

Text and books censorship: different contexts, ways of censoring, and resisting¹

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Abstract: The article analyzes censorship, problematizing its nature, legal and semantic unfoldings, and how different meanings of censorship were operationalized in material and symbolic actions. The work dialogues with other studies, such as those from Robert Darnton, who discussed the complexity of defining censorship and an ethnography of censorship during the Bourbon's France (18th century), British India under colonization (19th and early 20th centuries), and communist East Germany during the Cold War (20th century). Furthermore, it dialogues with investigations in Brazil conducted by Abreu (2003) about the censor court in Colonial Brazil and by Paiva (1996), who investigated the Catholic censorship of novels in the early 20th century. For a current analysis, the article discusses newspaper articles about the censorship theme, indicating cultural and social phenomena that lead to the "burn" of contemporary works and some new ways of control in digital society. The study concludes that censorship is contradictory, representing interests and regimes of truth, though, at the same time, existing legal and cultural ways of resisting its effects. Hence, the interests of censors or regimes confront readers themselves, the diversity of ways to disseminate texts, the world of editors, and the different systems of truth.

Keywords: censorship, resistance, books, texts.

1 Introduction: book-burning as a symbolic and material action².

Now you were planning to introduce them to Kafka, Cervantes, James Baldwin, Virginia Woolf and Toni Morrison. After that night, anything was possible. And that was keeping you off the edge. You didn't even notice when the bright red beam of a police car shone on the walls of the building in front of you. You didn't even notice the police car fast approaching, and you also didn't notice when it stopped. You only realized what was happening when one of the cops yelled you to stop. You were a suspect.

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Your mind was still in the classroom, still with Dostoevsky. He yelled at you to stop. He yelled at you to get against the wall (Tenório, 2020, p. 147).

I start this article with a quote from the work “The Dark Side of Skin” [*O Averso da Pele*, in Portuguese] (2020), which denounces racism. The book excerpt shows a moment in the narrative in which the character retells his father’s story, a teacher, who dreamed of introducing diverse literature works to his students. Amongst the authors are Dostoevsky and Toni Morrison, who, together with others, are part of the list of prohibited books by conservative groups in the United States. As other works denouncing racism, including Toni Morrison, conservative groups censored titles in other countries; for instance, the book “The Dark Side of Skin” (2020) was the object of censorship and polemic in some Brazilian states in 2024.³

The censorship theme is central in the book “Censors at Work” (2016) by the researcher Darnton (2016). Several Brazilian researchers have investigated or dealt with the theme in Brazil, such as Paiva (1996), who investigated the Catholic censorship of novels, and Abreu (2003), who studied the role of the Portuguese censorship court. Recently, a work defended by Petrovitch (2023) at *Faculdade de Educação da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais* (UFMG) researched the censorship of children and young adult books. Several journalistic articles were published in Brazil denouncing the different ways of censoring books, which shows that, though a democratic country, different forms of conservative movements have been resurrecting censorship. In this text, I aim to dialogue with concepts and forms of censorship in the past and nowadays, seeking to understand their workings and the resistance against them.

I start with some data about book burning collected through research conducted in some articles and news reports. This ritual highlights one of the most striking symbolic and material actions that build, at each moment, practices and representations about censorship.

The Spanish Inquisition burned 5,000 Arabic manuscripts in Granada in 1499, and Spanish conquistadors burned all the sacred texts of the Maya in 1562. Luther’s translation of the Bible went up in flames in Catholic parts of Germany in the 1640s, and in the 1730s the Archbishop of Salzburg oversaw the burning of every Protestant book and Bible that could be got hold of. The communists burned untold numbers of decadent western books and writings in the Soviet Union from the 1920s on, and several American libraries burned the works of supposedly pro-Communist authors during the McCarthy era.

More recently, Orthodox Jews in Jerusalem burned copies of the New Testament in 1984; Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses* was ceremonially burned in Bolton and Bradford in 1988; Harry Potter books have been burned in the US on various occasions since their first publication; and in Rome they burned *The Da Vinci Code*. Besides individual titles, whole libraries have been razed to the ground, some more

³ The theme of contemporary censorship to literature works will be discussed in another topic in this text.

than once: Alexandria in Egypt (by lots of people); Washington (by the British); Louvain (by the Germans); Sarajevo and, most recently, Baghdad. (Henley, 2010, n/p).

Another example of book-burning shows how Nazism operated by recruiting students and intellectuals from several universities to “purify” German literature and how the burning would be a ritual in which other actions and apparatus were present (Enciclopédia do Holocausto, n.d., n/p.).

During the dictatorial regimes in Latin America, for instance, in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, military censorship was implemented through torture, arrests, and the prohibition of books, music, and the press. They also implemented book-burning acts, as the one reported in Chile, when a military court, headed by the dictator Augusto Pinochet, would burn or remove sociological literature and works considered to be left-leaning from libraries and shelves, in a campaign to eradicate the “Marxist cancer” (Wikipédia⁴, n.d., n/p.). Most book burns took place after the invention of the press, even though there were several episodes of manuscript burning. In our opinion, the invention of the press and a way to reproduce more widely what one was thinking through paper are factors that make ideas more “visible” and, therefore, demand more control. A brief analysis of book-burnings and their supposed motivations reveals that it is carried out by groups that feel threatened, be it regarding their culture, territory, religion, or truth regimes. The burning of individual books and libraries is a sign of conflicts between more than one truth regime. The burning serves political, religious, and cultural regimes, and historically, the institutions are churches, parties, regimes, and their agents can be the police, priests, social groups, and even common people.

When studying censorship, we can perceive that it is established when truth regimes are disputed. Which religion? Which political regime or Party? Which moral behavior? Which race? They all involve power relations that justify censorship, thus keeping symbolic and/or material domains.

About censorship, we should ask: Which books? The literary ones? The didactic ones? The scientific ones? The press? Most works we read permeate literary and artistic productions, such as novels. However, when investigating the theme, we perceive that censorship is also against other types of books and printed materials, such as revolutionary leaflets, encyclopedias, music, plays, scripts, and their staging. In the relationship between censorship and the history of books and reading, we refer to the prohibition and the social, political, cultural, and economic scenario that allow or halt texts, not just books, to circulate.

Censorship works following certain social conditions. Its support and resistance against it depend on social conditions that make a given text circulate, be in the conditions to

⁴ To write this text, I used well-known sources, such as news articles, and scientific books and articles based on studies. The use of Wikipedia aimed to broaden the perspective on contemporary representations involving the censorship phenomenon.

orally reproduce it; be it in the creation of ways to greater reproduce the writings, as shown by the invention of the press; be it in the almost endless possibilities that several groups and people start having when they can have a voice – for better or worse- to defend, accuse, or outlaw certain texts.

An emblematic letter, reproduced by Darnton (2010) - from Niccolo Perotti to Francesco Guarerio in 1471 – shows the fears that emerged in an era of change in the regime of text reproduction.

My dear Francesco, I have lately kept praising the age in which we live, because of the great, indeed divine gift of the new kind of writing which was recently brought to us from Germany. In fact, I saw a single man printing in a single month as much as could be written by hand by several persons in a year. [...]. It was for this reason that I was led to hope that within a short time we should have such a large quantity of books that there wouldn't be a single work which could not be procured because of lack of means or scarcity. [...]. Yet – oh false and too human thoughts – I see that things turned out quite differently from what I hoped. Because now that anyone is free to print whatever they wish, they often disregard what is best and instead write merely for the sake of entertainment, what would best be forgotten, or, better still be erased from all books. And even when they write something worthwhile they twist it and corrupt it to the point where it would be much better to do without such books, rather than having a thousand copies spreading falsehoods over the whole world (Darnton, 2010, p. 15).

The letter transports us to a moment in which things are out of control, and the possibility of producing, disseminating, and circulating written materials escape the vigilance of some institution, such as the Church or other powers, when the movable types are created. Any similarity with the present is no coincidence because nowadays we do not need an institution, such as the critics, nor do we need to suffer the effects of institutionalized selection through moral, political, cultural, or commercial reasons over what is published. We call upon a recent episode in the Brazilian South region when an enraged mayor recorded herself throwing books from a school archive in the garbage. This episode widely resonated in social networks through the viralization process, leading the public prosecutor's office in her city to investigate the action that certainly caused institutional repercussions.

What would be the meanings of censorship among censorships, controls, and regulations done to handwritten texts, printed materials, and the so-called freedom of expression? This is a hard question to answer, and we need to understand the nuances of the terms and their associated actions.

In his book “Censors at Work” (2016), Darnton reflects on the difficulty of considering and conceptualizing censorship that encompasses the most public one, which reverberates in the publication prohibition and book burning promoted by the State, churches, or political

parties, those that take place in the backstage and its interdiction, up to the censorship related to everyday micro relations. According to Darnton, if the concept is overly expanded, it loses its specificity, thus hindering the approach of the theme. The same author affirms that, in a study review about the theme in the last 100 years, there are two main tendencies: “[...] a story of the struggle between freedom of expression and the attempts to repress it by political and religious authorities; on the other, an account of constraints of every kind that inhibit communication” (Darnton, 2016, p. 13). About freedom of expression, he gives the example of the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, which is for the judicialization of this right in court.

2 Semantic resonances in dialogue with censorship acts

Inspired by the etymology of censorship, interdiction, and prohibition, we sought answers in some studies that depended on the nature of censorship and how it operates subtly or institutionalized. The term amalgamates several semantic resonances. Searching in Portuguese for the word censorship (*censura*) in a dictionary of synonyms, the following terms appear:

Moral, political, and/or religious criticism

1 – Critique, commentary, analysis, appraisal, exam, judgment.

Prohibition or restriction

2 – Restriction, condemnation, control, disapproval, disagreement, prohibition, repression.

Reprimand

3 – Admonition, warning, scolding, reproach, rebuke, monitoring, objection, reprimand.

People that censor

4 – Commission of censors, censors (DICIONÁRIO DE SINÔNIMOS, n.d., n/p.).

Following the path raised by this entry, we would have, for example, the moral criticism that, in a way, follows the didactic and literature books. When literature is connected with the school, the apology for edifying texts based on a specific moral and civility is well known. In Brazil, the movement of bringing to school edifying works established/shaped access to school reading until the mid-20th century and continues, even with the emergence of new ways to make literature for children.

Opposed to the edifying readings, there is a fertile ground supported by the growth of the periodical press, political propaganda leaflets, and the existence of publishing and printing companies that, as institutions, allow for a literary production that emerges, for instance, with the philosophical, political movements of laicity, naturalism as a literary genre,

and materialism, which, according to Paiva (1996), would justify the existence of Catholic censorship in Brazil in the early 20th century.

In the second meaning, prohibition and restriction have legal implications or the power of the state and the military, which allows control, repression, and condemnation. In which moments did we live under these constraints, risking our own life or freedom? Reading and circulation of ideas are considered dangerous in authoritarian and dictatorial regimes.

Darnton's (2016) work is fundamental for understanding censorship as it evidences an ethnography of censors' practices in several times and regimes: in the Bourbon's France (18th century), in British India with the colonizers' control (19th century and early 20th century), and in the Eastern communist Germany during the Cold War (20th century).

From his studies, we can see that control starts with following a certain production, the institutionalization of regulation by creating the position of censors or instances that compile, list, like, or dislike texts, registering their opinions in catalogs, dossiers, or annuals. The censors and their teams deal with the works' contents and style aspects, reinforcing only one way of thinking about the world. Their actions are materialized in incentives to approaches that praise a regime, creating, since its production, a guide on the themes that reinforce an ideology. This was done in Eastern Germany, which incentivized books and movies that praised the revolutionary regime and unveiled imperialism. In this case, the control was done through style aspects and by the self-censorship incentivized since the production project: the well-built characters needed to represent the proletarian thought; the novels that presented an evil society regarding habits and ideas were placed in capitalist countries. In the case of Eastern Germany, the Party also induced the production of oral texts, authorizing intellectuals to cross the borders so that they could, during their conferences outside the country, denounce the military and weapon domain undertaken by the North American government.

In the three cases discussed by Darnton (2016), the censorship phenomenon gains stronger nuances and changes direction when the press, writers, and groups oppressed by a regime start reacting and creating barriers to a given truth regime. In this offensive against resistance movements, regulation focuses on actions, such as police investigations, espionage, interdictions, and trials, to provide the illusion of civility. For instance, in India's case, the British empire's censorship started with a state of alert and vigilance to better understand the natives as a precaution, with no explicit prohibition. The situation changed when, according to the colonizers, the books started confronting a race against the other and the Europeans against the natives.

In the meaning of control, we have censorship through access. Abreu's (2003) works on the actions of the Portuguese censorship court show that, when the books were not printed in colonial Brazil and needed to be imported, the requests had to go through this type of con-

trol. According to the author, there was “an effort from the metropole to control the access to instruction and books, as forms to keep them subordinated to it” (Abreu, 2003, p. 348.)

Censorship is contradictory and, depending on the context, texts and books are considered good or bad. The novel *Indigo* was accepted during one phase in India and condemned in another. In the current context, including Brazil, certain works that were part of official programs and libraries have started to be banned by some societal sectors that, amidst a conservative furor, evident moralist and denialism claims, and under a morality veil, say that the books are not adequate to a given age or that raise problems that should not be discussed with children and young people.

In other situations, regardless of federal policies and laws that defend the right to expression, groups, municipalities, or states fight for the removal of some books or simply take them from an archive. An example took place in 2024 when Tarcísio de Freitas’s (2024) government, in the state of São Paulo, removed from the school virtual library the book “*Cartas para a minha avó*” [Letters to my grandmother], from the philosopher Djamila Ribeiro, which approaches racism, feminism, and Afro-Brazilian religions. The government alleged that it was a work of “sensitive content”.⁵

Similar to other international legislations from other democratic countries, the Brazilian Constitution deals with freedom of expression in its 5th article: “IX – the expression of intellectual, artistic, scientific, and communication activity is free, irrespective of censorship or license” (Brasil, 1988, s/p). Article 220 reiterates this principle, reinforcing that any type of censorship is forbidden.

Article 220. The manifestation of thought, the creation, the expression and the information, in any form, process or medium shall not be subject to any restriction, with due regard to the provisions of this Constitution.

§ 1º [...]. § 2º Any kind of censorship of a political, ideological and artistic nature is forbidden. (Brasil, 1988, 192).

Even with constitutional principles, the contradiction involved in censorship acts can even lead to disputes between legislations and the disrespect of federal laws. In the case of the attempt to censor texts using neutral language, in 2024, Alexandre Moraes, Minister of the Brazilian Federal Court, received complaints from two institutions: the *Aliança Nacional LGBTI+* (ALIANÇA) and the *Associação Brasileira de Famílias Homotransafetivas* (ABRAFH). The justification is that those prohibitions would harm the constitutional principles and the human rights. The minister decided to suspend two municipal laws that pro-

⁵ This news was broadly disseminated in the media and can be found in different sources, such as: Djamila Ribeiro: Governo Tarcísio remove livro da biblioteca virtual escolar de SP. Accessed May 31, 2024 and Gestão Tarcísio tira obra de Djamila de app escolar - 16/05/2024 - Educação - Folha. Accessed January 20, 2025.

hibited using and teaching neutral language in public administration and public and private schools. He claimed that the municipalities violated principles of federal legislation, but there are still several lawsuits with the same theme in different cities. His report indicates that

In this context, the municipalities do not have the legislative competence to edit rules that deal with curriculum, syllabus, teaching methodologies, or ways to teach. The eventual need to supplement the federal legislation to regulate the local interest would never justify the prohibition of pedagogical content (Vivas, 2024, n/p.).

In the third meaning, repression and warning, there are lighter sentences but that affect production and access, such as those emerging from reprimands of symbolic warnings, for instance, by the literary criticism or religious discourses on the best reading. In this sense, we find the indications of a better reading to combat another considered inadequate, with editorial warnings, such as those informing “reading only for men” as in the late 19th century in Rio de Janeiro (El Far, 2004).

In the book “*Páginas de sensação*” [Sensation pages] (2004), written by El Far (2004), about popular and pornographic works that circulated in Rio de Janeiro, the author discusses the nature of books, their publishing, reception, and the various warning discourses. Analyzing some cases, she concluded that Brazil “ [...] framed its dilemmas in the scope of public morality” (El Far, 2004, p. 189), and the representations with which she works highlight the idea of warning that reinforces the social and religious character of prohibition and not its political or legal aspect. The press is used as a source to move between the condemnation of these popular works and the irony. The same author found in the magazine *Época*, a text by a journalist, who signed as Pierrot, written in 1875. It is a chronicle about the confession made by a priest who ironizes the literature forbidden to women and their strategies to read the works. Let us see the supposed confession scene:

- And who gives you these books?
- My husband.
- Your own husband?
- Yes, father. He starts to read at night but soon falls asleep, leaving the candle lit: I skip from bed with my nightgown...
- My daughter, respect the confessional booth: these paintings are not for the cloister...
- I’m sorry, Father, I leave the bed with my feet on the ground, throw myself on the sofa, take a book, and read until morning...
- But these books should not conciliate with your sleep, on the contrary...leave these readings, my daughter: burn these books to save your soul and your husband’s soul... What else do you accuse yourself of, my daughter?
- Nothing else, father. (El Far, 2004, p. 186).

Another example of censorship with warning is explored by Paiva (1996) when studying Catholic censorship in Brazil in the early 20th century. The author used as a source the censorship manual of Friar Sinzig called "*Através dos romances: guia para as consciências*" [Through novels: guide for consciences] published in 1915. She analyzed 6.657 entries out of 21,553. Similarly to what the Church did in Europe, the manual shows strategies to ban novels and indicate edifying works. The edifying themes that would make good reading – mainly those that could be accessed by women, beings with a supposed vocation for the private space, for the home, and to educate new generations -are opposed to the themes presented in novels that could corrupt moral and good habits. According to Paiva (1997), the banned themes were connected to naturalism in literature, crimes, suicides, free love, and adultery. When analyzing the entries, the author presents what would be the object of intolerance: cheap love, excessive love, anticlericalism, divorce, adultery, crimes, and suicides (Paiva, 1997). In this case, the discourse by Friar Sinzig did not oppose the sacred to the reading of novels but incentivized Catholicism itself in the field of novels.

In a way, censorship would also dialogue with control and the power to edit and disseminate material. Nowadays, these conditions have changed a lot due to the technical capacity of production and circulation for anyone who wishes to do anything. However, we cannot say that the criteria of symbolic control are not taking place.

Regarding the power over editing and circulation, we have endless examples from the primacy of colonialist thought, which reaches us through white European literature and less emphasis on Black, feminine, African, and Asian literature, up to the linguistic barriers that make us rely on translation to access works, which is under transformation due to the influences of the editorial market. In this case, advancing the rights and social movements brings opposition or contradiction. In recent years, several authors from other continents, such as Africa, have had their works circulated in Brazil.

There is also censorship through the indications and literary criticism that dispute the canon and the popular taste, as the criticism against the best sellers, most of the time, when some generational groups started to read an author or a work voraciously. The resistance of readers occurs through consumption, and the changes in the symbolic position of specific authors in the editorial market also show the role of other instances, such as media and transmedia actions, which transform best sellers into films, what makes readers go from films to books, despite instances, such as literary criticism.

In the fourth meaning network, we find the agency of some subjects and institutions: who censors? How do they censor? There are moments of explicit censorship, such as the organization of institutions like censorship courts, index, and positions connected to them, which would have the role of censor and penalize those who resist it. There is also censorship of groups or people and those veiled or hidden.

3 Moral censorship to works in contemporary time

Seeking to discover how censorship works nowadays, we analyzed some discourses about works that were the object of censorship: news, scientific articles, technical notes, and journalist articles that portray different voices that legitimize and delegitimize the presence of certain works.

We can identify several conservative waves that reach us in the 21st century, while we can say that society has advanced and that written texts and their nature have changed. Hence, what was banned at a given time is recognized nowadays by its literary quality, becoming classics that coexist with contemporary literature. Literature is a space in which the human condition, with its dilemmas and contradictions, can be broadly discussed from a fictional universe. However, as in the past, censorship towards works for children and young people reemerges and surprises us, based on what is considered inadequate by some sectors of society.

Where do these censorships emerge? Would they be echoing institutional positions, such as the State and the Church? On the contrary, would they be in an individual level that incorporates collective moral and institutional precepts? With what strategies do they operate? Would they favor or work based on which causes? What positions are under dispute? Would they be writers and publishing companies against educational groups? Would that be the politics of the book versus the appropriation of these works by schools and families?

I start with an example of a list of books banned by families or churches in a country considered to be democratic: the United States of America. In an article published by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News, in 2023, entitled “Why is the US banning children’s books? [in Portuguese, *Os livros infantis que estão sendo banidos nos EUA*] (Ciabattari, 2023)[4]. It is incredible to see the discrepancy between consecrated works by the public or by literary institutions and those listed as prohibited titles.

Among the several factors that explain a list of banned books are those that represent the reaction to diversity, LGBTQIAPN+ movements, and themes that unveil ills such as discrimination and prejudice. According to some people interviewed in the article, some associations of parents and religious groups, which are not the majority, make noise and, based on the general repercussion, create movements and even laws that justify the removal of books in some American places and states. A book censored since 1996 is the awarded “The Golden Compass”, by the British writer Philip Pullman, considered atheist by censors.

The article informs that the North American Association lists books banned for 20 years. In 2022, the number is alarming: 2,500 individual titles.

Books for young people that have been targeted for topics such as race, gender and sexuality include Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer*, George M Johnson's "All Boys Aren't Blue", Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" and Jonathan Evison's "Lawn Boy". "Ultimately, attempts to ban books are attempts to silence authors who have summoned immense courage in telling their stories," ALA president Lessa Kanani'opua Pelayo-Lozada tells BBC Culture. (Ciabattari, 2023, n/p.).

In Brazil, there are plenty book-burnings with similar themes. The note signed by the presidents of several entities defending the work "The Darker Side of Skin" in 2024, such as the *Câmara Brasileira do Livro* (CBL), the *Associação Brasileira de Livros e Conteúdos Educacionais* (Abrelivros), and the *Sindicato Nacional dos Editores de Livros* (SNEL) denounces other mayors and families from private schools in the attempt to censor works:

In 2019, at *Bienal do Rio*, the then mayor Marcelo Crivella determined the removal of the comic book "Avengers: The Children's Crusade" because the cover portrayed a gay kiss. In 2018, an elite school from Rio de Janeiro, after parental pressure, vetoed the use of "*Meninos sem Pátria*" by Luiz Puntel, in its 23rd edition, pointing out how the book disseminated communist ideas (CBL, n/d, n/p).

The author, Toni Morrison, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, wrote the book "The Bluest Eye" (2019) telling the story of a girl who wanted to have blue eyes at least once in her life, discussing the ills of racism in the United States. This work dialogues with the theme presented by Jeferson Tenório, who was awarded the *Jabuti* Prize in 2021, in his book "The Darkest Side of Skin" (2020). The complaint against this book began with a video recorded by the principal of a school in Santa Cruz do Sul, followed by other actions culminating with the removal of the books by *Secretaria Estadual de Educação do Paraná* (Seed- Paraná Education Secretary). Why do these books bother so much? Why does society want to cover up oppression and suffering? For sure, it is not only because they do not have a happy ending, as they represent the real suffering of people, groups, and countries in the world of racism.

Their prohibition, be their presence in lists of banned books or attempts to remove them from library and school shelves, can lead to complicated results that establish a type of treatment or the exclusion of themes. One effect is self-censorship, which is the most difficult type to analyze as it happens in the author's production process. In a context of great intolerance, several authors can avoid dealing with themes and situations that might be polemic.

Toni Morrison herself, a renowned North American author who had her book "The Bluest Eye" (2019) on a list of banned books, expresses the risk of the effects of these prohibitions in production:

The thought that leads me to contemplate with dread the erasure of other voices, of unwritten novels, poems whispered or swallowed for fear of being overheard by the wrong people, outlawed languages flourishing underground, essayists' questions challenging authority never being posed, unstaged plays, canceled films—that thought is a nightmare. As though a whole universe is being described in invisible ink. (Morrison, 2023 apud Ciabattari, 2023, n/p.).

If several works have ample literary legitimacy, if book programs incorporate them from criteria of evaluators that are literature scholars and quality work from publishing companies, where do advances collide? Here we have a fight between freedom of expression and cultural movements that appear in the written works. Maybe we are in a “cultural war,” as it is called in the article about the polemic on the removal of Djamila Ribeiro’s book.

There are several examples of moral censorship on book content for children and teenagers, who would need to be “protected” because they were considered fragile or immature readers when the control mechanisms are supposedly more “open.” According to the psychoanalyst Melo (2021):

A society that protects children by sparing them from stories or cutting parts of existing stories so that they have no access to themes concerning humans and the existence of violence (which is also present and constant in current political discourse) subtracts from these children, depriving them of the totality of life. Therefore, the defense of literary art is the defense of children (Melo, 2021, n/p).

In another study analyzing the period from 1850 to 2022, Petrovitch (2023) found 33 books of childhood literature censored due to racial, political, religious, moral, sexual, and ideological reasons. Acts of censorship were undertaken by governmental, religious, school, family, media, and publishing institutions. The author discusses what calls attention to the works censored and describes them:

as those in which the textual or image narrative approaches subjective and complex situations, crossed by aspects that show readers’ possible vulnerabilities. For instance, the books talk about death, abuse, separation, war, losses, emotions such as sadness, envy, jealousy, melancholia, power relations, transformations, changes, fears, and themes about sexuality and gender, among other situations often considered taboo. Such themes are defined as delicate from a given sociocultural context (Petrovitch, 2023, p. 28).

We could question the terms sensitive or delicate: sensitive to whom? To those suffering from the related problems? To those reading the texts? To those who do not want to shed light on them? To those who do not know how to approach them?

When approaching censorship of literary books for children and conceptualizing delicate themes, Petrovitch (2023) questions: “ [...] if children’s reality is not protected, why then mask children’s literature if it is the result of people’s relationships and everyday lives?”

Corrêa and Pinheiro (2024) analyzed the work “*Menino ama menino*” [Boy loves Boy] (2000) that, according to them, approaches the theme of different sexual identities and, consequently, raised polemics about its use in school. The authors considered the end of the work, which finishes with a play represented by the characters, and ask, “If art imitates life, being differently from it, life can imitate art.” Who knows? (Corrêa; Pinheiro, 2024, p. 6).

We opted to analyze in detail the censorship conducted in 2016 against the book “*Enquanto o Sono não vem*” [Before sleep] (2013) from José Mauro Brant, which approaches in one of its tales a theme from the tale “Donkey Skin,” from Charles Perrault, considered sensitive: the incest. In the work, the author points out that “The story of the princess harassed by her father can appear in several places of Brazil with different names: ‘Silvaninha,’ ‘Valdomira,’ ‘Faustina’” (Brant, 2017 apud Albuquerque, 2017, n/p.). In the tale, collected through the oral history told in the city of Barbacena, a king asks his daughter’s hand in marriage, saying he will place her mother as a maid. The daughter refuses, ends up in a dungeon, and, punished by the father, dies from thirst.

In the case of this book, in 2016, the author José Mario Brant explained that he told this story for 25 years and that the book had been published for 15 years and distributed in a public program since 2005, without any reception issues. In his opinion, “There is a disinformation of what folkloric tales and fairy tales are, which are territories that approach delicate themes. We are talking about a symbolic universe. It is a story that gives a voice to the victim” (Brant, 2017 apud Albuquerque, 2017, n/p.).

First, the form of the collection form stands out: they are tales from the oral tradition. If this work was already part of book programs, how does this censorship process occur in 2016 when the works are once again distributed? As shown in other studies, there seems to be a change in the discourses and how these works are received, depending on specific contexts. Darnton’s (2016) studies show that works that circulated freely in a given context start to be considered sedition in the same country when ideological and political conditions change.

A possible interpretation made by Melo (2021) about the reception of the work “*Enquanto o sono não vem*” (2013) was that the phenomena should be understood in its full complexity as it occurred in a social and political time in which the conservative ideas started to be radicalized in the country. Thus, establishing “truth regimes” and legitimizing specific cultural forms do not occur linearly because they can advance in ideological terms and worldviews or regress in other contexts and positions.

Another question that makes this discussion more complex, exemplified in the book *“Enquanto o sono não vem”* (2013), is the dependence/independence that the written word has from orality, as it is a collection of oral tales compiled by the author. First, this issue shows that an oral tale spans generations, and when it is inserted into the printed world, it is subject to more forms of control. The author himself is a storyteller, and when performing them as a play, with fewer possibilities of social control, did not bother the audience.

I call here *“Fahrenheit 451”* (1966), a work about book control in which a totalitarian society conducted a witch hunt, burning books at the ideal temperature of 451 Fahrenheit degrees. In the plot, a solution found for the books not to be lost is for the reader to memorize them and, allegorically, carry within each one what was, in a way, public and verifiable in the permanent record of printed books. Through orality, a book cannot be seen nor burnt. Those who memorize it can tell it orally to other generations.

A similar situation is described by Darnton (2016) regarding the theatrical representations in India during the British colonization that updated the play contents by incorporating or improvising social facts that were not in the script. Abreu (2003) also mentions the oralization process of texts, which was done by reading aloud during colonial Brazil to circulate texts beyond the interdiction or control of the metropole.

Secondly, the first censorship of the book *“Enquanto o sono não vem”* (2013) joins the discussion with a teacher’s complaint. On the one hand, we have the position of a sector and an education agent that represents the moralist bias and even her surprise with something she cannot deal with, and, on the other hand, a book policy that assumes bibliodiversity, diversity, and the valuing of oral culture.

The positive evaluation of a work in public policy and its rejection show that a lingering problem, child abuse, creates conflicts between two positions in school: one defends that children’s rights need to be preserved, and the other understands that they are not prepared to listen in literary language about the representation of family abuse against others, from a fiction collected from the oral repertoire. In this case, there is the need to problematize more nuances involved in these conflicts or in the choice of not working with the text: there are many teachers who, in fact, are not prepared to deal with the theme with their students.

The patrolling of themes to be dealt with children reveals the difficulty of dealing with death, wars, losses, and abandonment, which are issues in life and society. As was stated, these control questions resonate in the legal precepts of children’s defense and a way to attempt to protect them, thus denying the opportunity for them to symbolically know the nature of social relationships. In a technical note for the book *“Enquanto o sono não vem”* (2013), signed by Aparecida Paiva (2017), the commission problematizes this cathartic effect or psychological transfer when experiencing limit-situations in literature:

every human has anger, fear, angst, jealousy, and so many other feelings considered negative, next to the positive ones. When seeing them represented in the text, the reader can live them vicariously, that is, by loan and, thus, also freeing themselves from them. This is because the reader experiences these negative feelings in books, films, and soap operas; they do not need to bring them to real life (Paiva, 2017, n/p.).

There is also the idea that children's reception of the text would focus on some evil character trait and not the literary reading for language fruition or reflection over existing dramas and in the symbolic forms of solving them. In other situations, we perceived that some feared that young readers would commit suicide when reading the book "*O menino que espiava para dentro*" [The Boy who glanced inside] (2008) by Ana Maria Machado. The book was the object of several polemics because the character thought about choking with a piece of apple to enter a fantasy world.

Thirdly, the number of articles and comments about the work and its prohibition shows that the dissemination of hate speech against authors in a context where social media reverberates all types of ideologies and beliefs. Through the voice of the author José Mauro Brant, the prohibition undertaken in his book compromised his trajectory and his work as an actor. In this case, neither the book nor the author were spared. Hate speech also targeted Ana Maria Machado for her book "*O menino que espiava para dentro*."

I remember here Flaubert's judgment in France about the character Madame Bovary, from the book of the same name, discussed by Paiva (1996). In this case, the author was acquitted, and his judgment as a real person was appeased because he punished the behavior of his character by killing her in the end. However, Madame Bovary's behavior was morally condemned in the same trial.

Hate speech also permeated the appropriation of a school principal from Santa Cruz do Sul/RS, Brazil, who published her denouncement/censorship position against the book "The Dark Side of Skin" (2020) by Jeferson Tenório, though it was awarded the Jabuti Prize in 2021 and was part of the public archive of the education system. The denouncement triggered the book's removal by education secretaries in Paraná, Goiás, and Mato Grosso do Sul. In the case of the book "*Enquanto o sono não vem*" (2013), the Education Ministry demanded its removal, arguing that it was inappropriate for the age range. In the situation created by Jeferson Tenório's book, the books were returned to public schools after a lawsuit.

4 In the digital era: between control and freedom of expression

We are living in a moment in which censorship is diluted in actions from groups and people and is strongly disseminated in social media. The actions seem to be individual but represent positions from broader groups. However, its way of operation can be determined by economic and market interests.

Which censorships and prohibitions are underway? What censorship phenomena emerge in new contexts of broad dissemination in which the internet seems like a no man's land? If there are different censorships, at the same time, we have the freedom to write and disseminate texts through free publication and access. Who controls the texts is not only the State, the Church, and the parties. We are all under the market interest, and any text that creates engagement, likes, comments, and shares is good for big data company owners.

Recently, an international meeting of broadcast companies held in the United States produced a document that claims the recognition of agencies working with news and their authorship, as the dissemination of news conducted by these agencies does not benefit the companies that produce them but raises money for the large platforms that only replicate news. In this regulation attempt from companies that should produce news emerges the issue: the intention is not to regulate content but to recognize the capacity and even the morality of those that produce them and their professionalism while asking for the accountability of those producing news, mainly the fake news. Here, we find the dilemma of regulation versus freedom of expression, as in several historical episodes involving the so-called civilized societies and their laws.

As the space of reading and meeting increases with the internet and in digital environments, we believe it is emblematic of the approximation done between the material and the symbolic burn found in Wikipedia when searching by the keywords "book burning." In this case, the change from physical libraries to virtual ones and the non-conservation of printed issues become a book burning.

In the digital era

Nowadays, a large number of documents are recorded digitally. Therefore, deleting these records can be considered a new way of burning books (Wikipedia, n.d., n/p.).

There are countless effects of digital culture in printed books, and several focus on control, regulations, and evaluations. Even though there are legitimation regimes, the recognition of a certain quality of the works, and the establishment of truth regimes, in the case of texts from other spheres, the publication of a text no longer needs to go through editing processes. We have a big change in the order of the books, their technical production, dissemination, sale, storage, form, and presentation.

Against censorship, we can ask: How are the new regimes of authorship established and, therefore, the accountability of those writing them? Mainly in the reading done originally for the digital world in which languages and authors expand through the authorship of sounds, fixed images in movement, and special effects, among other resources, how are the authorship regimes established? What are the forms of social control regarding what is

published? Apparently, the sensation is that there are no forms of control and that everything can be published. However, will there be new forms of control we do not know yet?

Researchers who studied the history of books and reading, such as Chartier and Scolari (2021), have been following these radical changes. In the case of Chartier (2002), if he previously analyzed continuities between printed and digital culture, nowadays he stresses the many ruptures. The idea is that we are in a control-free regime because the texts do not need to be edited to circulate. Literary criticisms continue underway; the publishing companies coexist with initiatives beyond conventional editing work. However, these instances dispute positions with other voices, such as booktubers and commentators, that create other ways of dealing with works and disseminating everything in the so-called sharing culture. Did we solve the control problem? Are the texts available for those who can access them in these environments quality ones? Where do the texts that disseminate hate speech come from? Does a world where all can speak and write about everything, and artificial intelligence machines can write texts represent any freedom?

Recently, a legal polemic in the United States Congress involving the states of Florida and Texas shows a paradox: conservative parties do not want big techs to establish any control over discourses and nor limit or remove names from social networks, as done with Donald Trump, elected for a second run in 2024 as the president of the United States of America. The First Amendment was evoked in this process. On the other hand, the big techs monitor hate speech, discourses that harm the rights of minorities, fake news, and others. Due to society's demands, they establish control to have credibility and prove that they follow the advancement of rights. These big digital companies do this control and monitoring to get engagement (time using the site, sharing, and likes) seeking profit. However, their permanence needs agreements and negotiations with advancing rights in society. In the case of this paradox: who controls whom? Which controls does society need? Does the right to freedom of expression allow for everything?

However, in the case of reading, there are other controls. Let us think about an example. Even though we can choose what to read and what books to buy, to which controls are we submitted? It is not the ideology of a book that interests the great conglomerates but the algorithms and the engagement that create profiles for the next purchases, all under the cover of large corporations, such as Amazon, Google, and Microsoft?

There are forms of control we cannot even phantom. When we click on a theme or a book, they can draw our profile as a reader, which, in turn, can lead to offers that only reinforce what we already read and consume, creating what some authors call echoes. Nowadays, when buying an e-book, even when an author appears, even when it is a serial work in which we can identify aspects of its totality, with innumerable similarities with the printed format, the systems can configure our actions in a device, track some ways we read, know

how many people highlighted a part of the book, where we stopped, if we returned reading, or just stopped not to return.

The meeting with books and readers is dispersed and changed our sociabilities. Closing physical bookstores transforms sociabilities because, instead of finding something on the shelf that might surprise us, we may be subjected to other forms of control and indications. Our access to books and our reading results from social conditions, but our reading acts and meeting with books are no longer related to intimate and personal choices. There is a system that marks our meeting with books and our steps to seek them. Our relationship and meeting with books do not go through mediations and mediators we know; therefore, we still do not know how to resist this relationship. Our meetings with agents, such as booksellers, librarians, and interest groups, are non-existent or even more diffuse.

As archives are digitalized and we can no longer guarantee the existence of physical books as heritage, the digital era brings endless challenges, and book-burning as a metaphor for their physical disappearance is only one of many aspects.

New contexts, new books, and new texts suggest readers' freedom while new controls and bans are being reinvented. Commenting about the universe of books, reading, bookshops, and libraries, and their relationship with the digital world, Chartier (2020, p.112-113) warns that it " [...] allows the creation of new forms of citizenship but also establish a powerful tool of manipulation, control, and censorship". If before the systems of political, religious, and social control over books and reading were identified, we now need to find tactics and strategies to find resistance mechanisms by anticipating possible prohibitions, regulations, and controls.

5 Final remarks: acts of resistance against control and censorship

Approaching censorship also implies talking about resistance and tactics to bypass it. The case of the handmaid Marie-Madeleine Bonafon, retold by Darnton (2016) is an interesting one. Around 1745, she wrote a story, disguised as a fairy tale, about the king's love life printed in the printing house of the widow Ferran in Rouen, France. Another example described by the author is that of a minstrel artist who, through the oral representation of texts and his art, reached much more listeners in the places where he had been in India than imagined by the British Empire regime. Thus, besides readers, we have listeners in some cases. How can this flow be controlled?

There is tension in the case of Catholic censorship of books in Brazil, as discussed by Paiva (1996). On the one hand, the Church's voice advises readers. On the other hand, readers and the editorial field may resist, creating an editorial market that flourishes and raising new configurations to the themes and literary treatments that escape this control.

The production does not match with prohibition and we see that if there is the need to prohibit is also because there is the possibility of something to be read: there are texts from different natures and readers with several profiles and interests.

If in the *Guia das consciências* [Guide of consciousness] by Friar Sinzig, there were entries about 21.553 works (Paiva, 1996, p.22), we can only imagine a counter flow of censorship of the editorial market in the period. In this sense, there is a resistance created by social, economic, and cultural conditions that establish the production of written material and its appropriation, such as the processes to increase schooling, the extraordinary dissemination of writings from different natures, and the rapid formation of a reading public, highlighted by Paiva (1996), which lead to the return of censorship by the Church, when the Brazilian State became laic.

In the case of the censor Friar Sinzig, Paiva (1997) indicates that he was a voracious reader of any genre, and it is interesting to imagine how books (good or bad) reached him and how he read them. The author also stresses how the banned novels were treated in the Guide he created, with so many adjectives and details that could entice someone to read them. Hence, another side of censorship can be the motivation to search banned books and other printed materials.

The North American writer George M. Johnson (2023), author of “All Boys aren’t Blue,” which presents the viewpoint of a black queer boy, tells us about a movement of resistance against the control and the removal of literature books that have been leading the country and young people to fight for the right of reading books. Furthermore, there are groups winning lawsuits in several counties.

“What gives me hope,” Johnson tells BBC Culture, “is that the majority of the country is against book bans. The fact that the bans are activating students to fight for their rights to have books. And that we are winning in a lot of counties, and keeping the books on shelves. We are galvanised and organised and ready to continue this fight for as long as it takes. Furthermore, the banning of books has not stopped publishers from allowing more stories to be written. Eventually, there will be so many stories that you can’t ban them all.” (Ciabattari, 2023, n/p).

In Brazil, after what occurred to “The Dark Side of Skin” (2020) from Jeferson Tenório in 2024, there was a strong movement from the writers of the *Câmara Brasileira do Livro* (CBL) and the publishing company *Companhia das Letras* took legal actions to defend the work. The lawsuit was successful, and the book returned to the schools in the states where it had been removed. Moreover, the author and the book gained great visibility in social networks and the press, attracting new readers who did not know the work. The book “*Cartas*

para minha avó” by Djamila Ribeiro, returned for the schools’ digital archive because different sectors’ reactions were strong and decisive.

Analyzing the complexity of censorship and how it operates, we can identify that there are all natures of resistance. Against prohibited themes, there is freedom of expression and reader’s freedom. There is the possibility of judicialization against moralisms that lead to the symbolic burning of books. There is a reaction when the Public Prosecutor’s Office from the city of Canoinhas needs to investigate the behavior of a public authority that throws away the books of a school.

If there is a control of well-known authors, such as in the study about the French case conducted by Darnton (2016) in the time of the Bourbons, we have an uncontrolled production of unknown subjects. If books are collected, there is a clandestine network that commercializes it. If the State prohibits them, in the past and nowadays, there are divergences between ideological, political, and commercial interests, and history shows that printing houses printed those books and the illegal commerce would sell them. Books from banned authors were published in this way in other countries. Book loans and exchanges were and are done between people, bypassing control. If any conservative institution has its interests in controlling or banning, there are members of book academies, writers’ organizations, and editors combating these movements. In this way, the interest of censors and regimes confronts readers and the diverse ways of disseminating texts, the publishing world, and the several truth systems.

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