



Memory and identity: "Goat marked for death"

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ABSTRACT

The tense and violent climate in the rural area of Paraíba, from the 1950s onwards, was intense, to the point of becoming a documentary film. Thus, this article addresses some issues related to the relevance of the memory and identity of those people based on the documentary film directed by filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho, which was based on the life of João Pedro Teixeira and the Peasant League of Sapé. To this end, the text was discussed by Joël Candau, a theorist who addresses the issues of memory and identity.

Keywords: Tense and violent atmosphere, Documentary film.

1 INTRODUCTION

The agrarian question has always existed in Brazil, generating endless disputes, especially those involving peasants and landowners in republican times. When we go back to the 1950s, we have the fuse of this crisis, mainly caused by the changes that occurred in the countryside, due to mechanization, to what we call the modernization of agriculture.

Another aggravating factor of the crisis occurred with the implementation of sugarcane cultivation on several fronts, with the Northeast region, the former place of sugarcane cultivation, being the pivot. Thus, the evictions of the peasants from the land took place, due to the *foro*, a system that used the exchange of cultivating the land, while paying a fixed amount in kind to the owner of the land.

In view of this, there were several mobilizations in the countryside, among them, the creation of charitable associations, with the purpose of providing and serving the most needy, those whose work was linked to the land. With this, it was possible to make demands, because there was still no Rural Worker Statute, created only on March 2, 1963, although it did not meet the real needs faced by those workers at the time.

Faced with these scenarios of violence in the countryside, having together with it the creation of the Peasant League of Sapé, which referred to the memory of the first leagues that were created in 1940 by the communists and, in this context, the death of one of the leaders of those people, João Pedro Teixeira, occurred, it is in this context that the filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho, inspired by the tragedy, he had the happy idea of creating a documentary film that would be based on the life and murder of the peasant leader entitled: "Goat Marked for Death".¹

¹ We emphasize that part of the introduction can be recognized in the research of Juliana Alves. ALVES, Juliana Ferreira. 40f.



2 SO DOES THE STORY BEGIN?

He had been warned that they were going to persecute him. He had once witnessed, with his wife, a sinister round of their home. Perhaps he knew everything, but he had learned from the revolutionary poetry of the world that it is better to die knowing than to live deceived. [...] An idealist, he never understood in his agile intelligence and his correct reasoning, how all the lands of the Várzea da Paraíba belonged only to owners who could be counted on their fingers and hands. And so many landless men, and so many afflicted men, and so many hungry men! He had dreamed of agrarian reform, but he did not think of revising the statutes of the land wielding a sickle or a blunderbuss, the attitude of the desperate. He appealed only to the organization of peasant opinion, of the opinion of the countryside, because in organized opinion of the people, everything else would be disorganized. [...] Dreamed. He would pay for the crime of having dreamed. His dream was a dangerous vision of freedom. The landlords cannot understand that the hearts of the humble can nest beautiful dreams. (A UNIÃO NEWSPAPER, April 5, 1962).

It is at this moment that we resort to Joel Candau's theory, since, when we talk about João Pedro Teixeira and the cinematographic production, we refer to the memory and identity of a people, of a place, however, although we do not deny the struggle of the peasants of Paraíba to exercise the right over the land, we have to remember the construction of this memory and identity. Thus, when they fought for rights, as in the case of the peasants, they sought to find answers in a past, a memory, a place in which they idealized.

For Joël Candau, identity and memory are essentially inseparable in their social and cultural relations:

Memory, at the same time that it shapes us, is also shaped by us. This perfectly sums up the dialectic of memory and identity that come together, mutually nourish each other, and support each other to produce a life trajectory, a story, a myth, a narrative. (CANDAU, 2021, p.16).

In the face of this, the peasant is the fruit of a memorable time, the Marxist struggle or Marxist paradigm of the present, which seeks to intervene in the society of its time, to change its place of speech and memory, to produce a new identity history, the mill of revolution is the transformation of the peasant deprived of property into a hero of struggle. The figure of the oppressive landowner of the times of colonial Brazil was still rooted in the memory of those people, oppressed in their impoverished origin by the representation of the former plantation owner, now the landowner.

When we work with memory, we must look at the history of the writing of the producers of History, so we have as an example the work of Manuel Correia de Andrade, while writing the preface to the work of Fernando de Azevedo in the 1980s, refers to the 1950s and 1960s and demonstrates the spirit of that time:

The oppression of rural workers, especially peasants in Brazil, has developed since the colonial period, with the humble resisting direct dispossession in their tabas - indigenous -, organizing black

The documentary “Cabra marcado para morrer” and the construction of the history of the peasant league of Sapé. [manuscript]. Final paper (Graduation in History) State University of Paraíba. Guarabira - UEPB, 2014 [...] "*Which approaches the Peasant League of Sapé from a process of construction of a historical memory for the movement, which began in the 1960s and was interrupted by the military coup in 1964, being reopened in 1980*".



quilombos or transforming themselves into bandits - analysis of Lampião's epic - or fanatics - episodes of straws and cauldron, among others. They were spontaneous revolts, without a well-defined ideology, although always with respect for social justice, which were repressed with violence and refinement of perversity².

So, it is the fabrication of the peasant hero, João Pedro Teixeira that becomes the memory and identity of the struggle, it was necessary to have a trigger, a fracture in time, the appropriate space for the construction of that unfortunate story, for the filmmaker Eduardo Coutinho to understand the guiding thread of his filmic script, the activist leader, dead under the oppression of the landowner, now he gave life to the documentary "Goat marked to die".

The activist and leader becomes the representation of monumentality and martyrdom executed, now the peasant movement has a reference, something that could cling to in that moment of pain. The documentary film conceived by Eduardo Coutinho is the expression of pain transformed into a representative figure of the charismatic leader, and can refer us to what Le Goff (1996) states to be:

The monument, in the traditional sense, is a work built to go beyond the present and transmit to posterity the memory of a person or fact. If we look for the philological origins, we will see that monument is a noun that comes from the verb *monere* which means "to make remembrance", "to make remember". [...] "The monument is a sign of the past, [...] The monument is everything that can evoke the past, perpetuate the memory", the construction of individuals-monuments represents a privileged object in the study of the constitution of contemporary collective memory³.

The monumentalist and filmic memory created around the representation of João Pedro Teixeira is the object of worship of those suffering people and, now, being transformed into a documentary vision and with scripts, it allowed the memory of pain to bring encouragement to suffering and the possibility of building a history in those lands of latifundia.

3 LIGHT, CAMERA, ACTION

The fiction film, begun in 1964, shot in 35mm, black and white, without simultaneous sound recording, with non-professional actors, predominance of fixed shots and hieratic staging, would be resumed as a documentary, in 16mm, color, with direct sound, camera in hand, and agile style close to that of a ⁴reportage.

The 1960s, the revolution was knocking on the door, encompassed an artistic production increasingly marked by this perspective. The novelty of the set is not the thematic angle itself. The novelty was, rather, the presentiment that there, in the struggle for land, in the exploitation of labor in the countryside, in extreme

² ANDRADE, Manuel Correia Apud AZEVEDO, Fernando Antônio de. *As Ligas Camponesas*. Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Paz e Terra, 1982. p. 12.

³ LE GOFF, Jacques. *História e Memória*. 4 a Ed. Campinas/SP: Editora da Unicamp, 1996. p. 535.

⁴ ESCOREL, Eduardo. *Triunfo e tormento*. In: OHATA, Milton (org.) Eduardo Coutinho. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2013, p.486.



misery, was the main point of tension in Brazil, and that, consequently, the future would be born from there – as suggested by the striking verse reiterated in *God and the Devil in the Land of the Sun* (1964): "the hinterland will become the sea/ the sea will become the hinterland". The geographical, social, and historical fraction focused on the works gained the status of a reduced image of the country – whether its face of perpetual barbarism, or the horizon of transformation that our class struggle sprang from the earth⁵ presented.

The biennium was 1963-1964, a period that marked cinema in the country. Among these we find at least four decisive films that were being gestated and produced in the short time leading up to the coup d'état of April 1964. The interesting thing to think about is that all of them were interested in a critical figuration of the recondite margins of Brazil, in which the geography of the hinterland, extreme misery, class struggle, messianism and spasms of revolt for the land coalesced into a mass of their own and, at that moment, unavoidable to understand the boiling land that the country had become (TOLEDO, 2021).

We have the *break* (pause) consequence of the military dictatorship of 1964, and the recordings of the film "Goat marked to die" are interrupted, due to the fierce persecution that those people would face for that hard blow that the nation suffered. Now, it was time to flee! An escape no longer from the conditions that plagued those places, but from the persecution of the military, who attributed to these peasant leaders as communist revolutionaries, the Cuban guerrillas of the Paraíba hinterland.

Although the abrupt interruption of the film's recordings caused the dispersion of the main actors, such as Elizabeth Teixeira, who would play herself, widow of João Pedro Teixeira, other times were being prepared, as in the speeches written by João Pedro Teixeira, emerging in the midst of two distinct temporalities, that is, the 1960s, stolen by the military dictatorship, and then in the 1980s, the recent past.

In the 1960s, its emergence was linked to the politics of production of the peasant subject and in the 1980s, its history began to be written again and had the function of serving as a means of promoting a rescue of the past, a term that historians do not like to use, as well as a possibility of bringing the history of the Peasant Leagues back. re-elaborating forms of continuity⁶.

In 1981, Eduardo Coutinho meets Marta in a bar in the Baixada Fluminense in Rio de Janeiro, she is one of Elizabeth Teixeira's daughters, and he had already recovered the material that was seized in 1964, from the first recordings, and sees again the possibility of resuming them. Thus, we could say, the survivors of that period, such as Elizabeth Teixeira herself, who lived in hiding in Rio Grande do Norte using the false name of Marta.

⁵ TOLEDO, Paulo Bio. Modos de conexão popular no cinema brasileiro pré-64: considerações sobre Vidas secas, os fuzis e o inacabado Cabra marcado para morrer. Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros, Brasil, n. 80, p. 55-67, dez. 2021, p. 57

⁶ MUNIZ, Roberto Silva. 200f. A Fabricação de João Pedro Teixeira: como o Herói Camponês. Dissertação (Mestrado em História) - Universidade Federal de Campina Grande, Centro de Humanidades — Campina Grande, 2010, p.24.



The emotion is born from this parallel: the interrupted film completes itself against winds and tides, in a way coincides with the woman of fiber who, after eating the bread that the devil kneaded, meets her family again, reassumes her real name and reaffirms her conviction⁷.

And, now returning to the period of 1981, Eduardo Coutinho returns to the unfinished material to conduct what is perhaps his most important documentary, talking about the death of João Pedro Teixeira, the "Goat marked to die", and which premiered in 1984.

At the beginning of the film, fragments of the 1963 script are projected. It is possible to notice, in the passages of the text, an epic-popular structure, also derived from the poem, such as the presence of a narrator, noted as "cantador". He is an internal narrator of the film, who was the one who would probably make the connections between the fictional and documentary perspectives. There is no record of this narrative structure operating, that is, scenes in which this "singer" appears have not been recovered. Its insertion in the script, however, gives clues to the inventiveness that that project contained (TOLEDO, 2021).

4 MOVIE SCENES: "Goat Marked for Death" – 1964/1984

1 – Scenes from the Movie (1964)



Elizabeth Teixeira and her children in the film *Cabra marcado para morrer*, by Eduardo Coutinho. This is one of the scenes recorded in 1964, as foreseen in the original script that the IMS now releases in e-book, and included in the documentary released in 1984. Eduardo Coutinho Collection/ IMS⁸

⁷ SHWARZ, Roberto. O fio da meada. In: OHATA, Milton (org.). Eduardo Coutinho. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2013, p.460

⁸ "The film imagined back then survived both in the shot scenes (it is estimated that 40% of the text was filmed, and some scenes were included in the documentary released in 1984), as well as in the script typed by machine and with handwritten notes by the filmmaker." IMS. Available at: <https://ims.com.br/2022/09/30/ims-lanca-roteiro-original-de-cabra-marcado-para-morrer/>. Accessed on: Aug 06. 2023.



2 – Photographs (1984)



Peasant memories and identities.

Filming began in February 1964. Coutinho intended to tell the story of João Pedro Teixeira, leader of the peasant league of Sapé, in Paraíba, who was murdered in 1962. He didn't want professional actors: for the characters to be played by the peasants themselves. Seventeen years later, Coutinho returns to the region, manages to find Elizabeth, through the eldest son, Abraão, investigates the fate of the other ten children and all those involved in the project. It shows the originals filmed so long ago, the peasants rejoice with their faces, younger, live the emotion of recognition and the game of identifications. Twenty years later, Coutinho concludes his film, an epic told with clarity, patience and perseverance, by someone who trusts in work and days. An original experience in Brazilian cinematography. (ROBERTO MELLO, *Jornal do Brasil*, Jan. 1985).

5 CONCLUSION

Embarking on a final journey in search of Elizabeth Teixeira's children scattered in different places throughout Brazil - as payment for the price of militancy - Eduardo Coutinho's documentary film builds the memory and identity of those people, does what seemed to be impossible: it further expands the mosaic of the agrarian question now not only in the Northeast, created in the monumentality of representations around João Pedro Teixeira, "Goat marked to die" allowing us to see other regions of Brazil.

The documentary film places us as true accomplices in this search, we find ourselves discovering new nuances for the story of Elizabeth Teixeira, and of her entire generation, understanding in a broad way what all the discussion that the documentary film and the characters propose means, and what are the real consequences of this.



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