

BETWEEN NARCISSISM AND REPRESSION:
THE CASTRATION OF FEMALE DESIRE IN PORTUGUESE FILM
– JULIA KRISTEVA AND ABJECTION, THE 1974 REVOLUTION,
THE SIEGE AND DINA AND DJANGO

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INTRODUCTION

Julia Kristeva, in her pivotal book *Powers of Horror – An Essay on Abjection*, explores how fear and the object are linked and considers amongst other things “the object as a trimming of anguish,”¹ in its relation with the concept of abjection. This article is an analysis of two films pivotal to the understanding of the role of women in Portuguese cinema in the decade and a half that encircles the 1974 Revolution. It is informed by Julia Kristeva’s concepts in *Powers of Horror*.

In spite of Kristeva’s anchoring of her analysis of desire in literature, it seems possible to redeploy the concepts in *Powers of Horror* to the language of film.

The Portuguese films *The Siege* (*O Cerco*, 1970) and *Dina and Django* (*Dina e Django*, 1983) are set within divergent socio-political situations: twelve years separate the two, with Portugal’s 1974 revolution and the end to almost fifty years of dictatorship (1926-1974) between them. A man directs *The Siege* (António da Cunha Telles), while a woman directs *Dina and Django* (Solveig Nordlund). I depart from Julia Kristeva to ask how two films produced over a decade apart and under different social and political conditions, can both portray women protagonists castrated in the fulfilment of their desire for sexual pleasure and social emancipation – why, in both, the characters progress from narcissism to repression to punishment.

THE FILMMAKERS

By the time António da Cunha Telles has settled on directing *The Siege* he is already an important figure in the production of Portuguese Cinema Novo (New Portuguese Cinema).²

Under his belt as a producer, we can count films such as *The Green Years* (*Os Verdes Anos*, 1963) and *Belarmino* (1964); films that were pivotal for Cinema Novo. Cunha Telles represents a new generation of professional film practitioner who has studied abroad and cut his *cinéphile* teeth watching international cinema between Paris in London. He is *au fait* with the Nouvelle Vague movement, the international political movements of the time and how the language of cinema and the representation of women are being shaped by international filmmakers. We also need to be aware that when he embarks on the project to direct *The Siege* he is bankrupt due to the commercial failure of his previous projects and in a critical career moment upon which he needs to film what will finally materialise as a commercial success. However, *The Siege* is far from being the work of an isolated man: its script was co-written by, amongst others, a woman about to finish her philosophy degree, Gisela da Conceição, and an anti-dictatorship intellectual, Vasco Pulido Valente. Vasco Pulido Valente was also the husband of the actress playing the main protagonist of the film, Maria Cabral (who had also studied philosophy). Registers of the shooting mention that the script was constantly being changed, almost every day throughout the shoot, and that the intellectual exchange between director, actors and scriptwriters was dynamic and intense. What is being projected on the screen is not solely Cunha Telles' perspective; it is the product of a small collective of young women and men's work. Women and men that are middle-class and cultured, and want to present a narrative portraying specific situations on the screen, under the repressive eye of the dictatorship and while trying to make a commercial success. Marta, the main protagonist of the film, in all her misadventures, her characterisation and suffering, is the result of this collective vision.

Solveig Nordlund was deeply involved in the 1974 revolution. She worked as an assistant director for several of João César Monteiro's pre-revolution films and became an editor on Alberto Seixas Santos' 1974 film *Mild Manners* (*Brandos Costumes*). She worked with the main revolutionary filming collectives Cinequipa and Cinequanon and, in 1975, was one of the founders of Grupo Zero, developing several films in collaboration with Teatro da Cornucópia. Teatro da Cornucópia was, at the time, a space for the politicisation of the arts, and a space where Portuguese contemporary life could be brought to the stage and acted upon. *Dina and Django* was produced by Grupo Zero and was therefore the vision of a highly politicised collective. Whilst *Dina and Django's* narrative (the film was released in 1983 and set around April 1974) accompanies the revolution of April 1974, its main protagonist, Dina, re-

mains oblivious to it. Can this disconnection be construed as a remark on the depoliticisation of women? Perhaps through the development of Dina's character, as one which is largely focused on seeking pleasure, oppression is unacknowledged, emancipation is unachieved, and a transitional object fails to arise? Dina succumbs to the sticky net of patriarchal entrapment and punishment in a way parallel to Marta's pre-revolution surrender to the *pater-dictatorship*.

POLITICAL CONTEXTS

The Siege is filmed during what is called the Marcelist spring, a period under which, under the new leadership of Marcelo Caetano, the dictatorship tries to transmit the appearance of a softer tone, as a counterpoint to the Salazarist hard-line that precedes it. This softness is, in many ways, a cosmetic gimmick: Caetano had been, throughout his political life, an ultra-conservative and had acted, in his previous role, as an enforcer of the highest calibre of Salazar's doctrines. During the Salazar regime, women were orientated towards the home and the family, as these were where their attention should lie, as well as their main social and personal outlook and duty. Salazar's regime conceived of women as primarily mothers and housewives. Women were out-and-out blocked from several public service professions, or they could be dismissed if becoming single mothers or if they married while in certain public posts. The dictatorship was adamant that, for the good of the nation, women should marry and become mothers and, from the outset, in primary school books, young girls were made to understand that their future jobs, pastimes and objectives would be intrinsically different from those of boys. In addition, Portugal's agreement with the Vatican (*Concordat* of 1940) had consolidated a long-standing relationship between the Portuguese state and the Catholic Church, and this would be the basis for a moralisation of female behaviour and social standing in deep concurrence with the Church. This strengthened the social mantra of the subordination of women and of a sexual code that was solidly structured around catholic morality. "It is within that undecidable space, logically coming before the choice of the sexual object, that the religious answer to abjection breaks in: *defilement, taboo, or sin.*"³ If a woman chose to depart from this moral code, there would be negative social categorisation and punishment: the so-called polarisation of *saints or whores*.

In the late 1970s, Portugal had initiated its process of integration into the European Union and, in 1979, a centre-right party had won the general elections. The centre-right, together with the Socialist Party, changed the constitution that had been written immediately after the revolution (Constitution of 1976), eliminating or altering several revolutionary aspects of it. These changes were officially implemented in 1982, one year before the release of *Dina and Django*. For an awareness of the political context around *Dina and Django*, it is also important to understand that a strong counter-revolutionary process, accompanied by an acute depoliticisation of the masses, was taking place in simultaneity to the production of the film. The country and its people were being twisted by two strong, antagonistic pulsations: the revolution and its anti-capitalist inheritance, in particular an anxiety that capitalism may dissolve collective structures and unsettle individual lives, and the opposite desire to see the country embrace internationalisation and all the new commodities an open market may bring. The disquiet transmitted by these two strongly opposed poles was being reflected across all art forms.

THE ABJECTION IN CAPITALISM —

THE ABJECTION OF DEPOLITICISATION

“Abjection — at the crossroads of phobia, obsession and perversion — shares in the same arrangement.”⁴ Both films happen in periods of a sudden acceleration of the capitalist process in Portugal, and both films, in a more-or-less straightforward way, address the desire for and the fear of rising consumerism.

In *The Siege*, this happens as the dictatorship softens its tone, opening up to foreign investment and apparently easing up censorship in the display of erotic images in magazines, advertising and film. One of Marta’s lovers is Bob, an American airline director who treats their affair in the most opportunistic of ways, denying Marta financial help and emotional support. Is perhaps Bob representing the attitude of international multinationals in Portugal? If this is the case, then the beautiful and petite Marta, treated by Bob with such disdain, is not short of a symbol of what is happening to the nation, surrounded by external forces that push her in directions she wouldn’t otherwise take, whilst being, at the same time, attracted to and wanting the comfort and protection of those same forces.

All through *The Siege* we watch the apparent perversity of the advertising world, the superficiality of it all. Marta's beauty is used in her job as a model to sell products: "They need to want you first to then want the whisky," says one of the agency's employees. This voyeurism of advertising can be anchored by Kristeva's words: "Voyeurism is a structural necessity in the constitution of object relation, showing up every time the object shifts towards the abject."⁵ It is openly assumed, in the film, that Marta's body and face are a commodity. She spends long moments combing her hair, applying make-up, dazed by her own image. She needs to use it to sell products or to get a man who will pay her bills. Without selling her body, without desacralising it, she is unable to give anything to the capitalist machine. This commodification is also the object upon which falls the violence of both her husband and one of her failed lovers. The impossibility of truly possessing her disturbs both men. This limit on possession can be explained by Kristeva's analysis: "The vision of the ab-ject is, by definition, the sign of an impossible ob-ject, a boundary and a limit. A fantasy, if you wish, but one that brings to the well-known Freudian primal fantasies, his *Urfantasien*, a drive overload of hatred or death, which prevents images from crystalizing as images of desire and/or nightmare and causes them to break out into sensation (suffering and denial (horror), into a blasting of sight and sound (fire, uproar))."⁶ The impossibility of completely owning the object of desire leads to the transformation of sexual want into violence.

As with so many Portuguese women of this period, Marta's intelligence and her other talents are muted or diluted. We know from the outset that she is middle-class and educated. We watch her reading novels in French, playing the piano at her grandmother's house and listening to classical music in her flat. However, perversely, all throughout the narrative, her intellectual value is not something she seems able to use to sustain herself. She is fired from her job in an airline because she separated from her husband. And the only job that seems possible is in modelling for an advertising agency, or obtaining little sums of money from the lovers she keeps on accruing. Throughout the film, Marta's education remains worthless; only her body and how men can use it for their benefit can constitute the token of exchange.

Paradoxically, at the same time as *The Siege* criticises the world of advertising, it embraces it full on, with unconcealed product placements all through the film, almost forty years before Morgan Spurlock's 2011 documentary *The Greatest Film Ever Sold*. *The Greatest Film Ever Sold* is a film about branding, advertising and product placement that is financed and made possible by brands, advertising and product placement, and this is exactly what

Cunha Telles and his team did in 1971. Capitalism and its advertising world is in this film “an Object of fear and fascination. Abjection itself. He is abject: dirty, rotten.”⁷ At the outset of the film, Marta’s husband expresses vehemently how the advertising world is corrupting Portuguese culture, creating images of desire whilst degrading artistic values.

Dina is an altogether different reflection on capitalism and the Portuguese class system. She is a teenager, brought up by a grandmother who works hard as a maid for a middle-class family. The grandmother wants her to have a proper education, but Dina “bunks off school” to go to the bars and cafés where she flirts with boys and men. In a middle-class apartment, Dina and her grandmother sleep in a tiny bed in a small bedroom, hugging each other. Dina constantly concocts false stories in which she tells to whoever wants to listen that she comes from a wealthy lineage. Dina steals her grandmother’s boss expensive jumper and wears her secret luxury *eau de cologne*. Dina longs for a more affluent life. From the outset, we are made aware that the cheap love stories she reads have had a profound influence on her. Dina is a woman-child: we witness her mixing reality and fiction, and her despair to belong and be loved. This despair for love and a better life will be the cause of her downfall.

In *Dina and Django*, the soundtrack supplements the characters’ individualism and political indifference. When Dina sees Django for the first time and runs away with him, we can hear in the background Paulo de Carvalho’s song *E Depois do Adeus* — this was the initial radio password that triggered the April Revolution. As the collective journey of the revolution starts, Dina and Django start their individual, solipsistic journey. Further along in the film, we can see images of the revolutionaries singing repeatedly — *The people united, will never be defeated*.⁸ Dina and Django are completely detached, just centred on one another and on their mutual desire for each other. Later on, as they steal, we can hear Sérgio Godinho (an influential political songwriter) singing about the needs of the people and freedom.

Marta is a pre-revolution woman and Dina is a woman in the present of the revolution; they both live in politically charged periods and yet they are both apathetic. We need to remember that both directorial teams had strong political views and that they were both responsible for building the narratives that “punish” these women. Both Marta and Dina represent a woman who wants independence, but is superficial and consumeristic, oblivious to the social change around her. Both live historical moments with a strong collective desire for new commodities — the allure of consumption mixed in with the allure freedom. Marta and

Dina are the tragic muse, the classical symbol described by Kristeva: “And there you have the muse just as she is after two thousand years of art and religion. A muse in the true tradition of the lowly genres — apocalyptic, Menippean and Carnavalesque.”⁹ Marta’s and Dina’s narratives of the beautiful woman attracting tragedy are a recurrent, classic set up in the tradition of western narratives.

The *siege* that surrounds Marta is the patriarchal capitalist society, of which she is dependent, the men that want her and degrade her “such femininity is nonetheless in the position of a fallen demon who finds being only with reference to man.”¹⁰ Her social validation arises and decays from the gaze and desire of men.

Dina’s narrative is written half a dozen years after the revolution, looking back. She is portrayed as a vain beautiful woman, her narrative occurring around the revolution. She is so taken aback by her passion for Django that she is just a participant in her smaller narrative, oblivious to the revolution unfolding around her. We know how conscious Dina is of her beauty, we know of her frivolity. Solveig Nordlund is, in the present from which she films, recording a character of a recent past and consciously shaping her as politically indifferent.

THE NARCISSIST WOMAN — SEXUALITY AND REPRODUCTION

Both Dina and Marta are portrayed as narcissistic characters, allured by their beauty and their mirror reflection. However, in both films, narcissistic behaviour will lead to feelings of suffering and horror, narcissism leading to abjection. When relating abjection and narcissism Julia Kristeva states that

Abjection is therefore a kind of *narcissistic crisis*: it is witness to the ephemeral aspect of the state called “narcissism” with reproachful jealousy, heaven knows why; what is more, abjection gives narcissism (the thing and the concept) its classification as “seeming.”¹¹

Thus, there is an apparent, but not actual or genuine narcissism, as the self-esteem of the characters as independent women is systematically violated and broken.

The two women are used as commodities and in both situations the mother is absent and is replaced by the grandmother. Kristeva states that

When psychoanalysts speak of an object they speak of desire as it is elaborated within the Oedipal triangle. According to that trope, the father is the mainstay of the law and the mother the prototype of the object. Toward the mother there is convergence not only of survival needs but of the first mimetic yearnings. She is the other subject, an object that guarantees my being a subject. The mother is my first object — both desiring and signifiable.¹²

In this instance, we could construe that to see the mother is to see a primordial reflection of the self.

Because for both Marta and Dina the figure of the mother is absent, there is no sense of feminine generational continuity in their lives. There is not a woman between the blossom of fertility and the stumbling into menopausal existence. With the mothers removed from their narratives, they are isolated as female objects of desire, as active and fertile sexual women. There is a vacuum where continuity is supposed to exist. They are chronologically too far ahead and inveterately too far away from their grandmothers, they are an isolated island of femininity and reproductive *allure*. Kristeva can help us to understand how the role of the mother creates intermediate meaning in the Oedipal complex:

Do we not also find, in the very process that constitutes the mother as other, a series of *semi*-objects that stake out the transition from a state of indifferenciation to one of discretion (subject/object)-*semi*-objects that are called precisely “transitional” by Winnicott?¹³

Finally, do we not find a whole gradation within modalities of separation: a real *deprivation* of the breast, an imaginary *frustration* of the gift as maternal relation and, to conclude, a symbolic castration, inscribed in the Oedipus complex; a gradation constituting, in Lacan’s brilliant formulation, the object relation insofar as it is always “a means of masking, of parrying the fundamental fund of anguish” (Seminar of 1956-1957)?¹⁴

This is therefore the first crisis, the one of finding the mother as an object external to us, that doesn't belong to us. This crisis is consequently enhanced when the mother disappears completely, because with her void, gradations of meaning of the Oedipus complex also disappear.

The important difference between a mother and a grandmother is that the mother would be an intermediate object, able to make that bridge between the blossom of sexuality and desire and its absence in terms of representation. What is at stake here is the representation of something even more powerful in its social and sexual value, the image of a woman that is at a reproductive age: her choices and decisions can lead to procreation and therefore morale and taboo will have to bear a different, heavier weight. Dina and Marta defy this *pater-catholic* morality and will suffer the consequences of their sinful actions. Kristeva explores further the meaning of the mother and of sin within the Biblical perception:

Through the process of interiorization, defilement will blend with guilt, which already exists on a moral and symbolic level in the Bible. But out of the merger with the more material, object-like abomination, a new category will be established — Sin. Swallowed up, one might say reabsorbed, Christian defilement is by token a revenge of paganism, a reconciliation with the maternal principle. Freud moreover stressed the point in *Moses and Monotheism*, revealing that Christian Religion is a compromise between paganism and Judaic monotheism.¹⁵

The mother is the symbolic bridge between the daughter and sin. The mother is always a reminiscence of Eva's original sin. Without the mother desire and sin just have one object, the daughter, and the abject is unavoidable.

Since Eva's original sin, from misdeed, from sexualisation, comes the ability to become a mother. The mother is the midpoint object between puberty and menopause and would work as a transitional symbol of representation. Dina and Marta can only see in the mirror beauty, sexuality and reproduction in their present. Narcissism and anguish are unavoidable. In Dina's and Marta's family chronologies the woman with whom they could share a comparable symbolic value, the mother, is absent; it is a ghost and ghosts are mirrors and mirrors reflect them, creating the abjection of the self and, in a whirlpool, the abjection in others - sin

and punishment in an endless cycle. They carry wholly on their own shoulders the burden of representation of female sexual desirability, sin, and its catharsis.

The isolation of the self of the daughter as a representation of women, marks the daughter as the representation of both the self and the mother. And it is this essence of the feminine that turns exponential when confronted with abjection. If not for their grandmothers, the protagonists in both films are alone, relying on their (male) sexual partners for a sense of being and empowerment. They both lack political perspectives and neither belongs to any political groups in what were intensely political times. During the moments of the film when Dina is surrounded by people celebrating the collective experience of the revolution, she is oblivious to it. She is frozen to the need to embrace the collective revolution, as her focus is directed to her relationship with Django.

To recapitulate, Dina and Marta carry the burden of representation of female sexuality and desire, the symbolism of women in their reproductive age. Being motherless, they float in the sea of representation in isolation; they are the sole object of desire, the sole sexual object, and the sole reproductive being. The grandmother is devoid of any of this symbolic value, as her beauty has long faded and she is no longer capable and active in the reproductive cycle. A symbolic rift separates granddaughter and grandmother; they signify differently and cannot touch each other on a representational level. The mother would be the link, bridging the representations of the fertile woman and the woman whose fertility has long departed.

THE ABSENCE OF THE FATHER —

THE ABJECTION IN THE ABSENCE OF SEXUAL TABOO

Like the mother, the figure of the father is also absent from Dina's and Marta's lives. Without the father, there is no man who can give them love, care for them, protect them without sex ever becoming an option. There is no sexual taboo separating them from any man. Kristeva comments that "Freud notes that the morality of a man starts with "the two taboos of totemism — *murder and incest.*"¹⁶ *Totem and Taboo* begins with the evocation of the "dread of incest."¹⁷ Therefore, the absence of the father is the absence of sexual taboo in and towards the male.

With the absence of the father, the Electra Complex as the basis of heterosexual relationship building will be forever unresolved. And with the removal of the sexual taboo in relation to all and every single male around them, both Dina and Marta can be construed as limitless objects of desire – what is precipitated by the narratives of both films. Kristeva in the sub-chapter *Beyond The Unconscious* helps us to better understand the importance of this relationship between exclusion and desire:

Put another way, it means that there are lives not sustained by *desire*, as desire is always for objects. Such lives are based on *exclusion*. They are clearly distinguishable from those understood as neurotic or psychotic, articulated by *negation* and its modalities, *transgression*, *denial* and *repudiation*. Their dynamic challenges the theory of the unconscious, seeing that the latter is dependent upon a dialectic of negativity.¹⁸

And one of the exclusions in the case of Dina and Marta is the exclusion of the symbolic value of the father. He is a missing object, the cause of further symbolic negativity.

Dina and Marta have no space to disengage from the sexual pulsations of men, and from their own sexual attraction to the masculine; there is no space for not being sexual with a man. The absence of the father is also the absence of a male notion of the self: the presence of the father is the presence of an ascendant, of a biological part of the self. When the father is present, that masculinity is internalised. He can see in her a descendent, a shared biology, a part of him. And equally, she can see in him an ascendant, the same shared biology and a part of her. Father and daughter can be individuals, but they will always have each other's reflection. The father, when sexual taboo is present, is the ascetic bridge between the female and the male, between taboo and sexuality and desire. For the father, when taboo against incest is present, the body of the daughter is not objectified, as it does not exist to be used by him. Kristeva expands:

I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and instead of what will be "me." Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be. A possession previous to my advent: a being-there of the symbolic that a father might or might not embody. Significance is indeed inherent in the human body.¹⁹

The abjection exists both in the identification/confusion of the self with the father and in the absence of the father.

Important Freudian/Jungian symbols, and their meaning and consequent vertices of catharsis and complexity, are vanished from Dina's and Marta's lives due to the symbolic absence of the father and the mother. Important bridges are missing, emotional identity is perturbed and in its place appears a language of fear. A language created by a consciousness of what is absent. From the mother and the father what is left is their persona, their reflection in the mirror. We can add to this argument Kristeva's reasoning that

The abjection of the self would be the culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural *loss* that laid the foundations of its own being. [and that] There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the *want* on which any being, meaning language, or desire is founded.²⁰

Dina and Marta, by being in their reflection, mirrored symbols of the mother and the father, make the abjection of the self ultimately unavoidable; what is not there is paramount for their sense of displacement.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF BEAUTY — SNOW WHITE STEPMOTHER'S COMPLEX

In both *The Siege* and *Dina e Django*, the characters Marta and Dina spend moments transfixed by their beauty reflected in the mirror. Putting this image of the woman that is allured by her own image in the mirror into perspective, the tale of Snow White immediately springs to mind.

Yet, Snow White is different from Dina and Marta in the fact that she doesn't look in the mirror, that she is not narcissistic and vain, and that her beauty is pure because of the lack of consciousness she has of it. The hunter, the animals of the forest, the prince, all succumb and are touched by her beauty, but Snow White is unaware that she is desired because of her beauty. She is innocent. She is not narcissistic.

In her chapter *The Abjection of The Self* Kristeva states that:

One always passes too quickly over this word, “want,” and today psychoanalysts are finally taking into account only its more or less fetishized product, the “object of want.” But if one imagines (and imagine one must, for it is the working of imagination whose foundations are being laid here) the experience of *want* itself as logically preliminary to being and object-to the being of the object-then one understands that abjection, and even more so abjection of self, is its only signified [...]. Mystical Christendom turned this abjection of self into the ultimate proof of humility before God, witness Elizabeth of Hungary who “thought a great princess, delighted if nothing so much as in abasing herself.”²¹

We can consider that the vanity of looking in the mirror, but above all of being bewitched by the beauty of our reflection, is construed as the opposite of Christian humility.

The curses that fall upon Dina and Marta arise from the fact that, contrary to Snow White, they want to possess their beauty, they are conscious of it. Psychoanalysis and Marxism meet when they look in the mirror, become aware of the value of their beauty and want to use this value as a form of exchange for something. In the case of Marta, she represents this woman of the late sixties, early seventies, that is bathed by the echoes of the feminist liberation movements happening internationally during this period. She is trapped, nonetheless, in a society that is profoundly patriarchal and set in catholic rules. And her vanity, one of the seven catholic cardinal sins, threatens her with punishment. Furthermore, her consciousness of her beauty makes her an active player in the dynamics of the sexual partners she decides to interact with. She is conscious that she can attract and seduce and, because of this, she embodies the essence of so many *femmes fatale* in the history of cinema - her net of seduction, as in traditional *film noir*, will lead to death. She represents a new woman, she is empowered by the awareness of the self, by the consciousness of the mirror. However, because the Portuguese society of the time is sedimented in a strong patriarchal logistic, her empowerment cannot persist and, as such, needs to be dismantled. Because she separated from her husband, she is dismissed from her job with an airline and to make ends meet has to engage in activities one could concede as soft prostitution. Her freedom from her husband is her downfall, and her conscience of her beauty is to be used for the benefit of others. Be-

cause she has stepped out of the classic cadre of ascetic beauty (contrary to humble Snow White), Marta will fall victim to a Snow White Stepmother's complex and will therefore have to be punished as Snow White's stepmother was. Snow White's stepmother is an epiphany of narcissus.

Dina, also conscious of her beauty, will also inevitably suffer punishment. The value of her beauty will be used as a commodity by her boyfriend and this game will also lead to tragedy and death. Like Marta, Dina is Snow White's Stepmother. Dina is also narcissus and will generate her own tragedy.

ABJECTION, CATHARSIS AND REPETITION

In both films we see agents of abjection and catharsis associated with repetition. In *The Siege*, this narrative cycle is enacted by Marta; whilst in *Dina and Django*, it is ritualised by Django's character.

Django is attracted to Dina's beauty. However, paradoxically, he is consumed by jealousy and afraid that some other man will be attracted to her and will defile her body, which he believes, belongs to him. Because of this need to control her beauty, he stops working to be able to follow her around. He is jealous of other men, and of the fact that by attending school she will look down on him. The attraction and the fear of losing her make him have a rage and assault her. After this, he forces Dina to walk the streets at night as if she was a prostitute, only to, at the last moment, save her and punish those who have fallen for her.

Kristeva reasons that

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not left itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects.²²

By becoming a feigned pimp, Django controls Dina's beauty as a commodity. By repeatedly using her as bait and punishing the men who fall for her, he makes his fear tangible and exercises catharsis. Dina will not stop being beautiful, therefore he has to ritualistically and repeatedly control his fear, defile what she represents, symbolically transforming her into the prostitute who could have sex with others. By making her act as a prostitute he is symbolically degrading her, transforming her into the object of abjection he fears the most. By controlling the situation and punishing her would-be clients, he is in control and she is purified for him.

Marta's cycle of repetition is in all the lovers she successively takes in the hope of finding someone who will love her and, failing that, someone who will simply help her pay the bills. Contrary to the husband she is separating from, Marta wants independence and is reluctant to ask for financial support from her family. The price of this freedom is to have to depend on lovers to make ends meet. In Marta, we can see the echoes of Ana Karina's character in Jean-Luc Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie*. Like Marta, she starts the film breaking off from a relationship because of the wish to be free, only to have to prostitute herself to survive in a patriarchal society. Another film similar to Godard's, where the female protagonist falls prey to consumer society, is *Two or Three Things I Know about her*.

In both films is the reverberation of ideas of the feminine that had been inscribed by international filmmakers, and the repetition of the plight of women wishing for a break away from patriarchal rule, across countries, from the 1960s to the 1980s. We also see represented in these narratives the failure of this female struggle for freedom and emancipation.

SEXUALITY AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Marta and Dina suffer physical violence at the hands of their partners; the object of female desire becomes an object of anguish and abjection. Julia Kristeva, when considering the relation between *Jouissance and Effect*, argues that

One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [*on en jouit*]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in *jouissance*, where the object of desire, known as object *a*

[in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the object. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become *alter ego*, drops so that "I" does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. Hence a jouissance in which the subject is swallowed up but in which the Other, in return, keeps the subject from foundering by making it repugnant. One thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims — if not its submissive willing ones.²³

From the outset of the film, we see that Marta's husband persistently undermines her intellectual ability. After that, we see Marta being assaulted for the first time, when her husband, after she has stated that she wants to break free from the relationship, goes into a fit of rage. This is a brutal scene of domestic violence: her husband beats her up; Marta tries to fight back, only to succumb to his physical strength, ending up being raped. There is a transference of desire into violence, an erotisation of abjection, which is explained by Kristeva: "he acts on the strength of its power in order to condemn, he grounds himself on its law to tear the veil of oblivion but also to set up its object as inoperative. As jettisoned. Parachuted by the Other."²⁴ Male violence is, in both films, the ultimate mechanism for male recovery of emotional control.

We watch Marta being attacked a second time, when the photographer who had become her lover fails to hold onto his erection. She is punished because he is unable to execute his role as a lover, and is embarrassed by his inadequacy as a symbol of virility. At the end of both scenes she embraces herself in a movement of self-soothing, comforting herself from the humiliation and pain, once again from the impossibility of fighting back at someone who is stronger than her. Julia Kristeva, quoting a description in Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night*, talks about "those intermediate states, those non-states, neither subject nor object, where *you* is alone, singular, untouchable, unsociable, discredited, at the end of a night that is as particular as it is incommensurable."²⁵ For Dina and Marta these moments of discredit and loneliness are the instances when they have suffered the violence of their partners, a violence that is enclosed and goes unnoticed.

Django assaults Dina whenever he feels like it, to force her to work as a bait to attract men from which he will steal. His violence is the catalyst for her symbolic defilement, for her

life of crime; because of his perverse thoughts, she becomes perverse in her actions. Her submission and acceptance become her tragedy. Django's sadistic desires manifest themselves as abjection on an intimate side, on the suffering that his physical violence causes upon Dina. And as a public spectacle, this abjection is transformed into horror in the shape of violence and murder that together they will perpetrate on others.

Ultimately, when Dina's and Marta's lovers assault them, they are assuming the role of the punishing father; a Father where sexual taboo has been broken and which has to castigate the body as the representation of sinful desire.

LADY MACBETH AND THE OBJECT IN MURDER

In the chapter *Females Who Can Wreck the Infinite* Julia Kristeva analyses paranoia and crime in the feminine "Lady Macbeth-who, under the apparent narcissistic essence of the feminine, bares death drive."²⁶ As mentioned before, the association of women to sin is resurgent in classic western narratives, from literature to film. The ultimate sin is murder; women are the symbolic bearers of life, women who lead to death are therefore the supreme object of abjection. Kristeva argues: "For it is death that most violently represents the strange state in which a non-object, a stray, having lost its non-objects, imagines nothingness through the ordeal of abjection."²⁷ Dina and Marta become Lady Macbeth. With hands tainted by blood and the guilt of a murder, they are vertices of the negative, the anti-object as violence/abjection.

As a replacement of sleepwalking, as Lady Macbeth did, Marta goes on a bereavement journey in a *Cacilheiro* (typical boats that cross the Tagus river). In this journey, she revisits the river spot her lover and friend (Vitor Lopes) was found dead in. We can almost hear Lady Macbeth's lament — Out, damned spot! —, but there is nothing that Marta can do to erase the guilt of murder. Kristeva comments on loss that

The object is the violence of mourning for an "object" that has always already been lost. The object shatters the wall of repression and its judgements. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which in order to be, the ego has broken away — it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death. Abjection is a resurrection that has

gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance.²⁸

Because she couldn't keep a secret of his smuggling activities, Vitor Lopes lost his life. By creating death, life is forever transformed. The association of a woman with murder, makes the principles of life and death become one.

The same way Marta superficially used her body to obtain money, the same way she ostensibly spoke too much, her lack of grasp for the consequences of her actions, her superficiality, has led to bloodshed. We can see in this a widespread misogynistic perspective in which women are unable to keep a secret, and where female discourse is used as an extension of vanity: women are peacocks, unable to stop themselves from displaying to others the secrets that have been treasured to them.

On the other hand, Dina literally washes her hands from blood after having killed a taxi driver. The roads were being patrolled by the revolutionary army, and in a moment of panic, Django, hot-blooded, shot the taxi driver when he became suspicious of them (they had a shotgun under a blanket, used just moments before in an attempted robbery). However, immediately afterwards, it is Dina who triggers the fatal shot. It is "[m]urder as underground lining of the unclean-thinking being."²⁹ The stress of events dazing her actions and judgement and leading to murder. Dina has nightmares and wakes up in the middle of the night screaming with guilt. Afterwards, she will be caught, brought to justice and put in prison.

In the guilt both Dina and Marta manifest, we can find what Julia Kristeva describes as *The Abjection of Self*:

If it be true that the object simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when that subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it is none other than abject.³⁰

By leading to the death of her friend and lover, Marta has condemned herself to further isolation: the only man to show a gentler manner with her is gone. In the *siege* of men that still

surrounds her there are no friends and she knows it. The film ends with Marta back in front of the mirror, absorbed once again in the application of false freckles to her face. Her beauty, her ultimate commodity, is the only thing she has left to console her.

After the murder and another beating by Django (to force her to go on another thieving rampage), Dina tries to brake off from the relationship. Dina calls for her grandmother to come and save her, but by then it is already too late, she will have to go to prison and be lonely. All her egotism and superficiality, her blindness to the collective movement around her, is punished, she will be barred from the consumer society she longed to embrace.

CONCLUSION

Both Dina and Marta are striking women, alienated from the collective political processes surrounding them. They seek freedom, but because they are depoliticised, they turn into the ultimate patriarchal object, the representation of the whore, doomed and tragic. The search for personal pleasure and narcissism is punished. Both films progress from the portrayal of relatively unbound narcissism to the representation of repression and the symbolic enactment of castration with Kristeva's notion of *abjection* surfacing in a plethora of manifestations.

Ultimately, these two narratives manifest political circumstances that generate the social entrapment of the female, expressed in the castration and perversion of their desire and freedom. In so many ways, in the manner it reflects their female tragedies, pre-revolution cinema and post-revolution cinema mirror unexpected similar endeavours.

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1. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 32.
 2. Portuguese New Wave.
 3. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 48.
 4. *Ibid.*, 45.
 5. *Ibid.*, 46.
 6. *Ibid.*, 154-155.
 7. *Ibid.*, 185.
 8. From the portuguese "O povo unido jamais será vencido."
 9. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 169.
 10. *Ibid.*, 167.
 11. *Ibid.*, 14.

12. Ibid., 32.
13. Ibid. Kristeva asks the reader to see particularly D. W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (New York: International Universities Press, 1965) and *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1971).
14. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 32-33.
15. Ibid., 116.
16. Kristeva is quoting *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in vol. 13 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 185.
17. Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 57.
18. Ibid., 6-7.
19. Ibid., 10.
20. Ibid., 5.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 1.
23. Ibid., 9.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., 135.
26. Ibid., 169.
27. Ibid., 25.
28. Ibid., 15.
29. Ibid., 152.
30. Ibid., 5.