

REPRESENTATIONS OF CATASTROPHE VICTIMS IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE JOURNALISM^I



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ABSTRACT – In this paper, we study representations of catastrophe victims in two contemporary journalistic narratives in Brazil: *Todo dia a mesma noite* by Daniela Arbex and *Tragédia em Mariana* by Cristina Serra. We first study the meaning and uses of the word victim to describe the types of victims in the narratives. Our analysis of both narratives focuses on the victims. We aim to understand how the storytelling in each narrative develops the victims' stories. The results of the analysis point to different narrative projects and, as a result, to different ethical positions regarding the representation of victims. Arbex's work focuses on trauma as an emotional nucleus which all characters (and possibly the reader) suffer from. Investigating the catastrophe is the main focus in Serra's work, with the stories of those who died told through the memory of those who survive them, who seek justice, and who look to rebuild their lives.

Keywords: Victim. Narrative Journalism. Catastrophe. *Todo dia a mesma noite*, written by Daniela Arbex. *Tragédia em Mariana*, written by Cristina Serra.

REPRESENTAÇÕES DA VÍTIMA NO JORNALISMO NARRATIVO CONTEMPORÂNEO SOBRE CATÁSTROFES

RESUMO – Neste trabalho, investigamos representações de vítimas de catástrofes em duas narrativas jornalísticas brasileiras contemporâneas: *Todo dia a mesma noite*, de Daniela Arbex, e *Tragédia em Mariana*, de Cristina Serra. Recuperamos, inicialmente, o significado e usos da palavra vítima para uma descrição dos tipos presentes nas narrativas. Analisamos, a seguir, as obras com ênfase na categoria da vítima, personagem que constitui a face humana do acontecimento. Objetivamos compreender como, em cada narrativa, as vidas afetadas são colocadas em enredo. Os resultados da análise apontam para projetos narrativos distintos e, por seguinte, de posições éticas também distintas acerca da representação das vítimas. A obra de Arbex reitera o trauma como núcleo dramático, que fixa as personagens (e possivelmente o leitor) no sofrimento; a de Serra atua investigativamente sobre a catástrofe, com a recuperação das histórias dos que morreram por meio da memória dos sobreviventes, que, em movimento, buscam justiça e reconstruir caminhos.

Palavras-chave: Vítima. Jornalismo Narrativo. Catástrofe. *Todo dia a mesma noite*, livro de Daniela Arbex. *Tragédia em Mariana*, livro de Cristina Serra.

REPRESENTACIONES DE LA VÍCTIMA EN EL PERIODISMO NARRATIVO CONTEMPORÂNEO SOBRE DESASTRES

RESUMEN – En este trabajo investigamos representaciones de víctimas de catástrofes en dos narrativas periodísticas brasileñas contemporâneas: *Todo dia a mesma noite*, de Daniela Arbex, y *Tragédia em Mariana*, de Cristina Serra. Inicialmente, recuperamos el significado y usos de la palabra víctima para una descripción de tipos existentes en las narrativas. Analizamos las narrativas con énfasis en la categoría víctima, personaje que constituyó el rostro humano de los reportajes. Pretendemos entender cómo, en cada narrativa, se enredan las vidas afectadas. Los resultados del análisis muestran diferentes proyectos narrativos y distintas posturas éticas acerca las representaciones de las víctimas. La obra de Arbex reitera el trauma como núcleo dramático, que fija los personajes (y posiblemente el lector) in el sufrimiento; en Serra, se avanza en la investigación de la catástrofe, con el rescate de las historias de los que murieron por medio del recuerdo de los supervivientes, que buscan justicia y rehacer sus vidas.

Palabras clave: Víctima. Periodismo Narrativo. Desastre. *Todo dia a mesma noite*, obra de Daniela Arbex. *Tragédia em Mariana*, obra de Cristina Serra.

1 Introduction

This paper aims to investigate representations of catastrophe victims in two contemporary journalistic narratives in Brazil: *Todo dia a mesma noite*² (2018) by Daniela Arbex and *Tragédia em Mariana*³ (2018) by Cristina Serra. We intend to understand how characters whose lives are in ruins become a kind of structuring element for reports, and how these reports, together with the testimonies (Sarlo, 2007), can highlight the human aspects of the narrative and

engage the reader's empathy. When examining the life histories in these reports marked by trauma, we look to discuss the potential narrative fluctuation between the necessary denouncement of facts and the risks of firmly establishing characters as victims; between dramatizing the event and keeping the memory alive through testimonial discourse. Our purpose is not to judge the intention of the journalists but to understand how different ways of narrating, and particularly of inserting victims into a plot, produce different ethical approaches on catastrophes and the characters, thus constituting spheres of reflection about narrative journalism.

Characters have traditionally been an important pillar of journalistic narratives on catastrophes. When commenting on *Hiroshima*, John Hersey's book originally published in *The New Yorker* in 1946, Matinas Suzuki Jr. (2017, p.168) states that the impact of his work "came from the chosen focus and approach, humanizing the events through the stories of six survivors". For Svetlana Aleksievitch (2016, p.372), whose work *Voices from Chernobyl* includes testimonies, narrating the nuclear accident from man's point of view is equally interesting because "that's where everything happens".

The word catastrophe, from Ancient Greek (*kata* + *strophê*), means "to overturn" and has many synonyms, including "collapse", "disaster", and "devastation" (Nestrovski & Seligmann-Silva, 2000). A catastrophe can be understood as a destructive event that "strikes the heart of the community" (Dosse, 2013, p.7) and inadvertently transforms it. As a traumatic event, it is a disaster whose meaning is not final, since the highly unpredictable nature of the event itself prevents it from being completely understood (Caruth, 1996). The trauma narrative deals with the reiteration and the intricacy between the known and the unknown manifested in the victims' reports.

For Seligmann-Silva (2008, p.69), "trauma is characterized by a memory of a past that does not pass". The title of Arbex's work (2018), *Todo dia a mesma noite*, is based on this type of repetition and references the difficulty the characters had (mainly the family of those who died in the Kiss nightclub) during the night of the disaster, often referred to as the long winter night. This report recounts the stories of those impacted by the fire in 2013 which killed 242 people, mostly youths, in the city of Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

On the other hand, Cristina Serra's report addresses the environmental disaster in the interior of the state of Minas Gerais in 2015, one of the biggest in the country. The tailings dam collapsed,

killing 19 people, destroying communities, and spreading pollutants into 38 municipalities, also compromising the flora and fauna of the area and human activities on the Doce River⁴. In the book's introduction, Serra emphasizes the human side of this tragedy that the numbers do not reveal: "It was important to have their faces shown, reveal their identities, and give them a voice" (Serra, 2018, p.14).

The purpose of highlighting the victims' stories can be better developed in non-fiction book form, something both authors opted to do. These authors also work with daily journalism in Brazil. The time spent on investigating is more extensive when reporting in book form, as it attempts to further develop the approaches and the relationships with the characters in the story: "The book form allows the author to revisit the past in order to represent what is current, but is transformed and refitted with a new garment" (Lima, 2009, p.46).

To do this, the plots are better developed throughout the book, which allows the writer to articulate information and parallel stories through a narrative thread, creating a different kind of work from that of daily journalism, one which is more studied and directed at readers who are not only interested in stories about catastrophes, but in how they are told. The strength of the book form partly resides in its narrative construction, in the way it bundles main and secondary stories into a cohesive whole that reveals the very complexity of the event. This materiality has the appeal of permanence and proposes to emphasize what daily journalism cannot cover in detail.

The characters in the aforementioned texts are real victims of real catastrophes. They have suffered a hardship that must be repaired in some way, and reporting can help repair by recording and publishing stories and needs. However, it is important to pay attention to the way the trajectories are told and how the characters are described and inserted into a plot. If it is necessary to humanize what tends to be often expressed numerically, as claimed by Cristina Serra and Daniela Arbex, it is also necessary then to identify narrative resources that may root the victim in such a condition, usually by reiterating and perpetuating scenes of suffering, thus creating obstacles to overcoming the trauma.

We propose, therefore, to examine the ways that victims of tragedies are represented in these reports. Through narrative analysis, we intend to highlight the relationships established between the individual lives and the disaster. Due to the complexity of the non-fiction characters, we include perspectives for analyzing reports that,

as we have seen over time and in different contexts, are dedicated to the stories of catastrophe victims. We also intend to raise questions about what proper journalistic representations of human beings in suffering are.

This paper is divided into four parts, in addition to the introduction and final considerations. In the first part, we discuss the notion of victim based on the origin of the term (relating to something sacrificial) and its displacement into the legal sphere from typifications that can be verified in the analyzed narratives. We reflected on the criminal implications of the term when adopting or ruling it out as a word describing those affected by disasters. The collapse of the Mariana dam, and specifically its consequences, led to discussions about the term; used frequently by the two reports referenced in this paper to describe the people affected by the disasters.

Before beginning with the analysis, we look at the methodological order and explain the aspects of the journalistic narratives that this paper explores. Character analysis of our objects requires a more comprehensive look at the narrative aspects of the plotline and how the victims' dramas are narrated. The characters are qualified by the way they are described and placed in the scene, and allow us to learn about the values attributed to them and propose places to the victims. The next segments analyze the representations of the victims in *Todo dia a mesma noite* and *Tragédia em Mariana*, noting the different resources mobilized in the narratives and their ethical aspects.

In this study, there is ethics and a responsibility to representing the person whose life is being narrated, since a character in journalism is not just “a being on a page story”; it has an equivalent in the historical world whose life and memory may be affected by the report. Journalistic representations circulate in daily life and provide us with information. In this case, they help us better understand disasters and the relationships we establish with the victims who we read about in the narratives.

2 The victims they write about

“Victim” is the term both Daniela Arbex (2018) and Cristina Serra (2019) use the most to refer to those affected by the catastrophes although, as we shall see in the case of the dam collapse, the people

who suffered from this disaster say they were affected by it, and not victims of it, most likely to solidify collective efforts. The word victim, from Latin meaning animal sacrificed in a religious ritual. For René Girard (1990), human or animal sacrifice in archaic religions is a form of mediation between the sacrificer and a deity to unite the community, avoid conflicts, establishing order, or even appeasing the gods identified with natural disasters. Therefore, the victim is an innocent person who, through a sacrificial substitute, atones for some guilt in order to reestablish harmony.

However, Girard reminds us of another meaning for a sacrificial substitute, one which does not necessarily involve something being paid to a deity, “Society looks toward a somewhat indifferent victim, a ‘sacrificable’ victim, and any violence that its members may suffer need to be protected at any cost” (Girard, 1990, p.15). The victim is then a substitute who suffers violence as a sort of “escape valve” (p.15) for diverting and channeling the violence in that society.

For Daniele Giglioli (2018, p.67), the “fact that we are structurally open to the violence from the other is not an event; it is what challenges us and constitutes us as subjects”. As a victim, however, this general vulnerability is emphasized and associated with an identity: it is not what it does, but what is done to it. Throughout life, subjects tend to be identified differently; the victim “is something, it is certain, it has an origin, it has documents, it is based on an event, it is demonstrable. It questions security and authority. What is it? A victim. This is undeniable and can never be removed” (p.126).

In modern law, the term was originally used to describe individuals who had died or had suffered injuries or some type of loss due to crime, accidents, human disasters, wars, or forms of social injustice such as discrimination, political persecution, and others (Karmen, 2016). Victims can be primary and affected directly or they can be secondary, like family members of those who died in the Kiss nightclub fire or the collapse of the Samarco dam in Bento Rodrigues. These family members, although not directly affected, were also devastated by the catastrophes.

In her narrative *Tragédia in Mariana*, Serra (2018, p.256) interviews the individuals who created the Transaction and Conduct Adjustment Term (TTAC), an agreement signed between the Federal Government, the state governments of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, Samarco Mineração, and its shareholders, Vale and BHP Billiton; it shows how mining companies refused to use the word victim

because of the term's criminal implications. They also refused to use the word "affected", using "impacted" in its place, and refused to call the catastrophe a "disaster" or even an "accident", instead preferring the neutral term "event". Thus, the way that individuals and events are named is a subject of discussion, the semantics of which qualifies the catastrophe and may also indicate culpability in the legal sphere.

As we stated earlier, the victims of the dam collapse refer to themselves as being "affected", as evidenced in *A Sirene*⁵, a newspaper produced by the communities with the support of universities and social movements. They might use this term to try and distance themselves from the meaning of immobility and passivity that comes with the word victim, including its sacrificial connotations, which is also inappropriate as it refers to the idea of a life being offered to achieve peace or a greater good. We know, from Agamben (2008), that Jewish people reject the word Holocaust, which means "sacrifice" (or literally "all burnt"), as it carries with it the idea of surrendering to a sacred cause. They prefer to use the term *Shoah*, which means catastrophe.

Another explanation (which is not in place of the first one) for the community opting to use the term "affected" is its reference to the collective organization known as *Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens* (in English, Movement for Those Affected by Dams), or MAB, which fights for the rights of the nation's affected populations, including those in Mariana. In Latin America, the MAB is also associated to the *Movimiento de Afectados por Represas* (MAR). The words "impacted" or "affected" are used internationally for social movements on catastrophes involving water or tailings dams.

We use the word "victim" in this article not only because it is the word that journalists most frequently use, but because of the criminal implications it implies which are important aspects of the narratives. One of the objectives of this article is to explain the meaning of the word victim in these texts, as well as how these characters are constructed and the narrative place they occupy.

A catastrophe can produce a high death count: *Tragédia em Mariana* registered 19 deaths due to the collapse of the tailings dam and *Todo dia a mesma noite* registered 242 from the fire in the nightclub. The first category of victims that we will address is those who died in catastrophes. Their stories are told by others. There are also surviving victims, who are identified as victims so that they may have access to reparations; they are individuals whose stories have not ended and whose life meanings have been changed.

Surviving victims can be divided into those who are directly affected by the catastrophe and managed to escape death, and those who are affected indirectly and are identified by the loss of their lifestyles, even if they did not run the imminent risk of dying; we include the relatives of dead victims with this group.

Among the books analyzed for this study, *Tragédia em Mariana* is the one that has the most examples of indirect surviving victims. They are workers from various areas whose jobs and lifestyles were compromised by the mudslide – fishermen, hydroelectric workers, hoteliers, ranchers – as well as residents who could no longer live in the region, such as indigenous populations, notably the Krenak, and inhabitants of destroyed communities like Bento Rodrigues or Paracatu de Baixo and Gesteira. Due to its investigative nature, this book deals with a greater diversity of sources than *Todo dia a mesma noite*.

Some of the sources that Serra interviewed were institutional (for example, state and federal governments and the companies involved), including non-governmental organizations and environmental and health researchers. More than just sources of information, the victims are characters, human faces in the story whose lives are narrated so that, according to Serra, the event is not reduced to just numbers that make up the “statistics of disasters which, sooner or later, are forgotten” (Serra, 2018, p.15).

There is yet another category of victim: one who is, or claims to be, wrongly accused of unprofessionalism during a catastrophe. These are defendants who became or claimed to be victims of disasters. This was the case with firefighters at the Kiss nightclub who were charged (and later acquitted) with involuntary manslaughter for failing to stop the youths from going back into the concert hall to try and save their relatives and friends. In *Tragédia em Mariana*, engineer Samuel Loures, prosecuted for having signed off on the stability report for the dam that ultimately collapsed, also claims in that same report that he was a “victim of Samarco” because he did not have access to the company’s reports. Loures was charged by federal prosecutors for issuing a false report. The trial is not yet concluded.

The people and institutions that are under investigation can claim victim status and thus absolve themselves of any responsibility the lawsuits may try to hold them accountable for. In *Tragédia em Mariana*, the former State Secretary of Economic Development in Minas Gerais, Altamir Rôso, says that Samarco would also be a “victim of the dam collapse”. Another character in this same book, Renata

Gerusa, a lawyer, was accused by her husband of influence-peddling in procedural decisions for the JBS multinational food company. She argues that she is wrongly accused and is a “victim of fraud” (Serra, 2018, p.270).

Although these uses are not common in the aforementioned books, they are worth looking at because they highlight a possible use of the term with what Giglioli (2018) refers to as an “ideal victim”. An individual or organization can seek protection by claiming to be a victim because “how could a victim be guilty, or even responsible for something? It isn’t, it was done to it. Do not act, suffer” (Giglioli, 2018, p.19). Although all these stories are conveyed, we noticed that the books we analyzed mostly favored stories of victims who died and those who survive them, mainly relatives. We say mostly because the rescuers in *Todo dia a mesma noite* also play a prominent role.

In addition to this emphasis on the victims who died, the survivors, and the family members, we observed that the stories intertwine in such a way that the last two types of victims (survivors and family members) must relate the stories about the first ones (those who died), as they obviously cannot provide any testimony. If the trajectories of the dead are told through the survivors then the stories of the survivors are linked to those who have died. What they have to say about them may touch facets of their own loving, professional and social lives; however, it inevitably addresses their relationships with those who have passed on, with their loss, and with the catastrophe which leads us to say: in the report, it is through the death of another that the story of this indirect victim gains importance.

3 Methodological considerations

Our analysis of the representations of victims in the reports focuses on the most common accounts between the two narratives: those of the victims who died and those of the survivors and indirect survivors – friends and relatives of those who were killed in catastrophes. A comparative analysis of the two books is appropriate here because it allows us to examine different contemporary journalistic narratives and resources in the construction of characters and their traumas. It helps identify and reflect on methods of current Brazilian reports on the catastrophe, notably on how empathetic connections are created, on the use of testimony in journalism, the

constitution of somewhat complex characters, as well as their role in the narrative.

The fact that the two books have different scopes does not, in our view, hinder the comparative analysis. Looking at the different proposals allows us to compare the narratives on the victims and reflect on them in light of what seems to us to be the primary purpose of book reporting: to not only shock readers and help them understand and share the feelings of others, but to help them understand the intricacies of the lives being narrated and provide them with contextual knowledge and a critical perspective of the social forces which individuals are subjected to, and how these individuals react when trying to guide their own stories.

Our narrative analysis sets about with an emphasis on how the victims' stories are narrated and intertwined in the catastrophes and how these characters' images are depicted in the narratives. For Antonio Candido (2004), three central elements of the narrative extend throughout: the characters, the plot, and the ideas (values and meanings). However, the plot is developed and ideas are typically exposed through the character, an element of "emotional and intellectual adherence" (Candido, 2004, p.54). Although Candido deals with fiction, we find it important to mention that it is through the victim, the character in the report (his or her choices, composition, life story, and principles) that the events take on the consistency of the experience and give us a glimpse of the values contained in the narrative.

The non-fiction character is a being with two faces (Serelle, 2020) as it is constructed with language but done so from a correspondent in the historical world who experiences the consequences and reverberations of its narrative representation. As we have said earlier, this is one of the aspects of what we understand to be the ethical project of the report. The ethics of representations in narrative journalism involves the relationship between the beings constructed in the text through narrative methods and those who they are based on in the real world. The character is a medium providing the reader with a connection to the real victim of the catastrophe.

Another feature of this ethical project, which we look at in this paper, is the fact that the narrative representations for every single victim give us a general idea of the victim – whether it is the one who suffers, the one who needs mending, the one who narrates the lives of others, or the one whose story is told by a third party. An analysis of the representations of victims thus requires one to reflect

on the possible resonances of reports that explore these victims' emotions or that construct their identities in certain ways.

There are three main aspects of victims investigated in the two reports: 1) the place that their stories occupy in the general organization of the narratives; 2) how the plots are created for the victims and their stories concerning the narrative resources (for example, those referring to temporality) and their possible effects; 3) the feelings and values that are predominantly attributed to victims in the narratives.

Although we didactically highlighted victim categories and aspects for observation in the previous segment and this one, for fluidity, we chose to perform the analyses separately, book by book, with reflections that sometimes offer comparisons between the narratives. For both books, we start the discussion on their titles that give us an idea of what we understand to be the overall tone of the books, which is echoed in the different narrative structures and, consequently, in the representations of the victims. Our analysis of *Todo dia a mesma noite* also included comments from the author herself about her work (which we mentioned earlier in this paper). Serra's observations, which were written in the actual report, have a more self-reflective nature to them when she talks about the need to narrate the victims' stories.

4 Into the night

The title *Todo dia a mesma noite* suggests the perpetuity of a traumatic moment symbolically assimilated to the end. Although the reflections about this title only appear in the 13th chapter of the book – “It is as if time had frozen in January 2013, with the memory of the last words exchanged with the deceased loved ones” (Arbex, 2018, p.185). The general idea, both in the narrative and for the surviving victims and indirect victims, is that the night of that catastrophe is constantly felt, and since then the future has been rebuilding.

On one hand, Arbex edits and composes the characters' stories, focusing more on the feelings they must have felt at the time: confusion, pain, and a lack of hope. On the other hand, the author reports the facts as if she were there, starting from a point just before the catastrophe and ending with it, like a climax. Similar to how serial narratives are organized into incomplete episodes, the events are suspended and then later resumed.

This is how the book begins, with a story told from the perspective of Carlos Dornelles, a medic who attended to the victims in the first hour of the fire. Arbex describes how the doctor had had a relatively quiet week, afternoon and early evening leading up to the catastrophe. He had not seen any patients at the clinic where he was working for a few days. Then, at dawn, the ambulances were called to the Kiss nightclub, and what had been an inactive day up to that point suddenly turned into one of despair, of improvisations, and all kinds of shortcomings – “everything was out of control” (Arbex, 2018, p.28). This same chapter included the story of firefighter Robson Müller (the magnitude of the disaster was much worse than he had imagined) and the story of the first few hours when first aid was being administered at the site of the fire. These two stories both contain a negative climax, going from order to disorder. The stories are no longer told from this point on (in the sense that, even though these stories were later revisited, they did not investigate the characters’ lives post-catastrophe).

The stories of parents whose children were in the burnt-down nightclub are narrated in the second chapter, entitled *Sinfonia da Tragédia*⁶, and continue until the end of the book. These stories are interspersed with reports from firefighters, nurses, and doctors, whose stories connect with those of the direct victims of the catastrophe – the young people (both survivors and non-survivors) who were in the nightclub. As we said earlier, the parents’ stories are narrated at the time the event took place. Even though the narrator writes in the past tense, the victims gradually find out what happened, and the reader who is well-informed about the catastrophe sometimes knows more than the characters that are disoriented in the narrative. This is how we meet Sérgio da Silva and Nadir Krauspenhar, Guto’s parents; Celita Pazini and Homero Bairro, Greicy and Patrícia’s parents; Lívia Oliveira and Otacílio Silveira, Heitor’s parents; Marta and Sílvio Beuren, Silvinho’s parents, and many others, all of whom are unsure at the time of whether their children might have perished in the fire at the Kiss nightclub.

The passages relating to the parents of the youths who were at the club are structured around when they found out about the catastrophe and their resulting confusion. In some of these passages, the parents’ distress is replaced by memories of their own lives or relationships with their children, as in the narrative about Marta and Sílvio Beuren, who reflect on Silvinho’s festive lifestyle while maintaining hope of finding him alive.

The youngest of four siblings—the other three being married—Silvinho disturbed the family's routine with the gatherings he had in the farm's shed during "festerês"⁷, fueled by beer, a harmonica, and Silvinho's accordion, which he took with him everywhere. In love with the countryside, he had traded in a career as an optometrist for growing grains, like Japanese rice, on the ranch. (Arbex, 2018, p.60).

We view this as a positive for the narrative as it offers another perspective through structuring these parents and children as non-fiction characters. They gain less noticeable characteristics from the reported event, thus making these characters more complex. However, these stories inevitably come to an end, despite being written years after the events which they refer to, and that narrative gain also comes to an end.

In an interview with the Intrínseca publishing company, Arbex (2020) states that "this book has 55.000 words and none of them talk about overcoming difficulties because the death of a child cannot be overcome". We view this statement from the author's point of view. Although we are not suggesting that representations of surviving victims should include "comebacks", we do see a problem with shortening the life stories of certain people due to the death of others. In this regard, a good counterpoint to this idea comes from Svetlana Aléksiévitch, in her aforementioned book *Voices from Chernobyl*, where mourners express their suffering, but their lives are examined in other aspects: their political views, cultural relations, and a desire for restitution. When interviewing the families Arbex (2020a) reported that he found them to be in a certain frame of mind ("They appeared to be excited, enthusiastic, confident that justice would be served. Then, they would all of a sudden appear to be dispirited, depressed, and vulnerable") that does not seem to be well represented in the book. For Giglioli, a primary focus on feelings of pain and other pain-related emotions amounts to prejudiced pity.

More important is what this framing actually means for the victims themselves, stigmatizing them in an identity that strips them completely or partly of their own biographies and cultural references, or even ending up imprisoning them in its confines, depriving them not only of subjectivity but also of any right other than that of help (the practical effects of which are necessary to investigate). Reduced to what they have experienced, there are only tears and no reasons. Their voices, similar to that of animals, serve only to express pleasure and mostly pain, and not to deliberate together on what is fair and unfair; a prerogative that, according to Aristotle, distinguishes the human species

from others endowed with logos and societies. Their truth lies in the eyes of the other; the compassionate and the merciful. (Giglioli, 2018, p.34).

It is also worth looking at the negative climax structure that repeats with a wide range of characters who, even though are all affected by a common problem, appear to react differently to the situations they find themselves in. It seems to us that adopting a very similar narrative structure that recounts the lives of different people restricts the individuality that non-fiction characters could – or rather should – express. John Hersey (2017) in his book, *Hiroshima*, does just this. He tells the stories of six lives affected by the bomb dropped on the city and does so in an individual fashion: they are all affected by the same disaster, yet the characters react differently to it, responding according to their social conditions and their individual plans and professions.

If the stories told by Arbex all contain marks of catastrophes because they are disrupted by them, the diegetic nature of *Todo dia a mesma noite* and its expanded dimension is gradually formed by constantly overcoming the worst expectations. In the first chapter, rescue worker Müller “felt that many had perished inside the nightclub, perhaps fifteen” (Arbex, 2018, p.22); however, he found many more than that. On page 84, the phrase “eighty dead” is used (Arbex, 2018). On page 98, there is mention of the 233 bodies that were covered and taken to be identified in a sports gymnasium in the city. On page 184, a mother tells her surviving son when asked how many have died: “two hundred and thirty-nine so far”. Page 204 is the only one that contains a narrative stating that 242 people were killed in the fire.

Another aspect of the story that is gradually built up through the characters revolves around the families in Santa Maria and the misinformation they received about the fire. Chapter V tells the story of Andrielle Righi da Silva, who celebrated her 22nd birthday at the Kiss nightclub on the night of the fire. Arbex starts the story with da Silva’s grandmother listening to the radio and hearing about the catastrophe in the nightclub where her granddaughter had gone. The search began for the girl and was unsuccessful at first, and the narration intersected with other stories. It was only later on, in Chapter VII when Andrielle’s father identified his daughter’s body in the gymnasium. The stories of other characters in *Todo dia a mesma noite* followed a similar trajectory.

In many of the chapters, Arbex stops narrating the characters' stories and goes back to narrating the catastrophe which is told gradually. It is only in the last few chapters of *Todo dia a mesma noite* that the author stops narrating the story as if she were watching it unfold; however, in between these chapters, there is chapter XV "40 seconds" focusing on re-enacting the fire. We believe this chapter clearly shows Arbex's project behind her narrative on the Kiss nightclub fire: it is an event that needs to be remembered, even if that means having to repeat it throughout the text. The consequence of the catastrophe is the catastrophe itself; it brings life stories to an end and, in this case, the narrative as well.

5 The collapse

The title *Tragédia em Mariana* describes the collapse of the Fundão dam and the deaths and environmental disasters that resulted from it as a terrible event, yet it also avoids immediately revealing what its investigative narration ultimately communicates: evidence of a criminal nature. The title is important because, as we mentioned earlier, how an event is labeled becomes an object of legal, social, and media discussions. A tragedy is a catastrophic event; however, the artistic meaning of this word portrays the idea of something on the side of horrific. In this regard, the book draws attention to the tragedy by demonstrating how a series of errors and oversights in the dam's construction, licensing, monitoring, and risk management ultimately led to its collapse. What's more, as we shall demonstrate, the tragedy is the overall tone the narrative takes when focusing on the victims.

While it is an investigative report where interviews with the various parties involved in the collapse and document analysis are most prominent, the book's narrative opening is also worth noting as it attempts to place the reader within the event. This opening contains two surviving victims who act as the protagonists: the first is Romeu Arlindo dos Anjos (whose name, the text emphasizes, seems to be borrowed from a character in a Shakespearean tragedy) was the only worker who survived. The second protagonist, Paula Geralda Alves, a service assistant for a Samarco service provider, is a character who is described as having a heroic quality.

Paula didn't think twice. She climbed into Berenice, a red Joy Plus motorcycle she bought three years ago with the money she saved by working two jobs. She drove as fast as she could towards Bento Rodrigues, where her family and dozens of friends lived. A cell phone video recorded by the team leader, Pedro Paulo Barbalho, showed images of the oncoming mudslide and her friends pleading for her not to go. They thought the raging river would swallow her up before she could reach the village. "Paula, come back, Paula, come back!" "Paula, oh Paula..." "Paula is crazy." (Serra, 2018, p.23).

This excerpt shows the fearless nature of the character who, despite warnings and pleadings from colleagues who thought she was crazy, continued to head toward Bento Rodrigues, the first community affected by the mining waste. The video recording mentioned in the excerpt, where the pleas of Paula's colleagues can be heard, is a document and effect of the reality of the narrative. The text also highlights the character's commitment to hard work, taking on an extra job as a cleaner to save the money she needed to buy her motorcycle, which she affectionately named Berenice as if it were a loved one.

As we shall see, hard work and commitment are mentioned in the text to assert the positive character of the dead family members. Paula and her 50cc motorbike were "faster than the mud" (Serra, 2018, p.23) and she managed to warn Bento Rodrigues residents about the mudslide before it reached the village. Her heroism is referenced several times in the book, chapter 51 is one example where the book once again states that Paula "saved most of the residents of Bento Rodrigues" (Serra, 2018, p.443).

Described in the first chapter as a kind of "apocalypse", the collapse of the dam is also compared to a hecatomb, an analogy made by a fire chief when looking at the brown plume of mud which reminded him of a mushroom cloud of smoke, as one can see in the images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki explosions. At another point in the book, the rescue operation is compared (also by firefighters) to "a war movie" (Serra, 2018, p.30). The last page of the chapter talks about the end of the more immediate destruction (the environmental disaster occurred over the next few days after the mud had been carried down the Doce River) and describes a scene that is reminiscent of a Portinari painting of immigrants. In this scene, about 500 homeless people were waiting to be taken to the gymnasium in Mariana:

They came out single file, exhausted and silent, they carried with them their dismay, their pain, their children, and the few belongings they managed to save. A woman was holding a pair of slippers. A man was carrying a suitcase on his back. A boy was holding his pet dog. Another person managed to save a bird and carried it in a birdcage. They looked like pilgrims with no destination. (Serra, 2018, p.40).

Unlike *Todo dia a mesma noite*, Serra's report is not structured narratively around the victims' stories. As we mentioned earlier, it is primarily investigative. The stories of victims who died are told by relatives and secondary victims – mostly wives of the dam workers. The stories are told throughout the book in chapters that break away from the main story as a way to size up the information with the human drama. The victims who passed away as a result of the disaster are remembered and described as ideal sons and daughters, parents, and companions. "Samuel was a wonderful father. He took a fifteen-day leave from the service when Cecília was born. He would bathe her and put her to sleep" (Serra, 2018, p.128), as Aline Ribeiro fondly recalls, the widow of a drill operator who died in the collapse. "He was very dedicated. He was a great father" (Serra, 2018, p.260), said Ana Cláudia Profeta, in praise of her husband, Mateus Fernandes. "Everything he did was for them [the daughters], for our home, for us. He took their studies very seriously so that they could have a better future" (Serra, 2018, p.210), said Tânia, widow to Daniel de Carvalho, a machine operator who was also killed in the dam collapse.

The victims were also committed workers. "He was building his life. He started as an intern at Kemira [a chemistry company] working in production and worked his way up from there" (Serra, 2018, p.40), says widow Lira Moura about her former spouse, Marcos Aurélio Moura. Emerson dos Santos remembers his father: "Aílton always enjoyed working hard, 'even on his days off he didn't stop'" (Serra, 2018, p.237). In many of these stories, this dedication to hard work is the virtue that rightly places the victim in the scene of the catastrophe, just like the conflicts in a classic tragedy. The reports almost always emphasize the happy lives and promising life projects the families had before the tragedy. "We were in such a good place... You know...when you are so happy that you are afraid to lose what you have?" (Serra, 2018, p.128), said Aline Ribeiro about Samuel Albino. In this report, we observed

that death is a part of the victims' biography which shields them from any human ambiguity that might qualify that story in a non-virtuous way.

To further understand this positive framing of the dead victims, we look to Slovenian philosopher Žižek (2014) and his book, *Violence*. He claims that the victims in the planes that crashed into the towers on September 11th said their final words of love to those who were close to them, and he sees this as a "true ethical act" (emphasized by imagining the opposite: a wife who, in her last seconds of life, calls her husband to say that their marriage was a farce and she hates him). When the final words about those who have died are also loving it reveals the honorable position of the surviving victims, and journalism, when reporting on catastrophes, plays an important role in capturing it.

The tragedy is thus reinforced, as the report focuses on the fall of a faultless individual. As Albin Lesky (1996) points out, situations of misery can be touching, but they are not a tragedy in themselves. The "tragedy must mean the fall of an illusory world into the abyss of unavoidable disgrace" (Lesky, 1996, p.33). When quoting Aristotle, Lesky (1996, p.330) reminds us that in tragedy, the individual who is a victim of the fall must "be a little better than we are on average".

Another aspect of the victims' stories in *Tragédia em Mariana* is the prevalence of discourse over narrative. We understand discourse based on Benveniste (1991) where the form of enunciation of "I" denotes what is told since it is marked by a place, affections, and proposals for interactions with the other. In Serra's report, even though the narrator tells of the relatives' accounts of the victims who died, it is clear that they come from statements collected through interviews. Thus, the "I" of the family member often appears in quotation marks in these stories, showing that what is told is coming from the perspective and the sentiment that this indirect victim has for the lost loved one.

First-person enunciations represent most of the statements in the report, and their strength comes from the voice of the individual who is living through an extreme situation. In general, first-person texts of this type, according to Sarlo (2007, pp.86–87), are kind of shielded, as they "offer a knowledge that, in a certain way, has an indisputable character because of the immediacy of the experience and the moral principles that have been violated". Here, Sarlo is

specifically referring to direct victims of catastrophes, but we also consider that indirect victims such as family members from both books who lost their loved ones in the tragedies certainly experience forms of violation. Although she admits to the complicated nature of these accounts, Sarlo recognizes the ethical difficulty of critically approaching experiences of suffering when narrated by the individuals who experienced them.

In chapter 38, “Split Families”, the first person form is used to express the pain of a young mother, Pamela Rayanne Fernandes Izabel, who lost her five-year-old daughter Emanuelle. In this case, the report transcribes the text that Pamela posted on social media in the first-person form.

[...] When the school told us that the dam had collapsed, I quickly left in search of my children and my husband. But, when I was halfway there I ran into my mother-in-law and her husband, and he said that my husband had already gone upstairs and they did NOT let me go home. So, I went upstairs, I was distraught, and when I got up there I didn't find anyone. I felt like I was going to die, the pain was so bad, but I stayed on my feet. Every bit of information I got made me feel horrible. But I was hopeful. When I went to Mariana, that was when I learned the truth; that my son Nicolas was in Belo Horizonte and my husband was in Santa Barbara. And my daughter... nobody knew where she was. When I went to the guesthouse where I was staying I didn't want anything. I didn't sleep for days and nights and didn't eat anything. I only drank water because I was pregnant. One week later, on Wednesday, I got the news that they had found my daughter, but she was dead. My world fell apart. I collapsed, I couldn't stop crying, my heart was in pain. The most painful part was when they took her away from me. It was like a piece of my heart was being ripped out. From that point on, my life had no meaning. I thought I was going to die from so much anguish. But thank God I'm here now to show Samarco that the precious jewel they took from me cannot be brought back. They ruined my family. I want justice. My story doesn't end here. (Izabel as quoted in Serra, 2018, p.330, emphasis added).

This is the testimony of an irreplaceable loss that can paralyze someone and take away any meaning of life. The text describes the feelings of despair, breakdown, and anguish which, at the end of the testimony, are directed towards an active search for justice. The last sentence in the text highlights continuity and moving forward: “My story does not end here”. Emanuelle and Thiago Damasceno Santos, both 7 years old, whose lives are narrated by their grandfather Albertino Santos in the book's next chapter, are the two children who lost their lives in the catastrophe. Like Hurbinek in Primo Levi's book *The Truce* (1997), their lives

were cut short, and there is no other account of their lives than one of a pain of a great loss.

This is markedly different from the book *Todo dia a mesma noite* in which, as we mentioned earlier, we almost always witness the catastrophe as a scene that seems to narrate itself, through a third-person narrator. Chapter 15 of the book produces a realistic simulation of the fire at the Kiss nightclub. In *Tragédia em Mariana* the voice and pain of the victim are kept alive and the tribute is built through memory, which is mobilized in the effort for justice.

6 Final considerations

One of the reflections we had after a critical reading of these books was that its narrative choices and ethical propositions are deeply interwoven. It is through the narratives that representations of the victims and their stories are told, and these same narratives can make readers empathetic not only to the lives that were affected but to stories of other people in dangerous or perilous situations that also make us remember or feel. These somewhat interpretive journalistic narratives also need to inform readers about events that resonate and are still felt by many, and to make them think about these events.

Thus, we are able to differentiate between two narrative projects and, as a consequence, two ethical proposals and how they establish a relationship between the readers and the characters that are directly connected with the people they are representing. *Todo dia a mesma noite* re-enacts the event and thus ends up re-telling the trauma. To do this, it uses several resources, such as interruptions and serial-style narratives, re-enacting the fire at the Kiss nightclub, and including regional interjections in the characters' dialogues, making the reader feel as if he or she were watching the scene. The book sets the stage for a horror that cannot be overcome, thus the inability of its characters to get through the "night", fixated in the victim's suffering which might be conveyed to the readers.

In this case, we believe that taking into consideration the specific nature of victims who survive catastrophes might be important when considering other ethical and narrative positions

they might have. Even though they are scarred by the painful loss of their relatives or lifestyles, these people survived, and their unique trajectories, their ups and downs, are interesting. Describing their lives through events that are not directly linked to the catastrophe that affected them – work, love life, personal stances on life issues – is a proposal here.

Life stories and narrative are indistinguishable in *Todo dia a mesma noite*, since the report compiles these stories together, and ends up emphasizing the strategy of the plot. The narrated stories are barely biographical as they are usually temporally limited to the catastrophe, and the feelings predominantly expressed by the victims are of pain, disorientation and a lack of hope.

Tragédia em Mariana begins with the catastrophe and is the chapter in the book that most uses the dramatic narrative mode. When comparing the beginnings of both books, we can see a contrast between the account in Serra's narrative of the surviving victim Paula Alves, who warns the residents of Bento Rodrigues that the dam has burst, and the precariousness and subdued tone that precedes the fire in *Todo dia a mesma noite*. We observed that Serra prefers a style geared more toward action, while Arbex prefers the genesis of the negative climax that attaches the victims to the catastrophe. *Tragédia em Mariana* is developed with an investigative approach in which it exposes, in a documented and contextualized way, the negligence, the agreements made, and the level of political and economic dilemma associated with mining in Minas Gerais.

The investigative focus of the chapters is on the people in the catastrophe. The stories of the dead and the survivors are told through the emotional accounts collected by the reporter. Memory is an uplifting and valuable process that victims use in these accounts. Two sets of positive values which elevate the victims and further affirm the tragic nature of how their lives were interrupted are quite evident in the reports: one referring to affective individuals who care for their nuclear families and one referring to work. The latter, in the narrative structure of the tragedy, ends up emphasizing another violent side of the catastrophe; most of the dead victims were working for the mining company at the time the dam burst.

Furthermore, looking at the stories transformed by catastrophes from a historical perspective is an ethical and

narrative option that the victims seem to approve of. Once the catastrophe has passed, when feelings of pain and hopelessness are most prominent, we may see more proactive attitudes emerge such as those of Pamela Rayanne, searching for reparations and continuity. Using the narrative to express this multiplicity of emotions allows the victims to be shaped as the multifaceted characters that they are.

NOTES

- 1 A shorter version of this article was presented at a Journalism Studies group at the XV Congress of the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIIC).
- 2 Every day is the same night.
- 3 Tragedy in Mariana.
- 4 A river with a length of about 530 miles, and runs through the states of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, in the Southeast region of Brazil.
- 5 See the newspaper's website, available at: jornalasirene.com.br. Accessed on July 8, 2020.
- 6 The tragedy's symphony.
- 7 An expression used for a large festival.

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Two reviews used in the evaluation of this article can be accessed at: <https://osf.io/3hdr4> and <https://osf.io/pc5m4> | Following BJR's open science policy, the reviewers authorized this publication and the disclosure of his/her names.