

## LOOKING BACK FOR WAYS AHEAD – REVISIONING POST-DICTATORSHIP MEMORIES IN *REPARE BEM* (MARIA DE MEDEIROS) AND *LUZ OBSCURA* (SUSANA DE SOUSA DIAS)

### OLHAR PARA TRÁS, OLHAR EM FRENTE – REVISITANDO MEMÓRIAS PÓS-DITADURA EM *REPARE BEM* (MARIA DE MEDEIROS) E *LUZ OBSCURA* (SUSANA DE SOUSA DIAS)

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*Repare bem* (Maria de Medeiros, 2013) and *Luz obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2017) are illustrative examples of women documentary filmmakers' approach to post-dictatorship memory in Brazil and in Portugal. Their attempt to counterpose affective and personal memories with the official records of the state, through the use of mugshots and prison photos of members of a family nucleus taken by the oppressive apparatus of the respective regimes framed in a 'family narrative', is inextricable from a recovery of the memory of women's efforts as both witnesses and as social and political agents. This article will build upon works combining a feminist approach with memory studies (Marianne Hirsch, Annette Kuhn) which provide an insight into the particularities of family photographs as a means to explore the intersection between the personal and the official, the intimate and the public, family and nation, memory and history. Both documentaries raise the stakes by questioning as well as collapsing the said binaries when they structure and order the historical source material within a 'family frame': mugshots and prison photos are inscribed *in lieu* of a speculative family album, thus performatively upsetting the ideological framework of authoritarian regimes as well as their historical legacies, currently the object of contestation and political manipulation.

**Keywords:** Post-Dictatorship Memory. Documentaries. Women filmmakers. Photographs. Brazilian Military Dictatorship. Portuguese *Estado Novo*.

*Repare bem* (Maria de Medeiros, 2013) e *Luz obscura* (Susana de Sousa Dias, 2017) são ilustrativos da abordagem de realizadoras de documentários a questões de memória em regimes autoritários, no Brasil e em Portugal. Ao contrapor memórias afetivas aos registos oficiais do Estado, enquadrando numa 'narrativa de família' fotos de cadastro e fotos na prisão de membros de um núcleo familiar registadas pelo aparelho repressivo dos respetivos regimes, os documentários inevitavelmente recuperam uma memória dos contributos de mulheres quer enquanto testemunhas quer, sobretudo, enquanto agentes políticos e sociais. Este artigo partirá de uma abordagem combinada, incorporando uma perspetiva feminista com o estudo de memórias (Marianne Hirsch, Annette Kuhn), que estuda a especificidade das fotografias de família enquanto veículo para explorar a intersecção entre o pessoal e o oficial, o íntimo e o público, família e

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nação, memória e história. Ambos os documentários vão um passo além ao questionar, e fazer colapsar, os ditos binários à medida que estruturam e ordenam as fontes históricas dentro de uma ‘moldura familiar’: fotos de cadastro e na prisão são inscritas em substituição de um hipotético álbum de família numa performance que desafia quer a moldura ideológica dos regimes autoritários quer os seus legados históricos, hoje em dia objeto de contestação e de manipulação política.

**Palavras-chave:** Memória Pós-ditadura. Documentários. Mulheres realizadoras. Fotografia. Ditadura Militar (Brasil). Estado Novo (Portugal).

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## 1. Introduction: establishing shots

*Un país sin cine documental es como una familia sin álbum de fotografías.*

Patricio Guzmán

Patricio Guzmán’s epigraph in his text “La importancia del cine documental” works as a powerful aphorism which puts on a par documentary cinema and the family photo album, nation and the family (1997–2000). Indeed, few directors have been quite so consistent as Guzmán in reworking the memories of a nation’s recent authoritarian past, in his case the Pinochet regime in Chile (see, for instance, *Memoria obstinada*, 1997; *Nostalgia de la luz*, 2010; *El botón de nácar*, 2015). As for the comparison between nation and the family, it is a firmly established commonplace of political discourse, but Annette Kuhn finds that, when discussing the crucial role of memory in the “national imaginary” – “[w]ith its foothold in both the psyche and in the shared worlds of everyday historical consciousness and collective imagination” –, family provides a useful model for understanding other communities and the idea of nation itself (Kuhn 2002, p. 167):

The historical imagination of nationhood has something about it of the acts of remembering shared by families and other communities, and also of the desire for union, for wholeness, that powers the psychical dimensions of remembering. It is in the idea of the homeland, and above all in that of the “motherland”, that all of these aspects of the national imaginary are condensed, and home and nation come together. (*idem*, p. 169)

This essay addresses two documentaries which contribute towards a reframing of national collective memory by enacting, in distinctively different ways, the acts of remembering of two families whose experiences are particularly determined by the sociopolitical context of the period in their respective recent national histories, Portugal and Brazil. Maria de Medeiros’ *Repare bem* (2013) collects the testimonies of Denise, Eduarda and reveals Encarnación’s memories within the context of the acknowledgement, on the part of the Brazilian State, of the torture and murder of Eduardo

Leite “Bacuri” in 1970 under the military dictatorship (1964–85).<sup>1</sup> In *Luz obscura* (2017), Susana de Sousa Dias assembles the testimonies of the siblings Álvaro, Isabel and Rui by departing from the figure of the communist leader Octávio Pato, who was arrested and tortured under the Portuguese *Estado Novo* regime (1933–74).<sup>2</sup> What Sousa Dias defines as the contrasting of “affective and personal” memories to “official” ones in *Luz obscura* (Dias 2017) could also define, in distinctively different ways, *the modus operandi* of *Repare bem*. Annette Kuhn’s call for “memory work” is discernible in both documentaries:

But if the memories are one individual’s, their associations extend far beyond the personal. They spread into an extended network of meanings that bring together the personal with the familial, the cultural, the economic, the social, the historical. Memory work makes it possible to explore connections between “public” historical events, structures of feeling, family dramas, relations of class, national identity and gender, and “personal” memory. In these case histories outer and inner, social and personal, historical and psychical coalesce; and the web of interconnections that binds them together is made visible.  
(Kuhn 2002, p. 5)

*Repare bem* and *Luz obscura*’s reworking of the individual memory of family members, political prisoners, tortured, imprisoned or in exile will blur the distinctions between the personal and the official, the intimate and the public, nation and family, memory and history, to the point of collapsing the binary frameworks altogether. At first sight, the documentaries *Repare Bem* and *Luz Obscura* could be understood as being structured around two relatively high-profile figures in the political and armed resistance to the Brazilian military dictatorship and the Portuguese *Estado Novo*, respectively, both deceased. These absent figures are perhaps the most obvious link between the testimonies: *Repare Bem* features mostly the testimonies of Denise (also an operative against the regime, who provided logistical backup to the ransom of the Japanese consul by the *Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária* in 1970, co-led by Leite) and Eduarda, their daughter; *Luz Obscura* features the testimony of the three children of Octávio Pato. Upon closer inspection, however, the figure of the absent father, however, is far from being the guiding thread of the documentaries. The fact that the documentaries do not go into any ostensible detail about the political roles and historical significance of Octávio Pato or Eduardo Leite, but rather evoke them mainly as (absent) fathers and, in the case of Eduardo Leite, as a partner also, foregrounds the way in which the family narrative comes to structure both films: Álvaro, Isabel and Rui evoke, beside their father, their mothers

<sup>1</sup> Militant in the armed resistance groups *Ação Libertadora Nacional* (ALN); *Vanguarda Popular Revolucionária* (VPR) and *Resistência Democrática* (Rede). His case has received some attention given the particularly gruesome circumstances of his imprisonment and murder; accordingly, it was the first case chosen by the group representing the families of those murdered and disappeared during the military dictatorship to go before the post-dictatorship governmental Commission (*Comissão Especial de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos*). More information on the Brazilian Truth Commission website: <http://comissaodaverdade.al.sp.gov.br/mortos-desaparecidos/eduardo-collen-leite>.

<sup>2</sup> Octávio Pato was a key operative of the Portuguese Communist Party, a leading figure of the Party during clandestinity, and the first Presidential candidate for the party after the transition to democracy in 1976. He was imprisoned for a number of years (as were his wife and, briefly, his children) and subjected to torture, including torture by sleep deprivation for periods as long as 11 days (*in* Pimentel 2011, p. 367).

(Octávio Pato's partners Antónia Joaquina Monteiro and Albina Fernandes), their uncles Abel and Carlos, their grandparents – their grandmother in particular; Denise and Eduarda address each other as, respectively, mother and daughter and evoke Denise's mother, and Eduarda's grandmother, Encarnación.

The framing of the documentaries, noticeable in the film posters and promotion materials themselves, furthermore, distinctly shifts the focus away from the male-dominated narratives of political resistance and political armed struggle; the poster for *Repare Bem* features a stylized caption of the back of a woman as she looks outside through a window (Denise's); the poster for *Luz Obscura* features part of a photograph (a mugshot, actually) of a woman (Antónia Joaquina Monteiro, as will become clear), while promotion materials also feature details of children holding hands or leaning seemingly on a woman (Albina Fernandes, as the documentary will reveal). Gender plays a role in this reframing between official, public and national histories, on the one hand, and personal, individual, affective and emotional memories, on the other. The role of women in political resistance and armed struggle as well as in sustaining the families through those struggles assists in framing a family narrative, *i.e.* narratives of families whose existence, or inexistence in one sense, was structured by official political ideology and (less official) practices through and through. Ultimately, such framing renders official, affective and emotional memories and/or histories inseparable, if not indistinguishable.

## 2. The Fatherland and Lot's wife

The supplementing of official, historical narrative was well-travelled ground for both filmmakers before *Repare Bem* and *Luz Obscura*. Maria de Medeiros' fictionalized take on the events of the military coup that overthrew the Portuguese *Estado Novo* regime in 1974, *Capitães de Abril* (2000), made no qualms about adopting a circumspect view of the oft-mythologized 'Carnation Revolution', which has become enshrined in somewhat acritical fashion in Portugal's collective memory. When promoting the film for a Brazilian audience, Medeiros made the case for her take on the event, an approach which was wary of triumphalism and of epic undertones while allowing the "motores femininos" [feminine drivers] of the revolution to emerge (Medeiros 2000a). It is against this background that Medeiros justified her recourse to "licença poética" [poetic licence] when she inserted a largely fictitious scene in which a group of women marched against sexual discrimination and called for equal rights (Medeiros 2000b). Susana de Sousa Dias has displayed a consistent engagement with the archives of the *Estado Novo* leading up to *Luz Obscura*. *48* (2010) makes use of the album containing the mugshots of political prisoners by filming them with slight and slow movements in camera while the testimony of the ex-prisoner can be heard off-screen commenting on the events leading to the arrest, on the torture and violence endured, on the moment of when the photos were taken, on how they appear or tried to come across in the photo, etc.. Before that, *Natureza Morta* (2005) had already attempted a collage and visual manipulation of the *Estado Novo*'s archive footage, and Sousa Dias' debut documentary, *Processo-crime 141/53* –

*Enfermeiras no Estado Novo* (2000), followed the legal backlash endured by two nurses and their partners when they overlooked state directives on enforced celibacy for nurses.

Medeiros and Sousa Dias are part of a substantial number of women filmmakers who, whether in fiction or non-fiction, have addressed themes relating, broadly speaking, to post-dictatorship memory. In Portugal, just to name a few, Margarida Cardoso (*Natal de 71*, 1999), Diana Andringa (*Tarrafal: Memórias do campo da morte lenta*, 2011), Catarina Mourão (*A toca do lobo*, 2015), or Inês de Medeiros' *Cartas a uma ditadura* (2006), which addresses the memory of women's lives under dictatorship. In Brazil, Lucia Murat is arguably the filmmaker who has most consistently approached the theme of post-dictatorship legacies throughout her career. *Que Bom Te Ver Viva* (1989), which performs the experience of women who suffered repression and torture, stands as a work of seminal importance in the context of post-dictatorship memory. Flávia Castro, whether in the documentary *Diário de uma Busca* (2010), which investigates the death of her father at the hands of the *Departamento de Ordem Política e Social* (DOPS), or in the feature film *Deslembro* (2018), based on her own experience of exile and return to Brazil as a teenager, also uses film as a medium to revisit or question official memories and narratives which, lest we forget, are continuously re-appropriated, rewritten, and objects of dispute and controversy. A case in point is the recent backlash surrounding the nomination of Petra Costa's *Democracia em Vertigem* (2019) for an Oscar award, an apt reminder of both the power of documentaries in speaking truth to power and of the active role of women filmmakers in the struggle to shape public discourses, narratives, and histories.

The surge of documentaries addressing the memories and post-memories of conflicts under dictatorship, produced and directed by women, bring also a distinctive treatment of historical and cultural memory which does not, by default, overlook or disregard the place and the role of women under dictatorships or any political action they have been involved with (against or in support of the regime): whether they have publicly opposed the regime or participated in armed action; whether they have suffered imprisonment and/or torture; have provided logistic and organizational support to armed action; have been object of retaliation and violence through association or suffered as women under authoritarian patriarchal regimes which, in general terms, suppressed women's rights and restricted their public role and image to that of the guardian of the home. Both Medeiros and Sousa Dias, as Portuguese citizens growing up during the Portuguese *Estado Novo* regime, were familiar with the suppression of Women's rights and the construct of femininity promoted under authoritarian, conservative regimes (Ferreira 1996). Although their work, alongside the work of the vast majority of the previously named fellow women directors, most certainly cannot be reduced to a recovery of women's memory under and in the aftermath of State-sponsored political oppression, they unapologetically provide women with an unusual visibility in the narratives of political resistance under dictatorships.

*Repare Bem* and *Luz Obscura* fall into the category of what Belinda Smaill, building upon the term as developed by Thomas Waugh in the introduction to the edited volume *Show Us Life: Toward a History and Aesthetic of the Committed Documentary* (1989), would term a "committed documentary", one that bears "the weight of political

expectation and hope, as it assumes the status of a valued cinematic form that is invested with the capacity to trigger transformation” (Smaill 2010, p. 13). In similar ways, from the outset, both documentaries circumscribe personal memories within their respective historical context and approaching them through a family frame which functions as a distorted mirror to the authoritarian regimes’ model families. These documentaries end up stressing the specific form of resistance that operated also, albeit far from exclusively, through and across the notion of family. It gives some insight into the particular types of violence directed at women who resisted the regime as well to their respective families in Brazil and Southern Cone (Joffily 2011) and Portugal (Pimentel 2011, pp. 371–379), what Sousa Dias calls a “tortura de género” (2018). *Luz obscura* opens with a text that provides a succinct historical contextualization for the testimonies and visual evidence (namely mugshot photos from PIDE’s archive) that will follow. It successfully puts forward two interpretative cues: fierce persecution to political opponents, communists in particular, and the structuring role that a conservative and traditional notion of family played in the regime’s ideological discourse (‘Deus, Pátria e Família’ [God, Fatherland, Family]) and practices, since “[o] conceito de família sobrepunha-se ao de cidadão na organização da sociedade” [the notion of family took precedence over that of the citizen in the social structure]. *Repare Bem* begins also with a small text, in this case the epigraph from José Saramago’s novel *Ensaio Sobre a Cegueira* (1995): “Se podes olhar, vê. Se podes ver, repara” [If you can look, see. If you can see, take notice]. As the opening credits slowly roll and inform the viewer that this documentary was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice’s Amnesty Commission as part of a project on memory (*Projeto Marcas da Memória*), another intertextual link is established, this time with the 1938 newsreel *Il Viaggio del Führer in Italia*. The newsreel footage presents the visit by Hitler and key figures of the Third Reich to Rome in 1938, where they were received with a monumental parade and welcomed by crowds enjoying the national holiday declared by the fascist state for the occasion. This footage is immediately followed by scenes, now from a feature film, Ettore Scola’s *Una giornata particolare* (1978), set precisely on the day of Hitler’s visit to Mussolini’s Rome. The scenes incorporated in *Repare bem* present a recreation of the celebratory, triumphalist atmosphere that the newsreel also conveyed, before being introduced to Sophia Loren in her role as Antonietta, the homemaker in a model fascist family, overwhelmed by the household chores as husband and their six children join the crowds in watching Hitler’s parade. The intertextual references to the 1938 newsreel and to Scola’s film assists in framing the political persecution and violence (including torture and murder) perpetrated by the Brazilian military dictatorship with reference to the fascisms of the first half of the century, a political lineage and affiliations which Denise will flesh out in no uncertain terms later in the documentary.

The present, as well as the past, is haunted by history but we remember from the present, and History is (re)written always within a given context. Both documentaries make committed interventions on the discussions pertaining to post-dictatorship historical memory, when memory and history can be said to both frame and be instrumentalized by political discourse, in constant development and competing faction, both in Brazil as well as in Portugal. In Portugal, after the 25 April military coup led to the fall of the *Estado Novo* regime, several initiatives of transitional justice were set underway (‘black book’

on the fascist regime, political purges, imprisonment and trial of political police). Although a relevant step forward in relation to previous moments of transitional justice (for instance, post-World War II), these initiatives were seriously limited in relation to later processes, such as South Africa's or Argentina's Truth Commission. Portugal has also failed to revisit its process of transitional justice, as Spain did with its 2007 *Ley de Memoria Histórica*. Crucially, memory of the processes of transitional justice in Portugal has been short-lived, perhaps as a consequence that these were either merely formal, short-lived and reversed, or not designed to engage with the general public (Raimundo 2018). Even though there are established rituals of commemoration around the 25 April and the date is inscribed as part of the collective memory of the nation, its legacy is still the object of disputes. The date was never celebrated to the right of the parliament and governments on the right have tried to resignify the date by stripping it of its revolutionary contours with the campaign "Abril é evolução" to mark its thirtieth anniversary ("Abril is evolution"; *i.e.* not revolution). Recent years have seen the PIDE headquarters being transformed into luxury flats, the Peniche political prison coming close to being transformed into a hotel, and a Salazar museum greenlit by local authorities; as elsewhere in Europe, the emergence of national-populism has created a new front in the wars over post-dictatorship memory. In Brazil, the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade*, a Truth commission created in 2011, was instituted in May 2012 and ran until December 2014, when it produced a report with its conclusions. Testimonies were offered within the context of an investigation against the violations of Human Rights by people and agents/institutions at the service or in the interest of the State. Given the Commission's limited legal powers, the most obvious opportunity for symbolic reparation was the recording of testimonies of those persecuted and tortured under the regime. From anonymous citizens to public figures and artists, the Commission publicly acknowledged the rights of victims to provide testimonies for official public record.<sup>3</sup> The Commission thus brought official recognition on the part of the Brazilian state and complemented the work previously developed by groups such as *Tortura nunca mais*, the *Comissão de Familiares de Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos*, and the report *Brasil: Nunca Mais* (1985). Since then, the politician who has consistently denied there ever was a military dictatorship in Brazil and that honoured the torturer of President Dilma Rousseff in the impeachment procedure, has become President of Brazil. Military barracks in Brazil have since then been allowed to celebrate the anniversary of the coup, and high-level political figures have called for the reinstatement of AI-5 (Institutional Act 5), while the Minister of Culture has paraphrased Joseph Goebbels in a video message set to the sound of Wagner music.

If History is, as Enzo Traverso puts it in his call to reinterpret violence during the twentieth century, a "battlefield" (2016a), in what ways can the memory work developed by *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura* contribute to this particular contest? Anna Reading opens her study on gender, culture and memory of the Holocaust by evoking the biblical figure of Lot's wife, who is turned into a pillar of salt after disobeying God's command not to

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<sup>3</sup> These are archived in the *Centro Memórias Reveladas* of the Brazilian National Archive (<http://cnv.memoriasreveladas.gov.br/institucional-acesso-informacao/a-cnv.html>).

look back upon the destruction unleashed upon the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Reading 2002). It is a suggestive episode for a meditation on the intricate relationship between cultural memory and gender, as Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith argue: “What a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender” (Hirsch & Smith 2002, p. 6). The episode of Lot’s wife is instructive of the ways in which memory is tied to social constructions and constrictions: what may, should or must be remembered or forgotten, by whom, and for what purpose, frame the social and cultural practices of memory. Lot’s wife, punished because she looked back, stands as a stark warning to those who disobey the institutional, patriarchal diktats and who confront the horror of self-proclaimed divine punishment. Unlike Walter Benjamin’s *Angelus Novus*, another paradigmatic figure that looks back (however differently and perchance indifferently) to the destruction in the past, Lot’s wife is unmistakably gendered, it is her condition in relation to the patriarch (the wife) that which defines her. She is, also unlike the angel, inherently human, as evoked in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse 5*. The novel’s narrator, who revisits his experience as a prisoner of war and labourer involved in the cleaning up of Dresden after the firebombing of the city by Allied forces during World War II, comes to find Lot’s wife as an inspiration:

Those were vile people in both those cities, as is well known. The world was better off without them.

And Lot’s wife, of course, was told not to look back where all those people and their homes had been. But she did look back, and I love her for that, because it was so human. (Vonnegut 2000, p. 16)

In the eyes of Portuguese and Brazilian authoritarian states inspired by religion in their crusade against communists and subversives, the “world was better off without them”. And those who look back take a risk in confronting and challenging dominant discourses and pacts of forgetting and/or no less stringent pacts of remembrance. Lot’s wife, unlike Benjamin’s angel, is not immune to the catastrophe that she, contrary to Lot and their daughters (obedient to God and Father), witnesses. *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura* are committed to looking back, supplementing official, documented history with the personal memories of those whose lives and families were deeply affected by diverse layers of violence. They invite the social actors in them, and consequently, the viewers who become invested in the witnesses’ affective, emotional – but no less political – memories to bear witness against commands, however surreptitious, to ignore or forget.

### **3. Framing the family: Mugshots in the family album**

The simile of documentary cinema as a family album that Guzmán constructs will be taken somewhat literally in the course of this article. For that purpose, it is important to consider the role that photographs can play in “memory texts” such as *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura*, i.e. “cultural productions” which “are in effect secondary revisions of the source materials of memory” (Kuhn 2002, p. 6). These memory texts “constantly call to



mind the collective nature of the activity of remembering” (*ibidem*), whether the source materials hail from a domestic environment (*i.e.* the family album and the family photo) or from the public and State records (official photographs, State and police records, etc.).

The inception and early dissemination of photographic practice is indeed inseparable from its use as an instrument of surveillance and social control, but soon institutions such as the family joined State institutions such as the police in deploying photographs as an instrument of control (Sontag 1977/2005, p. 16). Family photographs, arguably, as Jo Spence and Patricia Holland succinctly put it, operate at a more complex, multi-layered level, at a “junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious” (Spence & Holland 1991, pp. 13–14). Accordingly, researchers that have come into memory studies from feminist critical theory (literature and cinema), such as Annette Kuhn and Marianne Hirsch, have addressed the ways in which family photographs (and the family album) play an important role in the framing of family narratives and spaces of intimacy by helping codify and naturalize behaviours, practices, and family myths. According to Hirsch, “photography’s social functions are integrally tied to the ideology of the modern family” (2012a, p. 7):

The family photo both displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of its togetherness; it both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals. Because the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real, a trace touched directly by the event it records, it has the effect of naturalizing cultural practices and of disguising their stereotyped and coded characteristics. (*ibidem*)

There can be little doubt that the indexical nature of the photograph, “widely held to be a record, a piece of evidence that something happened at some time, somewhere – in the time and the place in front of the camera” (Kuhn & McAllister 2006, p. 1), can provide information about or traces of an empirical, historical reality. Photographs play yet another role beyond allowing to recover a historical past or triggering memories, at times by indeed prompting the creation of memories. Marianne Hirsch, for instance, has highlighted the role of family photos in her discussion of “postmemory”, addressing both the familiar context and the creative engagement with photographs by artists in memory texts (2012b). Furthermore, Hirsch has explored “family frames” as a device to trace an “intersection between public and private history” (2012a, p. 13) in “imagetexts” such as family albums, ‘standard’ or ‘published and aestheticized’ ones (*idem*, pp. 11–12).

Although photos display an indexical connection to the past, memories are always constructed from a present moment; in other words, remembering takes place *in* and *from* the present. One must also account for the “temporal disjuncture” between the time when the photograph was taken and the time(s) when they are viewed:

the temporal disjuncture between the moment the photograph was taken and subsequent moments when it is viewed entails recognition of, at the very least, two different points of view: that of the photographer and that of the viewer. Finding a way to read each point of view, as they are situated in different places and temporal moments, calls for an ethics of reading. (...) In addition, the way that the photograph mediates our distance from the

past invokes uncertainty about what is possible to know from the images. As such, the photograph evades the closure of complete(d) knowledge.  
(Kuhn & McAllister 2006, p. 15)

Perhaps counterintuitively, this applies also to photographs taken as official record, as an instrument for identification, as is the case of mugshots. When the documentary fulfils its function of “provid[ing] structure and meaning” (Bruzzi 2000, p. 22), namely by drawing from prison photos as its source material, the relationship between the points of view of the photographer and the viewer is altered further, both in form and in substance. The power of the prison shots as they are deployed in *Luz obscura* and *Repare bem* is partially derived from the way in which official, ‘scientific’ photos are put to an emotional and affective purpose, heightened by the fact that political prisoners, in the photograph, looked in the direction of the photographer (*i.e.* a member of the oppressive apparatus), but, in the documentary, they face the spectator. There is an inevitable tension between the point of view of the photographer (member of the repressive apparatus of surveillance) and of the viewer of the photograph in the documentary (in democratic, post-dictatorship societies) which makes Kuhn’s call, above, for an “ethics of reading” inseparable from a politics of reading. The photographs in *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura* do more than document the historical existence of the political prisoner; they reveal, in no uncertain terms, the State’s power and violence wielded and exerted by the repressive apparatus against political opponents. The mugshots of Eduardo Leite and Octávio Pato, for instance, operate as markers of what happened historically under the dictatorships (their imprisonment, torture, and murder in the case of Eduardo Leite), but they also supplement the affective memories of family members (some of them also active political agents). Eduardo’s and Octávio’s photos are not alone, though: in *Repare Bem*, prison headshots (and full-bodied photos) of Denise and Encarnación are also featured; in *Luz Obscura*, all the photos of the evoked family members are mugshots. The documentary viewers, in their own context of reception, must take note of these photographs as both a document and a further act of symbolic violence and humiliation in an all-out ideological war.

The family frame – *i.e.* the family narrative as a framing device – in which mugshots are inscribed fits into John Berger’s call for, in response to his reading of Susan Sontag’s *On Photography* (1977), a “radial system to be constructed around the photograph so that it may be seen in terms which are simultaneously personal, political, economic, dramatic, everyday and historic” (Berger 2003, p. 37). In both documentaries, the mugshots are not just dislocated from the ‘original’ context of production and reception, or from the official archive. The family narrative structuring the documentaries mobilizes common *topoi* that bind together the individual testimonies of the social actors (the family house(s), the objects of loved ones, and – of course – photographs) in an articulation with the political actions and options of the different members of the family. Similarly, political activity frames family relationships: the narrative of family life and associated milestones (pregnancy, births, deaths, family meetings) are indissociable from the vicissitudes of political militancy under oppressive regimes, which led to separation, imprisonment and/or death. The political context makes for unusual stories (such as being born in

clandestinity or remembering the time when you first met your parents), but still recognizable as variations on, or subversions of, the family narrative genre. Photos play a relevant role in increasing the political reach of a “committed documentary” in exposing the brutality of the regimes’ tactics and the violation of Human Rights but they are equally crucial in establishing an affective dimension without reducing political struggle and political agents to a narrative of victimhood.<sup>4</sup> Prison shots are called upon to operate, very much like family photographs, as a point of convergence and articulation between family life, political agency and different socio-political and historical contexts. They become a focal point through which a number of conflicting memories and histories are activated and mobilized, calling for ever renewed readings.

It seems fitting, then, that the inspiration for *Luz obscura* (and, according to the director, 48) derived precisely from Albina Fernandes’ mugshot photo, which also includes her infant son, Rui, in the frame. The presence of a child either in the mugshot or, earlier in the documentary, in the blown-up details of photographs that depict the children (Isabel and Rui) with Albina Fernandes in the prison courtyard, elicits an emotional impact, in the way of a Barthesian *punctum*, that breaks through the conventions and stipulations of the prison photo. The *realist* approach to the on-screen testimonies of the three siblings – as they reflect on their childhood memories of a family whose members were either separated, in hiding or imprisoned as a result of their political activities – stands in powerful contrast to the moments in which their off-screen voice can be heard against the stylized filming of the only visual records of their family members shown on-screen, *i.e.* the photographs from the PIDE records. As Abel Pato’s mugshot emerges on-screen, at the juncture when Isabel, in the process of describing the physical appearance of her uncle, comes out with the revelation that she does not have any photo of him (“Would you believe it if I told you I don’t have a photo of my uncle Abel?”), it becomes clear that the PIDE’s identification album operates as this political family’s “family album”. This includes the mugshots filmed in the documentary of Carlos, Abel and Octávio, Albina (with Rui as a toddler) and Joaquina, photos of Rui and Isabel as children holding Albina’s hand in the prison courtyard, or Álvaro’s later on, as an adult. This is all the more poignant given the way Isabel describes her uncle Abel’s role in their family life as a surrogate father (“Durante muitos anos fomos nós os filhos dele”) [For many year we were his children], the man in the family (“o homem da família”).

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<sup>4</sup> For Enzo Traverso, sceptical of the overwhelming influence of the figure of the witness and its becoming synonymous with victim in what has been termed the era of memory (2005, pp. 15–16), this is associated with the collapse of left-wing revolutionary discourse after the fall of the Berlin Wall: “The end of communism introduced new tropes into our historical consciousness: the remembrance of the victims replaced that of the vanquished; only perpetrators and victims remained. Nowadays, the actors of the past need to achieve the status of victim in order to conquer a place in public memory” (2016b, p. 57). Regarding the social actors depicted in *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura*, the commitment to framing their imprisonment and oppression, within the context of historically situated political and ideological struggles, honours their role as political agents. In the face of orchestrated oblivion, to a greater or lesser degree, or of ideologically motivated calls to move on from the past, comes the refusal to portray the social actors of the documentaries as mere victims. To treat them as other than relics of a past that has been consigned to the ash heaps of history acts as a stark reminder of the ways in which Francis Fukuyama’s announcement of “the end of History”, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, was greatly exaggerated.

Although *Repare bem* is less dependent on photographs in conceptual terms, their use plays a no less significant role throughout the documentary. Some photographs, because of their historical importance, their place in the family narrative, or given how they are framed in the documentary, will play a key role on-screen: these include Denise's and Encarnación's prison headshots and full-body photos which occupy the screen as their experiences of imprisonment and torture can be heard off-screen. Early on in the documentary, the shot of a table with a number of family photos laid across, together with passports and ID documents, establishes early on the importance of photographs; their relevance is confirmed as photos on-screen will consistently punctuate the testimonies in the documentary. This shot functions as the closest materialization of a family album in the whole of the documentary: what the spectators are offered instead is the broadening (some might argue, distortion) of the family photograph as Eduarda establishes that one of the only two photos known to her of her father, and the only one of him as a fully grown adult, is a prison photo. Eduardo Leite's photos, visible in Eduarda's laptop and then in full screen, occupy the place of family photos when Eduarda points out in the mugshot the place where, as a child, she wrote the word "papá" [daddy]. Eduarda's statement as she shows the photographs, "As fotos que eu conheço do Bacuri, do meu pai" [These are the only photos of Bacuri, my father, that I know of], when she juxtaposes Eduardo Leite's *nom de guerre* (Bacuri) with the affective "my father" further reveal the extent of the entanglement between the private and the public, the intimate and the political. This statement tallies with Eduarda's wish to have known not just the historical figure, but the man who decided to start a family and have a daughter. The mugshot onto which Eduarda inscribed the word "papá" supplements the inexistent relationship between daughter and father.

The articulation between individual affective testimonies mostly on absent family members (mothers, grandmothers, fathers, uncles) on the one hand, and the photographic evidence of the State-sponsored political oppression suffered by those same members, on the other, highlights the ways in which the family narrative acts as the conceptual framing device through which the documentaries structure and order the archival material and the testimonies. The mugshots, as expertly deployed by Susana de Sousa Dias and Maria de Medeiros, supplement the testimonies heard on- and off-screen, further historicize and inevitably politicize the "family narratives". *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura* frame the social actors not just as individual victims but as historical characters, social actors and political agents who took active part, and some continue to take, in political and historical processes. Further, this political variation of the family album highlights the sociohistorical relevance of the family as a means for memory and political resistance – within and against the nation's aspirations or ideological coordinates at a given time.

#### **4. Family resemblances, beyond (in) the name of the father**

The effectiveness of family photographs could be said to lay primarily in their "bringing to life", in "keeping memories alive". However, in the case of the photographs filmed and displayed on screen on both *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura*, it is as important, at the very least, that the past presumably "fixed" in photographs can "disturb the present moment

and the contemporary landscape with troubling or nostalgic memories and with forgotten, or all too vividly remembered, histories” (Kuhn & McAllister 2006, p. 1). In both documentaries, there is more than juxtaposition at play: the positioning of the photos produced under, and initially belonging to, the oppressive apparatus in the context of family narratives inscribes an inseparability between private and public, between the family and the political spheres. The binaries personal *vs* official, individual memory *vs* institutional archive, intimate *vs* public/historic may be, to an extent, operative but only if we accept them as inherently unstable. The documentaries’ use of the vertical montage, in which the soundtrack directs the spectators’ attention to personal memory while the visual track confronts them with historical records, collapses any safe distinctions. The documentaries end up subverting the all too familiar performance of going through the family album by inserting the prison shots of political prisoners as the families’ photos. This process exposes *ad extremum* how family photos can “(...) ‘speak’ silence, absence, and contradiction as much as, indeed more than, presence, truth or authenticity” (Kuhn 2002, p. 154).

One must therefore be wary of jumping to conclusions when it comes to the role that families, whether model families of the regime or the families of “subversives”, can play in providing insight into the fatherland and its political regimes. If family photos do indeed codify practices and naturalize behaviours, then the mugshot in lieu of the family photo questions practices and behaviours. The documentaries do not bring the family together, do not recover the family’s past (in however mediated and textualized fashion). While these documentaries offer memories under the familiar trappings of family narratives, within family frames (in both *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura*, one is presented with social actors and political agents who chose to start a family while living underground, the message is political through and through. There is no attempt, in either documentary, to show the ‘other – *i.e.* personal, intimate – side’ of the political fight. In *Luz obscura*, while siblings refer to their family members and to each other, the testimonies are offered separately (*i.e.* Álvaro, Isabel and Rui are apparently interviewed separately and share no screen time together): the only visible sign of interaction between family members is the photos of Albina with Isabel and Rui in the prison yard or in mugshots with Rui. The same happens in *Repare Bem*, in which Denise and Eduarda offer their testimonies separately, and they are only very briefly framed in the same shot in the *Comissão de Anistia* [Amnesty Commission] ceremony.

The documentaries do expose the persecution and intrusion on the intimacy to which families, otherwise upheld as a pillar of the nation, were subjected. It is clear in both that the State’s intervention moved beyond the political persecution and physical violence (imprisonment, torture and death), as it interrupted or made family life as such impossible. It fully controlled and policed any family interactions, in prison but also, to the best of their abilities, outside prison as well. Denise recalls how she gave birth while effectively under arrest, revealing how military operatives did not allow Eduardo Leite to feel the baby in her belly the last time they met, and how she kept being molested and seeing her quarters invaded even after she was set free. Isabel, in *Luz obscura*, states how the political police not only invaded their houses but would also intervene at every stage of their relationships with their fathers and mothers: during the siblings’ visits to their

parents in prison, PIDE officers would be present and would listen in, demanding to be included in every family exchange and interfering in the conversation. In the fight to crush political resistance, to do what needed to be done there would be no hesitation whatsoever to separate family members and to police family life: as Isabel states at one point, both the political prisoner and the family would be punished.

The absence of family photos *per se* in detriment of mugshots (editorial choice, material scarcity) acts as a powerful statement: prison headshots and photos are made to operate in the place of the family photos that do not exist; in a sense, they recall the politically-motivated acts of violence unleashed upon the family, the reason why family photos as such do not exist. Hirsch's statement rings particularly true in this particular context: “[p]hotography’s relation to loss and death is not to mediate the process of individual and collective memory but to bring the past back in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasizing, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability” (Hirsch 2012a, p. 20). As Kuhn points out, it is not a question of gaining access to the past but rather engaging in an exercise in reconstruction:

The past is gone for ever. We cannot return to it, nor can we reclaim it now as it was. But that does not mean it is lost to us. The past is like the scene of a crime: if the deed itself is irrecoverable, its traces may still remain. From these traces, markers that point towards a past presence, to something that has happened in this place, a (re)construction, if not a simulacrum, of the event that can be pieced together. Memory work has a great deal in common with forms of inquiry which – like detective work and archaeology, say – involve working backwards – searching for clues, deciphering signs and traces, making deductions, patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence. (Kuhn 2002, p. 4)

When the documentaries articulate personal testimonies with the politically charged photos from the archives, they do more than show how there is a mutual contamination at play: the archival photos have an affective and personal meaning; the personal, individual memories are shot through with a historical and political dimension. They reveal that imprisonment, torture, and persecution for political reasons is not just part of the family narrative; they structure and, to a certain extent, *are* those families’ narratives. Hence, there is a strong case for these families’ narratives to be remembered and integrated into the competing collective memories of the nation, and for the documentaries to be acknowledged as performing what Kuhn would call “memory work”:

(...) a conscious and purposeful performance of memory; it involves an active staging of memory; it takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and its (re)construction through memory; it calls into question the transparency of what is remembered; and it takes what is remembered as material for interpretation. (*idem*, p. 157)

Octávio Pato and Eduardo Leite are a point of departure, merely evoked visually in photographs and aurally in testimony from family members, a pretext for a circumspect exercise of reconstruction that displaces the focus of the narrative away from the male hero and onto family nuclei that resisted and remember despite – and not because – the actions of the (forcefully) absent, putative *pater familias*. Rather than merely presenting

the family behind the man (the political militant, the politician), the documentaries actively stage a matrilineal memory that counteracts the historically documented male political icons. They reconstruct a memory of and for those women who not only looked back but, unlike Lot's wife, had to deal with the aftermath of the destruction brought by dictatorial regimes (supported by military and Church) on loved ones (torture or death), and with the impact of this violence on their lives and on the lives of their families as the struggle continued.

In this sense, there is no contradiction between recovering the role that women had in keeping the politically persecuted families together and in highlighting their role as political activists, since the latter often encapsulated the former. *Repare bem* inscribes the testimonies of three generations of women who survived the murder of Eduardo Leite and, as previously mentioned, the documentary opens with the newsreel footage of Hitler's trip to Italy and related fictionalization of that event in the life of a family woman and her neighbour in Ettore Scola's film *Una giornata particolare*. Antonietta's image as the model homemaker fascism that the film initially projects, however, stands in stark contrast with Eduarda's concomitant off-screen description of Denise as a mother and a warrior. The following shot presents Denise from the back, framed by a similar window to the one in Antonietta's flat. The image of Denise, a mother and a warrior, who birthed Eduarda while under arrest in a ward controlled by the military and survived the death of her partner, presents the negative image of, and an alternative to, the fascist model housewife. It will emerge later in the documentary that Denise owns a flat located in the same block of the Palazzo Federici residential complex in which Scola's 1978 film was shot. The association between Antonietta and Denise is then made clearer, via Scola's film, and it will later shed further light on the title of the documentary, taken from Saramago's epigraph: *Repare bem* means both to take notice and to make amends. Denise invested the money from the reparations (same etymological root as *reparar*) afforded by the lawsuit for Eduardo Leite's murder in the buying of the said flat.

Encarnación is, beside Bacuri, the other absent figure towering over the testimonies of Denise and Eduarda, and the embodiment of the dual role of mother/grandmother and political activist: whether making ends meet while her husband is in exile, carrying out political resistance and activism during the dictatorship, enduring prison, resisting pressures to denounce other activists (including Denise and Eduardo), or caring for her daughter and granddaughter, enduring the murder of her son and her daughter's arrest and torture. Her commitment to and identification with the political cause finds a parallel in equal commitment and support for the family. Encarnación's testimony of her stripping for photos before she was released as part of a prisoner exchange, read out by an actress, off-screen, makes that point clearly. Before being released from custody and allowed into exile, the military demand of Encarnación that she take a full-body nude besides the usual prison shots. Encarnación, one is told in her diary, faces up to the humiliation with a sense of defiance: "Sou uma mulher de meio século de idade, sou avó. O policial retruca: É avó mas é terrorista" [I am a woman over half a century old, I am a grandmother. The police officer objects: You're a grandmother but you're a terrorist]. The adversative conjunction is, of course, telling. When asked to strip, as a final act of aggression and humiliation, Encarnación finds strength in her age, gender and in her familiar role; in everything that

in the eyes of the police officer disqualifies her from engaging in political activity. In another scene, which immediately follows Denise's retelling of her mother's courage in resisting police pressure, a rare example of a typical family photo appears on a computer screen. The photo features Encarnación holding Eduarda as a small child, and the reflection of Eduarda's face on the computer screen is visible as the spectator listens to her description of her grandmother: "Era uma pessoa... Era bem mulher. Era bem feminina. Era uma lutadora muito feminina" [She was a person... She was a woman through and through. She was very feminine. She was a very feminine fighter]. The coexistence of a feminine side and a warrior side that Eduarda signals in relation to her grandmother now as she did in the very beginning of the documentary in relation to her mother is reinforced throughout.<sup>5</sup>

The testimonies in *Luz Obscura*, on the other hand, excavate a presence whose photograph is absent from the PIDE album, and therefore from the documentary. The testimonies evoke an extended network congregating around Octávio Pato's mother, Maria da Conceição Rodrigues Pato, the grandmother of Isabel, Álvaro and Rui, who as a woman, as director Sousa Dias pointed out in an interview, would most likely be shut out from the historical record (2017). She is the surrogate mother to the family nucleus ("A minha avó era a mãe desta família toda") [My grandmother was the mother for this whole family] given the imprisonment, and ensuing complications that stemmed from that, of Joaquina (Isabel and Álvaro's mother) and Albina (Rui's mother). *Luz Obscura*'s very first testimony, by Isabel, recalls how Albina was fiercely protective of Isabel and Rui and refused at all times to be separated from the children while in prison. The mother and caretaker that does not sleep for fear that the State will abduct her children would hardly fit in with the ideal family of the *Estado Novo* regime but this family (however disrupted) is in no less certain terms the result of the *Estado Novo*'s policies and practices. The aftermath of imprisonment and separation further adds a tragic undertone to the political resistance of the women in the family, whose prison headshots provide a singularly haunting effect. As for the grandmother, she withstood the murder of her firstborn (Carlos, at the hands of the political police), the imprisonment of Octávio, and in a rare moment, we also hear of her joy at the return of her son Abel after he was released. In a film built around photographs, it does not go unnoticed that one of the strongest presences is one of the few people whose likeness was not captured by the police apparatus and registered into the archive, and therefore is not featured in the documentary. It is up to Álvaro to describe her appearance and how she dressed, and to point out that there is more to the grandmother than the figure of the suffering matron by highlighting her support for the political choices and activities of the children and, eventually, grandchildren.

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<sup>5</sup> The composition of Denise's testimony, for instance, places her retelling the story of her political involvement with a statue of a female body in the background; the statue eventually takes up the whole frame at some point.



## 5. Looking back for ways ahead

Memory work's reconstruction of the past will have been in vain if it fails to demonstrate an appreciation for the ways in which histories and memories of the past still structure and condition present political, and often nationalistic, discourses. So, is it the case that the violations of political and human rights of citizens during dictatorships have been forgotten in Brazil and in Portugal? Let us not be naïve, any dispute over collective and historical memory cannot be reduced to the question of remembering the historical past. As Kuhn points out, memory "(...) does not simply *involve* forgetting, misremembering, repression – that would be to suggest there is some fixed 'truth' of past events: memory actually *is* these processes, it is always already secondary revision" (Kuhn 2002, pp. 157–158).

In memory wars, lest we forget, truth is the first casualty. The competing visions of 'truth' peddled by different political agents strongly indicates that establishing what 'really' happened in the past is not the name of the game. A more cynical commentator might suggest that establishing the truth comes very low in the priority list; and yet emphasizing the constructedness of the past and of collective memory does not equate to dismissing empirical, *historical truth* as wholly relative or fanciful. It implies, however, an understanding of historical discourse or collective memory themselves as the result of historically contextualized equivocal and multidirectional construction. Enzo Traverso's definition of History as a "battlefield" highlights the way in which any stability is provisional at best, even if collective memory/ cultural memory (ritualized celebrations/ commemorations and monuments) of events from a (sometimes not so) distant past can provide an appearance of stabilized meaning. As for the documentaries *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura*, they make a conscious, pointed use of photographs as particular "instruments of remembrance" (Hirsch 2012a, p. 22), as they deliberately convoke members of the community (political, social, national but also international) to welcome the political and ideological struggles as well as the violence and violations of human rights within the context of these families' histories as part of, following Guzmán one last time, the nation's family album. This is so not so much in spite of but precisely because of the fact that there is no fixed truth, and memory is always already secondary revision.

Thus, memory work can be understood, on the one hand, as a process of unearthing forgotten, misremembered and repressed events, actions or agents; on the other hand, it is also – it cannot help but *be* – a further instance of forgetting, misremembrance, or repression. Far from a fatalism, this represents a condition of possibility for memories and memory work. In *Luz Obscura*, Álvaro draws on the ground the layout of the house in which he grew up with his siblings, grandparents and uncle. It is a rare moment of spontaneity, traced in the camera movement as it attempts to keep up with Álvaro as he moves through rubble, on the grounds of where the house, since demolished, then stood. Seemingly unhappy with his first attempt of capturing the layout of the family home, Álvaro takes some steps to have another go. His is also an exercise that, in a documentary structured around carefully framed and static long shots of landscapes and photographs, acts as a moment of liberation through a mediated, creative engagement with the past. In *Repare bem*, when prompted to think about her father and what she would do if she could

go back in time, Eduarda moves back to very familiar territory: “Me deixa alguma coisa, me deixa fotos, me deixa... me deixa alguma coisa que me conte quem é você” [Leave me something, leave me some photos, leave me... leave me something that can tell me who you are]. Eduarda makes up for the scarcity in objects which can tell her about her father with an imaginative investment on her father's mugshot: in her own drawings based on the photograph, she concedes to have slightly softened the harsh expression and presented an idealized view; she will also candidly discuss her photoshopping of the mugshot, offsetting the weathering caused by time while simultaneously erasing her inscription of “papá”. Such an erasure can be argued to normalize the photo both as a mugshot and as a family photo; Eduarda’s engagement strongly suggests an anti-fetishization of the photo, even when photos take such a central role.

Viewers would do well to take heed of the call for a closer, discerning observation that is issued from the titles of *Repare bem* and *Luz obscura*. For it is not just a question of remembering the past, or just looking at the past that the photographs seem to capture; rather, it is an appeal to revisit it and uncover that which is obscure or not immediately apparent. To remember is to contribute towards giving direction and meaning in the battlefield of history. The first step is to look back, as in Vonnegut’s apology for Lot’s wife, to look back to the political Sodoms and Gomorrahs marked for destruction, to “look back where all those people and their homes had been” (Vonnegut 2000, p. 16).

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