

**Narratives of Fear: Constructions of Otherness in Contemporary  
Brazilian Cinema *O homem do ano***

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**Resumo:** Nas últimas décadas do século vinte e na década inicial do século vinte e um, as narrativas sobre a violência têm proliferado dentro da produção cinematográfica latino americana. Com a projeção da violência na tela, filmes como *Amores perros* (México, 2000) e *Cidade de Deus* (Brasil, 2002) têm alcançado grande êxito de bilheteria nacional e internacional. Estas produções cinematográficas parecem dialogar com as notícias em primeiro plano das transmissões televisivas e dos jornais que comunicam diariamente um sem fim de histórias sobre a violência metropolitana. A episteme mediática, desta forma, cria um discurso de exclusão que serve para validar a negação de direitos humanos aos grupos marginalizados da sociedade.

Dentro do espetáculo visual contemporâneo, quais são as narrativas que os filmes que abordam a criminalidade constroem e como dialogam com as percepções da violência e as suas origens? Este ensaio considera como *O homem do ano* (Fonseca 2003) critica o ímpeto da sociedade dominante de negar os direitos humanos quando não são pertinentes às classes altas. Tanto a sociedade hegemônica e como a mídia posicionam esta negação como uma resposta necessária à escalada da violência dentro do espaço urbano. O trabalho de Fonseca questiona o papel das elites na proliferação da violência e também na construção dos grupos sócio-econômicos não dominantes como bode expiatório pela mídia.

**Palavras chave:** Cinema da Retomada, violência, mídia, criminalidade, segurança

**Abstract:** In the final decades of the twentieth century and the initial decade of the twenty-first century, narratives of violence have proliferated within Latin American cinematic production. Films such as the Mexican *Amores perros* (Iñárritu 2000) and the Brazilian *Cidade de Deus* (Meirelles 2002) have become both national and international box office blockbusters by projecting the spectacle of violence upon the silver screen. These cinematic works appear to dialogue with newspaper and television headlines that broadcast daily what, at times, seems an ad nauseam repetition of accounts of metropolitan violence. This mediatic episteme in turn creates a discourse of exclusion that then serves to validate the negation of human rights to disenfranchised social groups.

Within the visual spectacle of contemporary media and film, what are the narratives that crime films construct and how do they dialogue with social perceptions of violence and its origins? This paper considers how *O homem do ano* (Fonseca 2003) offers a critique of dominant society's willingness to forfeit human rights when they pertain to individuals who do not belong to the upper and middle classes. Rather, hegemonic society and the media posit these transgressions as necessary responses to the escalation of violence within the urban sphere. In this manner, Fonseca's work questions the bourgeoisie plays in the proliferation of said violence as well as the media's scapegoating of marginal groups within this context.

**Keywords:** Cinema da Retomada, violence, media, criminality, security

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On July 23, 1993 eight street children were murdered on the front steps of the Igreja da Candelária (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil). Two months later, twenty-one individuals were massacred in the carioca *favela* of Vigário Geral, also in Rio de Janeiro. All twenty-nine deaths were attributed to (vigilante) police forces and were considered, in part, a retaliation for the *arrastões* of 1992 and 1993 in Rio. These disturbances of the middle and upper class beach enclaves of the carioca *Zona Sul* exacerbated already prevalent feelings of insecurity within the city's hegemonic social sectors. It also led to increased police brutality. As a consequence, the hope that the recent democratization of the country would usher in an era of respect for citizen's rights was effectively undermined by the clash between dominant and marginal social segments epitomized by the *arrastões* and the police-led massacres.

The *arrastões*, the massacre in Vigário Geral, and the killing of the street children on the steps of Candelária Church were all taken up by the Brazilian media, and reinforced a "Culture of Fear" (Soares, 1993, Herschmann, 1997) that infected the carioca imaginary of the early 1990's. According to Luiz Eduardo Soares, as quoted by Zuenir Ventura, the public conferred a heightened importance to these three incidences because they represented "a violação de três espaços míticos: o espaço sagrado, o espaço doméstico e o espaço do convívio democrático, a praia" (Ventura, p. 88). The media's relentless attention to the invasion of these mythical and purportedly safe spaces cemented a "culture of fear" into the dominant public's imaginary. Hilda Maria Gaspar Pereira, referring to Soares' work on violence from this period, states:

Rio de Janeiro has apparently become one of the most violent cities in the world. Yet a closer examination may reveal a gap between the reality and the perception given by the national and international media... To some extent the Brazilian media has been sensationalist when dealing with the subject of crime. It seems that the aspect of time is neglected in accounts. Consequently the daily addition of horror stories has provoked a snowball effect, inflating society's fears. (Gaspar Pereira, p. 4)

As indicated by Gaspar Pereira, violence, especially violence associated with lower socio-economic sectors, has become the object of a perverse voyeuristic pleasure that reinforces prevalent stereotypes associated not only with class but also with race and, finally, with questions of lower-class masculinity within the Brazilian hegemonic imaginary.

The lives of those who inhabit the limits of "legitimate" society has become a prevalent subject matter not only within the headlines of the local and national news outlets, but also is a central theme of the films of Brazil's Cinema

da Retomada. Though the Cinema da Retomada is marked by a "great diversity of aesthetic proposals" (Randall Johnson following the Oct. 27 of *Madame Satã* (2002) at the University of California, Los Angeles with director Karim Aïnouz), the films *do draw* attention to the need to address the relevance and the stereotyping of racial, gender and class identities in the debates over social change in Latin America.

According to José Álvaro Moisés: "The country [Brazil] understands, more every day, how important it is for us to look at ourselves in a cinematic 'mirror.' We realize that we need that fundamental function of self-identification which is made possible by the projection of our common experiences on a screen, to understand each other better and to define with more clarity what we want for ourselves in the new millennium" (Moisés, p. 5). In other words, cinema creates a social space that is a two-way street in which on the one hand society, both real and imagined, is "virtualized" through the projection of a symbolic social order upon the screen and "actualized" as this mediatic social order influences "real" individuals' understandings and engagement of society (Diken and Bagge Laustsen 2008). In this manner, cinema is transformed into a cipher through which the masses are introduced to social issues and interpret society (Deleuze 1989). Specifically, within the Cinema da Retomada, what stands out is the number of crime films that have been produced over the first decade of the twenty-first century.<sup>2</sup> Crime films both tap into and inform the media's depiction of violence and criminality, together these mass mediatic forums influence both individual and socially constructed ideas concerning the prevalence of crime, the individuals or groups who are responsible for criminal acts, the threat to oneself in both physical and psychological terms. Crime films dialogue with and help to formulate "the myths that a society lives by, as if these myths referred to some natural, unproblematic 'reality'" (Kaplan, p. 12-13). In this context, crime films hold a somewhat privileged position in the molding of the attitudes and assumptions that guide the way a society functions at the material and ideological levels, in this particular case, Brazil.

Is the Cinema da Retomada representing "common experiences" or is it projecting from the celluloid cultural paradigms that reinforce the socio-economic divisions that mark the national community consequently furthering

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<sup>2</sup> A few of the more salient examples are *Bufo & Spallanzani* (Brant 2001), *Cidade de Deus* (Lund, Meirelles 2002), *Contra todos* (Moreira 2003), *Carandiru* (Babenco 2003), *O invasor* (Brant 2003), *O homem que copiava* (Furtado 2003), *Quase dois irmãos* (Murat 2004), *Cidade Baixa* (Machado 2005), *O crime delicado* (Brant 2005), *Tropa de elite* (Padilha 2007), *Linha de passé* (Salles, Thomas 2008), *Meu nome não é Johnny* (Lima 2008), and *Última parada 174* (Barreto 2008).

the construction of a society of walls?<sup>3</sup> José Henrique Fonseca's 2003 feature length film, *O homem do ano* brings under the purview of the camera questions of violence, masculinity, socio-economic divisions, and the media, questioning which groups are responsible for increased societal violence and what are the motivating factors of said acts.<sup>4</sup>

*O homem do ano* takes place in the Baixada Fluminense, in the periphery of Rio de Janeiro, and narrates the story of Máiquel (Murilo Benício) who, at the start of the movie, is unemployed and believes “Antes da gente nascer, alguém, talvez Deus, define direitinho como vai foder a tua vida. Isso era minha teoria. Deus só pensa no homem na largada. Quando decide se sua vida vai ser boa ou ruim.” After losing a soccer bet with his friends, Máiquel must make good on his wager and dye his hair blond. Upon returning to the bar that he and his friends frequent to show that he has paid his dues, Máiquel gets into an argument with Suel (Wagner Moura), the local drug dealer who runs the lower-class neighborhood in which the two characters reside, challenging him to a duel. The following day Máiquel shoots Suel in the square in front of the bar. To his surprise, the community instead of punishing him as a murderer, begins to shower him with gifts. He receives praise and respect for ridding the streets of the human “lixo.” Máiquel becomes famous in his neighborhood as a vigilante. His fame spreads throughout the Baixada Fluminense, reaching the elites of the area, including Dr. Carvalho (Jórgue Dória) a dentist and representative of the bourgeoisie. The doctor hires Máiquel to kill Ezequiel (Nill Marcondes), a supposed honor shooting to avenge his familial pride. According to the dentist, Ezequiel raped his daughter Gabriela (Mariana Ximenes), but the police refuse to do anything about it.

Suel's and Ezequiel's assassinations set in motion a series of “revenge” killings that serve to establish Máiquel as an unofficial law-enforcer within the community. Once his fame is consolidated, Máiquel enters into a deal with Carvalho and several of his associates including Zílmar (Agildo Ribeiro), Sílvio (José Wilker), and the local police inspector, Delegado Santana (Carlo Mossy). This group of upper-middle class men become the silent backers of the security

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<sup>3</sup> Teresa Caldeira in *City of Walls* studies the transformation of São Paulo into an urban space divided and dominated by enclosures, walls, boundaries and distances. According to the Brazilian anthropologist, this Brazilian city is more divided now than it was in the 1970's. Her text, after establishing how the residents of the city talk about crime, then goes on to plot the rise in violence in the megalopolis and finally discusses how the city itself has been divided as a result.

<sup>4</sup> José Henrique Fonseca is the son of Rubem Fonseca, an author well known for his crime novels. Beyond this, Rubem Fonseca and fellow writer Patrícia Melo wrote the screenplay of the movie. Patrícia Melo wrote the novel *O matador* (1999) upon which the screenplay is based.

firm SESEPA that Máiquel operates and that "protects" local businesses.<sup>5</sup> After opening the firm, Máiquel is elected "O homem do ano" by the local business community. As his role as a vigilante grows, the ensuing power spirals beyond his control and the firm as well as his personal life implode.

The choice to set the film in the geo-political space of the Baixada Fluminense links this fictional story to the larger metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro and the history of violence that has enveloped it in recent times. Within hegemonic understandings of Rio de Janeiro, the Baixada Fluminense is traditionally considered a region that is plagued by violence to a higher degree than many other areas. Consider for a moment the historical developments of the Baixada Fluminense during the later half of the twentieth century in relation to the metropolitan center of Rio de Janeiro. Previous to 1975 the Baixada Fluminense was part of the state of Rio de Janeiro, separate from the Federal District (1889-1960) and the State of Guanabara (1960-1975). It was only in the 1970's, when the States of Guanabara and Rio de Janeiro merged that the Baixada Fluminense officially became a peripheral community of the Região Metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro. This being said, the urbanization process that culminated in the 1970's actually began in the 1930's. However, with the annexation of the Baixada Fluminense to the metropolitan core, a marked shift occurred in how the area was classified and represented. This shift also coincided with newfound interests in urban studies. In turn, many of the academic works that focused on urban planning and regional studies from that time period inserted the Baixada Fluminense into a center-periphery binary within discussions and understandings of the metropolitan region. By the late 1970's both academic and popular narratives of violence seemed to engulf the Baixada Fluminense as this binary was reconstructed more generally as a means to understand the region and its relationship to the urban center of Rio de Janeiro (Enne 2004). This fact was made clear in articles such "Câncer Vizinho," an editorial from 1977 in "O Jornal do Brasil." According to José Cláudio Souza Alves, since the late 1960's rising violence has been a mainstay of the region. What can be called into question, as concerns this violence, is to whom or what groups the acts of violence associated with the region have been attributed, be it execution squads, individual attacks, drug cartel violence, etc. According to the Souza Alves, what is evident in the acts of violence that have plagued the region is that: "Encontra-se a constituição do poder e do Estado calcada em empresas bem sucedidas de violência privada e ilegal" (Souza Alves, p. 24). In other words, while acts of violence may be attributed to rogue

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<sup>5</sup> Both Santana and Carvalho are from the upper-middle class, demonstrated by their ability to install home security systems, own businesses, take vacations as well as the general décor of their homes

groups or marginal individuals, the underlying motivational force for said violence is a political system that is constructed and premised around privatized violence. Again I look to Souza Alves: “Estado, sistema de justiça, setores econômicos e processos eleitorais associam-se na construção desta forma de poder extremamente permeável ao uso da violência e àqueles que a empregam (Souza Alves, p. 25). *O homem do ano* unearths the political links between violence and power, questioning dominant mediatic representations and hegemonic societal narratives that posit the marginal male individual as the primary perpetrator of urban violence, especially violence directed against the upper and the middle classes.

Returning to the previously mentioned massacre at Vigário Geral that occurred on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August, 1993, I would like to note a minor yet significant incident that following this brutal execution. A representative of the federal government, during a live interview on the radio, located the occurrence in the favela of Baixada Fluminense (Souza Alves, p. 14). The geographical relocation of the event from the favela Vigário Geral to the Baixada Fluminense signals a geo-epistemological issue: “Este equívoco, por sua vez, revela o problema dos limites dessa região. O aspecto geográfico acaba se relacionando com o político e com o social na construção de fronteiras não muito precisas” (Souza Alves p. 14). This rewriting of geographical boundaries vis-à-vis socio-economic and political divisionary lines signals an understanding of the multiple frontiers that divide Rio de Janeiro and other metropolitan centers of Brazil. The re-mapping of Rio de Janeiro by the aforementioned state representative transforms the Baixada Fluminense into an epicenter of violence. Beyond this, this rewriting of the urban space negates a differentiation of individual favelas and bairros of lower economic means, collapsing them into one homogenous, violent mass. It also illustrates how, among the many favelas and bairros of the city, the Baixada Fluminense occupies a privileged position within the imaginary of Rio de Janeiro’s elites as an epicenter of violence.

*O homem do ano* places itself in direct dialogue with the turbulent history of the region. The Baixada Fluminense has, throughout much of its history been considered a marginal territory rife with violence, political corruption and extermination squads. Understandings of the violence that have plagued this region throughout the twentieth century and into the present period are in large part guided by the belief that is held by many Brazilians that associates violence with poverty rather than with “a construção de trajetórias políticas calcadas tanto no medo como no clientelismo. Mandatos populares de matadores surgirão assim, não como expressão da barbárie de uma sociedade à margem da civilização e impregnada por uma cultura da violência, mas como

possibilidades historicamente construídas pelas relações de poder” (Souza Alves, p. 6). The historical legacy of violence that surrounds understandings of the Baixada Fluminense underscores the continuation of political ambitions that are founded upon violence and are then posited as acts that originate from the lower classes and racial minority groups.

Fonseca’s film brings the socio-economic relations of power between men of different social strata into the purview of the camera, questioning the location of the barbarous elements of society and where the culture of violence that afflicts both the region and the country originally stems from.

Although *O homem do ano* hones in on the metropolitan center of Rio de Janeiro and its peripheral regions, violence and the construction of the poor marginal male as the scapegoat for violent occurrences is not exclusive to this region. Take for example the recent case of Wallace Souza in the city of Manaus. Mr. Souza, a state legislator from Amazonas, was the previous host of the television crime show *Canal livre* that methodically railed against the growing violence within the city of Manaus as well as the broader nation.<sup>6</sup> The ex-television host has been charged with drug trafficking, gang formation and weapons possession, and stands to face charges on five counts of homicide. According to reports, *Canal livre*’s host ordered the assassination of at least five individuals in an effort to substantiate his claims that the city was being overrun by violence, to eliminate his competition and to boost ratings of his program through the televising of first hand footage that was recorded within moments of the crimes and the arrival of the police.

Returning to the cinematic work in question, in terms of cinematography, *O homem do ano* is narrated from within, presenting the perspective of MáiqueL who, through a combination of first hand narration and voiceovers, explains his initiation into the world of vigilante justice. The first hand narration inserts the viewers into the action, allowing them a "direct" experience vis-à-vis the trials and tribulations of the protagonist. *O homem do ano* follows in the tradition of many recent films such as *Amores perros* (Iñárritu 2000), *Cidade de Deus* (Meirelles 2002), and *O invasor* (Brant 2002) and their use of filming techniques such as jump cuts, steady pans, and various other "hip" cinematic techniques that fragment the visual narrative. These stylistic tools approximate the film to the modern day video-clip, with a high degree of editing, creating a fast-paced narrative that emulates the frenetic pace of life in modern metropolitan centers of Brazil. Furthermore, the video clip style filming and editing of *O homem do ano* augments the internal tension within the narrative and creates dramatic

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<sup>6</sup> Canal livre was started by Mr. Souza in 1989 and continued through 2008.

friction between the film and the spectator. At the same time that Fonseca's film undermines a sense of stability through the continual rupturing of the visual narrative, the rapid movements of the camera in tandem with editing serve to convey the mental turmoil of Máiquel, creating a parallel between the external world and the emotional instability of the protagonist.

Additionally, in terms of filming, the selection of a color palette marked by the use of saturated hues creates a visual experience that pulls the viewer into the scenes. This becomes all the more apparent because Fonseca manipulates the background of many scenes through the use of colored light. Saturated hues of blue, green, yellow and red flood the background creating unnatural lighting situations that meld into the visual narrative. On a purely aesthetic level, these colors serve to animate the scenes, generating more visually engaging shots.

On a psychological level, Fonseca both plays with the normal psychological responses that the viewer has to warm and cool colors. On the one hand he infuses a limited number of scenes with warm hues (red, orange, yellow), such as those that occur in Carvalho's home, Erica's (Natália Lage) first visit to Marlênio's (André Barros) church as he preaches a sermon of fire and brimstone, as well as scenes shot in the home of Cledir's mother (Marilu Bueno). A warm color palette is normally associated with excitement and energy, but in this case the activity conjured by these colors is inserted into spaces inhabited by individuals who hold sway over Máiquel. Contrary to the warm colors, a cool color palette (blue, green, violet) predominates in the background of the majority of the movie. While cool colors typically suggest a feeling of ease and relaxation, many of the scenes seem to employ a break with the psychological response naturally associated with this color palette. Take for example the evening when Neno (Marcelo Biju) kills Robinson (Perfeito Fortuna). After news arrives of Robinson's death and all the men go back to the chop-shop, the background of the space is flooded in blue and green. The coolness of the hues create an unnatural ease that contrasts directly with the tension of the action: Máiquel amped up on cocaine, the ambience charged with the desire to avenge Robinson's death and the subsequent killing of Neno and Pereba (Guilherme Estevam). The fact that Fonseca inundates the backgrounds with color stimulates the visual engagement of the viewer, an invitation to experience the, at times overwhelming, deluge of stimuli that confront the protagonist, creating a visual experience that attempts to parallel the action of the film. Color is further emphasized by the utilization of hard lighting that adds crispness to the textures and sharpens edges.



The use of hard lighting, colored light and saturated hues work in tandem with the framing of the shots throughout the film. In terms of Fonseca's decisions concerning the framing of the scenes, the camera rarely pulls back to wide or full shots. Rather the film is composed primarily of straight-on medium, close-up and extreme close-up shots, framing the characters from the waist or neck up. This has the effect of pulling the viewer into the personal space of the protagonist(s), using at times optically subjective shots, an invitation to experience the action from the character's perspective. Máiquel, particularly through the use of extreme close-ups, achieves central prominence throughout the film. According to “Hitchcock's rule,” the size of any object in a frame should be relative to its importance to the story.<sup>7</sup> The framing pulls the viewer beyond the physical actions of Máiquel and into his personal space, visually concentrating on the mental state of the character.<sup>8</sup>

Consider for a moment how framing serves to insert the viewer into the scene and introduce the viewer to Máiquel's emotional state when he arrives at the warehouse from which Caju (José Henrique Fonseca) deals arms. The *mise-en-scène* of Máiquel and Caju in the parts warehouse creates a virtually indefinable background of clutter against which Caju explains a multiplicity of firearms, their popularity and optimal use. Wires, belts, gears, engine blocks, electric motors and a variety of other parts clutter the background. These broken down pieces are stacked into every available space on large racks that line the walls and aisles. The background of these pieces is cast in blue and green hues, an ocean of confusion that drowns the protagonist. Máiquel, bleached platinum blond hair glowing, stares nervously at the weapons, his eyes shifting from side to side attempting to track them as Caju displays, cocks and whirls around his deadly products. Máiquel squints as Caju pulls out an AR-15 and then later unfolds the shoulder rest of an uzi. He winces when he pumps a 12-pump pistol (manufactured version of the sawed off shotgun). The camera registers the nervousness of Máiquel as it moves between the two characters in close-up answering shots. What the filming techniques bring to the fore is the anxiety of the protagonist as he delves into a sea of the unknown. The limited depth of field of the camera reflects / augments the confusion and claustrophobia of the space as well as the protagonist. Between the two individuals, a stream of lethal weapons ruptures the space. In each instance, the camera shifts from the firearm to Caju and Máiquel until finally at the end of

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<sup>7</sup> Truffaut, François. *Hitchcock, by Francois Truffaut with the collaboration of Helen G. Scott*. Simon and Schuster, New York. 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Due to the length and focus of this article, I will not compare the film to the Patricia Melo's novel *O matador* (1995) upon which it is based. This being said, I would like to signal that the visual narrative that Fonseca creates engages the development of the internal monologues of the protagonist in the novel.

the sequence Máiquel holds a 45mm semi-automatic pistol in his hand. Caju inquires anxiously: “Está sentindo a força? É como colocar uma coroa na cabeça.” Máiquel cracks a slight smirk as he stares down the barrel of the gun towards the camera. The fear and distress that was building throughout the scene seem to vanish. As the camera stares down the barrel, the depth of field elongates as Máiquel’s face fills the background. His face becomes almost drunk with the power of the weapon, the camera shifts slightly opening the depth of field into a dark nothingness, foreshadowing events to come. These filming techniques insert the viewer into the personal space and world of Máiquel. The viewer accompanies Máiquel as he spirals downward into the seedy world of murder and violence, visually experiencing the chaos and mental turbulence of the protagonist.

The film occurs almost exclusively within enclosed, controlled and limited spaces, from the small apartment of Máiquel to the automobile chop-shop that Marcão (Lázaro Ramos), Robinson (Perfeito Fortuna) and Galego (André Gonçalves) operate. Beyond this, the spaces seem to contract as the film progresses, constricting into the interior of automobiles, SESEPA’s office, Máiquel’s kitchen or the vestibule of the Igreja da Nossa Senhora das Penas. The film works with the framing of space to create a feeling of enclosure that also extends to spaces that would normally be viewed as open arenas, such as streets, squares, urban wastelands (terrenos baldios). For example, when Máiquel eliminates Pedrão (Romeu Evaristo) they drive him to these wastelands. An oil refinery rises above them in the background as they pull Pedrão from the car and force him to his knees. As the shot is fired that kills Pedrão, a clean single extreme close-up from the throat up focuses in on Máiquel as the background blurs and the sound of the shot reverberates. In this manner, the visual space shrinks around the protagonist and envelops him. In *O homem do ano*, framing progressively creates a sense of visual claustrophobia / spatial confinement.

Reflecting Gaspar Pereira's argument that hegemonic groups maintain a scopoc drive that fetishizes violence associated with lower socio-economic sectors, *O homem do ano* confers to the media a privileged position in relation to the production and consumption of images of violence. Throughout the narrative, Máiquel and his associates in SESPA collect the newspaper clippings of the killings that they are responsible for, pasting the articles into a binder, a trophy that Carvalho and his cronies marvel over. Headlines such as “Violência fez outras vítimas...,” “Tiroteio e morte em Ramos,” “Ladrão assalta a Caminho Aéreo Pão de Açúcar” declaim acts of violence in the Baixada Fluminense, Ramos and by extension in the rest of the metropolis. These articles attribute

the violence to marginais, quadrilhas, bandidos, ladrões and the turf wars, drug trade and balas perdidas that are associated with these groups in dominant media.

Claudio Beato contends that:

Ao contrário de temas como política, economia, educação, cultura ou ciência, esta [a violência e segurança pública] é uma área em que as redações não contam com muitos jornalistas especializados. Mesmo quando existem, raramente são qualificados para compreender o fenômeno da segurança e da violência em todas as suas nuances. Lugares comuns e chavões passam a servir como base de interpretação de fenômenos complexos e heterogêneos, reforçando ainda mais os inúmeros estereótipos existentes (Beato p. 35).

The media outlets peddle an unending barrage of headlines that narrate a vision of the urban space in decay, but this vision many of times only reinforces existing stereotypes and relies on “common sense” understandings of violence and its actors that circulate predominantly within the hegemonic classes. What we see in *O homem do ano* is that what these headlines construct as random acts of violence are actually the refined product of SESEPA that is sold to a consuming public whose fear stems in part from these same acts of violence. The power of the media and their stories to dialogue with, formulate, and manipulate understandings of events is a central theme of the film and one that attempts to question the construction and presentation of other mediatic narratives about violence and its actors, particularly the daily headlines of news outlets.

Consider for a moment the scene when Zílmara and Sílvio first meet Máiquel in Carvalho's home. As the four men discuss the current state of affairs within Brazil, i.e. their construction as citizens of fear,<sup>9</sup> they make reference to the incompetence of the police force to persecute the disenfranchised and supposedly criminal subjects that threaten the health and wealth, the need for more security, and the inability of the state to protect the

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<sup>9</sup> Susana Rotker coined the term "citizens of fear." Rotker contends that social practices are constructed around a generalized fear that shapes the "truths" of individual's daily lives. The bodies that inhabit the cityscape understand fear as an instinctive survival mechanism they use to guide the urban space. A daily portrait of life in these urban centers as beyond control dominates how these individuals understand the urban arena. The city becomes a text, a work of fear, in which the mass public consumes daily images, stories, and other representations of violence. Within these images there are few discernable narratives, but one that appears continually is that of the poor person as criminal. In this manner, violence rewrites the text of the city. According to Rotker, this violence "makes victims of us all, this undeclared civil war obliterates spaces of difference and differentiation, making all of us experience injustice, insecurity, and inequality" (Rotker, p. 18). This fear is then only heightened by media outlets that repeatedly feed into sensationalistic constructions of the poor, immigrants, etc as the source of crime.

hegemonic public. The dialogue invokes the actual events broadcast by the media of the kidnapping of Bus 174 by the street kid Sandro do Nascimento on June 12, 2000 that was televised live over a four and a half hour period to the Brazilian nation. Referencing this tragic event, Carvalho characterizes Sandro do Nascimento as a "crioulo enfurecido," evoking this term to posit him as a racialized social other. In an attempt to validate this stereotyping of the street kid, Carvalho asserts to his friends that Sandro himself, at one point during the events screams "Eu sou filho do demônio." This statement is meant to emphasize Carvalho's argument that criminals are not human beings, but rather the "redundant" that contaminates the urban landscape and therefore threatens the life / law and order of the upper and middle class citizens.<sup>10</sup>

Carvalho desires to segregate the lower classes from dominant society since, in his point-of-view, the former threatens the progress of the nation – formed by the latter. To this end, Carvalho utilizes the images broadcast by the media networks to reinforce the stereotypes that circulate within dominant society about the lower classes. This discourse is then employed to validate the denial of the civil and material "goods" to these groups, in effect negating them recognition as citizens.

Carvalho's discourse reflects the growing talk of the lack of security within the mass media and the government and the heightened sense of urgency with which this discussion is occurring. According to Cecília Coimbra in her study of *Operação Rio*:<sup>11</sup> “como sob novas maquiagens [...] os discursos sobre segurança pública [...] são profundamente influenciados pela Doutrina de Segurança Nacional - introduzida e enraizada em nosso cotidiano naqueles anos - e como, ao longo das décadas de 80 e 90, veio a ser criada uma outra Doutrina, voltada agora para as parcelas miseráveis de nossa população” (19). Coimbra indicates that there has been a shift from the repression of political dissident to a positing of the lower classes as the faction in need of control. After the country's redemocratization, the poor have been constructed as the subversive element that endangers the nation's "order and progress."

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<sup>10</sup> Modernization necessarily produces waste, both the refuse or byproducts of the manufacturing process (in the form of carcinogenic materials, contaminants and residues, cities of plastics and discarded items that overflow the world's landfills, not to mention the biological excrement that pollutes the waterways and lands of the world) as well as the human beings. According to Zygmunt Bauman: "The production of 'human waste,' or more correctly wasted humans (the 'excessive' and 'redundant,' that is the population of those who either could not or were not wished to be recognized or allowed to stay), is an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity" (Bauman 2004, p. 5).

<sup>11</sup> *Operação Rio* took place in 1994 and 1995. The local and military police occupied areas of Baixada Fluminense that were considered dangerous with the pretense of ending violence and drug trafficking in Rio.

Teresa Caldeira, in her book *City of Walls* (2000), discusses the rise in crime that has struck the urban center of São Paulo and how this has resulted in a general sense of fear that is embedded within a feeling of the loss and decay of a unified social fabric. It is from this feeling of helplessness in front of a crumbling social structure that crime is utilized to symbolically reorder / restructure a social episteme. This symbolic order is constructed around stereotypical categories that are formed and then employed as tools to order the world within a matrix of discriminatory practices.

In the framework of *O homem do ano*, Carvalho after establishing his argument that the city must be divided goes yet a step further. The doctor contends that delinquents are born with criminal impulses and, for this reason, they are ultimately not human beings. Carvalho states: "O bandido... corre solto. Eu sou a favor da pena de morte. Porque essa história de direitos humanos é uma piada. Porque eles não são humanos, os seqüestradores, os estupradores. Para mim, o sujeito já nasce com esses impulsos criminosos." These statements recall notions that were popular at the end of the nineteenth century, such as Darwin's and Francis Galton's theories on eugenics.<sup>12</sup> These same theories were later exploited by the Brazilian military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985.<sup>13</sup> The socially undesirable are posited within a medicalized discourse in which social sickness must be purged to allow for the advancement of the health of the national body. The words of Carvalho invoke these earlier treatises contending that "ordem e progresso" are to be achieved through the cleansing of society of those that are considered "infectious." For this reason, the dentist and his cronies consider Máiquel's vigilante work as "higiênico e patriótico."

One must also remember that when Carvalho and Máiquel originally meet, the dentist very clearly expresses his views about race, proudly stating

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<sup>12</sup> Medicalizing discourses that we see in the treatises and studies of nineteenth century Europe traversed the Atlantic and had a profound effect in Brazil. The "criminal," the "homosexual" as well as other social "deviants" became the location of perversion, bodies in need of study that were placed within the purview of science, quantifying and categorizing the "other's" material and symbolic body. At this same historical moment, Brazil was undergoing significant social transformations. In 1888, the *Lei Áurea* (Golden Law) abolished slavery. The same medical discourses that studied those who were considered social deviants were also employed to "understand" race. Darwinian ideas and Francis Galton's theories on eugenics were exploited by intellectuals of the epoch to promote the "whitening" of Brazil and attest to the detrimental influences and consequences of Afro-Brazilian elements within the society (Stam 1997).

<sup>13</sup> For example Sérgio Paranhos Fleury, a torturer during the military dictatorship, stated in an interview "O marginal é aquele cachorrinho que é mau caráter, indisciplinado, que não adianta educar" (Coimbra p. 84). What one may find disturbing is that these same arguments continue to reappear well into the eighties and beyond. According to Maurício Knobel, head of the UNICAMP department of psychiatry, in an interview with the newspaper *Estado de São Paulo* in 1981: "... a criminalidade tem origens patológicas e as condições que a sociedade oferece facilitam os portadores de problemas patológicos a externarem sua violência" (Coimbra p. 84).

that he is a racist, that all blacks and mulattos are criminals, and anyone who denies this is just scared to be honest due to international NGO's and their human rights campaigns. The linking of crime with race also connects transgression to questions of class, especially if we consider that in urban Brazil, fifty percent of households of color were poor in 1989 as compared to only twenty-two percent of white households (Telles, p. 112). *O homem do ano* connects these discourses with the current discussions within the media that revolve around public security, signaling the ongoing prevalence of an ideology that constructs the lower classes as the diseased edge of society.

*O homem do ano*, however, signals a gap between what Carvalho and his cronies propose as the root cause of the social maladies that afflict Brazil and the material reality that drives their beliefs. The spectator is lead to read this difference within the headlines of the news media, the talk of violence that inhabits both the public and private arenas, and lastly the reality (recreated on the silver screen) of those that perpetrate said violent acts. Upon the screen a collage of headlines and newspaper clippings are inter-woven within the narrative, visually exposing the fragments of these voices. The headlines of the local newspapers divulge the state of violence in Baixada Fluminense.

Beyond this, security and violence appear to be the primary topic of discussion within the general population, forming part of the conversations in the bars, homes and streets. However, what the spectator is forced to recognize is the double standard that hegemonic society employs in reference to the practice of violence. The violence that the lower classes utilize to attain a degree of material agency is construed as threatening democratic ideals, as injustices ravaged upon the middle and upper classes. However, the hegemonic groups resort to pre-modern violent measures when confronting those they consider responsible for these crimes.<sup>14</sup>

Consider for a moment that Zílmara, Sílvio, Carvalho, and Delegado Santana are the silent backers of the security firm SESEPA that Máiquel runs. The firm "protects" local businesses from the crime that plagues the city. However, Sesepe is responsible for some of the supposedly random crime that has surged in the neighborhood. This is transmitted in two ways through the film. Firstly, after having their security services turned down by several companies, Máiquel and several of his accomplices blackmail the same businesses they are hoping to protect, consequently creating the havoc and instilling the fear necessary for their economic aspirations to be realized.

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<sup>14</sup> See Foucault and his discussion of modern and premodern forms of punishment in *Discipline and Punish : The Birth of the Prison* (1973).

Beyond this, Máiquel and the security firm take the law into their own hands as vigilantes, assassinating those they consider to be "non-desirable" individuals, negating to them the possibility of participating in the democratic process i.e. a trial. This is, they resort to pre-modern form of punishment to achieve a simulacrum of a modern social order. *O homem do ano* highlights the irony in these actions, revealing the hypocrisy of the hegemonic groups that perpetrate these crimes.

*O homem do ano* reveals the circular nature of the relationship between the symbolic reality of the media and the material world. The media influences popular ideological constructions that guide daily discussions and understandings of violence. These same social constructs of criminality and / or other types of social otherness (gender, race, ethnicity) influence the representations of otherness in media. In the case of *O homem do ano*, the film reveals the hypocrisy of the dominant classes who consume the images of violence projected through the mass media outlets, while their own actions directly and / or indirectly contribute to the propagation of violence within the city and the media. *O homem do ano* calls into question this circular relationship by exposing the upper classes role in the proliferation of violence within the city.

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