

Reverberations, echoes and fragments of terror and intimacy in the Favela ADPF Public Hearing¹

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ABSTRACT

Setting out from testimonies presented by members of movements of relatives of the victims of police violence during the Public Hearing on ADPF 635, in April 2021, the article explores some of the connections between terror and intimacy. This aim in mind, it focuses on what are perceived as echoes or reverberations of what is said, like the fragments that tell us of the importance of the home, routine and relationships for the understanding of the diffuse force of terror.

KEYWORDS

Terror; Intimacy;
Police violence

Reverberações, ecos e fragmentos do terror e da intimidade na Audiência Pública da ADPF das Favelas

RESUMO A partir de falas trazidas por integrantes de movimentos de familiares de vítimas de violência policial durante a Audiência Pública relativa à ADPF 635, em abril de 2021, o artigo busca explorar algumas conexões entre terror e intimidade. Para tanto, concentra-se no que percebe como ecos ou reverberações do que é dito, como os fragmentos que trazem a importância da casa, da rotina e das relações para a compreensão da força difusa do terror.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Terror; intimidade; violência policial.

1. SLIPPAGES BETWEEN VIOLENCE AND TERROR

There are words that conceal their complexity in an apparent obviousness that leads us to believe that we are participating in territories whose semantic and ethical terms are widely shared. Violence is one such word, especially when we dialogue with those who recognize themselves as simultaneously victims and combatants of some kind of violence. Many of my interlocutors over recent years have been mothers and relatives of people killed by state agents, especially military or civil police officers, and who have formed and worked in collectives that denounce and confront 'state violence.' More recently, these same collectives have created larger networks, national in scope, led by the National Network of Mothers and Relatives of Victims of State Terrorism,² that supplement or even swap the expression 'state violence' for 'state terror' or 'terrorism.' Among other things, this shift reveals the insufficiency of the word violence to account for the actions and experiences that these movements seek to make visible in order to denounce and transform them.

However, the apparent obviousness of the term violence conceals significant distinctions, especially when adjectives like 'state' are used. As Veena Das (2008) has pointed out, there is nothing transparent in the term violence that might clarify for us which relations and situations are perceived or qualified as such. Noting its composite nature – as in 'state violence' – thus prompts us to give more emphasis to the positionings generated in this specific work of enunciation. Those who are the targets or antagonists of 'state violence' are simultaneously denouncing the perceived limits and zones of illegality pertaining to the state. As I have explored elsewhere, this involves a speech act that marks political subjects and produces recognition of a "sociology of structural injustice" (Vianna 2014: 221). In turn, the presence of the state in the form of violence denounces the absence of another state, its inverse, a state that is actually desired and that should be making itself present as a guarantor of rights and provider of public policies. Unsurprisingly, familiar phrases like "the only public authority to enter the favelas is the police"³ featured widely in the testimonies of activist residents of favelas at the Public Hearing held to discuss Constitutional Violation Claim 635 (*Arguição de Descumprimento de Preceito Fundamental 635*; hereafter ADPF 635), which I shall examine in more detail later.

If 'state violence' not only qualifies a type of violence but produces an image-accusation of what the state constitutes in certain territories of social life, what might the emergence of the terms 'terror' or 'terrorism' point to? As well as being mobilized in the name of a nation-wide activist network, these terms appear in relatively commonplace remarks like "they want to terrorize us" or "what they do to us is terrorism," indicating something that goes beyond violence, surpassing its own intensity and constancy. Something that also makes it possible to emphasize qualities and forms for which the semantic field of violence proves to be too timid or

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2 | In Portuguese: *Rede Nacional de Mães e Familiares de Vítimas do Terrorismo de Estado*. National meetings of relatives against state violence have been held since 2016, but the alliance began to adopt the terminology *Rede Nacional de Mães e Familiares de Vítimas do Terrorismo de Estado* (National Network of Mothers and Relatives of Victims of State Terrorism) from the second meeting in 2017.

3 | The phrase comes from the testimony given by Renata Trajano of the Papo Reto Collective during the first of the two days of the Public Hearing in question. I provide more detailed information on the ADPF in the second part of the article.

insufficient.

In “Culture of terror, space of death,” the first chapter of his book *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, Michael Taussig provokes us to “think-through-terror,” which entails recognizing and retaining something of its “hallucinatory quality” (Taussig 1993: 5 and 10). A dimension of this hallucinatory quality can, I believe, be heard to echo in the words used by the relations of victims and favela residents when they speak of the terror lived in different situations involving armed operations conducted by state forces.⁴ The expressive dimension of the term itself and the way in which it is used exceeds the more immediate meanings attributed to it, reverberating the relative inapprehension and unpredictability of its forms, consequences and durability. The aforementioned phrase “they want to terrorize us,” for example, was spoken to me by one interlocutor while she was relating diverse actions that could easily have been evoked as ‘state violence’ or ‘police violence’ had she so wished. But the word terror is not there for nothing, just as its ability to become internalized, inscribing itself in ‘us,’ is not a trivial matter. The battle is waged, therefore, not only in the world, confronting the forms of violence perpetrated in streets and houses, but also against terror’s poisonous capacity to infiltrate people’s senses and perceptions, becoming a constitutive part of its victims’ lives.

When narrated or performed, the corporalities formed through experiences marked by a transition between state violence and state terror evoke something of this perturbed interiority. People speak of shocks, tremors, the inability to sleep, the need for medications to control palpitations, high blood pressure and tightness in the chest, sweating and painful memories suddenly triggered a noise, image or smell. In this sense, they are corporalities entangled in nonlinear temporal transitions. As we shall see in the second part of the text, the testimonies concerning police operations conducted in favela areas presented at the Public Hearing did not point to precise moments in the past – or, at least, did not point to them in isolation. They spoke about actions inscribed in a time of infinite repetitions but whose most dramatic characteristic is, paradoxically, their unpredictability and, as a consequence, the unease that they instil in space, relationships and bodies. The evocations of the procedures that work to engender “terror in us” speak precisely about the possibility of something happening at any moment or having consequences that can be neither contained nor remedied. Beyond the political denunciation of how state armed forces operate in favela areas, describing and giving content to these procedures is a way of partially taming their corrosive capacity, their ‘hallucinatory quality.’

In this article I explore the tense interplay between enunciation and reverberation, components that I deem central to delineating what can be said about and from the viewpoint of terror. In the process, I wish to emphasize how we need to be attentive not just to the description of the practices of ‘state terrorism’ denounced by movements of victims’ families and favela residents, but also to the ways in which

4 | It is important to note that, due to the nature of the Public Hearing, I am not discussing other armed forces here that are also present in favela territories and that engender other devices of terror. For a contemporary map of the variety and complexities of these forces, see Geni-UFF/ Fogo Cruzado 2022 and Geni-UFF/Observatório das Metrópoles 2021.

what is not fully enunciated in speech finds expression in the form of effects – what reverberates through communicative resources other than direct enunciation, as invitations to imagining and sharing what does not fit into words, what spreads out diffusely in an interplay of narratives marked by reticence, interruption and allusion.

In the next section, I briefly describe the conditions of the Public Hearing and select some excerpts from testimonies given by favela residents, members of different movements and social organisations. The criteria for this selection amid the complexity and variety of depositions that took place over the two days of the hearing was, firstly, the way in which they call our attention to the overflowing components of the violence regularly committed by police forces in favelas, approximating the meanings and echoes of the semantic field of terror alluded to above. Secondly, though, the testimonies chosen here also highlight qualities of the acts of violence and/or terror that strongly connect to spaces, relations and expressions of intimacy. In this sense, my aim is to reflect on the extent to which terror and intimacy, two terms that are not stabilized a priori but which depend on constant descriptions and considerations, are deeply interconnected. Or put more directly, the extent to which practices and experiences of terror are closely linked to a sense of profound violation of intimacy, here understood as a territory of great moral and subjective valuation concerning the body, affects and spaces.

2. TESTIMONIES

The Public Hearing on ADPF 635 took place over two days, the 16th and 19th of April 2021, receiving testimonies from members of government bodies, civil organisations, researchers and social movements, among others. Chaired by Justice Edson Fachin of the Federal Supreme Court (FSC) and held virtually, the Public Hearing followed up on a legal action submitted at the FSC in November 2019 by the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB) and included various social movements as *amici curiae*.⁵ Primarily focused on the control of police lethality in the favelas and aimed at curbing so-called ‘police operations’ during the Covid-19 pandemic, the legal action became known as the ‘Favela ADPF’ and indeed succeeded, through the decisions taken by the court, in significantly reducing the losses of life resulting from police raids (Hirata, Grillo & Dirk 2020) – at least, for a while.

The situation in April 2021, however, already pointed to a renewed numerical advance of lethality, something that would only become more intense in the following months and years, including in the form of massacres.⁶ The testimonies of residents, participants of various favela collectives, many of which were formed by or composed of relatives of direct victims of police actions, marked the importance of the ADPF’s singularity and its effects, as well as bringing various temporalities to

5] Also participating in the ADPF 635 proposal, besides the PSB, were: Educafro – Education and Citizenship for Afrodescendants and People in Need, Public Defender’s Office of the State of Rio de Janeiro, Global Justice, Human Rights Network Association, Maré Development Networks Association, Unified Black Movement Institute for Religious Studies, National Human Rights Council, Papo Reto Collective, Manguinhos Mothers Movement, Network of Communities and Movements against Violence, Fala Akari, Initiative for the Right to Memory and Racial Justice, Alana Institute, Workers’ Party, Brazilian Bar Association - Rio de Janeiro State Section, Federal Council of the Brazilian Bar Association, Centre for Justice and International Law, Strategic Action Group of the State and District Public Defenders’ Offices in the Higher Courts, LABJACA Research Laboratory, Institute for Racial and Environmental Advocacy, Mothers of May Independent Movement, Federal Public Defenders’ Office, Angels of Freedom Institute, Luiza Mahin Popular University Legal Advisory Unit, and the Human Rights Laboratory. The full roster of participants also includes other actors from diverse movements, governmental and non-governmental institutions, as well as researchers (the condition in which I also participated).

6] The Public Hearing was followed by an extremely violent operation in the Jacarezinho favela, ironically and macabrely baptized ‘Exceptus,’ in reference to the ‘exceptionality’ allowing police operations under ADPF 635. The extent of the defiance of the decision was also made explicit at a press conference given by the Civil Police (see Araújo et al. 2021). For a map of massacres in Rio de Janeiro, see GENI/UFF 2022. For an analysis of the relation between the Public Hearing, the Jacarezinho massacre and the policy of ‘killability,’ see Medeiros 2023.

this public arena. Their remarks mentioned specific moments of the past, the constancy and continuity of certain violent, illegitimate or openly illegal practices, as well as fears for the future. In general, the statements were short since a maximum time of twenty minutes was available for each participant, which could be further abbreviated if more than one participant spoke on behalf of the same organization or collective.

Finally, still in terms of the organisation of the Public Hearing, it is worth noting a certain ritualisation present in the process of welcoming the speakers and thanking them at the end of their testimonies, embodied in the cordial and ceremonious figure of Justice Fachin. Far from being trivial, this ritualisation, reflecting the effects of aggrandizement of the state itself, lent the game of speaking and listening a dimension reminiscent, albeit very faintly, of the dynamics of commissions and bodies of transitional justice. In making this comparison, which I cannot explore further here, I simply wish to call attention to the fact that the testimonies themselves wove a plot in which description, reception and reverberation acquired somewhat exceptional marks and tonalities. As some participants observed, members of collectives and movements but researchers too, the possibility of speaking “in the FSC” – and being heard, to which, once again, the ritual gestures contributed significantly – represented a singular milestone. However, this was not just a question of the exceptionality of the situation or the locus of authority. In my view, it was also linked to the possibility of transposing certain perceptions to that scene of listening, transmission and recording that are seldom if ever considered in other situations, such as court hearings, in which other scripts and power relations prevail. In this sense, the possibility of marking something of the ‘how’ of police violence, its minutiae and effects, configures, albeit tenuously, a scene of recognition of the significant impact that such violence can have on life as a whole. In other words, a recognition that the lethality that occupies the centre of the ADPF and, consequently, the public hearing is not the only topic that demands being heard and recorded. Or even an acknowledgement that lethality is not translated by and exhausted in the number of deaths but also relates to other more widespread harm to favela territories, homes and subjectivities.

I begin, therefore, with some excerpts that call attention, among other issues, to the pervasiveness of police actions in domestic spaces, in the fabric of the family and in corporalities. My objective in choosing these excerpts and assembling them in sequence is decidedly not to produce any effect of explication or exemplification. What I propose to do rather is reflect, along with and through the analytic and ethical density of what was presented by some of these participants, on connections between the semantic fields of terror and intimacy. Hence my decision to transcribe the chosen excerpts in sequence in order to maintain, albeit precariously, something of the disruption they are capable of provoking. Finally, it should be remem-

bered that all the testimonies are publicly available, along with their transcriptions.⁷

Testimony of Eliene Maria Vieira from the Manguinhos Mothers' Movement:

(...) My son was shot and imprisoned. And it is in the name of this favela, so marginalized, so criminalized, that I begin my testimony. Before speaking the words that I've written down – I wish to apologise because I'm a little nervous – but I want to make it clear that we live in a territory constantly invaded by the state. And the only thing that this state brings to us is military power. (...)

Mothers for mothers. When one mother cries, all cry. And it is through this testimony that I come here to ask for your help, not only for my favela but for all Rio de Janeiro's favelas, and for it to be extended to all the country's favelas and [urban] peripheries. I live in a favela that is constantly terrorized by police actions. I fully understand the complexity of the issue but I come here as a mother. For decades our favelas and peripheries have been the target of this fallacy called the war on drugs and, amid this fallacy, our family members are being murdered.

First, they came and murdered the men. After a time, the target turned to the young men and now, Your Honour, in an absurdly perverse form, they are murdering our children. I have already lost count of how many children have been murdered and how many mothers are weeping for the loss of their babies. It's an unending pain.

When there's a [police] operation in my favela, my heart races, my legs tremble and I completely lose my mental health. When the police helicopter swoops in low overhead, it feels like it's going to bring down the roof of my house. As you can see, my roof is made of asbestos. Here the houses are small and most are shacks without the structure to withstand the helicopter rotor blades. We are asked all the time by the state why we feel so afraid.

I know that Your Honour, nor the other Justices, lives in a favela and I don't think you've ever experienced this kind of terror, but I tell you with all my heart that it isn't easy to wake at 5 in the morning and have several hooded men at your door, that's when your door hasn't been kicked in. I know various people who have been through this situation, including a friend whose door was kicked down when she was eight months pregnant.

I'm a mother and a grandmother. I'm so afraid of losing my children and grandchildren that I even lose the will to live. We are people and the only thing we want from the Brazilian state is to survive, because we are denied the right to live every day. At the moment when an operation is taking place, the favela, which is usually somewhere full of life, falls silent. We can clearly see the fear in the faces of the residents, the silence is deafening, entire families terrified of what's happening. My grandson cries and I try to hold him in my arms in an attempt to calm him down so he won't be so scared.

We see and experience so many absurdities that the simple fact of having a state agent looking at me when the operation is taking place causes me to panic, because of the certainty of knowing that I can be approached brusquely and that this same agent can decide, at that moment, whether I will be beaten, whether I'll be imprisoned or whether I'll leave there alive (...)

7 | The videos from the first day can be accessed via the following links: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rf3x9u6QQ5Y> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20MabrqGCQo>.

A transcription of the two days of the hearing can be accessed at: https://www.stf.jus.br/arquivo/cms/audienciasPublicas/anexo/ADPF_635_TranscricoesDaAudenciaPublica_REDUCAO_DALETALIDADE_POLICIAL.pdf.

Am I asking Your Honourable Justices and the people here for something absurd? What I want is for my favela to live; I want to be able to leave my home without the terror of leaving my son behind. I'm the mother of a 24-year-old young black man who, every time there's a police operation, a gun is shoved in his face (...)

Testimony of Elizabeth Santos da Silva from the Baixada Fluminense Network of Mothers and Relatives:

It's important we talk about the failure to comply with ADPF 635. This legal appeal did not put an end to the violations but it did reduce the deaths. The police are already entering the territory, shooting, killing, showing no respect for us, residents of the deprived community, and are still committing forced disappearances, like they did with my 17-year-old son, on the 13th of July 2020, at 1 pm. After 17 days, I found my son lifeless, decomposing. The only possibility they give us is death, because when they kill our children, they kill our family. Still on the topic of the violence and the forced disappearances, it's a widespread practice in the Baixada Fluminense, just as they did with my youngest son. Nine months is the time of a pregnancy and the time until birth, and, in my case, it's the time of suffering, because today Carlos Henrique Santos do Nascimento would be... It's nine months since they took his life and even made his body disappear. And I and many other families only know this kind of suffering and sadness, but I believe in justice.

Testimony of Dalva Corrêa from the Network of Communities and Movements Against Violence:

Today, Your Honour, is a very difficult day for me. Eighteen years have passed since the Borel Massacre. Today, when I woke up, the first thing I remembered was when my son, Thiago da Costa Correia da Silva, who was born on July the 3rd 1983, died on April the 16th 2003. I remembered that the day he was born, I hugged him, without any clothes, covered in blood, but his body warm. On April the 16th 2003 I also went to hug my son, without any clothes, but with his body riddled with rifle bullets fired by the Rio de Janeiro military police. When I tried to hold his hands, there was blood under his fingernails, but not birth blood; it was black blood. (...)

We, the families of victims, suffer from the impact. Each victim who dies does not die alone. They take their father and mother, friends and relatives. These traumatic upheavals that the families suffer lead to unemployment, depression, suicide and diseases, including death. As well as seeing our families destroyed, we have to live with the executioners of our children. They are there, pointing their rifles and we are forced to listen to their insults. We are intimidated, tortured, and our rights are constantly violated at gunpoint. This is the silent terrorism

of Rio de Janeiro state! (...)

Testimony of Renata Trajano from the Papo Reto Collective:

As Eliene said earlier, Your Honour, and I became very emotional – and now I'm becoming very emotional again – I don't think either Your Honour or the other Justices have ever woken up in a poor territory; you've never woken up in a house under fire. I don't know how people see us [and] think that everything that happens in our territory is our fault. In my house there is just one safe place for my entire family when there's a shoot out: my mother, an elderly woman of 81, my daughter with her 3-month-old baby, my siblings. [Complexo do] Alemão is a favela with 180,000 inhabitants and not everyone has a house with a safe place. Ágatha Félix, aged ten, didn't even have the right to grow up and she was on her mother's lap, in a van, arriving home. Her mother's lap seemed a safe place because our mother's lap is a safe place. (...)

I already heard from one military police officer that, as a black woman, I can't be a defender of human rights, because that's a white woman thing; a black woman is good for being hot in bed. Can Your Honour imagine how it was for me, a defender of human rights since I was fourteen, when my brother was executed in the Baixada Fluminense, being told by an agent of the state that I couldn't be a human rights advocate because I'm a black woman and black women don't fight for rights. A black woman has to be hot, show off a beautiful body and prostitute herself. These were the phases that a police officer, a sergeant, used towards me. (...)

We don't want the state to be perfect but we want a state that has a government that does something decent. We ask for food or water and it sends guns. The only public authority that enters the favelas is the police (...)

These are positionings that clearly show no respect for the court because what the court rules is one thing and the state does something else. As if our house were a hotel, where the police guys use a master key and enter. And if you complain, you're fucked up. Sorry for the expression, but you're fucked up. It's not a little beating; it's a beating that hurts. It hurts in your body and later it hurts in your soul, because you're inside your own home. Your Honour has never had your home invaded by the police – Your Honour, the Justices, the deputies, senators – in the same way that ours are. Your home will never be shot at like ours. Your bodies will never be shot at like ours (...)

The house invaded by armed and hooded men, shot with bullets and shaken by the deafening sound of the helicopter flying over the asbestos roofs. The journey to or from home that holds the threat of gunshots, beatings, intimidation and torture. The elderly woman and the baby who need to be protected from the shots in the only space of the house that seems to offer protection. The child who is not safe

even in her mother's arms. The disappeared body. The decomposing body. The spiral of time: the testimony at the hearing, the nine months since the son's death, the eighteen years since the massacre. The black woman who has to be hot in bed. Who cannot be a defender of human rights. Fear. Sickness. The lack of a will to live. The death that drags the entire family with it. The deafening silence.

The flashes in the testimonies allow us to glimpse, albeit fragmentedly, something of the disturbance that circulates in them and through them. Sometimes the word terror surfaces in a deposition, likewise terrorism. But more than the specific words, we can perceive its diffuse and hallucinatory presence acquiring blurred outlines in the described scenes, in the partially transmitted sensations and in the questions about just how impossible it is to translate its presence. Speaking to people who "have never been through this terror" or to those whose "bodies will never be shot" also implies acknowledging the impossibility of full communication. The infeasibility of communication is given, above all, by the brutal hierarchies of race, class and gender between the speakers and those hearing the words, encapsulated in the figure of Justice Fachin. The zones of possibility and impossibility of knowing are thus denounced as the outcome of profound inequalities, meaning that there is nothing innocent about the cognitive and bodily ignorance of those who listen. A distorted knowledge is transmitted, which calls attention to the echo of what is described or recounted. The echo of the invaded house, the walls and the bodies that tremble, the fear that tears away the will to live, the black blood under the fingernails. This is what I shall write about now.

3. BETWEEN WALLS, CORPORALITIES AND SHADOWS

Discussing how legal and police apparatuses designed to combat actions framed as 'terrorism' in India during the 1990s and 2000s are inscribed in slum areas, Veena Das (2022) ponders, among other questions, what kind of knowledge is generated by those directly affected by the policies of surveillance, imprisonment, torture and incrimination. Anchored in an earlier dialogue established by the philosophers Stanley Cavell and Cora Diamond, Das provides some important clues to think about the excessive nature of this knowledge, given above all by the way in which it penetrates social domains, becoming especially burdensome for those who cannot ignore it.⁸ The notion of inordinate knowledge proposed by Cavell (2010) enables Das to show us how what is at stake goes beyond the care taken with the circulation of a certain kind of knowledge and also involves the way in which it participates in spaces of intimacy and indeed overshadows them (Das 2022: 70).

Something of this excessive dimension is present in the testimonies presented at the Public Hearing, partially cited in the previous section of the article. Various

⁸ Her position can perhaps best be grasped in the following passage: "I hope to show in the discussion that follows that the boundaries between what knowledge is pale or bare and what it is that comes to carry the possibilities of excessive expression does not lie in any absolute characteristic of forms of knowledge. Rather, it is the way in which knowledge of one's relationships enters the realms of the social, becomes weighty with consequences for those who are in possession of knowledge or for those who have to endure what they cannot ignore, that it moves from being pale and bare to dark and filled with plenitude" (Das 2022: 36)

other depositions given by researchers, members of civil organisations or governmental bodies could easily be considered ‘pale’ knowledge, to use an expression of Cavell appropriated by Das (2022: 20). In stressing this point, I am not referring simply to a question of narrative form or a narrow sociological inscription of the conditions and properties of each participant, but to the way in which the overwhelmingness of this knowledge is inscribed in the daily lives of some people – and not others – and what effects this has on life as a whole.

When Eliene Vieira speaks of how it is possible to observe “the fear on the face of residents,” accompanied by the “deafening silence” and “entire families terrified of what is happening,” she elaborates a form of knowledge that has strong sensory marks and that depends primordially on sharing concrete experiences. At the same time as she circulates her knowledge of the effects and components of ‘police operations’ beyond the favela, her testimony also highlights the precariousness of the understanding that can be achieved by someone who has never heard the same silence or seen the same embodied fear. This fear also pervades the grandson who she attempts to calm in her arms, as well as rushing through her own body when she crosses paths with a police officer who stares at her, presaging an unpredictable outcome for what should be a routine journey through the favela.

Even though the central focus of ADPF 635 and the associated Public Hearing was ‘police lethality,’ a category and framework to be considered through technologies of governmentality related to the quantification of death, the testimonies speak of other forms of action that, entangled with the deaths, are inflicted on life as a whole. The circulation through the space contaminated by the “executioners of our children,” as Dalva Corrêa said, points to one of the dimensions of this entanglement between deaths and ways of producing life, in which the faces and names of police officers are far from abstract. The same applies to the interaction with the police officer who disparages the possibility of a black woman being a human rights defender, as Renata Trajano testified. Hence, although the central themes of the Public Hearing were the brutal police operations and their lethality, the depositions exposed and indicated other more routine modes of police activity. It is precisely in the preciseness of the encounter between the mother and the police officer who killed her son – this specific police officer and not another – that we receive an indication of what exceeds the framework of ‘lethality’ or even ‘police violence.’ So there is a confluence between extraordinariness and ordinariness that prevents any clear separation in time or space, poisoning everyday life with the shock of the potential encounter with the “executioners of our children.” As Das highlights, the situations marked by a certain quality of inordinate knowledge are not characterised simply by a general sense of uncertainty but by the kind of dangers hidden away in the everyday (Das 2022: 114).

If journeys in the territory are permeated by fears of the unexpected and of

physical and moral violence, like the name calling that has to be heard in silence or in the racialized and gendered insults, the borders of houses and domestic spaces also prove too fragile to withstand police actions. Kicked in doors, roofs shaken by helicopters, hooded men before dawn and gunshots that pierce windows and walls, all transform people's homes into unsafe and unpredictable localities. Moreover, they configure the very meanings of the violations experienced in a different way. The evocation of the house also operates as a moral designation, reinforced by its coalescence with the demeaned bodies sheltered within it, like those of the elderly woman, the baby or the eight-month pregnant woman. The contrast evoked by Eliene Vieira and Renata Trajano between houses that can be invaded and those that cannot, like those of the judge, the deputies and the senators – along with a significant portion of the participants in the Public Hearing – materializes the distance between the lived experience of inequality and the shared moral horizon. Precisely because they are repositories of images of protection and intimacy, houses operate as moral and semantic connectors, enabling the transmission of the lived outrage beyond concrete experience.

Reflections on the meanings and configurations surrounding houses, dwellings and habitations have expanded considerably over recent decades, offering us important conceptual shifts and ethnographic contributions.⁹ Since I cannot engage here in the detailed dialogue that this literature deserves, I shall focus on just a few elements that seem to me especially productive for understanding how houses allow us to connect intimacy and terror in the narratives presented in the hearing. The first of these elements concerns the understanding of houses as high-value and high-cost processes of moral and material support, which places a stain of debasement on the different forms of police irruption in their spaces that is particularly difficult to cope with. As Eugênia Motta shows us, houses can be deeply marked by their relationship to good or bad deaths, defining the chances of some comfort and tranquillity being sustained within their walls (Motta 2020, 2021).

In this sense, speaking of invasions, gunshots or the roof shaking is also to speak of a 'bad death,' in Motta's terms, which is always lurking, offering itself as a concrete possibility and an omen. Not by chance, there is a continuum between what happens 'outside' during operations, what penetrates the houses in the form of deadly objects or terrifying noises, and the corporalities, which transform into bodies crawling through rooms, hugging small children or being seized by tremors and palpitations. Houses and bodies are thus jointly shaped in their vulnerability, the attacks on spaces being strongly translated into ways of profaning people, family networks and moral biographies. As Renata Trajano put it emphatically: "it's a beating that hurts. It hurts in your body and later it hurts in your soul, because you're inside your own home."

Houses are constituted partly through this deep and diverse connectivity and

⁹ | Janet Carsten's works have a special importance for some of the questions that I explore here (see, among other texts, 2007, 2014 and 2018). In addition to this author, it is worth mentioning that an excellent survey of some of the discussions on the diverse meanings and possibilities of the ethnographic exploration of houses, above all in terms of thinking about the configurations of houses in black territories, can be encountered in the debate surrounding the work of Louis Marcelin, organised by John Comerford and Federico Neiburg (2021). I also highlight the multiscalar dimension of houses, explored in a debate organised by Biehl and Neiburg, 2021, and the discussions featuring in Comerford, Carneiro, Ayoub & Dainese 2022.

partly through the way in which they are capable of containing distinct temporal layers. The acts exercised on and through houses indicate meanings that overflow the semantic field of violence, approaching the hallucinatory potential of terror. I now wish to turn to a second feature of the importance of the language of the house as a vector of the relationship between terror and intimacy: the spectral dimension that police operations can assume when exercised on the materialities, moralities or temporalities of houses.

Some authors have called attention, with considerable ethnographic density, to the close and productive relations between houses and temporalities, considering above all how these relations permeate efforts to make kinship, memory and the future.¹⁰ In her introduction to the collection *Ghosts of Memory: Essays on remembrance and relatedness* edited by herself, Janet Carsten asks whether it is actually possible to speak of kinship and memory as separate dimensions (Carsten 2007: 6). As various articles from the collection explore, the process of making and editing memories plays a fundamental role in the way in which webs of kinship, which include absences and losses, continuities and ruptures, are experienced in people's lives. As Carsten emphasizes, houses also constitute privileged places in this process in which materialities and temporalities mutually interact, as becomes evident in the practices of accumulating or disposing of artifacts and objects, as well as moving away and returning to places. Kept, lost, found, discovered or destroyed things reallocate meanings to relationships and to configurations of the past and future. Houses, in turn, become empty, haunted or are nostalgically kept alive through the work of remembering and narrating.

It is possible to consider, therefore, that the trail of destruction and defilement of houses that appears in the transcribed depositions tells us of the intense pressure exerted on the work of making kinship and families. I have already stressed the relevance of the fragilization of domestic spaces as a mechanism of moral debasement, whether through the material damage that undermines efforts to make a home, or through the introjection of fear within its walls. I would now like to emphasize how much these scenes and their echoes tell us about the oscillatory movements between past, present and future through which kinship circulates. Eliene Vieira is so afraid of losing her children and grandchildren that she loses the will to live, Dalva Corrêa reminds us that each victim takes with them a father and mother, friends and relatives, while Elizabeth Santos da Silva tells us of the broad and deep reach of each death: "when they kill our children, they kill our family."

In each of these testimonies are woven diverse temporalities: deaths are not contained in the past, the present is contaminated by anxieties and anticipations, the future becomes infeasible and returns to the present with a destructive force, removing the will to live, consuming those left alive and who no longer see themselves as family. Much has already been said about the complex relations between

¹⁰ | In addition to Carsten, I encountered inspiring reflections on this dimension of houses in Han 2012 and 2020, Gutierrez 2016 and 2023, and Pierobon 2021.

mourning and time, including in the specific case of the deaths of young black men repeatedly killed by the police forces or by other armed forces.¹¹ What I wish to emphasize is how this destructive power also overflows family and domestic relations and spaces – houses and kin – constituting an atmosphere in which fear and the feeling of dissolution spread towards horror. Elizabeth Santos da Silva talks of the search for the disappeared body of her son, which later transforms into a decomposing body. Dalva Corrêa hauntingly makes us connect the warm blood of her newborn son with the black blood of his lifeless body, riddled with bullets. In the words of Eliene Vieira, a terrifyingly destructive procession is evoked: “First they came and murdered the men. After a time, the target turned to the young men and now, Your Honour, in an absurdly perverse form, they are murdering our children.”

The oscillating, nonlinear or undefined time that circulates in these images intersects with bodies that alter beyond the limits of conventional realism, whether through disappearance and decomposition, or through the transmutation of blood. And where supposedly there is some temporal linearity, as in Brecht’s evocation of the sequences of deaths by generations, this does not turn out to be precise or calming, much the opposite. In fact, time assumes a particularly spectral quality as it blends into an army of faceless bodies, the vague and shadowy ‘them’ who first kill men, then youths and finally children. In this sense, beyond their destruction by damage or degradation by invasions, houses appear here as spaces haunted by the unpacified bodies of children and by a future in which they are absent.

Containing this shadowy capacity of time, in turn, demands a subtle work of producing memory and desire in the midst of present life. This brings me to a third point that I would like to explore and which perhaps can only be glimpsed if we look at the testimonies of the Public Hearing in reverse. I think of this point as an inversion of the predatory capacity of the technologies of terror over intimacy – that is, as a kind of stubborn force of intimacy in containing the transmission and intensification of terror. First of all, it should be noted that the nature of the testimonies in the Public Hearing is permeated by the urgency of composing a picture of the brutal police actions in the favelas and, as I have been insisting, their corrosive capacity in relation to the everyday, to affects and to imagining the future. In this sense, it is not in their central elements that we can trace the persistence and reconfiguration of life that continues and renews itself. But in some ways it is there: when Eliene says that she wants to leave home with peace of mind; when Elizabeth states that she believes in justice; when Renata contrasts the undesired guns with the water and food that people do want; or when Dalva refuses to allow the full name of her son, and his date of birth, to be erased.

For black women in a society structured by racism, making a home has “a radical political dimension,” as bell hooks (2019: 105) teaches.¹² Part of this radicality takes shape in the ways of confronting or circumventing the constant precarious-

11 | See, among others, Birman & Leite 2004, Movimento Mães de Maio 2011, Vianna & Farias 2011, Rocha 2014, Barros 2016, Decothe 2019, Cruz 2020, Farias, Lago & Efreim Filho 2020, Scabio 2023.

12 | Discussion of the home is inseparable from racial and gender tensions, as well as the images projected with particular violence onto racialized women concerning sexuality, reproduction, family and care. In addition to hooks, fundamental references include the works of Lélia Gonzalez (1984), Angela Davis (2016) and Patricia Hill Collins (2019). The book by Camila Fernandes (2021) explores in depth some of these implications in an ethnographic context of favela territories in Rio de Janeiro.

ness of vital materials or the temporal and affective resources of care.¹³ Water and food, peace of mind when leaving and returning home, combine therefore with the demand for justice and for an end to the deaths and their burial in piles of numbers without name, memory or relationality, as mentioned in the excerpts from the testimonies cited earlier. It is through their anchoring in the everyday, here conceived always as a space too of the imagination (Das 2020), and in the density of concrete relations with children, neighbours and relatives, that possible responses to violence – and to the diffuse effects of the terror that exceed it – become delineated.

In her work on women as guardians of memory in favela territories, Monique de Carvalho Cruz (2020) shows us how distinct ritual and discursive languages and strategies are employed ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the favela to deal with police violence. Especially sensitive zones where deaths have occurred are marked with plaques, graffiti and crosses, or trees are planted in the name of the victims, inscribing forms of memorialization and vitalization opposed to the modes of colonial consecration, in the sense developed by Mbembe (2018), producing new symbolic circuits (Cruz 2020: 132-4). In turn, the intimate practices of memory compose other possibilities for dealing with these deaths. In the inside joke recalled with a smile, the small detail that emerges in the conversation on the daughter who liked to dance or the memory of how sons spoke to their mothers and behaved at home, delicate resources are outlined for experiencing memory as part of life (Cruz 2020: 135-6). There is, therefore, something of kinship that continues to be made, preserved and reaffirmed in these poetics of memory, defined by a kind of double intimacy: the intimacy of the small details of the everyday and the intimacy of the close circuits of affection and trust. I believe that is through the veins of this double intimacy that paths can be found to respond to the intoxicating pretension of terror, containing some of its potential to contaminate life as a whole.

4. ARCHIVES, COUNTER-ARCHIVES AND WHAT DOES NOT FIT

In a recent text, I pondered the meaning of certain images or scenes that, produced on the margins of the main denunciations of police violence, appear to invoke a specific type of indignation. The name I gave to these small and intense points of revolt was ‘infernal details’ (Vianna 2023). One of the dimensions that I sought to explore in this text concerns the place that these details may occupy in the archives on police violence and, more specifically, on the regular and mass murder of young black men in favelas and urban peripheries.¹⁴ Taking this archive to be constituted primarily by statistics, diverse forms of documentation, academic productions and the actions of social movements and/or movements of victims families themselves, where do the ‘infernal details’ fit, those that speak of the disregard or disrespect ex-

¹³ | The deep connections between water, gender and territoriality are explored in the work of Marcela Centelhas (2020, 2022), as well as in a recent article by Camila Pierobon and Camila Fernandes (2023).

¹⁴ | I repeat, without being able to expand on the discussion made in the cited article, that the notion of the archive used here does not imply just a physical archive, but a process of agglutination and disaggregation, capable of establishing or consecrating classifications, but also of contradicting them. See, among others, Foucault 2008, Derrida 2001, Stoler 1996, 2010, Mbembe 2002 and Hartman 2021a.

perienced in ‘minor’ situations adjacent to the central dramas of these deaths?

The transcribed recordings of the Public Hearing on ADPF 635 certainly do not confront the same lack of place as the offences experienced in the diverse administrative routines examined in my earlier text. Considering the historical depth and persistent regularity of the “machinery of death” (Farias 2020) that shapes the killability (Medeiros 2023) of the black population by armed state forces, both APDF 635 and the Public Hearing arising from it can be considered events singular in scope. Even so, due to its very format, the Public Hearing ends up producing textualities that, as I have sought to show here, extract part of the communicative force from the reverberations of what is said. The constraints inherent to the speech conditions of this kind of situation, like the predefinition of the primary topic to be addressed, the inscription through the double role of individual testimony and collective representation, the time limit and the material conditions for making the statements, among other elements, could be explored in detail to think about the inscriptions of what can be spoken and what can be heard. Instead of this, I propose in this short final section to outline some suggestions on even less visible layers of the experiences of terror that can be evoked between the said and the unsaid.

Discussing a specific modality of torture practiced by police officers during the long years of the apartheid regime in South Africa, Allen Feldman (2003) highlights, first of all, the fact that this modality had a precise racial distribution, inflicted only on black bodies. The reports that prisoners could be tortured during *braais* (a kind of barbecue), a convivial and commonplace social event, caused particular discomfort during the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the 1990s. Discussing the specific role of certain technologies of memorialization, like the commission itself, Feldman notes how some historical wounds become central, configuring what he calls trauma-tropism, a mode of organisation of collective memory.¹⁵

In the specific case of the shocking *braai*, the author offers an analysis that distances itself from the temporally and politically delimited universe that tends to dominate debates on the apartheid regime, seeking an alternative trauma-trope (2003: 238). Among the elements of this alternative trauma-trope is the extremely violent history of labour control, exercised directly on the bodies of black workers not only during the years of apartheid but also in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Hence, the *braai* represented “acts of structural nostalgia” in which commensality was linked to the commodification and consumption of black bodies (2003: 247). Shifting our understanding of torture from political persecution in a narrow sense to the long-term organisation of forms of labour control and extraction allows the practice to be reinserted at the level of everyday terror, similar to what Taussig called a culture of terror (Taussig 1993). Finally, there is one more point of the rich discussion formulated by Feldman that I wish to invoke here: the incorporation of everyday practices and objects into acts of torture, providing an expedient for its normaliza-

15 | “Trauma-tropism is a form of collective memory; more specifically, it is a framework and methodology by which a collectivity recalls the past and places it in a dynamic and formative relationship to the interpretation of the present” (Feldman, 2003: 236)

tion for perpetrators and intensifying the presence of the culture of terror in daily life (Feldman 2003: 245).¹⁶

In other excerpts and testimonies in the Public Hearing that I have not explored here, the mention of this intense flux of meaning of things is present, indicating, in one way or another, the terrifying potential than can be stored in banal objects and moments of life. It is found in the sheet that covers the sleeping woman and that is flung aside during the house invasion, in the mark of the sole of the boot on the girl's school uniform, in the newborn child hit with pepper spray, as well as in the boys searched endless times as they move through the favela and in the son removed from the car with a rifle pointed at his face. Alongside these scenes and situations are other things that speak of the hard struggle to keep life going: carrying the weight of huge bundles of candy on her back all day, the commute to homes in rich neighbourhoods to clean and cook, the cloths used to wash cars in the street. Objects and situations that are part of the ordinary weave of life and subtly transform into channels of humiliation, shock and exposure. Each of these scenes reiterates the production of bodies available for brutalization and commodification in a society that never separates the production of wealth and class relations from practices of terror, especially racialized terror.

Saidiya Hartman offers us profound and uncomfortable reflections on the relations between memory, terror and mourning in a world marked by slavery and the diaspora irremediably interwoven with it (2020, 2021). As she shows, there are no simple ways of remembering or producing memories that mobilize ideals of healing, emancipation or even justice. The encounter with the deepest fracture, the wounded kinship that defines the diaspora (2020: 249), is difficult to come about through the frameworks of established narratives, imagery and institutions. For this reason, the trajectory that she shares with us in her book reveals the coexistence between the indispensability of narrating, remembering and producing memories that create another type of archive, distinct from those that resemble a large morgue, and the countless traps that haunt these acts and desires (Hartman 2021a). Not by chance, at the end of her narrated journey, the place that she seeks is not encountered in the consecrated forms of monumentalizing memory, such as archives and museums, but in the fleetingness of a circle of girls who sing "the song of the lost tribe" (2021a: 295).

Although certain testimonies given in the Public Hearing mobilized images that refer directly to the process of enslaving people brought from the African continent for whom Brazil was one of the largest and most enduring destinations, I chose not to privilege them. The reason for this was not, of course, to contest or ignore its relevance to understanding racist colonial forms of controlling populations and territories, something discussed in depth by diverse actors and social movements (Guariento 2023). The point is that, although the explanation of the genealogical

¹⁶ | The capacity of everyday objects used in torture procedures to spread into everyday life is also explored, albeit within a different analytic framework, by Veena Das (2022).

links between enslavement and the brutalization of black people plays a key role at various moments during the Public Hearing, the didactic dimension of this explanation ends up betraying the relatively indescribable condition of terror. For this reason, my choice was to pursue what at different moments I have called reverberations, a mode of expressing terror that finds its form in the mention of objects, histories, routines and imaginings of the future that were deeply affected by police actions, though they do not occupy the centre of the narrated scene or the voiced denunciation. In this sense, we need to remember, as Díaz-Benítez and Rangel point out, that the colonial past is sometimes presented merely in the form of a fragment and not as a narrative that didactically reestablishes the social conditions of subjection (2022: 55-56).

As we know, fragments do not come together in an organised whole like jigsaw pieces. They are not parts of a partially undone whole but points of intensity that offer us questions. The ones that I have chosen here echo questions of different densities or temporal inscriptions, and can be moved backwards in search of lacunas in the archives of slavery and racialized terror, as well as forwards in doubts that any future that will actually provide adequate responses to the injustices and diverse forms of violence and domination exercised on massacred bodies and territories. The pervasiveness of terror thus lies in the capacity to establish and renew uncertainties about the life lived now, in the present, but which is also, in spiralling form, the life lived in the longevity of past and future times. Life as it was, life as it should be. This is why the fragments of terror never cease to speak, in reverse, of the meshworks of intimacy by indicating how they have been torn, contaminated or swamped by fear and the irruption of the unimaginable.

Nine months. Five in the morning. Eighteen years. A mother's arms.

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