

Secrets and myths about the Araguaia Guerrilla War (1972-1974)

Os segredos e os mitos sobre a Guerrilha do Araguaia (1972-1974)

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Abstract: In this paper we consider the Araguaia Guerrilla War experience from a mythological perspective, which allows us to gain a broader understanding of that war and its symbolic legacy. The origins of imaginary representations compiled from interviews with participants of the movement and peasants are profoundly related to the ways in which the guerrilla war was developed and fought and with the silence that followed. This context favored the spreading of myths about the guerrillas that continues up to the present. By recovering these myths we propose a new interpretation of the guerrilla movement and its symbolic universe, which was forged in the relationship with the local population and on the basis of the dissemination of repressive violence.

Keywords: Araguaia Guerrilla War, armed struggle, military dictatorship, enforced disappearance, memory.

Resumo: Nesse texto, consideramos a Guerrilha do Araguaia a partir de uma perspectiva mitológica, permitindo-nos uma compreensão mais ampla da guerrilha e seu legado simbólico. A origem de representações imaginárias compiladas em entrevistas com participantes do movimento e camponeses relaciona-se profundamente com a maneira como a guerrilha foi gestada e combatida e com o silêncio que a ela se seguiu. Este contexto favoreceu a propagação dos mitos guerrilheiros até a atualidade. Ao resgatar esses mitos, propomos nova interpretação da guerrilha e seu universo simbólico, forjado na relação com a população local e a partir da disseminação da violência repressiva.

Palavras-chave: Guerrilha do Araguaia, luta armada, ditadura militar, desaparecidos políticos, memória.

Introduction

There is a path connecting the visible and invisible. Imaginary representations often run between both sides, which confers on them a status of reality, while they make it possible to burnish what is real. As Merleau-Ponty (1996) pointed out, the unconscious comes down like a veil on the consciousness of the world, forging the colors of the imaginary.

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Some contexts greatly favor this connection, through which the imaginary can flow. This study is based on this premise and discusses a few little-known, but highly relevant myths involving the guerrillas who participated in the battles that were fought in the southeast region of Pará during the first half of the 1970s.

The guerrilla movement later called the Araguaia Guerrilla War became known because it fell victim to brutal violence exerted by the Armed Forces against the suspects and the use of large-scale repression against the local population. The terror and intimidation that occurred took on special features because of the dissemination of concentration camps. Peasants and indigenous people were terrorized by the generalized practice of violence, justified as a way of avoiding “the multiplying effects” of the guerrilla.

The duration of the conflicts and the violence employed by the Armed Forces led the local population to record what happened in their memory as a real “war”. The latter was fought by the military under the justification that the guerrillas wanted to help foreigners to invade the country. The population was confused, according to the story told by the local inhabitant and guerrilla sympathizer Maria Raimunda Rocha Veloso, known as Maria da Metade:

... was there a war against Brazilians? But what did the “forest people” [guerrillas] want? To live in democracy like now, right? ... After the “war time” the government began to give us attention ... Some of us even learned that what we need is organization. I learned from the women guerrillas that women also have rights, and that is why I joined a union and then attempted to become a town councilor here in São Domingos.²

This movement was developed in a real repository of legends – the Amazon Forest – which the harsh reality of the guerrilla war imbued with peculiar aspects. The present study introduces an original hypothesis about the origin of guerrilla myths compiled in interviews with participants in the movement and with peasants – that they relate profoundly to the way the guerrilla war was gestated and fought, and with the silence that followed it. This hypothesis guides the subsequent revelation of imaginary representations, with a typically mythological character, that appeared during the guerrilla struggle. Finally, a few practical implications of the dissemination of these myths during that period are discussed.

The present study brings back guerrilla myths of that period and undertakes reflections that propose to expand the understanding of the guerrilla movement and its symbolic universe, forged in the relationship with the local population, which was also under the influence of the discourses disseminated by the forces of repression.

The reflections presented are based on exclusive interviews with three guerrillas and four peasants (Almeida, 2008, 2013; Costa, 2001; Carneiro, 2010), together with a meticulous accounting of the existing references regarding the topic of myths in the Araguaia Guerrilla War (Veloso, 1996; Santos, 2001; Silva, 2001; Vieira, 2001).

Guerrilla warfare and land conflicts in Pará

Understanding the myths about the guerrilla war in the Araguaia refers us to its long preparation, gestated during the second half of the 1960s amid many expectations, insecurities and setbacks. That preparation forged the ties of camaraderie responsible for the preservation of the collective memory, giving us the opportunity to come into contact with such representations.

The preparation occurred in rather unstructured but very daring phases. It included sending three groups of militants to train in fighting guerrilla wars in China (a total of about 25 men), already in March 1964³. From 1966 onwards, small groups of militants began to establish themselves in the North region of the country to avoid political persecution and to learn how to survive in the forest, with a view to preparing the guerrilla movement.

Once these small groups were installed, the guerrilla warfare was gradually organized. The Southeast region of Pará was chosen as the most appropriate to begin activities given the existence of land ownership conflicts (which the leaders considered synergistic for their proposals), the relative proximity to Brasília and the existence of a dense forest which proved determinant to protect the combatants.

The process of installing the focal points for guerrilla warfare occurred at the same time as the agricultural and cattle raising activities subsidized and encouraged by the Superintendence of Development for the Amazon (SUDAM) began, supported by the National Institute for Settlement and Land Reform (INCRA) (from 1967 onwards), which greatly raised the pressures for expropriating the lands of farmers in the region – a phenomenon that

² Interview given by Maria Raimunda Rocha Veloso to the author (July 26, 1996), in São Domingos do Araguaia/PA. She collaborated with the guerrilla and died of cancer in 1999. Highlight by the author.

³ It is estimated that 11 of these militants participated in the Araguaia Guerrilla War and did not survive (see Martins, 2009; Graboïs, 2005; Carvalho, 2010; Lisboa and Garcia, 2009).

contributed to an approach between the local community and the combatants. This government action had several tactical consequences involving the use of the state-owned companies designed to act in the region, exclusively (Sudam) or inclusively (INCRA), whose efforts were directed at repressing the guerrilla movement.

The movement was idealized by the political bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Brazil (PC do B), influenced by the Chinese project of “prolonged popular war”. Due to the heavy repression, the activities were kept secret: long after the operations began, the specific location of the guerrilla activity remained unknown to most militants in the cities.

Despite its long duration (about five years), the preparatory phase of the guerrilla warfare was shorter than initially expected, lasting until the movement was discovered by the Army in April 1972, when it began to be harshly repressed by the military operation set up by the Armed Forces. Three campaigns involved approximately 7,200 military (Morais and Silva, 2005, p. 236) and the most modern war arsenal available in the country – in clear contrast to the conditions of the three guerrilla units and their 73 poorly equipped militants spread over an area of approximately 30,000 km², equivalent to Holland.

The Araguaia Guerrilla War lasted approximately two and a half years and ended in the death of almost all combatants of the political party involved. The way this somber episode of our history was treated led to it being called the most impressive phenomenon of historical *denial* of contemporary Brazil (Teles, 2005).

The facts that involved their extermination were censored and absent from the news between September 1972 and July 1978. During this period only President Ernesto Geisel alluded to the defeat of the guerrillas in a message sent to the National Congress in March 1975, in the chapter dedicated to combating subversion (Buarque, 1978, p. 4). The topic began to be mentioned in the news when the advance censorship of the *alternative press* ended in 1978 (Buarque, 1978, p. 22; Portela, 2002).

The military governments decided to root out the guerrillas from history; the movement was not even to produce any judicial effects. In the view of the military court of justice the Araguaia Guerrilla War did not exist – the lawsuits against the survivors did not mention the fact.⁴ Most of the people arrested at the beginning of the

guerrilla movement or outside the area of conflict were not even sued, as in the case of Danilo Carneiro and Criméia de Almeida, who remained under arrest for several months without a formal accusation (Carneiro, 2010; Almeida, 2008). Those who were tried ultimately were condemned only for their militancy in a clandestine party, the PC do B.

The guerrillas remain as missing political militants, since the location of their mortal remains is still ignored.⁵ It is said that the children of guerrilla fighters born during the combats or in prison were *appropriated* by the military. The guerrilla commander, Osvaldão, is said to have had a child with a peasant woman (Giovane) who was supposedly adopted (Nossa, 2012, p. 111). Dina, the most famous guerrilla woman, appears to have been pregnant when she was arrested (Cabral, 1993) – nobody knows where the mother and the possible baby are.⁶

After the Law on Forced Disappearance was enacted (1995) and the search and excavation mission was carried out in the Araguaia Guerrilla War region in July 1996, other excavations followed and the silence about them began to dissipate. In October of that year the Globo Network aired a program called *Você Decide* [You Decide] under the title “Sangue no Araguaia” [Blood in the Araguaia] (Você Decide, 1996; Kehl, 2001). Since then a few books (see Campos Filho, 1997; Moraes and Silva, 2005; Studart, 2006; Nossa, 2012) were published about this and there were at least two soap operas, a film and a few documentaries.⁷

Many of the inhabitants of the region saw the national newscast, *Jornal Nacional*, which announced the excavations organized by the Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances (Comissão Especial de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos) (at the time allocated in the Ministry of Justice) during the month of July 1996. In this context, the topic of the guerrilla movement, its ideals and actions reappeared on the agenda of the local community, inspiring several peasants to claim their right to compensation. The State acknowledged its responsibility for the death of five peasants because they had joined the guerrilla movement (CEMDP, 2007, p. 203-270).

The forest and its imaginary

The social imaginary of the Amazon Region has close ties to the supernatural; full of myths and narratives,

⁴ It is estimated that 59 militants of the PC do B and at least 17 peasants who supported it died in the guerrilla warfare (D'Araújo *et al.*, 1994, p. 24). Only 13 militants survived (see Teles, 2011, p. 245).

⁵ The mortal remains of Maria Lúcia Petit and Bergson Gurjão Farias were identified, respectively, in 1906 and 2009 (see Almeida *et al.*, 2009, p. 355, and Torres, 2009).

⁶ There are signs that other children of guerrilla fighters, born during the fighting or in captivity, were *appropriated* by the military. A DNA test concluded that Lia Cecília da Silva Martins has a 90% probability of being the daughter of Antônio Teodoro de Castro, who disappeared in Pará in 1974. See Torres (2010).

⁷ See the film *Araguaia – a conspiração do silêncio* (2004); and the soap operas *Cidadão brasileiro* (2006) and *Araguaia* (2011); and the documentaries *Palestina do Norte: o Araguaia passa por aqui* (1998); *Guerrilha do Araguaia – As faces ocultas da História* (2007); *Camponeses do Araguaia: a guerrilha vista por dentro* (2010); *Tocantins terra marcada* (2012) and *Araguaia: campo sagrado* (2013).

it peoples the difficult daily relationship with the vast nature of the region, with the technical challenges (for instance, to overcome the river currents or find quality game) and with the material scarcity around them (especially hunger). In contrast to the more industrialized parts of the country where, already in the 1960s-1970s, regional mythology was losing its power to make people dream and to strengthen intergenerational ties (Bachelard, 2001), allegories such as that of the Vitória-Regia, Uirapuru, Matinta Perera, Boi-Bumbá, Boto and Boiuna showed themselves in the rituals and discourses of the population in the region.

The Amazon imaginary which is comprised of these abovementioned allegories and others largely reflects the predominance of the symbolic productions of the main tribes in the region (Ribeiro, 1982). According to the survey performed for this study, we can say that in the Southeast of Pará (a region where the Araguaia Guerrilla War was concentrated) the process of occupying the frontier added other influences, bringing elements of the religious and cultural traditions of the Northeast region of the country, such as Mãe d'Água and the prophecies of Father Cícero.

According to the memories recorded by the guerrilla woman Criméia de Almeida, a militant sent to the region by the PC do B in January 1969, these elements were closely linked to the everyday life of the inhabitants:

The inhabitants believed in the supernatural, the Mãe d'Água, the Boto and the Boiuna, myths that were more related with the dangers of the waters. Canoes capsized, people disappeared in the rivers, their bodies were found mutilated by the fishes. These were frequent facts for which they sought an explanation in the supernatural. Everyone knew how to swim, everyone knew how to row, but some died. So they explained these tragedies in this way: these characters "took" people. The Mãe d'Água, the Boto, the Boiuna, said the people, preferred the most courageous, the most valiant, who were those who travelled at night when there was a "banzeiro" [when the river becomes choppy, generally in August] (Almeida, 2013).

The "syncretic" coexistence of different cultural traditions in the region is the main characteristic of the story, which is particularly interesting when we consider that the migrations to the region are relatively recent: the inhabitants of the Araguaia region settled in the area 10 to 20 years before the fighting began.

In a typically Brazilian manifestations, belief in the Boiuna – an Amerindian myth meaning black snake – joins that of the "mermaid" known as Mãe d'Água [Mother of the Water], which is a Northeastern myth from the São Francisco region, to provide a symbolic treatment for the fear of natural deaths common to everyday life among riparian population groups.

The Boiuna is described as a large dark snake which is able to capsize boats. Among its "characteristics" is the habit of mimicking the shapes of boats, attracting shipwrecked people to the bottom of the river. The myth's main function is to emphasize care with the stability of the boats in turbulent waters. The legend of the Mãe d'Água, in its turn, tells that at midnight the river "sleeps" for a few minutes, at which time she rises to the surface looking for a canoe to sit in and comb her hair. At this moment, the people who drowned emerge from the water and rise to the stars. The main function of this myth is to emphasize the importance of taking double the care when one navigates during the night (which is when many boatmen die), following the maxim that those who "wake up the river" will be punished.

The Amazon myths are related not only to the fear of natural phenomena but also to social violence, which created the demand for symbolic representations that would give meaning to this reality. As the peasants told, decades ago presages had foretold disastrous happenings in the region. The guerrilla leader Ângelo Arroyo, leader of the PC do B, who escaped the military siege of the Araguaia Guerrilla in January 1974⁸, tells that the local population became restless and fearful when the land ownership conflicts were intensified.

The Armed Forces held large military maneuvers in November 1970 to frighten the squatters. They were also intended to seek information and inhibit the presence of militants from left wing groups (Teles, 2011). For one week, the region was taken over by helicopters and paratroops. In Marabá (PA) the population saw napalm bombs thrown that put fire to the Tocantins river and the huts previously built for the supposed training. The inhabitants were waiting for the moment when force would be used by land grabbers, but not by the Armed Forces, and took counsel from some of the future guerrillas – Osvaldo, Paulo Rodrigues and Zé Carlos (André Graboís). The latter intensified the preparations to resist. The peasants became tense and began to say that what was happening was similar to a

... return to captivity. Many remember things that happened to them in other places. Dona Hilda, a

⁸ In December 1976, Arroyo was murdered, with two other leaders of the PC do B, in an ambush in São Paulo (Almeida, 2009, p. 669-76). For references about his diary, see Arroyo (1982).

famous witch-doctor, who had been here, there and everywhere, spreads Father Cicero's prophecy. Before he died, the priest had said that in the 1970s the Araguaia would catch fire, and who did not live on the Pará side would no longer be able to get there. And he added that one should plant things that would be below ground, to ensure the food supply and protect it from the fury of the attackers (Arroyo, 1979, p. 34).

The region had been occupied by squatters from several parts of the country since 1950, and the land conflicts there generated stubborn resistance against leaving it; those lands were their last hope, they were considered the "green flags" of Father Cicero's (1844-1934) prophecies. An owner of land, cattle and real estate, Cicero was a priest and a conservative politician in Ceará, connected to the *coronelismo* ["rule of the colonels"]. He impressed the inhabitants of Juazeiro (CE) in 1872, when he went to live in the town. In 1889 he claimed that he had been the protagonist of a miracle, which conferred fame and prestige on him but led to his excommunication by the Vatican at the end of the 19th century. According to sociologist José de Souza Martins, he had prophesied that it was necessary to

... cross the Araguaia, seek the "green flags" before it was too late. One day the Araguaia would boil over and whoever had not crossed would no longer be able to do so. Besides, he had foreseen for the first days of the 1970s the appearance of the "green cape", the devil, disguised as a friend and counselor, doing kind things and wanting evil, speaking about peace and making war. There is no "sertanejo" [man of the backlands] who does not know these prophecies in very vast regions of the Amazon The war from 72 to 74 in the Araguaia was not news to them (Buarque et al., 1978, p. 11, highlights by the author).

The association of the forest with the "green flags" was very present in the imaginary of the people who lived in the region, so that this representation also appears in the testimonies by the surviving guerrilla fighters, as told by Criméia de Almeida:

The "green flags" were salvation. Whoever crossed the river was safe. Behind them would come war, the river would catch fire... Parents would not recognize their children, and the children would no longer trust their parents. It was necessary to bury salt and ammunition, plant roots to have food to eat. So we followed all of Father Cicero's recommendations and created our caches of food and medicine, we planted a lot of manioc

in clear cut areas of the forest. Folks [the guerrillas] joked that the prophecies of Father Cicero were written in Mao Tse-Tung's little red book! (Almeida, 2013).

It is shown that the myths of the region were very important for the reality encountered by the fighters and for the production of myths involving them as protagonists, as will be considered in further detail in the next section.

The guerrilla imaginary and the forest: masculine myths

In order to enter the domain of characterization of the popular imaginary that was established at the time of the guerrilla war, it is necessary to consider the context in which the foundation was laid for this study. During the period of 1996-2001 I collaborated with the investigations to seek the mortal remains of guerrilla fighters. I especially participated in two journeys in the region where I was able to record a number of testimonies by inhabitants. Initially they were very resistant to talking about the guerrilla war; they avoided references to the guerrillas and were evasive about the myths that surrounded them. In spite of that, the increasing trust established allowed a new look at the relationship which was established between the fighters and the local population, bringing to the surface intriguing relationships between Amazon myths and myths about the guerrillas, as expressed in the idea that some combatants were "protected by mythical entities" or "under a spell".

At the end of each of the interviews, I encouraged the inhabitants who had fought in the forest with the guerrillas to say what they thought about the belief that during a pursuit the fighters were transformed into animals, to sidetrack the military. The answers were generally ambiguous; while some chuckled discreetly, others were evasive, changing the conversation to the difficulties encountered to get around in the forest when one was hungry, during the rainy season, without leaving tracks. Nobody took a position regarding the perception of the supposedly supernatural character of these occurrences, although they emphasized the craftiness and knowledge of the forest of some guerrilla fighters (see Vieira, 2001; Silva, 2001; Santos, 2001a).

Osvaldo Orlando da Costa, or simply Osvaldão, was one of the first to arrive in the region, around 1966. He had studied Mining Engineering in Prague (former Czechoslovakia); he was 1m98 cm tall, and had been a professional boxer (representing the Botafogo sports club) and had retired from the military; black and smiling, he

was noticed wherever he went. His story is a paradigm to understand the myths formed during that period.

Osvaldão became known in Pará not only because of his peculiar bearing but also because of his niceness, courage and marksmanship. He knew the area and surroundings very well and was an outstanding prospector and hunter. In 1969 he went to live on a property he purchased on the banks of the Gameleira river, where later he stayed with other party comrades. At the beginning of the guerrilla war he became the commander of Detachment B (Almeida *et al.*, 2009, p. 572).

Until that time he was not well known to the other militants (to the contrary of others who had, for instance, been leaders of university student unions and led public demonstrations); on the other hand, he had participated in military training in China, together with the first group of fighters sent by the PC do B on March 31, 1964 – the day of the military coup (Martins, 2009). His fame among the left was thus basically constructed in the region, just as that of some other guerrillas who became well respected and known to the local population, even before the fighting began:

The guerrillas were generally known because they were considered helpful, creative and courageous. We were not afraid to walk in the forest or be on the river at night, in other words, we were not afraid of the Curupira and the Boiuna. We had many advantages, because we knew how to read and had a certain command of technology. We used to say that our stay in the Araguaia was a trip to the past, and that we had the advantage of already knowing the future! (laughs) In Detachment A, the best known were the ones who had been longest in the region, Joca (Liberio Giancarlo Castiglia), André (Grabois), Nunes (Divino Ferreira de Souza), Piauí (Antônio de Pádua Costa), Landinho (Orlando Momente), I, Sônia (Lúcia Maria de Souza) and Jana (Moroni Barroso). Sônia and I were known because we delivered babies and took care of the ill, and Jana because she taught at the school. André, for instance, was a tradesman and often travelled around the region, he was playful, told jokes, created comic stories, and we went to all the feasts! Joca was very solidary, he always offered everyone help... (Almeida, 2013).

From local acknowledgment to (relative) international fame a difficult time went by during which they prepared for the guerrilla war, which began suddenly in April 1972. The fame of the guerrilla fighters went worldwide after a long story was published in the *O Estado de*

S. Paulo [a São Paulo newspaper], in September of the same year (Gonzaga Jr., 1972, p. 27), which mentioned the existence of a guerrilla movement in the North of the country, promoted by people from São Paulo referred to as Paulo, Dr. Juca, Osvaldo, Antonio and Dina. This story had an international repercussion and appeared in the *The New York Times* two days later (Larry Rohter confirmed the authorship of the article; see Rohter, 2008).

The myths about the guerrilla fighters usually are about their supposedly “fantastic” capacity to get around in the forest and their resurgence after the violent and unequal combats with the Armed Forces. Among these mythological figures, Osvaldão plays a paradigmatic role – like the woman fighter Dina, who, as we shall see later on, establishes an interesting dialogue with him, because of her particular relevance in the feminine mythology of the guerrilla movement.

Based on the documents available for the field research that gave rise to this essay, the initial reports about Osvaldão as someone “under a spell” or “immortal” appear in the military reports. This information was confirmed publicly by an anonymous officer, interviewed by journalist Fernando Portela in 1979; according to the report, the soldiers who participated in the 1st and 2nd campaigns against the guerrillas, besides fearing the fighters, “... came from humble families right there in the North, and were afraid of Saci, Mãe de Fogo, Werewolves ...” (Portela, 2002, p. 100).

According to Portela, many local inhabitants said that Osvaldão was immortal; they believed that figures such as Saci, Mãe de Fogo [Mother of Fire], among others, manifested themselves in the rituals of *terecô* – an African-Brazilian religion traditionally associated with the region of Codó (MA), which ascribes particular importance to witch-doctoring and the capacity to cause diseases (Ferreti, 2001, p. 90). Originating in Maranhão and having probably appeared in the final part of the 19th century, the *terecô* rituals were accepted in Pará, which is probably due to the proliferation of serious and contagious diseases in the region, such as malaria, yellow fever, Hansen’s disease and leishmaniasis.

Everyday life in the region was closely connected to the calendar of feasts and religious syncretism; many of them were a means to obtain protection for the isolated population in that region who got little assistance from the State:

We were invited to all the feasts. ... I know that Osvaldão used to attend the places (“terreiros”) where terecô rituals were practiced⁹, but there (in the area

⁹ According to Arroyo, in 1973 praises were sung to the guerrillas in the *terecô* sessions in the region (Arroyo, 1979, p. 54).

of Detachment A) we did not have much contact with these rituals. However, we had a good relationship with the terecozeiros. I remember that it was often said that the spirit of Camões often came into these terreiros. All the feasts were religious and mixed Catholicism, Umbanda and indigenous beliefs. For instance there was a feast in honor of the river waters that greeted Iemanjá, Saint Barbara and Our Lady of Nazareth. There was also the feast of Saint Lazarus, in honor of dogs. Every feast had lots of food, which was served in the following order: first the men, then the older children and, finally, women and small children. On Saint Lazarus' feast, especially, the first to be served were the dogs. They served the same food (as for people) to the dogs, on a tablecloth placed on the ground, and in the plates that would later be used by the other guests. They did this because they said that dogs were the only ones to take in Saint Lazarus, who was a leper (Almeida, 2013).

The feast of Saint Lazarus is particularly emblematic to understand the relations between the Amazon myths and the myths about the guerrilla movement. Saint Lazarus is a biblical figure that corresponds to the figure of the poor man in the parable about the rich and the poor (without material goods, the poor would find it easier to understand the scale of religious values). He was a beggar and leper who was raised to the status of Catholic saint, protector of dogs and against contagious diseases. In *candomblé* he appears as the *orixá* Omolu, a deity invoked to solve health issues, mainly those involving epidemic diseases. (The feast of this Saint is traditionally celebrated in Bahia).

As with *terecô*, the feast of Saint Lazarus is connected to the precarious life in the region, full of diseases that had already been defeated in the rest of the country; Hansen's disease, for instance, was very prevalent in the southeast of Pará, which possibly influenced the popularity of the feast – as I found during the research that gave rise to this study (Almeida, 2013).

This feast also reminds us of the importance ascribed to dogs by the local population. Various testimonies by local inhabitants show the essential role played by dogs in hunting and in protecting the houses, especially those located in the forest. According to Criméia de Almeida, dogs were rare in the region, and the guerrilla leader Maurício Graboís had to bring a male and female dog (probably from Goiás) to breed, and donated their offspring to the groups of combatants and to the local population (Almeida, 2013).

The references to the importance of dogs in the forest reminded me of the text by geographer Regina

Sader, who, when researching the life of the peasants in the Bico do Papagaio region (North of the state of Tocantins) and the “Massacre of Pindaré”, heard stories about myths related to the Araguaia Guerrilla War. The testimonies, given discretely and fearfully, denounced the interaction with violence, which was expressed through the symbolic language contained in their life stories.

In this land where many migrants or peasants expelled from other lands live – in the Bico do Papagaio, many came from the South of the state of Pará – the myths, legends and rituals act as references to the collective memory, keep “alive” the common stories and provide an identity to the groups that were taken away from their origins by the drought or the violence of land grabbers.

The story collected by Sader is a direct reference to Osvaldão, the guerrilla. The person who gave the interview, identified as M., was a child at the time of these events and vaguely remembers the facts of those days. Through the memories of her parents, she heard that Osvaldão was “under a spell”. He had the gift of transforming himself into any animal he wanted to be and therefore was the last guerrilla to be killed, according to an interview given in 1988:

[...] One day the federals ambushed him in the forest. A band of monkeys happened to be passing by and he transformed himself into one of them, and managed to get away jumping over the heads of the federals, who did not even suspect this. But his most frequent transformations were into a dog (Sader, 1990, p. 119).

The “fantastic” character of the story does not eliminate the clear reference to his capacity (and one might say, to that of the other guerrilla fighters) to perpetuate themselves in the struggle, despite the unequal conditions for combat. This vicissitude is added to the ability of successfully facing the challenges for survival years long in the forest, which certainly contributed to the duration of the confrontations. On the contrary of most of the local population, the guerrillas stayed in the forest year round, not only during the dry period; that is why they were called the “people of the forest”.

The allegorical character of this story brings us to the parallel between agile movement in the forest (monkey), solidary character (dog) and the characteristics acknowledged in Oswaldo and his companions. The dog, as previously mentioned, was acknowledged in the region for its positive attributes; it took in Saint Lazarus, who in turn took in the sick, like the PC do B militants who provided medical services in the region.

In the imaginary permeated by the forest, animals are associated with a well-defined set of attributes which

distinguishes them from the others. Thus, the allusion to the figure of the guerrilla fighter and to the armed movement allows us to infer notions concerning the ways in which the local population saw what was happening, despite the absence of explicit statements. According to the report of M., one day her mother met Osvaldão:

She had gone to feed the pigs, leftover rice with meat – “salt food”, M. insists, when a huge black dog appeared and began to eat with the pigs, although first he gave M.’s mother a very sad look. She was terrified and ran into the house, called her children and her husband: “Close everything and let everyone know that there are going to be problems”, because the federals must be around. Indeed, soon after this the federals arrived, woke up the village saying that they should denounce the people of the forest if they saw them “because it would be better so”. Despite her fear, M.’s mother said that Osvaldão had come to her house and the federals went off quickly to lay siege to the entire area (Sader, 1990, p. 120).

M.’s story suggests that the terror provoked by the repression of the guerrilla movement created a demand for “veiled speech”, which played an important role in circumscribing the myths created. This speech brings up an ambiguous view of the forest for the peasants – a place of salvation, but also of terrifying beings. M.’s mother’s attitude about Osvaldão, represented as one of these beings, is emblematic: while on the one hand she reported him to the “federals”, on the other she still offered him food – which is suggested by the reference to the fact that she “fed the dog”, and not the guerrilla fighter – in her “veiled speech”.

M.’s mother’s fear echoes the fear of the entire local population: during the 3rd campaign against the guerrillas, the Armed Forces arrested and tortured all the men and some of the women, and also burned their crops and the fruit trees in the region, to prevent them from feeding the guerrilla fighters (Teles, 2011).

The “veiled speech” which helped dissimulate the collaboration of the local inhabitants with the “federals” also helped them mask information demanded by the military, according to the report below:

Some time later, M.’s uncle was fishing with a friend on the banks of the Araguaia when a black dog approached him. The dog looked well at the two, howled sadly and hid on the river banks. The two fishermen

were terrified because they knew that the federals were nearby. They were soon surrounded by them. And the dog swam across the river, reaching the other side safe and sound. But the two men did not tell the federals anything about the dog (Sader, 1990, p. 120).

The contrast between the attitudes of M.’s mother and uncle reflect the everyday relations that the guerrillas established with the local population, on whom they depended (food) and to whom they contributed (by providing various services, including work on the crops). The collected interviews and recent studies¹⁰ reveal that the relationship between the guerrillas and the population of Pará was more positive and collaborative than had initially been assumed by the most famous studies, which is shown by the formation of the mythology (in the case of the specific focus of this section, of the masculine mythology, emblematically substantiated in the figure of Osvaldão), where fear was merged with admiration and respect.

The guerrilla women in the Araguaia and the feminine myths

In the previous section we considered the general lines of the myths concerning the guerrillas and their role in expressing the relationship between the combatants and the population at large through an emblematic male figure. Here we will apply the same principle to female representations.

An initial point to be considered is the increased complexity involving the female figures, which, at the time, produced a particular strangeness with their simple ways and their progressive attitude. This strangeness already permeated the relations which were developed from the time the guerrillas established themselves in the region, but became much stronger when the first female fighter (Criméia de Almeida) arrived, in January of 1969.

The most famous female combatant was called Dinalva Oliveira Teixeira, Dina; she is the only woman mentioned in the famous story in *O Estado de S. Paulo* newspaper in 1972 (previously cited), in which she was described as “brave and a natural leader”. A geologist by training, with a marked role in the student movement of Salvador (BA) and a history of involvement in protests which led to her arrest in 1968, the young combatant gained fame in the region where the guerrilla warfare was taking place by working as a midwife and elementary school teacher in São Geraldo (PA), from the time she

¹⁰ According to *Major Curió*, the investigations by the Armed Forces found that 26 peasants joined the guerrilla, 195 inhabitants in the region supported the movement directly and their network of support included 258 people (Nossa, 2012, p. 132).

arrived in May 1970. Several mythological representations about her were created and disseminated, rivaling with those that involve Osvaldão, with whom she composed the essential couple in forming the imaginary of the mythical figures of the guerrilla movement.

The main attribute associated with the fact that Dina became a legendary figure is that she was an excellent sharpshooter. She was outstanding for her skill as a guerrilla and several times escaped when surrounded by the military, on one of which occasions she was injured. In 1973 she became the sub-commander of Detachment C, the only woman to take a command position in the Araguaia (Almeida, 2009, p. 582-583). The courage of the guerrilla women of the PC do B was praised by the military. Dina's audacity in particular made her feared by the soldiers, according to reports from guerrilla fighters arrested at that time. According to Criméia de Almeida, General Bandeira made complimentary remarks about the guerrilla women:

When I was a prisoner at the PIC in Brasília, I was interrogated several times by General Bandeira, and he always said to me that the guerrilla women were very brave, fearless. He even made a very male chauvinistic comment when he said that they fought like men. He also said that if his soldiers were like certain guerrillas, especially the women, the Army would already have won that war (Almeida, 2013).

The legends about Dina appear in the documents of two military reports. She was one of the last guerrilla women to be captured, and it is told that she was transformed into a *butterfly* when she escaped the siege, in which she was hit by a bullet in the neck. The combat with a paratrooper patrol in September 1972 led to the death of two guerrillas and the arrest of another (Arroyo, 1982, p. 21). Dina escaped after hitting the group commander – the future General Álvaro de S. Pinheiro (Studart, 2006, p. 55, n. 1).

In 2004 Sebastião Rodrigues de Moura, known by the name of *Major Curió*, an officer of the Information Center of the Army (Centro de Informação do Exército – CIE), a central figure in the repression of the guerrilla movement in the Araguaia and responsible for the capture and death of Dina, spoke about the myths created about her. His report is particularly important because he coordinated a group for information and extermination during the 3rd campaign against the PC do B guerrillas (Studart, 2006, p. 233)¹¹. In an interview to the *O Estado*

de S. Paulo newspaper, on March 4, *Curió* said: "... There were lots of myths. Myths that she became a *termite*, that she became a *dove*. [In the end] she fought in an ambush" (Nossa, 2004).

The Army officer refers to the myths on Dina aiming to give a negative connotation to her actions, throughout his interview. With this he attempts to relativize her importance, without contradicting the maxim that the military and the local population did not remain indifferent to her actions.

As to the specificity of the allegories used, it is noteworthy that there are a great many butterflies in the Amazon and that they are universal references for the delicateness and beauty associated with the transformation. Butterflies are the graphic expression of *psyche*, to which the Greeks ascribed two meanings: *soul* and *butterfly*, which merged in the image of a woman with butterfly wings, used to represent the soul. In Japan butterflies are a symbol of women, because they are considered graceful and quick, agile. In that country, the butterfly coming out of the egg (chrysalid) is a symbol of resurrection, but can also be seen as leaving the tomb on the way to a new life.

The fame of Dina (and of other guerrilla women in the Araguaia), associated with the image of the butterfly, refers us to her agility, which equaled the men shoulder to shoulder, especially in relation to her efficient movement in the forest, responsible for the famous escapes for which she became known.

The association of Dina with the image of termites is added to the allegory of the butterfly, since termites are characterized by their smallness and living in hiding. Possibly these characteristics were related to the figure of Dina because she managed to escape and hide several times. On the other hand, the reference to a dove associated with the representation of the guerrilla woman is strange, because there were no doves in that area of the forest. Their presence in the area was due to the belief in the Holy Spirit, traditionally represented by the dove:

There was also the Feast of the Divine Holy Spirit, during which the Flag of the Divine remained on show at the home of the person who was in charge of praying, full of decorations. This was a very religious fest, with many litanies and prayers, but not much food. This feast was more serious, there was not much music and dancing as in the June feasts. Another marked presence of the Holy Spirit occurred in the Sentinels (wakes), when lots of coffee, cookies and cakes were served, and there were canticles, together

¹¹ *Curió* worked in the information and repression sector of the Army from 1960 onwards. After the Araguaia Guerrilla War he entered the National Information Service (SNI) and participated in operations in Latin American countries such as Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay (Nossa, 2012).

with the “songs of excellencies” (“cantos de excelências”), which were monotonous and sad. When it was time for the burial, the deceased was taken in the hammock by two strong men who ran along the trail to be quickly rid of the weight, while another carried the Flag of the Divine, which was supposed to be over the dead person throughout the route. The burials had a lot of running (Almeida, 2013).

For Christians, the Holy Spirit is part of the Holy Trinity and is considered a “counselor” who intercedes in favor of all creatures of God, and as the one who comforts and reanimates. Doves, for their part, are characterized by their excellent sense of orientation and by the capacity to fly long distances speedily, which may be an allusion to the guerrillas’ skill in moving around with an acute sense of orientation in the forest. Christians believe that the Holy Spirit gives the faithful “gifts”, among them wisdom, understanding and curing, characteristics that were also ascribed to the guerrillas by the local population.

Another relevant myth is the “metamorphosis” of the guerrilla women (and men) into mosquitoes, as told to us by Criméia de Almeida; according to her, these myths were invented by the military to hide their incapacity to quell the guerrilla war:

In June [1972] we went to visit the family of a neighbor who had been arrested and lived on the banks of the Araguaia river. For this we had to cross the Transamazon highway, a very vulnerable place as far as our safety was concerned, because that was where the Army troops were camped. Along the way we greeted a few of our former neighbors. We visited Eduardo’s family and spent the night there The Faveira group of Detachment A left this home at the end of 1970, because it was on the banks of the Araguaia river, which was a bad place for us in terms of security. When we moved, Eduardo’s son became responsible for the store we had there. The pigs and chickens we were breeding there remained under the responsibility of Eduardo and his family in the system called “meação” [sharecropping]. ... We salted the rest of the meat and carried it with us The next day the Army, informed by some people living in the area about our presence there, laid a siege to the region. They did it by digging several trenches along the Transamazon highway and through mobile patrolling with Jeeps. There was still a curfew at night Therefore we took two days watching how long the patrols took to pass on the road in order to locate their trenches on both sides of the highway. We found that the safest way of crossing the road would be during the day, between two trenches, outside the time when the mobile patrols passed, and

individually. While one crossed, the others covered him or her. As a disguise we used a white sack as a skirt, rolled up the pant legs and the rifle went along with sticks as though it were a bundle of firewood. That is what we did and all managed to get across. There were five of us, I, André, Divino, Orlando [Momento] and Lúcio [Petit]. We crossed close to the home of Arlindo Balela [at Bacaba], a local inhabitant known to be a gossip; we went to his house and asked him to let the army know that we had crossed on the road.

Days later we heard from Arlindo himself that the military said we had managed to get through the military siege because we had a pact with the devil and transformed ourselves into mosquitoes. We explained to him that this was not true, but rather an excuse for their incompetence. In my opinion, he did not believe that we transformed ourselves into mosquitoes or that we had a pact with the devil. This was the version of those who were in power in the region, so he had to repeat it. Afterwards I often heard that Osvaldão turned into a mosquito. Often we heard from the local people that the Army had been at their home a few days before us or that, after our visit, the Army had also visited them. This occurred for two reasons: first, when the Army was in some house, we did not go there; second, when the military knew that we had visited someone, they would go there to pressure people and obtain information. The inhabitants explained that we didn’t meet by saying that the military were avoiding us. On the other hand, the military tried to explain this situation telling that story that we were transforming ourselves into mosquitoes. I thought it very funny, because there certainly were lots of mosquitoes in the Amazon! (Almeida, 2013).

Mosquitos are the “minimal power”, the capacity – a benefit of their size – of reaching an individual’s supplies (blood in the case of some species) and flying without necessarily being noticed. These animals are also symbols of the power of causing bother and – of particular relevance in this Amazon context – of transmitting diseases that, in the worst case, can cause death.

The persistence of these feminine myths brings us to the outstanding performance of women in the armed conflict, which can be understood in the light of the transformations undergone by society in the 1960s and 1970s, when the traditional role assigned to genders was seriously questioned. These transformations did not affect Brazil homogeneously; in Pará, customs remained attached to more traditional views than those that permeated the intimately urban and progressive spirit of the PC do B combatants, creating a very peculiar situation.

Women's participation in the armed fight against the dictatorship took place although the majority of members of the left-wing organizations were men¹². The left-wing women militants, however, faced not only authoritarianism, but the established order as regards the customs that imposed the stereotype of the woman who was supposed to be in politics and restricted to the private and domestic space. They faced the prevailing order at all levels, although their claims did not yet have an openly feminist character. The feminist movement in Brazil was formed as such in the mid-70s, driven and influenced to a large extent by these militants (Teles, 1993, p. 82-102).

Testimonies collected for this study reported that these militants faced discrimination because they were women inside their organizations (see Almeida, 2008; Prado, 2009; Santa Cruz, 2009). Some women even reached leading positions (Bargieri, 2009). In the everyday life of militancy, it was possible to challenge the division of domestic tasks, the taboo of virginity and monogamy. Despite this, although the discourse of political and social gender equality was spreading through the left, in the field of militant practices there was little respect for gender differences (Ridenti, 1993, p. 203); it took great determination from the militant women to question the prevailing male chauvinism.

In the guerrilla groups, as in the Araguaia, despite discrimination from their own comrades, several women gradually managed to become good or excellent guerrillas (see Cunha, 2009; Lisboa, 2003), as told by Criméia:

... When I went to the Araguaia, João Amazonas [a leader of the PC do B] told me: "It depends on you whether other women will go there." I answered: "And if the men don't work out? Will there be no guerrilla movement, no armed struggle, no resistance? Because this cannot depend on me: I may not work out, but others yes. How can you say this?" He dissembled and said "No, it is just a manner of speaking."

... When I arrived, I felt that I was not very welcome to the younger ones There I learned to shoot, a few military notions, how to get around in the forest, to find that azimuth, which was... a complicated art I learned to plant, hunt and ..., basically all exercises for survival in the jungle, but I had to deal with resistance from the comrades, because they thought that women would be a burden to the guerrilla movement.

They did not say it openly, but this is how they did it: "Bring this 60 Kg sack!" Some of them managed, but not all. It was obvious that I ... would not manage.

They said sarcastically: "What? Aren't you a guerrilla woman?" Once a load came in by boat and ... there was nobody else. ... I had to open the sacks and take it bit by bit to the house. I made "hundreds" of trips and then, ... I sewed the sacks as though they had never been opened (Almeida, 2008).

The militant women had to break with the historically settled view that "it was more difficult to make soldiers out of women" (Ridenti, 1993, p. 198), and they often competed with the men on an equal footing, despite the clear differences and difficulties:

Among the guerrilla women with whom I interacted, Sônia [Lúcia Maria de Souza] was the strongest and most determined. She faced up to the male chauvinism of the comrades and insisted on competing with the men in activities considered typical, such as carrying weight, cutting down forest with the axe (which was very heavy). When she found it more difficult to do physical work, such as clearing ground for farming, she obliged herself to produce the same amount as the men, even if for that she had to stay there until 10 or 11 pm. And despite this, she never criticized or humiliated the men who did less than she did. She became important even in the region, because, being a medical student, she took care of health-related activities. In general, with an effort, all the guerrilla women managed to adapt to the heavier work (Almeida, 2013).

Despite the physical limitations and vicissitudes faced by the female combatants regarding life in the forest and the prejudices of their comrades and local inhabitants, they overcame and even helped transform local customs:

When I arrived, Elza Monnerat (a long-time leader of the PC do B) wanted me to dress and behave the same way as the peasant women, in other words, wear a dress, let my hair grow and not carry weapons or machete. And I refused, because this made me very vulnerable. Usually I wore jeans, T-shirt, rubber sandals, machete and rifle to go anywhere because we had to walk far in the dark forest to reach places where feasts were being held. These clothes and manners were considered "masculine". If any peasant made a critical remark about my ways, I answered that I was just as afraid as them, on the contrary of the women who had the courage to get around the forest unarmed! The irony of it is that the peasant women ended up

¹² The guerrilla women were on average 18.3% of the participants in the urban armed combat groups, according to the data concerning those who were sued by military courts, a percentage above the number in the other parties, which reached 16% (Ridenti, 1993, p. 197-98).

by adopting our customs and began to use pants under the skirt and to carry weapons (at least a machete)! (Almeida, 2013).

The recognition of the role of women as combatants was underscored by the PC do B, initially in the *Diário da Guerrilha* [Diary of the Guerrilla Movement] (1975), by Arroyo¹³, in which he made the guerrilla woman Sônia famous when describing her death. On October 24, 1973, the medical student was ambushed by an Army patrol as she tried to find two guerrillas who had left an adolescent (the son of a farmer who had joined the guerrilla movement) close to the road to São Domingos. Wounded by shots in a stream close to the Grota da Borracheira (Arroyo, 1982, p. 26), she hit Major Lício Maciel and Curió in the face and arm, respectively. She died with her body riddled with bullets. Since she had severely wounded two officers and was appreciated, the news of her death spread throughout the region and years later reached the history books.

The discipline and dedication of Sônia and her female comrades caused women to perform well in the guerrilla warfare, showing their military capacity and the magnitude of the political work done with the local population, according to a report by Criméia de Almeida:

The women became good guerrillas because they managed to adapt well to life in the forest (which the men also had to do) and developed reasonably well the military techniques such as shooting well, orientating themselves and surviving in the jungle. This kind of activity was entirely new for women, and they had to surpass themselves to achieve it. They were more selfless and disciplined. It was also useful that the guerrilla women managed to have a good relationship with the men in the region – when hunting and getting around in the forest – and, at the same time, have an excellent relationship with the women, learning to weave, cook a few typical dishes, and some crops that were for the women, such as medicinal teas and condiments in general (Almeida, 2013).

An accounting of the role of women in the Araguaia Guerrilla War is being done, a goal to which this section adds new elements and angles. This said, we can already consider the validity of some synthetic perspectives: women had a relevant role comparable to that of the men: on the contrary of the traditional war and civilization model, in which women are assigned to the tasks of group

maintenance and managing the encampments, this was an experience in which women participated fully in political and military terms.

The inclusion of women in the PC do B group sent to the Southeast of Pará was difficult for reasons of gender (prejudices), but it was made easier by the great determination with which they joined this enterprise. In many cases the way they performed their work made history.

The military and local population were touched by what they did; a large part of the myths about the guerrillas can be seen in the light of the need to justify or, in the case of the population in the region, to praise the work of the guerrilla women.

The defeat of the guerrilla movement and the enduring myths

The repression of the guerrilla movement culminated in the period that goes from October 1973 to mid-1974, and was extended until the beginning of 1975. It was characterized by the involvement of a substantial number of special troops in two phases: in the first a large part of the population was incarcerated, in order to neutralize the guerrilla support network; in the second the region was searched in depth, for guerrillas and storage sites.

The notion of “internal enemy” in the Doctrine of National Security, with its peculiar lack of precision and inconsistency, was the justification for the arrest of large numbers of civilians in military bases, which became real concentration camps. The generalization of violence was followed by the phase of hunting and eliminating all guerrillas, even when they were caught alive, followed by the decapitation of some and the disappearance of all of their mortal remains. Fifty-six guerrillas (out of a total of 69 militants) were left in the region, and six of them were peasants who had joined the movement. The combatants concentrated in the areas where originally Detachments A and B were located.

The military movement in the forest was intensified, reaching areas where the guerrillas had taken refuge, and they decided to disperse the peasant families since they could not protect them (Santos, 2001b).

Amid growing difficulties, the guerrilla command managed to meet on December 20. Acknowledging the magnitude of the military offensive, they issued what was to be their last communiqué two days later. The bulletin denounced the generalized repression of the population and the Armed Forces’ decision to take no prisoners.

¹³ There are at least two versions of the *Relatório Arroyo* or *Diário da Guerrilha do Araguaia*, which dates from January 1975; see Arroyo, 1979 and 1982. About the guerrilla women see Arroyo, 1979, p. 48-49.

It honored the memory of the dead combatants, at the same time as it emphasized their effort to spare their forces and “get out of the siege”. It appealed to the solidarity of all to make the military attack stop, conveying optimism about the growing dissatisfaction of the peasants and their support of the armed struggle (Foguera, 1982, p. 91-92).

The command planned to gather all the combatants on December 25, 1973 to assess the situation. This concentration of people left many tracks that enabled the military patrols to find them. Maurício Grabois and three other guerrillas died in an ambush (Arroyo, 1982, p. 28) at Grotão dos Caboclos Hill (the site of the meetings) (Nossa, 2012, p. 182-183).

Some of the militants still managed to meet on December 29 in the refuge area of Detachment A; there were 25 guerrillas. Since the situation was very bad, they decided to subdivide into groups of five to become more agile. They would remain in the better known areas to try to maintain contact (doubling the care with security) and regroup all those who were dispersed. Regular meetings until March of the next year would be a reference (Arroyo, 1982, p. 29) to try to escape the military siege in an organized manner.

The internment camps for the population became extermination camps for the guerrillas. According to the testimonies of local inhabitants, the death of Osvaldo occurred in April 1974, near São Domingos, close to Easter week. He was injured with a 22 caliber rifle shot in the belly, with a shot fired by Piauí, a *bate-pau* [informant] employed by the Army. Then he was shot by the military. His body was hanged by ropes from a helicopter that took him to the military camp of Bacaba and from there to Xambioá (PA). His lifeless body was shown in São Domingos and other villages, where the soldiers shouted to the population: “Look here at the protégé of the spirits!”, as described by journalist Fernando Portela (2002, p. 64).

At the military base of Xambioá, his corpse was mutilated by kicks, stoning and beatings and finally burned and thrown into the hole called “Vietnam” – a ditch at the end of the runway where the dead and dying were thrown (Almeida, 2009, p. 573). A “cleansing operation” was said to have taken the mortal remains of several guerrillas to Serra das Andorinhas in 1975. Over the years, others were organized. The military, however, do not inform where the sites were and the names of those responsible (Nossa, 2012).

Dina and Tuca (Luisa Augusta Garlippe) were among the last guerrilla women arrested, in an ambush,

at a distant site (trying to get out of the military siege), denounced by a *mateiro* [a man from the forest] in July 1974. They were caught near a bridge over the Sororó river, near Marabá (PA), where they could have easily caught a boat or gone to a bus stop (Nossa, 2012, p. 209-211). There was a real possibility of escaping the siege, considering that in January 1974 the guerrilla leader Angelo Arroyo managed to get out of the region with the help of another comrade and reach São Paulo, where he disseminated his “diary of the guerrilla movement”.¹⁴

The stories of guerrilla combatants Osvaldo and Dina are not yet very widely known, but they have been partially preserved by the families of the dead and missing political militants and the survivors, despite the silence imposed by the Armed Forces on the subject. Osvaldo was from Minas Gerais, he lived in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro before being obliged to live clandestinely in order to maintain his political militancy. Before this, however, he inspired the Czech writer Cytrian Ekwensi to write the book *O homem que parou a cidade* [The Man Who Stopped the City], in 1962, and participated in movies filmed in the former Czechoslovakia (Almeida *et al.*, 2009, p. 572). Allusions to Dina (and the other guerrilla women), in turn, were present in the film “Araguaya – conspiração do silêncio” [Araguaya – Conspiracy of Silence] (2004) and in the soap opera “Cidadão brasileiro” [Brazilian Citizen] (2006), transmitted by TV Record¹⁵.

The association of the guerrilla Osvaldo with the dog or with mosquitoes, and of Dina with the dove and butterflies, makes the symbol replace the historical person, reinforcing their uniqueness and the meaning of their actions, or modifying them according to those who transmit and those who receive the message of the myth. In this process mnemonic images become available for a signification, transmitting experiences and stories. The myth designates and notifies, makes one understand but imposes, which constitutes the benumbed look of mythical speech (Barthes, 1980, p. 139, 146-147).

The myth is formed by the sign – the language, the meaning of Osvaldo and Dina’s life story – and the signifier – the way in which their stories are told – guerrillas who become animals to hide and combat the Armed Forces during the dictatorship. The myth needs images taken from memory to try to give meaning to the events, which partly lose the remembrance of their creation but not their existence. The myth thus takes on its meaning again and may modify it, creating new meanings.

¹⁴ In December 1976 Arroyo was murdered with other leaders of the PC do B in an ambush in São Paulo (Almeida, 2009, p. 669-76). For references on the diary see Arroyo (1982).

¹⁵ The soap opera showed the Araguaia Guerrilla War and the struggle of the families of the missing guerrillas. It is developed in four phases, from the 1950s to the present. Eleni, a combatant, dies and her mother begins to look for information on her. Teresa joins her daughter’s struggle and goes to Angola, where she becomes a guerrilla and also dies.

This ambiguity, a constituent of the non-manifest “veiled speech”, is at the source of the mythological power that we consider in this study, which is marked by ambivalences and allegories with multiple meanings. Among the inhabitants of the region there is a weave with more than one direction involving the guerrilla myths. While on the one hand these myths represent violence and the imposition of force used by the Army, on the other they attempt to hide their incapacity to fight. To those who interacted with the guerrillas and even fought with them, the myth appears as a disguise, as a simulation of acquiescence to the military when needed. To those who were more distant from the guerrilla movement, the myth arises to explain the facts as normal, as an attempt to include and explain what is uncommon in their lives.

In the next section we will consider relatively current versions of the Araguaia Guerrilla War, with a mythological key parallel to the fantastic allegories that we considered above, giving us a broader understanding of the guerrilla movement and its symbolic legacy.

The mythology of the guerrilla movement in the light of heroicization by the media

Over the last 17 years, two Globo Television Network programs dealt with the topic of the Araguaia Guerrilla War, directly or indirectly: the soap opera *Araguaia* (2010-2011) and the program *Sangue no Araguaia* [Blood in the Araguaia] (1996), which we will analyze in this section, given their relevance to understand the role of the guerrilla movement in the imaginary of the Brazilian population as a whole – and not only of those who in some way were exposed to the conflict.

A few perspectives about the treatment given by the media to the “typical representatives” of the Araguaia guerrilla movement on Brazilian television are worthy of note. They are usually idealist characters, moved by altruistic passions, who initially tend to arouse the immediate sympathy of the public, but these perspectives turn out to be mistaken because of their low adherence to practical reality in many different spheres. This representation was inaugurated by Globo when they aired the mini-series *Anos Rebeldes* [Years of Rebellion] (1992) and is further developed in *Sangue no Araguaia* and in the Record Network soap opera, *Cidadão Brasileiro* [Brazilian Citizen]. The premise of all these programs is the transformations of the struggles of resistance against the dictatorship and the abuses committed by the State during that period into something palatable.

A particular aspect of the program *Sangue no Araguaia* is the fact that it evolves towards a dichotomy in which two possible progressions for the plot are raised and then voted on by the viewers. In this way the final part of the program tends to reflect the average position of the audience (one would say of common sense) about a given topic. The nature of the program of course leads to proposing narratives that can evolve to simplistic dilemmas that can motivate the audience, regardless of their previous contact with the subject. It should be considered that the very prospect of a vote that will determine how the narrative will develop brings in itself a type of adherence to the demands of the public (to what the latter can understand as entertainment worthy of interest) which favors Manichean approaches to the most diverse topics.

In this specific case, a supposed survivor of the Araguaia Guerrilla War escapes alive after being considered dead by the military and abandoned in the forest, where he is saved by a peasant. He returns to Rio de Janeiro using a false identity and lives there clandestinely until the present. At the time when the episode is shown (1996), the character lives in the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro and works as a taxi driver to support his wife and son. He spends his life feeling tormented by the memories of torture and of his dead comrades, when the Law on Forced Disappearance (Law 9,140/1995) is signed. Then his feeling of guilt begins. Living under a false identity, he cannot practice his profession as a lawyer. The family is short of money and the wife and son pressure him to receive the 120,000 that they would have a right to if he had really died, because his real name is on the list of missing political militants.

In the beginning, what prevails is the voice of the conscience of the selfless, losing hero, with whom the public does not want to identify: “I can’t do this, in the name of the memory of my comrades”, “I am a man of character”. His utterances express a moral consciousness devoid of political meaning. His conscience confronts pragmatism when his wife says: “Your character does not pay the butcher’s bill”, and he does not know what to answer. His son insists: you have already suffered a lot, you have given your share for democracy, you have a right to the money. In the end the public voted “yes” by 100,000 to 20,000 who voted “no”, and the former guerrilla accepts that his wife receive the money and decides to live the rest of his life under a false name, clandestinely.

The fact that we have a story associated with the Araguaia Guerrilla War transformed into a moral dilemma with a simple and strictly pragmatic structure reflects, as mentioned above, the determinants of the program. Even so, one should remember the perspective according to which this is the dialogue in which the audience can

situate themselves, characterizing the assumption of historical alienation about the points of tension at stake in the case of the legacies of the Araguaia Guerrilla War, as we will consider below.

It is more plausible to consider that the option of dedicating one's life to a cause that at no level resulted in direct personal advantages – but in sacrifices and the risk of imminent death – becomes distant from the point of tension delineated by the program. In addition to this aspect, there is also the fact that, pragmatically, hiding one's identity was no longer the most advantageous choice in 1996, given the enactment of the 1988 Constitution¹⁶, involving amnesty and economic compensation for the survivors.

In this episode the occurrence of a chance meeting in the taxi between the former guerrilla and his torturer is proposed. The former combatant recognizes his executioner, whom he begins to accuse of the atrocities committed. The torturer retorts: "What did you want? It was a war! Everyone did their share, that is what it is like in war: kill or be killed. You had your truth and I had mine, and each of us fought for his truth." And that is the way the story develops, without actually questioning the abuse of power represented by the usurpation of constitutional freedom by the military.

Repression is portrayed as part of a dialectical clash, "ferocious as though we were at war", in opposition to the view that it was the point of departure for an escalation of conflicts which the country saw and of a large scale abuse against various segments of the population, based on torture and other reprehensible practices. In clear contrast to this perspective, the former combatant in the program makes a remark that appears to want to pacify the spirit of the viewer even more: "In those days things were against me, now they are against you", as though in fact the historical compensation were being carried out in the country, with the arrest of the torturers and the clearing up of the crimes committed by the dictatorship.

The dilemma then begins to insinuate itself into the conversations between the protagonist and his wife and becomes worse when he has a car accident that prevents him from working with the taxi and supporting his family: should he remain clandestine (hiding his real name and the chance of testifying and carrying out political acts of reparation) to receive a compensation from the State?

*At the end of *Você Decide*, the family does not celebrate democracy, but the new car that they will be able to buy with the compensation from the State for military*

abuses. This is the myth. ... It is with this idea that the program sustains its argument and leads the vote to "Yes". ... The television enunciation that "we are already in a democracy" really does away with the need for the daily participation of citizens in politics: a citizen considered dead, ultimately, does not even have to vote, right? Thus, the media talks about democracy today in order to separate us definitively from the past (Kehl, 2001, p. 231-2333).

The story is ultimately about the comparative value of the legitimate memory and the possibilities of action which go from there in contrast with the appropriation of a small amount that may satisfy immediate, petty interests. The media, represented by the Globo network's dramaturgy in its most popular interface, puts into play a situation that depletes the great issues involving the legacy of the Araguaia Guerrilla War: the recovery of the experience, the comprehension of the historical determinants that led to its outbreak and development; the inclusion of the efforts and lives pledged to the social memory of the country; the proposal of institutional mechanisms that can guarantee that the national State be purged of repressive structures (for instance, information agencies, secret lawsuits, restricted communication of topics to which the military are sensitive) and of the agents involved in torture and murders; among other important issues.

Ever since *Anos Rebeldes*, this past of political militancy concerns well-meaning but mistaken people. The left is represented as a group of harmless heroes despite their revolutionary impulses. Generally, the Brazilian media created space to deal with this, with big successes among the viewers, at the same time as it emptied the historical meaning of the guerrilla movement and of the revolutionary left, contributing to the establishment of a broad social distancing from the search for factual restitution and the meaning of this recent past.

The mythology of the Araguaia gains contours that are very different from those that we visited in the previous sections, in which we discussed the fantastic universe constituted in the region where the fighting took place. In the media key, in place of the fantastic we have the plot with shades of political conflict – in which "mythical heroes" are revealed, without any connection with praxis – and which provides the background for the introduction of a number of other characters moved by issues situated in a time – the contemporary narrative – that is no longer the time of the guerrilla movement (especially in the Globo Network programs).

¹⁶ See art. 8 of the Acts of Transitional Provisions and the laws regulating it.

Final considerations

The Araguaia Guerrilla War took place in a real repository of legends – the Amazon Forest. As we argued, the origin of imaginary representations with a mythological character, compiled in interviews with participants in the movement and peasants, is profoundly related to the way in which the guerrilla war was gestated and fought and with the silence that followed it, which had implications for the dissemination of these myths up to the present time.

When we recover the guerrilla myths of that period, we make reflections that propose to expand the comprehension of the guerrilla movement and its symbolic universe, forged in the relationship with the local population and based on the dissemination of repressive violence.

The stories told about guerrillas who were transformed into animals (protected by spirits of the Amazon) to hide and combat the Armed Forces during the dictatorship sustain the myths. The latter take up meanings again and may modify them, creating other meanings. This ambiguity, which is constitutive of the “veiled speech”, is at the source of the mythological power that we consider in this study and that is marked by dubious meanings and allegories whose interpretation may allow conclusions without ties to the facts and the discussion that takes place in the milieus in which those who dedicate their efforts to reconstituting them are positioned.

While on the one hand these myths were instrumentalized by the effort to deal with the violence and repressive force of the military, on the other they helped protect them from the exposure of their failures when faced with the small group of combatants belonging to the PC do B. To those who interacted with the guerrillas or fought with them, the myth appears as a simulation of acquiescence to the military. Finally, the inhabitants of the region who stayed farther from the guerrilla war appear to have grasped these myths as attempts to include and explain the unusual in their lives.

These myths have been timidly revisited during the last 30 years, in the light of efforts turned towards the factual restitution of the guerrilla movement. The author of this article was present at two key moments in the investigation of what had occurred in the region (1996: excavations and investigations; 2001: search for bones and investigations with the Federal Public Prosecution), on which occasions she was able to explore some of the memories of the local population exposed to the conflicts.

The presence of well-known zones of silence about what occurred allows a timely contrast with the treatment given to the legacy of the period of dictatorship in other Latin American countries. Whereas Brazil continues to

be a model of impunity and backwardness in promoting a policy of reconstituting the facts of the crimes committed by the dictatorship, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay see the development of systematic efforts to circumscribe the facts of the crimes committed by the dictatorship and the punishment of the main people responsible.

The role of the Brazilian media in this process of “alienation from the facts” is ambiguous in several senses, as we were able to consider. All the same, a marked characteristic of our historical process is the fact that soap operas and special television programs that are clearly concerned with generating an audience – and much less with the production of a critical consciousness – act as main vectors for the public knowledge about the Araguaia Guerrilla War. There is thus a deflation of the formation of an engaged public opinion and the exploration of strategies turned towards the preservation of the democratic State and the advocacy of human rights through symbolic and legal devices.

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