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The Invisible Hand at Play. Unveiling the Impact of Austerity on Memory in Brazil

La mano invisibile in gioco.
Svelare l'impatto dell'austerità sulla memoria in Brasile

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the relationship between the politics of memory, austerity measures, the implications of neoliberalism, and the importance of collective agency in Brazil. The study analyzes how implementing austerity measures between 2016 and 2022 affected government spending on initiatives related to the country's memory of the dictatorship. The reduced funding from measures such as the Expanding Cap Amendment harmed several ongoing projects. The article discusses the broader impact of neoliberalism on memory through the perspective that neoliberal reasoning might be apathetic to collective memory, but, by doing so, it may become an incubator of authoritarian practices. Thus, collective agency and a broader role of civil society are cornerstones in transmitting collective memories of a violent past.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Politics of Memory; Austerity; Neoliberalism; Collective Agency.

Questo articolo analizza la relazione tra la politica della memoria, le misure di austerità, le implicazioni del neoliberalismo e l'importanza dell'agency collettiva in Brasile. Lo studio analizza come l'attuazione delle misure di austerità tra il 2016 e il 2022 abbia influito sulla spesa governativa per le iniziative legate alla memoria della dittatura nel Paese. La riduzione dei finanziamenti dovuta a misure come l'emendamento "Expanding Cap" ha danneggiato diversi progetti in corso. L'articolo discute l'impatto più ampio del neoliberalismo sulla memoria attraverso la prospettiva che il ragionamento neoliberale potrebbe essere apatico nei confronti della memoria collettiva, ma, così facendo, potrebbe diventare un incubatore di pratiche autoritarie. Pertanto, l'agency collettiva e un ruolo più ampio della società civile sono pietre miliari nella trasmissione delle memorie collettive di un passato violento.

KEYWORDS: Politica della memoria; Austerità; Neoliberalismo; Agency collettiva.

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The right to memory and truth is grounded in the broader notions of democracy and the rule of law. The Brazilian Constitution of 1988 guarantees the right to truth and memory about the human rights violations committed during the military dictatorship through the principles of citizenship, human dignity and publicity, and, more specifically, the right to information -article 5, 2. Brazil's military dictatorship lasted from 1964 to 1985 mainly because of its brutality against the growing number of political opponents.

The process of building a memory of that violence can be divided into different periods, but 1995 was a turning point regarding how a critical perspective and collective agency started influencing the government's agenda. According to Marcos Napolitano, after 1990, the state developed a politics of memory, although mediocre, somewhat incoherent, and focused on specific cases¹. After 1995, the government's actions became more clear and regulated, guided by reparations and the reconstruction of stories of the military government's victims. However, policies addressing the legacy of violence have been «slow and limited»². The Report of the Institute of Religious Studies (ISER) points out the insufficient financial and specialized personnel, leading to a setback, especially between 2016 and 2022.

Civil society has been involved in constructing memory, with an adequate capacity to legitimize their reasoning in the public debate. Several political parties, NGOs, labor unions, museums, archives, the media, artists, universities, and cultural institutions, in general, have contributed to building critical memory of the dictatorship. These efforts impact government decisions that result in important legal endeavors of memorialization, such as the Law 9140/1995 - on Deaths and Disappearances. The government's involvement is essential in the process as an expression of collective awareness of the violence of the past. Most of the archives, documents, and places where the violence was perpetrated are under the government's property. From 2003 to 2016, the politics of memory intensified in the Brazilian federal government, especially after 2007.

Another turning point in the politics of memory happened in 2016, a process that the ISER Report named «dismantling the institutions» after the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff³. The impeachment process was initiated after the reelection of Dilma Rousseff in 2014, and completed in 2016. The accusation of fiscal irresponsibility against President Dilma was not legally supported⁴. On the contrary, the austerity agenda gained momentum as a solution to Brazil's economic crisis since 2014. This is basically the idea that fiscal sustainability will be achieved as long

¹ M. NAPOLITANO, *Recordar é Vencer: As Dinâmicas e Vicissitudes da Construção da Memória sobre o Regime Militar Brasileiro*, «Antíteses», 15, 8/2015, pp. 9-45.

² S. SANTOS, *Relatório Sobre a Situação do Brasil acerca da Memória, Verdade, Justiça e Reparação pelos Crimes da Ditadura de 1964*, «ISER», 2/2018, <https://www.iser.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Relatorio-ISER-MVI-CIDH-11-2018-1-1.pdf>, accessed May 10, 2023.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ E. SOLANO (ed), *O ódio como política : a reinvenção das direitas no Brasil*, São Paulo, Boitempo, 2018.



as the government imposes a fiscal adjustment to bring about a primary surplus in the fiscal accounts. The leading example of this economic policy in 2016 was the Expenditure Cap Amendment – or Amendment 95 – a limitation on the growth of the Brazilian government's expenses for 20 years⁵.

Austerity is one of the core pillars of the neoliberal financial reforms. Mainstream economics has harped on austerity and financial liberalization since the Brazilian 1980s crisis as a means to replace public spending for international private funding⁶. As Bresser-Pereira sums up, the three components of the orthodox concept of the macroeconomic tripod – primary surplus, floating exchange rate, and inflation target – are intended to guarantee a high real interest rate and an overvalued currency. This is demanded by the neoliberal political coalition formed by technocrats, rentier capitalists, and financiers, whose liberal economists ignore the particularities of the periphery of the world and advocate for using the exchange rate as a nominal anchor against inflation. This means prioritizing inflation control – the best way to guarantee a high real interest rate – rejecting any exchange rate policy, and primarily relying on international financing and funding for national development and cultural projects.

However, there are massive inconsistencies and black holes in its program. In terms of funding public projects – which encompasses the institutional politics of memory – the idea of cutting public spending and trusting in international money inflow is specifically disastrous. First, the role of the government in working on its own past as a perpetrator of violence is a cornerstone of memory and truth. Second, the inflow of international money is rather speculative, which flees at the slightest sign of instability. It is a money that is not directed to investments in the real economy, let alone museums, research, or places of memory⁷.

For Enzo Traverso, neoliberalism does not intend to rewrite history according to its own criteria, neither reinterpreting nor explaining it through economic reasons⁸. The problem is that neoliberalism is indifferent to history writing rather than trying to dominate the past. Instead of attempting to manipulate history, imposing an official version of the past, it is a spirit of commemorations and the rise of human rights discourse, especially in the Global North, where neoliberalism has prevailed

⁵ As Cristiano Paixão and Beatriz Vargas point out, «If such a measure would already be exorbitant for a government legitimized by the valid votes of the majority of Brazilian voters, for a government sworn in as a result of a questionable impeachment process, from the point of view of its constitutional foundation, the proposal is absolutely arrogant. Despite being rejected by more than 70% of Brazilians (according to the Vox Populi Institute), the Federal Senate rejects the option of submitting PEC 55 to a popular referendum», C. PAIXÃO – B. VARGAS, *PEC 55: contra a política e contra a Constituição*, «Jota», Dec. 2, 2016.

⁶ A.C. COUTO, *Constitucionalismo, elitismo e capital: o equilíbrio difícil entre justiça social e neoliberalismo nas disputas constituintes da década de 1980*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Brasília, <https://repositorio.umb.br/handle/10482/43248>, accessed May 10, 2023.

⁷ K. LIMA, *The IMF & the Legacy of Bretton Woods*, «Phenomenal World», Jul. 7, 2022 <https://www.phenomenalworld.org/interviews/imf-bretton-woods/>, accessed May 29, 2023.

⁸ E. TRAVERSO, *Presentism: the Politics of Memory in the Age of Neoliberalism*, Sep. 15, 2016, accessed May 10, 2023.

for a longer time. Traverso points out that there can be an accommodation of politics of memory to the individualistic ethos of the neoliberal agenda. As this economic reason is pervasive, shaping all aspects of human life, it also affects the regime of historicity. Therefore it can affect the past and the political uses of memory.

The market-liberal excesses of 2016 led to democratic deficiencies that paved the way towards authoritarianism, boosted widely by inequality. In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right candidate, was elected president. Still in 2016, during the voting session of President Dilma Rousseff's impeachment in Congress, Bolsonaro praised Dilma Rousseff's torturer from the dictatorial period⁹.

This paper analyzes how austerity, one of the pillars of the macroeconomic tripod of neoliberalism, hindered the politics of memory between 2016 and 2022 in Brazil. The main argument is that the political economy of neoliberalism became an incubator for a broader agenda of anti-intellectualism and hostility towards critical inquiry, historical research, and social activism. By emphasizing the need for austerity and marked-oriented monetary policy, the discourse against government spending devalues the importance of memory and truth as a foundation for a democratic society. There are many examples of interrupted projects because of funding, but it was not just a matter of funding, as the case of the Honestino Guimarães bridge can show.

1. Politics of memory in post-dictatorship Brazil: «dismantling the institutions» from 2016 to 2022

The military dictatorship in Brazil lasted from 1964 to 1985. It began with a coup d'état that overthrew the democratically elected government of President João Goulart. The military dictatorship was marked by the brutal persecution of political opponents and the implementation of an economic agenda that deepened social inequalities in the country. In the 1960s and 1970s, opposition to the regime grew, and various social movements emerged, including labor unions, student groups, and religious organizations. These groups organized protests and strikes against the government, leading to increased repression and violence from the military regime. By the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, social activism for democracy was gaining momentum. The dictatorship had been in the process of «slow, gradual and safe» openness since 1974 in response to increased social pressure to release political prisoners. The transition to democracy was controlled by the military and civilian political elites who supported and benefited from the dictatorial regime. The approval of an Amnesty Law in 1979 was a step to protect perpetrators, ensuring that crimes committed by the dictatorship would be unpunished.

⁹ One of the most notorious torturers of the Brazilian dictatorship, General Carlos Brillhante Ustra.



Promoting policies to address the aftermath of violent conflicts was slow and limited. In 1985, civilian rule was restored with indirect elections. Regarding politics of memory organized by the Brazilian federal government, the first considerable initiatives were the Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances in 1995 and the Amnesty Commission in 2001. The Amnesty Commission was created to examine requests for reparation, but over the years has expanded its activities, developing projects that encourage the production of memory and psychosocial care for people affected by the military dictatorship.

Between 2003 and 2016, there was an expansion in the government's agenda and public discourse on the politics of memory and transitional justice. The Amnesty Commission supported numerous memory-related endeavors, resulting in a substantial change in 2007. As a result, the National Human Rights Programme of 2010 addressed the topic «Right to Memory and Truth» and the National Truth Commission (CNV) was created in 2012.

However, many issues related to the dictatorship, such as the responsabilization of military officials, have faced challenges. The decision of the Brazilian Supreme Court to judge the Amnesty Law as constitutional prevented the opening and advancement of criminal proceedings. However, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights concluded a few months later that the amnesty law should have no legal effect because it prevented the investigation and sanction of serious human rights violations -Case of Gomes Lund et al. (Guerrilha do Araguaia) V. Brasil. And the Amnesty Law is still in force. Among other challenges, the Federal Government did not create a body to monitor and encourage compliance with the recommendations of the National Truth Commission.

In what comes to memory, the period between 2016 and 2022 is marked by several challenges. According to the «Report on the Situation in Brazil regarding Memory, Truth, Justice and Reparation for the Crimes of the 1964 Dictatorship», published by the Institute of Religious Studies, one of the obstacles was the lack of financial resources and expert personnel¹⁰.

The turning point in 2016 mirrors the arrival to power of an agenda of austerity in the country as a solution to the economic crisis. After the coup against the elected president Dilma Rousseff (2016), the interim president made a series of inaugural speeches. The guidelines for the interim government were in line with the assumptions of an orthodox political economy: cutting government expenditure -by reducing the number of institutional bodies and personnel-, giving the Central Bank independency to set macroeconomic aggregates to reassure the confidence of the market:

¹⁰ S. SANTOS, *Relatório Sobre a Situação do Brasil acerca da Memória, Verdade, Justiça e Reparação pelos Crimes da Ditadura de 1964*, p. 3.

We must rebuild the foundations of the Brazilian economy [...] and significantly improve the business environment for the private sector. [...] The first measure is to eliminate several Ministries and personnel [...]; I would also like to reassure the market, to say that all the functions that the Central Bank currently have will be maintained to strengthen its performance as the conductor of monetary and fiscal policy; public spending needs to be efficient; [...] we all know that [...] investors follow the changes in our country with great interest; [...] we are going to present this proposal for a constitutional amendment that will limit the growth of total primary expenditure¹¹.

Still, in 2016, the Brazilian government passed Constitutional Amendment 95, also known as the Expenditure Cap Amendment – *teto de gastos* – which limits public spending for the next 20 years, including social programs.

2. The vital role of government funds in supporting collective memory

In 1995, the Brazilian politics of memory changed its course. Driven by political democratization and the enactment of a new Constitution, scholars and activists had struggled to re-writing how Brazil's past was told then. They sought to demystify the myths surrounding historical 'truths' through new memory initiatives. Similarly, government agencies, companies, and institutions began to dedicate themselves to restoration, organizing archives, and publishing books and interviews¹².

Indeed, in response to requests from civil society –especially the Commission of Families of the Political Dead and Disappeared and Institute for the Study of State Violence– and based on similar experiences in Eastern Europe, the government ordered the opening of some archives in 1994, which resulted in the «Dossier on Political Deaths and Disappearances after 1964», published in 1995. It included a partial list of 339 individuals who died or went missing during the national security regime. During the 1994 presidential campaign, the two leading candidates signed a letter of commitment drafted by groups of families of missing persons. It compelled the future government to adopt ten fundamental points about memory and truth. Among other things, the document required formal public acknowledgment by the Brazilian state of its full responsibility for the imprisonment, torture, death, and disappearance of political opponents between 1964 and 1985¹³.

¹¹ This is a summary of two speeches of President Michel Temer: M. TEMER, *Discurso do Presidente da República, Michel Temer, durante cerimônia de posse dos novos ministros de Estado*, «Presidential Library», May 12, 2016, <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/presidencia/ex-presidentes/michel-temer/discursos-do-presidente-da-republica/discurso-do-presidente-da-republica-michel-temer-durante-cerimonia-de-posse-dos-novos-ministros-de-estado-palacio-do-planalto>, accessed May 31, 2023; M. TEMER, *Discurso do Presidente interino, Michel Temer, durante cerimônia de apresentação das medidas econômicas*, «Presidential Library», May 24, 2016, <http://www.biblioteca.presidencia.gov.br/presidencia/ex-presidentes/michel-temer/discursos-do-presidente-da-republica/discurso-do-presidente-interino-michel-temer-durante-cerimonia-de-apresentacao-das-medidas-economicas-brasilia-df>, accessed May 31, 2023.

¹² M. NAPOLITANO, *Recordar é vencer: as dinâmicas e vicissitudes da construção da memória sobre o regime militar brasileiro*, p. 15.

¹³ SECRETARIA ESPECIAL DOS DIREITOS HUMANOS DA PRESIDENCIA DA REPUBLICA, *Direito à memória e à verdade. Comissão Especial sobre Mortos e Desaparecidos Políticos*, Brasília, Secretaria Especial dos Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República, 2007.



After several gatherings between civil society and the state, the government passed the Law 9140 in 1995 to promote reparations and create memory commissions. The law created the Special Committee on Political Deaths and Disappearances (CEMDP). The role of the Commission was to locate the bodies of dead and missing persons and to analyze requests for financial compensation from family members. In addition, it had an appendix with 136 names of people who had already been identified as missing, making it easier for family members to claim compensation.

The case of CEMDP illustrates how much public institutions are entwined with past violations. The government's role is more than funding initiatives such as museums, lectures, public exhibits, and other cultural and educational events. As the state perpetrated the actions that led to disappearances, deaths, and torture, it also has the archives, the sites where the violence was perpetrated, or the means to discover and unveil these hidden pieces of information to rewrite history. Besides, one part of producing collective memory is to make it relevant for the present and future. As part of social organization, the state should be engaged in the disclosure process.

Nevertheless, funding is a cornerstone in the politics of memory. However, public spending on these endeavors is expressively low comparatively in terms of public policies. Some government-funded programs and initiatives have been implemented to promote awareness and education about violence during the dictatorship. However, as previously mentioned, the new economic policy guidelines after the impeachment of 2016 have decreased or ceased government spending in many areas, including initiatives related to the politics of memory. It harmed the funding available for these initiatives and the ability of the government to promote memorialization.

There are some examples of budgets for specific projects.

Since the creation of the CEMDP in 1995, the official number of assassinations by the dictatorship has increased above 360 people. This amounted to R\$ 39.9 million in compensation. It is essential to highlight that the budget was not for the activities of CEMDP but for the monetary compensation for state violence in the past.

Also, the National Truth Commission was created in 2012 with a budget of R\$ 7 million (around US\$1.75 million at the time) to investigate human rights violations committed during the dictatorship. The NTC's budget was later increased to R\$10 million (around US\$2.5 million) in 2013, and it received additional funding from private organizations. For the digitalization of the documents alone, 20 billion pages approximately, the cost would be around R\$ 2.8 million¹⁴.

¹⁴J. DUAİLBI, *A verdade da Comissão*, «Revista Piauí», Apr. 2014.

Besides, the account for political amnesties who appealed to the Amnesty Commission –also created by FHC in 2001 and boosted during the Lula government– exceeds R\$ 3.4 billion. The number is still increasing, considering many cases have yet to be brought before the Commission. Similarly to CEMDP costs, this money represents reparations of the state to families and individuals who were victims of state violence in the past¹⁵.

In São Paulo, the truth commission of the state (Truth Commission of São Paulo) did not have its own budget and had a small structure composed of seven advisors hired by the Legislative power of the state of São Paulo. Even so, it managed to hold 115 hearings on more than 100 cases of murder and torture, in addition to collecting 47 testimonies from children of political prisoners who were born in jail or taken there as children due to their parents' imprisonment¹⁶.

However, it is worth noting that these budgets are just a tiny part of the overall government spending on politics of memory initiatives, including funding for educational programs, cultural events, and other forms of commemoration.

3. Austerity and memory: how the neoliberal economic policy affects Brazil

The economic policy of austerity in Brazil, which limits government spending, has significantly impacted the allocation of funds for politics of memory initiatives. The law has limited the amount of public resources that can be invested in such initiatives, reducing government spending in this area. This was brought about not only by the amendment specifically but by the overall economic agenda prevailing between 2016 and 2022, based on the idea of fiscal responsibility and the need to prioritize the country's public debt and budget deficit. The mentality behind this amendment was to impose stricter limits on government spending to restore fiscal discipline, control inflation, and attract international private investment. The proponents argued that by curbing public spending, the government could regain economic stability, reduce borrowing costs, and create a favorable environment for sustainable economic growth. The expenditure cap was seen as a means to prioritize long-term fiscal austerity and prevent some types of government spending.

With the prevailing austerity agenda after 2016, government funding for the politics of memory initiatives was reduced, and many projects were postponed or canceled. However, it is more than just a matter of cutting public spending. It is part of a broader neoliberal agenda, which, regardless of how tiny the budget is, has no provisions for investing in memory or history or rewriting the past.

There is a plethora of examples of how damaging a market-oriented economic policy is to the work on collective memory. One is the case of the Amnesty

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*



Commission right after the 2016 impeachment. As soon as Minister Alexandre de Moraes was appointed to the Ministry of Justice, right after Michel Temer took over the Presidency, 7 of the 22 councilors of the Amnesty Commission were fired. Others left because they disagreed with the new guidelines. Thus, after Temer took office, 19 new councilors were sworn in, but almost none had the expertise and substantial commitment to the human rights agenda. According to the former councilor and Professor José Carlos Moreira da Silva Filho, «the Commission has essentially come to a standstill. All the memory projects that had developed over the years were virtually paralyzed and with no signs of continuity».

Created in 2002, during Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government, the Commission aims to repair morally and economically the victims of exceptional acts, arbitration, and human rights violations carried out by the military dictatorship. Its work is of great public interest and is carried out voluntarily by the councilors. By the time of the *coup d'état* of 2016, the Ministry of Justice, to which the commission responds directly, had more than 75,000 amnesty requests filed¹⁷.

Moreira da Silva Filho witnessed the Commission's breakdown in 2016, denouncing that amnesty recipients did not have their ordinances signed. Many of them were elderly, with illnesses even from the consequences of the torture they suffered, and they did not have access to reparation. Moreover, others did not have the process appreciated because the commission was not working.

Other projects of memory were similarly affected by austerity policies. This is the case of the Amnesty Caravans (Caravanas de Anistia), the Marks of Memory (Marcas da Memória), and the Testimony Clinics (Clínicas do Testemunho). They are all promoted by the Amnesty Commission, and in 2017, the Minister of Justice started reviewing and refuting the Amnesty Commission's views on granting political amnesty for the first time in history. In 2019 after the new government took office, the Amnesty Commission was moved from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of Family, Women and Human Rights.

The Amnesty Caravan used to offer victims of the dictatorship violence the possibility of public acknowledgment, apology, and reparation for the dictatorship's crimes. The Commission had the assignment to travel around the country hearing representations from victims in front of public audiences and reporting on cases. Its mandate is manifold but essentially about acknowledging state crimes and building the democratic transition. As the Commission's president Paulo Abrão pointed out, its purpose is «political, judicial, reparative and cultural». The Amnesty Commissioners comprise scholars and members of the Justice Ministry, all of whom

¹⁷ I. RICHARD, *Ministro da Justiça troca 19 dos 25 membros da Comissão da Anistia*, «Agência Brasil EBC», Sep. 2, 2016, <https://agenciabrasil.etc.com.br/politica/noticia/2016-09/ministro-da-justica-troca-19-dos-25-membros-da-comissao-da-anistia>, accessed May 31, 2023.

offer their services *pro bono*. Some of them have no personal memories or life experiences under the dictatorship. Others were tortured and imprisoned by the regime. As Cardozo and Abrão point out:

As well as truth, the Caravans produce memory. They are not limited to conveying individual recollections; [...] they encourage social memory. Returning to tell the story of the past brings generations together. They unite those who fought against the dictatorship and for social justice in the past with those who are experiencing democracy and are responsible for widening its scope in the present. They allow us to compare past and present violations, and to detect the current imperfections in our democracy. As such, they serve as a bridge for transition. On one side is the authoritarian past, whose experiences are put on trial in a democratic context, in order to learn lessons that strengthen participation and freedom, now and in the future¹⁸.

The last official Amnesty Caravan hearing was the 93rd, on 6 December 2016. Until December 2022, it was discontinued¹⁹.

Marks of Memory was created in 2008. It was designated to support and develop memory initiatives and projects coordinated by civil society and government. It focuses on the visibility of the victims' memories and building a collection of oral and audiovisual sources. As early as 2014, the project was harmed by budgetary cuts, as the Annual Report of the Amnesty Commission showed: «considerable budget cuts also impacted memory projects. Thus, given the small amount of resources available to invest in the Marcas da Memória project, the Amnesty Commission opted to sign terms of cooperation with federated entities».²⁰

The data in the 2014 Annual Report shows that civil society was intensely engaged in the initiatives promoted by Marks of Memory. As Frias Sampaio analyzes,

In terms of democratization and the reach of those initiatives, they constituted the Amnesty Commission's greatest action in the field of memory and truth. The 'Marks of Memory' initiative allowed artists, academics, and civil organizations to bring creativity to the process of state policies on memory. The single vision of these social groups widened the diversity of State-backed memory initiatives. This led to an interaction between memories of politics and politics of memory that allows the two to become intertwined. However, rather than being superimposed the one upon the other, there is dialogue between them, acknowledging 'the plurality and diversity of existing memories'. It is the diversity of the 'marks' of memory that allows them to be shared more widely.²¹

The Testimony Clinics was established in 2012 and shut down in 2017. The purpose of this project was on psychological reparations for people, families, and groups affected by the dictatorship. It was a cooperation between the Amnesty Commission and mental health institutions. As Article 6 of the National Policy for the Promotion of Transitional Justice and Political Amnesty requires, the project

¹⁸ M.J.H. COELHO - V. RÖTTA, *Brazil Ministério da Justiça Comissão de Anistia, Caravanas da Anistia: o Brasil pede perdão*, Brasília, Comunicação, Estudos e Consultoria, 2012, p. 22-23.

¹⁹ Faculdade de Direito da Universidade de São Paulo recebe a Caravana da Anistia, <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/faculdade-de-direito-da-universidade-de-sao-paulo-usp-recebe-pela-primeira-vez-a-caravana-da-anistia>, accessed May 31, 2023.

²⁰ MINISTÉRIO DA JUSTIÇA - COMISSÃO DE ANISTIA, *Relatório Anual Comissão de Anistia 2014*, 2016, p. 79, <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/navegue-por-temas/comissao-de-anistia/anexos/anistia-2014-final-reduzido.pdf>, accessed May 31, 2023.

²¹ E. FRIAS SAMPAIO, *Politics of Memory of the Recent Past in Brazil: the Federal Government's Role in Constructing Collective Memory between 2003 and 2016*, s.l., Global Campus of Human Rights, 2019, <http://doi.org/20.500.11825/1826>, accessed May 31, 2023.



involves training and maintaining the support network and offering psychological care. By putting together reference materials for wider professional use, the document also aims to publicize the project throughout society, sparking a debate and a collective reflection on the traces of state violence.

By providing the context of a clinic for the telling of experiences of violations, the project allows the psychological overload of traumatic content to be heard –perhaps for the first time– as a testimony. This consolidates narratives that shape memory and the chance to speak, making possible psychological reconstruction to the affected persons²².

Reducing government spending on these projects challenges the broader politics of memory. The Testimony Clinics project, which had already secured funds for its implementation until the end of 2017, was not interrupted at that time. However, no public notice was issued for the following period, and the project was shut down entirely in 2017²³.

It seems challenging to achieve the National Truth Commission's primary goal: to examine and clarify the grave human rights violations [...] aiming at accomplishing the right to memory and historical truth.

The impact of the austere economic policy on the politics of memory initiatives in Brazil has been significant, and it raised concerns about the country's commitment to preserving its democratic values and the memory of the victims of the dictatorship era. Moreover, the reduction in government spending has also impacted other initiatives, such as the construction of museums and memorials dedicated to the victims of the dictatorship. In many cases, these projects have been either delayed or abandoned due to the need for more funding.

Similarly, the lack of funding has also affected the preservation of documents related to the dictatorship era. Projects have been delayed or abandoned with insufficient funds, resulting in the loss of important historical artifacts. For example, in Rio Grande do Sul, the documents of the State Truth Commission, which were available on the website of the Civil House, were removed in February 2016 due to high maintenance costs. The State Truth Commission of Rio de Janeiro collection took longer than expected to be handed over to the Public Archives, which were closed for three months due to an electricity shortage.

Furthermore, the reduction in funding has negatively affected the development of places of memory. The construction of the Political Amnesty Memorial (Memorial da Anistia Política) in Minas Gerais was interrupted in 2016 due to the government's funding cut. The Memorial project, as it was conceived, would be based on research that explored the point of view of the victims of the dictatorship, reinforcing concepts such as the recognition of peoples' rights to resist; defense of

²² Clínicas do Testemunho, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, 2017.

²³ A.C. INDURSKY - D.S. MAYORCA, *Clínicas do Testemunho: a política de reparação psíquica no Brasil*, «Revista Sul-Americana de Ciência Política», 5/2019, 1, pp. 163–178.

democratic freedoms; citizenship; the right to memory and justice; repudiation of all crimes against humanity. The collection would encompass more than 64,000 compensation processes presented to the Amnesty Commission, administrative archives, photos, images, reports, testimonies, books, audio, and videos received by the Commission on the occasion of the campaign to donate files regarding the period of military dictatorship. It would also have the collection preserved by the University of Minas Gerais, which includes around 10,000 photos and 400 films from the time²¹.

In times of economic crisis, the recommendations of the Truth Commission should be a priority. As Rosa Maria Cardoso da Cunha, one of the coordinators of the National Truth Commission, said, the most unprotected individuals are the ones living in slums and other poor areas or are homeless, or trapped in overcrowded prisons, and unemployed. The Commission's recommendations for creating mechanisms to combat torture also apply to police raids, arrests, and imprisonment as a form of torture, she says. The broader purpose of politics of memory is the improvement of human rights and other democratic values in terms of education, especially for the police and military force both in the present time and for the future.

4. Rename the bridge: honoring Honestino Guimarães and the struggle against authoritarian waves

In 2015, a bill was presented in the Legislative of the Federal District to switch the name of the Costa e Silva Bridge to Honestino Guimarães Bridge in the Lago Sul neighborhood of Brasília. That means replacing the name of a dictator with the name of a victim of the dictatorship. The bill was passed then, but it was declared unconstitutional for not meeting the legal requirement of holding a public hearing beforehand with the community.

Changing the street sign with the name of a bridge is not so expensive as to make a significant difference in the public budget. However, many other tools were used to prevent the change. In less than a year, the street sign had been painted several times with the dictator President Costa e Silva's name by protestors holding the far-right symbols. Protestors from the far-right, who defended the return of the dictator's name, advocated for a public hearing, which was why the Judiciary voted out the law that first determined the name Honestino Guimarães.

The rise of the political economy of austerity paved a way for a broader context of anti-intellectualism and hostility towards critical inquiry, historical research, and social activism. By emphasizing the need for austerity and marked-oriented

²¹ I.T. SOUZA, *Sem anistia, sem anistia!*, «Jornal GGN», Jan. 11, 2023.



monetary policy, the discourse against government spending devalues the importance of memory and truth as a foundation for a democratic society.

The history of this victim, Honestino Guimarães, is an important memory in the history of Brasília. He was involved in student politics and joined Ação Popular, an underground political organization acclaimed by the student community. In student politics, his leadership soon became apparent. In 1965, before reaching 18, he was first placed in the entrance examinations at the University of Brasília. He was a very dear and respected fellow university student²⁵.

The first arrest was on strike in February 1966. Then, in February 1967, while making graffiti. Also, in April 1967, during a demonstration at the Main Library of the University of Brasília. In August 1967, in prison for the fourth time, he was elected president of the Federation of Students of the University of Brasília. Because of his involvement in the student movement, Honestino began to be pursued by organizations of political repression. On 29 August 1968, twenty days after his wedding, the University of Brasília was invaded to issue a warrant of arrest against him and other student leaders. Honestino was arrested again. In September, two months before the end of the geology course, he was expelled from the university. He was released from prison in November. On December 16, 1968, three days after Institutional Act n. 5 was issued, his father died in a car accident. Without respect for the family's grief, police officers occupied the cemetery with patrol cars, and he could not attend the funeral.

Honestino started living clandestinely in São Paulo. In October 1971, he moved to Rio de Janeiro. He became president of the National Union of Students the same year. He carried out his duties at the organization clandestinely and was active in the Marxist-Leninist Popular Action. The authorities acknowledged that they had arrested Honestino, but other prisoners never saw him. Even after many years of tireless research, his family could not know what happened to him. He is one of the disappearances of the 1964 dictatorship.

In September 2013, the Amnesty Commission declared Honestino a political amnesty in a session held at the University of Brasília, when it was also decided that his death certificate would change the cause of death for «acts of violence practiced by the State»²⁶.

During the trial, the rapporteur of the case and Professor at the University of Brasília, Cristiano Paixão, pointed out that the crime of concealing a human corpse, perpetrated by state officials, does not prescribe. Paixão indicated that the Amnesty Law is ineffective in protecting perpetrators in crimes of torture and corpse

²⁵ There is a website about his story and the collective struggles for truth and memory: <https://honestinoguimaraes.com.br/honestino-guimaraes>.

²⁶ The decision on Honestino Monteiro Guimarães case can be accessed at <http://comissao-daverdade.al.sp.gov.br/upload/005-voto-comissao-anistia.pdf>.

concealment. Thus he recommended sending a copy of Honestino's amnesty process to the Public Prosecutor's Office to evaluate whether it is appropriate to open investigations «in the face of the news of a permanent crime of concealment of a corpse».

In line with the «right to memory and truth», Honestino's name has already been honored in various public places in different states. In Brasília, the National Museum Honestino Guimarães was opened in 2006.

However, that specific bridge is for Brasília, as well as the history of Honestino, a remarkable realm of memory²⁷. In the words of Professors Cristiano Paixão and José Otávio Guimarães,

The city we live in, its urban facilities and public places, the streets we go by, should not be understood as neutral, functional physical means, devoided of a symbolic dimension. In the life of a community, each building, each centimeter of asphalt, concrete, or steel that constitutes the public space, carries the culture. Streets, squares, buildings, and other constructions also receive a name and, therefore, participate not only in the city's collective life but also in a memorial experience.

[...] The gesture of naming a bridge after Honestino is significant. A bridge, by definition, is an expression of humanity, a mark built on nature, with the civilizing sign of urban life. [...] The bridge can then be understood as a metaphor for a passage from one generation to another, from a time of darkness to a transparent present that heralds a democratic future²⁸.

Thus, the bill is proposing to rename the bridge from Costa e Silva to Honestino Guimarães. However, months after the bill was proposed, an impeachment process deposed President Dilma Rousseff. It was a context of economic crisis when Dilma's economic policy was the main reason against her administration. As aforementioned, the neoliberal agenda had a significant rise. Dilma Rousseff was the first woman president elected (2011-2016), from the Workers' Party, and during her impeachment, the former congressman Jair Bolsonaro praised Dilma Rousseff's torturer from the dictatorship. In 2018, Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right candidate, was elected president.

Once again, a new bill to change the bridge's name was passed in the Legislative Assembly of the Federal District. However, the governor vetoed, and the Legislative Assembly had to vote on the same bill again to override the veto.

5. Austerity, authoritarianism and the politics of memory in the periphery of capitalism

The spread of neoliberal reasoning does not spare memory²⁹. In fact, by molding every aspect of human life, it affects the past and the political uses of memory. Neoliberalism affects the present, and by doing so, it also changes societies' relation

²⁷ P. NORA, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, «Representations (Berkeley, Calif.)», 26/1989, pp. 7-24.

²⁸ C. PAIXÃO - J.O. GUIMARÃES, *A ponte Honestino Guimarães*, «UnB», <https://noticias.unb.br/artigos-main/92-a-ponte-honestino-guimaraes>, accessed May 31, 2023.

²⁹ W. BROWN, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2015.



to the past. Capitalism has been increasingly naturalized during the last 30 years, eclipsing any alternative. Market and competition, the cornerstone of the neoliberal lexicon, have become the natural foundations of post-totalitarian societies.

Thus, the regime of historicity has been affected by the interaction of some characteristics of neoliberal societies. One is the prevailing perspective that the past does not entail provisions or redemption for the future. Enzo Traverso points out that the past and future are encapsulated in an eternal present, causing, consequently, the end of utopias³⁰. Another trend where neoliberalism is prevailing for a long time is the de-politicization of the past, as it erases the transmissibility of memory through collective actions. Traverso says the memory is transformed into individual recollection in a way that ignores critical reflection and collective agency. And the last trend is the reification of the past. Indeed, in places where neoliberal reasoning has been pervasive for a long time, the *realms of memory* have a performative character. Although they convey the remembrance of victims, it is depoliticized, disconnected from the present, and reified as it is increasingly incrustated to the market.

The agenda of letting politics of memory to private funding is close to the idea of cultural industry. Memory is commodified rather than a product of the collective living experience. The examples are numerous in the Global North, where the logic of capital dictates the rhythm of life. But even in the periphery of capitalism, examples of politics of memory as a market-oriented project have arisen. Susana Draper shows some cases in post-dictatorial Argentina and Uruguay, where former spaces of confinement for political prisoners were transformed into shopping malls. Such are the cases of Buen Pastor prison, in Córdoba, and Punta Carretas in Montevideo.

The periphery of capitalism has not received as much private funding as its core. Thus, contrary to what some scholarly work³¹ concludes about the Global North, in the periphery, one could hardly argue that the logic of capital dominates the politics of memory. Rather, the recent reforms to liberalize the flux of money and to create a structure of austerity in these peripheral countries emptied ongoing governmental projects without replacing them with private ones. And once institutions were disengaged from the memory of their past, it opened a cleavage for a solid return to an authoritarian agenda and the rise of the far-right discourse that glorifies state violence. In this sense, even if neoliberal reasoning is indifferent to history and memory, as Traverso says, it paves the way to an agenda invested in erasing memories.

³⁰ E. TRAVERSO, *Presentism: the Politics of Memory in the Age of Neoliberalism*.

³¹ C. CERCEL, *Towards a Disentanglement of the Links between the Memory Boom and the Neoliberal Turn*, in «Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics», 6, 1/2020, pp. 27-42.

In Brazil, from 2016 to 2022, both interests affected the politics of memory. In the first moment, right after the impeachment of President Dilma, a strong orthodox economic policy was put into practice, thus weakening or ending ongoing projects of politics of memory. The justification was often government spending cuts in line with Traverso's thinking that neoliberalism is apathetic to collective memory, which is definitely not a priority. Thus, after 2019, the justification for the abandonment was even obliterated. Indeed, the government similarly neglected public management of the pandemic of COVID-19 contributing to the second largest number of deaths for COVID-19 in the world³². One can assume that such is not an *indifferent* stance, but rather that death, disappearances, and torture is part of the project.

The Honestino Guimarães bridge exemplifies how neoliberal reasoning can open ways beyond mere indifference. In Brazil, the democratic years have witnessed a parallel of neoliberal reforms in economic laws and institutions simultaneously with the increasing public policies and governmental bodies of the welfare state. There is no supremacy of the logic of capital in this peripheral country. Dario Negreiros analyzed how the collective agency is at least as important as the government in working the collective memory:

all our achievements on the topic of Transitional Justice are not to be entitled to the rulers but to those who were tortured, persecuted, whose family members were killed and disappeared, and who never stopped fighting. And they are entitled [...] also of those who were barbarously killed: because, as Vladimir Safatle says, the bodies return³³.

As Walter Benjamin stated in «On the Concept of History», «even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins»³⁴. The way societies see their past depends on the actions of the present, not only governmental policies but also the collective endeavor of transmission of memories. For Traverso, «it is changing the present that the past can be saved».

³² WORLDOMETER, *Countries where Coronavirus has spread*, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/countries-where-coronavirus-has-spread/>, accessed May 31, 2023.

³³ D. DE NEGREIROS, *Reparação Psíquica para Quem?*, in INSTITUTO APPOA, *Por que uma clínica do testemunho?*, Porto Alegre, Instituto APPOA, 2018, pp. 33-47, https://apboa.org.br/uploads/arquivos/1437_livro_2.pdf, accessed May 10, 2023.

³⁴ W. BENJAMIN, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, Boston, Mariner Books, 2019.