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The Memory of Militarism and the "Value" of Resistance: An Analysis of the Resistance Memorial of São Paulo.

Introduction

The experience of military regimes in the Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) is rarely discussed in debates on militarism.[1] Perhaps this is because the Southern Cone has enjoyed a period of relative peace since the Malvinas/Falklands War (1982). Perhaps, the reason lies in the fact that militarism in the region was largely thought to be outdated. Until very recently, few would believe that the age of military coups d'état would ever return to threaten the stability of the region's new democracies. Regardless, this absence can no longer be justified. The Southern Cone's history of violence, insecurity and militarisation, even in the absence of warfare and unrelated to it, provides a privileged site from which to intervene in contemporary debates about militarism.

This paper investigates processes of memorialisation of past military regimes in the region with the intent to contribute to the ongoing examination of the term "militarism". The central objective is to open a pathway for dialogue between the field of critical military studies and the work of scholars and practitioners making sense of state-led violence in post-authoritarian societies in the Global South. More specifically, the paper presents an analysis of the Resistance Memorial of São Paulo in Brazil (RM-SP).[2] Inaugurated in 2009, the RM-SP is an example of site of memory (Nora 1989), a space

[1] For notable exceptions see (Diamint 2015; Kruijt and Koonings 2012).

[2] *Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo*, in the original Portuguese. All translations hereafter are my own.

"where memories converge, condense, conflict, and define relationships between past, present, and future" (Davis and Starn 1989, 3). Built in a former iconic site of torture, the RM-SP was one of Brazil's first public institutions to openly address the crimes of the civic-military dictatorship (1964-1985). In a country marked by the legacy of a blanket amnesty, the RM-SP emerged as the demand of former political prisoners seeking some form of historical accountability. In the past 10 years, the RM-SP has become a reference centre, reaching an annual viewership of 78,000 persons on average.[3]

While discussing a set of questions dear to critical audiences (e.g. political violence and militarisation, the politics of memory and the possibilities of resistance), this paper makes two arguments. The first concerns the need to incorporate perspectives on political violence from the Global South in debates about militarism. As a site of memory connected to a rich archive and supported by decades of historical research and the testimony of survivors, the RM-SP is a gold mine. Interestingly, the dilemmas faced by the curators when making sense of state-led violence, such as the role attributed to civic-military relations, are similar to the dilemmas currently faced by critical scholarship. Therefore, an analysis of the ways in which the RM-SP responds to these dilemmas is extremely important, elucidating the consequences of certain decisions, or pointing towards solutions, not normally contemplated in the Global North. This is the case with the RM-SP's decision to delink the question of militarisation from the study of warfare altogether, seeing it, instead, as a matter of social control. Critical Military Studies needs to include different perspectives (not only different case-studies)

[3] Figures disclosed in a personal interview with Maurice Politi, president of an association of former political prisoners, at the RM-SP on 4 July 2014.

precisely in order to grasp this radical potentiality to explore otherwise unexplored paths.

But the radical potentiality present in the way the RM-SP remembers political violence comes with a caveat, which leads to my second argument. As a site of memory situated in the present, the RM-SP is also *a site of struggles* expressing the dilemmas of a (neo)liberal society, torn in-between the *liberal* defence of democratic principles and the reorganisation of social relations according to the *neoliberal* market. In the spirit of a political economy of memory (Allen 2016), this paper analyses how the RM-SP's duty to remember the past is contrasted with, and sometimes shaped by, the (neo)liberal urge to sanitise the present and to celebrate the future. Drawing on poststructuralist/post-Marxian critiques of representation (Baudrillard 1981; Žižek 2008; Rancière 2011) this paper argues that the radical potentiality displayed by the RM-SP is constantly held back by what I call the "language of (neo)liberalism": the set of equivalences between concepts, practices and experiences that constitutes the frame through which the past is represented and communicated to present audiences. This language affects the RM-SP is two ways: First, by introducing a temporal break between the past/present that explains *present-day political violence as an abnormality*; and second, by providing a *commodified memory of resistance*, whereby the values that make different struggles "exchangeable", or equivalent, in eyes of the present are concealed as the natural values of resistance. Together, these two effects work to render the overall narrative much less disturbing for the (neo)liberal order.

This paper is the fruit of two short-term visits to the RM-SP in 2014 and 2018 and a series of informal meetings with the curatorial team and former political prisoners. The first section introduces the historical trajectory of the RM-SP, contextualising it in the

Brazilian post-authoritarian scene. The second section investigates the RM-SP's permanent exhibition, most specifically modules A, B and C, where the exhibition deals with the themes of militarism and resistance. The third section reveals the ways in which the representations and memorialisation practices at work in the RM-SP are affected by the language of (neo)liberalism. The paper ends by the proposing an interpretation of the RM-SP as a complex site of struggles; a space of remembrance in which the meanings and values attributed to the (neo)liberal order are endlessly disrupted, re-instated and reproduced.

A Site of Memory in São Paulo

In 2002, the Secretariat for Culture of the State of São Paulo became the main administrator of a five-storey edifice right at the historical centre of the city that never sleeps. This was no ordinary building. Originally raised in 1914 to house the offices of a defunct railway company (Gumieri 2012b), from 1940 to 1983 the site served as the headquarters of the State Department of Social and Political Order (DOPS), Brazil's political police. Created in the 1920s to contain the spread of anarchist strikes and the appearance of communism (Gumieri 2012b), the DOPS became a central cog in the state's repressive machine during the civic-military dictatorship (1964-1985) (Skidmore 1988).

[Figure 1 near here]

Violence was a common currency used by the DOPS since the early days. Officers arbitrarily incarcerated and often tortured political dissidents, such as anarchists and communists, but also other individuals and groups seen as undeserving or undesirable, such as prostitutes, transvestites, the homeless and unemployed vagrants. The question of political regime mattered little in this case. Torture coexisted as easily with periods of

authoritarianism in the (1937-1945; 1964-1983) as with periods of democratic rule (1945-1964) (D'Araujo, Soares, and Castro 1994). Nevertheless, it was during the Cold War that the DOPS became known as one of the most iconic torture chambers of São Paulo. In the early 1970s, the DOPS became the centre of a plan to reorganise the regime's counter-offensive against the urban guerrilla. Under the command of police deputy Sérgio Paranhos Fleury, a notorious torturer and leader of a paramilitary death squad, the state's response soon derailed into terror (D'Araujo, Soares, and Castro 1994). Underneath the beautiful high ceilings and modern façade of the early 1914 edifice, hundreds were incarcerated, mistreated, raped and eventually "committed suicide" or "disappeared" (Atencio 2013).

As the years passed, and the threat of communism "passed away", the military successfully bargained the terms of a long period of re-democratisation. No longer possessing an immediate *raison d'être*, the DOPS was dismantled in 1983. The headquarters of the former political police were to host a different agency, the police department for the protection of consumer's rights, illustrating the links between political violence and consumerism like no academic critique ever could. Before vacating the site, DOPS officers were careful enough to destroy the physical evidence of torture, scrapping off the walls the inscriptions left by political prisoners (Atencio 2013).

This would not be the last attempt at whitewashing the building's history in the reconciliatory atmosphere of the democratic transition. In fact, the Brazilian transition can be defined by a double sense of indebtedness. The legitimacy of the dictatorship relied on an economy policy of strong and sustained growth financed by foreign private banks. During the apex of political violence, the regime enjoyed rates of growth of 10%

a year, but it came with a cost. The sovereign debt, which stood at around 3 billion dollars in 1964, reached more than 95 billion dollars by 1985 (IPEA 2019). The return to democracy came amidst a deep economic crisis, mounting inflation and international pressures for debt repayment/re-scheduling. The debt crisis not only imposed severe constrains on public policies, but it also influenced the language and symbology in which policies of accountability were framed. Unlike the Argentine and Chilean cases, the process of re-democratisation in Brazil included no trials or truth commissions. The terms of the bargained transition were based on a blanket amnesty to torturers and a tacit, unofficial policy of silence regarding the crimes of state terror. This policy of institutionalised impunity came to represent another sense of debt owed by the authorities, who remained in silence, to the victims of terror, who were denied justice (Bilbija and Payne 2011).

These two senses of "debt" met in the 1990s, when the policies of austerity, liberalisation and privatizations formed the background to the first official measures of accountability. In 1995, the Brazilian state acknowledged hundreds of disappeared as victims of state violence for the first time in history. While the state could not afford to review the amnesty law, it offered reparations to the families of victims and created a special commission of inquiry to investigate the practice of forced disappearances (Mezarobba 2006). The need to "settle the debt" with relatives and survivors was informed by a context of excitement with the prospects of the future and an urge to let bygones be bygones. In the late 1990s, the former-DOPS building was included in an exciting wave of urban renewal in São Paulo, reimagined as a lively cultural space (Menezes and Neves 2009). The building was granted cultural heritage status, but the renovation destroyed most of the DOPS, leaving the ruins of four cells as its main legacy. In the early 2000s, the amnesty commission was created to expand the policy of

reparations beyond the families of the disappeared to other groups purged from office, exiled or otherwise affected by political repression. The State Secretariat of São Paulo decided to open a museum celebrating the successes of the Brazilian transition (Gumieri 2012a). The new museum was named *Freedom Memorial* and it was inaugurated with an exposition celebrating the legacy of human rights (Menezes and Neves 2009).

[Figure 2 near here]

The association between the former-DOPS and the word *Freedom* profoundly displeased survivors and the relatives of the disappeared. In a personal interview on the 4 July 2014,[4] Maurice Politi, the president of an association of former political prisoners explained that "freedom was precisely the only thing you couldn't find in the DOPS". Politi's association demanded a change in focus from the celebration of freedom to the commemoration of the resistance movement against the dictatorship and the struggles of the prisoners themselves. The demands of former prisoners came at a time of political change in the Southern Cone, defined by growing dissatisfaction with the consequences of the neoliberal reforms of the 1990s. Between 2003 and 2011, the Southern Cone witnessed the coming to power of left-of-the-centre leaders promising to roll back austerity measures, stop privatisations and address the rising levels of inequality (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012; Arditi 2008; Cameron 2009). The so-called leftist turn also marked a different politics of memory in the region. Many of the new leaders such as Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff in Brazil, Pepe Mujica in Uruguay and Michelle Bachelet in Chile, were themselves former political prisoners. Others, like Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández in Argentina, promised to overrule the country's impunity laws.

[4] See note 3.

The swing to the left intensified processes of transitional justice in the region. By the end of the decade, thousands of former agents of state had been prosecuted, or were under investigation, in Argentina and Chile (Collins, Balardini, and Burt 2012). In Brazil, the year 2007 marks the shift to a more active policy of accountability, with two major events: the release of the report of the special commission on the disappeared *Direito à Memória e Verdade* (the right to memory and truth), and the appointment of Paulo Abrão, an expert in transitional justice, as the new head of the amnesty commission (Santos 2015). In this context, the administration of the former-DOPS, now in the hands of the Pinacotheca de Sao Paulo (a public art gallery), started a project to remodel the Freedom Memorial in line with the demands, and with the participation of former political prisoners (Seixas and Politi 2009). The memorial was renamed the *Resistance Memorial* on 1st May 2008, the same year the Brazilian bar council officially questioned the constitutionality of the blanket amnesty (Schneider 2011). The RM-SP was inaugurated on 22 September 2009 by Paulo Vannuchi, a survivor turned head of the Special Secretariat for Human Rights. Three months later, Vannuchi announced the plans for the establishment of truth commission (Secretaria de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República 2010).

Remembering and Resisting Violence

The RM-SP is situated in a longstanding tradition of memorialisation in Latin America: that of regarding *remembrance* as a quintessential *act of resistance*. Anchored on global narratives of transitional justice, this idea promotes the fight against state terror as a struggle to grant victims a platform to express themselves. In the context of widespread silence on past violations that often define post-authoritarian/post-conflict polities, the mere act of remembering the past becomes a form of resistance and an imperative to

make sure political violence never happens again.

The inscription *lembrar é resistir* (to remember is to resist) is one of the first things visitors see when entering the RM-SP via module A (focused on the buildings' history). Situated on a corner wall, above the memorial's logo (a lockup grid resembling a hashtag), the inscription pays homage to a homonymous play written by Analy Álvarez and Izaías Almada and enacted in the ruins of the DOPS in 1999, in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the amnesty of political prisoners (Atencio 2013). Against the conciliatory urge to "settle the debt" in the 1990s, the play *Lembrar é resistir* invited members of the public to witness the violence perpetrated by DOPS officers as well as the courageous acts of resistance staged by political prisoners (Atencio 2013). The play emphasised the systematicity of violations of human rights during the military regime; that is, the fact that torture, extrajudicial executions and forced disappearances were not exceptional misdeeds, but a central part of the state's response to dissent (Atencio 2013). Module A has other installations detailing the history of the building, but it is this inscription that produces a powerful and immediate effect, dictating the tone of the visit. By reminding visitors of the play, the inscription strengthens the links between the memorial's pathos, its political commitment with non-recurrence (never again), and a narrative that explicitly connects violence to the unrestrained militarisation of the state.

[Figure 3 near here]

Module B handles the question of militarism more explicitly by situating the history of the DOPS in the development of a wider *geopolítica do controle* (geopolitics of control) (Carneiro 2009). The module comprises one large rectangular room with a miniature model at the centre (a reconstitution of the DOPS in the 1960s based the accounts of survivors) and two interactive screens opposite to a large wall mural showing a timeline

of Brazilian history (1889-2008). The interactive screens invite visitors to learn more about the rationale and the logistics behind the DOPS, carefully avoiding traditional liberal representations of political violence as the dissolution of order. Instead, the screens explain state-led violence as the expression of the modern state's drive to institutionalise its authority via the control of a given population. Political violence is discussed alongside three axes: *controle* (control or surveillance), *repressão* (political repression) and *resistência* (resistance). Visitors learn that the institutionalisation of political authority is not violence-free but involves the identification of pockets of the population whose very existence is deemed subversive of such authority. The constant surveillance and repression of these pockets, commonly seen as illiberal excesses, are described as the requirements of the continuous processes whereby control is ascertained. As every action lead has an opposite reaction, the screens also emphasise that resistance emerges as a natural consequence of the geopolitics of control. Because state-led violence poses a constant threat to the lives of "marginal" groups (those living at the ideological or economic margins of society), their very existence leads to acts of resistance.

[Figure 4 near here]

The text acknowledges the role of the geopolitics of control in structuring roughly 60 years of DOPS activity (from the 1920s to the 1980s), but it also gives particular attention to the military regime (1964-1985) (Carneiro 2009). It is with this focus that Module B invites a reflection about the concept of militarism and the recent calls to bring militarism to the forefront of critical security studies (Mabee and Vucetic 2018; Stavrianakis and Stern 2018; Shaw 2012; Ferguson 2009; Basham 2016; Howell 2018). Since the heydays of the study of militarism in the 1980s, there has been no single, undisputed definition of the term. Militarism can mean an ideology that glorifies war, a

simple increase in military spending and operational capacity or, in institutionalist terms, the interference of the military in the domains of public society (Stavrianakis and Selby 2012). Regardless of the fluidity of meanings, uses of the concept often evoke the element of preparation for, and the normalisation of war as a social phenomenon (Mann 1987; Stavrianakis and Stern 2018). Despite efforts to enrich the study of militarism by locating new manifestations of the concept in its civil-society or neoliberal varieties (Mabee and Vucetic 2018), war has largely remained its guiding principle, uniting different conceptualisations of the term.

[Figure 5 near here]

The problem is that state-led violence in the Southern Cone does not abide by this characterisation. The RM-SP's explanation for the focus on the military regime is illustrative here. Far from mentioning war, it simply states that "under dictatorial rule [repression] *escapes from the norm*, assuming the form of practices of *deliberate violence* like torture, disappearances and extermination" (translated from Figure 5, my emphasis). This view of state-led violence is situated in-between traditional liberal approaches that assume an essential separation between the state and the military and Agamben inspired works that argue that "the separation […] is always contingent and indeterminate" (Mabee and Vucetic 2018,101). Divided between the geopolitics of control, for which political violence is always already at work, and a liberal approach, for which it is a sign of illiberalism, Module B is nonetheless unequivocal in its side-lining of war from the memory of militarism. From the perspective of the Southern Cone, militarism appears as a moment of crisis when the state's capacity to repress dissent is brought into question and a recalibration is needed. In a way that resembles critiques of pacification more so than works on militarism (Neocleous 2011; Kienscherf 2016), the RM-SP treats war as part of the "mythology" and symbolism of social

control; not so much as an external phenomenon for which society needs preparation, but as a "reality" socially fabricated to justify the radicalisation of political violence from above.

This mix of liberal and critical perspectives on political violence generats tensions and contradictions that can be seen in the large wall mural. Breath-taking in scope, the mural displays a timeline with seven rows containing the international facts, presidents, state governors, statutes, political organisations and events of political violence during 119 years of republican history (1989-2008). The timeline shows elements of the liberal approach, marking a clear distinction between the decades of democratic rule (colour coded in a green and yellow) and the decades of military rule (colour coded in grey). Indeed, the order of the rows are suggestive of the centrality of the decision-making process and the question of legislation in relation to political violence. Nevertheless, the liberal frame coexists with a more critical viewpoint. The timeline is entitled "Control, Repression and Resistance: Political Time and Memory", which reminds visitors of the central axes of the geopolitics of control. The last two rows of the timeline provide pictorial and textual descriptions of measures of control, (e.g. draconian laws, emergency decrees) acts of state-led violence (e.g. the purging of public officials, extrajudicial killings, military occupations) and, at last, acts of resistance (e.g. pro-democracy demonstrations, workers strikes).

[Figure 6 near here]

Considered in isolation, the interplay between control, repression and resistance has the interesting effect of disturbing the centrality, maybe even the relevance, of the liberal perspective. The farther away from the wall we stand, as if adopting the perspective of the *longue dureé*, the more undistinguishable the green and yellow of democracy

becomes from the grey of authoritarianism. This is particularly true of the years of (neo)liberalisation following the democratic opening and the retreat of the military in 1985. Instead of an abrupt end to political violence, the timeline shows a sequence of brutal events under democratic times: the assassination of environmentalist leader Chico Mendes in 1988; the slaughter of 111 inmates by the police during the Carandiru Penitentiary massacre in 1992; the killings of 19 members of the landless workers movement in 1996; the arrest of hundreds of indigenous leaders boycotting the 500th anniversary of the Portuguese "discoveries" in 2000. This chilling reminder of the violent face of Brazilian democracy is counterposed by uninterrupted acts of resistance. The black movement in the 1880s, the anti-fascist movement in the 1930s, the urban guerrilla in the 1960s, the alter-globalisation movement in the 2000s are all linked in a continuum of acts of resistance that ends with the inauguration of the RM-SP in 2009. Contrary to the standard narratives of transitional justice, this perspective enables visitors to hear the delicate echoes of a leftist reasoning for which resistance to political violence is not a thing of the past, but a struggle that goes on.

[Figure 7 near here]

Module C shifts the focus away from the historical to the personal level, recounting everyday acts of resistance by prisoners during the dictatorship. This space occupies the four remaining prison cells, restored with the help of the association of former political prisoners. The first cell works as the institution's mission statement, recounting the events organised by the staff and the links built with civil society since the inauguration of the RM-SP. The cell explains the RM-SP's main goals of promoting the historical memory of resistance and educating new generations about the authoritarian past. Here visitors are also introduced to one of the most interesting and invaluable activities of the RM-SP: the *Sábados Resistentes* (Resistance Saturdays), whereby members of staff

organise guest talks, book launches, guided visits and other activities in order to engage the public in the thematic of political resistance. The second cell pays homage to survivors of violations of human rights perpetrated by agents of the DOPS. In the centre of the room is a device projecting the individual stories of those "who fought for justice and democracy" (see Figure 8) on a glass screen that hangs from the ceiling. The third cell is a faithful historical reconstitution based on the testimony of survivors. Everything in the cell, from the mattresses to the foul toilet, from the inscriptions carved on the walls to the hefty wooden door, is meant to provide a vivid and authentic experience of what was like being a political prisoner. The effect works, creating a truly chilling atmosphere.

[Figure 8 near here]

[Figure 9 near here]

Module C also hosts one of the most beautiful and poetic parts of the RM-SP: cell number four, a space commemorating the stories of solidarity, hope and tenacity of political prisoners. At the end of the long corridor, the last cell is purposefully made darker than the other rooms, with two long wooden benches placed against the two side walls and headphone sets sitting on top of nails hammered into the walls. Here, visitors can listen to the stories of survivors, narrated by themselves, in edited testimonies collected by the curatorial team. In the middle of the room, in front of a rusty central column, is a red carnation in a transparent pet bottle, laying on top of a wooden crater. The carnation is the only thing illuminated in the room, catching the eyes of visitors once the audio begins.

[Figure 10 near here]

[Figure 11 near here]

Siting on the bench in the dark cell, visitors listen to tales ranging from the abhorrent to the tragicomic, never losing sight of the red carnation, a symbol of hope turned into the room's focus point. In the recorded testimonies, different voices explain that the experience of imprisonment was not the end of their struggle. Far from it, life in a DOPS cell required the constant articulation of innovative and ingenuous everyday acts of resistance. The audio recounts how political prisoners continuously played the system against itself, by using the sunbathing time to communicate with each other, preparing common stories to be told under torture. How they tried to buy themselves some time at all costs, not only for the cause, but also hoping to save the lives of comrades in the regime's murder list. When the DOPS bureaucracy bluffed, setting up a no-bathing policy for weeks in order to dehumanise prisoners and break their morale, inmates raised the stakes, making the cells dirtier than even the bureaucrats themselves would accept, forcing their retreat.

The different stories of cell number four are united under the sense morale that humanity and hope will always prevail. In one story a survivor recounts the profound feeling of happiness and relief felt when, years after the dictatorship, a cellmate presumed dead was found alive. In another, visitors learn about the petty, almost metaphorical, similarities between life inside and outside the DOPS. As good public servants, the DOPS agents never worked weekends, and political prisoners, just like everyone else in society, look desperately forward to Friday nights, when their torture ended for a brief time. There are also stories of how terror was resisted with irony and the memory of loved ones, such as the story of a prisoner who left a message to her fiancé, shortly after a torture session. Using her own blood as ink, she apologised for

not having resisted the urge to confess under torture as much as she had resisted going out with him, when they first met.

The experience in cell number four is not only touching because of the stories told, but also tasteful because of what it carefully omits. In an all too literal and unsubtle age, the installation only indirectly touches on the experience of torture. Mistreatments and disappearances provide the backdrop against which the stories of survivors make sense, but at no point they become the centre of attention. There are largely no graphic displays of dilacerated bodies or lengthy typologies of torture methods, commonly found in the reports of commissions of inquiry. Politi explains that two concerns of former political prisoners directly influenced this choice. First, to raise public awareness without the cheap trick of naked violence (which could either repel visitors, or worse, trivialise torture). Second, to avoid the common reduction of survivors' lives to their experience of victimhood, suffering and helplessness (Baines 2015). Instead, cell number four depicts survivors in their complexity and humanity, as individuals that faced the direst of situations, but never gave up their combination of hope and defiance.

Site of Memory, Site of Struggles

As an act done in the present, remembering is never far detached from the socio-economic context of the present. Dwelling in the memories of the past can provide a fictitious sense of security and stability to counter the insecurities of the everchanging present (Edkins 2003; Nora 1989). The way individuals remember the past can itself change, as a response to new conceptions of time and space, new technologies and the restructuring of economic production (Huyssen 2003). Memories are also mobilised in response to present concerns and political dilemmas; the past is re-created as a model, providing lessons from the present and the future (Zehfuss 2007). Therefore, memory is

often as much *about the present* as it is about the past. In the context of the Southern Cone, the memory of militarism happens in, it is shaped by, and responds to a (neo)liberal context defined by an unstable relationship between two poles: the *liberal* defence of democratic principles and the *neoliberal* framing of the market as the template of all existence.

There are obvious reasons why curators make the decisions they make, impacting on the narrative of a particular exhibition. I already explained some of these decisions, such as the choice to include political prisoners and to leave the details of torture outside the narrative. As a public institution, the RM-SP also faces constrains that impact heavily on the story that is told. Members of staff have to find creative ways to square their social mission with budget constraints and even the political sensitivities of different administrations. But there is also a more fundamental sense in which their memorialisation practices are shaped, or at least constrained by the language of post-authoritarian times.

Remembrance is a representational practice. To remember something is to bypass its actual absence through an act of representation, that is, an interplay of resemblances that fabricates a sense of "presence" (Ricoeur 2004). As an instance of representation, memory requires a certain language with which to translate sensuous experiences into thought, speech and even complex stories (Halbwachs 1992; Freud 2001). The term language here is not only restricted to the vernaculars but refers to any system/chain of equivalences that attributes meaning to experience. The language that remembrance needs to mobilise, as it were, is also always situated in and shaped by the present. It is in this sense that memory meets the market. The relationships between words, sounds, concepts and the phenomena they describe are always inserted in wider social dynamics

where the circulation of goods and people affect the circulation of signs and symbols. The constrains imposed by the market on institutions go far beyond the idea of budget constraints or the demands of those "consuming" the memory of the past (Bilbija and Leigh 2011). The market is also a language, operating via representational practices that determine the *value of things and persons*.

It makes sense to speak of a political economy of memory from this recognition: that memory and the market as instances of representation mediated by, and constitutive of a certain language. Marxian critiques of political economy were not only preoccupied with exploitation within the sphere of production. They were also concerned with the attribution of meaning and value to things and persons in societies where production was dictated by the market (Marx 1990; Debord 1995; Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). For traditional Marxian critiques, the expansion of commodity production (goods produced for exchange) that characterised capitalist economies was accompanied by a general process of *commodification of life*, whereby everything and everyone was *made replaceable* (Lijster 2017).

Scholars influenced by French structuralism, and to an extent Marx himself, have analysed the question of commodification through the lenses of representational practices (Baudrillard 1981; Žižek 2008; Rancière 2011). In these works, the economic sphere appears as another language, that is, a set of equivalences between different goods (signs) that opens the possibility of trade (communication) and defines their value (meaning) according to a system of exchanges. The defining feature of commodification is the production of a certain "fetishism": the belief that the value of goods is a representation of their own utility, according to the natural needs they fulfil, whereas, in fact, value is defined by circulation (Baudrillard 1981; Žižek 2008). Likewise, in the

sphere of representation, signs and concepts are also thought to be meaningful in themselves, due to the natural relationship with the phenomenon they refer to, such as "militarism" or "resistance". Nonetheless, their meaning is also a function of circulation; it is not in relation to the phenomena they represent, but due to the position they occupy in a wider chain of equivalences that such concepts acquire any meaning. In other words, it is not from what they are in themselves, but from what *they are not*, in relation to other concepts, that they become intelligible.

The similarities between the two spheres do not stop there. Representational practices are also assumed to rely on a chain of production-exclusion-domination. The system of equivalences that produces meaning (value) in a given language is also a system that produces exclusion. To define a phenomenon or an event according to a system of equivalences is to repress their radical ambivalence, excluding possible meanings that could de-stabilise the whole language. Thus, it is via the exclusion of ambiguity and the "repression" of indeterminacy that representational practices preserve the stability of a given language. And by preserving the stability, that is, the internal order of a given language, it also helps to preserve the wider socio-political order supported by this system of equivalences.

I have already provided some ideas of how the language of (neo)liberalism shaped the memory of political violence. At the apex of neoliberal restructuring programmes, the former-DOPS was envisioned as a memorial in *commemoration of freedom*. Remodelled and re-inaugurated, the RM-SP evidenced the shifts, hopes and dilemmas that characterised the Latin American turn to the left, torn in-between *liberal democratic* principles and *neoliberal market* imperatives. As the analysis has shown so far, the narrative of the RM-SP is pervaded by a sense of ambiguity, providing both

radical and not-so-radical ways in which to remember state-led violence and political struggles in the past. What I define here as the language of (neo)liberalism is the set of equivalences established at certain points throughout the exhibition, that work to control the radical ambiguity of the overall narrative. Paraphrasing JanMohamed (1985), this language has the effect of appropriating a certain surplus morality for the (neo)liberal present, infusing it with meaning, value and legitimacy exactly in opposition to the past.

Making use of critical perspectives, the permanent exhibition invites readings of political violence that transcend concerns with civic-military relations. In the timeline of social control, the distinction between democratic and authoritarian rule seems arbitrary at best. As I suggested, this perception of arbitrariness could lead visitors to question the centrality of the military regime, or the centrality of militarism, in the dynamics of political violence. But the full potentiality of this reading is foreclosed by a move commonly seen in narratives of human rights and transitional justice: the need to re-establish a temporal break between a militaristic past and a democratic present, as fragile as this break may be (Meister 2012). This is where the critique of social control is suddenly transformed into a critique of militarisation; as a concept, militarisation is suggestive of a similar temporal break whereby the natural liberal order is encroached and corrupted by the principles and practices of the military (Howell 2018; Kienscherf 2016). It is exactly this logic that pushed the RM-SP to define the dictatorship as a moment when social control *exceeds its normal function*, adopting a systematic and deliberate use of political violence.

The equivalence between the military regime and the idea of abnormality has the effect, intended or otherwise, of normalising the present liberal order. Hence, the radical effect that cases of present-day violence could have, in terms of subverting the liberal

narrative, is tamed via the suggestion that they constitute an *abnormality*: not a direct consequence of neoliberalism, exclusion and insecurity, but an authoritarian remnant of militarism; the sign of an incomplete transition. Any association between state-led violence and the fabrication of the politico-economic order (Neocleous 2000), such as the fact that the DOPS persecuted beggars, vagrants and prostitutes as much as anarchists, is shifted to the background of the narrative. The memory of political violence is translated into a language that assigns meaning and value to the present exactly in opposition to the illiberal and militarised past. Excluded from any disturbing links with the present context, seen almost as an anachronism, political violence loses its uncomfortable complexity and becomes palatable to (neo)liberal audiences.

There is a second way in which the radical potentiality of the RM-SP is held back. The duty to keep the memory of political struggles alive is constantly unsettled by a certain process of commodification: a tendency to delimit the scope of what resistance could possibly mean. The RM-SP shows a commendable effort to democratise resistance, linking the struggles of former political prisoners with those of peasants, indigenous peoples, human rights and anti-globalisation activists. The equivalences between acts of resistance has a progressive effect, emphasising the urgency of an ethics and practice of resistance based on plural struggles in the present. But again, this radical replaceability is constantly subjected to the risk of commodification: the confusion of the plurality of values associated with resistance for that which makes them all equivalent in the eyes of the liberal present (as an opposition to militarism/illiberalism).

The risk of commodification is particularly clear in the way the dynamics of social control are translated into the chronology surveillance-repression-resistance. In this chronology, the moment of resistance appears mainly as a reactive act; that is, in the

strict sense of an act in reaction to original breaks of the natural liberal order (the military coup, disappearances, present-day massacres). While the reading of resistance as an act in the form of dissent is very clear (and accessible to wider audiences) the complex reasons why individuals resisted are less so. The exposition refers to the ideals of *justice and democracy*, but their possible meanings are never explored. Justice and democracy could be associated with that which the *neoliberal present lacks* as much as with that which the *liberal present provides*. The risk of commodification is, therefore, expressed by a twist that superimposes the latter onto the former; a moment when resistance is tamed, becoming synonymous with the defence of the present order.

Conclusion

Through the advocacy of former political prisoners and the hard work of its curatorial team, the RM-SP became one of the most important centres for the preservation of the memory of state-led violence in Brazil. The memorial's permanent exhibition offers a privileged point from which to start a conversation between the field of critical military studies and accounts of state-led violence from the Global South. The RM-SP invites an interesting reassessment of the concept of militarism, the centrality often assigned to the phenomenon of war and the possibility of analysing political violence from the perspective of a geopolitics of control. The site also excels at preserving and disseminating an account of resistance based on everyday experiences of former political prisoners without trivialising the pain and suffering they endured or victimising them. On both accounts, the RM-SP is a commendable institution, committed with the deepening and strengthening of Brazilian democracy.

But sites of memory are always also sites of struggle. The duty to keep the memory of the past alive is never detached form the struggle to avoid the risk of commodification

in the present. As institutions that rely on representational practices mediated by systems of equivalence, memorials are always at risk of reducing the radical ambiguity of what they represent. When it comes to the RM-SP, the central paradox faced by curators is that, in order to keep the memory of political prisoners alive, and to communicate it in an accessible way, they must translate it into the language of the (neo)liberal present. Sometimes, this is masterfully done through the setting of equivalences between political struggles across time, or the immediate connection created between prisoners and visitors by the centrality assigned to the themes of humanity and hope. Other times, the language employed risks reproducing an unreflective legitimation of the present political order. This is what happens when the narrative re-establishes the centrality of civic-military relations in the analysis of political violence; it is also what happens when the concept of resistance is dissociated from its subversive value.

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