





Literature of minorities under the pen of a sad visionary

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to study the work of Lima Barreto (1881-1922), whose production is associated with the Pre-Modernist period of Brazilian literature, but his works are considered fundamental for the study of modern narrative, as he markedly addressed the political, social reality and culture of a time. From this perspective, we investigated the literary factors that combined with factors of national historical reality made his production reach us so up to date. Barreto wrote about the problems of men and women in a country, whose rulers were increasingly focused on the interests of those who dominated by force and less and less on the interests of the people – the minorities: blacks, indigenous, women and all those who they found themselves on the margins of a capitalist and exclusionary society. We prioritized reading Barreto's Brazil, taking as a theoretical basis the Lacanian Materialism proposed by Slavoj Žižek (2010, 2014), whose purpose is to establish the points at which the narrated facts come together and distance themselves historically and socially. This is a bibliographical and qualitative research analyzing the structure of the novel, which is why it sought to study the forms of systemic violence that mark/marked these minorities and discuss literature as a representation of people in a given society and time. One of the most significant aspects of Lima Barreto's work is its continued relevance. The issues he addressed, such as racism, social inequality and exclusion, remain current and resonate in contemporary Brazil.

RESUMO

Este artigo objetiva estudar a obra de Lima Barreto (1881-1922), cuja produção se encontra associada ao período Pré-Modernista da literatura brasileira, consideradas fundamentais para o estudo da narrativa moderna, pois ele registrou a realidade política, social e cultural da sociedade. Nessa perspectiva, investigamos quais são os fatores literários que, aliados aos fatores da realidade histórica nacional, fizeram com que sua produção chegasse até nós tão atualizados. Barreto escrevia sobre as problemáticas do homem e da mulher em um país, cujos governantes se voltavam cada vez mais aos interesses dos que dominavam pela força e cada vez menos para os interesses do povo – as minorias: negros, indígenas, mulheres e todos que se encontravam à margem de uma sociedade capitalista e excludente. Priorizamos ler o Brasil de Barreto, tomando como embasamento teórico o Materialismo Lacaniano proposto por Slavoj Žižek (2010, 2014), cuja finalidade é estabelecer os pontos em que os fatos narrados se aproximam e se distanciam histórica e socialmente. Trata-se de uma pesquisa bibliográfica e qualitativa, por isso, buscou, na análise da estrutura do romance, estudar as formas da violência sistêmica que marcam/marcaram essas minorias e discutir a literatura como representação do homem em dada sociedade e época. Um dos aspectos mais significativos da obra de Lima Barreto é sua relevância contínua. As questões que ele abordou, como racismo, desigualdade social e exclusão, permanecem atuais e ressoam no Brasil contemporâneo.

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Introduction

Lima Barreto, one of the most significant authors of Brazilian Pre-Modernism, recorded in his works the complex political, social and cultural reality of his time. This article aims to investigate how literary factors, combined with the national historical reality, contributed to the timelessness of his literary production, highlighting his critical view of social minorities. The Pre-Modernist period, situated between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, was a time of transition in Brazilian literature. Lima Barreto's work is inserted in this context, characterized by a strong critique of the society of the time.

Brazil was experiencing a period of intense social, political and economic transformations. The country, still a recent republic, faced challenges of modernization and the persistence of exclusionary social structures. Barreto's work reflects these tensions, highlighting the inequalities and injustices suffered by minorities. Lima Barreto dedicated himself to portraying problems faced by social minorities, including blacks, indigenous people, women and other marginalized groups.

Literary research that engages with historical and social studies of Brazilian thought based on discussions about the relevance of an author cannot be restricted to concepts that attempt to explain only internal factors, since it is necessary to take into account the social aspect that involves the creative process. To do so, it relies on dimensions of its structural elements: the narrator, characters and the reader and, mainly, the time and space where facts were narrated.

We chose Lima Barreto (1881-1922) because his literature is characterized as a representation of limits of man in the face of problems of the modern world, whose themes involve the Brazilian people within a panorama of losses and searches in opposition to values and interests of those who are always in power, establishing the importance of outlining a panel with data from the past that resembles current facts. In addition, Barreto writes about black men, black women, mixed-race men, old black women, pale brown men, mixed-race men and countless other terms that named his characters that, currently, following the process of evolution of literature and history, fit inside the current 'literature of minorities', as revered as movements and campaigns in favor of the importance of valuing racial and gender diversity. Hence the importance of research on an author who, above all, was a 'visionary'.

Visionary because he managed to write at the beginning of the 20th century about themes that have been transferred to the present day, mainly because, in addition to being made up of divergent perceptions about human actions, literary art presents itself as a fertile field for the analysis of man's own way of thinking and the interpretative process similar to human existence.

This research is established because Lima Barreto presents literary marks that allow us to analyze the narrative and the man of the past from historical perspectives and the

commitment of the author, who arrived in the 21st century as contemporary as the period in which he lived. This fact not only democratizes reading, but also opens spaces in the classroom for the study and dissemination of works through other languages.

His narratives denounce the structural violence and exclusions imposed by a capitalist and elitist society. An analysis of Barreto's works reveals how violence, both physical and symbolic, permeates lives of minorities. His characters often face discrimination, prejudice, and marginalization, reflecting the social conditions of their time. One of the most remarkable aspects of Lima Barreto's work is its continued relevance. Issues, written by him, such as racism, social inequality and exclusion, remain current and resonate in contemporary Brazil.

This article explores connections between the past and the present, demonstrating the persistence of many of problems that Barreto denounced. To achieve our objective, which is to analyze forms of violence that marked/mark the history of characters who are on the margins of society (minorities), we took as our theoretical basis the application of Lacanian Materialism proposed by Slavoj Žižek (2010, 2014). This is a bibliographic and qualitative research, whose purpose is, through the study of narrative structure, to discuss literature as a representation of man in a given society and time.

Texts presented in the development of this work point to one of the most significant aspects of Lima Barreto's work, which is its continued relevance, since the issues he addressed, such as racism, social inequality and exclusion, remain current and resonate in contemporary Brazil.

Lima Barreto – Language, Literature and History

Literature deals with the imaginary, whether personal, social and/or cultural, which is manifested through images and discourses, the result of a reconstruction of the truth carried out from the point of view of the person who writes the text. The literary reconstruction of reality, whether it is a historical phenomenon, a contemporary social relationship or an ideology, can be critical, but it is also ideological, as it will always be the point of view of an author, in a class society, which is, by extension, the point of view of a given class.

Reading a work with the aim of establishing connections between literature and history is not a simple matter. The question lies in knowing what history and what literature are being discussed. From this perspective, the text is, above all, a human product and its most eloquent material testimony. In Lima Barreto, this testimony of individual creative effort is embedded in the national memory by social conditioning, cultural dimensions, economic conditions, ethical conflicts and political contradictions that shape the historical space in which it was generated and published.

It is common to record historical facts in Lima Barreto's works, mainly those that occurred during the period of the First Republic, such as: the Vaccine Revolt of 1904, the

Armada Revolt (1893-1894), the Pereira Passos Reform (1902-1906), workers' strikes of 1917 and the celebration of the Centenary of Independence, leading to the fact that, according to Schwarcz (2017, p. 18), “there is no longer any way to discuss the period of the First Republic without mentioning Lima Barreto's work, his writings, his provocations”.

This heated statement reminds us of Sevcenko's (1985) conceptions when he states that literature can serve as a document for the historian, but the historian must consider that literature's greatest commitment is to fantasy rather than reality. In his words, “the historian is therefore concerned with reality, while the writer is attracted by possibility” (Sevcenko, 1985, p. 21).

This theorist emphasizes that these differences must be considered by the historian, who must seek in literature elements that express the writer's position regarding history, since “literature, therefore, speaks to the historian about the history that did not occur, about the possibilities that did not come to fruition, about the plans that did not come to fruition. It is the sad but sublime testimony of men who were defeated by the facts” (Sevcenko, 1985, p. 21). Following this line of thought, the story of Lima Barreto's characters fits “into a story of unfulfilled desires, of unfulfilled possibilities, of unconsummated ideas” (Sevcenko, 1985, p. 21).

In the case of the work *Triste Fim* by Policarpo Quaresma, selected for analysis of the participation of characters that constitute minorities: black men, women, old men, caboclos, indigenous people and women, the narrative transcribes the history of Brazil in the First Republic from the perspective of those who were left on the margins (those belonging to the minority group – the excluded and made invisible) of the promises of freedom, development and progress that the new system promised.

Characters, such as “the most dispossessed; those with great souls” belong to the author, for example, “Mr. Manuel Cabinda”, and who carry a pain greater than the world, but who never simply let themselves be caught or defeated; those who win even when they “seem” to give up fighting, such as Olga and Ricardo Coração dos Outros; those who die of heartbreak, like Ismênia.

These are real-life people: indigenous people who fight, despite countless murders of their brothers; those who defend the cause, despite the cowardice of how dreams and struggles of Bruno Araújo Pereira and the English journalist Dom Phillips were exterminated; those who defend forests, despite having taken the life of Tim Lopes; they are real people, many women beaten to death, despite the existence of the Maria da Penha Law; they are real people, the women who, like Mariele, needed to be silenced; they are real-life people, the many ‘Conceição’, ‘Carolina’, who, like Lima Barreto, make the art of writing an exercise in “writing life” of the difficult art of surviving amidst the violence of the modern world.

Following this line of thought, this research sought to combine studies of literary theories with the proposals of a writer who used simple, everyday language to ensure the unity of the narrated text. Regarding this aspect, Oliveira (2023, p. 141) highlights that “for Lima Barreto, it is intelligence that, through language, provides man with the ability to progress and develop in society, since language is his greatest instrument of communication”. And this language, therefore, as a creative and literary process, expands any form of the written word. What in this work we call the “essence of language” to which Oliveira (2023) refers.

Regarding this characteristic of Lima Barreto, we highlight that, through his writing, he observed, analyzed, criticized and multiplied/multiplies thoughts of man of all times. This author experienced the hardships, the hopes, the despair and all sorts of prejudices of a period of transition – from the Monarchy to the Republic, from slavery to abolition and which was marked by the entry into modernity, but he,

Through Art, he was not restricted to precepts and prejudices of his time, his birth, his homeland, his race; he goes beyond that, as far as he can, to reach the total life of the Universe and incorporate his life into the world (Oliveira, 2023, p. 141).

From this perspective of associating old forms with the new model of life, we studied, in addition to the narrative structure, theories that provided the basis for the analysis of literary, historical, social and philosophical conceptions in Lima Barreto's work.

Methodology

Our research aims on the study of Lima Barreto from the perspective of ‘Minority Literature’, mainly because ideals of equality, fraternity and freedom have not, in fact, reached individuals or groups of people socially and culturally fixed on margins of capitalist and exclusionary society. From this perspective, we present an academic research, that prioritized the set of accumulated knowledge that students and teachers carry with them. This knowledge was used as a starting point to promote greater involvement during the process of discovery and expansion of the worldview that studies provided.

This study, of a bibliographic nature, was based on the analysis of Lima Barreto's works and critical studies on his production and, more specifically, on the application of Lacanian Materialism in literary works. The qualitative approach allowed a deep understanding of forms of violence represented in Barreto's works, as well as literary strategies used by the author to denounce social injustices. For this purpose, the investigative field involved, in addition to the study of human and social sciences, the analysis of a novel published at the beginning of the last century from the perspective of a contemporary philosophical theoretical line – Lacanian Materialism.

In Literature, qualitative research involves the crossing of data that proposes a dialogue between the object, in this case, the literary work selected for reading and the meanings in the text, based on studies on the life and work of Lima Barreto, which were based on the historical context of facts in Brazil, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, which were confronted with events and occurrences in evidence in the current Brazilian historical context.

The methodological process followed the path of selection and review of the bibliography based on readings and studies of printed and digital works that provided essential data for the construction of this article. Since this is a qualitative research, we resorted to readings of Literature and Lacanian Materialism, as well as – but not in depth – studies of Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology, whose objective was to investigate the relationship between the world, people, events and places, in their forms of social and literary representation.

The literary analysis was carried out based on the concept of ‘Minority Literature’, observed in the work of Lima Barreto, which points to issues in vogue today, such as literature on ethnic minorities and issues relating to the place of women in society.

From this way, we observed the way in which data from reality were transported to the fictional reality of characters represented in the work as belonging to the minority class, specifically, blacks, indigenous people and women, that is, we made a survey of how these issues related to the process of ethnic, social and gender exclusion are addressed in Lima Barreto's work that can justify the title attributed to him of “sad visionary”.

About its organization, the research was divided into stages of progressive studies, structurally designed to help researchers understand the proposal presented. Initially, it was essential to learn about the life and body of work of Lima Barreto, the purpose of which was to write a brief account of the history of literature, in its narrative form, and to present Lima Barreto's literature, based on some critics of his work. Sequentially, it was essential to study the historical, cultural and social context of Brazil in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, since the narrative of the selected work takes place between the years 1890 and 1893, but it was only published in 1915.

To prove that Lima Barreto's work presents a strong and current social engagement, we resorted to the historical, cultural and social issues of Brazil today and compared them with those of the previous century, with the aim of verifying which historical and social points, over centuries, reached the 21st century as a work as contemporary as the year it was published.

Based on this methodological approach, our research was carried out in the composition of a bibliographic collection, the scope of which will allow a critical and analytical study of current and relevant issues to think about the formation of man and the society of which he is a part, through the lens of Lima Barreto's literature, as presented in the analysis set out below.

Sad End –a violation announced in the Lima Barreto’s language

The book *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* (Sad End of Policarpo Quaresma), written by Lima Barreto, is a landmark in Brazilian literature, not only for its literary quality, but also for the way it addresses social issues, particularly the representation of minorities. This novel, originally published in serial form in 1911 and in book form in 1915, exposes problems faced by various marginalized groups: blacks, indigenous people, women and other individuals who find themselves in vulnerable situations, in a capitalist and elitist society.

To understand the importance of Lima Barreto's work, it is necessary to place it in the historical and literary context of the early 20th century in Brazil. This period was marked by deep social and political transformations, including the abolition of slavery (1888) and the Proclamation of the Republic (1889). Despite these changes, Brazilian society continued to be extremely unequal, with persistent practices of violence that led to exclusion and discrimination.

Based on Ginzburg's (2017) conceptions about the presence of violence in literary texts, we highlight that Lima Barreto's writing recognizes the presence of social violence in the History of Brazil and emphasizes that it maintains a relationship with authoritarian regimes. This knowledge leads him to construct images, characters, plots and narrative structures that support his critical view of that historical context.

From this perspective, we seek grounding in forms of violence presented by Žižek (2014, p. 17-18), when he distinguishes between subjective violence and objective violence, classifying them, respectively, according to their form, as visible and invisible. This philosopher highlights that “subjective violence is only the most visible part of a triumvirate”, and that objective violence, which is invisible, is divided into symbolic and systemic, the latter being responsible for maintaining a “normal” state of affairs. This invisibility is what helps to sustain the subjectivity of systemic violence, since it consists of “often catastrophic consequences of the regular functioning of our economic and political systems” (Žižek, 2014, p. 17), as it is responsible for sustaining the relations of power, domination and exploitation “necessary for such a comfortable life to be possible” (Žižek, 2014, p. 23).

We observe, for example, the historical moment of first years of Brazil, described in the oba now under analysis, as a Republic, with emphasis on the government of Marshal Floriano Peixoto. The way in which the central axis manifests itself in the narrative configures the literary form that reveals the conflicting relationship between individuals and a reality that opposed their ideals of freedom and nationality, constantly in conflict with the true forms of domination imposed by the new political system.

Policarpo, an extreme nationalist, appears with all problems of the modern individual: at the same time that he is dazzled by the new regime – the Republic, we realize that advances, the progress had not yet reached everyone. For this reason, he suffers and his behavior shows the impossibility of adapting to the world, as we can see in the following excerpt: “And in this

way he went on living his life, half in the office, without being understood, and the other half at home, also without being understood” (Barreto, 1996, p. 23). Facts that attest to the systemic violence that permeates the entire narrative and that is a result of the process of colonization and structural development of Brazil.

Lima Barreto, himself a descendant of enslaved Africans, critically addresses the situation of black people in post-abolition Brazilian society. In *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* (1996), the figure of the character Ricardo Coração dos Outros, a black musician, illustrates the marginalization and prejudice faced by people of African descent. These facts are characterized as acts of systemic and symbolic violence, according to the concepts of Žižek (2014). In the case of this character, the prejudice, as a form of violence, was twofold: in addition to being black, he played the guitar – an instrument considered to be used for “crookedness,” as stated by Policarpo’s neighbors: “it wouldn’t be nice for this gentleman [Policarpo] to be involved with a man – Ricardo Coração dos Outros – who plays the guitar, because he would be a lowlife” (Barreto, 1996, p. 21).

Later, Ricardo Coração dos Outros was not invited to Ismênia's engagement party because the general feared public opinion about his presence at a “serious party” (Barreto, 1996, p. 44). Ricardo, despite his talent and cultural contribution, is relegated to a subordinate position, which highlights the lack of recognition and the continuity of structural racism, as violence of a capitalist and exclusionary system that only prioritizes and gives voice to the wealthy and the socially and culturally favored.

According to Žižek (2014), it is essential to understand forms of violence that emerge from the history of social relations, based on the analysis of conflicts arising from the processes of exclusion that defined the division of classes and the strengthening of the capitalist system. This strengthening changed the notion of objective violence, highlighting the need for a more in-depth study of its manifestation in society, especially when we observe that, despite the abolition of slavery, blacks, indigenous people, women and all those who, despite being part of the majority of the population, find themselves in a state of social vulnerability, hence we call them minorities, precisely because they are excluded and continue to suffer all forms of violence, from the visible to the invisible.

For the analysis presented here, we used studies of systemic violence, which resulted from the entire colonization process experienced by countries that enslaved Africans, as well as studies of symbolic violence – the violence that is embodied in the language used by Lima Barreto. Žižek (2014, p. 18) defines symbolic violence as that which is “embodied in language and its forms” and is characterized as “invisible” because it is the result of a relationship of violence considered “natural”, since the dominated agent does not feel like a violence victim.

Within this context, we highlight the statement by Candido (1989), that presents Lima Barreto as a fiction writer of the otherness, and this factor is responsible for the elevation of his creative process, whose writing reveals “an intelligence lucidly focused on unmasking

society and analyzing one's own emotions, through a language full of warmth" (Candido, 1989, p. 39).

Following this line, we corroborate Oliveira (2023, p. 141), when she emphasizes that the language expressed by the narrator of *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* (1996) attests to the creative process that involves forms of violence, which is, at the same time, a violence of the System and of language, but which registers a certain degree of poeticity, as we highlight in the excerpt: "he remembered his sister, her green and placid eyes that saw him leave with an impassivity that was not natural" (Barreto, 1996, p. 128). We observe the use of an 'almost poetic' language, that precedes the violence in the natural behavior of the sister, who, at that moment, remained impartial. In other words, green and placid eyes announced neither the hope nor the tranquility of that reality that was presented, as expressed in the excerpt in which Policarpo observes the real aspects that involve the lives of the less favored beings.

In a moment, his eyes passed over those yellowish, gaunt faces that leaned lazily against the shop windows; he also saw those ragged, dirty children, with their eyes downcast, surreptitiously begging on the roads; he saw those abandoned, unproductive lands, given over to weeds and harmful insects; he also saw the despair of Felizardo, a good, active, hard-working man, with no desire to plant a single grain of corn at home and drinking all the money that passed through his hands – this picture passed before his eyes with the swiftness and sinister brilliance of lightning; and it only completely disappeared when he had to read the letter that his goddaughter had sent him (Barreto, 1996, p. 114).

From this perspective, the narrative is constructed from the perspective of a narrator regarding the behavior and actions of his main character, who is frequently faced with the ills that permeate lives of those who live at the mercy of a capitalist and exclusionary system: indigenous people, women, rural workers and slaves recently proclaimed free, but still social and culturally enslaved.

In this Lima Barreto's novel, the plot develops in three parts, which, as previously mentioned, analyze the use of language as a literary resource used to present forms of violence in Policarpo Quaresma's project to reform the Fatherland, which is structurally divided into three different stages: culture, agriculture and politics.

The first project or reform idealized appears in the cultural sphere. Initially, Policarpo proposes revaluation of Brazilian customs, censuring the imitation of foreign fashions. This idea takes hold of him completely and reaches extremes when he suggests the appropriation of a language, in this case Tupi-Guarani, as the first form of social identification of man. The second reform occurs in the rural environment when Policarpo turns to the means of agricultural production. And finally, in the third plane, reform emerges through politics. Not only with reference to "government acts", but to politics as a set of activities or praxis of

humanity directly associated with practice and that should allow individuals to achieve power (Oliveira, 2023, pp. 96-97).

The representation of indigenous people in the work is complex and critical. Policarpo Quaresma, the protagonist, is a fervent patriot who decides to learn Tupi-Guarani and cultivate the small farm he bought shortly after the failure of the first reform, according to indigenous methods, believing in the superiority of native culture. However, his idealization encounters the reality of a society that devalues and marginalizes indigenous peoples. In several passages of the narrative, Policarpo repeated his purpose that the people should value the indigenous people, their language, and culture, and always referred to the physical and psychological abuse they suffered and still suffer from tax collectors, as small producers of a land that originally belonged to them.

The narrator highlights the marginalization and unfair treatment of indigenous people, who are presented as victims of abuse and discrimination, evidencing, through Policarpo's actions, the situation of oppression to which they are subjected, that is, systemic violence - that of Capital was always present. This character also exposes the prejudiced attitude of farmers towards indigenous people, who compare them to animals, treating them with contempt and cruelty, clear examples of symbolic violence - that of language. Policarpo Quaresma, in defending indigenous people, comes into conflict with his coworkers, which demonstrates society's resistance to recognizing the humanity and rights of these people.

From this perspective, he intends to do justice when he proposes changing the Portuguese language to Tupi-Guarani. Below are excerpts from the Request that Policarpo Quaresma sent to the Brazilian Congress:

Policarpo Quaresma, a Brazilian citizen and civil servant, certain that the Portuguese language is a loan to Brazil; (...) - using the right granted to him by the Constitution, comes to ask that the National Congress decree Tupiguarani as the official and national language of the Brazilian people. The petitioner, leaving aside the historical arguments that militate in favor of his idea, asks for permission to remember that language is the highest manifestation of the intelligence of a people, it is their most lively and original creation; and, therefore, the political emancipation of the country requires, as a complement and consequence, its linguistic emancipation. Furthermore, congressmen, Tupi-Guarani, a very original and agglutinative language, it is true, but to which polysynthesis gives multiple aspects of richness, is the only one capable of translating our beauties, of putting us in relation with our nature and adapting perfectly to our vocal and cerebral organs, as it is the creation of people who lived here and still live here (Barreto, 1996, pp. 52-53).

Policarpo Quaresma's attempt to implement this proposal fails, and this reflects the invisibility of native peoples and also denounces the population's contempt and prejudice towards the traditional indigenous knowledge to which the protagonist had dedicated himself.

Furthermore, in the first reform, the one related to culture, we emphasize that the representation of minorities, specifically black people, leads us to reflect on the complex and often painful social realities of Brazil in the early 20th century. Using language that is sometimes simple and colloquial, sometimes extremely subjective and poetic, Lima Barreto addresses critically and realistically the racism and marginalization faced by Afro-Brazilians in society at the time. We observe this characteristic through the eyes of the character Ricardo Coração dos Outros when he is looking at a black woman washing clothes: “He felt sorry for that poor woman, twice as sad in her condition and her color. A surge of tenderness came over him and then he began to think about the world, about its misfortunes, becoming for a moment entangled in the enigma of our miserable human destiny” (Barreto, 1996, p. 85). Policarpo Quaresma reflects on the degrading conditions in which many black and mixed-race people find themselves.

In other words, black characters are often portrayed in situations of subservience or marginalization, revealing social injustices and exclusion they suffer, characteristics of systemic violence. An example of this is the character Ricardo Coração dos Outros, a popular musician who, despite his talent, faced a lack of recognition and economic precariousness, a common situation for many black people at the time. He was a light-skinned mulatto, short, somewhat pot-bellied, with large, black, upturned mustaches, and a round, smiling face. And, despite being seen in the neighborhood as a “famous man for his ability to sing modinhas and play the guitar” (Barreto, 1996, p. 25), he was considered a poor man who spent his life playing the guitar in search of sustenance and recognition, as we see in the passage where he asks Albernaz for a ticket to go to the place where his friend Policarpo was: “— I would like you to get me a ticket, a pass, to go see you. The general stood with his head down for a few moments, scratched his hair and said: “This is difficult, but you should come to the office tomorrow” (Barreto, 1996, p.91). The excerpt emphasizes his humble social condition and the difficulty in supporting himself through his musical talent. These facts reflect the marginalization of black people.

It is worth highlighting the hypocrisy and prejudice of Brazilian society, which, despite being proud of its supposed racial harmony, practices racism in a veiled and institutionalized way. This is evident in the social interactions and opportunities (or lack thereof) offered to black characters. Their origin and color made their careers difficult.

Behind all their misfortunes and failures, there was always an insurmountable barrier that prevented them not only from rising socially, but also from living in society. In the narrative, Lima Barreto highlights how racial prejudice and social origin are significant obstacles for black people, limiting their opportunities for advancement and success.

We also notice Policarpo's view of the difficult life imposed on black people, and that he saw them as dedicated and suffering workers who faced difficult living conditions and were often undervalued. He perceived them as hard-working and suffering people, just like other people he knew in the city and whom he loved (Barreto, 1996). In other words, Barreto's work addresses the racial issue and points out the injustices suffered by black people when he criticizes Brazilian society for its hypocrisy and lack of racial equity.

Furthermore, the work presents a detailed portrait of the living conditions of Afro-Brazilians, often confined to poor neighborhoods that were described as distant suburbs and poor alleys, where misery was hidden, the setting winter sun descended later, making the resigned poverty of those who lived there even sadder.

Suburbs of Rio de Janeiro are the most curious thing about the city's construction. The topography of the place, capriciously hilly, certainly influenced this aspect, but the misfortunes of the constructions influenced it even more. Nothing more irregular, more capricious, more unplanned can be imagined. The houses appeared as if they were sown by the wind, and, as houses were, the streets were formed. There are some of them that start out as wide as boulevards and end up as narrow as alleys; they twist and turn, useless circuits, and seem to stray from the straight line with a tenacious and sacred hatred. (...) you won't even find those gardens, well-kept, trimmed, combed, because ours, if there are any, are generally poor, ugly, and unkempt. (Barreto, 1996, p. 83).

There are also passages that show black people being subjected to exhausting and poorly paid work, as seen in the conversation between Olga and the employee at farm of Policarpo:

—*Sá dona* is” thinking one thing and the thing is another. While the plant grows, so what? “*Quá, sá dona*”, it’s not like that. He took an axe; the trunk escaped: he placed it better in the chopper and, before swinging the axe, he still said: — The land is not ours... And "*frumiga*"?... We don't "have" tools... that's good for Italians or "Germans", whose government gives everything... The government doesn't like us... (Barreto, 1996, p. 103).

These transitions in the work serve as a critique of social and economic structures that perpetuate the racial inequality that characterizes symbolic violence.

Regarding this violence, Žižek (2010, p. 16) highlights the fact that men, despite being subjects of language, speak and live in society as mere puppets guided by the symbolic order, which directs and controls their actions. Following this conception, we observe that it is

through language that violence is strengthened, since it is from the dominant discourse that culture is imposed on the dominated class.

In synthesis, *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* uses the representation of black characters to make an incisive critique of racism and social exclusion in Brazil. Lima Barreto not only narrates lives of marginalized individuals, but also denounces systemic injustices and encourages reflection on the need for social change. The work, therefore, remains relevant for understanding racial and social dynamics in contemporary Brazil.

Although women are not the central focus of the narrative, Lima Barreto criticizes their living conditions and the limitations imposed by patriarchal society. Barreto shows the importance of marriage in women's lives, because, by remaining single, in addition to social disrepute, women were considered failures and were forced to live subjugated to some relative, submitting to their every whim. In the excerpt below, we observe how marriage was a constant institution in the dialogues held in the house of the character Ismênia who “Since she was a little girl, she would hear her mother say: ‘Learn how to do this, because when you get married...’, or else: ‘You need to learn how to sew on buttons, because when you get married...’”.

At every moment and at every hour, there came that – “because, when you get married...” – and the girl became convinced that her entire existence only tended towards marriage. Education, intimate satisfaction, joy, all of that was useless; life was summed up in one thing: getting married (Barreto, 1996, p. 46). When the narrator of *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* explains the education of women to be wives and housewives, and this criticism leads us to reflect on the breadth of his social vision: “Besides, it was not only within her family that she [Ismênia] found that concern. At school, on the street, in homes of known families, everyone talked about marriage” (Barreto, 1996, p. 46-47). In other words, the demand for marriage was not a particularity of Ismênia’s family, but a trait found in the various environments of society. The narrator, throughout the narrative, reveals this limitation of Ismênia:

Life, the world, the intense variety of feelings, ideas, our own right to happiness, began to seem like trifles to that little brain; and so much so that getting married represented something important to her, a kind of duty, that not getting married, remaining single, “aunt”, seemed to her a crime, a shame. Of a very poor nature, without the capacity to feel anything deeply and intensely, without the emotional capacity for passion or great affection, the idea of getting married stubbornly embedded itself in her intelligence like an obsession (Barreto, 1996, p. 42).

Following this model for which she was created, at the age of 19, Ismênia began a relationship with Cavalcânti, motivated by her lack of determination and fear of not finding a husband. After five years of dating, Cavalcânti went on a trip and never returned. Without interests or motivations to overcome her sadness, Ismênia was unable to get involved in another relationship and ended up passing away. She was buried in a wedding dress, as she wished. The narrator uses Ismênia's story to reflect on how education focused on gender roles can limit a person's perspectives and horizons. If a woman is educated only for domestic tasks such as washing clothes, sewing or cleaning, her connection with the world is restricted to these functions. When she loses this function, she also loses her connection with the world.

In a language that is violent towards the feminine universe, the narrow horizon imposed on women's existence is visible. There was no female individuality. The woman was hindered from being able to express her desires and thoughts. Studying, training professionally and building a career was not part of this universe. The education he received was solely intended for the administration of her future home.

The character Dona Adelaide, Policarpo's sister, represents the submissive woman, whose role is restricted to the domestic environment. Her limits and perspectiveless life reflect the exclusion of women from public spheres and power. But the mold of a condemned life without a husband and without dedication to her own home fit Adelaide well, as it reflected the resigned spirit of a woman with restrained feelings, whose “calm, sweet and regulated existence, had no ambitions, passions and desires” (Barreto, 1996, p. 106). Highlighted adjectives externalize the violence to which women were subjected for centuries of not being able to express their feelings and emotions. Policarpo's sister appears as a being whose existence is defined by the phenomena of language violence that structure the environment in which she lives with her brother Policarpo.

Accustomed to this model of life, Policarpo's sister had readily accepted the fate reserved for her as an older and single sister, but fissures in the Symbolic world that made her “alien” to life also “violently” accentuated the difference established between her and her brother – Adelaide “was cold, unimaginative, with a lucid and positive intelligence” (Barreto, 1996, p. 106). The prevailing idea is that language functions as a means of denial and mediation between opposites because, at the same time, it symbolizes the violence that is embedded in the sister's objectified existence. This same narrative presents the process of Policarpo's constitution as social being related to the identity of his sister, who was there to take care of him, but with one caveat: “Don't assume that Quaresma was upset like a crazy person. Fortunately not!” (Barreto, 1996, p. 106). This language restricts the origin of the differences between brothers, in the criteria presented for both: lack of imagination and lack of intelligence in the sister and the “apparent” state of foolishness, which, for some, bordered on madness, in character Policarpo.

In short way, the novel is a blunt denunciation of the structural violence present in Brazilian society. Barreto exposes how institutions and social structures perpetuate the exclusion and marginalization of minorities. The tragedy of Policarpo Quaresma, who ends up in prison and later executed, symbolizes the failure of the project for an inclusive and fair Brazil. Quaresma is a dreamer, an idealist, but his ideas of justice and equality clash with a reality dominated by violence, prejudice and exclusion.

Final Considerations

Lima Barreto's book, *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma*, is not only a literary landmark, but also a critical and profound analysis of social and ethnic-racial injustices in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century. Through the trajectory of the character Policarpo Quaresma, Barreto exposes the systemic and symbolic violence that permeates Brazilian society, highlighting the difficulties faced by various marginalized groups, such as black people, indigenous people and women.

Lima Barreto criticizes the capitalist and elitist society of the early 20th century, which perpetuates inequality and marginalization. The work shows how the concentration of power and wealth in hands of an elite prevents the development of a more equitable society. The economic and political elite, represented by characters such as General Albernaz, mocks Quaresma's ideals and ignores the needs and rights of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

The narrative reveals the complex net of exclusion and prejudice that characterizes capitalist and elitist society, where minorities are systematically silenced and subjugated. The description of poor neighborhoods and the working conditions of black people, for example, illustrates the precariousness and exploitation faced by these populations. The character Ricardo Coração dos Outros, a talented black musician, is an example of how structural racism prevents the recognition and appreciation of Afro-Brazilians.

Lima Barreto, himself a descendant of enslaved Africans, uses his work to criticize the hypocrisy of a society that prides itself on supposed racial harmony but in practice perpetuates inequality and prejudice. Through the narrator's rich and multifaceted language, Barreto reveals the systemic and symbolic violence that is embedded in communication and social structures.

A comparative analysis between the historical context of Lima Barreto's time and contemporary Brazil reveals both similarities and differences. Problems of minorities, although manifested in different ways, continue to challenge Brazilian society. Lima Barreto's works demonstrate how literature can serve as a mirror of society, reflecting its contradictions and conflicts. His literary production offers an insightful critique of power structures and the dynamics of exclusion. His work, at once historical and contemporary, offers valuable information about the persistence of inequalities and the struggle of minorities in Brazil.

Finally, we consider that *Triste Fim de Policarpo Quaresma* is a work that challenges the reader to reflect on history and social relations in Brazil. Through his incisive criticism and faithful representation of the living conditions of minorities, Barreto invites us to question the continuity of injustices and the urgent need for social change. The work remains relevant not only as a historical document, but as a constant warning about inequalities that still persist in our society.

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