or waste our time in a thousand and one ways trying to quickly reach an ending that was perhaps undignified, but certainly liberating. (Pron, 2018, p. 36)¹¹

⁹ Translated from Portuguese: Só depois, muito depois, conseguia escrever. Ainda assim, me sentia como se cometesse um equívoco. Um grande equívoco. Como se forçasse aquelas pessoas, tão reais, tão vivas dentro de suas lutas, desaparecimentos e mortes, a se tornarem meras referências em um texto, ou pior, personagens, como se eu impusesse a elas, depois de tudo que viveram, algo tão frágil, capaz de se desmantelar ao menor sopro, a mínima insistência, uma farsa, uma representação. (Laje, 2019, p. 24)

¹⁰ Translated from Portuguese: Mas como dizer sem parecer insensível que eu o olharia sem sentir nada, que para tantos e para mim os tempos não são outros, mas o mesmo, o mesmo tempo, as mesmas forças que aniquilaram a minha mãe, que anestesiaram meu pai estão aqui, a mesma dinâmica a mover o mundo, os mesmos motivos de revolta, de lutas, estão aqui, eu nasci disso, eu emergi disso. (2019, p. 76)

¹¹ Translated from Portuguese: (...) mas depois pensei que eu não tinha realmente lutado, e que ninguém da minha geração tinha lutado; algo ou alguém já tinha nos infligido uma derrota, e nós enchíamos a cara ou tomávamos remédios ou desperdiçávamos nosso tempo de mil e uma maneiras tentando chegar depressa a um final que talvez fosse indigno, mas com certeza libertador. (2018, p. 36)

In *O fantasma de Luís Buñuel*, published in 2004, whose author, Maria José Silveira, participated in the struggle to resist Brazilian dictatorship, the past returns as a spectrum of the utopia of changing the world that moved youth in the 1960s/1970s, as a phantom of a freedom dreamed of, which the devotion to cinema helped feed, through the great avant-garde filmmakers such as Buñuel. One of the characters says:

I have the impression that we are too marked by the radical and profound questioning that we live with so sincerely when young. The splendor of that utopia, in which we believed and was not fulfilled, condemned us. Nothing was as we thought it would be. How that was our finest moment. However, we don't want to leave: it is our reference, our founding mark. Take the test: when we think of ourselves, we always see ourselves still there, with our flags of freedom, equality, and beauty. (Silveira, 2004, eBook, p. 4101)¹²

Maria José Silveira compiles a broad panel of Brazilian history in the second half of the 20th century, tracing, not without a certain nostalgia, a portrait of the university generation that lived through the intense and traumatic year of 1968. Through the destinies of the five main characters, deeply marked by the country's political trajectory, the novel brings to the fore the violence of the authoritarian regime, which snuffed out the project of building a fairer country, and the consequences of this violence in the three subsequent decades. The big step towards the future that the construction of Brasília, the point of convergence of the lives of the young characters, intended to announce, did not materialize: the conservative forces, in favor of stagnation, conquered the new.

Final remarks

Considering the construction of temporality in the works referenced here, we can conclude that the past that refuses to pass is both a result of a policy of forgetting, established by power, as seen, for example, in *Incidente em Antares*, or in *Aranha*, and as a result of the commitment to memory on the part of the vanquished, as in *A Chorona* or in *O corpo interminável*. Amid the proliferation of messages in the media, the incessant circulation of fake news on social networks, the expressive increase in neo-Nazi cells in several countries, literary and cinematographic fiction from the first decades of the 21st century seeks to build a network of alternative stories to recompose lost plots, in opposition to the dominant versions. These fictional narratives face historical denialism, reviving the notion of truth as a political horizon and object of struggle: "A notion of truth that breaks from immediate evidence, which first supposes to dismantle the constructions of power and its fictitious forces and, on the other hand, to rescue the fragmentary truths, allegories and social reports", as Ricardo Piglia (2001, p. 30) says.¹³

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¹² Translated from Portuguese: Tenho a impressão de que ficamos por demais marcados pelo questionamento radical e profundo que vivemos com tanta sinceridade quando jovens. O esplendor daquela utopia, em que acreditamos e não se cumpriu, nos condenou. Nada foi como pensamos que seria. Como aquele foi nosso melhor momento. No entanto, não queremos sair de lá: é nossa referência, nosso marco fundador. Faça o teste: quando pensamos em nós mesmos, sempre nos vemos ainda lá, com nossas bandeiras de liberdade, igualdade e beleza. (Silveira, 2004, eBook, p. 4101).

¹³ Translated from the original in Spanish: "Una noción de verdad que escapa a la evidencia inmediata, que supone primero desmontar las construcciones del poder y sus fuerzas ficticias y por otro lado resgatar las verdades fragmentarias, las alegorias y los relatos sociales." (Piglia, 2001, p. 30)

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Vera Lucia Follain de Figueiredo holds a PhD in Language Studies, is a professor at the Department of Social Communication at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro and a researcher at CNPq. Vera is the author, among other works, of the books: *A ficção equilibrada: narrativa, cotidiano e política*; *Narrativas migrantes: literatura, roteiro e cinema*; *Os crimes do texto: Rubem Fonseca e a ficção contemporânea*; e *Da profecia ao labirinto: imagens da história na ficção latino-americana*.