



## **SOCIAL CRITICISM OF THE MILITARY DICTATORSHIP AND ITS REPRESENTATION OF GENERATIONS THROUGH MPB (BRAZILIAN POPULAR MUSIC)**

### **A CRÍTICA SOCIAL DA DITADURA MILITAR E SUA REPRESENTAÇÃO DAS GERAÇÕES POR MEIO DO MPB (MÚSICA POPULAR BRASILEIRA)**

### **CRÍTICA SOCIAL A LA DICTADURA MILITAR Y SU REPRESENTACIÓN DE GENERACIONES A TRAVÉS DE LA MPB (MÚSICA POPULAR BRASILEÑA)**



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#### **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the role of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship as a regime that oppressed freedom of expression, with a focus on repression and censorship applied to the artistic and musical field. It seeks to investigate the importance of Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) as a form of resistance and social denunciation, linking the authoritarian past to the contemporary relevance of freedom of expression. We conducted qualitative and quantitative research, including group discussions, analysis of song lyrics with historical background on artists, the use of surveys, and the study of censored works. The project was structured in two main stages: the first focused on the analysis of censorship practices and the repressive methods of the regime; the second examined emblematic songs such as “Apesar de Você” (Chico Buarque, 1970) and “Cálice” (Chico Buarque and Gilberto Gil, 1973), aiming to uncover their underlying messages and the political context of their creation. The results indicate that, despite severe repression, music established itself as an effective tool of contestation. The lyrics analyzed reveal the transformative role of MPB, which functioned as a coded means of communication to express criticism of the regime and mobilize society. The research highlights the importance of preserving the memory of this period in order to reflect on the resilience of art and the risks inherent to censorship. It is concluded that Brazilian music during the Military Dictatorship transcended its aesthetic role to become a vital political expression. The study reiterates the importance of protecting freedom of expression and democratic rights, while also emphasizing the capacity of art to resist and denounce in

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contexts of oppression. This work contributes to the understanding of music as both a historical record and an ongoing tool for critical awareness.

**Keywords:** MPB. Dictatorship. Censorship. Brazil. Military.

## RESUMO

O presente estudo analisa o papel da Ditadura Militar no Brasil como regime opressor da liberdade de expressão, com foco na repressão e censura aplicadas ao campo artístico-musical. Propõe-se investigar a importância da Música Popular Brasileira (MPB) como forma de resistência e denúncia social, conectando o passado autoritário à relevância contemporânea da liberdade de expressão. Realizamos pesquisas de abordagem qualitativa e quantitativa, incluindo discussões em grupo, análise de letras de canções com levantamento histórico de artistas, aplicação de forms e estudo de obras censuradas. O trabalho foi estruturado em duas etapas principais: a primeira concentrou-se na análise do contexto de censura e nos métodos repressivos do regime; a segunda consistiu no exame de canções emblemáticas, como "Apesar de Você" (Chico Buarque, 1970) e "Cálice" (Chico Buarque e Gilberto Gil, 1973), buscando desvendar suas mensagens subentendidas e o contexto político de sua criação. Os resultados indicam que, apesar da forte repressão, a música consolidou-se como ferramenta eficaz de contestação. As letras analisadas revelam o papel transformador da MPB, que funcionou como meio de comunicação codificado para expressar críticas ao regime e mobilizar a sociedade. A pesquisa reforça a necessidade de preservar a memória desse período para refletir sobre a resiliência da arte e os riscos inerentes à censura. Conclui-se que a música brasileira, durante a Ditadura Militar, transcendeu seu papel estético para se tornar manifestação política vital. O estudo reitera a importância de proteger a liberdade de expressão e os direitos democráticos, ao mesmo tempo que evidencia a capacidade da arte de resistir e denunciar em contextos de opressão. Este trabalho contribui para o entendimento da música como registro histórico e ferramenta contínua de conscientização crítica.

**Palavras-chave:** MPB. Ditadura. Censura. Brasil. Militares.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio analiza el papel de la Dictadura Militar Brasileña como régimen que oprimió la libertad de expresión, centrándose en la represión y la censura aplicadas al ámbito artístico y musical. Su objetivo es investigar la importancia de la Música Popular Brasileña (MPB) como forma de resistencia y denuncia social, conectando el pasado autoritario con la relevancia contemporánea de la libertad de expresión. Realizamos una investigación cualitativa y cuantitativa, que incluyó discusiones grupales, análisis de letras de canciones con un estudio histórico de artistas, aplicación de formas y estudio de obras censuradas. El trabajo se estructuró en dos etapas principales: la primera se centró en analizar el contexto de la censura y los métodos represivos del régimen; la segunda consistió en examinar canciones emblemáticas, como "Apesar de Você" (Chico Buarque, 1970) y "Cálice" (Chico Buarque y Gilberto Gil, 1973), buscando desentrañar sus mensajes subyacentes y el contexto político de su creación. Los resultados indican que, a pesar de la severa represión, la música se consolidó como una herramienta eficaz de protesta. Las letras analizadas revelan el papel transformador de la MPB, que funcionó como un medio de comunicación codificado para expresar críticas al régimen y movilizar a la sociedad. La investigación refuerza la necesidad de preservar la memoria de este período para reflexionar sobre la resiliencia del arte y los riesgos inherentes a la censura. Concluye que la música brasileña, durante la Dictadura Militar, trascendió su función estética para convertirse en una manifestación política vital. El estudio reitera la importancia de proteger la libertad de expresión y los derechos democráticos, a la vez que destaca la capacidad del arte para



resistir y denunciar en contextos de opresión. Este trabajo contribuye a la comprensión de la música como registro histórico y herramienta continua para la conciencia crítica.

**Palabras clave:** MPB. Dictadura. Censura. Brasil. Militar.



## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Military Dictatorship in Brazil was an extensive period that lasted approximately 21 years (1964-1985), characterized by high levels of censorship and repression. The fuse of this regime occurred during the government of João Goulart, who assumed the presidency through a coup d'état in 1964. However, the most severe peaks of censorship and repression were recorded during the administration of Emílio Garrastazu Médici, which marked the beginning of the so-called "years of lead". This was the most violent period of the dictatorship, characterized by torture, murders, forced disappearances, and intense media censorship, which predominated from 1969 to 1974, accompanied by the expansion of DOI-CODI, an organ of political repression. In this context, it was observed not only the expansion of the activities of the DOI-CODI, but also the enactment of AI5, which established one of the most severe regimes among all constitutional acts, affecting artists, writers, filmmakers and playwrights. The repression targeted any work that criticized the regime or addressed themes considered "subversive". To circumvent the constant surveillance of the censors, the artists resorted to subliminal messages, hiding criticism of the regime in their works. Songs such as "Despite You" (Chico Buarque, 1970) and "Cálice" (Chico Buarque and Gilberto Gil, 1973) are emblematic examples of this resistance. Thus, music became a space of resistance and a symbol of the struggle for freedom of expression, even under the intense surveillance of the military regime. In this scenario, Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) assumed a role of great cultural and political relevance. As Napolitano (2014) and Schwarcz & Starling (2015) point out, MPB emerged in the 1960s as an artistic movement capable of dialoguing with the country's social and political transformations, uniting elements of the Brazilian musical tradition with international influences, such as jazz and rock. Through song festivals and the university space, MPB has consolidated itself as a vehicle for contestation and criticism, bringing together intellectuals, students and youth engaged in resistance movements. Authors such as Tinhorão (1998) and Wisnik (2004) emphasize that the music of this period functioned not only as an artistic expression, but also as a form of collective memory and denunciation, challenging the silencing mechanisms imposed by the authoritarian State. Therefore, understanding the importance of MPB during the Military Dictatorship means recognizing its role as an aesthetic language and instrument of social mobilization, capable of articulating political discourses in the midst of censorship. This perspective is fundamental for historical and cultural analyses, since it shows how art can become a space of resistance, reaffirming identities and strengthening the struggle for democracy.



## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of the relationship between the Military Dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985) and the censorship applied to artistic manifestations is supported by extensive academic production. Schwarcz and Starling (2015) characterize this period as one of the most authoritarian in national history, marked by political repression, persecution of opponents, and systematic control of culture. In this context, censorship has consolidated itself as a central silencing mechanism, aimed at restricting speeches considered threatening to the current order. According to Rui Barbosa (1952, p. X), "all revolutions of popular vertigo were shipwrecked in dictatorship", emphasizing that regimes of force tend to stifle the democratic impulse and delegitimize popular aspirations. Gaspari (2002) complements this view by showing that, during the so-called "years of lead", especially under the Medici government, there was an intensification of state violence, the monitoring of the arts and the intimidation of artists, resulting in an environment of fear and self-censorship. In this sense, Rui Barbosa (1947, p. X) states that:

"Military regimes, in turn, engage in a precarious life. However, they would never be able to impose a certain order with such violence. However, they cannot serve as a reference for human actions for an attempt at a false hope of 'democratic' power organization."

In the musical field, Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) took on prominence as a form of symbolic contestation. Napolitano (2014) points out that music, due to its wide circulation and popular appeal, has become one of the main vehicles of cultural resistance to the regime. Songs composed by artists such as Chico Buarque, Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso presented, through metaphors and implicit messages, social and political criticism that challenged the mechanisms of surveillance. Wisnik (2004) reinforces this perspective by stating that the MPB of the period not only expressed collective feelings, but also acted as a space for memory, denunciation and reflection, articulating political discourses in the aesthetic form of the song. The understanding of art as an instrument of cultural resistance finds support in classical theorists. Benjamin (1987) argues that the work of art can break with the official discourse, configuring itself as an alternative historical record. This conception dialogues with the analyses of Tinhorão (1998), who recognizes the social function of popular music as a means of representing the social and political reality experienced by the population. Thus, MPB stood out for translating, in aesthetic language, the political tensions of the dictatorship, preserving cultural identities and strengthening democratic values. Thus, the theoretical framework that sustains this study evidences censorship as a systematic practice of the military regime and music as a privileged field of resistance. The contributions



of Schwarcz and Starling (2015), Gaspari (2002), Napolitano (2014), Tinhorão (1998), Wisnik (2004) and Rui Barbosa (1947; 1952) allow us to understand how MPB went beyond its aesthetic dimension to assume a political, historical and social role, becoming an essential tool in the fight against oppression and in the defense of freedom of expression.

**Figure 1**

*Brazilian artists during the period of the Military Dictatorship*



Source: Unidentified photographer. Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso in exile in London, 1969. Black and white photography.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

The present work was developed by students of the 1st and 2nd year of High School at Colégio Objetivo São Pedro, located in the municipality of Tupã/SP, with the purpose of analyzing music as a form of expression, contestation and resistance in the face of the military dictatorship in Brazil. To this end, a qualitative and quantitative approach was adopted, based on discussions, reflections, analysis of musical productions of the time and research carried out with students and teachers of the Colégio Objetivo de Tupã/SP. The research was structured in two complementary stages. In the first, we carried out a bibliographic and reflective survey on the period of the Brazilian Military Dictatorship, with emphasis on the censorship imposed by the government and its impacts on freedom of artistic expression. In the second stage, emblematic compositions of Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) were selected, such as "Despite You" (Chico Buarque, 1970) and "Cálice" (Chico Buarque and Gilberto Gil, 1973), which were analyzed considering the historical context, the implicit messages and the



role of metaphors in the social criticism of the current regime. After collecting and analyzing the material, the study was finalized and revised in order to contribute to the understanding of the impact of censorship and social criticism represented by MPB in the period of the military dictatorship. In addition, it sought to promote reflections on the relevance of art as a form of political and cultural resistance, establishing relationships between the historical past and its importance for the present day.

#### **4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Most of the survey participants (51.9%) are between 14 and 25 years old, while only 2.6% are between 66 and 85 years old, which shows that most did not live through the military dictatorship, but only heard about it.

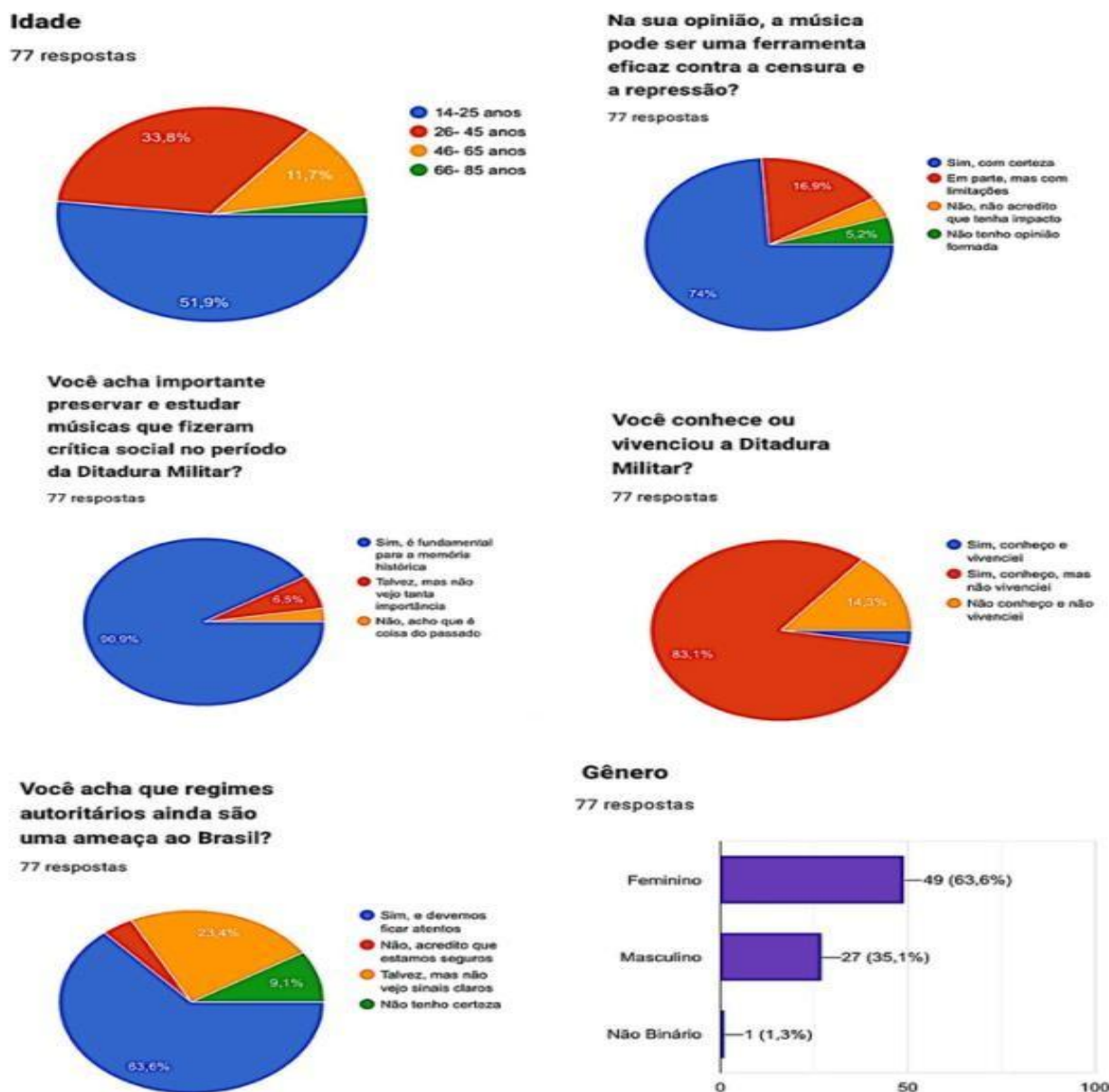
Even so, 83.1% said they knew this period of history, even without having experienced it directly.

Regarding the risk of the return of authoritarian regimes, 63.6% believe that this threat still exists and that it is necessary to maintain vigilance. Only 3.9% consider the country totally safe, while another 23.4% see the possibility with uncertainty, and 9.1% did not know how to give an opinion. These data reveal a significant concern with democracy, even among the youngest. Music stood out as an element of resistance: for 74% of the participants, it is an effective tool against censorship and repression. Another 16.9% partially agree, recognizing limitations, while a minority (3.9%) do not believe in its impact. As for the preservation of social criticism songs produced during the dictatorship, 90.9% consider this fundamental for the country's historical memory.

Only 6.5% think that these works belong to the past and do not need to be kept alive. The results show that, even without having lived through this period, young people recognize the importance of remembering, reflecting and valuing forms of resistance such as music, which help to keep memory alive and strengthen democracy.

**Figure 2**

*Results of searches made on forms*



Source: Research carried out on google Forms about the Military Dictatorship and MPB with students and teachers of Colégio Objetivo de Tupã – SP. Luiza Buzzinaro Vieira, Amanda Gössler Fernandez, Gabrielle Rezende dos Santos and Isadora Aparecida Santos Silva. Posted on August 12, 2025.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The Military Dictatorship in Brazil represented one of the most tense periods in our history, marked by censorship, repression and silencing of artistic expressions. Through the analysis of emblematic compositions of Brazilian Popular Music, such as "Despite You" and "Cálice", it was possible to understand how art served as a form of resistance and denunciation against the injustices of the regime. Even under intense surveillance, artists found ways to express their criticisms, contributing to the preservation of collective memory. As we reflect on this past, we recognize the importance of valuing freedom of expression and





remaining vigilant in the face of any threat to human rights and democracy. Art, therefore, remains a powerful tool for social transformation.

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