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# Women's Memories of the Armed Struggle in Brazil and in Portugal

## Memórias femininas da luta armada no Brasil e em Portugal

MARIA PAULA NASCIMENTO ARAUJO\*

**ABSTRACT** Literature and cinema can serve as historical documents, bearing potent testimonial content that aims to transmit the experiences and memories of those who have lived them. This analysis centers on the narrative of women who were active participants in armed organizations during the military dictatorship in Brazil and the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal, between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, and that later chose to make public their memories and experiences. Two works are analyzed: the 1989 documentary *Que Bom te ver viva* [*How Nice to See You Alive*] by Brazilian filmmaker Lucia Murat, and the 2012 book *Mulheres de Armas: História das Brigadas Revolucionárias* [*Women in Arms: History of the Revolutionary Brigades*], by Portuguese journalist Isabel Lindim. The testimonies presented in these works make explicit the differences in the political processes experienced in the two countries, as well as the specificity of histories and memories narrated by the women who were interviewed. These differences are not only indicative of the distinct political characteristics of the two countries but also reflect the specific contexts of remembrance at stake in the book and film under analysis.

**KEYWORDS** Women, armed struggle, testimonies

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**RESUMO** A literatura e o cinema podem ser documentos históricos que assumem forte teor testemunhal. Procuram, nesses casos, transmitir a vivência, a experiência e a memória daquele/a que as testemunham. Neste texto, colocamos o foco em narrativas de mulheres que participaram de organizações armadas durante a ditadura militar no Brasil e a ditadura salazarista em Portugal, entre o final dos anos 1960 e o início da década de 1970, e que, posteriormente, trouxeram a público suas memórias e vivências. Analisamos o documentário *Que bom te ver viva*, da cineasta brasileira Lucia Murat, lançado em 1989, e o livro da jornalista portuguesa Isabel Lindim, *Mulheres de arma: História das Brigadas Revolucionárias*, publicado em 2012. Os depoimentos apresentados nessas obras evidenciam as diferenças dos processos políticos vividos nos dois países, bem como as especificidades das histórias e memórias narradas pelas mulheres. Essas diferenças remetem não apenas às características políticas dos dois países em foco, mas também aos distintos contextos de rememoração em pauta no filme e no livro analisados.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Mulheres, luta armada, testemunhos

This paper aims to investigate the memories of women who were involved in armed organizations during the dictatorships in Brazil and Portugal. These two dictatorships had different characteristics, time frames, and forms of action and repression. However, they intersected in the 1960s and 1970s because of a common political element: the armed struggle. This period, marked by the influence of the Cuban Revolution, the events of May 68, the Vietnam War, and the expansion of anticolonial struggles, saw the proposal of armed struggle spread across continents in various formats, garnering significant support from young people worldwide. Between the mid-1960s and the first years of the 1970s, armed organizations emerged and operated in Brazil and Portugal, following a worldwide political, ideological, and intellectual movement.

Between 1966 and 1969, Brazil experienced what historian Jacob Gorender (1987) called an “immersion in the armed struggle”.<sup>1</sup> Various organizations took to weapons, such as the Ação Libertadora Nacional [National Liberation Action] (ALN), the Movimento Revolucionário 8 de Outubro [8 October Revolutionary Movement] (MR-8), the Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária [Revolutionary Popular Vanguard] (VPR) and the Vanguarda Armada Revolucionária Palmares [Palmares Revolutionary Armed Vanguard] (VAR-Palmares). The Partido Comunista do Brasil [Communist Party of Brazil] (PCdoB)<sup>2</sup> managed to establish a focus of rural guerrilla in the Araguaia region in the early 1970s. Between 1972 and 1974, most of these organizations were dismantled by the dictatorship, with their members arrested, killed, exiled, or banished.

In Portugal, two armed organizations stood out: the Liga de Unidade e Ação Revolucionária [League of Unity and Revolutionary Action] (LUAR), founded in 1967, and the Brigadas Revolucionárias [Revolutionary Brigades] (BRs), created in 1971 after a break with the Partido Comunista Português [Portuguese Communist Party] (PCP). In addition to these, the PCP itself, unlike most of the traditional communist parties at the time, especially in Europe, created its armed arm, the Ação Revolucionária Armada [Armed Revolutionary Action] (ARA), which was active between 1970 and 1974.

Our interest lies in investigating and comparing how Brazilian and Portuguese women lived and narrated this experience. Our aim is not to discuss the armed actions politically, but rather the memory constructed by the women who took part in them. We want to understand their motivations, their desires, their fears, and how they viewed this experience afterwards. What impact did this choice have on their lives? What are the similarities and differences between Portuguese and Brazilian memories and experiences?

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1 Freely translated: “imersão na luta armada”.

2 PCdoB is a dissidence of the Partido Comunista Brasileiro [Brazilian Communist Party] (PCB), created in 1962. Unlike the other organizations mentioned here, the PCdoB still exists today, having been legalized in 1985.

This study adopts an approach pervaded by a subjective view of the experience of the armed struggle. We are interested in recovering and comprehending the personal stakes, the worldview that underpinned this choice, the unique experiences, the shared or kept feelings, the impact of this choice on these women's personal lives, the emotional balance, and the generational imprint of this experience.

In *O pequeno x: Da biografia à história* [*The Little X: From Biography to History*], Sabina Loriga (2011, p. 11) states: "Since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, historians have turned away from the actions and sufferings of individuals to dedicate themselves to discovering the invisible process of universal history".<sup>3</sup> According to the author, our history books deal with powers, nations, and interest groups, but not people. Loriga proposes recovering the individual dimension of history, what each human being adds to history, "the little x". This historiographical perspective valorizes subjective experience and makes it possible to approach this subjectivity in its historical and social dimension. From this point of view, subjectivity becomes a historical object and source.

Feelings and emotions are dated. People experience, record, share, and express their emotions within a certain historical time. And the ways in which they decode, demonstrate, or conceal feelings and emotions such as love, anger, fear are shaped, to a large extent, by a historical time – simultaneously helping weave this same time. Therefore, analyzing subjectivity as an object of history has both an individual and a collective dimension. In this sense, studies and individual and group biographies have gained prominence. Which is exactly the case with this article. In a book that pioneered the renovation of biographical studies, titled *Histoire et histoires de vie: La méthode biographique dans les sciences sociales* [*History and Life Histories: The Biographical Method in the Social Sciences*], Franco Ferrarotti (1983) drew attention to the relationship between history and multiple individual stories and the resulting

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3 Freely translated: "Desde o fim do século XVIII os historiadores se desviaram das ações e dos sofrimentos dos indivíduos para se dedicarem a descobrir o processo invisível da história universal".

possibility of reading a society through one or many biographies. Above all, Ferrarotti valued the construction and study of collective biographies. This would be the greatest potential of the biographical method: to show that the multiple life stories from a particular era, generation, or locality, are inscribed within the limits and possibilities of a broader history – and that each of these multiple stories interprets history and its relationship to it in its own unique way.

Studies in the field of memory and oral history also guide this paper. In Latin America, the memory of military dictatorships has galvanized numerous historians and researchers to reconstruct and understand this past with the objective of preventing its recurrence. This movement has involved some important premises such as the notions of memory disputes, underground memories (POLLAK, 1989), and memory work (JELIN, 2005). The conception of memory as a historical construction, based on disputes and conflicts, difficulties and conscious action, permeates this text. We have also incorporated the methodological proposal of oral history, which values the contribution of statements and testimonies about historical experience. In fact, the articulation between oral history and memory is intrinsic for the historian because what the oral source documents is precisely the action of memory (ALBERTI, 2004).

This theoretical perspective underpins this article, which aims to analyze the experiences and memories of two groups of women who participated in the armed struggle in Brazil and Portugal and have publicly shared their memories through testimonies. This text discusses two quite dissimilar works, with different narrative supports and approaches. They are essentially united by the themes they deal with.

The documentary *Que bom te ver viva* [*How Nice to See You Alive*],<sup>4</sup> released in Brazil in 1989, was directed by filmmaker Lucia Murat, who also penned the script and co-produced the film. Lucia was a militant herself in the armed organization MR-8; in 1971, at the age of 22, she

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4 QUE BOM te ver viva. Direction: Lucia Murat. Rio de Janeiro: Taiga Filmes e Vídeo, 1989, 100 min.

was arrested and spent three years in different prisons, suffering various types of torture. *Que bom te ver viva* was her second film, and it brought her into prominence in the cinematographic field. Seven women recount their experiences of imprisonment, torture, and violence in the documentary. All of them were militants, and some still carry out some kind of political activism. The film is a hybrid with inserts of dramaturgy, and the character played by Irene Ravache seems to be an alter-ego of sorts of Lucia herself. The film is entirely centered on the strong testimonies of the women, who expose to the viewer the violence they have experienced and the effort they make to overcome this experience.

The book *Mulheres de armas: História das Brigadas Revolucionárias* [Women in Arms: History of the Revolutionary Brigades] was published in Lisbon by the publisher Objectiva in 2012. The book was written by journalist Isabel Lindim, daughter of Isabel do Carmo, one of the founders of the Brigadas Revolucionárias, and tells the stories and experiences of 15 women of different ages who were part of the BRs. The first six women took part directly in the armed actions, while the other nine worked in support of the organization. The book is based on the testimonies of these women. The titles of each chapter bear the name or pseudonym of one of them. We have chosen in this essay to work solely with the first six interviews, which recount the memories of the women who took part directly in the armed actions. Isabel Lindim (2012) did not interview her mother, but Isabel do Carmo is present in the book. She is the author of the long introduction that precedes the biographical narratives, presenting a historical and political contextualization of Portugal. The book is 257 pages long and includes an appendix with a detailed chronology of the BRs.

### **QUE BOM TE VER VIVA: MEMORIES OF VIOLENCE IN BRAZIL**

The documentary features the narratives of seven women: Criméia Schmidt Almeida, Estrela Bohadana, Jessie Jane Vieira de Sousa, Maria do Carmo Brito, Maria Luiza Garcia Rosa, Regina Toscano, and Rosalina Santa Cruz. Their real names appear on screen. They do not play a

role, they narrate their experiences, sometimes with effort, sometimes with emotion. An eighth woman is presented as Anonymous. She did not want to give a filmed testimony but sent Lucia a written text and authorized its use by the director. Actress Irene Ravache plays a character who, in a way, represents Lucia Murat herself. This identification only became clear later, when Lucia recounted episodes related to the torture she was subjected to,<sup>5</sup> which were extremely similar to those described in the film by Irene's character. Thus, she is the only one who acts, with a great deal of drama, sometimes with irony, sometimes with fragility, giving the film a hybrid character.

At the start of the documentary, the women are introduced by their names, political affiliations, the repression they experienced (arrests, torture, exile), and their status at the time the film was made (late 1980s). Brief descriptions of the characters are listed below. The screen shows a photo of the interviewee and a short caption about her. It is a fairly sketchy presentation, but it serves to introduce us to the characters.

MARIA DO CARMO BRITO: a militant from the VPR, arrested in April 1970. A few months later she was on the list of political prisoners who were exchanged for German Ambassador Ehrenfried von Holleben. She spent 10 years in exile. She is married with two children and works as an educator.

ESTRELA BOHADANA: she was a militant in the Partido Operário Comunista [Communist Workers' Party] (POC) and was arrested twice, in 1969 and 1971. She is a philosopher, is married, and has two children.

MARIA LUIZA GRACIA ROSA (PUPÍ): a member of the student movement, she was arrested four times in the 1970s. Divorced, with two children, she is a public health doctor.

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5 See, for instance: MURAT, Lucia. Depoimento às Comissões Nacional e Estadual. Rio de Janeiro, 28 May 2013. In: *Comissão da Verdade do Rio (YouTube)*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwyKtFdZrKk> (from 9 min 44 s onwards). Access on: 18 Sept. 2023.



ROSALINA SANTA CRUZ: a former VAR-Palmares militant. She was arrested in 1971, imprisoned until 1973, and arrested again in 1974. Her brother, Fernando Santa Cruz, is a political missing person, and was a militant of the Ação Popular Marxista Leninista [Leninist-Marxist Popular Action] (APML). Rosalina is a university professor.

CRIMÉIA SCHMIDT ALMEIDA: a member of the PCdoB and a survivor of the Araguaia guerrilla war, she was arrested while pregnant in 1972, and her son was born in prison. Now a nurse, she lives with her teenage son.

REGINA TOSCANO: she was a militant of the MR-8, arrested in 1970 and imprisoned for a year. She has three children and works as an educator.

JESSIE JANE VIEIRA DE SOUZA: she was a militant of the ALN, arrested in 1970, together with her companion Colombo, for hijacking an airplane. She was imprisoned for 9 years. She has a daughter with Colombo, conceived and born in prison.

ANONYMOUS: She spent 4 years underground and 4 in jail. Today she lives in a mystical community and takes a critical look at her years of militancy.

As previously mentioned, the documentary is based on the testimonies of former militants. These testimonies are interspersed with speeches by actress Irene Ravache, who plays a political activist who has experienced imprisonment and torture and who is interviewing women who have lived through similar experiences. Irene Ravache scenically expresses their trauma, their efforts to overcome it, and the enormous difficulty of talking about what happened. The structure of the documentary is simple: the women are interviewed in their homes, sometimes filmed in their workplaces. Family members, children, husbands, and partners are also interviewed. The focus of the camera is always on the face of the woman being interviewed. Newspaper photos from the time are also used. The only film set is the space where actress Irene Ravache plays, characterized as a simple flat. Over the course of 1 hour and

40 minutes, what holds the viewer's attention is the testimony, whether it is spoken by the witnesses or dramatized by the actress. It was the first time that the violence of the military dictatorship had been shown on a cinema screen, narrated by women who had experienced this violence in their own bodies.

All the testimonies mention torture, as well as the difficulty of discussing it. Estrela says that her children do not like her talking about her imprisonment. The memory of the violence suffered seems to carry a stigma of aporism. Her husband comments: "You can't pretend it didn't happen, but that can't be all you talk about".<sup>6</sup>

Although they do not describe in detail the physical torture they suffered, they all mention beatings, electric shocks, *pau de arara*,<sup>7</sup> sexual violence. What they do talk about in more detail, effectively wanting to communicate, is the psychological and moral deconstruction, the experience of degradation and discouragement that torture causes.

Rosalina talks about her feelings of fear, loneliness, and a sense of utter helplessness in the face of those men. She also says that in the torture session, it was not so much the information she could give that was at stake, but her own rebelliousness. Rosalina describes this horrifying moment:

After they had beaten me a lot, with a stick, electric shocks, shocks to the vagina (...) I even asked him to "kill me, I can't take it anymore". And I remember his smile: "I won't kill you, I don't care, I'll torture you as much as I want and, if I want, I'll kill you". So that level of impotence during the torture... the feeling that he could do what he wanted, and I didn't

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6 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 21 min 35 s. Freely translated: "Não se pode fingir que isso não aconteceu, mas não se pode falar só disso".

7 *Pau de arara* is a torture method in which the victim is bound by the ankles and wrists, with the biceps under a pole and the knees over it. The *pau de arara* torture method was widely used by during the military dictatorship in Brazil.

know what my resistance was. For me, that was the road to madness.<sup>8</sup>

Regina also emphasizes her powerlessness and degradation. She says that at the age of 14 she was diagnosed with epilepsy, a condition she learnt to control with medication and therapy. When she was arrested, these two supports were interrupted and the torture itself aggravated her epilepsy: “At the time of the torture, I had no control over my body (...) I was afraid of having a seizure and them taking advantage of it (...). It was a very degrading thing, they took advantage of it, of me being epileptic”.<sup>9</sup> Maria Luiza also discusses this feeling of degradation, albeit from a different perspective. According to her, this degradation was felt when she was unable to withstand the torture and gave information to the torturers: “you give away what is most dear to you... it takes away a piece of your soul”.<sup>10</sup> The greatest trauma in Maria Luiza’s experience was not being able to withstand the torture and “opening up” (giving) information to the torturers; information that could have led to the arrest and death of her comrades. The feelings of betrayal and failure that torture produced could be worse than the physical violence suffered.

In the experience of those who took part in left-wing organisations between the 1960s and 1970s, the hardest and most difficult experiences to overcome are often related to other people, to loved ones. In

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8 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 49 min 6 s. Freely translated: “Depois de terem me batido muito, pau de arara, choque elétrico, choque na vagina (...) eu cheguei a um momento em que eu pedi: ‘Me mate, eu não estou mais aguentando’. E eu me lembro do sorriso dele: ‘Eu não te mato, não me interessa, eu vou te torturar o quanto eu quiser, e, se eu quiser, eu te mato’. Então esse nível de impotência durante a tortura... a sensação de que ele podia fazer o que ele queria, e eu não sabia qual era a minha resistência. Esse para mim era o caminho para a questão da loucura”.

9 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 40 min 47 s. Freely translated: “Eu sentia, na hora da tortura, que eu não tinha controle do meu corpo (...) tinha medo de ter uma convulsão, e eles se aproveitaram disso (...). Era uma coisa muito degradante, eles se aproveitavam disso, de eu ser epilética”.

10 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 34 min 32 s. Freely translated: “Você entrega aquilo que te é mais caro... Isso te tira um pedaço da alma”.

her testimony, Rosalina mentions the disappearance of Fernando Santa Cruz, her brother, a militant in the APML. He went missing in February 1974, alongside Eduardo Collier, a fellow APML militant. They were never found again.<sup>11</sup> She considers the search for Fernando to be the most traumatic experience that she and her family have lived through: "The missing person issue was the most terrible invention of the repression. It's a crazier situation than torture itself, because it's a death where you don't have the body, so you don't have a sense of death".<sup>12</sup> Without the body, mourning does not happen. Rosalina talks about her guilt at having survived: "Why did I survive, and he didn't? I had joined the armed left, I was older than him, I was more militant than Fernando".<sup>13</sup>

As Argentinian anthropologist Ludmila Catela (2001, p. 150) has pointed out, disappearance is an "unfinished death",<sup>14</sup> a pain that is perpetuated over time, that does not materialize in a body, that is not located in a grave, that does not allow for mourning. In Rosalina's case, this endless grief is also compounded by the guilt of having survived her brother, who was younger than her, less militant than her, and had taken part in a non-armed left-wing organization. Her testimony exposes her guilt and emphasizes the actions that would make her a more suitable target for the state forces.

While the documentary features several striking traumatic narratives, other testimonies speak of ways of overcoming the trauma, of

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11 The disappearance of Fernando Santa Cruz and Eduardo Collier is recorded in the *Relatório final da Comissão Nacional da Verdade* [National Truth Commission's Final Report], in volume III, *Mortos e desaparecidos políticos* [Political Deaths and Missing Persons] (BRAZIL, 2014, p. 1595-1607). In both cases, the report indicates the possibility that they were killed in the so-called Casa da Morte [House of Death], in Petrópolis. This place functioned as a clandestine detention and torture centre.

12 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 51 min 7 s. Freely translated: "A questão do desaparecido foi a invenção mais terrível da repressão. É uma situação mais louca que a própria tortura, porque é uma morte onde a gente não tem o corpo, então não tem uma sensação de morte".

13 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 52 min. Freely translated: "Por que eu sobrevivi e ele não? Eu tinha me ligado à esquerda armada, eu era mais velha do que ele, eu tinha uma militância maior do que Fernando".

14 Freely translated: "morte inconclusa".

the paths that allowed life to restart. In several of the testimonies, this path was provided by the birth of children, who marked the continuity of the women's lives. Many of them, like Maria do Carmo, spoke of the importance of motherhood as an experience that countered the violence they had endured and gave them a new sense of life. This idea is made most explicit in the documentary by Regina: "When I was arrested, I was pregnant and I lost the baby in prison (...) and there, while I was in prison, what really held me back was the desire to have a child, the certainty that I was going to have a child. And that represented life for me. I had to give an answer of life!"<sup>15</sup> As soon as she and her partner were released from prison, they had a son, Daniel. A few years later, in a second marriage, Regina had two more children.

But Criméia's testimony shows us that the relationship between prison and motherhood can be quite complex. Criméia left the Araguaia guerrilla war because she was pregnant. She swam across the Araguaia River and, after this endeavor, headed for São Paulo. A few months later she was arrested, seven months pregnant. Even so, she was violently tortured. She gave birth to her son in prison. In her statement she says:

It's such an impossible feeling... I thought: they try to finish me off and another one is born, right here in prison. When they try to finish people off, life goes on. I felt the birth of my son as if he was breaking free from my womb. For me it was a sign of freedom, my son free!<sup>16</sup>

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15 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 38 min 31 s. Freely translated: "Quando eu fui presa, eu estava grávida e perdi esse neném na cadeia (...) e lá, durante a cadeia, o que realmente me segurou foi a vontade de ter um filho, a certeza de que eu ia ter um filho. E isso representava para mim a vida. Eu tinha que dar uma resposta de vida!"

16 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 62 min 45 s. Freely translated: "É uma sensação assim, meio impossível... Eu pensava o seguinte: eles tentam acabar comigo e nasce mais um, aqui mesmo, na prisão. Quando eles tentam acabar com as pessoas, a vida continua. Eu senti o nascimento do meu filho como se ele estivesse se libertando do meu útero. Pra mim era um sinal de liberdade, meu filho livre!"

Criméia's association of her womb with a prison is filled with meaning. It suggests that a guerrilla woman's womb imprisoned her baby, since he went to jail with her because of her choices. And this painful, traumatic sensation was so strong that Criméia never wanted to get pregnant again: "For me, a second pregnancy was something dreadful. Nine months of pregnancy was a long time, a lot could happen in nine months".<sup>17</sup>

Another remarkable story of motherhood is told by Jessie Jane in the documentary. She and her partner Colombo were arrested in 1970 for attempting to hijack an airplane. They were imprisoned for almost 10 years. They did not see each other for 5 years. When Ernesto Geisel became President of the Republic and began his project of "political opening", he changed the prison warden and Jessie and Colombo asked for intimate visits – which were authorized. Their daughter Leta was born in 1977. Jessie emphasizes: "Leta's birth opened up a space for emotions to flow".<sup>18</sup> The images of the three of them together – Jessie, Colombo, and little Leta – coming out of prison, are filled with enormous joy.

Amidst the narratives about political activism, imprisonment, torture, and overcoming, Lucia Murat also recorded a detached position: the text sent by the Anonymous activist presents a markedly different view from the other women. This activist spent 4 years underground and 4 more in prison. When Lucia contacted her, she was living in a mystical community. Here is a reproduction of parts of the text that is read in the film while the camera pans inside a place that looks like a Buddhist temple:

As a generation, we were affected by the aspiration to devote ourselves to the good of humanity. This aspiration was

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17 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 63 min 48 s. Freely translated: "Para mim, uma segunda gravidez era qualquer coisa, assim, pavorosa. Nove meses de gravidez era muito tempo, muita coisa podia acontecer em nove meses".

18 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 82 min 19 s. Freely translated: "O nascimento da Leta abriu uma brecha para as emoções fluírem".

interfered with by the prevailing thought at the time that the best way to alleviate human suffering would be a social revolution. We were impulsively, unconsciously, receptors and transmitters of violent emotions. As these events unfolded, torture became an inevitable accident. Like all of us, I am a link in humanity's evolutionary chain and as such I know that I am jointly responsible for any violence that takes place.<sup>19</sup>

The content of the letter stands in contrast to all the other testimonies in the documentary, chiefly because of its critical stance towards the armed struggle. It is the only moment in which a different memory about what was experienced appears.

Finally, the role of Irene Ravache should be highlighted. The actress reveals the thoughts and feelings of a woman marked by trauma and loneliness; the kind of loneliness that results from the difficulty of sharing her experience. Her character is a woman devastated by memories and traumas, but committed to surviving, being happy, experiencing pleasure and life; she struggles with her traumatic memory. The last scene of the documentary is symptomatic of this standoff. The character says, "I should put up a sign. Beware, wounded dog".<sup>20</sup>

In his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra (2014) underscores the crucial presence of trauma in contemporary history and highlights the role of historians in recognizing its centrality in human life. He also argues that testimonies are significant in the attempt to understand the traumatic experience in history, because they

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19 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 68 min 13 s. Freely translated: "Fomos, enquanto geração, afetados pela aspiração de nos devotarmos ao bem da humanidade. Esta aspiração sofreu a interferência de um pensamento, dominante na época, de que a melhor forma de minorar o sofrimento humano seria uma revolução social. Fomos impulsivamente, inconscientemente, aparelhos receptores e transmissores de emoções violentas. Ao desenrolar destes fatos, a tortura se tornou um acidente inevitável. Sou, como todos nós, um elo na corrente evolutiva da humanidade, e, como tal, sei que sou corresponsável por qualquer violência ocorrida".

20 QUE BOM te ver viva, 1989, 95 min 24 s. Freely translated: "Eu devia pôr uma placa. Cuidado, cachorro ferido".

bring something specific, related to the way in which this experience was lived; that is to say, “they provide something other than purely documentary knowledge” (LACAPRA, 2014, p. 86). When Lucia Murat’s film was released, Brazil was taking its first steps towards redemocratization. The Amnesty Law had been passed in 1979<sup>21</sup> and, with it, many exiles, banished persons, and political prisoners returned to the country’s public scene. However, there was still no movement for truth, justice, or redress; it took many years for this to happen. In 1985 a civilian government replaced the presiding generals; a new Constitution was promulgated in 1988 by a Constituent Assembly created in the previous year. Brazilians voted for President of the Republic in 1989, for the first time since the military coup of 1964. People were talking about the dictatorship, new and old leaders had returned to the country, new parties had been created, the 1988 Constitution marked a new political level.

Nonetheless, torture was still an uncomfortable subject, as many of the film’s interviewees point out. The country was advancing in the process of redemocratization, but it was sweeping some issues under the carpet, including torture, manslaughter, and political disappearances. All the interviewees commented on this discomfort in talking about torture, a difficult subject to talk about and to listen to. This taboo has been broken over the years of redemocratization, with the action of social movements such as *Tortura Nunca Mais* [Torture Never Again] and groups of victims and relatives of victims of the dictatorship. Lucia Murat’s film played a pioneering role, opening space for women to talk about the torture they had experienced and, with this, opening space in society for these stories to be heard.

Marcio Seligmann-Silva (2008) discusses the testimonial content of 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature, which recounts the Holocaust, the Gulag, Latin American dictatorships, the wars and catastrophes that marked the 20<sup>th</sup> century and those that continued into the 21<sup>st</sup>. Seligmann-Silva defines the essential characteristics of testimonial literature, based on

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21 BRAZIL. Lei nº 6.683, de 28 de agosto de 1979. Concede anistia e dá outras providências. Available at: [https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/leis/l6683.htm](https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l6683.htm). Access on: 18 Sept. 2023.



the books written by Primo Levi about his captivity in Auschwitz. A literature that refers to a traumatic experience of political violence and that is produced caught between the need to narrate and the difficulty of narrating. Therefore, testimony – whether oral or written – opens a window that reveals the singular experience associated with trauma and political violence. Seligmann-Silva mainly discussed testimonial literature, but this characteristic can be extended to other forms of expression. The documentary *Que bom te ver viva* can be seen as an example of testimonial cinema. This testimonial character is inextricably linked to the trauma and the effort to overcome it; testimony is then presented as a condition of survival for the witnesses. (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2008, p. 66). Not only the testimonies of the real characters, but also those of actress Irene Ravache, who stands for the testimony of the director herself, should be read under this light.

Lucia Murat's film added to and expanded the efforts of some women to narrate the violence and trauma to which they were subjected by the repression. We can cite some other examples that mark this process. The book *Memórias das mulheres do exílio* [*Memories of Women in Exile*] was published by Paz e Terra in 1980, organized and edited collaboratively by Albertina de Oliveira Costa, Maria Teresa Porciúncula Moraes, Norma Marzola, and Valentina da Richa Lira. A pioneering work that approaches women's testimonies from a feminist as well as a political perspective, the book features women who relate different experiences of exile. Some fled Brazil, others were banished, like Maria do Carmo Brito, who also appears in Lucia's film. Some deponents use their full names, others just their first name or an alias. The dictatorship was not yet over. In the book's introduction, the organizers present their project from the memory and political point of view: "We look for our experience as women in the field where the subjective and the objective intertwine: that of emotions and concrete personal history, of daily changes that are not minor, no less historical"<sup>22</sup> (COSTA et al., 1980, p. 16).

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22 Freely translated: "Buscamos a nossa vivência como mulheres no terreno onde o subjetivo

Another important book, with a more academic approach, was published by Elizabeth Xavier Ferreira (1996), *Mulheres, militância e memória* [*Women, Militancy and Memory*], as a result of her research for a master's degree in anthropology at the Museu Nacional [National Museum] of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Her work brings forth the testimonies and the life and survival stories of 13 women who experienced capture, torture, and imprisonment. In the case of this book, the witnesses are presented using aliases. Two years later, the presence of women in the political struggle, their imprisonment, and the torture they suffered were addressed by journalist Luiz Maklouf Carvalho (1998) in *Mulheres que foram à luta armada* [*Women Who Went to the Armed Struggle*]. The book features testimonies from various activists such as Vera Silvia Magalhães, Maria do Carmo Brito, and Lucia Murat herself.

Since the 2000s, historiography on the military dictatorship in Brazil has expanded significantly, with a focus on studies of memory and transitional justice processes, often in a comparative perspective in relation to Latin American countries, especially the Southern Cone. This comparative perspective constitutes the specificity and contribution of the book organized by Joana Maria Pedro and Cristina Scheibe Wolff (2010), *Gênero, feminismos e ditaduras no Cone Sul* [*Gender, Feminisms, and Dictatorships in the Southern Cone*]. The emphasis of the compilation is to intertwine the two themes of gender studies and feminism with the history of military dictatorships in Latin America. The book brings together essays by researchers from countries such as Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, and Bolivia, as well as testimonies by women activists from left-wing organizations in these countries who had their lives affected by imprisonment, torture, and exile. Due to its historiographical relevance, the book is a fundamental reference for studies on the trajectories and memories of women in times of dictatorship. The valorization of testimonies and statements in the historiography of the dictatorship has been accentuated by the

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e o objetivo se entrelaçam: o das emoções e o da história pessoal concreta, das mudanças cotidianas e nem por isso menores, nem por isso menos históricas”.

memory policies implemented by the government itself, which have resulted in projects such as *Memórias reveladas* [*Revealed Memories*]<sup>23</sup> and *Marcas da memória* [*Memory Marks*],<sup>24</sup> both aimed at developing research and building collections of testimonies. The creation of the Comissão Nacional da Verdade [National Truth Commission] (CNV) in 2011<sup>25</sup> was an important moment in this process.

### **MULHERES DE ARMAS: THE ARMED STRUGGLE IN PORTUGAL**

In the book *Mulheres de Armas*, journalist Isabel Lindim (2012) tells the story of 15 women who took part in the armed struggle in Portugal, based on interviews she conducted. As we have seen, she recounts experiences of her mother's generation. Her mother's testimony is not in the book, but Isabel do Carmo (2012) introduces the political history of Portugal. There is a division of labor between mother and daughter: the mother handles history and politics, and the daughter interviews and memory. Isabel do Carmo was not interviewed, but she gave her political view on the subject, an analysis that was legitimized by the fact that she was a founder and leading figure in the Brigadas Revolucionárias organization.

Isabel do Carmo's (2012) introduction, titled *As mulheres nas Brigadas Revolucionárias* [*Women in the Revolutionary Brigades*], has a much broader scope. She describes some of the situations in which she and her companion Carlos Antunes, their daughter Isabel Lindim (nicknamed Bli), and other militants in the organization found themselves a few months before April 25. After these first paragraphs, the story goes back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to narrate the history of

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23 ARQUIVO NACIONAL. *Memórias reveladas*. Available at: <https://www.gov.br/memorias-reveladas/pt-br>. Access on: 18 Sept. 2023.

24 Partial results are available in: Montenegro; Rodeghero; Araujo (2012).

25 See: BRAZIL. Lei nº 12.528, de 18 de novembro de 2011. Cria a Comissão Nacional da Verdade no âmbito da Casa Civil da Presidência da República. Available at: [https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil\\_03/\\_ato2011-2014/2011/lei/112528.htm](https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2011/lei/112528.htm). Access on: 18 Sept. 2023.

Portugal and the history of women in the country. This is the aim of the book: to present the history of the women's movement in relation to the history of Portugal and the world.

This article does not intend to analyze Isabel do Carmo's text; our primary interest lies in analyzing the narratives and memories of the armed struggle expressed in the testimonies, i.e., in the part of the text written by Isabel Lindim, her daughter. However, some discussions of the armed struggle in the mother's text are important for understanding the specificity of this theme in Portugal, as well as for a fruitful reading of the testimonies.

Usually, in discussions about the armed struggle against the Portuguese dictatorship, the colonial war comes to mind. At the Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril [April 25 Documentation Center] (CD25A) in Coimbra, there are boxes with documents from the Brigadas Revolucionárias (BRs), the Liga de Unidade e Ação Revolucionária (LUAR), and the Ação Revolucionária Armada (ARA). This documentation is not entirely classified and organized. The LUAR folder, for example, has propaganda material as well as political evaluation documents, pamphlets, and newspapers. One of the documents found in this folder refers to LUAR's first high-profile armed action: the assault on the Banco de Portugal in Figueira da Foz in 1967, led by Palma Inácio and Camilo Mortágua, which marked the beginning of the organization's activities. After the Carnation Revolution, LUAR continued to act politically, but abandoned armed actions and began trying to radicalize the Portuguese political process towards a socialist revolution. The group's newspaper and releases, which can be found in the folders of the CD25A, attest to this political endeavor.<sup>26</sup>

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26 CENTRO DE DOCUMENTAÇÃO 25 DE ABRIL (CD25A), Coimbra. Pasta LUAR, 1967-1976. The materials about LUAR had not yet been catalogued when we conducted our research in Coimbra. They were stored in boxes and folders containing pamphlets, newspaper clippings, posters, and various documents from the organization. Several of these documents convey the organization's conflict between supporting the government and maintaining the project of socialist struggle. In a pamphlet dated August 15, 1974, LUAR denounced what it considered a retreat and betrayal by the post-revolution government, which failed to take popular demands into account.

The ARA was the armed arm of the PCP, created in 1970. In the 1960s and 1970s, armed organizations created in various countries of the Western world were generally opposed to traditional Communist Parties – which, in turn, criticized the armed choice and insisted on more institutional paths.<sup>27</sup> Hence, the ARA was a peculiar trait of the PCP. According to D. L. Raby (1988), the training of communist militants for armed action was coordinated by members of the PCP's own Central Committee, who were even sent to Cuba and the USSR. One of the ARA's first acts was to sabotage the warship *Cunene*. The ARA suspended its actions after April 25 and only then did its links with the PCP become public.

According to Isabel do Carmo (2012, p. 63-65), the Brigadas Revolucionárias were established in 1970. Their first armed action took place on November 7, 1971, and their last on April 9, 1974. The characters in the book talk about precisely this period. After the Carnation Revolution, the Brigadas Revolucionárias were disbanded. However, some BR militants had been organizing a political party, the Partido Revolucionário do Proletariado [Revolutionary Party of the Proletariat] (PRP), which had already been running underground. When the BRs ceased their actions, the PRP became legal and continued to operate, as did LUAR, with the aim of radicalizing the revolutionary process.

A distinctive aspect of the Portuguese organizations' armed struggle is their primary focus on sabotaging Portuguese ships bound for the colonial war in Africa. They also carried out bank robberies to buy bombs and explosives for these sabotage actions, but they were against the use of weapons or bombs that could harm people. The BRs and the ARA had this very clear guideline. The armed struggle had the sole aim of jeopardizing Portugal's military action, thus helping the struggle of the African colonies. No attack that could put people's lives at risk would be carried out by these organizations. In the lengthy introduction to her daughter's book, Isabel do Carmo emphasizes this

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27 That was the case of Brazil, of various Latin-American and European countries, such as Italy, Germany, among others. For a discussion of the matter, see Araujo (2000).

characteristic. In a subheading titled *Não matarás* [*You shall not kill*], Isabel do Carmo (2012, p. 69) wrote:

The BR leadership, where Carlos Antunes and I were, decided that the organization wouldn't kill. It's a philosophical and practical position. Respect for human life means that each person is unrepeatable, and we don't have the right to end life because it will be irreversible. Causing death is an irreparable act. We are also against the death penalty.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of this position, the actions were planned "so as not to cause harm to people"<sup>29</sup> (CARMO, 2012, p. 70). This included choosing times when there would be no employees in the place where the bombs would be placed. The death of two militants is a recurring theme in the speeches of the women interviewed by Isabel Lindim. According to her mother, "in the end, two of our militants who died in an action were the only fatal victims of the BRs' actions"<sup>30</sup> (CARMO, 2012, p. 70).

The Carnation Revolution interrupted the armed interventions and changed the scenario of political action. The main thrust of the Portuguese armed struggle was to support the African colonial struggle. The focus of the actions was the sabotage of Portuguese ships that were going to fight in the colonial war in Africa. The new Portuguese government, born out of the Carnation Revolution, stopped the war and signaled its support for the independence process in the African colonies. As a result, after April 25, the militants of the armed organizations got involved in the legal political struggle, in the revolutionary effort, and in

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28 Freely translated: "Foi decisão da direção das BR, onde estávamos eu e o Carlos Antunes, que a organização não mataria. É uma posição filosófica e prática. O respeito pela vida humana significa que cada pessoa é irrepitível e não temos o direito de acabar com a vida porque isso será irreversível. Provocar a morte é um ato irreparável. De igual modo somos contra a pena de morte".

29 Freely translated: "de modo a não provocarem danos em pessoas".

30 Freely translated: "acabaram por ser dois militantes (nossos) que morreram numa ação as únicas vítimas mortais das ações das BRs".

the attempt to radicalize the political process in the direction of socialism; they worked in neighborhood movements, founded newspapers, created and took part in Revolutionary Councils (RABY,1988).<sup>31</sup>

*Partir para a acção* [Getting into action] is the title of the second part of the book, written by Isabel Lindim (2012), which presents the stories and memories of women who took part in the Brigadas Revolucionárias. We will focus here on the interviewees who were directly linked to the armed actions. However, the names of the women who worked in support of the Brigadas and who also gave their testimonies for the book are worth mentioning: Teresa Gaivão Veloso, Manuela Lima, Marília Viterbo, Maria João Ceboleiro, Celeste Ceboleiro, Laurinda Queirós, Alexandra Ramos, Joana Lopes, and Luísa Sarsfield Cabral.

The book features interviews with six women who directly participated in the armed actions of the BRs: Graça, Joana I, Joana II, Maria Elisa da Costa, Maria Patrocínia Raposo Guerreiro (Rosa), and Paula Viana. The first three preferred to use the aliases they had at the time they were militants in the organization.<sup>32</sup> In 1974 (the year the Brigadas disbanded) they were all between 20 and 31 years old. The reason why the first three preferred to use aliases was not a matter of security, but a result of care for their professional position. After April 25, these three activists developed successful careers in a Portugal that, following the downfall of the long dictatorship, was modernizing along the lines of European democracies. They never mentioned in their workplaces that they had taken part in an armed organization.

Each chapter is named after one character and recounts her respective political trajectory. This is not a full transcript of the testimonies.

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31 There are indications that the PRP carried out armed activities in 1975. In the chronology that accompanies Lindim's book, there is the following entry: "August 1: Armed Resistance of the PRP-BR at the São João da Madeira headquarters" (freely translated: "1 de Agosto: Resistência Armada do PRP-BR na sede de São João da Madeira"), but no further information is provided about what happened. In her doctoral thesis, Sofia de Matos Ferreira (2015, p. 303) also mentions a declaration by the PRP to return to the armed struggle, without offering specific details.

32 Since two of them had used the same alias, Lindim named them Joana I and Joana II.

Isabel Lindim (2012) interviewed these women and constructed a text based on the testimonies; the text is interspersed with quotes and references to the interviews.

Graça was 19 when she joined the Brigadas Revolucionárias. She came from a middle-class family – her father was a civil engineer, which gave the family a certain economic level. According to her, it was a “republican and secular family environment” where “freedom was breathed and intellectual life was fostered”<sup>33</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 79-80). It was a Catholic family, but only her mother was a churchgoer. When Graça wanted to stop attending church, the family accepted without any problem. Her upbringing was based on a sense of equality and an anti-Salazar spirit. Graça had a lot of contact with her cousins, who had an influence on her political positions. One of these cousins is even in the book, Joana I, and joined the organization alongside Graça:

I remember there was always a discourse against Salazar in the conversations at home. There was a lot of discussion about politics, but curiously it came more from the girls, who took part in the discussions; the boys never had the same interest in politics. There was a struggle associated with women and I felt very identified with them<sup>34</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 81).

It was in this family environment that Graça began her political activism. Isabel Lindim (2012, p. 81) comments that her political commitment would probably have been accepted by everyone in the family, but not her militancy in an armed organization. For this reason, her family never knew about her political activity, even though Graça took part in an action that made the headlines. On May 25, 1973, *Diário de*

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33 Freely translated: “ambiente familiar republicano e laico”; “respirava liberdade e fomentava-se a vida intelectual”.

34 Freely translated: “Lembro-me de haver sempre um discurso contra o Salazar nas conversas em casa. Discutia-se muito política, mas, curiosamente, era mais da parte das raparigas, que participavam nas discussões, os rapazes nunca tiveram o mesmo interesse pela política. Havia uma luta associada às mulheres e eu sentia-me muito identificada com elas”.



*Lisboa* announced on its front page a bank robbery in Alhos Vedros. The newspaper mentioned a “young woman in a blue miniskirt”<sup>35</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 73). After this, she took part in several more robberies, one of which involved a car chase through the streets of Lisbon. The Brigadas’ activities were entirely surreptitious. At the same time, Graça continued to work part-time as a secretary in a family planning organisation. When the Carnation Revolution took place and the BRs’ armed activities were suspended, she was finished with her double life and never told anyone about her experience. She graduated in sociology. At the end of the chapter dedicated to her, she says: “It’s very sad that 37 years after April 25 we have built a country with such injustices”<sup>36</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 93).

Joana I, who also chose to use an alias, is precisely the cousin mentioned by Graça in her statement. Joana came from a traditional and cultured family. During the interview, she mentions that Manuel Serra was a huge political influence in her life. A former activist in the Juventude Universitária Católica [Catholic University Youth], Manuel was a historical figure in the fight against the dictatorship. Graça and Joana I joined the Brigadas and even carried out robberies together. The first mission they took part in failed, but the group managed to escape. Joana recounts this episode with details of the escape, which involved a chase by the bank’s security guard, cars going the wrong way, the action vehicle abandoned, the militants dispersing. After April 25, Joana did not join any other political organizations, but she participated intensely in the social movements of 1974 and 1975: the neighborhood movements, the residents’ associations, the factory strikes, the house occupations.

Joana II had a different background to the cousins discussed in the earlier chapters. She came from a traditional, wealthy, conservative, Catholic family. She had 16 siblings. Her father belonged to the Opus Dei and supported the dictatorship. But the conservative family had

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35 Freely translated: “jovem de minissaia azul”.

36 Freely translated: “É muito triste que 37 anos após o 25 de Abril tenhamos construído um país com tamanhas injustiças”.

huge libraries: “I was greatly influenced by the hundreds of books ‘stolen’ from the libraries of my grandparents, parents, and uncles. I discovered that books were a gateway to an unknown, complex world full of diverse options”<sup>37</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 106). Joana pursued studies in social work. Despite the religious content of the course at the time, Joana loved the internships and practical work. One of these assignments was at the parish center of a working-class neighborhood in Lisbon. The residents organized an exhibition showing the living conditions in the local community. “The material ended up being confiscated by the PIDE<sup>38</sup> and the person in charge of the social center and the parish priest had political problems”<sup>39</sup> (p. 107). After this experience, Joana decided to leave Portugal in search of “a little freedom and wisdom”. She lived in Paris and the United States, having extensive contact with ideas, political debates, and freedom. She became pregnant and had the child alone. She decided to return to Portugal in 1972, but her family did not want to take her in as “a single mum with left-wing tendencies”<sup>40</sup> (p. 109), so Joana went to Setúbal to live with an aunt. There she worked in a bookshop and a printing press, meeting left-wing activists with whom she collaborated by printing political propaganda leaflets. Thus began her participation in the Brigadas Revolucionárias. But it was after the Revolution that Joana joined the neighborhood movement in Setúbal:

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37 Freely translated: “Influenciaram-me muito as centenas de livros ‘roubados’ às bibliotecas dos meus avós, pais e tios. Descobri que os livros eram uma porta para um mundo desconhecido, complexo e cheio de opções diversas”.

38 The Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado [International and State Defense Police] (PIDE) was established in 1945 as a political police force at the service of the Portuguese *Estado Novo*. During Marcello Caetano’s government, in 1969, it was replaced by the Direção Geral de Segurança [General Directorate of Security]. See: PIDE/DGS. In: *Associação dos Amigos da Torre do Tombo*. Available at: <https://www.aatt.org/site/index.php?op=Nucleo&id=1452>. Access on: 18 Sept. 2023.

39 Freely translated: “o material acabou por ser confiscado pela PIDE e a responsável pelo centro social e o pároco tiveram problemas políticos”.

40 Freely translated: “um pouco de liberdade e sabedoria”; “mãe solteira com tendências esquerdistas”.

Our great excitement began there, after April 25, in the socio-economic life of Setúbal. There was organization with the residents, the soldiers, and the workers in the companies. It was an amazing time, when a lot was discussed, and everyone wanted to get involved<sup>41</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 113).

From that moment onwards, Joana strengthened her choice to work with urbanism and neighborhood movements, combining “professional and political desires”<sup>42</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 114). Today Joana is a professor at the Universidade de Lisboa, where she heads a team working on housing policies.

Maria Elisa da Costa is the only child of a modest and conservative family. At the age of 17, she found a job in a family home as a preceptress. A few years later, when the children had grown up, Elisa decided to find a second job and was selected for the Laboratório Nacional de Engenharia Civil [National Civil Engineering Laboratory] (LNEC). She made new contacts and friends while working there, and even took part in the creation of a theatre group at LNEC. Acting in this group allowed her to have the first contact with movements that protested and opposed the regime. Elisa began collaborating with the escape of Portuguese youths who did not want to serve in the colonial war. José Paulo Viana, the brother of Paula Viana, another one of the interviewees in the book, was responsible for introducing Elisa to the Brigadas Revolucionárias. Elisa took on the name Fátima within the organization and served as a support for its different actions and strategies. One of the most important actions in which she was involved was, in 1972, the capture of the maps of the Portuguese colonies in Africa, which were stored in the Serviços Cartográficos do Exército [Army’s Cartographic

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41 Freely translated: “A nossa grande animação começou aí, depois do 25 de Abril, na vida socioeconómica de Setúbal. Havia a organização com os moradores, com os soldados e com os trabalhadores das empresas. Foi uma altura espantosa, onde se discutia muita coisa, toda gente queria participar”.

42 Freely translated: “os desejos profissionais e políticos”.

Services] building: "In the middle of the night they all left with military maps of Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea, which José Paulo later took to Paris, from where they travelled to Algiers, to reach the hands of the liberation movements"<sup>43</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 122).

During the interview, Maria Elisa recounts an episode that has already been mentioned in this article and will be referred to in other chapters of the book: the accidental explosion that took place in March 1973 when BR militants were placing bombs in military installations. The original plan was for them to explode at dawn, but a technical error caused them to go off while they were being assembled. The casualties of this explosion were Ernesto and Luís, respectively Arlindo Garret and Carlos Curto, the latter of whom was Elisa's colleague at the Laboratory. Elisa's connection with Carlos Curto was obvious, which is why she had to leave Lisbon and take refuge in Paris. On the same day, the PIDE started looking for her. In Paris, Elisa went back to work as a maid. Meanwhile, she met Portuguese activists who were also refugees, such as Manuel Serra and Fernando Pereira Marques, the latter linked to LUAR. Elisa and Fernando began a relationship and had a daughter born in exile in Paris. Elisa returned to Portugal on April 25 with her partner Fernando and their daughter Marta in her arms. She resumed her work at the Laboratory after two years in exile.

Maria Patrocínia Raposo Guerreiro (Rosa) has the most surprising story narrated in the book *Mulheres de Armas*. Rosa was her alias in the Brigadas Revolucionárias, but it is with this name that Isabel Lindim tells her story. Rosa was born in 1944 in the Alentejo to a humble family who worked "harvesting and picking olives"<sup>44</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 137). Her father died when she was one and a half years old, and a few years later her mother remarried. Her stepfather already had a son, and 10 years later another brother was born. When Rosa was 18, her stepfather's

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43 Freely translated: "De madrugada saíram todos com os mapas militares de Angola, Moçambique e Guiné, que mais tarde José Paulo levou até Paris, de onde seguiram para Argel, para chegarem às mãos dos movimentos de libertação".

44 Freely translated: "na ceifa e na apanha de azeitona".

son, who was in the army in Mozambique, asked her to marry him. She accepted. They married by proxy and a year later she went to Africa to meet her husband. The marriage was never consummated. In her interview Rosa says that “she accepted the marriage because she didn’t want to disappoint her mother”<sup>45</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 138). According to Rosa, her husband understood and accepted the situation. The marriage officially lasted for many years, and they only divorced after April 25. He died soon afterwards.

After her return from Mozambique, Rosa applied for a job, passed the public exam, and was hired as a Post Office employee in Leiria. There, she fell in love with a man, moved in with him, quit her job at the Post Office and became pregnant with her first child. Her partner died in a car accident when she was three months pregnant. She moved in with her sister-in-law in Figueira da Foz until her son Carlos was born. Some time later, her sister-in-law, who worked at the Casino de Espinho, helped her find a job. Rosa was hired as a striptease dancer and became a success. She performed at various clubs in Lisbon and Porto. Isabel Lindim (2012, p. 139) describes the scene:

All there was on stage was a chair and a tiger-patterned silk blanket. Rosa would start her performance on the chair and end up on the floor. Sometimes she also had to have a cocktail with a client. Thus, in February 1972, she sat at the table of Victor, the “João Grande” [“Big John”] of the Brigadas.<sup>46</sup>

Rosa gave up her life as a dancer, moved in with Victor, and started collaborating with the BRs’ activities. Victor was the one who suggested that she took up Rosa as her alias. At first, her role in the

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45 Freely translated: “aceitou o casamento porque não queria desapontar a mãe”.

46 Freely translated: “No palco tudo que havia era uma cadeira e uma manta em seda com padrão de tigre. Rosa começava a sua *performance* na cadeira e acabava no chão. De vez em quando, também tinha de beber um *cocktail* com um cliente. Foi assim que, em Fevereiro de 1972, se sentou na mesa de Victor, o ‘João Grande’ das Brigadas” (emphasis in the original).

organization was one of support, driving or picking up militants by car. But soon the situation evolved: "At some point I also started taking part in the actions. During robberies, I wouldn't go into the bank, but I would wait for them to come and hand over the money"<sup>47</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 141).

Rosa refers in her interview to an episode already mentioned in the chapter about Elisa: the March 9, 1973, incident in which the militants Ernesto and Luis lost their lives. The plan was to place the bombs in two different barracks and then set them off. Rosa was standing by with a car full of explosives that her comrades were going to pick up. She was with her son Carlos and pregnant with Victor's daughter Armanda. Something went wrong and when the bombs accidentally exploded, killing the two militants, the detonators that were in her car also exploded; the only reason the car did not blow up was because the detonators were not connected to the plastic.<sup>48</sup>

At some point the detonators went off in the back of the car. It made a huge noise, the windows shattered, and it smelt of burning. There were more than twenty kilos of plastic. If it had been connected to the detonator, we would have died. People started coming round. I only had time to take off my wig, take off my sunglasses and grab my son. I left the car as it was<sup>49</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 141-142).

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47 Freely translated: "A dada altura eu comecei também a participar nas ações. Nos assaltos, não entrava no banco, mas ficava a espera que me viessem entregar o dinheiro".

48 This technical explanation appears both in the chapter on Maria Elisa da Costa and in Maria Patrocínia's (Rosa) testimony.

49 Freely translated: "A dada altura rebentaram os detonadores no carro, na parte de trás. Fez um estardalhaço muito grande, partiram-se os vidros e cheirava a queimado. Tinha mais de vinte quilos de plástico. Se estivesse ligado ao detonador tínhamos morrido. Começou a aproximar-se gente. Só tive tempo de tirar a peruca, tirar os óculos escuros e agarrar o meu filho. Deixei o carro como estava".

Rosa also participated in other explosives operations and provided logistical support to the organization. She rented the cars used in the actions. A few months after April 25, João Grande and Rosa separated. Three months after their separation, Victor died in a car accident (as had happened to Carlos' father). After Victor's death, Rosa moved away from her old mates in the BRs and resumed her work at the Post Office. Carlos, who always accompanied his mother, now has a shop in Lisbon's Bairro Alto. Armanda gave her a grandson, named Afonso.

Paula Viana lived in Angola with her family. According to her, "in a colonial, modern and wealthy environment"<sup>50</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 148), she only knew the white people who lived in the rich neighborhoods. She went to Porto to study economics. There, she lived in a student hostel next to a low-income housing block where entire families shared a single room. Her process of political awareness began there, and she sought out contacts with student leaders and PCP militants but became dissatisfied. She learnt about the Brigadas Revolucionárias when they carried out their first actions and was at once attracted to them. Her brother José Paulo Viana (whom we met in Elisa's chapter) was already a member of the Brigadas and introduced her to the group. Her first action was to place firecrackers with leaflets inside rubbish bins, at confluence points, to explode and spread leaflets for the First of May. Paula was 22 years old. After this action, her husband Chico also joined the BRs. The couple and another friend handled several actions in Porto. One of the targets was the Distrito de Recrutamento e Mobilização do Porto [Recruitment and Mobilization District of Porto], where the archives of the soldiers who would be sent to the colonial war were found. Paula recounts in detail the installation of the bomb, which she placed during the day and programmed to explode at night, when no one would be there.

Paula also took part in the planning of an action to be carried out in Guinea. The aim of this action was to intimidate a group of soldiers. Isabel Lindim (2012, p. 157) points out that this was the only time that,

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50 Freely translated: "num ambiente colonial, moderno e abastado".

according to Paula, the “possibility of victims”<sup>51</sup> was discussed within the organization. The bomb was carried by a Brigadas militant inside a book, the pages of which were cut out for the insertion of the explosive artifact. The idea was to place it next to a room where a meeting should take place. In the end, the meeting was cancelled, but a Portuguese military officer, General Galvão de Figueiredo, who was in the room working, was hit by some shrapnel. There were no fatalities. Paula took part in other actions, along with the militants already mentioned, such as Graça and João Grande. She also took part in the last bank robbery carried out by the Brigadas a few days before April 25. After the Revolution Paula Viana became involved in the revolutionary climate in Porto, taking part in residents’ committees, supporting workers’ strikes, and getting involved in factory occupations. She said “those early days after April 25 were very intense and some of the happiest of [her] life”<sup>52</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 165).

With all its subjectivity, Isabel Lindim’s book holds a unique significance in the landscape of gender studies on the Portuguese dictatorship. The theoretical and methodological perspective of working with memory and testimonies is relatively new in Portugal. The Museu do Aljube [Aljube Museum] – a former prison that was transformed into the Museu da Resistência e da Liberdade [Museum of Resistance and Freedom]<sup>53</sup> – has been dedicated to advancing the theme of memory in Portugal since its inception, placing particular value on testimonies. In 2014, the museum initiated the *Projeto Vidas Prisionáveis* [Imprisonable Lives Project],<sup>54</sup> conducting public interviews in its auditorium. Former

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51 Freely translated: “possibilidade de haver vítimas”.

52 Freely translated: “aqueles primeiros tempos depois do 25 de Abril foram muito intensos e dos mais felizes da [sua] vida”.

53 To learn more about the institution, see: *Museu do Aljube Resistência e Liberdade*. Available at: <https://www.museudoaljube.pt/>. Access on: 18 Sept. 2023.

54 Recordings can be viewed at: TESTEMUNHOS/Vidas prisionáveis/Vidas na resistência. In: *Museu do Aljube Resistência e Liberdade* (YouTube). Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQzogtmqfY&list=PLuMKlAonEPgUsqwWdu5M0N5GXzJi3x\\_hZ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQzogtmqfY&list=PLuMKlAonEPgUsqwWdu5M0N5GXzJi3x_hZ). Access on: 18 Sept. 2023.



victims and prisoners of the Salazar dictatorship were invited to give these interviews, each featuring a different character. Some of these interviews were published in the book *No Limite da dor: A tortura nas prisões da PIDE* [*At the Limit of Pain: Torture in the PIDE Prisons*], by Ana Aranha and Carlos Ademar (2014).

### **CROSSING NARRATIVES AND MEMORIES: COMPARATIVE ELEMENTS BETWEEN THE BRAZILIAN DOCUMENTARY FILM AND THE PORTUGUESE BOOK**

Both the women featured in the documentary and those interviewed in the book value their participation in the armed struggle and do not deny it. However, the tone and, above all, the contents of the memories they convey are quite different. The Brazilian militants were subjected to enormous physical and psychological violence, abuse, and humiliation. The trauma and the struggle to overcome it are the central elements of the testimonies in *Que bom te ver viva*, not only from the interviewees, but also from the character played by actress Irene Ravache. The testimonies of the BR activists presented in Isabel Lindim's book are different. They did not experience arrests or torture. The Brigadas' actions were interrupted by April 25, which overthrew the Portuguese dictatorship. The Carnation Revolution emptied the action of the BRs, which put the brakes on their armed actions. But while the Portuguese dictatorship was overthrown by a revolution, in Brazil the guerrilla organisations were dismantled by a still strong military dictatorship, which saw the defeat of the armed left as a trump card. The period that marked the confrontation between the armed organisations and the Brazilian military dictatorship entered the annals of history as the *Anos de Chumbo* [Years of Lead] (1969-1974), the most violent period of the dictatorship, corresponding to President Médici's government. This difference in the Portuguese and Brazilian historical processes is the determinant factor for the difference not only in the tone of the testimonies but also in the experience they portray. The issue of torture, in its different dimensions,

both physical and psychological, is therefore a central element in differentiating the experiences and memories analyzed here.

Interestingly, the women who testify in the Brazilian documentary (except for the activist Anonymous) have their full names published in the film. They were all imprisoned and the recovery they were experiencing at the time the film was made was based on their real names in society. There is no possibility of reparation under a fictitious name. Overcoming the trauma and reintegrating into “normal” life (the life that other people live) can only be done using their real names. The first three women in the Portuguese book tell their stories under the aliases they used when they were militants in the Brigadas Revolucionárias. Their justification is that they do not want to expose themselves in the space in which they work today. That is to say, it is a rational, professional justification. This difference stems from the divergent historical processes, but another element should be considered: the difference in the date of publication of these works relative to the lived experience.

Lucia Murat's film was released in 1989, some 15 to 18 years after the events that took place. The interviews had begun a few years earlier. Many wounds were still open. In 1989, the first direct elections for President of the Republic were held after the 1964 military coup. The redemocratization of the country was taking its first steps, but it seemed that Brazilian society wanted to erase the memory of violence, torture, the dead and the disappeared. The process of personal and political mourning was still taking place. The women in Lucia's film are still wounded, traumatized, and struggling to reintegrate into the world and social life. The issue of recovering their physical and emotional integrity is still a priority. And for that they needed to say who they are and what happened to them. The situation of the Portuguese interviewees is different, partly because they are recounting episodes that happened around 40 years prior. What they experienced is already distant and does not affect their lives or their feelings in a more profound manner. Furthermore, some of them (those who use their aliases) already have consolidated professional careers that do not fit in with a past of armed actions. The issue of anonymity versus the need to speak in one's own

name thus arises differently for these two groups of women, due to the differences in the political processes of the two countries, as well as the temporal proximity or distance of the events experienced.

The Brazilian documentary was made by Lucia Murat, talking about herself, and interviewing her companions. It is a generational testimony about the trauma of violence and the attempt to overcome it. The Portuguese book, written by Isabel Lindim (2012), recounts the experiences of her mother's generation. A mother who is strongly present in the work, not in a testimonial way, but through a theoretical text on the history and politics of her generation. The places and positions of authorship are different and give the two works a distinct character. Isabel Lindim writes the book, in a way, under the ascendancy of her mother. The book's framework is given by Isabel do Carmo's (2012) introduction. Carmo was also responsible for suggesting and establishing contacts with the interviewees. The interviews make up a narrative that inserts the presence of the Brigadas Revolucionárias into contemporary Portuguese history. The book is an act of valorization of the Brigadas' armed experience.

The experience of the Portuguese militants discussed in the book is essentially positive, in part because these women were neither imprisoned nor subjected to torture. In her testimony, Paula Viana makes this clear: "Everything happened over a period of three years, from 1971 to 1974. If April 25 hadn't happened, perhaps the police would have discovered the trail of the organisation and its elements"<sup>55</sup> (LINDIM, 2012, p. 164). But that did not happen. None of the armed militants who were interviewed went through prison.

It can be pointed out that the two works construct different types of memory: a traumatic memory in the Brazilian documentary, and a happy one in the Portuguese book. The military dictatorship ended in Brazil through a process of negotiation that left many open wounds.

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55 Freely translated: "Tudo se passou num período de três anos, de 1971 a 1974. Se não tivesse acontecido o 25 de Abril, talvez a polícia tivesse descoberto o rasto da organização e de seus elementos".

Lucia Murat's film makes this fact clear. Meanwhile, in Portugal, the overthrow of the dictatorship by the Carnation Revolution and the period of intense political participation that followed influence the way the interviewees remember and narrate their experiences.

The comparison proposed here puts into dialogue a documentary film and a book, cultural productions which would normally require different methodological tools. However, we are analyzing these two documents from the point of view of their testimonial content, because they are both supports for testimonies. In this sense, they have some interesting common characteristics: both the film and the book are essentially made up of edited testimonies. They deal with women's memories that have been collected and edited by the director and the author, both of whom are deeply involved with the subject matter and with the women who testify. Lucia Murat's film makes use of the theatricality of the character played by Irene Ravache. In Isabel Lindim's book, the deponents themselves often narrate their experiences in a theatrical way.

## **SOME FINAL THOUGHTS**

This article is an attempt to explore the interplay between politics and subjectivity, based on the interweaving of history and memory. We would like to conclude by showing how this pair played a role in the writing of this text. Rewatching Lucia Murat's film after many years – having seen it for the first time in 1989, upon its release – and committing to its analysis mobilized our own memories.

It is also worth mentioning the impact of discovering the existence of armed organizations in Portugal and learning about their unique traits. The only armed struggle in the world that imposed upon itself the precept “Não matarás” [“You shall not kill”]. This discovery first came up in the collection of the Centro de Documentação 25 de Abril in Coimbra and was later complemented in the documentation sector of the Biblioteca Nacional [National Library] in Lisbon. For a historian, the discovery of previously unknown documentation always opens up a new field of study and reflection.

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