

MIXED WORLD, WORLD IN REBELLION: ON VIOLENCE IN *GRANDE SERTÃO: VEREDAS* (*RURAL SETTLEMENTS*), BY GUIMARÃES ROSA

Patricia Carmello

University Federal of Rio de Janeiro

pscarmello@gmail.com

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Abstract || The analysis of violence in Guimarães Rosa's novel *Grande Sertão: Veredas* reveals references to the Brazilian historical conflicts of that time, situated between town and country, the government and people of the country, the Winners and the Forgotten people of history. Furthermore, the theme of violence comes at a tension between a memory not forgotten, related to the repression, and the *poverty of experience* that's not worth remembering.

Keywords || Theory of Literature | Guimarães Rosa | violence | memory.

*O grande sertão é a forte arma. Deus é um
gatilho?*
João Guimarães Rosa

NOTES

1 | To avoid repetition, from now on the novel will be cited as GSV.

In the 1950s—marked by the development project of the then President Juscelino Kubitschek, under the slogan *fifty years in five*, which reached its climax in the construction of the capital, Brasília, strategically located in the center of the country, given the strong growth of the cities, it is curious to the eyes of Guimarães Rosa set in the forgotten history. Who are they? All his work is built on the characters rural, archaic and interior Brazil, inhabitants of small villages, farms, huts isolated in the countryside or on the banks. It's crazy, as the characters of the story “Sorôco, sua mãe, sua filha” (Pink, 1988), strange, as in “A Menina of Lá” (1988), and a series of day-laborers, mestizos, bandits and prostitutes (Starling, 1999: 16).

In short, there are figures of exile and helplessness, as Miguilim (Rosa, 2001a), ending his saga of unhappy childhood when he was brought to live in the city... They are representatives of those who were left *out of history*, not by chance, in the book Euclides da Cunha (2005a), author of *Os Sertões* (2005), both titles with which Rosa dialogues through themes such as exile, a foreigner in the middle of a lush and hidden nature, as well as references to the history of Canudos. However, the *great Sertão: Veredas*¹ brings together in a same universe all these beings proscribed, as debris and waste, who modernized Brazil does not provide a proper place (Starling, 1999: 16), to transform them into fiction, main protagonists of the *other* history.

Given this premise, it is necessary to highlight the way in which they appear, on the novel by Rosa, references to the history of the country, not as isolated acts, but as fragments, always linked to the subjectivity of someone that reminds: in 1979 is the memory of Selorico Mendes on the invasion of Januária and Caririnha, and the passage of the column Prestes is remembered through the testimony of the Narrator, with respect to the historical event has left him: “Muitos anos adiante, um roceiro vai lavrar um pau, encontra balas cravadas” (Rosa, 2001: 114).

Here, what prevails is not in line with a presumed objectivity of the *Act itself*, but in this critical gaze to a specific context, which arises in fiction through the memories of the narrator and other characters, such as waste, Brazil pieces, dissolved in lagoons and fantasy elements, as described by the Narrator, better than anyone else, when he is declared incapable of telling: “retrato de pessoas diversas, ressaltado de conversas tolas, coisas em vague...” (Rosa, 2001: 221).

The vision of the writer about his time refers to the concept of Walter Benjamin on the history, which proposes a new writing of the past, whose objective would be “peinar la historia a contrapelo” (Benjamin, 1986: 225). Targeted by the philosopher as task of materialistic historian, is different from the historian (one that traces a linear chain of events in the history), since it avoids establishing a relationship of empathy with the victors of history, and seeks, through the past forgotten, and defeated, “despertar no pasado as centelhas da esperança” (1986: 224).

The task of the historian wraps, according to Benjamin, a temporality that combines the three times, in which the past has a link to the present and the future, seen by Jeanne Marie Gagnebin (1982), as the *future of the past*, what could have happened, or what you need to recover from oblivion: “aquilo que teria fazer da nossa história uma outra história” (1982: 60). Back this way in the country’s history, Guimarães Rosa shares outlined vision commonly by Benjamin, Freud and Proust (each so develop in their own way): “da mesma convicção de que o passado comporta elementos inacabados; e, além disso, que aguardam uma vida posterior, e que somos nós os encarregados de fazê – los reviver” (1982: 71).

Certainly, clear images of the *courtship triumphant history* on the novel by Rosa are found in the multi advancement of the cities in manifestation, progress, and the *machine of government* on the region: “Ah, tempo de jagunço tinha mesmo de acabar, cidade acaba com o sertão. Acaba?” (Rosa, 2001: 183). The writer reformulates this conflict through this specific formal construction, in which each statement follows another question unanswered, and produced effect a cut or a suspension in the discourse of advancement of progress², highlighting the dialectic and motion inherent in the process of collision between the city and countryside, to the armed conflict between the law of the government and the law of the Sertão the war between soldiers and bandits, exposing the point of view of the latter in relation to the first:

Mas, quem era que podia explicar isso tudo a eles, que vinham em máquina enorme de cumprir o grosso e o esmo, tendo as garras para o pescoço nosso mas o pensante da cabeça longe, só geringonciável na capital do Estado? (Rosa, 2001: 319).

This critical view of the narrator, distinguishes a mixture of Utopia and criticism in relation to the process of modernism existing at the time, because Riobaldo also dreams of a *citizenship* which is only possible in a planned town *on a third bank*, fairer than the Sertão and where the city runs: “mas eu tinha raiva surda das grandes ciudades que há, que eu desconhecia. Raiva - porque eu não era delas, produzido...” (Rosa, 2001: 533). Critical images speak of a promise

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2 | Leyla Perrone-Moisés talks about the suspension of narrative discourse in the sense of lacanian cut, that points out the absence of sense and the possibility to create new senses at the end of the story.

that will not reach to the Sertão, trains that do not arrive and the contrast between the lack of bridges and the city in which the *Lord* lives: “no carro-de-bois, levam muitos dias, para vencer o que em horas o senhor em seu jipe resolve. Até hoje é assim” (2001: 118).

If each time hides a secret, as you said Benjamin (1986: 40), the author constructed in fiction a new writing of history, revealing, on the other hand, some secrets lost by the discourse of the development of the period, as the violence on the opposition between the countryside and the city, the conflict between the archaic and the modern, the manifestation of unequal growth and the absence of dialogue between the characters of the interior of the country and the *distant machinery* the government.

Despite criticism, repeatedly manifested by the Narrator describing the details of the wars, which equates to the objective dimension of life, and therefore do not deserve to be remembered: “Vida, e guerra, é o que é: stupid esses tontos movimientos” (Rosa, 2001: 245), memories of the war effectively compose your story: “senhor exigindo querendo, esta aqui que eu sirvo forte narração - dou or tampante, e o que for- de trinta combates. Tenho lembranças” (2001: 245). And you are unable to forgive yourself when it comes to admitting your own crimes, including the two rapes he committed (2001: 189), disapproving, totally, violence already apparent at the time, as evidenced by sharing the dream of a Sertão with his friend Zé Bebelo: “people also should reject the uses of armed gangs invading cities, sweeping shops and looting” (2001: 147).

In this regard, it is necessary to point out that, whereas the question of the eyes of the writer about these characters, to be inserted in history in terms of the bandits, the text does not sin with naivety; but it characterized the vision of the writer as a *sensitive* nor assumed that he transformed them into simple victims of violence:

Remorso? Por mim, digo e nego. Olhe: légua e outra, daqui, vereda abaixo, tigre cangussú estragou e arruinou a perna do Sizino Ló, [...]. Comprou-se para ele, então, uma boa perna-de-pau. Mas, assim, talvez por se ter sacolejado um pouco do juízo, ele nunca mais quer sair de casa, nem se levanta quase do catre, vive repetindo e dizendo: «Ái, quem tem dois tem um, que tem um não tem nenhum...» Todo o mundo ri. E isso é remorso? (Rosa, 2001: 233).

The decision to expose between to *narrate the war* or *narrate the important things* seems to suggest, furthermore stripped of importance to the memories of war, whose content is empty value, a difference that split with the memory of the notion of current reality, since that what remains in memory as trauma may be, or not, the war. It is undeniable, however, that violence is articulated with the problem of evil and, above all, fits as pain, something that occurs as

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3 | In “Além do Princípio do Prazer”, is both founded the idea of excess and the idea of fixation of a subject in the trauma, taken from Freud’s approach that “os históricos sofrem principalmente de reminiscências” (Freud, 1976: 24).

an excess³, which is always beyond representation and memories, because extension of all the suffered escapes from memory-Rosa, 2001: 418 leading to the ex-bandit to doubt the possibility of forgetting of what it relates to the evil:

Informação que pergunto: mesmo no Céu, fim de fim, como é que a alma vence se esquecer de tantos sofrimentos e maldades, no recebido e no dado? A como? O senhor sabe: há coisas de medonhas demais, tem. Dor do corpo e dor da idéia marcam forte, tão forte como o todo amor e raiva de ódio (Rosa, 2001: 37).

Mixed world, world in rebellion

The violence is going through the text altogether, bringing back the previous conflicts between the rural and urban, urban law and the custom of the Sertão. Violence in Rosa's text fits between traumatic experiences and the banal, fiction and history, and also between what should be remembered or forgotten. Critic José Miguel Wisnik indicates that the root of visible violence in the work of the writer is a specific issue of Brazilian culture, circumscribed around the double - or doubles - absence of law, and that it referred not only to random and the inadequacy in the basis of all law, but the absence of a law that "não faz felt sentido formação ancestral brasileira" (Wisnik, 2002: 184) and it deserves to be conceived, therefore, within its uniqueness.

In line with formulations of "ideas out of place", Roberto Schwarz (1977), and addressed contradictions in *roots Brazil* (Netherlands, 1995), there is something in the history of Brazil which is repeated and remains an enigma, "entre a violencia e a retorica" (Wisnik, 2002: 184), where attempt to establish a common law, able to impose limits on the brute force, live hand in hand with the *law of the strongest* of the Sertão: "Sertão. O senhor sabe: sertão é onde sends quem é forte, com as astúcias" (Rosa, 2001: 35).

The starting point of Wisnik is the tale of Guimarães Rosa 'Hungry', of *First Stories* (1988), in which violence - Unlike GSV- appears as no specific threat, but where again an outlaw of the Sertão, seeking counsel, city man, a sense that can clarify a word or an experience. The essay focuses on the question of the passage of the Sertão in the city, in the *absence of the law* of the Sertão *law that lack* in the Brazilian city, through (mis) understandings about the sense of the word *hungry*, which is the plot of the story.

The challenging question of Bandit Damázio - ranging from São ão Sierra to the city to interrogate the doctor, the narrator of the story, about the meaning of the word *hungry*, from a mindless servant of government--to note, with humor, the "armas desiguais" (Wisnik,

2002: 181) from one to the other: “um homem cuja linguagem é to da faca e a da bala esta suspenso pelo fio sutilíssimo de uma palavra, podendo no entanto, e qualquer momento, cair matando” (2002: 181). Established the triad between the bandit, the cultured man and government official, which is in sight here is the intermediate location of the intellectual and ideas in our history, between *power of the bullet* and political power, place that could be of mediation by common agreement, to provide the symbolic ground of a law able to ensure limits to barbarism.

The mourning begins with the light of the first and the last tale of the book, ‘The limits of joy’ (Rosa, 1988) and “Tops” (1988), in which, exceptionally, the rural scenery viewing by Rosa is reversed, and the main character, the child, travels to the “lugar onde se construía a grande cidade” (1988: 7), in a reference to the construction of Brasília inaugurated in 1960, two years before the publication of tales. The dialogue takes place, thus, on a stage situated in the Centre of the conflict, between all the contradictions that wrap the construction project, symbol of a modernization program that places the city at the heart of the interior of the country and makes it the seat of political power.

The choice of the field as the privileged setting, in the writings of Rosa, also shows a place where historically, from the Guerra Canudos, developed violent, involving numerous people conflicts, and it contrasts with our common image of “um caracter pacífico e ordeiro” (Grynspan, 2002: 154). The theme of those tales persists in GSV and, for Wisnik (2002), is a melancholy related to the *traumatic* from the archaic to the modern in our history, something not symbolized there, that would give rise to the *mixed, world* emerged precisely from the lament of Riobaldo in the hour of to define the pasture, i.e. separating good and evil (Pink, 2001: 237).

Mas o que se decanta nesses contos é mais um trabalho de luto, nem apologético nem saudosista, onde a saudade é mais funda e inclui o futuro —o desígnio irresolvido que persiste na mudança. A questão aqui não é a passagem sucessiva do arcaico ao moderno, mas a persistência de um no outro (Wisnik, 2002: 179).

Melancholy – take note - as well as GSV, “à qual não is entregam” (Wisnik, 2002: 179) characters, and that does not exclude the experience of joy, however, appears *in the margin*, or form *intermittent*, as the light of a firefly at the end of the tale, according to Wisnik (2002). In “Hungry”, Rosa treats with humor the ambiguity of the meaning of the word present in the source of all meaning, i.e., how can the use of a word result in opposite to its original sense, as proposed by Freud (1970; 1988). Ambiguity which associated to other contradictions of the Brazilian historical context remains unresolved duality. Since the

word removed from experience since our inception, slides, fragile, along a chain of associations: sei fasmisgerado... faz - me gerado... falmisgerado... familias-gerado... “ (Rosa, 1988: 15).

Nevertheless, however, attempting to attribute a neutral sense of the term to the eulogy, hidden possibly the negative sense which was pronounced: “ Famigerado? Bem. É: “important”, deserving louvor, respeito (1988: 16), the cultured man reiterates that (literal) state of things, in which the word happens to have the value of an ornament, stripped of practicality (Schwarz, 1977), intelligence becomes “decorative” (Netherlands, 1995: 84), and eloquence tells you the strongest wish to hear... Output in the form of a *formation of commitment*, found by intelligence in our historical past, in order to reconcile two opposing demands (escape alive from incident and clarify simple men, tell the truth), maintains the emphasis, in oblivion, implied violence of the situation, in a sort of parody of the history of our *ideas out of place*.

This formulation is, also, the concept developed by Lacan’s “forclusion” in the Name of the Father, of the instance of the law, of the psychotic structure, and (in simplified form) makes that word, to not enroll symbolically, return of reality to the form of delusions and hallucinations, leading to psychosis, to state that the word happens to be treated in its value of *thing* What are check, for example, the irreducible, opaque, certainty of delirious constructions (Lacan, 2008). Something close to what these sociological studies suggest: training of Brazilian culture, the value of the word moved to decorum, ornament; who dubious thinking of Damázio seems to indicate, as shows Wisnik, at the end of the story, reflecting on an extradition of authority, embodied in the government official: “ Sei lá, às vezes, mesmo melhor mesmo, pra esse do Governo era ir- se embora, sei não “ (Rosa, 1988: 17).

And yet, in the context of the *formation of the commitment* made by the ideas in our culture, Sérgio Buarque of Holland shows how the cordiality, *sweetness*, start developing a stroke of the national character from the sugar mills, bearing, in origin, the *stock* where mixed Iberian and african heritage, among slavery. In this light, the cordiality admits violence for not succumbing to it, hiding her (Netherlands, 1995: 61).

Stories that evoke Brasília, this symbolic non-meditation of the tongue, is perceived through the eyes of the child, between the world of nature and the arrival of civilization, between the “incessant joy” (Rosa, 1988: 9), the *transfer* of nature, in the “de muita largura “ (1988: 9) focused on the vision of Peru, and the discovery of the evil incarnate “no mundo maquinal, no hostil espaço” (1988: 10) in the working fields of the airport, “ entre o contentamento e a desilusão,

na balança infidelíssima, quase nada medeia” (1988: 10).

There would therefore be in the origin of the Brazilian social formation, a failure or absence of a symbolic , through the language of the mediation, he re-wrote a distinction in the experience, and, to not be held, again as violence in acts, not symbolized, that would lead to the law and crime, the police and the bandit, the public and private, to pass to be experienced alike, and to do that, still today, the law of the city closer to the *law of the jungle*...

‘The margins of joy’ (Rosa, 1988), violence of this passage, not symbolized in the collective, will be experienced subjectively by the child, as he points out Wisnik (2002), as “or unheard of shock” (Rosa, 1988: 11), trauma, in that it allows some order in excess, in that the surprise factor is preponderant and involves a break (Freud, 1976: 47), a division that here relates to the experience of cut trees:

Mostraram-lhe a derrubadora, que havia também: com à frente uma lâmina espessa, feito limpa-trilhos, à espécie de machado. Queria ver? Indicou-se uma árvore: simples, sem nem notável aspecto, à orla da área matagal. O homenzinho tratorista tinha um toco de cigarro na boca. A coisa pôs-se em movimento. Reta, até que devagar. A árvore, de poucos galhos no alto, fresca, de casca clara... e foi só o chofre: *ruh*... sobre o instante ela para lá se caiu, toda, toda. Trapeara tão bela. Sem nem se poder apanhar com os olhos o acerto —o inaudito choque— o pulso da pancada. O Menino fez ascas. Olhou o céu —atônito de azul. Ele tremia. A árvore, que morrera tanto (Rosa, 1988: 10-11).

Already in *GSV*, the absence of law is felt by Riobaldo as something that, is passing by a political authority, could mark a division, a limit capable of ensuring the *demon*, sign of chaos and the *mixture of the world*, does not exist:

Olhe: o que devia de haver, era de se reunirem-se os sábios, políticos, constituições gradas, fecharem o definitivo a noção —proclamar por uma vez, artes assembléias, que não tem diabo nenhum, não existe, não pode. Valor de lei! [...] Por que o Governo não cuida?! (Rosa, 2001: 31).

The *law of the strongest* of the Sertão appears summary in the indictment of the bandit during the trial of Zé Bebelo: “Lei jagunço é o momento [...]. “é a misericórdia de uma boa bala” (2001: 284). “Costume velho lei” (2001: 276), dictated by militarism, fruit of a set of political alliances between the great landowners and the heads of camps, is transmitted by Selorico Mendes to the protégé, Riobaldo:

Ah, a vida vera é outra, do cidadão do sertão. Política! Tudo política e potentes chefias [...] Mas, adiante, por aí arriba, ainda fazendeiro graúdo se reina mandador —todos donos de agregados valentes, turmas de cabras do trabuco e na carabina escopetada! (Rosa, 2001: 127-128).

The landowner teaches what in the *world in rebellion*, where the

standard is already born undermined, the bandits are “ordeiros” (2001: 128), responsible for maintaining balance at this intricate system, moving among those who mandate and those who obey, creating a *law there that is not there, helping to catch and dictating sentence* following an essentially personal authority. For example, the case of the brothers who join forces to kill the father who, before, had ordered the brothers that they kill each other. Prisoners of the bandits, the two have the forgiveness as the verdict of the then Chief Zé Bebelo, on the condition of having the drove of oxen not appropriated by the bandits. Already in the trial of Zé Bebelo, where each head gives its verdict, what is insinuating itself is a collectivization of the attempt to do justice, outlining the creation of a *third law*, an intermediary between the power of the bullet by local custom and law, distant and imposed by the government...

The same previous contradictions, simultaneously, shown in the project of Zé Bebelo put an end to the world of the bandits: “Dizendo de depois, estável abolisse o jaguncismo, e deputado fosse, então reluzia perfeito o Norte, botando pontes, baseando fabricas, remediando a saúde de todos preenchendo a pobreza” (2001: 147). The irony of trying to obtain peace through war, the proposal to exterminate bandits with government support - assimilating it to the Canudos Guerra, in which the Government troops were defeated three times before destroying the camp - note Bebelo after each victory in battle cry: “Viva a lei! “Viva a lei...!” (2001: 93).

In designing formally romance, projecting the design of the Sertão as a conversation,-where the Bandit speaks and the Lord listens – Guimarães Rosa brings back not only the dialogue that was lacking in Canudos⁴, but also symbolic as mediation absent in the origin of our culture, in an allegorical image that places these opponents in movement, in dialogue:

Na conversa entre o narrador sertanejo, o velho fazendeiro e ex-jagunço Riobaldo e seu visitante, um jovem doutor da cidade, são tematizados as diferenças, os conflitos e os choques culturais, mas também as interações, os diálogos e o trabalho de mediação (Bolle, 2004: 39-40).

In this dialogue is interesting to note, from the reading of *Brazil roots* (Netherlands, 1995) and “Hungry” (Wisnik, 2002) - just pointing to slavery as our *outstanding and intimate violence*, our past forgotten - how the term Lord, used from the beginning to the end in the novel, can also be conceived as a designation, in contrast with the Bandit, the slave, the ancestral *sinhô*, *Lord* of ingenuity and possessions, Patriarch of this *archaic task*, in the double connotation of the term, both *mythical* and *rudimentary* (Netherlands, 1995: 49; Bolle, 2004: 282-306). Is the way in which, after all this time, Riobaldo assumes the place of the *catrumanos*, possible descendants of former slave

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4 | Só faltou uma conversa”. With this sentence from the resident João de Régis about the lack of dialogue between the authorities and population from Arraial de Canudos, in the interior of Bahia, between 1896 y 1897 —that culminated in the slaughter of the inhabitants from Sertón and the destruction of 5.200 houses by the Brazilian army, after the defeat of the three expeditions— Willi Bolle begins his investigation about the *Gran Sertón* (Bolle, 2004: 17).

hidden by the Sertão, and turns to the *Lord* in the strange *language* that they speak: “Tudo isto para o senhor, meussenhor, não faz razão, nem adianta” (Rosa, 2001: 546).

To return to the substance of our Constitution as a country, in our *mirages of the origins*, the text moved both fantasies related to conceptions idealized on the origin and nature, and the illusions of modernity linked to the idea of a country of the future. In this sense, we can say that the GSV promotes a reminder of the “sonhos coletivos” (Bolle, 1994-1995: 92) of the country, through this waste of history. But, also, includes the awakening as something that becomes possible to “recordar aquilo que é mais proximo, banal mais, mais ao nosso alcance” (Benjamin, 2007: 434) rebuilding the past in its relationship with the present and the future.

In this way, on the one hand, the current criticism about *indiscriminate memory culture* leads us to think in the bait of a super-memory - as it anticipates Funes, *the memorious*, character in Jorge Luis Borges (2007)- the critical text of Rosa is present in the discussion about collective memory in Brazil (where the *ruin* comes before *construction*) and Latin America. Subsequently, in Brazil, the politics of forgetting the dictatorship were still in a play of forces other than the global context, and even equal in some Latin countries more advanced in the discussion, bringing the need for dialogue and contrary to the elimination of traces. It is also interesting to note that this partnership between oblivion produced by prominence and historical memory is already in the same Freud:

É universalmente reconhecido que, no tocante à origem das tradições e da história legendaria de um povo, é preciso levar em conta esse tipo de motivo, cuja meta é apagar da memória tudo o que talvez seja penoso para o sentimento nacional. (Freud, 1987: 137).

On this bias, the analysis of violence in the text of Rosa - located at the intersection between *the mixed world*, the *world in rebellion* and even the *unclean of madness*, of disobedience perceived by Medeiro Vaz, of the “impossível qualquer sossego, desde em quando aquele imundo de loucura subiu as serras e is espraiou us gerais” (Rosa, 2001: 60)- analysis of the violence is inserted, thus nowadays to awaken certain truths asleep for very trivial as they may appear to us, such as: “who controls the past, controls the future”⁵. And others, in fact, not *easy*, but that seems equally *intimate* to the Brazilian context, such as the idea of Marx that history repeats itself “a first time ever as tragedy” - in the *absence of law* of the Sertão violence - “e a segunda como farsa” (Marx, s/d)-in the *law of the jungle*, today, in major cities. But, above all, the text outlines as possibility of mediation and symbolization, insinuate and occupy the intermediate space between critique and the utopia of the creation of a *third law*,

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5 | Sentence from Orwell in 1984, that is also the epigraph in *Lo que queda de Dictadura*, written by Edson Teles and Vladimir Safate (Teles, E.; Safate, V., 2010).

built through a partnership with the participation of all segments involved.

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