

Torture, Beheading, Revenge, and Retaliation: Spectacularization of Deaths in Filmed Homicides

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Abstract: When killing includes extreme brutalities, sometimes called extralethal violence, it usually carries a social function that goes beyond that of a “mere” execution. In this research were present the analysis of a filmed triple homicide that was committed and deliberately spread through social networks by members of an organized crime group in northeastern Brazil. Content analyses of seven amateur videos showed that the tortures, murders, and beheading were producing a type of criminal propaganda. Apparently, the perpetrators acted in accordance with criminal social norms, without any reluctance to commit the killings. Remarkably, one of the criminals ordered the deaths from inside a prison by phone. Feelings of belonging to the criminal organization, deindividuation, obedience to the leader, dehumanization, and repulsion towards members of rival criminal groups, are discussed as a basic dynamic of this type of extreme violence.

Keywords: Filmed murders. Extralethal violence. Organized crime. Cruelty. Video Analysis. Dehumanization

In 1999, a telephone intercept by the Brazilian Federal Police (PF) caught Fernandinho Beira-Mar (FBM), appointed as the leader of a major criminal faction, talking to a 21-year-old man who had allegedly had a relationship with his ex-girlfriend. In the audio, FBM also talks with members (M) of his faction who had, by that time, mutilated the victim. The audio was released to the Brazilian press, and television stations gave wide publicity (Repórter Record, 2019) to the brief dialogue between FBM and the victim (V):

V – Hello. I'm missing both feet, the fingers, everything's hanging. The right ear, they ripped everything out, I can't hear it.

FBM – But are you still talking? Have they taken both your feet off too?

V- Everything's hanging. I can only see the heel.

FBM – Damn! And the little fingers?

V – Everything's hanging.

FBM – Really? And the ear? Is it tasty?

V – It's very big. It came down in the mouth. I almost didn't swallow it.

FBM – Does it hurt a lot? Really? But you're ok, you're talking very much, you're ok, you're not bad.

V – Hey, it looks like they ran a tractor over me (...). My ribs are fractured.

FBM – No! But I won't let them do this to you. Ribs have to be whole, right? Wanna go home? I'll have a car take you to the front door of your house (Azzariti, 2015).

When the victim returns the phone to one of his captors, the death sentence is finally decreed by FBM: "*Sure thing, he's gone!*". Four gunshots are heard. When asking the victim how he was feeling, FBM's calm, friendly, and cynical tone and his contempt for life materialize in the capital execution order carried out by the members of the criminal organization without any reluctance. The case was widely publicized by the Brazilian press and yielded revulsion in the audience for its cruelty. It is noteworthy that the registration and disclosure were not made by the perpetrators, who did not know they were being monitored by the police. At the time of the crime, FBM was incarcerated in a prison from which he commanded the Brazilian criminal organization *Comando Vermelho* (CV) by telephone. For that crime, he was sentenced another 120-year conviction for first degree murder.

Accidentally perhaps, the press made it possible for criminal organizations to get to know the effects of fear, intimidation, and a powerful form of strength and force demonstration provided by recording and disclosing filmed crimes. This practice became a terrible psychological advertising, and one of the main consequences was its replication in situations involving conflicts between rival criminal organizations, especially within prisons where the recording of mutilation scenes by rivals became increasingly frequent in Brazil (Sisnando, 2021; Ferreira & Frumento, 2019; Passarinho, 2019; Cariello & Galdo, 2017).

There is no official Brazilian database on mutilations in homicides. Data can be found only for the Federal District, where the capital city of Brasilia is located, there

between 2012 and 2016, at least 17 victims showed signs of mutilations, with 9 of them having been dismembered, 3 when they still had vital signs, according to forensic experts (Filho & Machado, 2019). But no videos are reported. While for some countries not having such statistics this might be a good indicator, for many others hampers the investigation of extreme crimes. In fact, there are only a handful published studies that deals specifically with this subject (Ros, Humphries & Cunha, 2019). Little is still known about its dynamics and about its instrumental use to cause intimidation and fear through image registration.

Homicide, Violence, and Group Affiliation: Gaps, Classical and Contemporary Studies

Crime correlates are widely known, with evidence of relationships between socioeconomic factors, such as high unemployment rates, deteriorated family relationships, and crime rates. Likewise, individual factors, such as age, sex, and race have also been identified as correlates of the criminal phenomenon (Blackburn, 1993; Soria Verde, 2018). Young males are more likely to be aggressive (Carlo *et al.*, 1999; Pike, Allsop & Brookman, 2020). However, despite being a serious and unwanted behavior in most cultures, most people are able to make their morality more flexible to justify murder in wars or situations of self-defense (McMahan, 2009). Homicide analysis allows for the most diverse macro, meso, micro, situational and dispositional factors (Pike *et al.*, 2020). There are occasions when the confluence of different factors could provide better explanations for phenomena of violence, as in the case that follows.

The relationship between behavior and attitudes involves a complex decision-making process, and it cannot be stated that attitudes determine behavior, especially when external factors prevail over individual ones (Soria Verde, 2018). In this aspect, group processes gain relevance, in which an individual's behavior seems to be affected by the presence of other individuals. Classical studies in social psychology on group norms (Sherif, 1936), group pressure (Asch, 1951), obedience (Milgram, 1963; Milgram, 1974), social identity (Tajfel, 1974), and anonymity (Zimbardo, 1969) have inspired studies that investigated behaviors and groups, demonstrating individuals' susceptibility to suggestion, compliance, obedience to authority, and aggressiveness.

The desire for affiliation and the sense of belonging support social identity (Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Abrams & Hogg, 2001). From this, other group phenomena arise, such as social facilitation (Zajonc, 1965) and deindividuation (Le Bon, 1995/1895; Festinger *et al.*, 1952). Group dynamics seems to have explanatory power in criminal behavior (Soria Verde, 2018), especially considering the process of deindividuation, the one in which the individual acts with little or no individual discernment due to the decrease in self-control capacity (Le Bon, 1995/1895; Vilanova *et al.*, 2017), and also brings

important contributions to the understanding of violence where informal collective norms legitimize violent behavioral patterns (Jung & Cohen, 2020).

Nevertheless, there is a shortage of scientific studies in Psychology, Criminology, Sociology and related areas that have sought to understand the processes, dynamics, and variables that operated in cases of deliberately filmed tortures and homicides by members of criminal factions. For example, no reference to this topic are specifically made on such prominent publications as *The Cambridge Handbook of Violent Behavior and Aggression* (Vazsonyi, Flannery & Delisi, 2018), *The Handbook of Gangs* (Decker & Pyrooz, 2015), *The Routledge Handbook of Qualitative Criminology* (Copes & Miller, 2015), the *Handbook of Related Crime* (Ellis, Farrington & Hoskin, 2019), or even the *Handbook of Homicide* (Brookman, Maguire & Maguire, 2017).

A few exceptions have tried to understand how filmed aggression is associated with ways of elaborating power, intimidation and fear. Krahe (2020) showed how crimes of ethnic, racial, religious and sexual prejudice can be explained by intergroup aggression and collective violence against individuals based on the feeling of belonging to a group. From the point of view of group identity, the psychological superstructure of individuals is replete with normative references, allowing them to act with extreme violence against rival groups and individuals in competition for material resources, for status or for defending the interests of the belonging group (Densley & Peterson, 2017).

Video recording of rivals' humiliations, tortures, and deaths is quite common among Mexican cartels (Cisneros, 2014; Gonzales Rodríguez, 2009). The narco-violence of drug cartels, according to Campbell and Hansen (2013), is a struggle for territorial political control, orchestrated by criminal leaders with clear objectives: guarantee and expand territories. The humiliating treatment of rivals, a reenactment of acts of cruelty with the aim of sending messages (to opponents and the government) allows classifying Mexican organized crime actions as true acts of terrorism (Philips, 2018).

Converting the act of killing into an advertisement, producing the grotesque spectacle in which victims are subjected to atrocities is part of promoting drug cartels (Campbell, 2012). Executors obey the orders of their leaders without reluctance, and it is a practice to record in videos the ritual of torturing, killing, and beheading. The crueler and the more appealing the videos are, the greater the recognition towards partners and the greater the impact on rivals (Gonzales Rodríguez, 2009; Cisneros, 2014; Philips, 2018; Pereda, 2021).

A performative homicide is much more than just a murder. The filmed murders become a kind of rituals where the experience of communion is shared and seems to connect members of criminal groups, providing a collective pleasure, giving meaning and reinforcing their ties of belonging (Turner, 2012). Fujii (2013) uses the term *extralethal violence* to refer to situations in which aggressors exceed the necessary actions to inflict

the resulting death on their victims. Degrading treatments such as forcing victims to sing, dance, submit or to sexual acts; or cruel treatments such as mutilations of victims still alive, the ridiculing, dismembering the bodies are too some examples of extra-lethal violence (Fujii, 2013).

In the criminal underworld, according to Gambetta (2009), although cunning is important, violence is a decisive resource. Often, the reputation of an individual or their criminal group is correlated with the ability to impose themselves through violence or the threat to use it, generating a “useful reputation” (Gambetta, 2009, p. 78). Pereda (2021) analyzed several murders filmed by members of the criminal organization *Los Zetas* and found that it is quite obvious that decisions for filmed violence are rational and aligned with the strategic objectives of the criminal group. It is a utilitarian perspective which, according to Pereda (2021) itself, does not cover other relevant underlying phenomena.

Filmed Crimes in Brazil

In 2016, in a prison in the north of the country, a rebellion between prisoners from rival groups resulted in the death of ten prisoners in which seven of them had their bodies burned, three of them were beheaded (Carvalho & Bantin, 2019). Part of the attacks and deaths were filmed and spread on social networks. It is a fact that Brazil has experienced episodes similar to those that occur in Mexico. Members of the two main Brazilian criminal organizations, sometimes from subsidiary criminal groups, have been often responsible for deliberately filmed tortures, humiliations, and homicides (Costa, 2017; Ferreira & Framento, 2019; Graça & Leal, 2017; Sisnando, 2021).

Whether perpetrated against their own members as a form of discipline, through criminal courts, alternative courts (Feltran, 2020) or even against rival members, the acts have as objective the criminal organization’s self-affirmation through fear and intimidation. These acts have a tactical objective and are not exclusive to Brazilian criminal groups (Feltran, 2020). Throughout history, beheading has been used as a form of ‘dehumanization’ of the opponent and a strategy to demonstrate power (Passarinho, 2019). It is not simple to determine the frequency and territorial distribution with which these crimes occur within the country. There are no specific controls by the authorities, in fact, there are no academic studies on the subject. Generally, only journalists are interested in these facts and often the press are the only source. Many cases occur without witnesses, in restricted places, and often the perpetrators take precautions not to be identified. This was not, however, what happened with the object case of this study.

Episodes like these make us question: why do individuals torture, kill, and dismember? How do they come up with decisions like these? What individual or contextual factors impact this type of crime? There do not seem to be simple answers.

There is a complex combination of cognitive, affective, and situational factors that play an important role in decision-making processes to kill (Brookman & Wright, 2017).

The Current Study

This study refers to a case of triple homicide that occurred in a neighborhood close to the capital of Ceará state, in Northeastern Brazil. The crime took place on March 2nd, 2018, when three women were snatched and taken to a mangrove area, a desolate place, where they were initially assaulted. Victim 1 was 23 years old, Victim 2 was 31 years old, and Victim 3 was 22 years old. Six perpetrators participated in the crimes and produced seven amateur videos that were shared on social networks, mainly through WhatsApp®. It is estimated that 80% of Brazilians, about 120 million people, use the application regularly (Newman *et al.*, 2021). The videos gained great repercussion due to the cruelty of the scenes in which victims appear being tortured, killed, and beheaded. There was extensive coverage by the local and national press with details about the location, victims, and the circumstances of the crimes being divulged.

Method

Data

The study was based on information extracted from amateur videos recorded at the crime scene. The videos had wide repercussions in the Brazilian national media and were obtained through social networks in the Whatsapp® application. It is impossible to measure how many people watched, because they circulated (and still circulate) freely through social networks. From the amateur videos, it is possible to describe how the dynamics of the crimes took place, but there is a criminal context that must be considered in which rival criminal organizations have used footage to cause effects.

Procedures

The local and national Brazilian press gave wide publicity to the case. This made the videos even more popular. The paradigmatic fake video of Benjamin Vanderford being beheaded in 2004 showed an important consideration: the speed of journalistic media for extravagant news and the failure to check the veracity of the facts (Guthrie, 2008). We took and considered it essential to be careful to confirm with law enforcement authorities the integrity of the videos.

From exploring the content of the videos, the scenes and the actions of perpetrators and victims were described. The speeches were transcribed and relevant excerpts were selected for discussion. We sought to understand the microenvironment and the dynamics that led to the spectacularization of the homicides. The chronological order

in which the filming took place was organized based on the content analysis carried out for the seven videos. So, the methodological approach aimed to find explanations linked to the context and interactions that led to the lethal violence, variables of utmost importance in explaining homicides (Brookman & Wright, 2017; Pike *et al.*, 2020).

General Case details

The victims were numbered according to the order in which the torture and death scenes were filmed. The perpetrators were listed according to the hierarchical position they appeared to have, with the mastermind, supposedly the leader, Perpetrator 1 (P1), who does not appear in the videos and who is not heard. Table 1 orders, presents general information, and provides a short description of the content of the amateur videos:

Table 1: Data from the amateur videos of the triple homicide shared on social media

<i>Order</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Short description</i>
1	00'10"	Victim 1 looks at the camera and says she tore the CV shirt.
2	00'44"	Perpetrator 3 tries to cut off victim 1's fingers.
3	01'37"	Perpetrator 2 orders Perpetrator 3 to dismember victim 1's left arm with a machete. Perpetrator 4 also uses the machete to attack the victim.
4	00'10"	Victim 2 looks at the camera and says: I belonged to CV, I'm tearing the shirt, and I'm wearing the GDE [<i>Guardiões do Estado</i>] one.
5	00'43"	Victim 2 is sitting on the floor, crying, and begs not to be killed. Perpetrator 2 instructs Perpetrator 4 to shoot her in the head. Sounds of laughter. One of the perpetrators says she is still alive. Perpetrator 4 starts delivering machete blows to the victim's throat.
6	02'00"	Perpetrator 3 tries to behead victim 1 who is still alive. People laugh at the difficulty. Sounds of the machete.
7	00'27"	Perpetrator 4 holds the heads of the three victims.

Results

The victims were snatched from a neighborhood and taken to a location close to the neighborhood dominated by the criminal faction of the perpetrators. They suffered physical and psychological aggression before being killed. In fact, they were barbarized. Video 1 (Vd1) shows Victim 1 (V1) sitting on the ground with lots of mud, looking at the camera, following instructions from the perpetrators. In Video 2 (Vd2), Perpetrator 4 (P4) is seen delivering machete blows to the little finger of V1's right hand, but he does not succeed in chopping off the fingers. P3 can be heard in a mocking tone saying: "*Cut off her entire hand!*". P4 finally manages to cut off V1's fingers, who shows for the camera the hand without the fingers.

Video 3 (Vd3) shows V1 inside a muddy hole, while P3 grabs his right arm by the wrist and delivers several blows to the elbow joint. P2 laughs a lot, clearly amused. P3 manages to dismember V1's right arm and throws it beside her into the hole. V1 squirms in pain. P3 delivers two blows to the victim's neck and is reprimanded by P2: "No, no! Not there!". Perpetrator 5 (P5) laughs and encourages P3: "Bring off the other arm! It hits her face!". P5 asks P2: "Have you recorded everything already?" and finally suggests to the others: "Let's start digging, dude!".

In Video 4 (Vd4) victim 2 (V2) is showed seated on the ground, with fear. V2 says: "We were CV [Comando Vermelho], now we're tearing our shirt and we're wearing the GDE [Guardiões do Estado] one, 745 [numerical references for the letters GDE], nothing escapes!". Video 5 (Vd5) shows V2 with a bloodied face, begging for her life. Then P5 fires a shot to the V2's head. The image is brought closer to the victim's face and one of the perpetrators is heard: "She is alive, my son!". An object similar to a large kitchen knife is used to strike 9 times against V2's neck. It is not possible to identify which of the perpetrators does it.

One of the perpetrators is seen in Video 6 (Vd6) slashing the front of V1's throat with a machete, while the victim tries to bring her arm up to his neck. The perpetrators laugh and seem to have fun. P3 says, with laughter: "Take your hand off, you wretch!". Several blows are delivered. At 1 minute and 50 seconds, after repeated blows to V1's cervical, P4 uses his hands to rip the victim's head off. P2 asks: "Show it, show it to the camera!". Video 7 (Vd7) shows P5's arms gathering the heads of the three victims, grabbing them by the hair. P2 films his own right hand making gestures with three fingers while saying: "Here, it's all 3, damn! If it passes, it explodes, got it?! Scoundrels! [the image shows the three heads held by the hair by P5]. Nothing escapes!". At 12 seconds, one of the perpetrators is heard saying: "This one is so skinny, man!". Another perpetrator says: "We are GDE." At 24 seconds, the camera points to the body of one of the victims being thrown over the bodies of the other two already inside a grave. The voice of one of the perpetrators is heard: "This one is fat, I can't handle her alone!".

Three perpetrators (P3, P4, and P5) conducted the torture, death, and decapitation sessions of the victims under the command of a fifth one (P1) who gave orders by telephone to P2. P6 was not directly involved in the commitment of the crimes, however he was accused and convicted of other crimes. An unspecified number of other people were present at the place and watched the scenes.

Discussion

The serious aggression to which the victims were subjected, the mutilations and filmed murders, and the high disapproval by society, materialized by the condemnations of the perpetrators by the Sentence Council, are commendable conduct for the conflict

between the criminal factions. This is inferred from the fact that deliberate recordings and the dissemination of videos in which criminals appear vilifying their rivals are common. On the other hand, the meaning that aggressors attribute to their homicide victims can be inferred from the manner and place where the crime is committed, the present case being an instrumental homicide (Salfati, 2000).

Victims were taken to a desolate area that became a stage where the horrors took place. The three victims were savaged, their heads were brutally cut off and displayed as trophies, their bodies were dumped and piled in a shallow grave. In the videos, the aggressors laugh at and mock their victims, treating them inhumanly, as mere objects that make up the scenes. The victims were mere objects and this case fits in the dehumanization literature. Indeed, the review by Haslam and Loughnan (2014) argued that dehumanization should follow an analysis of how it is done, who is dehumanized, and who dehumanizes, which situational and motivational factors are involved, and the implications of dehumanization on behavior and moral judgment.

Even though the perpetrators deliberately executed orders to film the sessions of torture, murder, and beheading, they tried to mask their identities. In the videos, they use hoods to hide their faces, which, presumably, gave them some sense of anonymity, and can have diminished inhibitions and moral brakes. A very similar effect was described in the experiments of Zimbardo (1969) where participants wearing Ku Klux Klan hoods were able to deliver more shocks to a collaborator than when their faces were bare.

Violent practices as a form of conflict resolution and the rivalry between members of criminal groups can cause another relevant phenomenon: desensitization. There is evidence that negative responses to violence can be substantially diminished and replaced by beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that endorse violence (Krahé *et al.*, 2011). Sparrow (2009) reported that a large part of his interviewees who killed had wanted a trophy, a reminder of what they did, especially if they did it in the name of something they think is bigger than themselves. It can be assumed that the performative videos recorded by the perpetrators were and would again, at some point, a way of remembering the rough elimination of the rivals. That is also how the US military personnel who recorded cruel and degrading treatment of Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison justified themselves (Martschukat & Niedermeier, 2013).

A comparison should be made here with the film productions of decapitations created by Islamic radicals that became popular in the last few decades. These filmed decapitations, despite being a cultural practice from centuries ago (Tracy & Massay, 2012), gained status of a psychological weapon of terror and intimidation, principally, with the advent of image sharing technologies from social networking applications (Auchter, 2017). For example, the videos of the radical group Islamic State (IS) are

designed to reach as many Western audiences as possible and, not by chance, their production is choreographed by the perpetrators, the scenarios are carefully chosen, as well as the scenes filmed from different angles and edited to extract the maximum horror, anger, provocation, and fear (Friss, 2015).

Similarly, the deaths filmed by criminal groups, though more amateur, are acts of abuse and terror, which also aim to impact the adversary's morale. They are ritualistic murders, a systematically symbolic aggression, which exceeds the actions necessary to reach the desired end – death. As a signature or visiting card (Perlmutter, 2003), sometimes with secular characteristics, they seek economic and political gains, making use of religious or spiritual characteristics which further increases the brutality level of deaths (Bunker, Campbell & Bunker, 2010).

Grossman's (1995) "psychology of war" seems to be very useful for understanding homicides, such as the case analyzed in this paper. According to the author, the confluence of obedience to authority and norms, self-pity and anonymity when acting for the group, the objectification or dehumanization of victims, and the individual's predisposition, all contribute to the commitment of homicides without remorse. The interrogation of Nazi military personnel, for example, responsible for deporting and killing prisoners during World War II showed that many of them killed without taking orders (Browning, 1998). Despite the reports showing initial revulsion, more than 80% of respondents said that it was preferable to follow the norms shared by others, even if it meant committing extreme acts of violence. According to Browning (1998), the feeling of integration and belonging, and the fear of social rejection were the main motivating forces.

Proving to be able to kill mercilessly on behalf of the group provides status and recognition in the eyes of fellow henchmen. Bourke (1999), following a similar reasoning, pointed to evidence that war gives combatants the pleasure of killing opponents. Anyone is fully capable of killing, enthusiastically, without remorse, with the proper conditioning provided by training or by the environmental conditions typical of combat zones. In war, murder is legitimate, authorized by governments, socialized and normalized in the group's social relations. This systematically subverts a combatant's morality. Art and propaganda demonize enemies, desensitize soldiers to even having fun with enemies' corpses. There is something similar in murders filmed by criminals.

Diminishing the power of criminal factions is essential, by replacing the "parallel state", that oppresses good people, with the Rule of Law. Actions by the Mexican government against drug cartels provoked even more violent reactions, with criminals seeking and, at times, even managing to undermine the country's sovereignty, making some regions inaccessible to public authorities. Filming of dismembered bodies, including those of public agents, is part of this brutal repertoire (Lantz, 2016; Rios

& Rivera, 2018). This worrying episodes happened in Brazil when, in 2006 and, more recently, in 2012, dozens of cops were killed, government agencies attacked, and fear was installed among the population when criminals from *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (PCC) acted in total affront to the State (Biondi, 2017). It is also not a novelty that Brazilian native people, since the beginning, would practice dismemberment as a ritualistic way of impacting enemies (Filho & Machado, 2019), but nowadays, such barbarities are not acceptable.

Hostilizing, brutalizing and killing their opponents appears to have become a way of sharing and reinforcing collective beliefs among members of Brazilian criminal organizations. The collective reputation towards rival groups and the individual reputation within the group seem to be an objective and a consequence of the filmed aggression. On the intergroup spectrum, the criminal organization projects its power, imposes fear and, to some extent, attracts new affiliates, many of them interested in protection; on the individual spectrum, self-assertion, recognition, and hierarchical status seem to motivate filmed violence. In both there is a basic symbolic factor and rational calculation. Among the *Los Zetas*, repulsive violent behavior ends up becoming a valued and even desired group norm, generating social cohesion. There is evidence in this dynamism that psycho-sociological factors operate to produce increasingly violent criminal groups and individuals increasingly predisposed to commit extreme violence (Pereda, 2021). In the case analyzed here this seems to apply.

Analyzing interactions involving perpetrators, victims and situational elements in lethal episode allows the capture of motivational aspects, individual and contextual characteristics capable of explaining homicides (Miethe, Regoeczi & Drass 2004), but the materials analyzed here are insufficient for in-depth analysis, mainly due to the impossibility of access by the individuals involved. However, they allow for a good understanding of the episode.

Theoretical Implications

These cases refer to another theoretical discussion. As Warburton (2015), models and empirical studies of social psychology seem, to provide the best ways of understanding human violence, however, taxonomies of some prominent researchers such as Krahe (2020), Parrott and Giancola (2007), Buss (1961), as the classification by Bushman and Hessemann (2010) seem not to technically encompass this modality. The extreme degradation of the victims observed in the videos is extrapolated to cause another, equally extreme, violence in those who watch them.

Here, we agree with the discussion presented by Allen and Anderson (2017), Bushman and Anderson (2001), that related to the dichotomous classifications of aggression and its limits. Intentionality matters and if it is to produce impacts in an

audience, it is an aggression. For example, if we consider the traditional concepts between hostile and instrumental aggression (Buss, 1961), intentionally filmed crimes carry characteristics of both, and there is overlap. The intentionality is ambiguous when the intentional cruelty and dehumanization perpetrated against the victims in the videos is intended to harm morally and psychologically, directly and indirectly, other people.

Including, in the proposal of Allen and Anderson (2017) the concept of aggression reflects a *continuum* that varies of severity, from minor to more serious behaviors, that homicide is on the top, the filmed homicide cases extrapolates the mere homicide. There is automatism in the execution, but also premeditation, there is anger and impulsiveness, but also deliberation. Victims are in direct contact with the perpetrators, but who will watch the videos is not. The script humiliates, injures, kills and uses the scenes as an instrument for the final product: the dark spectacle.

The violence perpetrated against victims of filmed homicides is not the only point. Victims, although are primarily the target, are also objects of violence directed at other people, those who will watch the videos. Thus, there are presumably, more two intentions: to positively impact within the criminal group itself (eg, to reinforce ties and reassert the group's power) and negatively on rival groups or individuals (eg, to cause fear and intimidation). That is, violence goes beyond degrading actions against victims, resulting in consequential violence.

The extra-lethal violence, term of Fujii (2013), fits the case analyzed here. Just killing was not enough, it was necessary to produce a spectacle that involved time and effort to produce performance footage, in a macabre and brutal ritual of collective entertainment to obtain a "graphic effect" (Fujii, 2013). As stated by Pereda (2021) and Fujii (2013), there is another logic involved, still little explored by the sciences that deal with violent behavior and criminological studies. For example, when using three fingers and calling out the initial letters in reference to the criminal faction they belong to, the perpetrators resort to an identity, a sign that represents and reinforces the image of the criminal group.

Unfolding of the Trials

The perpetrators were tried and convicted in February 2019, less than a year after the crimes, for the crimes of triple first degree murder, destruction and concealment of corpses, participation in criminal organization, illegal possession of firearms, and torture. Perpetrator 3 was not tried because, at the time of the trial, he was a fugitive. The videos were not presented in full to the jurors who considered them too cruel and impactful. The applied penalties demonstrate the disapproval of the acts committed, but seem not to have been enough to inhibit the actions of GDE faction members.

Attention was given to the conviction of perpetrator 6, who was proven not to act directly, however, the Public Prosecutor's Office still convinced the jurors that his mere presence, as a member of the criminal organization, endorsed and contributed to reinforce the behavior of others. There are theoretical and empirical postulates that support this relationship (Block, 1977; Collins, 2008).

After analyzing the content of the amateur videos, we made a formal request to the Public Ministry, in charge of the criminal action. We were then given full access to the court records, a digitalized file containing 836 pages, including police reports and examinations on victims. Of special relevance, it also included 11 video files of court sessions in which perpetrators and witnesses were interrogated, totaling about 3 hours and 55 minutes. It is an extensive material that allows for the design of studies of different areas and approaches to investigate the use of videos as an instrument of criminal propaganda and intimidation.

Based on intelligence intercepts, it was confirmed that P1 was in a prison from where he commanded the actions against the victims by telephone. P1 ordered P2 to make an "Islamic video" by ripping off an arm and a leg from V1. In the judicial interrogation, P4 claims that he killed the victims along with P3 on his own initiative, because "there is a war between GDE and CV" and the crimes "were filmed to share on whats app". In fact, at that time, their city was experiencing a wave of violence, retaliation and mutual revenge between rival criminal groups and their affiliates. A few days before the crime analyzed occurred, on January 27, 2018, members of a faction fired shots at people who were simply partying in a neighborhood under the control of a rival group. Fourteen people were killed.

Still under judicial interrogation, P2 denied that P1 was the head of the criminal organization. P2 said he was worried about the prison where he was being held, because there are 5 pavilions of rival members and only one of his group. He then asked the authorities to try to transfer him to another place: "I've been arrested before, I know how it works. I want to get out of where I am". In November 2020, criminals victimized a 25-year-old man salesman of cleaning products, in the same place where the victims of the present case study were killed. The victim was tortured, killed, and dismembered for supposedly being involved with a rival faction (G1 Ceará, 2020).

The cases of murders filmed in Brazil continue to be publicized (Carone, 2021; MCeara, 2021; Portal Capital, 2021) and there are similarities, such as: being carried out by men belonging to a criminal organization, in the name of this organization, against rivals (or supposed rivals), and deliberately registered for spread on social media. It is a kind of criminal governance, a type of parastatal social ordering (Ferreira & Gonçalves, 2021) in which extreme violence must be recorded in videos as a power demonstration. This became in itself a powerful tool for intimidation and

fear that created a cycle of revenge and retaliation: torture, dehumanize, record and disseminate.

How group norms operate in the behavior of perpetrators? There is still no robust background on this topic. The intentionally filmed murders, in fact, seem to follow a singular logic. In relation to Brazilian cases, there is a long way to go. Obtaining information on statistical and territorial incidence is not easy. There are indications that it is not such an uncommon practice, but that it seems to attract much more attention from the press than from scientific areas. In the case analyzed here, the perpetrators were all male and were in the numerical majority, while the victims were completely subjugated by the captors. Clearly, the victims were just objects of a violence that exceeded the interest in just causing death.

Concluding Remarks

The present study focused on a phenomenon that has become common in the scenery of violence between criminal factions in Brazil. The case analyzed shows that taking the three victims to a desolate location was not just to kill them, but to produce an intentional spectacle of the deaths. According to the police investigation, perpetrator 1 (P1) was in a prison and gave orders by telephone to his interlocutor perpetrator 2 (P2), who transmitted them to perpetrators 3, 4 and 5 (P3, P4 and P5). P2 was the one who filmed the scenes and also does not appear in the videos, but it is possible to hear him in a few moments transmitting orders. P3, P4, and P5 appear attacking without any hesitation. It was much more than that: to produce an intentional spectacle of the deaths. The disdain for the victims' lives and the inhumane and cruel ways they were treated seems to derive from a group process in which the faction's implicit social norms involve the extreme use of violence against all those considered rivals.

Understanding the motivation behind a triple homicide is not simple. In order to know the exact motivation of a murderer, is necessary to go deeper into his or her subjectivity, from where it is possible to understand the criminal conduct misadjustments of social, moral, and cultural factors. Despite that, it is not simple to access the individuals involved. Thus, from the criminal context known, the prior facts and the dynamic observed in the audiovisual register crimes that one can infer that the violent behaviors are consistent to sociocultural and moral factors that are typical of the parallel state generated by criminal organizations.

There are some theoretical implications. Violence is taken to a new level. If conceptualizing is difficult, measuring the degree of violence produced is a challenge for research, since the videos are disseminated on social networks and indiscriminately impact all types of people. Sadism, bestiality, evil are words that can be associated. But the findings mentioned here only indicate possible directions for understanding the

complexity involved in the use of recordings of violent crimes as a form of intimidating rivals and intra and intergroup self-affirmation. For instance, the social norms that prevail in criminal organizations and the severity of punishments of dissident members suggest that obeying the leader's orders is not an option. In the analyzed case, only the perpetrators can reveal the degree of compliance (acquiescence and acceptance) in relation to the orders they received. The perpetrators are serving sentences and, given the impossibility of access to them, due to restrictions resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, in addition to those mentioned, other many answers remain unanswered.

The study limitations indicate gaps that can be filled by future research, that may, for example, investigate relationships between individual characteristics, such as personality traits and propensity to commit brutal crimes. Studies with an experimental design, for instance, may focus on simulations with participation of volunteers who are admittedly members of rival criminal factions. The use of interviews about the motives of the intentionally filmed murders may also bring answers and explanations capable of enriching the field of study and to produce scientific inputs that allow apprehending the complexities involved. At the time, there are more questions than answers. How can they have such contempt for the victims? How can they bear to act so cruelly? What did those individuals feel at the time of aggression? If they watched the videos later, what would they feel? What are the psychological characteristics of these aggressors?

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Supplementary materials

The analyzed videos are available at:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1o9fvMko9zDAfTzTqFbazSsqCRxm9wwX_?usp=sharing

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