

Volume 41
issue 3 / 2022

Contracampo e-ISSN 2238-2577
Niterói (RJ), 41 (3)
sep/2022-dec/2022

Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication is a quarterly publication of the Graduate Programme in Communication Studies (PPGCOM) at Fluminense Federal University (UFF). It aims to contribute to critical reflection within the field of Media Studies, being a space for dissemination of research and scientific thought.

Female bodies as objects of abjection and torture in the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship

FLAVIANA DE FREITAS OLIVEIRA

São Paulo State University (UNESP) – São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.
E-mail: flaviana.freitas@unesp.br.
ORCID: 0000-0003-3714-5820.

PEDRO ANGELO PAGNI

São Paulo State University (UNESP) – São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.
E-mail: pedro.pagni@unesp.br.
ORCID: 0000-0001-7505-4896.

ANA MARIA KLEIN

São Paulo State University (UNESP) – São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.
E-mail: ana.klein@unesp.br.
ORCID: 0000-0002-0004-1908.

TÂNIA SUELY ANTONELLI MARCELINO BRABO

São Paulo State University (UNESP) – São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.
E-mail: tania.brabo@unesp.br.
ORCID: 0000-0002-9833-0635.

TO REFERENCE THIS ARTICLE, PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING CITATION:

Oliveira, Flaviana de Freitas; Pagni, Pedro Angelo; Klein, Ana Maria; Brabo, Tânia Suely Antonelli Marcelino. (2022). Female bodies as objects of abjection and torture in the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship. *Contracampo – Brazilian Journal of Communication*, Niterói, v. 41, n. 3.

Submitted on: 01/27/2022 / Reviewer A: 02/14/2022 / Reviewer B: 09/13/2022 / Accepted on: 09/14/2022.

DOI – <http://dx.doi.org/10.22409/contracampo.v41i3.52794>

Abstract

Brazil has frequent cases of gender violence, which historically reveal unequal and asymmetrical power relations between men and women. The final report of the Comissão Nacional da Verdade reveals that women victims of the 1964 civil-military dictatorship received specific tortures, focused on gender violence and misogyny. Thus, this work aims to analyze how torture was linked to gender performativities and the binary sexual divisions "man-rational" versus "woman-emotional", as proposed by Butler (2017). In order to do so, a vision of what would be the dictatorship is built within the biopolitics and sexpolitics of the 20th century and how the militant female bodies were the object of contempt by the repressive apparatus.

Keywords

Dictatorship; Female bodies; Torture; sexpolitics.

Introduction

Talking about the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship and understanding the various human rights violations that occurred is a way of bringing to light the right to memory and truth. This is important for building a social imaginary that values Human Rights and repudiates any attempt at authoritarianism or an anti-democratic regime.

The civil-military coup that took place in Brazil in 1964 led to an extremely repressive regime, which did not allow any kind of opposition. As a result, members of opposition groups and armed guerrillas were physically and psychologically tortured. At this time, the repressive apparatus began to act informally, arresting, torturing, and murdering people considered subversive and abandoning them in clandestine places.

Dictatorial acts installed fear and the presence of a violent state. Politics appropriated people's lives as an object, using the right to put to death, decreeing death for those who faced the government. The State began to exercise power over life, leaving a mark of explicit violence, persecution, and physical and psychological torture (São José, 2013).

Brazil has frequent cases of gender violence, which reveal historically unequal and asymmetrical power relations between men and women. The final report of the The National Truth Commission (Brazil, 2014) reveals that women victims of the civil-military dictatorship of 1964 received specific torture, focused on gender violence and misogyny. Investigating the violence experienced by these women during their arrests and torture sessions, and moreover, bringing their perceptions on the subject to light, is relevant for the recovery of memory and truth, rejecting the gender binary that places the feminine in a position of social erasure.

The tortures of “abject bodies” in the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship

In order to understand the use of violence by dictatorships, especially torture as a fundamental device of these governments, it is necessary to distinguish between different types of torture. The spectacle of torture serves the purpose of setting an example for society so that it does not commit crimes. This was also done by the dictatorships studied here, but torture is a punishment established in a legal trial and is also legally justified. Therefore, for each particular crime, different types of torture were employed during the historical period in which Foucault located the power of sovereignty. It is noteworthy that the practice of torture in sovereign societies was the form of law enforcement that was legally recognized, both by the sovereign and by their subjects (Foucault, 2006).

In dictatorships, the fact that the government and the torture are inherently illegal and specifically target what is deemed "leftist thinking" creates a situation where the tortured individuals suffer the terrible consequences of this practice: injustice. Therefore, the distinction between punishment and torture is made based on their legal reference. (Coelho, 2014).

To say that there is a philosophy involved in the ordeal is not irrelevant. Torture, in the context in which it was inscribed, was not a symbol of a mere moral degeneration of society, a lack of rationality or humanist values. On the contrary, through it, the offender was given the opportunity to atone for the mistakes committed, to reach divine mercy. (...) Torture, unlike torture, has always been and always will be just a pastiche of great human performances: moral, political, religious or scientific. A practice from the basements, from the shadows, from the faceless and voiceless, from the historyless. Torture only exists in the history of the tortured (Silva, 2009, p. 86).

Thus, the penalties of torture end up being extinguished, according to Foucault (2006), through

the penal reform of the 18th century, which had as its main objective not the regulation of violent penalties, but their mitigation. This is due not to a respect for the criminal, but to soften the suffering of judges and spectators. Humanity is a respectful term attributed to this economic rationality that must measure the penalty and prescribe adjusted techniques so that they can control the generalization a crime brings with it. Now, the penalty is economically ideal insofar as it is minimal for those who suffer and maximum for those who imagine it (Foucault, 2006).

Foucault (1988) points out that today sovereignty has been replaced by biopolitics, understood as a means of controlling the individual that seeks to solve political problems through the intervention of regulatory agents of the population. Thus, the sovereign power, the power to bring about death, is replaced: "the old power of death in which power was symbolized is now carefully rediscovered by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (Foucault, 1988, p. 152).

In the military dictatorships of South America, if the purpose of punishment is to correct, reeducate, and heal, it does not apply to "leftist thinkers" as they were not seen as curable but as "subversive" participants in a dirty and dangerous war labeled as an "internal threat," which formed the ideology of "national security."

In a way, the dictatorship points to a "Biopower of Sovereignty", as pointed out by Coelho (2014). For the author, the State would be confused with dictatorship and repression, while the enemy would be confused with an ideology considered extinct. Therefore, we understand that the phenomenon of a certain setback to sovereign power enlivened by the illegality of torture can be better understood in light of the state of exception concept.

According to Agamben (2004), the term was born with the transformation of democratic regimes due to the progressive expansion of executive powers during and after the two world wars, and it is justified based on civil war, insurrection, and resistance. The state of exception consists of legal measures that cannot be understood in the field of law since it is the "legal form of what cannot have a legal form." (Agamben, 2004, p. 12). There is a contiguity between the state of exception and sovereignty, since the sovereign is the one who decides on the state of exception, but "(...) the modern state of exception is a creation of the revolutionary-democratic tradition and not of the absolutist tradition." (Agamben, 2004, p. 16).

In this sense, modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, through the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows the physical elimination not only of political opponents but also of entire categories of citizens who, for whatever reason, appear not to be integrated into the political system (Agamben, 2004).

Given the above, when defining the power perpetrated by the dictatorship, it is important to mention that power and violence are terms that are distinguished and, at the same time, related. Violence would be the last resort to keep the power structure intact as if it were the most flagrant manifestation of that power. Thus, we can say that in the twentieth century, the multiplication of means of violence through technological revolution was introduced into politics, as is the case with torture (Arendt, 2009).

Thus, one can say that there is a difference between the punishment of sovereign power and torture, which would be a reflux of sovereignty. Torture emerges from a reaction to security devices filed by public agents who invest themselves with power over the life and death of individual bodies that defy the government. Its practice does not occur through the public exposure of those who are subjected to torture, but through undermining the subjectivation that individuals produce. By force and perversity, there is an overlap that serves as an individual deprivation.

In the case of the civil-military dictatorship, it is clear that there is constant surveillance by the State over those considered "subversives", that is, those who do not consent to the government. Hannah Arendt (2009), however, considers civil disobedience as a legitimate political act, distinct from the criminal transgression of laws, and as something that should not be punishable.

While civil disobedience openly defends its cause in the public space and, even though it is a minority, claims the support of a majority for the transformation or conservation of a given situation, criminal transgression necessarily has to hide itself, since it is nothing more than an exception made in the name of self-interest. (...). In emergency political situations, civil disobedience is, therefore, a way of recovering the human capacity to act collectively and resist arbitrariness and oppression, refounding and renewing the foundations of constituted power through recourse to the renewing potential of constituent power (Arendt, 2009, p. 55-56).

In the microphysics of power prevailing in the 20th century, discipline becomes a requirement, necessitating an entire hierarchical and surveillance structure. This is what happens with the repressive apparatus in the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship, in which it assumes the role of “a perfect gaze that nothing escapes and the center toward which all gazes converge” (Foucault, 2006).

Thus, the control through the gaze emerges, which, while it watches, is also being watched, thereby creating the disciplinary individual. Immersed within the disciplinary power, there is also a small penal system with its own sanctions, enforcing acceptance and efficiency of discipline. In other words, it disciplines, massifies dispersed individualities, and extracts from individuals learned behaviors that will be unidirectional in the pursuit of greater efficiency. It is from this operation that the normal, adapted, and efficient individual emerges – it is the normalizing sanction. Lastly, there is also the examination, an act that simultaneously observes the performed action and normalizes its deviations by indicating failure, allowing for classification and punishment. It is a scrutinizing gaze that is fixed in writing – it is the normalizing control (Oliveira, 2007).

The most modern control machine is exercised from the contrast of light and the controlled body. It is through the police that the individual is trained and social peace is achieved. The police are the monarch's long riots. Then, the disciplinary society appears, taking power to spheres never reached before. The individual, in this society, is born free but is forged from birth in low heat and cold water, becoming more useful every day, having repressed areas of his possibilities every day, and reinforced others of what is permitted by discipline. It's as if from the infinite possibilities of being, now there's only a small disciplinary portion of having to be useful and effective. Discipline brings with it an economy of power and spreads it in the broadest social field, orders the social, generating docility and utility (Oliveira, 2007, p. 18).

Butler (2017, p. 16) states that “to be a body is to be exposed to modeling and a social form”. Thus, once inserted in relationships, as well as in certain operations of power, bodies go through frameworks that delimit which lives are considered as such. In this way, the author draws attention to the conditions that make it possible for a life to be apprehensible and considered worthy of being recognized as such.

If recognition characterizes an act, a practice, or even a scene between subjects, then the 'condition of being recognized' characterizes the more general conditions that prepare or model a subject for recognition - the terms, conventions, and general norms 'act' in its own way, molding a living being into a recognizable subject, though not without fallibility or, indeed, unforeseen results. Those categories, conventions, and norms that prepare or establish a subject for recognition, that induce such a subject, precede and make possible the act of recognition itself. In this sense, the condition of being recognized precedes recognition (Butler, 2017, p. 19).

For Lins (2019), bodies are imbricated by characteristics, norms, and values that rank, classify and determine them socially and culturally. Thus, we have “a series of artifacts, accessories, gestures, and attitudes that a society has arbitrarily established as adequate and legitimate” (Louro, 2004, p. 87). This aims at the production of what are considered normal bodies, or as Louro (2004) proposes, bodies marked and signified by elements that constitute traits of power and, consequently, will make them more or less valuable.

This is what can be seen in the face of torture perpetrated against women during the civil-military

dictatorship: they are “abject bodies” - as defined by Butler to refer to bodies whose lives and materialities are understood as unimportant, insignificant - which would not constitute lives of fact (Meijer; Prins, 2002). For Agamben (2007), they are bodies whose lives are worthless or unworthy of being lived. In other words, they would constitute “sacred lives”, those that cease to be politically relevant and, therefore, can be eliminated with impunity.

Gender violence and tortured female bodies

In its final report, the National Truth Commission brings chapter 10, entitled “Sexual violence, gender violence and violence against children and adolescents”. A chapter is dedicated to the theme due to the serious humiliations suffered by women, during the civil-military dictatorship, as a result of gender. According to the report, there are systematic reports of humiliation, torture, and mistreatment accompanied by misogynistic acts and sexual violence (Brazil, 2014).

Inserted in the logic of torture and structured in the hierarchy of gender and sexuality, the sexual violence reported by survivors of the military dictatorship constitutes an abuse of power not only if we consider power as the faculty or possibility of the state agent to inflict suffering, but also the permission (explicit or not) to do so. This is how routinely, in spaces where torture became a means of exercising power and total domination, femininity, and masculinity were mobilized to perpetrate violence, breaking all limits of human dignity. In this disempowered space, the politically persecuted had their bodies fitted in the condition of prisoners. In the exercise of violence, women were installed in loci of feminine identities considered illegitimate (prostitute, adulteress, deviant wife of her role, distorted mother, etc.), at the same time that they were treated from categories constructed as masculine: strength and resistance physical (Brazil, 2014, p. 402).

According to the report, there were repeated reports of verbal and physical violence that labeled the woman as a “prostitute” and deserving of violations of a sexual nature. Actions involving motherhood were still frequent, with threats to the women's children during torture sessions or the compulsory separation of children (Brazil, 2014).

For Teles (2017), the repressive system at the time acted in a misogynistic way and reinforced the female stereotypes of submission and emotional, affective, and political dependence. Female militants received different treatment from men and were treated with contempt for not fulfilling their social roles as mothers, wives, and housewives.

Female participation in the resistance to the dictatorship had space in the social transformations of the time, with a greater presence of women in the public space. Militancy itself was part of a movement of rejection of taboos, sexism, and the lack of freedom imposed by the regime. This caused significant changes in the division of roles between the sexes and re-signified women's political participation (Ribeiro, 2018).

When it comes to the normativity that refers to the feminine, there was a concrete, orderly, and drastic regulation, since the woman who started to occupy the public space was punished with public humiliation and with the social stigma of the transgressive woman. “Such behaviors were considered as affronts not only to the patriarchy of society but to the dictatorship and conservative military thinking” (Ribeiro, 2018, p. 54).

Biroli (2018) explains that politics is updated as a male space and that the history of public space and modern political institutions are associated with the exclusion and marginalization of women. Thus, parallel to political repression, there was an attempt to repress militant female bodies that, at the time, were considered affronts to patriarchy.

In his research, Vannucchi (2002) emphasizes that the Military Justice of the time was based,

for the condemnation of the defendants, on pre-fixed gender roles and profiles. The CNV's final report¹ emphasizes that submission, weakness, dependence, emotion, chastity, modesty, female honor, maintenance of family values and traditions are some examples of stereotypes associated with "family" women (Brazil, 2014).

The women's participation was by their own decision. By assuming a political position of transforming dictatorship into freedom, justice, and democracy, they began to thicken the various trenches of struggle, from political actions to repudiate the dictatorship, whether armed struggle or not, which deeply irritated the military who expected them to be easily dominated and controlled by them. They did not accept that women could freely exercise their right to choose, including fighting against the dictatorship. They hated the militants who ran away from the stereotype of submission, dependence, and inability to make a decision. Torture was widely used against women and men. However, women were more intensely subjected to sexual torture, such as rape and mutilation, including the use of live animals (Teles, 2017, p. 224).

Thus, the repressive apparatus, by valuing women's honor and maintaining their social submission, used torture as a means of exercising power and total domination. According to the CNV's final report, there are repeated reports of the use, during arbitrary detention and torture sessions, of verbal and physical violence that labeled the woman as a "prostitute" and, therefore, deserving of violations of a sexual nature (Brazil, 2014).

The CNV, by addressing gender violence, sheds light on a topic that, for many years, was left aside. The very militancy of women was hidden by the documents of the time, becoming an object of study only in recent years. For Joffily (2008, p. 23-24), "(...) the official sources of the repressive apparatus have the intrinsic quality of carrying with them the imprint of the institutions that produced them".

For Teles (2017, p. 244), "the dictatorship combined hatred of oppositionists with hatred of women". Thus, the lack of human dignity filed against the women who fought against the system brought a legacy to the political history of our country that cannot be ignored, under penalty of not being overcome (Teles, 2017).

Without understanding the harm that sexism and misogyny can bring to society, we continue to repeat the mistakes of the past. Many studies demonstrate the horrors of torture; however, we still fail to associate sexual violence with torture perpetrated during the civil-military dictatorship. This association is essential when thinking about an education focused on memory and truth, which is concerned with a society focused on gender equality.

For this, it is necessary to elaborate on the past taking into account the deeper elements that move sexism and misogyny against female bodies. Education, by itself, is not capable of combating such unconscious and inhuman factors of memory, but it is an important way for us to be able to think of a more just and egalitarian society.

For the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (UN, 1994), violence against women is also understood as physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated by the State or its agents, wherever it occurs. Thus, the tortures perpetrated against women in the civil-military dictatorship constitute massive violations of gender rights.

The female "sex" as an object of contempt and torture

The testimonies given to the National Truth Commission demonstrate that the torture carried out by the agents of repression had a strong gender difference. It is obvious that, regardless of gender, these practices represented a serious violation of human rights and the dignity of the human person. However, when these tortures were inflicted upon women in the resistance, they were laden with

¹ CNV is the acronym in Portuguese for the National Truth Commission.

misogyny and gender stereotypes, to the extent that women were violated because of their sexuality, with reports of rape, forced abortions, and other aggressions involving feminine issues such as breastfeeding, motherhood, and menstruation. (Brazil, 2014).

Preciado (2018) says that sex has become such an important part of contemporary power plans that “the discourse on masculinity and femininity and the techniques for normalizing sexual identities have become agents of control and standardization of life” (p. 76). According to the author, Foucault characterizes the process of sexual modernization through biopower processes of the hysterization of the female body, the sexual pedagogy of children, the regulation of procreation behaviors, and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasures.

The testimonies given to the National Truth Commission, which are part of the final report's chapter “Sexual violence, gender violence and violence against children and adolescents”, show Preciado and Foucault's perception of the sexual issue in contemporary times. Through torture, one can perceive the presence of the use of sex as a torture apparatus, as well as the abjection towards deviant female bodies.

Coelho (1999), in his testimony “Memoirs of a Communist”, writes about sex as a dimension of power strategies in the civil-military dictatorship:

In passing, before I forget, it is necessary to point out the sexual prowess of the DOI staff. Unhealthy concern about inmates' sexual behavior; knowing whom they had sex with; constant comments about the sexual organs of the tortured, especially women; name-calling and scatological insults to prisoners. I'm sure they stripped and tortured Vera just to see her naked. Incidentally, certain types of torture, such as sticking a broom handle in the anus or vagina and electric shocks in sexual organs, are preferred because it satisfies your craving. At the same time, they take pains to underline, for the tortured, that, due to torture in organs and genitals, they would be sexually inhibited. His predilection, in telling jokes, is those most grossly connected with sex. Week after week I was asked to confess that I had sexual relations with Alva Mendes, Ruth Simis, and Jeny. By their judgment, in the end, they concluded that of the two, one – that I am a pederast or sexually incapable. They do not believe in friendships and camaraderie free of sexual relationships (Coelho, 1999, p. 56).

Butler (2019) points out that the category “sex” is from the beginning normative, a “regulatory ideal”. Thus “sex” would not only function as a norm but also as part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs. In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct forcibly materialized over time, a sign that bodies are never complete enough, that bodies never completely fulfill the norms by which their materialization is imposed.

In the civil-military dictatorship, in which order is placed as a matter of first instance, the category “sex” is highly emphasized by the repressive apparatus, both for the use of “sex” as a form of torture, and for classifying bodies – in the binary female, male.

Among the various testimonies, one can see how female bodies are placed in a place of erasure or discrimination in gender binarism. Thus, the military refers to women, in torture sessions, with abjection to the way these deviant bodies behave socially: they are women who, due to predetermined gender roles, should be at home, taking care of their children, in the manner proposed by society.

Rose Nogueira's statement to the CNV demonstrates the military's abjection of female bodies that do not correspond to the regulatory ideal of “sex”:

They said: “Where has it been seen! She just gave birth and has this body! It's because it's a terrorist cow.” (...). Then they started calling me Miss Brazil because there was a real dairy cow that won a prize. (...). A cow called Miss Brazil won a prize. One of those guys, Tralli, brought a newspaper that showed the cow and ripped the newspaper and passed it to me. Another thing is that they took my clothes off (...) there was a desk and they leaned over me naked with my butt up and they kept sticking their hands. Penetration, I did not have (...). He pinched me all over, that Tralli. He was a pervert

(Brazil, 2014, p. 404).

Ana Maria Gomes, arrested in July 1968 at the União dos Metalúrgicos de Osasco and taken to DOPS/SP to give a statement, was “advised” by a delegate not to deviate from the path to be followed by “family girls”:

The union was invaded, we were taken to a police station in the neighborhood and then to the DOPS. (...) At the end of the day, we were called to the delegate's office. (...) I couldn't, evidently, say what I was doing there [in the union]. So, I said that my brother – I didn't say who my brother was –, that my brother worked in a factory, that he had gone on strike, he started taking a long time to get home, my mother was very worried and people assumed he was in the union. The union was very close to my house. Me and my friend went to the union to see if he was there and he wasn't there. Then, the union was surrounded by soldiers on horseback, we were too scared to leave (...). We get a sermon. He [delegate] said: “you are girls, young people, who probably intend to get married, start a family, and it looks very bad, girls like you are attending a union, being involved in this kind of thing, so you go home, be sensible and never get involved in that again” (...) It is interesting to see how you place yourself in your condition as a woman and you manage to resist this condition that society gives you. Then it was perfect: we fit in and that was it. And [it is interesting to see] how he also threatened us with the danger of not getting married, with the danger of not fulfilling what every woman dreams of (Brazil, 2014, p. 405).

Oliveira (2017) finds that violence against women in Brazil, including those perpetrated by the State, constitutes a social problem anchored in a certain permanence of asymmetric power relations historically constructed and nurtured. The historian emphasizes both the continuity of discourses of inferiority and disqualification of women, which permeated the reports of different practices of physical violence, and observed that the female body had also become the target of symbolic violence.

Exalted as an expression of beauty, inspiring desire, a source of pleasure, of life through motherhood, symbol of the republican nation, the female body is also a place of violence - whether physical violence, beatings, rapes, etc., as well-known for those other subtle, ingenious forms of violence, including the so-called symbolic violence, which also contributes to the maintenance of inequalities (Oliveira, 2017).

And within these various forms of specific violence against women in the civil-military dictatorship, the issue of motherhood stands out. Butler (2019, p. 67) says that “the classic association of femininity with materiality can be traced back to a set of etymologies that link matter with mater [mother] and matrix [matrix] (or womb) and, therefore, to a problematic of reproduction”. Thus, in the case of female bodies, the classical configuration of matter appears as a place of generation or origination. When not explicitly related to reproduction, the matter is generalized as a principle of origination and causality.

Because of this, motherhood was a strong point for the torture of women imprisoned by the repressive apparatus. Elzira Vilela, in her statement to CNV, reports that she was arrested in September 1973 and taken to DOI-CODI/SP with her 13-month-old daughter:

She was tortured all day, they beat her a lot. And I only thought about Carminha. I was absolutely desperate. (...). Look, to tell you the truth, I didn't even feel much pain. Because my whole focus was like this, the madness (...). She was in his hands (...) and that for me was the greatest torture in my life. I believe that never again, in my life, will I suffer as much as I did in those days. Because you keep questioning yourself all the time: hey, I chose it, it's my life choice. (...) if I have to die, I die. Now, what about my daughter? Is it the girl? She was a year and a month old, starting to walk. She was a beautiful, beautiful, Japanese child. (...). In their hands (Brazil, 2014, p. 409).

For Preciado (2018), there is an appreciation of the ideal of reproduction in the heterosexual mentality of the sexpolitics of the 19th century. The author comments that the heterosexual body is the artifact that will underpin the greatest success of the government, ensuring “the structural relationship between the production of sexual identity and the production of certain parts of the body (to the detriment

of others) as reproductive organs” (p. 78).

Arrested about a month after giving birth to the couple's son and taken to the São Paulo DOPS with her then-husband, Luiz Roberto Clauset, Rose Nogueira tells CNV in her statement:

And then I was bleeding a lot and I didn't shower, they wouldn't let me shower. And there was the milk and it smelled sour. And I was bleeding. Then I was beaten because I was bleeding and he was disgusted. It stank. It smelled. Nervous sweat, sour milk, blood. I smelled. I thought I smelled because they said I was stinky, so I believe that. Then I was beaten because I was stinky. (Brazil, 2014, p. 420).

According to Butler (2015, p. 47), the value distinctions between female and male lives are decisive for the "choices" between the lives that will be cared for and those that will not, those that are or are not subject to mourning. “The acknowledgments given to gender performativities are also affected by different states of valuing women according to other social cuts, namely, the intersectionalities of gender, economic condition, class, color, age group, etc.”.

In the case of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship, there is a distinction between the feminine and the masculine according to the place that was attributed to women: housewife, family woman, mother and well-behaved woman. Thus, in addition to the torture perpetrated by the State against the militants, there was a strong sex policy, as proposed by Preciado (2018), which made torture against women totally related to gender stereotypes.

Final considerations

Irigaray (1997) shows us that binary oppositions are formulated by excluding a field of disruptive possibilities. His speculative thesis is that the binaries, even when reconciled, are part of a phallogocentric economy that produces the “feminine” as its constitutive exterior. The economy that intends to include the feminine as a subordinate term in a binary opposition of masculine/feminine excludes the feminine and produces it as what must be excluded for the economy to work. Thus, when women are represented, they are placed exactly in the place of their erasure (Butler, 2019).

Thus, it is clear that militant women during the civil-military dictatorship were precisely in the space of erasure: they should not be in the resistance, they should not be protagonists in this movement. In addition, there is much to rescue about the history of the time to bring to light the gender violence perpetrated by the repressive apparatus.

The reports given to the National Truth Commission are significant for understanding the perversity that went on in the minds and bodies of the torturers. It is something that goes beyond power, implying a domination of female bodies which clearly shows how women are treated as objects of sexual attraction and repulsion.

To speak of memory and truth without understanding that, in addition to the political forces of the time, there was a strong misogyny, is to ignore part of the violations of human rights during the civil-military dictatorship. Understanding that the woman was the victim of misogynistic aggression by the State is important to build a collective imaginary focused on Human Rights in an even broader way, deconstructing the gender binarism that places the feminine as a place of submission and delicacy.

References

- Agamben, G. (2004). *Estado de Exceção*. São Paulo: Boitempo.
- Agamben, G. (2007). *Homo sacer: o poder soberano e a vida nua I*. Belo Horizonte: Editora UFMG.
- Arendt, H. (2009). *Sobre a violência*. Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.

- Biroli, F. (2018). *Gênero e desigualdades: os limites da democracia no Brasil*. São Paulo: Boitempo.
- Brazil. National Truth Commission (2014). *Relatório Comissão Nacional da Verdade*. Brasília: CNV.
- Butler, J. (2019). *Corpos que importam: os limites discursivos do "sexo"*. São Paulo: N-1 Edições.
- Butler, J. (2017). *Quadros de guerra: quando a vida é passível de luto?* Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira.
- Coelho, M. (2014). Tortura e suplício, ditadura e violência. *Lutas Sociais*, 18(32), 148-162, Jan./June. 2014. Retrieved from <https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/ls/article/view/25698>.
- Coelho, M. A. T. (1999). Memórias de um Comunista. *Estudos Avançados*, 13(37), 33-74.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *História da Sexualidade I: a vontade de saber*. Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal.
- Foucault, M. (2006). *Vigiar e punir: nascimento da prisão*. Petrópolis: Vozes.
- Irigaray, L. (1997). *Éthique de la Différence Sexuelle*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Joffily, M. (2008). *No centro da engrenagem: os interrogatórios da Operação Bandeirante e do DOI de São Paulo (1969-1975)*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of São Paulo, São Paulo.
- Lins, S. L. F. (2019). Corpos feitos de memória: subjetivação e construção dos corpos femininos durante a ditadura civil-militar brasileira (1969-1972). *Sures*, 1(13), 30-38. Retrieved from <https://revistas.unila.edu.br/sures/article/view/1806/1821>.
- Louro, G.L. (2004). *Um corpo estranho: ensaios sobre sexualidade e teoria queer*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica.

Flaviana de Freitas Oliveira is a substitute professor at the Department of Education at the São Paulo State University (UNESP), a lawyer, and a journalist. Alternate coordinator of the Memory and Human Rights Center of the Brazilian Bar Association in São Paulo. Flaviana is a Ph.D. student in Education and has a master's degree in Teaching and Formative Processes. In this article, she contributed to the conception of the research design; development of theoretical discussion; data interpretation; manuscript writing, and revision of the foreign language version.

Pedro Angelo Pagni is a full professor at the Department of School Administration and Supervision and at the Graduate Program in Education (PPGE), both located at the Faculty of Philosophy and Sciences (FFC) at the São Paulo State University (UNESP). He has a full professorship in Philosophy of Education, has a PhD in Education, and a master's degree in History and Philosophy of Education. In this article, he contributed to the conception of the research design, the development of the theoretical discussion, and the writing of the manuscript.

Ana Maria Klein is a full professor at the Department of Education and the Graduate Program in Teaching and Training Processes at Universidade Estadual Paulista (Unesp). She is an advisor at the Vice-Rector's Office, working alongside the Coordination of Education for Diversity and Equity. She has a PhD and a master's degree in Education. In this article, she contributed to the development of the theoretical discussion; data interpretation, and support in text review.

Tânia Suely Antonelli Marcelino Brabo is a full professor at the Department of School Administration and Supervision and at the Graduate Program in Education (PPGE), both located at the Faculty of Philosophy and Sciences (FFC) at Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP). She has a PhD in Sociology and holds a master's degree in Education. In this article, she contributed to the conception of the research design; development of theoretical discussion, and interpretation of data.