MEMORIAL CINEMA IN LATIN AMERICA: FILMIC DEPICTIONS OF THE DIRTY WARS IN BRAZIL AND MEXICO

by

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ABSTRACT

SOFIA PAIVA DE ARAUJO. Memorial Cinema In Latin America: Filmic Depictions Of The Dirty Wars In Brazil And Mexico. (Under the direction of DR. DAVID DALTON)

Notably, the authoritarian regimes of Latin America during the Cold War have been discussed not only in the academy but also by the arts. The conflicts and violence of the period have been depicted in several plays, performances, *testimonios*, memoirs, poems, novels, paintings, and films. This thesis focuses on the latter, and its main goal is to investigate the links between cinema and the making of national memory about the collective trauma caused by the dirty wars of the second half of the XIX century through an examination of selected Brazilian and Mexican movies. The choice to analyze films from Brazil and Mexico serves three purposes: firstly, to demonstrate the connections between movies and memory making, proving the pertinence of the concept of memorial films; secondly, to show that Mexican cinema has produced memorial films and in doing so contribute to understanding the country's experiences under authoritarianism; lastly, to discuss the political and aesthetic features of memorial films. Additionally, by showing that Mexican cinema has produced memorial films that follow the same characteristics of the Brazilian memorial cinema, this thesis reiterates the argument that there was a dirty war in Mexico from the 1960s to the 1980s --despite the democratic façade. I analyze two movies from each country. From Mexico, I examine *Rojo Amanecer* (1989), directed by Jorge Fons, and *El Bulto* (1991), directed by Gabriel Retes, who also plays the main character. From Brazil, I analyze the films *O que é isso, companheiro?* (1997), directed

by Bruno Barreto, and *Memórias do Medo* (1981), directed by Alberto Graça. The main umbrella that allows us to group these four movies together is the fact that all of them have references to 'memory knots', a metaphor used by Steve Stern. Moreover, the four movies address major transitions in their respective countries: the Brazilian films address mechanisms of transitional justice, and the Mexican films address the transition to neoliberalism. In the chapter dedicated to Brazilian memorial films, I discuss the mutual interplay between films and transitional justice mechanisms by examining the depictions of the amnesty law and the party reform law in Barreto's and Graça's films. This chapter shows that while *O que é isso, companheiro?* reverberates with the official ideologies behind the amnesty law, *Memórias do Medo* is very critical of the party reform it represents. The comparison between these two films reiterates Atencio's argument that cultural works that exemplify the zeitgeist of their respective countries enjoy greater popularity. In the Mexican chapter, I discuss depictions of authoritarianism and paramilitarism in Fons' and Retes' works, which were the first feature films to address the massacres of Tlatelolco and Corpus Christi, respectively. I argue that *Rojo amanecer* promotes the idea of reconciliation by memory, while *El bulto* upholds the idea of reconciliation by oblivion.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Memory is a tool and a political project – an honoring of those who are gone, and a reminder to those who will listen that the victimizers have gotten away with murder."

(Diana Taylor 71)

"As relações que as sociedades estabelecem com seu passado são dinâmicas, fluidas e, muitas vezes, contraditórias."

(Marcos Napolitano, "Recordar é vencer" 10)

During the Cold War, the U.S.-promoted National Security Doctrine bestowed on Latin American military forces the role of protecting their countries from communism (Marmontel Braga 112; McSherry 48; Napolitano, *1964: História do Regime Militar Brasileiro* 5). The CIA-backed military coup that ousted Jacobo Arbénz from the Guatemalan presidency in 1954 represents an early sign of the application of this doctrine in the region (García Ferreira 60; Padrós 106). This doctrine became more thoroughly enforced in Latin America after the Cuban Revolution of 1959 as U.S. officials strove to avoid the installation of another communist regime in the region. Joan Patrice McSherry notes that, "through its Cold War lens, U.S. policymakers saw the 'loss' of Latin American allies as a de facto benefit to the USSR in the geopolitical game" (50). Because the United States perceived the possibility of a communist revolution in other Latin American countries as a menace to the hemispheric defense strategy, it actively worked to prevent this from happening elsewhere. Moreover, Latin American military and

political elites were also concerned about the risk of a leftist revolution in their own countries (Loveman and Davies 7). Jerry Dávila alludes to this fact when he argues that "members of the armed forces and the political right were also emboldened by U.S. Cold War ideology, from which they drew the moral authority to attack their opponents" (2). In other words, Latin American elites also promptly embraced the National Security Doctrine as a strategy to prevent "another Cuba" from stripping them of their privileges in their own countries.

In the mid 1960s, the National Security Doctrine was already entrenched, and by the 1970s several Latin American countries had adopted authoritarian governments (Pion-Berlin 382). According to Trentin Silveira, "the American strategy for inoculating the Security Doctrine in Latin America was highly successful, as it led to the emergence of various military regimes on the continent that were aligned with this Doctrine and worked to adapt it to their regional peculiarities without abandoning its essential features" (257). As a matter of fact, U.S.-backed authoritarian regimes replaced democratic governments in several Latin American countries. The pattern that had initiated with the coup d'etat against Arbénz continued into the following decades, as illustrated by the military coups that installed dictatorships in Brazil (1964-1985), Chile (1973-1990), Argentina (1976-1983), and Uruguay (1973-1985). Political oppression, state-sponsored terrorism, as well as disregard for war conventions and human rights marked these newly installed regimes (Napolitano, "Recordar é vencer" 13). "In each case, security forces harassed, arrested, tortured, raped, murdered and/or disappeared thousands of leftists, students, intellectuals, workers, *campesinos* and civilians" (Herrera Calderón and Cedillo

1). As a result, the period from 1964 to 1985 became known as the time of the "Dirty Wars" in Latin America (McSherry 24; Herrera Calderón and Cedillo 1; Carey 199).

This thesis aligns itself with several works published about the Latin American dictatorships from the 1960s to the 1980s that use the term dirty wars to refer to this period (Robben 120; Dávila 121; Kaminsky 104; Herrera Calderón and Cedillo 1; Carey 199). As such, it is important to clarify the concept and why it is pertinent for this thesis. To do so, I briefly discuss two questions. First, what is a dirty war? Second, why have scholars used this term to characterize conflicts between the Latin American authoritarian states and groups that were perceived and/or treated as threats to their hegemony?

In the article "War in the Gray: Exploring the Concept of Dirty War", M.L.R. Smith and Sophie Roberts trace the origins of the term:

> Insofar as one can determine its origins, "dirty war" derives from the French phrase, *la sale guerre*, which was used originally to refer to France's vicious struggle with the Viet Minh in Indochina from 1945 to 1954, although it was later used, and became widely synonymous with, the widespread use of torture and atrocity in the Algerian conflict between 1954 and 1962 in which over a million people were thought to have perished. From the early 1960s the Spanish term *guerra sucia* also came to be used to describe state repression in Latin America. (Smith and Roberts 377)

In the case of Latin America, the term 'Dirty War' was initially more commonly used in reference to Argentina's dictatorship (1976-1983). Although Rafael Videla's regime lasted shorter than the dictatorships in the other South American countries, it

stands out as one of the most violent and lethal: the estimated number of disappeared in Argentina ranges from about 9,000 to 30,000 people, while in Brazil, where the dictatorship lasted about three times longer, the estimated number of disappeared ranges from 434 to 1,000 people (Burkholder, Rankin and Johnson 349; Dávila 3). These horrifying statistics earned the Argentine dictatorship's persecution of its civilian population the title of *guerra sucia*. Indeed, several works about the Latin American military states during the Cold War refer to the disproportionate violence of the Argentine dictatorship against the country's subversives as a dirty war (Dávila 121; Fitch 65; Kaminsky 104; Pereira 32; Robben 120; Scheper-Hughes 150).

However, the number of people killed is not the main factor to define a dirty war. Indeed, Smith and Robert's definition of dirty war refers to the unfair warfare used against the target populations by mentioning torture and atrocity. Dávila reiterates this point by explaining that "violence was integral to the dictatorships: they applied their goals of national transformation by deliberately torturing, jailing, and killing their foes. (...) In this context, judging the regimes on the basis of the relative numbers of deaths they inflicted is misleading" (3). What makes a dirty war is the unconventional warfare. In other words, it refers to the means used by authoritarian governments to remain in power and achieve their goals, not necessarily the number of people killed and disappeared.

Considering this, it is reasonable that the term dirty war has had its use extended to include authoritarian regimes in other Latin American countries whose dynamics were similar to the Argentine dictatorship. For example, the term has been used to deal with

authoritarianism in Brazil, Chile, Peru, Guatemala and Mexico (Garnica xv; G. Williams 18; Herrera Calderón and Cedillo 6). Although the latter seemed to be an exception to the authoritarian wave that swept the region at that time because there was no military coup as in other Latin American countries, the Mexican government also adopted the "Cold War policies exported by the United States (...) as a pretext (...) to update their national security system in order to prevent a communist uprising in their country" (Sierra Guzmán 184). Indeed, the *Pax Priísta* was an illusion and the Partido Revolucionário Institucional (PRI) employed systematic violence and counterinsurgency operations to curb opposition (Carey 199). According to Dávila, the Mexican "counterinsurgency campaigns led to a larger number of deaths than in Brazil" (3). Additionally, the PRI funded paramilitary groups, such as the Batallón Olimpia and the Halcones, and had their own intelligence officials trained in the United States (Doyle 37; Sierra Guzmán 187). The Anti-Communist rhetoric and the propaganda used by the government to demonize opposition were also similar to other authoritarian regimes throughout the region. In this sense, it is possible to see many similarities between the authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the Mexico that make it reasonable to state that there was also a dirty war in the latter, despite the fact that there was no coup d'état.

Notably, the authoritarian regimes of Latin America have been discussed not only in the academy, but also by the arts. The conflicts and violence of the period have been depicted in several plays, performances, *testimonios*, memoirs, poems, novels, paintings, and films (Atencio 38). Verónica Garibotto alludes to the importance of these cultural interrogations of the dirty war period when she argues that "like clinical testimony,

literature, cinema, and graphic art are precocious modes of accessing history" (654). In this thesis I focus specifically on films for the following interrelated reasons: firstly, the cinema consolidated its place at the center of contemporary culture during the twentieth century (Bennett, Hickman and Wall 9; R. Williams 17); moreover, film functions "as an important social and cultural barometer, measuring for us the prevailing issues and concerns at any given point in our history" (Bennett, Hickman and Wall 1); therefore, cinema is a politicized art by its very nature, a fact that Sylvia Caiuby Novaes drives home when she argues that, "of all the arts, it was surely cinema that best served the most diverse political ideologies, parties and governments" during the twentieth century (290); additionally, cinema plays a major "role in shaping and reshaping the discursive and visual boundaries of political discourse" (Sanchez Prado 105); lastly, cinema functions as an extension of cultural memory (Torres San Martin 50).

The goal of this study is to investigate the links between cinema and the making of national memory about the collective trauma caused by the Dirty Wars in Latin America through an examination of selected Brazilian and Mexican movies. The choice to analyze films from Brazil and Mexico serves three goals: firstly, it demonstrates the connections between movies and memory making, proving the pertinence of the concept of memorial films; secondly, it shows that Mexican cinema has produced memorial films - yet less prolifically than Brazilian cinema; lastly, it serves to foment a discussion about the political and aesthetic features of memorial films. Additionally, by showing that Mexican cinema has produced memorial films that follow the same characteristics of the Brazilian memorial cinema, this thesis reiterates the argument that there was a dirty war

in Mexico from the 1960s to the 1980s --despite the democratic façade.

For this purpose, I analyze two movies from each country. From Mexico, I examine *Rojo amanecer* (1989), directed by Jorge Fons, and *El bulto* (1991), directed by Gabriel Retes, who also plays the main character. From Brazil, I analyze the films *O que é isso, companheiro?* (1997), directed by Bruno Barreto, and *Memórias do Medo* (1981), directed by Alberto Graça. The main umbrella that allows us to group these four movies together is the fact that all of them have references to 'memory knots', a metaphor used by Steve Stern.

> "The specific social groups, networks, and leaders who are sufficiently motivated to organize and insist on memory constitute troublesome "knots" on the social body. They interrupt a more unthinking and habitual life, they demand that people construct bridges between their personal imaginary and loose personal experiences on the one hand, and a more collective and emblematic imaginary on the other. [...] They force charged issues of memory and forgetfulness into a public domain; [...] Expressed theoretically: memory knots are sites of society, place and time so bothersome, so insistent, or conflictive, that they move human beings, at least temporarily, beyond the *homo habitus* postulated by the anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu. Expressed colloquially: memory knots are sites where the social body screams" (*Remembering Pinochet's Chile* 120-121)

Stern explains that these memory knots are multidimensional and refer to places, events, and social groups -- sites of physical matter or geography, sites in time, and sites of humanity, respectively (*Remembering Pinochet's Chile* 121).

The movies I analyze in this thesis have clear references to memory knots, of the three kinds explained by Stern. Firstly, the films address major milestones in the timeline of the dirty wars in their respective countries: Fons' masterpiece addresses the Tlatelolco Massacre of October 2, 1968; Retes' movie deals with the Corpus Christi Massacre of 1971; Barreto's movie makes reference to two temporal milestones of Brazilian dictatorship, 1968 --when the hardline dictatorship started with the decree of the Ato Institucional n.5 (AI-5)-- and 1979 -- when the Amnesty Law was released; and Graça's deals with the 1979's Party Reform Law, that allowed the creation of political parties. Clearly, all four movies analyzed in this thesis address major sites in time related to the dirty wars in Brazil and Mexico. Secondly, the movies also represent the sites of geography and physical matter where major events of the dirty wars happened. For example, *Memórias do Medo* is set in Brasilia, the national capital and where the Brazilian Congress and Executive powers are located; *O que é isso, companheiro?* is set in Rio de Janeiro, where the abduction of Charles Elbrick, reenacted in the movie, took place. More impressively, *Rojo amanecer* is set in a replica of an apartment in the housing complex of Nonoalco-Tlatelolco surrounding the Plaza de Las Tres Culturas (also known as Tlatelolco Square), where the massacre of students took place (Steinberg 132). Additionally, all four movies figure sites of humanity as their protagonists, mainly guerrilla members, journalists, and government officials (Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile* 120-121).

There are four main reasons for the choice to discuss movies from these two countries. First of all, Mexico and Brazil experienced authoritarian governments at about

the same time. Brazil was ruled by a dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, and Mexico's *guerra sucia* during the Cold War lasted from 1964 to 1982 under the *sexenios* of Gustavo Diaz Ordáz, Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo, whose administrations' reliance on counterinsurgency strategies and operations to dismantle any perceived subversive activity led to ominous abuses against human rights (Herrera Calderón and Cedillo 7; Sierra Guzmán 183; Carey 199). The timeline of major dirty war events and shared experiences in these countries is marked by increased repression from 1968 on into the seventies --as illustrated by promulgation of the Ato Institucional n.° 5 (Institutional Act #5, heretofore AI-5) in Brazil (Dávila 23) and the the Tlatelolco massacre in Mexico City-- and democratization and neoliberal opening in the late 1980s[1]. Indeed, Brazil ratified its civilian constitution in 1988, the same year when "the democratic transition (...) came to light from its origin in the 1968 generation" in Mexico (Steinberg 120).

Secondly, both governments applied violence selectively, and were considered *ditabrandas*, or examples of 'soft' authoritarianism (Napolitano, *1964: História do Regime Militar Brasileiro* 69; Preston and Dillon 60; Calderón and Cedillo 13). This was especially the case when people compared them to Argentina, where the estimated number of disappeared amounts to 30,000 (Dávila 3; Suárez Jaramillo n/p). Similarly,

[1] I emphasize the period discussed here to differentiate it from more recent events, such the massacre of *normalistas* in Ayotzinapa. The violent repression targeting the students from a rural teaching training school considered to adopt leftist ideologies when they were heading to Mexico City to participate in demonstrations related to the Tlatelolco massacre, in addition to the Mexican government's denial of its role in the massacre and the disappearance of the 43 *normalistas*, can be interpreted as an evidence that the dirty war never actually ceased (Devereaux; Gibler 16).

Central American countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador also endured extreme violence during the time of the dirty wars. In Guatemala alone, estimates point out that more than 250,000 people were victimized by government-funded death squads. Most of the victims of these assassinations were indigenous peoples caught in the middle of the conflict between guerrillas and the government. The quintessential testimonio about the Guatemalan dirty war is Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*.

Thirdly, the choice to compare these two countries is also motivated by the importance of their film industries within Latin America: along with Argentina, Brazil and Mexico are the major cinematic industries in Latin America (Alvaray 49). Additionally, Latin American cinema is known for its politicization. Directors such as the Brazilian Glauber Rocha, the Bolivian Jorge Sanjinés and others developed aesthetic innovations to match their political ideologies, as exemplified by Rocha's manifesto, "A estética da fome" (1965). Scholars such as Laura Podalsky and Ignacio Sanchez Prado acknowledge the tendency of politicization of Latin American cinematic production in the 1960s and 1970s (Podalsky 3; Sanchez Prado 4). In the case of Brazil, this tendency to make movies about political themes continues into the present day, with an average of at least one movie about the dictatorship per year. For instance, in 2014, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the military coup, an online magazine, *Revista Forum*, published a list of 50 movies about the military regime in Brazil. The next year, they added one more movie to the list, for it was the 51st anniversary. This cinematic production has conveyed different aspects of the history of the dictatorship through

multiple points of view. For instance, *Kuarup* (1989) and *Batismo de Sangue* (2006) address the tension between the military government and progressive members of the Catholic church; *Zuzu Angel* (2006) shows the drama of a mother that tries to find her disappeared son, and *O ano em que meus pais saíram de férias* (2006) is narrated from the perspective of a child whose parents had been targeted as subversives by the military.

Lastly, I chose to analyze *O que é isso, companheiro?*, *Memórias do Medo*, *Rojo amanecer* and *El bulto* because all four movies relate to moments of transition in their respective countries. The Brazilian movies refer to transitional justice bills related to the country's democratization: the amnesty law and the party reform law of 1979. The Mexican movies, on the other hand, address the transition into neoliberalism. In *Photopoetics at Tlatelolco: Afterimages of Mexico, 1968*, Samuel Steinberg asserts that the 1960s "represents Mexico's powerful opening to an early stage of the neoliberal era, evidenced by the convergence of the increased entry of foreign capital, the intensification of consumer society, and the denationalization of the banking system" (120). Similarly, Sanchez Prado notes that *Rojo amanecer* has been interpreted "as a representation of the early moments of the Mexican "democratic transition" (106). According to Steinberg, *El bulto* is also a transitional film, as the protagonist Lauro Cantillo has to cope with all the changes in Mexican society from the 1970s to the early 1990s, when he awakens from a comma after being victimized by the Halcones in 1971 (119).

This thesis analyzes several issues related to memorial films. Are there any recurring themes or preferred aesthetic forms which characterize these works, heretofore called memorial films? Are these movies effective in promoting public debate about such

a delicate issue as the relatively recent authoritarian past? Do they challenge or uphold official ideologies of memory, amnesty and transitional justice? How does this tone influence their reception? What points of contact are there between Mexican authoritarianism under Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, Luis Echeverría, and López Portillo, and the Brazilian military regime? How do the Mexican films analyzed in this thesis compare to the memorial films produced in Brazil, and other Latin American countries in general? More specifically, what can one learn about authoritarianism, film, and memory making in Latin America from a comparison between Brazilian and Mexican memorial cinema? Movies play a crucial role in the construction and negotiation of Latin American countries' traumatic memory, particularly as it relates to the dirty wars. They serve not only as records of the past but also have the potential to promote discussion, engage the population with memory issues, and shed light on hidden truths that neoliberal oblivion strategies have tried to erase (Avelar 2; Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile* 106; Atencio 4; Garibotto 655; Fried 543).

In *Postdictatorial Latin American Fiction and the Task of Mourning*, Idelber Avelar explains that "the neoliberalism implemented in the aftermath of the dictatorships is founded upon the passive forgetting of its barbaric origin" (2). For Avelar, this barbaric origin is authoritarianism itself, that enforced the "implementation of market logic" (1), that is, neoliberalism, in Brazil and Chile (59). As a matter of fact, the theory of authoritarianism espoused by scholars such as Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Guillermo O'Donnell and José Joaquín Brunner equated dictatorship and economic statism (Avelar 57), the opposite of which would be democracy and free market: "the ultimate equation

between political freedom for people and economic freedom for capital, as if the former depended on the latter" (Avelar 59). Notably, other Latin American countries, such as Argentina, also elected neoliberal presidents after the end of military rule. In Mexico, the neoliberal Miguel de la Madrid was responsible for implementing market-oriented policies in the country after the end of López Portillo's sexenio. De la Madrid's successor, Carlos Salinas de Gortari continued and advanced his predecessor's policies by signing the NAFTA agreement.

All these arguments and examples explain how neoliberalism became prevalent in Latin America after the democratization. Now let us proceed to explain how neoliberalism led to oblivion, that is, unconsciousness or insensitivity to the very conditions that made it prevalent. First of all, neoliberalism enforces a "growing commodification [that] negates memory because new commodities must always replace previous commodities, send them to the dustbin of history" (Avelar 2). Secondly, scholarly interpretations such as Cardoso's downplayed the relations between authoritarian regimes and foreign capital (Avelar 57). In doing so, these scholarly theories promoted oblivion in regards to the potential negative outcomes of economic opening to foreign corporations.

Yet, through cinema, different aspects of reality and of a nation's history--and the collective memory about it--can be represented and fictionalized. For instance, the movie *Memorias do Medo* addresses the theme of the negative effect of foreign capital on Latin American economies through the fictional representation of a conflict between two mining companies, the United Mining and the Japanese Steel, who engage in fraudulent

exploitation of Brazilian natural resources. Similarly, the movie *El bulto* also addresses the opening of the Mexican economy to foreign capital as it shows the early 1990s under Carlos Salinas de Gortari's government, when the NAFTA negotiations were being carried out. As discussed in the Mexican chapter, *El bulto* shows a relatively balanced account of Mexico's transition to neoliberalism, as the film accommodates different points of view about the transition itself and the transitional period. As such, cinema itself becomes a source of knowledge and a way to experience the past (Acuña 56; Caiuby Novaes 291). Indeed, the proliferation of movies about Latin America's dictatorships has made these works central to cultural studies throughout the region, and there are "compelling analyses of how postdictatorship movies can unsettle emotions, shape sensibility and bring about new knowledge" (Garibotto 656).

Two main approaches have been used to discuss these post dictatorship movies: trauma theory and semiotics (Garibotto 654). The former allies psychoanalytic clinical discourse to cultural interpretation and is used, for example, by Idelber Avelar in *The Untimely Present*. The semiotic approach, on the other hand, focuses on "indexical, iconic, and symbolic signs" and analyzes how they emerge and merge on the screen of post dictatorial cinematic productions (Garibotto 655). Both approaches have apported valuable contributions to the study of post dictatorial films in Latin America. This thesis, however, will tend toward the semiotic approach that has prevailed in the more recent scholarship and favors the historicization of the events represented in the movies analyzed here (Garibotto 655).

This thesis proposes to analyze the selected movies through an interdisciplinary

theoretical framework that situates them as a contitnuity in the long Latin American tradition of using fiction and narrative for memory and nation building. As a result, one of the contributions of this research is that it articulates major scholarly works from various fields of knowledge to expand the literature about memory, cinema, trauma and authoritarianism in Latin America generally and Brazil and Mexico specifically. Moreover, this thesis argues that, similar to the Ficciones Fundacionales [*Foundational Fictions]* to which Doris Sommer dedicates her book on 19th century Latin America, these movies fill discursive gaps and play a role in the construction of national history and in the negotiation of a new national project; this very fact leads them to function as memorial films. I propose this term as an umbrella for the cultural genre of historical movies about the dirty wars in Latin America. Indeed, the main contribution of this research is the proposal of this concept to serve as a framework to examine cinematic productions about the dirty wars.

I thus define memorial films as works related to the memory of the dirty wars that explicitly address sites in time (dates and events), sites of humanity (survivors of authoritarianism, specially former guerrillas, grassroots activists, journalists, etc), and sites of geography or physical matter (places where major events related to the Dirty Wars took place), that Steve Stern has defined as "memory knots" (*Remembering Pinochet's Chile* 120). If one considers a nation to have a social body, then these memory knots are painful tension points that, when touched, "force charged issues of memory and forgetfulness into a public domain" (Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile* 120). Therefore, memorial films often have sites of humanity as their protagonists, and they

depict specific sites in time and geography to make a connection with and shed light onto the past.

The concept of memorial films is constructed mainly through analogies with Doris Sommer's *Ficciones Fundacionales*. These references are combined with Steve Stern's concepts of the memory box and the memory knots, that are purposefully represented in these films as allegories of major events, social actors, and places, and that bring about the memory of Latin America's traumatic past during the dirty wars. This thesis analyzes allegories through a semiotic approach that favors the historicization of the works (Garibotto 654). Allegories have gained "renewed relevance" and are useful for unveiling history because they are themselves historic in essence: "they display the petrification of history characteristic of all allegory" (Avelar 15).

Sommer's work explores the connections between literature and nation-making in Latin American countries after the independence wars (9). She demonstrates that the foundational novels functioned as allegories of the national projects that Latin American countries, recently independent, looked to implement. The declaration of amnesty and the democratic wave of the late 1970s (Wiarda and Kline 61; Hagopian and Mainwaring 1), although under a controlled transition to democracy, as observed in Brazil and Argentina, also represented a relative overcoming of oppressive political regimes, favorable to the proposal of a new national project. Reiterating such potential of cinematic productions, Samuel Steinberg writes, "[c]inema, as we shall see, is a different sort of time machine. It performs the visual transition, as it were, that prepares the ground for a social and political transition" (117).

In other words, foundational fictions were published shortly after independence, while memorial fictions, especially in the case of movies, were released, for the most part, after the amnesty laws in their respective countries. Although Latin American cinema from the 1960s and 1970s is known for its politicization (Podalsky 2; Sanchez Prado 4) directors like Glauber Rocha and others from the New Cinema faced censorship, and their movies tended to have a broader and subtler allegorical aesthetic (Sadlier 240). Thus, the number of political movies released after the promulgation of the amnesty law is considerably higher than before it. This timeline marks the links between these movies and memory issues, for these "regimes of atrocity [were] also regimes of euphemism and misinformation" (Stern, "Memory" 117), which led to indifference and a lack of accountability. The memory component of political movies about the dirty wars can be related to two main goals: valuing human rights, and learning from the past so as not to repeat the same errors. In doing so, this cinema "expresses a consciousness of struggle against state terror and extermination projects or, more positively, an awakening into values" (Stern, "Memory" 117).

In the nineteenth century, fictional narratives were used to fill discursive vacancies, or gaps, in the history of Latin American countries after the wars of independence. "Despojada de la presunción científica, la narrativa gozaba de una mayor libertad para reconstruir la historia a partir de las pasiones privadas" (Sommer 25). Similarly, the dictatorships have left many discursive, historical (because of the censorship), and human (in thousands of dead and disappeared) gaps that the arts have tried to fill in with narratives, performances, paintings and drawings, and film. What is

more, Sommer notes that, in foundational fictions, conflicts between antagonistic national sectors were constantly solved, a fact that promoted mutual comprehension between the different strata of society (Sommer 12). Similarly, the memorial cinema that I discuss also emulates and triggers dialogues – more or less productive - between different national sectors. Thus, it is possible to make many analogies between the memorial fictions and the national novels discussed by Sommer.

Nevertheless, I do not only construct the concept of memorial films through their similarities with Sommer's foundational fictions. A major difference between the two concepts is related to the media and genre of the fictional texts that form each one. On the one hand, Sommer's concept of foundational fictions is applied only to literature, and the works analyzed fit a single genre: they are romantic novels. On the other hand, the concept of memorial films is to be seen as an umbrella term. More a cultural genre than a cinematic genre, the concept of memorial films can include films of various genres which address major memory issues about the dirty wars. Drama and thriller are the genres most commonly used by cineasts to frame their memorial films, but it is not the genre that defines a memorial film.

Indeed, the films that I discuss in this thesis are marked by their clear references to the memory knots defined by Steve Stern (2006) as “sites of society, place and time so bothersome, insistent, or conflictive that . . . the social body screams” (121). Stern argues that these memory knots are multidimensional, and he divides them into sites of humanity, sites in time, and sites of physical matter and geography. The first term comprises the various human groups--such as government officials, journalists, and

human rights activists--that have organized and mobilized to project emblematic memories about the dictatorship into public domain. The term sites in time refers to culturally charged particular events and dates, which "concentrat[e] the symbolic power to 'convene' or project memory" (122). Finally, sites of physical matter or geography are "physical places or artifacts [that] could evince a power of almost sacred connection to the past" (123). As a result, they project memory issues onto the screen an foment further discussion.

Besides addressing memory knots, memorial cinema might also be associated with institutional mechanisms of transitional justice and reparations for the victims, for instance amnesty declarations. Atencio notes that various Brazilian ex-guerrillas who benefited from the 1979 Amnesty Law published books with their accounts about the period of the dictatorship as they returned from exile or prison; these works were rapidly labeled the cultural outcomes of the amnesty (Atencio 28). In terms of reconciliation, institutional mechanisms have the potential to work as either a formula for closure or a step through which more gains can be obtained. In other words, the meaning of a given institutional mechanism is to be negotiated.

Atencio notes that, in Brazil, this meaning is often negotiated by the government and activist/grassroots groups alike, vis-a-vis cultural works that somehow address the institutional mechanism (4). For example, the publication of *O que é isso, companheiro?* mobilized the civil society to discuss the meaning of the amnesty law. "Various individuals and groups, including Gabeira himself, leveraged the connection according to their various agendas and through their efforts helped promote book and author, helping

consolidate the meaning of the amnesty as reconciliation and a victory for society rather than as impunity and partial defeat" (Atencio 29).

More importantly, Atencio argues that works which reverberate with the official ideology behind an institutional mechanism and are released somewhat simultaneously with them have the potential to trigger cycles of cultural memory (6). The first of these cycles in Brazil was deflagrated in 1979 with the Amnesty Law, and "[n]o single work is more closely identified with the amnesty than Fernando Gabeira's memoir *O que é isso, companheiro?*" (Atencio 28), a novel that was published almost simultaneously with the new law.

Other important works consulted for this thesis are works by historians, as well as social and political scientists that provide the basis for comparing the dirty wars of Brazil and Mexico. For instance, in *Predatory States*, Patrice McSherry discusses the Cold War scenario and the hemispheric defense strategy that led the U.S. to give military, logistic and financial support to Latin American authoritarian governments (22). McSherry also examines the Condor System and its various levels of operation which allowed military governments to locate, detain and often disappear subversives in each other's territory. The Condor Operation is also discussed by Samantha Quadrat in "A preparação dos agentes de informação e a ditadura civil-militar no Brasil (1964-1985". In this article, Quadrat comments on the widespread nature of repression in Latin America during the dirty wars.

Loveman and Davies edited the impressive *The Politics of Antipolitics*, which contains essays and primary sources about the period, including speeches by Brazilian

military presidents Ernesto Geisel and João Figueiredo. Loveman and Davies trace U.S. support of Latin American dictatorships to the context of the Alliance for Progress (9). Furthermore, they also lay out the characteristics that mark the antipolitics, amongst which they listed its foundation on the use of coercive methods (7), "the negation of partisan strife" (8), the centralization of authority and the "censorship or closure of opposition mass media" (12).

In "The Unknown Mexican Dirty War", Herrera Calderón and Cedillo explain that these same features also marked the *priísta* administrations in Mexico: "the political system under the PRI was authoritarian, patriarchal, politically and administratively centralized, and corporatist" (2). They further point out that the presidents "Díaz Ordaz, Echeverría, and López Portillo aligned themselves with the rigid national security doctrine promoted by the United States" (7). This essay is part of the edited work *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico*, which comprises several texts detailing the development of student movements in different parts of the country. The book also explores, among other themes, the struggle related to the documentation and memory making about the Mexican Dirty War (Carey 198), which has the Massacre of Tlatelolco and the Corpus Christi Massacre as some of its main events.

In *Revisiting the Mexican Student Movement of 1968: Shifting Perspectives in Literature and Culture since Tlatelolco*, Juan Rojo points out that, despite some sparse short movies produced about these events, "it is not until 1989 and 1991, with the releases of *Rojo amanecer* and *El Bulto*, respectively, that the events of Tlatelolco and its aftermath are approached in feature-length films" (115). Both movies have the issue of

memory as one of their main themes, although they take slightly different approaches to it.

Finally, this work also draws on contributions by Ignacio M. Sánchez-Prado and Laura Podalsky. The former unveils the influence of neoliberal ideologies and practices in Mexican cinematic production and aesthetics. More specifically, Sánchez Prado comments on how the lack of governmental incentive resulted in a decrease in the number of movies produced by year, which also tended to become more market-oriented and therefore less politicized. It is important to note that, while every memorial film is political, not all political cinema is memorial. For her part, Podalsky discusses the role of affect and emotion in the reception of contemporary Latin American movies and defies the critics that dismiss this more recent production as "apolitical and sensationalistic" (7). Podalsky points out that "films contribute to the articulation of new sensibilities," and defends that even apparently depoliticized movies have potential to engage political issues (7).

Chapter 2 discusses the Brazilian process of democratic opening and memory making while analyzing two memorial films. The first of them is *O que é isso, companheiro?*, directed by Bruno Barreto, released in 1997 and inspired by the journalist and ex-guerrilla Fernando Gabeira's memoir, published upon his return from exile. Gabeira's testimonio is considered the cultural work more closely associated with the 1979 amnesty law. Both the book and the movie have been well received by critics and audiences (both domestic and foreign); it has also received wide attention from the academic community. The other Brazilian memorial film analyzed in this thesis is

Memórias do Medo, directed by Alberto Graça and released at the Cannes' Festival Producers' Week in 1981. This movie is set in the context of the promulgation of the 1979 Party Reform Law which extinguished the bipartisan political system that marked Brazilian dictatorship. Indeed, *Memórias do Medo* is the single major feature film to address this institutional mechanism that, along with the formerly mentioned Amnesty Law, marked Brazil's period of *distensão*, a slow, gradual and controlled transition back to democratic rule. Yet, despite its historical importance, *Memórias do Medo* has received much less scrutiny than *O que é isso, companheiro?*. Indeed, while there are plenty of scholarly works dedicated to analyzing Gabeira's book and its movie adaptation (Atencio 28), no major scholarly work that I am aware of carries out a through analysis of *Memórias do Medo*. As a matter of fact, the movie is mentioned as part of the corpus compiled by Helena Stigger, who applies Nietzsche's theory to examine notions of evil and moral in Brazilian films produced between 1964 and 2010 (2009, 2011). However, in none of her publications did Stigger carry out an in-depth analysis of *Memórias do Medo*. This chapter shows that while *O que é isso, companheiro?* reverberates with the official ideologies behind the amnesty law, *Memórias do Medo* is very critical of the party reform it represents. The comparison between these two films reiterates Atencio's argument that cultural works that exemplify the zeitgeist of their respective countries --defined by Atencio as "the preexisting national sensibility or mood" (6)-- enjoy greater popularity.

Chapter 3 discusses two Mexican memorial films, Jorge Fons's *Rojo Amanecer* (1989) and Gabriel Retes's *El Bulto* (1992). The former depicts the Tlatelolco Massacre

of 1968, and the latter the 1971 Jueves de Corpus, also known as the Corpus Christi Massacre or El Halconazo. The dates of these massacres mark major sites in time related to the Mexican dirty war. Indeed, the 1971 massacre is contextualized in the aftermath of Tlatelolco's massacre. Furthermore, another point of contact between these two movies is that they engage the same sites of humanity: student protesters, and the paramilitary troops that violently repressed them. In other words, both *Rojo amanecer* and *El bulto* address the violent repression against student protests which marked the Mexican Dirty Wars. The epitome of this repression is undoubtedly the Massacre of Tlatelolco, about which a large intellectual production has been produced, including Elena Poniatowska's *Massacre in Mexico*, and documentaries such as *El grito*. However, *Rojo amanecer* and *El bulto* are the first feature films to directly address the government's violent repression of the student movements, which is a major theme in both movies. Another theme that the two movies have in common is the role of paramilitary groups financed by the government in this repression. The analysis of these movies shows that Mexican cinema, although not as prolific as Brazilian or Argentine cinema in movies about the dirty wars, has nonetheless produced important memorial films. By dedicating a chapter to discuss Mexican memorial films, this thesis aims to contribute to expand the literature about the Mexican Dirty War.

2. CINEMATIC DEPICTIONS OF BRAZILIAN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE: 1979'S AMNESTY LAW AND PARTY REFORM LAW IN *O QUE É ISSO, COMPANHEIRO?* AND *MEMÓRIAS DO MEDO*

"Não foi apenas o regime militar que, no Brasil, teve traços peculiares. Também singular foi seu processo de democratização. Tratou-se do caso mais longo de transição democrática: um processo lento e gradual de liberalização, em que se transcorreram 11 anos para que os civis retomassem o poder e outros cinco anos para que o presidente da República fosse eleito por voto popular." (Maria D'Alva Kinzo 4)

In 1979, when President João Figueiredo decreed the amnesty law, the journalist and former guerrilla Fernando Gabeira returned to Brazil after almost a decade of exile. In the same year, he published his memoir book, *O que é isso, companheiro?*, in which he recounted his participation in the armed struggle against the dictatorship and his role in kidnapping Charles Burke Elbrick, who served as ambassador from the United States during those years. The book quickly became a bestseller, and Gabeira was treated as a "superstar of the Amnesty" (Atencio 29). Indeed, *O que é isso, companheiro?*, became the cultural work more closely associated with the Amnesty Law, and has been extensively studied by scholars from various disciplines (Atencio 28). The novel's success with critics and general audiences inspired a filmic adaptation, which Bruno Barreto directed and released in 1997. In addition to the Amnesty Law, the government also released the Party Reform Law in 1979, which allowed for the creation of multiple

political parties. Although publicized by the government as a sign of democratization, the establishment of this law was ultimately a strategy to promote the fragmentation of opposition forces (Kinzo 6; Napolitano, *1964: História do Regime Militar Brasileiro* 299). This context inspired the screenwriter and director Alberto Graça's first feature film, *Memórias do Medo* in 198. Released at the Cannes Festival, the movie starred famous actors and is the single major feature film about the Party Reform Law. Nevertheless, despite its historical importance, *Memórias do Medo* never enjoyed the critical, academic, or popular successes of *O que é isso, companheiro?*. While the later reverberates with the official ideologies behind the amnesty law, the former is very critical of the party reform it represents. The comparison between these two films reiterates Atencio's argument that cultural works that exemplify the zeitgeist of their respective countries might enjoy greater popularity. According to Atencio, the national imaginary might link certain cultural works to institutional mechanisms of transitional justice depending on two main traits: "a flair for making an episode from the past newly relevant and an ability to capture and intensify the Zeitgeist" (6).

In the case of *O que é isso, companheiro?*, both the original novel and the film resonate with the Brazilian zeitgeist regarding the amnesty law. Although Gabeira's original novel includes accounts of torture, it does not demand punishment for these human rights abuses perpetrated by the security forces. The guerrillas, identified mostly with Gabeira himself, are portrayed as young and immature "superhero militants" guided more by voluntarism than principles (Avelar 65), and as such they have no aptitude for self-criticism. According to Avelar, in the original memoir Gabeira tells his story "as an

adult would narrate his naughty behavior as a child" (65). As such, the original novel suggests that both sides are to blame. Similarly, the film adaptation also tries to be a relatively "balanced" account - in that it discusses both sides, as it were - of the period. Indeed, the film humanizes people on both sides of the struggle. On one hand, it shows guerrillas that are young and naive, like Gabeira's character and his friend César -- later on in the movie rechristened as Oswaldo by the guerrilla (Selton Mello); on the other hand, it also portrays more seasoned guerrillas, like the comrades Jonas (Matheus Nachtergaele) and Toledo (Nelson Dantas) that had participated in other operations before the kidnapping of Charles B. Elbrick (Alan Arkin). Moreover, while the film shows torture, and suggests that some military enjoyed performing it, there is no overall demonization of the security forces as cruel torturers. Instead, the film humanizes the military through the character of Henrique (Marco Ricca), who tells his girlfriend Lilia (Alessandra Negrini) that he felt bad for having to torture people as part of his job. He further explains that he had nightmares with the screams of his victims. Enrique, who stands as an allegory for moderate military men --the group that had controlled Brazil before the AI-5--, is not evil himself: he had to perform torture for the sake of a greater cause, that is, he did this to protect his country from communists and terrorists. In doing so, the film dissociates the men from the institution they represented. Similar dissociation is made between the character of Elbrick and the United States' government and/or institutions. By portraying Charles B. Elbrick as a well-meaning and reasonable gentleman, the film also suggests that while the ambassador represents the United States's diplomacy, he is not responsible for the country's foreign policies. This

allegorical reading further absolves the United States from the roles that it truly did play in the conflict --backing the military regime and providing training the counterinsurgency techniques that were used against subversives .

Other factors might also affect the popularity of memorial films. Synchronicity or "(near) *simultaneous emergence*" with the promulgation of the transitional justice mechanism it represents is one of them (Atencio 6). For instance, with the promulgation of the amnesty law, former guerrilla members returned to Brazil after years of exile, and many of them published their memoirs or testimonios about their experiences under the dictatorship. Notably, Gabeira's memoir *O que é isso, companheiro?* was the first of this kind to be published after the amnesty, a fact that favored the association of his book with the new law within the public imaginary. This further boosted the book's popularity and made it a bestseller. Similarly, during Dilma Rousseff's first term as Brazilian president, Tatá Amaral's film *Hoje* was released only two months prior to the creation of the Comissão Nacional da Verdade (CNV, National Truth Commission). "*Hoje* tells the story of a woman named Vera who receives a check from the Brazilian government in official recognition of the political disappearance and presumed murder of her husband, Luiz" (Atencio 4). The media very promptly picked up the connection between the movie and the CNV and its goals. The association between them "proved fruitful for all involved" (Atencio 4), helping boost the movie's audience as well as promoting public debate about the need for a truth commission and the goals it would serve.

In addition to the time of release, the cultural works' adherence to genre formulas that make them more palatable for the general public might also play an important role in

boosting their popularity. For instance, Gabeira's original memoir was published at a time when many other testimonios were also gaining visibility. In other words, people were eager to read testimonios. The genre was popular, and it enjoyed solid reception in the market. Gabeira took advantage of this market opening and his journalistic skills helped him make his testimonio "the most successful dictatorship memoir published in Brazil, [which] reads like an adventure novel" (Avelar 65). Similar to the book, the film adaptation of Gabeira's memoir, a political thriller, was released in a favorable timing for the genre: "thriller emerged as an important genre in the 1990s" (Podalsky 7). It is a film full of action, that captivates the spectator from the outset. Podalsky points out that the film "closely adheres to the mechanisms of filmic suspense" (65), and that the distribution of knowledge throughout contributes to its ability to gain the audience's attention. Various film "sequences generate a greater level of suspense by providing the spectator with a more privileged vantage" (Podalsky 67). In other words, at key points of the plot, the spectator knows more about what is to come than the characters in the movie. In using this narratological strategy, Barreto's film engages the spectator's affections and keeps the film's appeal even to audiences that might already know how the history developed. According to Podalsky, the "armature of the suspense film allowed even historically informed audience members to reckon with the past in a way that confirmed their knowledge of the present" (66).

Memórias do Medo, on the other hand, is a drama. Although this genre is also commonly used in memorial films, it might be less appealing and captivating than thrillers --an exception needs to be made for movies such as in *Rojo amanecer*, which

closely adheres to the melodrama's genre formulas, but that is not the case of *Memórias do Medo*. The film's plot is fairly interesting, intricate and complex. It revolves around power games between congressmen and lobbyists in Brasília. Yet, it develops too slowly, and the distribution of knowledge does not privilege the spectator, which loses much of its audience. While in *O que é isso, companheiro?* the spectator holds greater knowledge of the future than the film's characters --which makes the audience engage affectively with the characters on the screen--, in *Memórias do Medo* the spectator is never the one to know the most of what is to come. Indeed, the narrative strategy of the movie is to gradually present the spectator with pieces of information, but the complicated nature of the story makes it very difficult to put the pieces together despite the didactic tone of some dialogues --which also make the movie tedious at times. Additionally, the unconventional camera work might also play a role in making the movie difficult to follow. Overall, the plot is interesting, but it is not developed to its full potential.

The choice to analyze *O que é isso, companheiro?* and *Memórias do Medo* is justified by their historical significance and the insights they can offer about the Brazilian process of building and negotiating the collective memory of the dictatorship: these films address the two major institutional mechanisms of transitional justice that marked the democratic opening, the Amnesty Law and the Party Reform Law. In the case of *Memórias do Medo*, the choice is also motivated by the fact that the film has been neglected by scholars. Graça's film has not received the scrutiny it deserves due to its historical importance. Beyond Helena Stigger's mentioning of the film as part of a corpus of films about the Brazilian dictatorship compiled for her unpublished doctoral

dissertation (2011), no other study that I am aware of carries out a thorough analysis of this movie. As such, this thesis aims to fill in this gap. Additionally, this thesis discusses how the two movies, despite dealing with similar themes, address them in contrasting ways.

In this chapter, I discuss two main themes that hold across both films. Firstly, I discuss the influence of the United States in Brazilian politics and knowledge control, particularly the lack of access to information. Indeed, the movies have very different takes on these themes. The ambassador plays the role of an essentially generous and well-meaning gentleman in *O que é isso, companheiro?* It is only due to a conflict that lies beyond his control that he finds himself caught in the middle of a conflict between the Brazilian government and the MR-8. In *Memórias do Medo* Steiner, the character who represents the United States, is depicted as cold, manipulative, and self-interested. The issue of knowledge control is also represented differently in each movie. In *O que é isso, companheiro?* the guerrillas defy the government's censorship and therefore its monopoly on knowledge control by carrying out subversive acts and exalting other ways of knowing. Yet, in some passages, knowledge is attributed to Elbrick, who reads the conflict in the country more competently than either the revolutionaries or the Brazilian government. In this way, he functions as a disinterested intermediary who connects the dots for the spectator and somewhat simplistically reconciles two sides that continue to interpret the dictatorship and its aftermath in contradictory ways. In *Memórias do Medo* there is also a fight for knowledge control. Indeed, knowledge is represented as a puzzle of fragmented and disconnected pieces that slowly come together as the plot advances.

2.1 The Amnesty Law and *O que é isso, companheiro?*

The approval of the Amnesty Law marked the end of the most repressive period of the military regime, which consisted of the ten-year period from 1968-1978 in with the Ato Institucional #5 (AI-5) held power. Sanctioned by the General-President Artur da Costa e Silva, the AI-5 functioned as a strong censorship and control apparatus that prevented straightforward, en-masse denunciations of military agents for their crimes against civilians (D'Araujo). While the Amnesty Law was promulgated before the military government's de facto end in 1985, it nevertheless marked a movement toward democratic opening and transition by creating favorable conditions for building the collective memory about the dictatorship. Indeed, the end of periods of political repression begat the necessity to discuss the trauma they imposed (Lísias 229). In the aftermath of the Amnesty Law, many former political activists and guerrillas published books with their testimonies about the country's military dictatorship. Similar to the Argentine and the Chilean experiences, "[m]ost of the testimonies (...) originated on the Left" (Avelar 65). According to João Roberto Martins Filho, "a esquerda esforçou-se por vencer, na batalha das letras, aquilo que perdeu no embate das armas" (2). Some of these books enjoyed great success, becoming best sellers and winning literary prizes. Nevertheless, none of these works became as closely associated with the amnesty as *O que é isso, companheiro?* (Atencio 28). According to Denise Rollemberg, Gabeira's memoir "mantém-se (ainda) hoje (...) uma espécie de *senso comum* do que foi a luta

armada, renovando-se ante as novas gerações" (83). Building on Atencio, this study suggests that *O que é isso, companheiro?*'s great success comes from a combination of factors that include the timing of the original work's publication, its ability to capture and amplify the Brazilian zeitgeist of the time in regards to the amnesty, and the skillful film adaptation that renewed the relevance of the themes addressed in the original text.

According to Atencio, Gabeira's memoir was the first testimonio published after the *Anistia*, and although it mentions torture and other abuses committed by the military, it does not raise the issue of accountability for these human rights' violations (29). In this sense, Gabeira's book served a purpose of reconciliation by memory which did not go against the official ideology that held that amnesty had forgiven guerrillas and state security agents alike (Atencio 29). Furthermore, the *simultaneous emergence* of the law and of the book favored the creation of an imaginary linkage between them, thus both triggering Brazil's first cycle of cultural memory and consolidating Gabeiras's memoir as the cultural work most closely tied to the amnesty (Atencio 6). In the movie, released almost two decades after the book, the story is rendered as a fast-paced thriller which captivates the attention even of people who already know how the story will end. The film's positive reception by critics and popular audiences both domestically and internationally became especially clear as the movie earned almost two million dollars at the box office and was nominated for numerous international awards, such as the Academy Awards' Oscar (1998) and the Berlin International Film Festival's Golden Bear (1997). The film won two major awards: the American Film Institute's Audience Award for the best feature film in 1997 and the PFS (Political Film Society) in the category

Democracy in 1999 (IMDb).

What is more, the movie also boosted its own relevance and renewed that of Gabeira's original novel by creatively adapting the original and adding to it. For instance, Gabeira did not play a part in devising the kidnapping plan, nor did he write the manifesto denouncing the dictatorship that the guerrillas wanted publicized as part of the ransom to release Elbrick. Both actions are attributed to him in the movie for aesthetic reasons and to simplify the plot for the viewing audience. In an interview with the one of the most important newspapers of the country, *Folha de S. Paulo*, Gabeira explained that "[o] que aconteceu é que os caras tiveram a liberdade de fazer o roteiro do filme e quando estavam fazendo o roteiro … pensaram: 'O Gabeira, ou esse personagem que corresponde ao Gabeira, não tem qualidade nenhuma. Não sabe dirigir, não sabe atirar, então vamos botar alguma coisa nele, ele pelo menos sabe escrever'" (Gabeira, 1997). Some people complained about these creative adaptations because there is an expectation that a historical movie "portray[s] rather than betray[s] what happened" (Atencio 122). However, the beauty of artistic works, be they literary or cinematic, is related to their potential to allow multiple interpretations. As Atencio puts it, "great films, like other aesthetic works, are rife with ambiguities, and the task of the director (...) is not to impose a single meaning (the way a judge and jury do in a trial …) but to invite multiple interpretations of his or her work" (122). Moreover, as I will discuss below, one of the most discussed scenes of the movie offered a perspective usually absent from the ex-guerrillas' memoirs: the point of view of a soldier about his own participation in torture sessions.

In the movie, Fernando Gabeira is a young and revolutionary-minded journalist who decides to join the October 8 Revolutionary Movement (MR8) in the late 1960s. Prior to joining the guerrilla, he was engaged in the student movement and he has participated in demonstrations against the government. However, in the face of the military dictatorship's growing authoritarianism, violence, and censorship of the press, Fernando decides that peaceful protests are ineffective for bringing about any real change. As such, despite a total lack of any kind of military training, he joins the guerrilla certain that it represents the only option for fighting the dictatorship. His friend César, a former seminarian, follows him and joins the guerrilla, too. They are then rechristened as Paulo and Oswaldo, respectively. During a bank heist to get money for the MR8, Oswaldo gets shot and is left behind. Aware that his friend has been arrested and that he is certainly being tortured by the military, Paulo devises a plan to have Oswaldo and other guerrillas released: kidnap the American ambassador Charles B. Elbrick and demand the release of the guerrillas as ransom. Additionally, they also write a letter denouncing the authoritarianism of the government and push to have it publicized in exchange for the release of Elbrick. Despite several obstacles, they successfully kidnap Elbrick and keep him captive for almost three days until the government finally accepts the MR8's demands. After they release the ambassador, the guerrillas spread and demobilize, but are nevertheless hunted down and detained by the military regime. At the end of the movie, the guerrillas reunite as they are being sent to exile in Argelia as a ransom for the release of a German ambassador that had been kidnaped by another guerrilla group.

The theme of knowledge control is addressed shortly after the beginning of the movie, which opens with black and white photographs of Rio de Janeiro in the early sixties. A bossa-nova chilling song plays in the background to match the fit and beautiful racially mixed young people the camera captures frequenting Rio's beaches, streets, bars, and soccer stadium. There is a sense of nostalgia for the good old days when people took the *bondinho* (trolley) to work and celebrated along samba dancers in carnival parades on the streets. This nostalgia is interrupted by the blurbs. The background is now black, an atmosphere of darkness slowly starts to settle in, and the white lettering chosen to give contrast reads, "Em 1964, o governo democrático do Brasil é deposto por um golpe de estado militar. Em dezembro de 1968, a junta militar que governa decreta o Ato Institucional n°5 país pondo fim à liberdade de imprensa e todos os direitos do cidadão". The bossa-nova soundtrack starts to fade and is gradually substituted by protesters shouting. As the spectator is informed about the AI-5 and its restrictions upon civil rights and freedom of the press, the protesters' voices become clearer, "o povo, unido, jamais será vencido". The remaining blurbs mention political prisoners and popular protests against the regime. The next sequence is a reenactment of the most famous of these protests, the Marcha dos Cem Mil, which happened in 1968, the same year when the movie's plot begins (Memorial da Democracia). The protesters chant, "Abaixo a ditadura", as they swarm through Rio's central areas. Aerial shots, still in black and white, give a perspective of the number of people who participated in these demonstrations. The camera then moves down to show the protesters and a close-up shot figures the protagonist Fernando (Pedro Cardoso) in the center, walking along with his

friends Artur (Eduardo Moscovis) and César (Selton Mello) in the protest. These characters allegorically represent some of the main groups within Brazilian civil society that vocally opposed the dictatorship: Fernando is a journalist who participates in the student movement, Artur is an actor, and César is a former clergyman (do Bem 1150). The crowd behind them waives their closed fists up in the air to show determination and resistance to the dictatorship. The protesters' voice now starts to fade out and the sound of a helicopter calls Artur's attention to the sky. Following that, a horizontal shot depicts military troops sent to repress the demonstrators, who scream and run in desperation to escape the security forces. A short sequence of fast action shots shows the arrival of the cavalry and protesters reacting armed with rocks and sticks.

The National Security Doctrine's rationale was that the armed forces must protect the country against communist threats; more often than not, however, the targets were civilians with no military training nor real weapons. Through force, the military dispersed the protest and actually repressed any kind of opposition to the regime. Indeed, the theme of knowledge pervades throughout the movie. The war between the guerrilla and the military is one over knowledge; the person who knows the most about what the other will do next holds a great advantage. For the guerrillas, knowledge is precious and can be shared only with those who prove themselves courageous and worthy. For instance, when the protagonist and his friend first join the armed movement, they cannot see the face of comrade Maria (Fernanda Torres), who leads the group. Even after that, they were not supposed to know each other's real names nor the address of their next hideout. They establish these precautions to guard against the possibility that a comrade may divulge

important secrets under torture. For its part, the military's access to knowledge and information allows it to maintain control over a nation with a strong dissident movement. For this purpose, junta officials hold not only public campaigns to have civilians denounce "suspect" activities, but they also have secret police who carry out counterinsurgency operations (Quadrat 19).

The movie gives examples of both military and guerrilla intelligence operations. In the first case, the guerrilla are denounced as suspects immediately prior to the kidnapping, and later when they have already abducted the ambassador, one of them buys a lot of food and shows off his money at a local grocery store. This latter episode leads to the intervention of the secret police, who start investigating the group more closely. The theme of knowledge is so important in this movie that Laura Podalsky states that "rather than highlighting the different socioeconomic philosophies and political projects that separated guerrillas and the state, *O que é isso, companheiro?* portrays the conflict that ripped apart Brazilian society as a struggle over knowledge" (66). For Podalsky, the depiction of different points of view (that of the military, the guerrilla, and the ambassador) throughout the film "offers new perspectives on this event, and thus questions what many know about guerrilla movements and military repression" (64). Therefore, I infer that the film presents itself as a somehow more balanced and complete account of the events it represents than the original memoir, that "reads like an adventure novel" (Avelar 65). Additionally, the most interesting part of Podalsky's analysis about knowledge is related to the American ambassador. For Podalsky, Elbrick represents a relatively unbiased point of view due to his skillful reading of both the guerrillas and the

Brazilian government, especially in the second part of the movie. As such, the audience ultimately sympathizes with him and aligns itself with his point of view. According to Podalsky, “the film's narrational strategies ultimately privilege Elbrick's point of view as uniquely situated, like that of the spectator, to understand what is happening and what is to come” (66). Additionally, Podalsky also emphasizes the way that the film plays with affect and the unknown, alternating between narrative strategies of restricted and unrestricted knowledge of what is to come, in order to create tension and suspense in the audience.

The focus on Elbrick's character also points to the theme of role of the United States in the Brazilian dictatorship. During an interrogation scene in the rebel hideout, the guerrillas asked Elbrick about the CIA men in Brazil, and the torture training provided by the U.S. to the Brazilian military. These were the two openly critical questions about the American participation in the dictatorship that were raised in the movie, and Elbrick answers both evasively. Most of the time, Elbrick is represented as a polite, smart and well-meaning gentleman who strives to do his job the best way possible. In this way, the film casts him as a victim who finds himself at the center of a conflict between guerrillas and the state.

Considering that, and building on Podalsky's work, this thesis underscores that the movie posits the external observer as the knowledge holder (Elbrick/the spectator), and deals only superficially with the active role of the U.S. in the Brazilian dictatorial experience. Even if the United States has deployed CIA officers who have trained the country in torture techniques, the logic of the film casts Elbrick’s kidnapping as

ultimately the fruit of a guerrilla movement who oversteps the bounds of what is appropriate. This fact that clearly communicates how Elbrick's nationality imbues him with greater privilege than that enjoyed by Brazilians, particularly those on the left. In the next section of this chapter, I discuss how the issues of knowledge control and the role of the United States in Brazilian politics are addressed in the movie *Memórias do Medo*.

2.2 The Party Reform Law and *Memórias do Medo*

The power games and fragmentation of the opposition forces promoted by promulgation of the Party Reform Law inspired the screenwriter and director Alberto Graça to produce his first feature film, *Memórias do Medo*. Released in 1981, the movie, stars Claudio Marzo as the protagonist, Carlos Santana, and a team of other famous Brazilian actors, such as Walmor Chagas, Carlos Gregório, and Xuxa Lopes. The film recounts the political tensions related to the 1979 Party Reform Law (República Federativa do Brasil, Câmara dos Deputados "LEI Nº 6.767"). Indeed, *Memórias do Medo* is the Brazilian memorial movie most closely related to the political reform which ended bipartidarism in the country[2]. While the opposition to the military regime was weak and mostly a façade under the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement, heretofore MDB), it prompted the plural forces that formed it to act together to achieve their goals, even if only partially. On one hand, the promulgation of the Party Reform Law represented a movement toward political opening, which was a positive expected outcome. As a matter of fact, this was the official ideology behind the promulgation of the law. On the other hand, the possibility of creating new political

[2] Before the party reform law of 1979, the military government allowed two political parties to function in the Brazilian Congress: the ARENA (Aliança Renovadora Nacional) and the MDB (Movimento Democrático Brasileiro). The former was the government's, party, and the latter was the opposition's party.

parties revealed the fragmented character of the Brazilian left and opened the way to greater dissension among them, a fact that would ultimately buoy the chances of the country's political right in the electoral arena. The movie addresses the negative outcomes of the law much more closely than it does the positive ones; indeed, it presents the Party Reform Law as as a right-wing strategy to dismantle the opposition. This critical aspect of the movie prevented it from reverberating with the official ideology supporting the law, and it impeded the public from engaging with it as they would later do with Gabeira's memoir. Additionally, the movie's release in 1981--only two years after the promulgation of the law--did not help it in its endeavors to challenge what was generally a popular law. The film's premier in the Cannes Festival, rather than in Brazil, and the lukewarm reception it received abroad further alienated the Brazilian audiences from engaging with it as would happen in the case of other cultural works. On top of that, the movie is somewhat difficult to follow despite the fact that the blurbs in the opening segments contextualize the plot. The storyline is filled with intrigue, conflict and betrayal, which are elements that generally help capture the audience's attention. Nevertheless, the movie's slow pace and unconventional editing of dialogue blocked it from developing its full potential.

The film opens with a long text explaining the plot and setting it in the context of the law's promulgation, that reads:

> "Brasília 1979, o governo militar permite a criação de novos partidos. As forças de oposição, agrupadas num único partido dividem-se. Senador Viana, político liberal, articula a formação de um novo partido de oposição, desencadeando

> violenta campanha contra o capital estrangeiro. O senador Machado, para fortalecer sua liderança dentro deste novo partido, acusa a United Mining, multinacional americana, de irregularidades na exploração do minério de Gangorra. A United Mining reage em silêncio. Procura neutralizar o senador Machado dentro do próprio partido, acusando-o se utilizar-se de campanha nacionalista, para entregar a exploração do minério a multinacional japonesa – Japan steel."

It is in this troubled context that the progressive Senator Viana hires the famous political journalist Carlos Santana to help him articulate alliances to strengthen the newly formed party, which defends nationalist ideologies and attacks alliances with foreign capital. However, conflicts among the main leaders of the new party, fomented by the United Mining's representative, Steiner, gain more media coverage than the ideals that Viana defends. These conflicts involve mainly the Senators Machado and Viana, as well as the congressman Raul Pratis. Anna Maciel, a journalist member of congressman Pratis' press committee and also Santana's lover, finds evidence that links Machado and the newspaper Correio da Nação to irregular contracts with the Japanese mining company, Japan Steel. However, Santana, who is himself involved in these irregular negotiations, turns a blind eye to the evidence and tries to hide the facts to prevent any denunciation in order to protect the unity and the image of the newly formed opposition party. By doing so, Santana becomes an obstacle to the interests of people inside the party as well as in the government. At the end of the movie, Santana dies in a car accident, leaving a letter to his lover Anna, explaining the reasons behind his actions.

There are two main reasons why the movie is difficult to follow. One reason is that it presents its characters in confusing ways. There are not many characters, but they are frequently referred to by their position rather than their names, and this can be confusing. Additionally, some characters, like Carlos Santana, are sometimes called by their first name and sometimes by their surname. The lack of consistency in the way characters are referred to demands much more attention from its spectators, which can have the effect of disengaging them, a potential that is exacerbated due to the film's slow pace. Additionally, many of the characters are mentioned by others much before they actually appear on the screen. Senator Viana, for instance, is mentioned several times since the beginning of the movie, but only appears more than an hour later. Secondly, the editing makes dialogues seem like narration, because the characters, even when discussing issues they are passionate about, employ a monotonous style, and the camera often captures someone other than the speaker, or even the background. These factors also weigh in to prevent the plot from becoming more interesting to the public, which is unfortunate given its historical importance and the relevance of the themes it discusses. I will dedicate the balance of this chapter to Graça's treatment of U.S. influence on Brazilian affairs as well as on the intricate connections between knowledge and power in the movie. These themes sit at the film's heart despite the fact that the director largely buries them under disengaging film techniques. The choice to analyze these themes allows for a comparison with the way they are addressed in *O que é isso, companheiro?*.

To start off, in *Memórias do Medo*, the U.S. influence on Brazilian politics is depicted much more actively and negatively than in the previously analyzed movie.

Indeed, this theme pervades most of the movie's plot, while it is only dealt with superficially in *O que é isso, companheiro?*. The U.S. influence on Brazilian politics is symbolized in the plot mainly by Steiner, the United Mining's representative in Brasília. He participated in secret meetings with members of the newly founded opposition party, such as congressman Raul Pratis, and tried to influence his next political moves to formulate a case against Senator Machado in a CPI (Parliamentary Inquiry Commission). A CPI is a temporary committee with powers to investigate events of constitutional, social, and economic relevance for the country (República Federativa do Brasil, Câmara dos Deputados). Being investigated by a CPI has serious impacts on a politician's reputation. In other words, in *Memórias do Medo*, the U.S. participates both in the unlawful exploitation of Brazilian mineral resources and in the fragmentation of opposition forces. Additionally, Steiner is not as charismatic as Elbrick. The ambassador and his wife try to integrate themselves into the Brazilian culture in the former movie by participating in samba ballroom dances, and they even speak some Portuguese. On the other hand, Steiner is cold, manipulative, self-interested, and speaks in Spanish to the Brazilian politicians. As a result, the spectator does not empathize with the United Mining representative in the same way s/he does with Elbrick.

However, Steiner is not the only character presented in this Manichean fashion. Anna, for instance, is also a flat character: she is represented as well-meaning but naive, and she is easily manipulated by Brazilian politicians and foreign lobbyists like Steiner. Similarly, Pratis is an idealist who cannot compromise for the sake of the party's unity. Indeed, the most round character of the movie is the protagonist Carlos Santana, who

seems to be righteous and well-meaning almost until the end of the movie when Novaes tells Anna that Santana was actually involved in the negotiations to give the exploration of Gangorra to the Japan Steel mining company rather than United Steel. These Manichean characters contribute to making the movie less interesting because their actions and the outcome of these actions are overly predictable and leave no room for different interpretations. In addition to that, none of the characters are truly charismatic, a fact that further disengages the spectator, who cannot identify with nor cheer for any of them.

While in the previously analyzed movie, ambassador Elbrick connects the dots for the spectator and offers a supposedly balanced view of the events, in *Memórias do Medo* there is no character that performs such role. Rather, knowledge is fragmentary and ephemeral. Each character holds partial knowledge of what is to come next, and it is also constantly changing in the discussions and negotiations between the various characters. On the spectator's end, watching the movie is similar to putting together a giant puzzle. The plot develops as different pieces of information become available from time to time. Thus, the treatment of the theme of knowledge control also makes the movie confusing, thus lowering its appeal to general audiences.

In the end, the slow pace of the movie, coupled with the long-winded treatment of characters and themes, prevents the movie from being developed to its full potential, and as a result it alienates many viewers from different publics. Moreover, the complexity of the story and the somewhat unconventional camerawork contribute to making it less palatable for general audiences. Lastly, although unconventional, the camerawork is

neither innovative nor artsy enough to make the movie worth watching for its aesthetic value. For instance, the movie's climax, which shows Santana's car accident, has basically no special effects and is as slow as the rest of the film. In conclusion, *Memórias do Medo* has the potential to be a great film: it has famous actors in the cast – a choice which could have reflected positively in the box office- and has an interesting plot filled with intrigue, betrayal, and mind-games. Given the film's engagement with themes that remain relevant in Brazil to this day--such as corruption and foreign influence--this film had many positive elements in its favor. Yet, because it could have been better developed, the film falls short of being a must watch. This in turn muted its ability to gain popularity and to insert itself more fully and lastingly into a canonical body of post-dictatorial cultural production.

3. *ROJO AMANECER* AND *EL BULTO*: FILMIC REPRESENTATIONS OF MEXICAN AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE DIRTY WAR

"1968 was a pivotal year: protests, disturbances, and riots in Prague, Paris, Tokyo, Belgrade, Rome, Mexico City, Santiago. Just as the epidemics of the Middle Ages respected neither religious frontiers nor social hierarchies, so the student rebellions annulled ideological classifications." (Octavio Paz 221)

"The students in Mexico were well aware of developments in France, Cuba, United States and elsewhere. It was a time for rebellion and a time for change, and Mexican students did not want to be left behind." (Kevin B. Witherspoon 4)

The Mexican state was enjoying its place in the international spotlight in 1968: Mexico City had won its bid for that year's Olympic Games against the cities of Lyon (France) and Detroit (U.S.A.). As such, Mexico had convinced the world that it was "stable enough, prosperous enough, and sufficiently prepared to host the Olympics" (Witherspoon 3). For the leaders of the PRI, it was a sign that their long-term image-building project had been successful. Unlike other Latin American countries, Mexico seemed politically stable, and it had experienced years of economic and urban development during a period of time called the Mexican Miracle (Flaherty 197). "Beginning in the 1940s, the state intensified its sponsorship of large-scale welfare and transportation projects that were meant to thoroughly modernize and integrate the nation"

(Flaherty 196). As George F. Flaherty explains, these projects were led by architects and urban-planners, like Mario Pani, who were politically aligned with the PRI. At the same time, these projects represented "grand gestures" meant to compensate for growing social inequality and the lack of political representation for the masses (197). As the Olympics approached, the Mexican government's expenses on beautification projects increased even as discontent among the population festered. Student protesters printed fliers and organized marches that denounced the government. The protests put significant pressure on the federal government; they began to pick up steam immediately prior to the Olympics, a moment that was supposed to showcase the nation's modernity. Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, the Mexican president, opted for violent repression of the protesters, and ten days before the games' opening ceremony, the Batallón Olimpia --a riot police or paramilitary group created to carry out counterinsurgency operations-- crushed the students as they ended a demonstration. George Flaherty notes that the plaza was rapidly cleaned and tanks"stationed at the plaza for weeks after the massacre in an attempt to preempt any public mourning" (Flaherty 192). Nevertheless, the state could never fully stifle these memories; as Kevin B. Witherspoon notes, "the resulting massacre of students at Tlatelolco on 2 October was one of the transformative events in recent Mexican history" (Witherspoon 5). Student activists publicly blamed the government for the massacre and several strikes persisted throughout the rest of the year. However, in December 1968 the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH) was dismantled.

The massacre at Tlatelolco (1968) and the subsequente massacre at Corpus Christi (1971) constituted some of the most violent episodes of repression against student

protesters in twentieth-century Mexico. In both cases, government-backed paramilitary groups perpetrated most of the violence. The anti-communist rhetoric that the government used to undermine the movement--it "claimed that the students were motivated by the agents of Mao" (Paz 221), for example--mirrored that employed by military dictatorships throughout Latin America. What is more, the PRI followed in the footsteps of its authoritarian counterparts in military regimes throughout the region by proactively attempting to scrub these events from the collective memory. It is for this precise reason that Juan Rojo points out that, despite a few short films produced about these events, none of which were distributed through national movie theaters, "it is not until 1989 and 1991, with the releases of [Jorge Fons's] *Rojo amanecer* and [Gabriel Retes's] *El bulto*, respectively, that the events of Tlatelolco and its aftermath are approached in feature-length films" (*Revisiting the Mexican Student Movement* 115). In this chapter, I analyze how these pioneering films address paramilitarism and the personal costs of political opposition. Additionally, I also discuss how these films address the issue of memory in terms of the dichotomy memory *versus* oblivion. As such, I also discuss these works' contributions to the construction of a Mexican collective memory of the massacres of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Both movies deal with collective memory as one of their main themes, although they take slightly different approaches. I argue that *Rojo amanecer* promotes the idea of reconciliation by memory, while *El bulto* upholds the idea of reconciliation by oblivion.

Despite their differing approaches to memory, these films have important features in common. In both cases, the plot revolves around a middle-class family from Mexico

City in which one or more family members engage in leftist political activity. In *Rojo amanecer*, two of the family members, Sergio (Bruno Bichir) and Jorge (Démian Bichir), attend the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and participate in the student movement and the protests against the government; in *El bulto*, the protagonist Lauro Cantillo (Gabriel Retes) is a photographic journalist who works for a newspaper and write pieces denouncing the government's wrongdoings. He falls into a coma after being victimized by one of the Halcones as he works on the news coverage of a student protest. Secondly, there are instances of ideological and/or generational conflicts between the family members. In *Rojo amanecer*, the major conflicts occur between Sergio, Jorge, and their grandfather Roque, who fought in the Mexican Revolution and thinks that college students have no reason to fight the government. In *El bulto*, there is ideological confrontation between Lauro Cantillo and his brother-in-law Toño (José Alonso), who accepts a job in the government and leaves his rebellious past to form part of the institutionalized revolution that he had spent so much time opposing in the past. Additionally, there are also generational conflicts between Lauro Cantillo and his children Sonia (Gabriela Retes) and Daniel (Juan Claudio Retes), who are reticent against Lauro's strict parenting style. Thirdly, in both films the politically engaged family members are victims of paramilitary violence backed by the Mexican government and the United States. This violence drastically impacts the lives of the entire family, even those who avoid political militancy. The paramilitaries murder the entire family, except for Carlitos, the youngest child, in *Rojo amanecer*. Only Lauro Cantillo suffers the physical violence in *El bulto*, but his children have to grow up without a paternal figure while he

remains bedridden in a coma for twenty years. This last difference actually creates a point of convergence between the two movies: by addressing the issue of children who are deprived of proper parenting in their formative years, both films are able to denounce the political repression and paramilitary activity by focusing on its consequences in the private sphere, particularly the family.

3.1 The Massacre of Tlatelolco and *Rojo amanecer*

Samuel Steinberg states that "until the late 1980s, Tlatelolco was represented almost exclusively through photojournalism and journalistic or testimonial writing" (114). We see this with Elena Poniatowska's *Massacre in Mexico* [*La noche de Tlatelolco*], one of the first works published about this ominous event; the book compiles testimonies of survivors, journalists, soldiers and witnesses of the massacre. Juan Rojo points out that, while directors tried to produce feature films for two decades, it was not until 1989 that the government would finally greenlight such a project with Fons's *Rojo amanecer* (*Revisitng the Mexican Student Movement* 115). Viewed in this light, it should come as no surprise that, once a film finally came out, it explicitly and self-consciously engaged with those works of testimonial literature that had come before. Indeed, Poniatowska's book inspired some dialogues in *Rojo amanecer* (1989). Similar to *Massacre at Tlatelolco*, the film also functions as an audiovisual archive of the different experiences associated with the massacre. "*Rojo amanecer* becomes another node in the '68 Movement's rhizomatic structure of collective memory: repeating information, recalling the past, and creating a dense media field that cannot be denied or co-opted by its enemies" (Flaherty 214). Considering this, I argue that *Rojo amanecer* upholds the

ideology of reconciliation by memory.

There are many characteristics of the movie that mark its clear relationship with the construction of Mexico's collective memory following the Massacre of Tlatelolco. Firstly, *Rojo amanecer* was filmed in a replica of one of Pani's apartments, that is, the setting of the film recreates the interior of the Nonoalco-Tlatelolco housing complex which surrounded the plaza where the massacre occurred (Steinberg 132**)**. Secondly, in the first sequence of the film, one of the characters, Don Roque, fixes the calendar to the day of the massacre: October 2. Shortly after this, as the family gathers to have breakfast, the dialogues are quite expository of how the student movement had developed, "recount[ing] recent events, offering a month-by-month chronology" (Flaherty 214). In doing so, the characters in the movie voice the demands of the Consejo Nacional de Huelga (CNH, National Strike Council), a group that played an integral role in the organization of the students' movement. The CNH was created in August, 1968, and it worked to organize demonstrations, to gather support among other social groups, and to publicize the movement's demands. A month before the massacre, for example, the CNH organized a silent march and ran a paid announcement in the popular newspaper *El Día* to invite "all workers, peasants, teachers, students, and the general public" to support their "six-point petition", that included the release of political prisoners, the dissolution of the granaderos' corps, and the "determination of individual government officials implicated in the bloodshed" (Poniatowska 53). As such, I agree with Steinberg, who argues that *Rojo amanecer* "reproduces or reenacts other, earlier, representations of 2 October. It does not deny or overcome the earlier testimonial and documentary texts [...],

but, rather, consumes those texts, as an archive that would collect them" (Steinberg 115). As such, *Rojo amanecer* is a filmic reenactment of the massacre and the moving image of the testimonies of the archives. Jorge Fons makes use of several allegories to address the Massacre of Tlatelolco and to "ingeniously exploi[t] cinema's potential for processing the archive of 1968" (Steinberg 115). As a result, I read the movie as upholding the ideology of reconciliation through memory.

Indeed, one of the main allegories resides in the construction of the characters' profiles: each of the seven family members represents a different social group in Mexican society. Juan Rojo writes, "*Rojo amanecer* examined the events of the night of Tlatelolco from the point of view of a divided family that acts as an allegory of the nation" (*Revisiting the Mexican Student Movement of 1968*, 115). The *abuelo* Don Roque (Jorge Fegán) is a retired military officer who fought in the Mexican Revolution. He represents the Revolution's time and ideals. Humberto (Hector Bonilla) is a government employee and represents the institutionalization of the Revolution. Humberto's wife Alicia (Maria Rojo) is a homemaker. She happily performs all household chores by herself and represents a generation of Mexican women that were raised by machista revolutionaries and grew up in a very patriarchal society that they do not question. Humberto and Alicia are the parents to four children. The two oldest, Sergio (Bruno Bichir) and Jorge (Demián Bichir) attend the UNAM and participate in the student movement: they represent the student activists who are targeted by the government-backed paramilitary attack. At this point, it is important to note that the family represents "the metonymic vicisitudes of twentieth-century Mexico in the flesh: Revolution, Institutionalization, and the Student

Movement, inhabitants of the apartment buildings that sit on the site of Mexico's origin, which in turn collect the names of Mexico's territory" (Steinberg 133). The remainder of the family members are much younger. Graciela (Paloma Robles) is a teenage girl that attends secondary school and wants to pursue an education beyond the high school level; Graciela is already the fruit of a Mexico slightly more modern than the one where her mother was raised. The youngest child is Carlos (Ademar Arau) --also called Carlitos by his family members-- who is about ten years old; in the end of the film, Carlitos is the only family member that survives the massacre. As such, he represents a generation that witnesses the bloodshed and grows up marked by it.

Interestingly, the gender and generational gaps and conflicts between the various family members mirror the ones in the Mexican society. There are various scenes in the movie that depict generational conflicts between the characters. For instance, while the family members get ready to start their daily routines and wait for Alicia to make breakfast, Don Roque watches television. When Jorge joins him, asking if there had been any news about the *mítin*, the grandfather responds, "a mí qué me importa el mítin?" Some time later, when the family gathers around the breakfast table, Humberto teases his sons for looking too thin and suggests that they exercise. Yet, Humberto is still a modern father, who wants to have a good relationship with his children: he actually wants Jorge and Sergio to go exercise *with him* and spend time together as a family, "hace cuánto tiempo que no van con nosotros?". Shortly after that, Graciela turns the radio on, and the news covers events related to the student protesters. Don Roque comments, "puros gritos de maricones" and looking at Jorge and Sergio completes, "ni como hombres se visten".

Don Roque disagrees with his grandsons' involvement in the protests because he sees the young generation as a beneficiary of the Revolution's successes. Roque also sees the grandsons as spoiled --he refers to them as "*chamacos consentidos*"-- and hints that Sérgio and Jorge would not survive a 'true revolution'. For Flaherty, "Roque echoes the state's criticism of the '68 Movement using the language of a host rebuffed" (215). Humberto is less aggressive than Don Roque, but says that the students "tampoco entienden por qué cantan" and orders Graciela to turn the radio off to put down the stressing factor that was causing the argument. In doing so, Humberto exerts his paternal authority to put order in the house and to prevent the discussion from getting worse.

Although less assertively, Alicia also acts as a peacemaker --as expected of a 'good wife'. When Don Roque and Humberto make fun of Sergio and Jorge's hair, Alicia promptly tries to protect her sons saying, "es la moda; se ven guapíssimos". In other words, Alicia always tries to downplay the conflicts between Don Roque and her sons. Indeed, Alicia tends to be protective of Jorge and Sergio. For instance, when she finds a magazine about the student movement in their bedroom, she looks at it, but hides it back in the same place --she could have thrown it away, she could have told someone about it, but she chooses to be lenient with her sons. As a matter of fact, the one child with whom Alicia has a conflict is Graciela. One scene that represents this conflict is when the latter tells her mother about her desire to continue studying. Alicia discourages her daughter from overthinking because she is already destined to be a homemaker. Because Alicia is older, the machista characteristics of Mexican society have already been ingrained in her thought --truly *hogareña*, she serves all the men in the house without questioning or

complaining. Graciela, on the other hand, has bigger dreams for herself which include working outside the domestic sphere. Similar to the conflict between the men of the house, the conflict between mother and daughter is also generational.

Being from different generations shapes the film characters' perception of Mexican political reality and conflicts. Indeed, the various characters of the movie represent different degrees of awareness in regards to the Mexican political conflicts of the time. Steinberg asserts that "[a]part from their two teenage sons, (...) the rest of the family is, according to the film, completely innocent" (115). I agree to a point; Sergio and Jorge attend the UNAM --one of the hubs from where the student movement was articulated--, and are certainly the only two family members actively engaged in the protests. Moreover, they know that the student movement was formed in reaction to police violence at university campus --in other words, they know what the government is capable of. Even so, they still choose to participate in the protests and engage in the peaceful demonstrations organized by the student movement. While it is undeniable that they willingly engage in activities that might be seen as subversive by the government, it is out of voluntarism and naiveté. They are young and idealistic, and choose to take the risk, because they believe their cause is worth fighting for.

Steinberg's invocation of the term innocence is especially interesting if we consider its secondary definition, which refers to immaturity or inexperience. If we use this definition of the term, then it would appear that Sergio and Jorge actually are quite innocent. Indeed, the most politically seasoned characters viewed in this light would be Humberto and Don Roque. Their positions within the state as a revolutionary (Don

Roque) and as a mid-level bureaucrat (Humberto) leave them privy to knowledge that gives them a broader comprehension of Mexican politics than that of the remainder of the family. They know that the government will likely react harshly against the students' protests. For instance, Humberto warns his sons that the government could escalate the response. Similarly, after seeing snipers in the building, Don Roque tells Alicia that the government is preparing a reaction, demonstrating his knowledge of tactical operations. He clearly knows that the government may choose to dismantle dissent and crush opposition to its hegemony, and he also knows that they have set up the tactical formation to do so. Being a former soldier, Don Roque is able to read the situation and anticipate how the riot police might act. This is why he offers himself to talk to the police when the officers knock at the family's door looking for subversives. Additionally, it is Roque's experience that leads him to have Carlitos hide under the bed--a move that ultimately saves the little boy's life--before the riot police kill everyone they see in the family apartment.

If we continue with the definition of innocence as inexperience, then the most innocent characters of the film are Alicia, Graciela and Carlitos. Indeed, these characters are innocent in all meanings of the word: they are not guilty of involvement with subversive activity, and yet they suffer the consequences of it anyway; they are also innocent in the sense of being unaware of the brutal nature of the authoritarian state. They do not know better. In constructing the female characters and the child in this way, the film buoys the popular 1960s imaginaries that held women and children to exist beyond the scope of politics (Rojo, *Revisiting the Mexican Student Movement* 59); as such,

violence against them was seen as especially unacceptable. As a homemaker, Alicia spends most of her time in the family's residence; additionally, because the government controls much of what is publicized on the news, for most of the film she only acquires information from that heavily-controlled source. These women and children come to understand the scope of government overreach as it comes to affect them directly. Alicia is the first to do this: she loses her innocence gradually, on the day of the massacre. It starts when she is cleaning her sons' bedroom and finds a magazine under the sheets with photos of the violence against students; Alicia is shocked with the graphic images, but she still cannot imagine that anything would happen to her. An evidence of this continued political innocence is that, when the energy and telephone lines do not work in their apartment complex, Alicia orders Graciela to try and make a phone call to Humberto from a public phone on the street or at a neighbor's house.

The act of sending her daughter to run this errand is a sign of Alicia's innocence, because it shows that despite Don Roque's comments about the snipers in the roof, and Humberto's earlier warning about the possible reaction of the government, Alicia still has no idea of what could happen. Had she not been innocent --in other words, had she been aware of how things could develop--, she would have protected her daughter, and kept Graciela sheltered. In the case of Graciela and Carlitos, their innocence is related to their age. They witness some of the heated arguments about politics between their older siblings and their father, but they are too young to fully understand the discussions. They both lose their innocence involuntarily: Graciela loses her innocence when her mother sends her to run an errand outside the house, and this is when the girl sees the

demonstration and the security apparatus that is being formed; Carlitos loses his innocence when he sees the massacre from the apartment window with his mother. The "young boy stands in as witness and victim both: he watches the grisly massacre take place (...), but also, because the students are never seen, his anguished face stands in the place of theirs" (Steinberg 125). At the end of the film, Carlitos is the only family member that survives the bloodshed, and he therefore comes to represent the generation that lost its innocence in 1968 after the massacre.

Indeed, in the last sequence of the film, Carlitos, who had been hiding under a bed, leaves the apartment. Scared, in pajamas, and barefeet, Carlitos walks over the dead bodies of his family members and the other students that his brothers had invited home to escape the violence at the Plaza de Las Tres Culturas. He briefly lays on a wall, and looks at his dead mom. He cries, "mamita!", and lets his body fall. He then crawls around the corpses, touching his *papá* and "abue", as if he is briefly mourning them. He then stands up again, and walks out of the apartment. On his way down the stairs, he sees more dead bodies, probably of students like his brothers. Clearly distressed, Carlitos then continues his way out of the apartment building, going down the hallway, deviating from corpses and stepping on fresh blood. When he makes it to the street, a man is cleaning the entrance of the building --sweeping out the material evidence that the place had been the locus of a massacre, as did the government. Carlitos also sees soldiers with automatic guns guarding the street --as mentioned earlier, the government had security forces stationed in the plaza to prevent public mourning (Flaherty 214). Carlitos does not stop to mourn; indeed, he does not interact with anyone. On the contrary, he follows his way,

walking steadily but without a destination, and carrying in his body the marks of the massacre: his face is wet from tears, his feet are dirty with the students' blood. He can clean himself later, wash the tears and the blood, but he will nevertheless be forever marked by the massacre. As such, Carlitos is the living memory of the massacre.

By the end of the movie, it is undeniable that the lives of the all family members are tragically impacted. Most of them are dead, and the only survivor is a child orphaned by the state's violence. Carlitos is now on his own, deprived of familial convivence and proper parenting. As a result, the costs of political engagement are not contained to Sergio and Jorge, the only family members that were guilty of participating in the protests. By analogy, the costs of the massacre are not contained to the student activists, but to the whole Mexican society. The state had tried to frame its accounts of the massacre as a reaction to subversion or even terrorism, by positing the students as aligned to foreign interests, calling them "agents of Mao" (Paz 221). Just as represented in the movie by the Riot Police killing all family members, the state's response to the supposed threat the students represented was disproportionate to the actual gunpower they had. The photo essay that integrates Poniatowska's quintessential account of the massacre shows the Mexican army posing next to the few arms that the students actually had: "our only weapons against the Riot Police were firecrackers and Molotov cocktails", reads the caption (183). The cowardice of the bloodshed that victimized so many young Mexican students, as well as those who dared to support them, made the massacre a watershed event in the country's recent history. This is why every year people still gather to light candles and honor the dead, reminding that, despite all the state's efforts to erase this

episode from collective memory, *el 2 de octubre no se olvida*.

3.2 The Massacre of Corpus Christi and *El bulto*

On June 10, 1971, a group of student protesters organized a march toward the Zócalo, the famous plaza in downtown Mexico City, and demanded increased democratic transparency and autonomy for their universities. These demands were similar to those of the student movement of the 1960s. Mexican President Luis Echeverría Álvarez, whose *sexenio* had started in 1970, had signaled an intention to ameliorate the country's democracy by allowing for greater freedom of expression: he allowed the return of political exiles and the release of political prisoners. The students saw these measures as a new opportunity to engage in demonstrations and express their demands. However, despite this appearance of a democratic opening, the government secretly enacted a counterinsurgency operation and sent paramilitary forces called *halcones* to repress the student protesters. The demonstrators never made it to their final destination because the paramilitary violently crushed the protest as the students marched up Avenida San Cosme (Calderón and Cedillo 5). This episode became known as *La Masacre del Jueves de Corpus Christi*, in allusion to the day it happened, or *El halconazo*, in reference to the major role played by the paramilitary group that perpetrated great violence against the protesters. Released in 1991, Gabriel Retes' *El bulto* recounts this ominous day and its long-lasting consequences from the point of view of the communist and idealistic photographic journalist Lauro Cantillo. One of the Halcones hits Lauro on the head while he covers the protest, and the reporter falls into a coma that lasts twenty years. When he awakens, Lauro faces a reality that differs substantially from the world he remembers. In

the article “History Comes Out of its Coma: *El bulto* and the (In)corporation of Tlatelolco”, Juan Rojo points out that “Lauro is clearly a man of 1968” (7) and the massacres of Tlatelolco and Corpus Christi are his “last conscious existence” (8). Yet, Lauro awakens from the coma in a neoliberal Mexico. His family has changed and so has Mexican society; its customs, economic system, and political situation--both at home and abroad--strike him as unrecognizable. Faced with a reality he cannot change, Lauro begins a journey of physical and mental recovery while at the same time struggling to reconnect with his family, friends, and former coworkers. However, for this to happen, Lauro has to abandon his utopian dreams and accept the new reality of a neoliberal Mexican society. More specifically, Lauro has to accept that his country --and the world, in fact-- had transitioned to a new social, political and economic reality, despite having himself missed the transition. He has to accept that his former comrades had not betrayed the ideologies they fought for in the past, but rather that they now lived in a world where the student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s existed only in photographs, and the ideological conflict between capitalism and communism had fallen with the fragmentation of the U.R.S.S. and the demolition of the Berlin Wall. Although it is unsettling that the changes and political transformation initiated in the 1960s and 1970s opened way to neoliberalism, Lauro has to accept the transition to be able to fit in. Moreover, he has to come to terms with his own place in this new reality, and accept that by doing so, he will not be selling himself --transition has already happened while he was in a coma. As such, Sánchez Prado points out that “the general tone of *El bulto* is that of resignation and defeat in the face of a struggle that, in hindsight, is void of any

significance" (112). As a result, Lauro has to move on from the past, and forgive people associated with his bad memories as well as to create new ones.

To contribute to the development of the growing scholarship on the Mexican dirty war, this thesis discusses how the issue of memory is addressed in the movie *El bulto* and argues that it advances a model of reconciliation not only by forgetting, but through forgiving. In other words, *El bulto* upholds the idea of reconciliation by oblivion. "The journalist, awakening to Carlos Salinas's Mexico, sees his former comrades now financially successful and quite a bit more conservative. He clashes with his family and friends, who are all sellouts, he thinks. By the end of the film, however, he makes peace with all." (Steinberg 120) Therefore, Lauro's initial anger towards everyone with whom he has associated his misfortune prevents him from reconnecting with his family and friends, and it is only when he accepts the changes and forgives them that he can truly reintegrate himself into his family and, by extension, into the Mexican society. To heal himself, Lauro has to move forward, and let "the very weight (*bulto* in a different sense) of those years (...) melt away" (Steinberg 120). Additionally, this thesis examines two other major themes commonly associated with the dirty wars and addressed in the movie: anti-communism and paramilitarism. Lastly, I also discuss the contributions of the movie to the construction of the Mexican collective memory about this traumatic event in the country's recent history.

El bulto is an ideal movie to discuss the Mexican authoritarian experiences because it addresses the themes of memory, anti-communism, and paramilitarism from the films's beginning. Let us begin the discussion through the representation of the

memory issue. The film opens with a five-minute-long sequence of shots in black and white that recreates the halconazo. This opening sequence in "black and white images allude to Lopez Aretche's *El grito*" (Rojo, "History Comes Out of its Coma" 8). Considering that *El grito* is one of the first cultural works produced about Tlatelolco, it is possible to notice that Retes's filming strategy connects his own movie to the memory of the 1968 massacre. In doing so, Retes also presents the 1971 student riots as a continuation of the previous student movement. Rojo furthers his analysis by elaborating on the treatment of memory in the movie and treating it as a synonym to history itself:

> Still, while the events of Tlatelolco do not appear to have a central role in this film, its history and certainly its memory are very much central the its development being that Lauro comes to represent that very history. He is in fact a personified history. It is noteworthy that Lauro suffers his injuries while working as a photographer. Presumably, he is documenting the events of June 10,1971. His profession is one dedicated to capturing and preserving a historical moment. Curiously, we do not see an attempt to uncover the circumstances that led to his near death. Nor do we see the evidence he might have taken by means of his camera. There is no need to uncover a history because Lauro is that history. However, it is not a history that has been coopted, adjusted, or manipulated in any way. Instead, it is a history that has been suspended in a cocoon of death for twenty years. (Rojo "History Comes Out of its Coma: El bulto and the (In)corporation of Tlatelolco" 9)

The other two prominent themes in the movie are paramilitarism and

anti-communism, which go hand in hand. As a matter of fact, the paramilitary forces had been assembled and trained to prevent communist or left-leaning subversive activity in the country. The first character to appear on screen is the chief of the *halcones*, who instructs his men to repress the protesters saying, "no temen México (...); son comunistas; vamos a darles una lección." Dressed in civilian clothes and identified mostly by a black piece of cloth tied around their left arms, the *halcones* display their martial arts training by skillfully manipulating *varas de bambú*. A close up shows a man carrying a semiautomatic gun, like the ones that were used later to open fire against the protesters after they had already been ambushed by the paramilitary. Following that, short-length and frantic shots simulate the experience of journalists and photographers, including Lauro Cantillo, covering the protest, while at the same time trying to escape the violence. Freeze frames that resemble photographs of the event interrupt strenuous camera movements to display the names of actors and staff. The soundtrack at this point is fast-paced and resembles a military band interpolated with the desperate screams of the victims. The soundtrack also contributes to the skillful match cut that links the various shots that compose this opening scene. This first part ends with angry *halcones* walking over bloody bodies and occasionally kicking them to ensure they are dead. The last of these shots features Lauro, unconscious, lying next to various corpses. After this opening, there is no doubt that the halcones had been responsible for crushing the protesters, as it was also clear in *Rojo amanecer* that the Batallón Olimpia perpetrated the massacre.

Unlike the opening sequence, the rest of the movie is filmed in colors. This filming strategy marks a clear difference between two eras, two historical contexts, two

Mexicos: the dirty war Mexico, and the neoliberal one. The movie then fast-forwards twenty years later, as Lauro rests in a profound coma on a hospital bed. His children, Daniel and Sonia (Juan Claudio and Gabriela Retes), alternate taking care of him. Adela (Lourdes Elizarrarás), Sonia's best friend, helps them with their bedridden father and later in the movie becomes his love interest. When Lauro wakes up, he is very confused about who these people are and where he is. Lauro initially communicates only through blinking his eyes, but as he shows signs of steady recovery, the doctors allow him to go home. Still physically debilitated, Lauro, who can barely sit still, starts receiving visits from family members, friends, and former co-workers. His sister Valeria (Cecilia Camacho), her husband Toño (Jose Alonso), and their children pay Lauro the first visit. Valeria is actually the first one to tell him how long he had been in the hospital: "Veinte años, Lauro. Te nos fuiste veinte años. La mitad de tu vida."

After the family visit, a drum solo marks the transition to another round of visits that shows various people talking to Lauro about what he had missed while in the coma. The skillful editing, allied with the upbeat soundtrack, creates one of the best sequences of the movie. Through an ingenious montage/succession of shots, a stationary camera frames all the guests from the same angle and sitting on the same armchair. The richness and action of the sequence reside in the way the conversations are superposed to convey different points of view. The first guest to appear is a former comrade, who tells Lauro about how their movement lost momentum and people subsequently changed: "Somos todo lo que detestábamos hace veinte años". Yet, as the people who visit Lauro come from different walks of life, their opinions about the events they report also varies. For

instance, after Valeria tells Lauro about the NAFTA negotiations and how she thinks the free trade agreement might benefit them, a former coworker tells him the opposite: “Un editorial en cuatro palabras, mano: ahora estamos bien jodidos”. Additionally, Retes’ acting is also worth praising, especially given that at this point his character still does not speak to the guests, but his facial expressions convey a great range of emotions, from boredom to discontentment and irritability.

The brilliance of this sequence is that it functions as a metaphor for the process of constructing and negotiating Mexico’s collective memory. As mentioned before, the multiple guests who visit Lauro come from different walks of life. Therefore, they represent different sectors of the Mexican society. As they remember and recount the events to tell Lauro, they are also dealing with them, that is, coping with all the changes that have recently occurred in Mexico. Through this perspective, Lauro embodies what Steve Stern has called the memory box, which is a memory repository that contains "several competing scripted albums, each of them works in progress that seek to define and give shape to a crucial turning point in life" (*Remembering Pinochet’s Chile* xxviii). As a result, the collective memory is negotiated between the different works deposited in that memory box. By analogy, it is possible to say that Lauro’s own memory of the events he lived and the ones he missed is constructed and negotiated between the various inputs that he receives from these guests, as well as from other sources like literature and mass media. Lauro’s family has a lot of books at home, and as a journalist, he is also an avid reader. He is shown many times reading books and newspapers, both by himself and with his mother and his lover Adela. Moreover, Lauro watched a great deal of television.

"Está viendo demasiada televisión, le dá pavor a sair a la calle", Sonia comments with the doctor, suggesting that it is one of the factors holding Lauro's recovery back.

Later in the movie, Lauro receives the visit of Alberto (Héctor Bonilla), his former boss at the newspaper, and their conversation further advances the discussion of the themes of memory, anti-communism, and paramilitarism. One of the first questions Lauro asks Alberto is what happened to Mário Gomez, a co-worker who was in the protest with him. Initially, Alberto tries to evade the question and asks Lauro if he really does not remember anything. Lauro's answer is a compelling account of La Masacre de Corpus Christi: "Me acuerdo que íbamos por San Cosme cuando de repente de todas las calles adyacentes comenzaron a salir esos hijos de la chingada. Me acuerdo de mi corriendo, de los balazos, de la gente cayendo al mi alrededor y de esos tipos golpeandonos con sus varas de bambú". After that, Lauro insists to know what happened with Mário Gomez, and Alberto finally responds, "lo desaparecieron". Asked about the press coverage of the massacre, Alberto suggests that there has been governmental control or censorship of the press, that published "verdades a medias" about the event. Alberto further explains that as time has passed, some publications have been released about it, and gives Lauro two gifts: a book by José Augustín --which reinforces the idea that Lauro is into countercultural literature and identifies with the 1960s and 1970s's revolutionary thought--, and a movie by Jorge Fons - which, given the chronology of the movie, is *Rojo Amanecer*, that had been released the year before. This last scene is clearly connected to the theme of memory because Fons' movie is the first major feature film about the Massacre of Tlatelolco.

This process of building and negotiating memory is not always peaceful. Indeed, it is permeated by conflict and anguish. For instance, throughout the movie, there are multiple instances of generational conflicts between Lauro and his children. When he tries to assert his paternal authority over Sonia and Daniel saying she could not show affection to her boyfriend Armando (Francisco de la O) at home, and that Daniel could not shave his head, it only results in dissent and them living home. Another example of conflict is between Lauro and Toño, with whom he is disappointed for having accepted the patronage of the government and becoming institutionalized. During a family reunion, Lauro directs very harsh words against his brother-in-law and his sister, "son unos corruptos, cómplices de los que me echaron a dormir". Lauro's anger ruins a family's fiesta, and only contributes to making himself feel further alienated as even his mother disapproves of his behavior. Additionally, he also hurts Adela, who distances herself from him for some time because of that. The pain of being alienated by his family and his girlfriend strikes Lauro quite harshly, and he considers attempting against his own life. He even gets a gun, and starts playing with it. The telephone rings and interrupts his plan, but he does not pick it up. Shortly after the telephone stops ringing, the electronic secretary plays a voice message from Adela, "Lauro, te estas portando mal". It is a fortunate coincidence, as Adela actually meant that he was treating her poorly; Adela's message continues and explains that even though he does not want her as a romantic partner, she still would like him to go to the theater to see Sonia and Armando's last rehearsal session before her play's premiere. After that, Lauro puts the gun away.

Adela's call makes Lauro feel important, cared for, and triggers him to also try to

better himself. This is when Lauro decides to resume writing and go to the newspaper to ask Alberto for a job. When Lauro gets to Alberto's office, he is well received by Alberto, who seems surprised, "no puedo creer que ya andes aquí!". Lauro looks confident, and says, "te traigo un artículo … se llama 'la relatividad del tiempo'. Espero que te guste y que lo publiques". Lauro explains that he feels good about the writing and that it will cause people to reflect, "va a hacer pensar a mucha gente". Alberto reads part of it and offers Lauro a column in the Sunday supplement to write two essays per week. Lauro gladly accepts the offer, and is sent to the shared office space where the other journalists work. One of Lauro's former co-worker promptly recognizes him, "Lauro Cantillo, no puedo creer". The journalists stand up and welcome Lauro with a round of applause. This is a cathartic moment for Lauro, who strives for being recognized for what he stands: a man from the 1960s and 1970s. With his eyes watering up, Lauro smiles and shows gratitude and happiness for being able to get his old job back. For Lauro, this is a big step toward reintegrating himself into the Mexican society.

Lauro's insertion into the job market also prompts him to try to reconcile with his family and friends. One of the first people he apologizes to is Toño. Sonia had told Lauro how her *tío* has always been there for her and her brother, providing for them not only financially but also emotionally, and therefore acting as a paternal figure while Lauro was in the hospital. When Toño shows up at Lauro's house to drop Valeria off, Lauro asks to talk to him: "Toño, quisiera hablar contigo … quiero pedirte una disculpa". Toño responds, "olvídalo", but Lauro insists and Toño assumes to have contributed to their fight, "yo también me puse muy necio"; as Lauro opens himself and talks about his

feelings, Toño also shares how the changes from the last twenty years had affected himself: “todo ese tiempo que te la pasaste dormido, yo lo he vivido dándome de golpes en la cabeza, justamente por defender esas ideas”. Lauro finally understands that Toño also struggled to adapt to the new socioeconomic reality of their country; moreover, Lauro understands that Toño also had to make concessions to his old ideals to adapt to the neoliberal changes. In doing so, Lauro finally accepts that it is Toño’s job for the government that allows him to be the breadwinner for his sister Valeria’s family, and to help Lauro’s family when they needed, too. As a result, Lauro stops seeing Toño --and by analogy, the generation of former comrades that accepted the government’s patronage-- as sell outs, and starts to accept that a transition happened while he was in a coma. Therefore, it is possible to notice that, while Lauro is given the chance to remember, reconciliation and his own reintegration into society are only possible when he accepts that Mexico and the world had changed, and forgives the people who he had so harshly judged and mistreated. Additionally, after apologizing to Toño, Lauro also reaches out to his former love interest: “Adela, soy yo. Me siento como un imbécil hablándole a una grabadora, pero te extraño con toda mi alma … perdóname, soy un estúpido”. Lauro’s voice message prompts Adela to go visit him; they get back together and Adela resumes frequenting Lauro’s house.

The next sequence of the film shows one of these visits. Adela, Lauro and his mother are reading newspapers in the backyard. Lauro uses the opportunity to read his essay to them, and this this is when the spectator finally learns about the content of Lauro’s *artículo* for the newspaper: “El 10 de junio de 1971, un halcón descargó un

certero golpe que me desconectó del mundo. Hoy, a dos décadas de distancia, me pregunto: por dónde empezar? Por el encuentro con mis hijos, jóvenes de mi misma edad mental y emocional, a los que no conozco, a los que no eduque, a los que no ví crecer?" The camera cuts to Armando reading the same article to Sonia, who is touched by her father's testimony. She smiles with each word that Lauro had never been able to say to her face-to-face. This scene is not only heart-warming; it also clearly connected to memory building. In integrating testimonio into the narratological structure of the film, Retes is taking advantage of the genre's the major role in the construction of collective memory and in aiding victims of trauma to move on.

Finally, another significant move Lauro makes to reconcile with his family happens at the end of the movie when he goes to his daughter's party showing changes in his appearance that reflect his internal changes. Lauro had shaved his head like Daniel had done before, and also had shaved his long guerrilla-like beard into a mustache like Toño's. Clean-shaved, calm and humbled, Lauro asks Sonia if he can come in and join the party --he actually had not been invited to it because of his former aggressive behavior. He then meets Alba's (his ex-wife, played by Delia Casanova) husband, Rogelio (Gonzalo Lora), lets Armando call him *suegro*, and later tells Daniel that he felt bad for not knowing how to be around him. His son makes Lauro feel better by saying that he was already around, and they kiss and hug sealing peace and leaving the tension behind them. After that, all the characters sing together "el rap del Bulto", to which Lauro even improvises some rhymes "after overcoming his surprise" (Sanchez Prado 114). The movie ends with a close up of Lauro laughing at the whole situation. I interpret Lauro's

laughing as showing that he has accepted things as they are and has decided to make the most out of the life as he can. I conclude that Lauro's acceptance is related to his own way of grieving and moving on from the past: keeping his own identity, while adapting to the transformations in his family, his country, etc. In an earlier passage of the film, the spectator learns that Lauro had written in the newspaper article that he was the same from 20 years before: "preservo mis ideales, mis gustos, mis valores. Después de todo, yo me quedé dormido ayer y han pasado 20 años". In other words, Lauro's ideals had not changed, what had changed was his approach to pursuing them. In doing so, Lauro demonstrated traits of flexibility and resilience that allowed him to reconcile his past and present lives and affections.

4. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have discussed four memorial films from Brazil and Mexico: *O que é isso, companheiro?* (1997), *Memórias do Medo* (1981), *Rojo amanecer* (1989) and *El bulto* (1991). Through this pairing of movies, I have demonstrated the concept of memorial films, which are works that explicitly address the collective memory of the dirty wars by engaging with the so-called memory knots --sites in time, physical geography, and sites of humanity related to the memory of Latin American authoritarian regimes (Steve Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile* 121). In using this concept of memorial films to analyze the aforementioned Mexican films, I have shown that Mexican cinema, although less prolifically than Brazilian or Argentine cinema --which are more famous for their productions about the dirty wars' period--,has nevertheless produced memorial films. Indeed, I have shown that Mexican memorial films share important characteristics with Brazilian memorial films: firstly, they address major milestones of their respective countries' traumatic experiences under authoritarianism -- the decree of Ato Institucional #5 in Brazil and the massacre of Tlatelolco in Mexico, for example; secondly, they tell stories that are protagonized by social groups that are considered to guard or embody (at least part of) the memory of the authoritarian period: former guerrillas, political activists, government employees and journalists; thirdly, the movies are set in sites that are directly related to the events depicted in the movie: for instance, *Memórias do Medo* is set in Brasília, the Brazilian national capital, and *Rojo amanecer* is set in a replica of an apartment in the Chihuahua building actually located in the plaza

where the massacre of students took place (Steinberg 132); therefore, similar to Brazilian memorial films, the Mexican memorial films are also structured around the memory knots discussed by Steve Stern. Additionally, by showing how Mexican memorial films share characteristics with memorial films from the aforementioned countries, I also showed that although Mexico did not go through a coup d'état as other Latin American countries, it has still experienced authoritarianism in the same way as them.

In the Brazilian chapter, I discussed films that address the country's most famous mechanisms of transitional justice: the amnesty law and the party reform law, both promulgated in 1979. In analyzing the aforementioned laws' representations in the movies *O que é isso, companheiro?* and *Memórias do Medo*, respectively, I have proposed a dialogue with Rebecca Atencio's work between the mutual and subtle interplays between cultural works and institutional mechanisms of transitional justice. My analysis has reinforced her findings that, in Brazil, cultural works that reflect the zeitgeist of the nation and the official ideology behind the transitional justice mechanism they address tend to gain more popularity than their counterparts that defy the zeitgeist.

A possible way to further this research would be to investigate how these relations play out in other countries. The Uruguayan equivalent of the Brazilian amnesty law, the Ley de Caducidad de la Pretensión Punitiva del Estado (1989) is addressed in the movie *El ojo en la nuca* (2001), directed by Rodrigo Plá. Starring Gael García Bernal, the film tells the story of a young exile who returns to Uruguay before the decree of the Ley de Caducidad to revenge his father, that had been killed by the military dictatorship. It would be interesting to analyze *El ojo en la nuca* vis-a-vis *O que é isso, companheiro?* to

see how the amnesty law is represented in each of the movies, and how these movies amplify or defy their countries' zeitgeist and the official ideology behind the amnesty.

Also starring Bernal, the movie *No* (2013), directed by Pablo Larraín, addresses the referendum that led to Chile's democratic opening. Bernal plays another former exile, who is hired to lead an advertisement campaign to encourage people to vote against the continuation of Augusto Pinochet's government. Similar to *Memórias do Medo*, it is also a movie about democratization, and the two movies make an interesting pairing for analysis.

In the Mexican chapter, I have analyzed movies that address the bloodiest and most famous episodes of the countries authoritarianism during the dirty war: the massacre of students at Tlatelolco and later at San Cosme during Corpus Christi. An interesting way to continue investigating cinematic representations of these events would be to compare *Rojo amanecer* to more recent productions, such as Carlos Bolado's *Tlatelolco, Summer of 68*, released in 2013.

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