

TERROR: TORTURE AND STATE TERRORISM IN *LAMARCA* AND *IDEOLOGIA*

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RESUMO: Ao longo da história da humanidade, tortura e castigos corporais foram usados para os mais diversos propósitos. Na Europa medieval, a tortura foi empregada como forma de controle social, primeiramente pela Inquisição, mas também por representantes do Estado. Apesar de a tortura ser veemente combatida no discurso oficial e no direito internacional, relatos pululam de seu uso ao redor do mundo em investigações policiais. No Brasil, durante a Ditadura Militar, a tortura física e mental de opositores ao regime se tornou rotina por parte de membros da polícia e das forças armadas. O sequestro, a tortura e a morte de militantes, executados secretamente, foram acompanhados de uma campanha pública cujo objetivo era instigar um medo coletivo dos assim chamados “terroristas”. Esse contexto é reconstruído em *Lamarca* (Rezende, 1994), mostrando em detalhes a sofisticada “indústria” da tortura durante a ditadura militar. Ao mesmo tempo que narra a história de Carlos Lamarca, o filme retrata a relação entre o exército e o DOPS, a tortura e a polícia secreta. Já o filme *Ideologia* (Marins, 1968), através de sua linguagem metafórica abundante em elementos de horror e terror, consegue capturar o sentimento de medo coletivo sem fazer nenhuma menção explícita à ditadura. Na análise dos filmes, dá-se ênfase às sequências de tortura e à relação dos meios de comunicação com a ditadura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Tortura; Terrorismo de estado; Terror; Horror.

ABSTRACT: Throughout the history of humankind, torture and corporal punishment were used for different purposes. During the Middle Ages, in Europe, torture was used to exercise social control, first by the Inquisition, and later also by State forces. Although torture has been strongly opposed in official discourse and in international law, there are still numerous reports of its use around the world in police investigations. In the Brazilian context of military dictatorship, physical and mental torture of political dissidents by members of the police and armed forces became routine. The secret abduction, torture and killing of militants were accompanied by a public campaign designed to produce collective fear of the so called “terrorists”. This context is recreated in *Lamarca* (Rezende 1994), showing in detail the sophisticated "industry" of torture during the military dictatorship in Brazil. Through the story of Carlos Lamarca, the film also portrays the relationship between the Brazilian army and DOPS¹, exposing how torture was used to extract information and how the secret police operated. In contrast, the film *Ideologia* (Marins 1968) manages to capture the feeling of collective fear without making any explicit mention to the dictatorship. Such effect is achieved through the film's abundant metaphorical language, rich in horror and terror elements. In the analysis of the films, emphasis is given to the torture sequences and to the role of media in supporting the dictatorship.

KEYWORDS: Torture; State terrorism; Terror; Horror.

¹Departamento de Ordem Política e Social, an official department created to repress the social movements. It became infamously known for torture and murders committed during Getúlio Vargas dictatorship and during the Military Dictatorship in Brazil.

“The invisible armies of the night carry out the task. There are no corpses and no one is responsible” (GALEANO, 281)

INTRODUCTION

Surrounded by armed men, surprised and with no chance of escape, with hands bound and head hooded, the individual is abducted from the relative safety of the outside world and taken to an unknown, isolated location. There is no time to warn a friend or a relative. No one knows he or she has been captured. Still hooded, the individual cannot see as he or she descends into a dungeon, through a maze of corridors. The individual can only hear the sound of footsteps, and its echo reverberating on the naked walls. Finally, the hood is removed. Struggling with disorientation, the individual rapidly understands his or her predicament. The torturer orders the individual to strip and then presents the torture instruments. Again and again, the individual’s body is tortured while the mind watches powerlessly, experiencing indescribable pain, imprisoned in its own body – a prison within a prison. The torture only stops when the desired outcome is achieved, be it a confession or obtaining valuable information, or when the individual is dead.

The scene we have just described could have taken place in medieval Europe, the torture of a suspect of heresy by the Inquisition, or perhaps it could have been some time less distant from our present, such as during the Military Dictatorship² in Brazil. In fact, when the issue of torture comes to mind, it is a common misconception to think it is a thing of the past, a bizarre practice from the Dark Ages, or that the only place it can exist nowadays is in fiction. Despite the effort in publicly condemning torture and fighting for human rights, torture is still a widespread practice worldwide. According to Amnesty International’s report entitled *Torture in 2014: 30 years of broken promises*, between 2009 and 2013, there were reports of torture in 141 countries (10). Amnesty International observes the contradiction

² Although I refer to it as "military", the dictatorship also involved non-military personnel, such as members of the police and businessman. In Portuguese, it is referred to as *ditadura civil-militar*.

between discourse and statistics and concludes that governments may be facilitating torture (6).

In Brazil, police and armed forces members routinely employed torture and other forms of abuses to persecute and dismantle dissident organizations during the Military Dictatorship. Following the Amnesty Law of 1979, which granted a pardon to all those that committed political crimes, many jurists³ claimed that the law also applied to the police and military members involved in torture. As a result, torturers were not prosecuted, many sensitive files were kept secret for decades and this has become a somewhat forgotten chapter of Brazilian history. Fortunately, some public attention followed the national inquiry promoted by *Comissão Nacional da Verdade*,⁴ which declassified many documents and interviewed hundreds of people, though not enough to revert decades of obliviousness. As a probable result of the lack of investigation and prosecution, not only hundreds of people are still missing – likely buried in unnamed graves, but violence has been increasingly naturalized in Brazilian society. Mass killings, known as *chacinas*,⁵ the daily violence against young blacks⁶ and people that live in slums,⁷ and even the apology of torture,⁸ are some examples of how violence has been largely accepted as normal.

Despite the obliviousness surrounding the violence during the Military Dictatorship, there were attempts to question the official history. During the 1980s and 1990s, several films

³See for example <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2010/01/687053-procurador-geral-da-republica-e-contra-revisao-da-lei-da-anistia.shtml>

⁴ Created in 2012, this special commission conducted a thorough investigation, which culminated in a three part report published in 2014. The report is available at <http://www.cnv.gov.br/institucional-acesso-informacao/a-cnv.html>

⁵See a list of 12 (in-)famous *chacinas* in Brazil, many of them involving members of the police. <http://noticias.terra.com.br/brasil/chacinas-brasil/>

⁶According to Amnesty International, 77% of the young people killed in Brazil in 2012 were black. Less than 8% of the cases went to court. See <https://anistia.org.br/campanhas/jovemnegrovivo/>

⁷ In 2013, Amarildo Dias de Souza, a resident of Rocinha, disappeared after being arrested by the police. The investigation concluded that Amarildo was tortured and killed by the police. His body has not been found. In 2016, 12 people, 10 of which were members of the police, were convicted. See <http://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2016/02/caso-amarildo-entenda-o-que-cada-pm-condenado-fez-segundo-justica.html>

⁸On April 17, 2016, during the vote for Impeachment of then President Dilma Rousseff in Congress, Federal Representative Jair Bolsonaro dedicated his vote to Army Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, the former commandant of DOI-CODI and the man responsible for the torture of Rousseff during the dictatorship. See http://brasil.elpais.com/brasil/2016/04/20/politica/1461180363_636737.html

attempted to historicize the previous period, such as *Pra Frente Brasil* (1982), *Nunca Fomos Tão Felizes* (1984), *Cabra Marcado Para Morrer* (1984), *Lamarca* (1994), *O Que É Isso Companheiro?* (1997) and *Ação Entre Amigos* (1998). Those films, produced in a context in which there were no official inquiries or trials, can be understood as a re-writing of history from the perspective of the defeated,⁹ as proposed by Walter Benjamin.

According to Benjamin, “[t]hose who currently rule are however the heirs of all those who have ever been victorious. [...] Whoever until this day emerges victorious, marches in the triumphal procession in which today’s rulers tread over those who are sprawled underfoot” (2005, p.4). *Lamarca* (1994) – one of the films I analyze in this article – challenges the official historiography by depicting the struggle of left wing militants against the dictatorship in Brazil. Since it is a biopic,¹⁰ it focuses on the history of the army captain turned guerrilla leader Carlos Lamarca.

Ideologia, the other movie analyzed in this article, is an episode of the horror film *O Estranho Mundo de Zé do Caixão* (1968). It was shot during the dictatorship and was released in the same year of the establishment of AI5.¹¹ *Ideologia* follows a number of other films directed by José Mojica Marins, such as *À Meia-Noite Levarei Sua Alma* (1963), *O Diabo de Vila Velha* (1966) and *Esta Noite Encarnarei no Teu Cadáver* (1967). Although Marins's movies are usually considered completely different from *Cinema Novo* films, it should be noted that, behind its metaphorical language, *Ideologia* has a very interesting political potential I intend to explore in this analysis.¹²

⁹In this case, the defeated would be the vanguard left wing organizations that employed armed struggle and their militants. The victors would be the Military Dictatorship and its members.

¹⁰A biopic is a biographical film that is at the border between fiction and non-fiction. It is not a documentary, since it reenacts events through acting, instead of recording interviewees describing events. Biopics are fictional films since screenwriters and directors have freedom to adapt a story to the medium, but such freedom is also limited to a certain extent by the historical aspects of the “story” to be told.

¹¹*Ato Institucional Número Cinco*, it granted the President full power to intervene in the Congress and it suspended a number of civil rights. Effective from 1968 to 1978, AI5 symbolizes the most vicious period of the dictatorship.

¹² I would like to thank CAPES for supporting my research and to Professor Daniel Serravalle de Sá for providing a critical reading of the manuscript.

FILM ANALYSIS

Since it was produced in a post-dictatorship context, *Lamarca* (1994) depicts the police and military members involved in torture and in death squads. For example, in the beginning of the film, there is a sequence of a high command army meeting to discuss the kidnapping of the Swiss ambassador by the organization VPR¹³. The General is worried about the kidnapping of the Swiss ambassador and is outraged by the demand of releasing seventy political prisoners. At the same time, the audience is presented to two important characters in the film: "Major"¹⁴ is positioned at the back and occupies a higher seat; "Police Chief Flores", a possible reference to the dreaded Police Chief Fleury, is positioned closer to the camera and occupies a lower seat. This shot (Picture 1) represents the cooperation between army and police forces in persecuting, torturing and killing political adversaries of the regime.



Picture 1 - "Major" and "Flores" (REZENDE, 1994).



Picture 2 – General on the phone (REZENDE, 1994).

In contrast, instead of more straightforward references to the dictatorship, *Ideologia* (1968) is rich in symbolical language, probably because "allegorical expression is especially prevalent in times of political repression and serves as a means of offering disguised comment on the present" (XAVIER, 1986, 354). In other words, "issues which could not be openly addressed at the time (such as torture and violence) were transported to the fictional

¹³ *Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária*, a revolutionary organization involved in urban and countryside guerrilla.

¹⁴ Probably a reference to Major Nilton Cerqueira, who was responsible for the Operation Pajuçara, which culminated with Lamarca's death, or to Major Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, member of Operação Bandeirantes and commander of Doi-Codi.

dimension of the horror film” (SERRAVALLE DE SÁ, 2010, 15). One example of such allegorical language is the very title, which has a double meaning.

On one hand, "ideology" refers to the science of ideas proposed by Count Destutt de Tracy as a part of zoology. Tracy believed “one could resolve all ideas into the sensations that produced them” (RICHARDS, 1993, 103). On the other, the title is also a reference to the critical perspective regarding ideology as an instrument of social control. Hence, the title functions as an early metaphor to the covert powers that enforce ideologies, as Professor Oaxiac¹⁵ and acolytes do to the skeptic journalist Alfredo and his wife Wilma through torture and murder.

Despite their differences, one similarity between the films is the reference to mass media. In *Lamarca* (1994), the high command meeting is interrupted by a telephone call. The general, then, gives instructions by phone of what is and what is not to be published (Picture 2). Immediately after, there is a close up of a *Jornal do Brasil* issue in which the headline reads “Government vetoes 9 and alters 8 in the kidnap list” (LAMARCA, 1994, *my translation*; Picture 3). The juxtaposition of the telephone call and the newspaper headline establish the dictatorship's control over the media.



Picture 3 – Headline (REZENDE, 1994).



Picture 4 – Taxi (REZENDE, 1994).

¹⁵Oaxiac Odez is an anagram for Zé do Caixão, José Mojica Marins' famous character Coffin Joe. Interestingly, Alfredo comments that Oaxiac resembles someone he cannot quite remember.

In another sequence, Clara¹⁶ is in a taxi reading a newspaper. When she folds it, we can read part of the headline: "terrorists". At the same time, we hear a Globo news bulletin announcing the release of the Ambassador after the plane with the seventy "terrorists" reached Chile. Although initially relieved by the denouement, her expression suddenly changes when she spots an immediate threat. The reverse shot reveals what she sees: army soldiers are searching every vehicle. At the same time, we hear off screen the voice of the taxi driver saying: "the hunt for those bastards is on. They are the ones who do things and we have to pay for them" (LAMARCA, 1994, *my translation*). As we can see, the radio bulletin shapes the taxi driver's understanding of the events around him, establishing a dualism between the forces of good – the State – and the forces of evil – the "terrorists". As Jeffrey Sluka points out,

propagandistic use of the criminalizing label 'terrorism' manipulates public fears for political purposes – it removes the 'political' from political violence, excludes consideration of underlying political causes, and reduces it to mindless or 'evil' violence which cannot be explained, understood or justified (2002, 23).

Ideologia (1968) opens with a sequence of a television debate program. Three journalists are interviewing Professor Oaxiac about his thesis. But instead of the cameras focusing on the television host and his guests, there is an alternation of shots of the studio (Picture 5), shots from the side and from the back, depicting the movement of the camera operators (Picture 6). Even the director's voice is audible as he gives commands to the television crew. Marins organizes the sequence in order to create metalanguage. In other words, Marins is showing how news can be made and how everything is a matter of perspective.

¹⁶Alias for the MR8 militant Iara Iavelberg. Blond, tall and well dressed, she is able to go undetected for some time.



Picture 5 – Studio (MARINS, 1968).



Picture 6 – Cameras (MARINS, 1968).

The debate sequence also gives the impression of an apparent democracy and cordiality, since the journalists are free to agree or disagree with Oaxiac's thesis that humans are driven by desire and repulse of what is around them.¹⁷ Alfredo is the only journalist to vehemently disagree with Oaxiac's ideas, calling them "absurd" and "crazy". After Oaxiac declares the end of the program, he invites Alfredo to visit him at his house so that he can give further "evidence" of his theory. As a result, the television debate sequence also works as an introduction for the terrible tortures the skeptic journalist Alfredo and his wife Wilma will have to endure at Oaxiac's house. In other words, it is the descent from the hypocritical public sphere – where differences are apparently tolerated – to the secret realm of the torture chamber, where dissidents are coerced by brute force to become believers.

Torture is another common feature in both movies. The first to be tortured in *Lamarca* (1994) is Jairo.¹⁸ After being wounded and arrested, he is handcuffed, blindfolded and brought to a torture chamber. Police chief Flores is waiting to torture him. We watch as Jairo is escorted through a narrow hallway that resembles a maze (Picture 7). The image is framed by the door, as if we were gazing at something secret. Jairo's handcuffs and blindfold are removed. Flores orders him to strip and threatens him: “You are now my prisoner, Mr. Jairo. I will listen to you. If you don't speak, you will die here in a stupid way” (LAMARCA, 1994, *my translation*).

¹⁷ Oaxiac's thesis, besides the already mentioned reference to Tracy's ideology, can also be understood as a parody of Psychoanalysis and of Parapsychology.

¹⁸ In the film, a member of the national committee, he knew about the hiding places of Fio, Clara and Lamarca.

Flores's warning corresponds to the method employed by the Inquisition, which is discussed by Scott (1959): first, the threat of torture; then, the torture chamber, instruments and executioner are presented; finally, the torture itself (ps. 66, 67). Jairo is beaten. Then, his arms are suspended by a pulley – which was also commonly employed by the Inquisition – and electrical wires are connected to his genitals (Picture 8). There is an alternation of close ups of Flores shouting questions about Lamarca's whereabouts and close ups of Jairo being electrocuted.

When Jairo is unconscious, a doctor is brought to check if he is still alive. A bucket of water is thrown at him and the torture resumes. In the morning, Jairo is dead. His body is lowered and Flores announces the probable headline: “Jairo, José Cunha Mendes, run over when reacting to his arrest” (LAMARCA, 1994, *my translation*). Once again, similar to the torture conducted by the Inquisition, the outcome is either collaboration or death. In addition, by having Flores announce the probable headline of the news report, the movie reinforces the previously discussed theme of the dictatorship's power over the media and how the facts were narrated.¹⁹



Picture 7 – Maze (REZENDE, 1994).



Picture 8 – Wires and genitals (REZENDE, 1994).

The second to be tortured in the film is Kid.²⁰ Once more, the frame within a frame technique is employed to create the effects of gazing at something secret and of being enclosed (Picture 9). He eventually breaks and reveals information about Fio's hiding place.

¹⁹ This refers to Benjamin's understanding of history as written by the victors.

²⁰ Kid knew the whereabouts of Fio, Clara and Lamarca. In the film, Kid was captured following the lead of an undercover state agent.

Later on, Kid is threatened again. Now, he suffers psychological torture as Major reminds him of all the militants Flores has killed (Picture 10). Then, Flores cocks his weapon and presents his identification to Kid, who is terrified and reveals Lamarca's location. The information obtained by torturing Kid was used by State forces to kill Clara²¹ and Lamarca. The last portion of the film describes in detail the undercover raids of numerous towns in the countryside of Bahia by a task force of soldiers and policemen.

At this point, the film has presented compelling evidence of the contrast between the destruction caused by the guerrillas's actions and by those caused by State forces, which corresponds to Chomsky's (1991, p.13) distinction between retail terror and wholesale terror. In other words, State forces cause large scale violence. In addition, Galeano refers to the torture and executions committed by dictatorships in Latin America as "state terrorism" and "terror industry" (1997). According to him, "[t]he population immediately became the internal enemy. Any sign of life, of protest, or even mere doubt, is a dangerous challenge from the standpoint of military doctrine and national security" (GALEANO, 1997, p.281).



Picture 9 – Kid is tortured (REZENDE, 1994).



Picture 10 – Psychological torture (REZENDE, 1994).

Anyone could be tortured. For any reason. If torture becomes an ordinary tool for interrogation and if anyone can be a victim, even those that are not part of opposition movements, “fear of torture is spread through the whole population, like a paralyzing gas that invades every home and implants itself in every citizen’s soul” (GALEANO, 1997, p.281). The collective anxiety, the fear of being tortured and or incarcerated, was an effective tool of

²¹Although Rezende's film presents the official version regarding Iara Iavelberg's death, a 2013 documentary entitled *Em Busca de Iara* (2013) presented enough evidence to dismiss the alleged suicide.

control, similar in a way to the effect the Inquisition had in Europe. Besides adapting the system once employed by the Inquisition, military dictatorships in Latin America also revived the Roman law regarding treason²² both as legal grounds and political propaganda to justify what could not be humanly justifiable.

In *Ideologia* (1968), the torture begins when Alfredo and Wilma are presented to the torture chamber, the tools and the executioner (Picture 11). Interestingly, there is a movement from more psychological forms of torture, such as being forced to watch gruesome scenes, to more physical ones, when the victims are chained, and deprived of water and food. In terms of torture techniques, Marins was surely more creative and not bound by realistic concerns. The torture sequence involves an orgy, sadism, masochism, murder followed by cannibalism, different forms of violence against a woman and burning her with acid, pouring molten lead down one's throat. And finally, Wilma is so thirsty she is obliged to drink Alfredo's blood (Picture 12).



Picture 11 – The basement (MARINS, 1968).



Picture 12 – Wilma drinks Alfredo's blood (MARINS, 1968).

The gradual reduction of one's will, the breaking of one's resistance, is contrived by Oaxiac as proof of the power of instinct over reason. Like everything else Oaxiac says, one cannot take it literally since his discourse is filled with instances of irony and sarcasm.²³ Rather, in the symbolism of “instinct over reason” and “instinct over love”, one must identify

²²The Roman Law of treason, *lex maiestatis*, allowed torture as means of obtaining information in trials of crimes against the State. During the Middle Age, the Inquisition interpreted such law as treason against God, instead of treason against the State. In Brazil, the dictatorship promoted the infamous slogan "Brazil: love it or leave it".

²³For example, when he announces a “burlesque” presentation, or when he talks about how his treatment allows everyone to be more “authentic”, or when he quotes the Bible to justify killing one man to feed four others, or when he asks his servants to take his “guests” to their “rooms”

the use of torture as means of social control. Oaxiac dehumanizes his victims, just as the torturer reduces an individual to a pile of flesh and blood. In fact, the behavior of the characters in the torture chamber resembles that of animals since most of them crawl and have to be chained or whipped. In addition, Oaxiac is the only one able to speak. Even Wilma and Alfredo eventually become silent. Here, language is once again an instrument of power.

Regarding the setting, the police stations in *Lamarca* (1994) and the basement in *Ideologia* (1968) correspond to the idea of labyrinth not only in the geographical remoteness or the suspension of moral codes, but also in the sense of being lost, or in other words, the hopelessness of the tortured. According to Botting (1996, p.52), “the horror of the labyrinth and its confusion of fears and desires lies in its utter separation from all social rules and complete transgression of all conventional limits”. Likewise, the torture chambers in both films are the modern equivalents of remote locations such as castles, monasteries or convents, which provide the perfect setting for any kind of violence to take place (PUNTER; BYRON, 2004, p. 288).

FINAL REMARKS

Lamarca, as a biopic, historicizes both the life of Carlos Lamarca and the period in which he lived. Besides referring to the role of mass media in supporting the regime, the film also presents a counter statement to the official history since it portrays the “terrorists” as the ones hunted, tortured and killed. The members of the guerrilla are the ones terrified by the state terrorism, that is, by the army's and police's capacity of torturing and murdering. Furthermore, Lamarca is represented in the film as a martyr figure, although I decided not to focus on this aspect for space limitations.

If *Lamarca* (1994) challenges the official historiography by humanizing the guerrilla members and by portraying the disparity between State forces and the guerrillas, *Ideologia*

(1968) portrays a male figure of power, someone who shrouds himself in rhetoric and pseudo science, as the torturer and murderer of a heteronormative couple. Oaxiac is the one in power and, at the same time, the embodiment of all that is conceivably wrong, comparable to the character Antônio das Mortes in Glauber Rocha's film *Deus e o Diabo na Terra do Sol* (1964). In that sense, a contextual reading of the film can identify a critique of the dictatorship.

The challenge in any comparative study is to find a balance between having a focus and not ignoring relevant issues in each object of study. Hence, there are some issues in each film I decided not to discuss, although it might be relevant to address them in more in depth enterprises. For instance, it would be interesting to study the representation of Lamarca as a martyr, comparing it to other martyr-like figures, such as Che Guevara. It would also be relevant to analyze the other films produced in the period after the dictatorships regarding the rewriting of history. Yet another possibility is to analyze both *Lamarca* (1994) and *Ideologia* (1968) in terms of gender, discussing the representation of women and the issue of love. Another possibility is to study the references to vampirism and cannibalism at the end of *Ideologia* (1968).

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