

Tortured Text: An Analysis of the Absent Pages of Ignácio de Loyola Brandão's *Zero*

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Born of political repression, censorship and torture, the novel *Zero: romance pré-histórico* (1974) by Ignácio de Loyola Brandão is an exceptional work of post-1964 Brazilian literary production. It daringly fictionalizes the political reality of living under an authoritarian regime. Loyola's novel was banned during the military dictatorship of 1964-1985 along with over 500 other literary works (da Silva 15). *Zero* is particularly interesting because throughout its publishing history, its textual and paratextual content was revised in congruence with the intensity of repression in Brazil. In 2001, a new edition integrated pages that had been previously excluded from all editions and translations of the novel for unknown reasons. In this essay, I borrow narratological terms from Gérard Genette and David Herman to examine the most politically charged sections from the absent pages. A close reading sheds light on the relationship between what Herman calls the storyworld, that is, the fictional world of Latíndia-America that Loyola created, and what we think of as the real world in which Loyola was writing. I analyze how the content of the absent pages challenges the hegemonic ideology of the regime that banned *Zero* in its construction of a meta-commentary on neocolonial relations between Brazil and the United States. By employing Elaine Scarry's work on the structure of torture, I argue that censorship and torture operate both textually and extra-textually in *Zero*. The absent pages illuminate this relationship in their criticism of a regime characterized by its dependence on censorship and torture to maintain its illegitimate and fledgling power.

Zero's protagonist, José Gonçalves, is a working-class man who meets his wife through a dating service. In order to fulfill his wife's dream of purchasing a home, José tries to earn money while living

under a repressive military state called Latíndia-America, leading to his becoming a thief, a hit man, and eventually a member of the armed struggle against the government. Loyola employs numerous styles, diagrams, drawings, graphics, capital letters and creative punctuation in hundreds of tiny chapters to create the storyworld and plot in *Zero*.

In order to understand the close relationship between Loyola's storyworld and the reality of Brazil's military regime, *Zero* must be examined in the political and social landscape from which it emerged. In 1964, a military coup d'état ousted President João Goulart and replaced him with General Castello Branco, who became the first dictator of a military regime that lasted for nearly 20 years. The United States government supported the military during the coup with logistical resources through Operation Brother Sam¹ and officially recognized the new regime within days of the coup as it awaited the denationalization of Brazilian industries. Some have argued that the United States' involvement in the 1964 military coup of Brazil had less to do with the threat of the proliferation of communism and more to do with imperialism (Black 53-55; Galeano 291-293). The relationship between the United States and Latin America, characterized by neocolonialism through international investment and loans, is an underlying theme in *Zero*, featured most prominently in the absent pages.

After the military coup, Brazil was governed by a repressive regime that disregarded human rights, resorting to widespread arrests, torture and disappearances. The dictatorship also controlled the flow of information through the censorship of news, magazines, music, theater and literature. In her book *The Muffled Cries* on censorship and literary production in Brazil, Nancy T. Baden cites the two legal justifications for prepublication censorship according to Decree No. 1.077 of January 26th, 1970, which looked for "(1) books considered contrary to moral principles and good customs and (2) books capable of inciting subversion of the political and social order" (Baden 56). These two stipulations are important in looking at *Zero*, both in reading the text, and also examining its publishing history.

Zero portrays censorship and the prohibition of books in addition to other forms of cultural production. One of many examples comes from a scene in which José stays with his friend after he is threatened and beaten at the boarding house where he had been living. The apartment where they stay "was a temporary warehouse for books

belonging to a publisher who had been closed down by the government” (Loyola 38; Trans. Watson).^{2 3} José devours the books: some fiction, some reference, some political. In a tiny chapter called “scrap iron,”⁴ a narrator addresses José in all capital letters, warning him:

IT’S STUPID TO READ THAT STUFF, IT ONLY COMPLICATES YOUR LIFE / DON’T LET THE REPRESSIVE MILITIA KNOW THOSE BOOKS ARE THERE / YOU WERE ALREADY HAULED INTO INVESTIGATIONS ONCE / THE NEXT TIME IT’LL BE THE END OF YOU / YOU’LL DISAPPEAR LIKE SO MANY PEOPLE DO EVERY DAY / BUT HOW WOULD YOU KNOW ABOUT THINGS LIKE THAT, THEY’RE NOT IN PRINT, THEY’RE NOT ALLOWED TO BE IN PRINT / STOP, JOSÉ / STOP READING THOSE BOOKS: scrap iron [sic] (Loyola 50; Trans. Watson)⁵

Loyola illustrates the rampant fear that was disseminated throughout countries under authoritarian rule. In doing so, he implicitly condemns censorship and repression, activating the political themes in the novel that complicated Loyola’s ability to publish it in Brazil.

Loyola’s relationship to the Brazilian publishing industry permeates his text. He was subject to the pessimistic environment that censorship created and as a result, *Zero* has a very unique publishing history. Paratext on the cover of the 1979 edition (Editora Codecri) explains, “Completed in 1969, the book was rejected by four Brazilian publishers under the crafty allegation that ‘graphic difficulties’ would prevent quality production of the book.”⁶ The fact that the novel was not published in Brazil attests to the strength of the government to censor cultural production. The threat of violence was widespread, from authors who censored themselves, to publishers who feared arrest, to readers who would be accused of subversion for possessing any of the prohibited books. Consequently, Loyola looked abroad to publish *Zero*. With the help of Luciana Stegagno Picchio, professor of Lusophone Literature at the University of Rome, *Zero* was translated into Italian by her student, Antonio Tabucchi, and published by Feltrinelli in 1974. It was only in the following year that the first Brazilian edition in the original Portuguese was published. Despite critical acclaim and the 1976 award for Best Fiction from

the Fundação Cultural do Distrito Federal, the Brazilian Ministry of Justice blacklisted it in November of 1976 (Baden 97; 101). The ban on *Zero* was lifted in 1979.

Since then, *Zero* has enjoyed steady success in Brazil and abroad. The 12th edition published in Brazil in 2001 by Global Editora boasts a new geometric cover and a makeover of the graphics in the text. More importantly, it includes graphics and sections that are not found in any of the previous editions. The paratext on the inside cover of the 2001 edition explains, “When the first edition was released, Loyola, still in doubt as to certain illustrations (like the initial map of Latíndia-America) and other segments, left them out. Today, 26 years after the first Brazilian edition (and 27 after the Italian), all that was omitted is included.”⁷ None of the earlier scholarship on *Zero* has taken these previously omitted segments into account. Even criticism⁸ since 2001 was based on older editions of the book, and thus overlooked the absent pages.

In this paper I focus on three absent sections of *Zero*. The first is a prolepsis, in Genette’s sense of a “narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later,” (Genette 40) a flash-forward called “Hórreo.” The second contains a map of Latíndia-America. Both pages redefine the storyworld in which the novel takes place in contrast to how it was formerly represented in previous editions. The third shows a more complete picture of the transformation of the society in the storyworld, and in doing so, refers to the other absent pages, emphasizing their importance as they work in conjunction to revise the novel into a more critical and daring text.

“Hórreo” appears on the first page of the novel as of 2001. A prolepsis spanning generations of time, this section is the first page of the novel, yet its content concerns the end of the story, telling the reader what the destiny of Latíndia-America will be after the end of the novel. The narrator of “Hórreo” makes it clear that Latíndia-America, the fictional world in which the story of *Zero* takes place, has been made obsolete: “The younger generations have never heard of Latíndia-America or Some African Countries. . . What was Latíndia-America is today the Fifth World, a region called Hórreo, isolated, autonomous, independent” (Brandão 97).⁹

In *Zero*, Hórreo, formerly known as Latíndia-America, is the place from which the raw materials of the “Mundo desenvolvido” or “Developed World” originate. Like the name suggests,¹⁰ it is a deposit

of resources that the developed world feeds upon. Latíndia-America is the *hórreo* of its colonizers and neocolonizers. Loyola uncannily transforms the signified from one that evokes images of harvest and family farm to one of a pillaged wasteland. The family farm is a myth in *Hórreo*, which is teeming with plantations growing products for export. The transformation of Latíndia-America, the setting of the story, into the uninhabitable nightmare of *Hórreo* suggests a meta-commentary on neocolonialism. It depicts the aftermath of its transformation into a dystopian place that has become unrestrictedly available for the “developed countries” to pillage.

Hórreo is a post-apocalyptic landscape described in terms of international trade: “From these places (considered uninhabitable for the developed world) come raw materials like coal, iron, uranium, petroleum and recently discovered metals, aside from wood and some decorative animals on the verge of extinction) and men destined for science experiments” (Brandão 97)¹¹ [sic]. It appears that the independence of *Hórreo* is related to its economic dependence upon the “developed countries” for *Hórreo* exists to serve them. Apart from calling it independent, it is only described in relation to its exports of raw materials and humans. The transformation of Latíndia-America into *Hórreo* has occurred as a result of an extreme shift in technological capabilities and philosophy represented by these questions: “How much would it cost me for you to change your concept of life, your political idea, your manner of administration, close your eyes to what I do and the manner in which I do it, ignore my destructive actions and my lack of ethics?” (Brandão 97)¹² *Hórreo* is clearly a place where a culture of corruption buys support and alliance. Nonetheless, these questions that depict corruption render the subject and the object ambiguous. The speaker is unknown, creating many possible speaking subjects. For example, could the “developed countries” be speaking to Latíndia-America? Is the repressive regime speaking to the people of Latíndia-America? Is a faction of urban guerrillas speaking to the people of Latíndia-America? Is the narrator speaking to the reader? This ambiguity forces the reader to ask who the agents of corruption might be.

While *Hórreo* is not mentioned in *Zero* before the 2001 edition, this culture of corruption is paralleled throughout the rest of the novel as police rob José, and José’s friend Átila is denied a teaching job when he refuses to bribe an administrator from the department of education.

The images of corruption intensify as both characters are arrested and tortured in prison. The atrocities depicted in the novel intensify, and Hórreo, the worst-case scenario, is formed after corruption and repression have evolved into the situation described on this first absent page. After reading “Hórreo,” it is clear that *Zero* is the beginning of the end of Latíndia-America.

Interestingly, *Zero* was not Loyola’s first choice for the novel’s title. The first title that he chose was *A inauguração da morte*¹³ (*The Inauguration of Death*), which foregrounds the idea that the story of *Zero* is the beginning of a societal decline that ends in “Hórreo,” a depiction of death and destruction. The title, *Zero: romance pré-histórico*, also alludes to this idea of the beginning of an era, suggesting that the novel takes place at year zero. This interpretation of the title also makes a space for Loyola’s text in the Brazilian literary tradition by summoning Oswald de Andrade’s *Marco Zero*, a text which also describes the beginning of the future of Brazil, similarly employing a dictatorship as its point of departure.

“Hórreo” effects a tragic ending to *Zero*, erasing the hopeful ending in previous editions. In the final pages of the novel when José sits in a Miami prison cell, he has a revelation about political consciousness, which he repeatedly had been told he lacked throughout his time working with an armed communist group. Other critics¹⁴ have read *Zero* as José’s quest for self-discovery; therefore this epiphany of political consciousness is among the most important moments of the novel. His self-discovery is inseparable from his position as a subject living under a repressive authoritarian regime. The political becomes personal for José as he recognizes his position in Latíndia-America as a “zero,” a nobody, and decides that through resistance and political action the people of Latíndia-America can subvert relations of power. Reaching out to other political realities of oppressed populations, he compares the Latíndio-American struggle with that of the Jews, “Maybe in a thousand short years, we’ll become, as they have, strong, something difficult to destroy, and some other group will take our place in the cycle. Meanwhile we extend our hands, Latíndio-Americans, Africans, Asians, not to weep and moan, but to understand and organize” (301-302 Loyola; Trans. Watson).¹⁵ Ultimately, José decides that organizing is a way to fight repression, whereas before, he killed and destroyed for the sake of violence and chaos. In the final segment titled “Grand-finale,” as José is deported

back to his country from Miami, he thinks, “. . .They got everyone, and they’ll keep on getting everyone until we find a way to fight and organize. And turn things around. And turn things around again. Whoever is right will be wrong, whoever is wrong will be right [. . .]”¹⁶ (305 Loyola; Trans. Watson). In this version, *Zero* ends in a hopeful call to action as earlier scholarly work on the novel demonstrates. In 1989, before the publication of the absent pages Robert E. DiAntonio notes that in the end:

José’s metamorphosis has been completed [. . .] he has been magically transformed into a self-confident and feared urban terrorist [. . .] José is now a threat to the very system that spawned and repressed him [. . .] On a note of desperation, a call to arms and a prayer, the novel moves to its conclusion tendering an apocalyptic vision of an entire era of political repression. (DiAntonio 147)

In this ending, José is no longer a “zero,” but a subject with political consciousness and potential for agency. However, *Zero* in its post-2001 form destroys optimism by presenting the actual future of Latíndia-America that is of the storyworld: the horrifying image of Hórreo. This first absent page renders the struggle against repression and José’s political revelation vain. While *Zero* already seemed an apocalyptic nightmare in its original form, the storyworld continues to devolve after the last pages of the novel. Latíndia-America never overcomes, and things do not “turn around.”

The relationship between the “Fifth World” and the “Developed World” is of course a nod to the relations between Latin America and the United States, as we know them. Facilitating the 1964 military coup secured U.S. interests abroad by repressing socialist and communist ideology and securing a powerful ally in Latin America. This reality is referenced throughout the novel as foreign governments donate tanks and weapons. Other Latíndio-American countries are described in terms of currency and exported goods. Additionally, the mention of human trafficking in “Hórreo” is mirrored by the two-way flow of people. The city described in *Zero* receives migrants from Mexico, Argentina, Colombia and rural parts of the country; they are depicted as desperate, miserable laborers. Conversely, throughout the novel, scholars and scientists flee into exile in sections entitled “Adeus,

Adeus”: “After having his entire library confiscated and burned by Government #1, sociologist Carlos Antunes, who was researching the origins of national underdevelopment, accepted an invitation from Yale to lecture at that famous North American university. He should be leaving in ten days, if the lawyers release his passport” (Loyola 11; Trans. Watson).¹⁷ The intellectuals going into exile are usually welcomed by the United States or a Western European country. “Hórreo” foreshadows the motif of exile and positions the reader to watch the flow of capital, goods, and people in and out of Latíndia-America.

“Hórreo” also disorients readers’ sense of time with its haunting last words: “This story happens a little before the Summit of Division, Clustering, and Isolation of Areas that *happened in many years to come*,” (Brandão 97; emphasis mine).¹⁸ The tenses in this sentence make time problematic, as this story *se passa, it happens* in the present, before the summit that *aconteceu daqui a muitos anos, happened in many years to come*. This places the story in the novel between the past and the future and therefore in the present, a concept that is not unique to the absent pages. In fact, Loyola called the novel *romance pré-histórico*, a pre-historic novel, placing it in the past. Yet, the page before the first page of the story in all versions of *Zero* places the story in the future, “Num país da América-Latíndia amanhã” (Brandão 103) / “Somewhere in Latíndia-America, tomorrow” (Brandão 103; Trans. Watson). Thus, the present is narrated through the past that will have happened in the future. This articulation of problematic time is reflected throughout the novel, as the passage of what Genette calls the story time, that is the time that elapses in the fictional storyworld, is coded and undermined by the narrative structure that resembles a flashing sequence of vignettes, images, memories, laws, and prayers rather than a traditional, chronological narrative. The narration switches between present and past tenses. Sections entitled “Affective Memory” and “Free Association” recall scenes from José’s childhood, while “Hórreo” happens generations after his death.

Following “Hórreo” is a map of Latíndia-America, which is the second absent page in the 2001 edition. The map depicts Latíndia-America as what we recognize as the Americas. There are points of interest on the map with statistics of superlatives. For example, Death Valley is the lowest point on the continent and Argentina has the widest river in the world, the Rio de la Plata. All of the statistics on the map are true of the actual Americas, blurring the distinction between

what David Herman calls the storyworld, that is to say the fictional world of *Zero*, and the real world, the one we think we know and live in. Over the city of São Paulo, the text blends elements of both the storyworld and the real world, thus Loyola plays with the distinction between the storyworld, and the real situation of Latin America. As other critics have explained,¹⁹ the allegory of Latíndia-America was key for the success of *Zero* in the years it was published under military rule. Although the construction of Latíndia-America may seem to be an obvious allusion to Latin America, Loyola's successful creation of the storyworld made *Zero* hypothetical, and therefore unassuming. In fact, *Zero* was not officially banned for its political content, but rather for its immoral themes (Baden 101). Nonetheless, it is more likely that the censors used the "immoral" sex scenes and violence in the novel as a pretext to ban the book so that the regime could avoid crediting the text with the power to incite subversion.

Even though there are similarities between the city in Latíndia-America where *Zero* takes place and the real city of São Paulo, there is no reference to a particular location that correlates to the real world prior to the inclusion of the map in the 2001 edition. Paratext of the 1979 edition, for instance, situates the story "In some Latíndio-American country in some time in the future, near or remote, José Gonçalves kills rats in a low-class movie theater."²⁰ Within the text, the storyworld is constructed subtly throughout the opening segments of the novel without referencing Brazil. Portuguese proper names of places hint at the connection, but Latíndia-America is indeed an invented world. With the map from the 2001 edition in hand, the reader can identify São Paulo as the place where:

- Átila, José's friend, rips the smelliest fart in the world.²¹
- Rinaldo Cavaquinho is proud to be the cruelest torturer in the known world.²²
- The screen at CinemaScope of the Cine República in São Paulo was the largest cinema screen in Latíndia-America. (Brandão 99)²³

Hence, the map situates the characters in São Paulo. Interestingly, the fictionality of the first two superlatives contrasts with the third one. The Cine República in São Paulo did in fact boast the largest movie screen in the world for many years. Therefore, information from both the storyworld and the real world is located in what is explicitly called São Paulo. All the other points on the map correspond to the

real world and are notable for being the biggest and the best natural wonders. São Paulo, in contrast, is known for the foulest smelling flatulence, the worst torturer, and the biggest movie screen. Although Átila's fart does not appear in the novel, it does foreshadow the terrible smell that lingers after his death. The section in which he dies is called "The Smell."²⁴ It depicts his death after a series of detailed and excruciating torture scenes. After nearly drowning in a bucket of human waste, Átila cannot get the smell out of his nose. As he dies, the smell of his own decomposing body overpowers him and he becomes the smell, "Átila disappeared and the smell (Átila) remained" (Loyola 292; Trans. Watson).²⁵ Locating the worst torturer in São Paulo also foreshadows the torture and cruelty that is revealed throughout the novel. Likewise, the cinema is an interesting image. It is significant as a medium through which cultural colonization is deployed and supported, reflected in José's repeated references to U.S. pop culture. The cinema can also be interpreted as a symbol of a torture chamber, a place in which the spectacle of the regime's power is displayed, invoking Elaine Scarry's claim that "torture is a grotesque piece of compensatory drama" (28). More importantly, by mingling information about the real world and storyworld, the line between the two worlds is blurred, making it possible to criticize the actual Brazilian government by virtue of criticizing the regime of Latíndia-America.

This map and the mention of Hórreo transform the storyworld by moving it from "some" Latíndio-American country to a country that is congruent to the geographical location of Brazil on a map of the actual Latin America. By making that connection explicit, "Hórreo" and the map of Latíndia-America make *Zero* even more audacious than it was when it was banned. In addition to modifying the storyworld, these first two absent pages also revise the end of the story. They tell the reader that the world where José lives is doomed and that ultimately Latíndia-America will become a wasteland. The international interests are stronger than the opposition, presenting the typical neocolonial paradigm in which the colonized, in this case the Latíndio-American people, are at a disadvantage. On the map, the line between the storyworld and the real world of Brazil wavers and "Hórreo" can be interpreted as a prophecy of both the future of Latíndia-America and the future of Brazil. "Hórreo" attributes the decline and destruction of Latíndia-America to a shift in mentality, "A philosophical tendency that turned into quotidian action was

developed there out of an extreme level of technology” (97)²⁶ which is inherently corrupt. Observations of this extreme shift are illustrated in the other absent pages as well.

The third absent section is integrated into the novel in a way that the others are not; it shares the page with an original segment that has been a part of *Zero* since its initial publication entitled “Intrepid Firefighters Can’t Prevent Catastrophe.”²⁷ In it, José is taken in by police and tortured as he is interrogated about his relation to Walter, a suspected communist terrorist who lived in José’s boarding house. This scene is the first detailed glimpse of the state brutality that had been previously delivered by second-hand sources, such as newspapers and gossip. The officers’ violence and corruption are observed firsthand; highlighting the use of torture the regime requires to maintain its power.

In the novel’s post-2001 editions, “Intrepid Firefighters Can’t Prevent Catastrophe” integrates absent text on the right-hand margins of the pages. The absent text is written in italics and consists of three numbered stories. The stories are told in an impersonal, journalistic style and each story reveals something frightening about the society in which José is living, ultimately narrating the philosophical shift that is credited with the regression of Latindia-America into Hórreo. As this absent page is coupled with the original text, specifically a torture scene, it reveals the illegitimacy and instability of the military regime’s power and the ways in which it creates what Elaine Scarry calls “an illusion of power” (28). The torture scene and the absent pages that parallel it, informed by Scarry’s work on the structure of torture, illuminate the weakness of the military regime through the government’s utilization of torture and violence as a spectacle. By examining the original section first, it becomes clear that the absent text further magnifies the spectacle of the regime’s power that is suggested by the torture scene. The absent text reveals how everyday life absorbs and then becomes the ideology of the military regime.

In the original novel, the torture scene stood alone on the page, narrating an interrogation in which José is tortured to the point of losing consciousness. At this point in the novel, José has not begun robbing and killing people. He is not yet subversive, nor is he a criminal. Nonetheless, when José tells the officers that he does not know Walter, he is tortured:

The cop worked him over for five minutes.
 The cop worked him over for five minutes.
 The cop worked him over for five minutes.
 They put ammonia under his nose. He came to.
 — If you don't start talking soon, you're gonna be here a
 long, long time.
 (Loyola 43; Trans. Watson)²⁸

Compared to the torture scenes at the end of the novel, this depiction of violence is vague. There is no discussion of the specific methods of torture, no mention of a particular weapon, nor any description of José's wounds. In this sense, his physical pain is not expressed in the language of the text, illustrating Scarry's argument that, "Both weapon (whether actual or imagined) and wound (whether actual or imagined) may be used associatively to express pain [. . .] The point here is not just that pain can be apprehended in the image of the weapon (or wound) but that it almost cannot be apprehended without it" (16). Therefore, the absence of descriptions of weapon and wound in the narrative leads to a failure to express the extent of José's physical pain.

By repeating the phrase, "The cop worked him over for five minutes," the narrative is able to express the repetitive and persistent nature of these acts of state violence. José's pain operates textually and extra-textually in distinct ways. Within the text, the failure to articulate José's pain feeds the swelling power of the regime as his pain is misinterpreted as the regime's power. Though Scarry describes the way a prisoner is unable to articulate his pain and is therefore powerless to expose a regime, she also describes the way in which the existence of a torture scene in a book can challenge a regime's protocol. Thus, José's pain operates extra-textually by exposing the practice of torture in the actual Latin America to readers and in doing so chips away the dictatorship's power as it reveals the atrocities committed. She writes, "The failure to express pain [. . .] will always work to allow its appropriation and conflation with debased forms of power; conversely, the successful expression of pain will always work to expose and make possible that appropriation and conflation" (14). Even though the details of the act of torture are not explicit in the text, the reader recognizes that José is indeed in pain as he begs not to be beaten. José's pain also lends itself to the destruction of his world,

as Scarry explains, “Intense pain is also language destroying: as the content of one’s world disintegrates, so the content of one’s language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject” (Scarry 35). What Scarry calls the disintegration of the self is also illustrated symbolically as the police rob José. They refuse him the items he had when he was taken in for questioning: his ID, his watch and his papers. The police deny it, “No, sonny, no one took anything, remember that. Shitty little Communist. We’ll get you, don’t worry” (Loyola 45; Trans. Watson).²⁹ The police insist that no one took anything, but in fact they took much more than his material belongings. Through torture and corruption, the police have destroyed José’s sense of self and his world, which are symbolically represented by his papers and ID, his only legal representations of himself, and his watch, which connects him to the universe by measuring the passage of time.

Furthermore, it becomes clear that police intelligence is flawed since José indeed knows nothing about Walter, revealing the arbitrariness of arrests and torture under the regime. More importantly, it shows the desperation of the government to display its power. Once again, Scarry illuminates the strategic motive behind the government’s spending on resources to interrogate an innocent person: “But for every instance in which someone with critical information is interrogated, there are hundreds interrogated who know nothing of remote importance to the stability or self-image of the regime” (28). José is certainly part of the latter, yet his torture serves the regime in that his pain is misread, and therefore it becomes a testament to the spectacle of the regime’s power. While the regime interprets torture as a mechanism for displaying and maintaining power and as a technique to gather information, the reader sees the weakness and desperation of the regime. In *Zero*, José’s interrogation is a catalyst in his evolution into a communist guerrilla. After being tortured he is no longer afraid of the regime’s power, but instead becomes subversive. Looking at this original scene illuminates the absent texts that share a page with it as of 2001, as the regime’s weakness and spectacle of power are central in all of them.

The first absent text tells of Alberto Junior, who appears in a “masculine miniskirt” (Brandão 144)³⁰ avoiding the streets of the jurisdiction that has declared him wanted for wearing the skirt: “Albert is convinced of two things: pants are not a symbol of

masculinity and the style will catch on” (Brandão 144)³¹ This story shows the reader that in Latíndia-America, those who challenge societal norms are considered criminals, but it also subtly underscores the inherent weakness of the regime. If Alberto is able to audaciously wear the forbidden miniskirt within certain spaces, it is because he knows that the power of the repressive militia is not omnipresent. This section reveals a disparity between the image the regime projects of its power through ideology, what Scarry calls the spectacle of its power, and its logistical capabilities and limitations. The government can condemn miniskirts and threaten people, like Alberto, with punishment however, it cannot physically enforce its multitude of superfluous regulations because they would be impossible to uphold in actuality. The image of a man effeminized by a miniskirt as a challenge to the macho image of the government’s power further highlights the posturing of the government and ridicules its (in)ability to exert authority. Additionally, the text illustrates the regime’s fear that the style could “catch on,” and in doing so, creates a popular trend that challenges the government’s laws and its image.

The second story recounts the construction of Kolys Heum (pronounced in Portuguese like “*coliseu*” or coliseum). Although it explains the terrifying plan to build a coliseum in which “subversives” will be sent to battle lions, the polemic presented in this story is that the government refuses to investigate shipments of iron and cement that were illegally diverted from the building site. The head engineer of the project, who was fired, affirms that iron and cement were embezzled. Superficially, the story condemns corruption. Below the surface it illustrates the regression of the society in the storyworld to one in which violence is a public spectacle and a form of entertainment for the masses.

In *Zero*, the mention of the Kolys Heum and the creation of a cultural event that celebrates the executions of so-called subversives as they battle lions, indicates a regression to the most primitive of state apparatuses. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault begins with the historical background of state-sponsored torture. What he calls the “the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle” (7) is a transition from the state’s application of punishments that inflict pain upon the body in public, thereby creating a spectacle of torture and death, to punishments that were carried out in private. He writes, “At the beginning of the nineteenth century, then, the great spectacle of

physical punishment disappeared; the tortured body was avoided; the theatrical representation of pain was excluded from punishment. The age of sobriety in punishment began” (14). For Foucault, the era in which violent punishments were public spectacles is a point of departure for the evolution of modern-day criminal justice. Foucault explains that corporal punishment was relocated to a private place, “therefore ensuring that the execution should cease to be a spectacle and remain a strange secret between the law and those it condemns” (Foucault 15). In *Zero*, the “strange secret” between José and the police takes place on the very same page as the story of the Kolys Heum. In *Zero* before 2001, state-sponsored violence and torture are blatantly depicted as they occur in private, especially towards the end of the novel.

In the editions from 2001 and on, the spectacle of violence is highlighted through the absent pages as the plot has changed. This regression that the Kolys Heum represents clearly undoes centuries of progress in human rights and echoes the ultimate destruction of Latíndio-American society in “Hórreo” where there is no regard for human life. It bolsters the theory that *Zero* is the depiction of a year zero, or the beginning of the end. The decline of Latíndia-America starts with repression and ends in apocalyptic “Hórreo.” Additionally, the story of the Kolys Heum illustrates the government’s desperate attempts to maintain its own illegitimate power. Scarry points out that the physical pain elicited by torture is converted into a fiction of power. She writes, “[Torture] goes on to deny, to falsify, the reality of the very thing it has itself objectified by a perceptual shift which converts the vision of suffering into the wholly illusory but, to the torturers and the regime they represent, wholly convincing spectacle of power” (27). As the Kolys Heum represents a moral regression, it also depicts the complex relations of power at play. The military government’s spectacle of power is moved from that of a private screening for individual prisoners to a public venue, in which prisoners and civilians alike are exposed to the spectacle, thus strengthening the regime’s deployment of fear and ideology against “subversives.”

The Kolys Heum is the perfect symbol for regression because it is an ancient symbol of Western torture from Roman times, while it is also a venue for entertainment. Spectators who attend the Kolys Heum would adopt the regime’s ideology by supporting, condoning and relishing in the public executions. However, like the previous story of Alberto and his miniskirt, the ideology proves stronger than

the government's capacity to carry out its objectives when it is undermined by its own culture of corruption, choosing to fire the engineer who blows the whistle rather than investigating the embezzlement of construction material. The corruption illustrated in this section reflects the same corruption expressed in "Hórreo," while it also depicts the "philosophical tendency" that shifted collective mentality: "How much would it cost me for you to change your concept of life. . .?" (Brandão 145)³² In the segment on the Kolys Heum, the regime's philosophy is becoming quotidian action and the Kolys Heum is the space in which the people witness and cheer on the spectacle of power.

The text about the Kolys Heum also provides an example of how the absent pages refer to each other, in this case, to the map of Latíndia-America. Interestingly, it also refers to the novel *Zero* as a volume, "As it is well-known, the Kolys Heum is the largest concrete structure in the world (in spite of not being recognized on the map at the opening of this volume), with a capacity of holding 200,000 people" (Brandão 146)³³ The absent page describing the Kolys Heum and the absent map refer to each other providing continuity among the absent pages, which functions to transform the novel. This continuity extends to the final absent text, which like the map, makes the city of São Paulo part of the storyworld.

The third story tells of the discovery of gold in a river in the north of the country. It further depicts a public act of violence, the unmaking of the world and history via the destruction of language. It ultimately reveals that even powerful actors in the military regime of Latíndia-America are vulnerable to state-sponsored torture as the regime slowly destroys itself. The line separating the oppressor / oppressed binary is unstable and in flux. The gold discovery illustrates the dominance of neocolonial interests; the Latíndio-American country in *Zero* is loyal to its allies abroad while it is willing to sacrifice any of its own supporters: "A mineral deposit of 23 kilometers. The Spokesman declared: *You can be sure that of these 23 kilometers, only about 10 centimeters will remain in our country.* The tongue of the Spokesman was cut out in a public plaza in São Paulo" (Loyola 146; emphasis his).³⁴ Clearly, the absent text addresses the abundance of Latíndia-America's natural resources, and the privileging of neocolonial relationships, which as previously mentioned is an underlying theme throughout the novel and central to "Hórreo." Furthermore, the Spokeman's comment reveals a gap between the regime's deliberately

constructed ideology and what the regime covertly achieves. It reveals that the government does not want the people to know that it exports the majority of its natural resources. In “Hórreo,” what was Latíndia-America is described as a place that merely exports and sacrifices its own development in order to serve developed countries. The mention of this gold that will be exported foreshadows the mass exports described in “Hórreo.”

Like the map, this text makes São Paulo a site where torture is practiced. Not only is São Paulo home to the worst torturer as the map points out, but it also supports public corporal punishment. The public aspect of punishment operates in a similar manner as the Kolys Heum, in that violence becomes a spectacle for the public to see. In the original scene in which José is tortured, the segment on the Kolys Heum and here in the segment on the Spokesman, the regime converts the pain of its people into a spectacle of its own power. In cutting out the Spokesman’s tongue, the regime literally silences him by making him physically incapable of speaking. On the symbolic level, language is destroyed through the pain of the Spokesman, unmaking his world according to Scarry’s scholarship, and also stripping him of agency by subverting the paradigm between oppressor and oppressed. The Spokesman, a key actor on the oppressor’s side, becomes the oppressed. This exemplifies the flexibility of this dividing line, demonstrating that those who make up the military regime also become its victims, which is clear in “Hórreo” where corruption and neocolonialism have made the land uninhabitable. With these three stories, the reader becomes aware of how dire the situation in the storyworld truly is.

The very existence of *Zero* is a testament to the repressive society in which it was written. It depicts repression, censorship and torture all within the pages of a banned book that was sewn together from the censored and tortured Brazilian press. Torture and censorship work together to create and preserve the regime’s fictitious spectacle of power, and inadvertently reveal the regime’s weakness and vulnerability. Torture censors the victim by robbing him of language and, by extension, the possibility of expressing his pain and the atrocities committed against him. Censorship operates in a similar way in that it destroys language by undermining linguistic expression. Textual bodies, like human bodies, are vulnerable to censorship and torture under a military regime, as depicted in the storyworld and actually experienced in Brazil.

With the absent pages working together to make a meta-commentary on neocolonialism, characterized by corruption and the decline of society in Latíndia-America and therefore in Brazil, the novel also becomes a warning for the future. In particular, the grammar of the questions in “Hórreo” and the text about the Spokesman illustrate the flimsiness of the division between the repressive regime and the opposition, the oppressors and the oppressed, or the powerful and the powerless. When these paradigms are subverted in the novel, *Zero* becomes especially relevant in the Brazil of the twenty-first century. Eighteen years after the official return to democracy, the Brazilian government employs an older generation of politicians who participated in the military regime and also former members of the opposition, among them many who participated in violent counter-attacks, served jail time and were tortured during the dictatorship.³⁵ Nonetheless, the line between these groups who were enemies mere decades ago blurs every time politicians face polarizing issues, such as corruption scandals, debates about Brazil’s role in international relations and choices about how to use Brazil’s natural resources. Remarkably, this line also wavers as the current government considers that it has not investigated its dark history of torture and disappearances, setting it apart as the only South American country that suffered under a military regime that has not repealed its amnesty law.³⁶ While Brazil’s new National Truth Commission, launched under the administration of President Dilma Rousef, herself a torture survivor, is just beginning to scratch the surface to understand what happened during the dictatorship, books like *Zero* remain a crucial resource for younger generations looking to uncover a history that is still censored.

Notes

1. See Jan Knippers Black’s *United States Penetration of Brazil* and Carlos Fico’s *O Grande Irmão: Da Operação Brother Sam aos Anos de Chumbo: O Governo dos Estados Unidos e a Ditadura Militar Brasileira* for more on United States involvement in the 1964 coup.

2. “O apartamento era um depósito provisório de livros, de uma editora fechada pelo governo” (Loyola 139-140).

3. All citations from the Portuguese text *Zero* come from the 35th Anniversary Edition of the text published by Global in 2010.

4. “sucata”

5. “BESTEIRA LER ESSAS COISAS SÓ COMPLICA A VIDA / NÃO DEIXE AS MILÍCIAS REPRESSIVAS SABEREM QUE ESTES LIVROS EXISTEM AQUI / VOCÊ JÁ ESTEVE UMA VEZ NAS INVESTIGAÇÕES / SE FOR OUTRA VAI SER O SEU FIM / VOCÊ DESAPARECE COMO TANTA GENTE ANDA DESAPARECENDO / MAS VOCÊ NÃO SABE ESTAS COISAS ELAS NÃO SÃO PUBLICADAS ELES NÃO DEIXAM PUBLICAR / PÁRA JOSÉ / PÁRA DE LER ESSES LIVROS: sucata” [sic] (Loyola 150-151)

6. “Terminado em 1969, o livro foi recusado por quatro editoras brasileiras, sob a alegação capciosa alegação de que ‘dificuldades gráficas’ impediram a boa execução da obra. . .” (All translations by the author unless stated otherwise.)

7. “Quando da primeira edição, Loyola, em dúvida ainda quanto a certas ilustrações (como o mapa inicial da América Latíndia) e alguns segmentos, deixou-os de fora. Hoje, passando 26 anos da primeira edição brasileira (e 27 da italiana), tudo o que ficou de lado voltou.”

8. See Andréa Fleury Bertoncini and Marcos Hidemi de Lima’s “América Latíndia Di(zero)icizada” and also Helena Bonito Couto Pereira’s “Semelhanças que não são meras coincidências: Narrativas Pós-Modernas no Brasil e no México.”

9. “As novas gerações nunca ouviram falar da América Latíndia e Alguns Países Africanos. . . O que era América Latíndia é hoje o Quinto Mundo, região chamada Hórreo, isolada, autônoma, independente” (Loyola 97).

10. The name “Hórreo” suggests the role of Latíndia-America as a repository of raw materials. Hórreos are sheds that store grain and other dry goods. They are often associated with the northern Iberian Peninsula.

11. “Destes lugares (considerados insalubres para o mundo desenvolvido) vêm matérias-primas como o carvão, ferro, urânio, petróleo e metais recém-descobertas, além da madeira e alguns animais decorativos, em vias de extinção) e homens destinados a experiências científicas.” [sic] (Loyola 91)

12. “Quanto me custa você mudar seu conceito de vida, sua idéia política, sua maneira de administrar, fechar os olhos para o que faço e a maneira como faço, ignorar minhas ações perniciosas e minha falta de ética?” (Loyola 97)

13. From one of the forwards to the 2010 edition of *Zero*, “E se eu não tivesse tido coragem de publicar o *Zero* naquele ano em 1974?” (16) in which Loyola reflects on the process of writing *Zero* under censorship.

14. See Ronald M. Harmon’s “Angústia e Zero: depoimentos da repressão;” Robert E. DiAntonio’s “The Evolution of Ignácio de Loyola Brandão’s Dystopian Fiction: *Zero* and *Não verás país nenhum* as Brazilian

Cultural Fantasy” in *Brazilian Fiction: Aspects and Evolution of the Contemporary Narrative*.

15. Talvez dentro de mil anos curtidors, sejamos como eles, uma coisa difícil de se destruir, e em mil anos sejamos substituídos por um novo ciclo. Enquanto isso, estendemos as mãos, latíndio-americanos, africanos, asiáticos. Não para chorar-gemer, mas para compreender-organizar, (Loyola 385).

16. “. . . Pegaram todos, vão continuar a pegar até que possa descobrir um modo de lutar e organizar. E então, inverter. E reinverter. Quem está certo estará errado. Quem está errado estará certo. . .” (Loyola 388)

17. Depois de ter sua biblioteca inteiramente confiscada e queimada pelo Governo 1, o sociólogo e pesquisador das origens do subdesenvolvimento nacional, Carlos Antunes, aceitou o convite de Yale para lecionar na famosa Universidade Norte-Americana. Deve embarcar dentro de 10 dias, se os advogados liberarem o seu passaporte. (Loyola 114)

18. “Esta história se passa pouco antes da Reunião de Divisão, Agrupamento e Isolamento de Áreas que *aconteceu daqui a muitos anos*” (Loyola 97).

19. See Nancy T. Baden’s “The Censor’s Scissors” from *The Muffled Cries*; Andréa Fleury Bertocini and Marcos Hidemi de Lima’s “América Latíndia Di(zero)icizada;” Elizabeth Lowe in “The Earthly City at the Edge” from *The City in Brazilian Literature*; E. Rodríguez Monegal’s “Writing Fiction under the Censor’s Eye;” Arturo Santorio’s “Individuo, potere e società in *Zero* di I. de L. Brandão.”

20. “Num país qualquer da América Latíndia, num dia do futuro que pode ser próximo ou remoto, José Gonçalves mata ratos num cinema de última classe.”

21. Atila, amigo de José, tem o peido mais fedido do mundo.

22. Rinaldo Cavaquinho se orgulha de ser o torturador mais cruel do mundo conhecido.

23. A tela em CinemaScope do cine República em São Paulo era a tela de cinema mais extensa da América Latíndia.

24. O cheiro

25. “Átila desapareceu e o cheiro (Átila) permaneceu” (Loyola 376).

26. “Ali se desenvolveu em extremo grau de tecnologia a tendência filosófica, tornada ação do cotidiano” (Loyola 97).

27. “Bravos soldados de fogo não evitaram a catástrofe”

28. O tira bateu em José durante cinco minutos.

O tira bateu em José durante cinco minutos.

O tira bateu em José durante cinco minutos.

Deram amoníaco para José cheirar. Ele acordou.

Se não dé esse serviço logo, vai ficar aqui muito tempo. (Loyola 144-145)

29. “Não ficou nada. E vai andando, vai antes que fique de uma vez. Comunistinha de merda. Nós vamos te pegar. Vamos, mesmo, ah, se vamos!” (Loyola 146)
30. “minissaia masculina” (Loyola 144)
31. “Alberto está convicto de duas coisas: a calça não é símbolo de masculinidade e a moda vai pegar” (Loyola 144).
32. “Ali se desenvolveu em extremo grau de tecnologia a tendência filosófica, tornada ação do cotidiano: quanto me custa você mudar seu conceito de vida. . . ?” (Loyola 97)
33. “Como se sabe, o Kolys Heum é a maior estrutura em concreto do mundo (apesar de não constar do mapa de abertura deste volume), podendo abrigar duzentas mil pessoas.” (Loyola 145)
34. Uma jazida com 23 quilômetros. Porta-Voz declarou: *Podem ficar certos que desses 23 quilômetros, só uns 10 centímetros vão ficar em nosso país*. A língua do Porta-Voz foi cortado em praça pública, em São Paulo. (Loyola 146; emphasis his)
35. In fact, Brazil’s current president, Dilma Rousseff, was a Marxist guerrilla during the military regime and experienced torture while in prison.
36. See “La boîte noire de l’amnésie” by Jean-Pierre Langellier in *Le Monde*. May 12, 2011.

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