

# Forced Disappearance and the Unworthy Lives: A Parallel between the Military Dictatorship and Contemporary Brazil in the Construction of the Enemy Figure

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## Abstract

This study, focused on the criminal dynamics involving the disappearance of seven inmates in a penitentiary in the state of Roraima, Brazil, aims to delve into the social artifact of reputation building that legitimizes deaths perpetrated by the Brazilian state, as well as to understand the practice of forced disappearance as its facilitator. With a focus on the roles of the press and the Judiciary, a parallel is drawn between the construction of the enemy figure against left-wing militants during the civil-military dictatorship and that against people deprived of liberty in contemporary Brazil.

## Keywords

Forced Disappearance, Military Dictatorship, Criminalization System, Press Narratives

## 1. Introduction

During monitored visits to prisons in the Brazilian states of Amazonas, Rio Grande do Norte, and Roraima, where simultaneous prison riots occurred in early 2017, the National Mechanism for the Prevention and Combating of Torture (NMPCT) became aware of a peculiar phenomenon common to all these locations, in addition to the various precarious conditions that are routine for those incarcerated in Brazilian prisons. In distinct periods, whether during or in the post-riot context, it was found that in these three locations some of their prisoners had disappeared, as their bodies were not among those who had their lives taken in the massacres, nor among those who survived them (Prando &

Coelho, 2024).

Among all the regions covered, those whose visits were later detailed in a report issued by the NMPCT, the way in which such disappearances occurred at the Monte Cristo Agricultural Penitentiary (MCAP), located in the rural area of Boa Vista, capital of the state of Roraima, is particularly striking. Occurring in April 2017, in a still very turbulent scenario due to riots that occurred in January of the same year, seven men disappeared after being transferred to a triage area in those facilities, with five of them having been removed from their cells and the other two having just arrived at the location (Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights of Brazil, 2018).

Accounts from their fellow inmates at the time were insistent that upon arriving in this triage area, they were beaten and tortured to death. However, the MCAP administration, along with the state government, continues to use the narrative that they escaped from the prison and remain at large, even though such claims are far from making sense in light of the facts presented so far. Besides the prison failing to explain how the escape could have occurred, none of the seven “escapees” have made contact with their families since. In fact, some of them, who had already served a considerable amount of their sentence, were close to obtaining conditional release:

“My husband didn’t run away. The only time he did that, I was the first to know. Both before and after, as soon as he left, he called me. We are sure they were taken from there. There was no way to escape from the place they say they escaped from.”

“He was about to be released. If he had intended to escape, he would have told me, like he did another time, he warned me<sup>1</sup>.”

Because of this, public protests by the mothers and wives of these inmates have been common on the streets of the capital ever since, with them making shirts with their faces printed on them and making complaints to various bodies such as the Human Rights Commission of the OAB-RR and the state Legislative Assembly (Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights of Brazil, 2018). The movement, which does not differ much from others of families of the disappeared during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship, and also from mothers of young people who were murdered in the context of police violence, has very clear objectives, such as identifying those responsible for these deaths, their consequent punishments, and that these men be recognized and treated according to the proper nomenclature: forcibly disappeared.

The state bodies responsible for investigating the case, however, have already taken sides before these disappearances were even confirmed. Despite a police investigation being opened (which only occurred after strong external pressure from these mothers and wives), the prosecutors and police authorities assigned to the case quickly adopted the version of escape presented by the MCAP, which

<sup>1</sup>Reports taken from reports by G1 RR, from Grupo Globo, in which the families of these prisoners were interviewed in response to the street protests that followed the disappearances.

shows that, in addition to the inferiority given to the favela and its residents within the hierarchy of police occurrences, the disappearance of people is also seen as unimportant (Ferreira, 2013).

In the inquiry concluded in 2022 by the Civil Police of Roraima, recommending the case be closed due to the “impossibility of identifying the perpetrators of the crime,” the chief of the Missing Persons Investigation Unit (MPIU) highlighted several serious flaws that occurred during the investigation, such as the failure to report the alleged prison escape, the failure to preserve the crime scene, and the inadequate efforts of the investigation at the time, which did not seize the footage from the prison’s security cameras, which were subsequently erased, among others. In light of the absence of new efforts by the Brazilian state to resolve the case, the Public Defender’s Office of Brazil today requests the intervention of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) in the investigation<sup>2</sup>.

## 2. Forced Disappearance as the “Perfect Crime”

In the context of the Cold War, with massive support from the economic elite and hegemonic sectors of the press and the Catholic Church, the then-president of Brazil, João Goulart, was ousted from office in a coup perpetrated by the Armed Forces in 1964. At the time, the military capitalized on successive American investments in the Brazilian media to strengthen anti-communist sentiment among the population (Durão, 2024), to make the coup more palatable to public opinion. They justified the overthrow of Goulart, who was well-regarded at the time, by claiming the need to “thwart the communist plan to seize power and defend military institutions” (Skidmore, 1988).

In addition to the systematic censorship of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, to ensure that no information contrary to the regime was disseminated, and the suspension of political rights and the revocation of the legislative mandate of over 400 left-wing parliamentarians, Skidmore points out that it was in the streets where the repression concentrated most of its violence. To combat supposed resistance from “subversive” opponents, thousands of members of the student movement, progressive Catholic organizations, and communist political parties were persecuted, imprisoned, exiled, tortured, or murdered<sup>3</sup>.

Despite the shift in international posture, along with popular pressure and the significant economic crisis in Brazil during the 1980s, which undermined the legitimacy of the military regime and facilitated the transition to democracy in the

<sup>2</sup>DPU pede à CIDH que interceda em investigação de desaparecimento de presos em Roraima. [DPU asks the IACHR to intervene in the investigation into the disappearance of prisoners in Roraima.] Available at:

<https://direitoshumanos.dpu.def.br/dpu-pede-a-cidh-que-interceda-em-investigacao-de-desaparecimento-de-presos-em-roraima/>.

<sup>3</sup>In Skidmore’s words, the number of people detained because of the coup can only be estimated, as no official data were released, likely ranging between 10,000 and 50,000. Many were released within days, others within weeks, while hundreds suffered prolonged torture. The apologists for the repression often claimed that any possible excesses would be insignificant compared to what the left would have perpetrated had they seized power.

On the contrary, what occurred was that the military ideology, strongly based on the idea that the intervention was necessary to save the country from an internal threat, has historically perpetuated itself in some sectors of civil society. These sectors believe that the military brought stability to Brazil and that the excesses committed were necessary to ensure it (Skidmore, 2010). This ideology, strengthened by the regime's instrumentalization of education—which reproduced a conservative culture that limited the critical capacity of students (Mota,

<sup>5</sup>Federal Supreme Court of Brazil. Allegation of Non-compliance with Fundamental Precept No. 153, Rapporteur: Minister Eros Grau, judged on April 29, 2010, Diário da Justiça Eletrônico, Brasília.

1980)—and by a technicist curriculum that restricted possibilities for questioning and criticism, contributed to the perpetuation of a culture of conformity and to the difficulty of building a truly democratic society after the country's re-democratization (Dias, 2015).

The second observation is that there was a lack of proper media regulation to ensure it served real democratic principles and the Rule of Law. In addition to the absence of retraction from the major outlets that, at the time of the coup, not only supported the overthrow of democracy but also legitimized the violent persecution of those who opposed the dictatorial regime, there is also a lack of well-constructed memory regarding their roles in demonizing left-wing militants who were murdered by the government. The result of this is that, combined with the difficulty in consolidating public opinion that sufficiently pressures state authorities to commit to resolving crimes that violate human rights, the hegemonic segment of Brazilian journalism continues to repeat the same mistakes, failing to report these crimes appropriately or even respecting the honor of their victims.

The third observation is that there was no concern regarding the demilitarization of state police forces and other security agents, so the violence and surveillance characteristic of the regime are still reproduced today by our security agents. Since the military ideology is entirely disengaged from the guarantee and limitations of police power, and security is one of the perspectives of transitional justice, it was imperative to undergo a process of transformation in this sector to convert what was a source of oppression and human rights violations into a body for the protection of individuals and the defense of their rights (Castro, 2016).

Writing for the *Estado de Choque* [State of Shock] dossier in *Le Monde Diplomatique Brasil*, Fábio Araújo (2019) points out that there is a whole “exercise of power and an economy of punishment that are inscribed directly on the body,” while at the same time it is used to “send a message” to the residents of a given territory. According to him, this power is inscribed by tactics that torture, mutilate, and destroy bodies, within a “machinery of cadaver production underway in Brazil,” which can occur in a spectacular manner but also through the disappearance of these bodies.

Such tactics, commonly used by militia organizations, terrorists, and criminal factions to exert control and power over marginalized communities, play an important role in the state structure as a tool of repression, as they reflect the necropolitical project upon which modern Brazil was built. Despite the similarity in objectives—namely, eliminating enemies and making this serve as an example to other groups—on the one hand, the former originates in guerrilla tactics dedicated to fighting a state that oppressed its population, while the latter finds its roots in the oppressive state itself.

In terms of the popular saying frequently uttered, those who led the Brazilian government during the civil-military dictatorship established in 1964 found in

the practice of making people disappear a way to “kill two birds with one stone”: besides eliminating their political opponents and quelling criticism of the regime, they also targeted the families of the disappeared, who, not knowing the whereabouts of their loved ones’ bodies, suffered mentally and endured a long (and sometimes eternal) affliction. First, due to the uncertainty, and second, for being deprived of the right to give them a dignified burial. Even though the “legalistic authoritarianism” characteristic of the dictatorial regime in Brazil—stemming from the broad adherence of the justice system institutions to the repressive apparatus—curbed the number of its victims compared to neighboring Argentina and Chile during their respective dictatorships (Abrão & Torelly, 2011), it was still sufficient to consolidate it as a method that endures in urban violence practices to this day.

Not only that, Molina Theissen (1998) argues that the practice of forced disappearance throughout Latin America began to be used as state policy when the military saw it as a “perfect crime”: within the inhumane logic, without victims, there are no persecutors, and therefore, there would be no crime.

Forced disappearance begins with the violent and arbitrary capture of a person, who is then taken to unknown locations. In most cases, the person is tortured and murdered, without leaving any traces or evidence of the body, the places where they were detained, or who committed the crime. In many cases, bodies are mutilated to make identification or the characteristics of the death difficult. People may be taken to clandestine prisons where they may be subjected to physical abuse. Furthermore, with the aim of disposing of the corpse, those responsible may bury the bodies in clandestine cemeteries or throw them into rivers. (Araújo, 2016; Calveiro, 2013; Molina Theissen, 1998)

Therefore, what distinguishes it from the dozens of homicides committed by state agents, and what reveals the gravity of the problem, is the possibility of concealing the crime behind the missing body. With no corpse—whether destroyed or hidden—it becomes difficult to confirm the murder of the person whose body is being sought. If, throughout Brazil’s history, in cases of homicides committed by prison guards where the lifeless body of the victim is found, we have seen the vast majority of perpetrators go unpunished, without any accountability or compensation for the remaining family members, in cases of disappearances this becomes even more evident, as there is no indictment.

And as the elimination of enemies leaves no traces, facilitating their acquittal, combined with the difficulty of applying the charge of forced disappearance provided in Decree No. 8.767/16, and the deterioration of departments responsible for this type of investigation, due to the lack of necessary investment for their improvement—highlighting the absence of social instruments with sufficient power to suppress their repetition—it is evident how easily today’s state agents can draw inspiration from the post-1964 repressive apparatus.

In a long-term perspective, it can be said that such a situation is directly re-

lated to a country forged by the racist inequality and violence stemming from the way its independence process occurred, as the laws and social practices in the post-colonization process continued to favor white people of European descent (Hasenbalg, 1979). However, in a short-term perspective, it also relates to the lack of concern in building a public memory of the events of the dictatorial period—which would serve not only to consolidate an aversion to those barbaric times, reinforcing the democratic ideal and preventing these crimes from happening again, but also to strengthen respect for the honor of those who were victims of that period. In addition to an entire state apparatus designed to perpetuate inequalities and eliminate marginalized populations, public opinion, corroborated by the media, does not sufficiently reject the atrocities perpetrated by the regime during the 1960s and 1970s, nor does it sufficiently condemn the police violence that currently affects those same populations.

### 3. The “Reputation-Building” Artifact as a Ratifier of State Violence

Van Dijk (1997) describes discourse as actions intentionally carried out to provoke other actions, events, situations, or states of mind. Thus, it serves as the “means by which ideologies are persuasively communicated in society and, therefore, helps reproduce the power and domination of specific groups or classes.” It can be argued that the media constructs stories and uses a series of strategies designed to capture the readers’ attention, producing and reproducing ideologies and beliefs, which makes it a powerful tool of domination that influences the world in all its dimensions (Martin & Wodak, 2003). Evidently, such a strategy is not restricted to media outlets but is observed in all power relations that make up society in general, including the process of constructing documents that comprise the criminal justice system.

Conducting research on forced disappearances in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro, Araújo (2016) noted that the relationship between the families of the disappeared and the press involves a dilemma: while the latter fulfills the role of giving visibility to the case in the media, there remains uncertainty about what and how it will be published. The journalist’s actions and the newspaper’s editorial policy can translate into engagement with the suffering of others, but it can also mean a spectacularization of that suffering and an additional obstacle for the families:

“They took the report, assembled a story, and accused my son of being a militiaman, a rapist, and that he had been out of jail for only a few days. So at that moment, besides my son being missing, they also wanted to tarnish my son’s reputation<sup>6</sup>.”

Regarding the media outlets in Roraima after the disappearance of the seven

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<sup>6</sup>Report extracted from the article “‘No body, no crime’: socio-anthropological notes on the act of making bodies disappear” (2019), by Araújo, and given by one of the mothers interviewed by the author.



detainees, it is noticeable that, beyond informing the readers, the vehicles also sought to form a judgment about their characters. In most news sites, the articles published adhered unquestioningly to the version given by the MCAP administration that they were escaped prisoners, without allowing room for the possibility of disappearance to be raised<sup>7</sup>. In other parts, although there was mention of this, it was observed that the editorials were concerned with highlighting the crimes for which these men were convicted, without giving any relevance to the main event.

A news report cannot be understood solely by the literal text, as there are tendencies and motives that conceal the intentions of the writer. The method of “reputation-building,” widely present in the manipulation of public opinion during the military dictatorship, contributed to the government’s appropriation of it. Through the media outlets of the time, which strongly supported the government, the anti-regime militant was identified with the stereotype of “criminal,” “troublemaker,” thus denying the political conflict between the dictatorial government and the liberation movements, with the villainy attributed to the latter (Fustoni & Caniato, 2019).

In this regard, we seek to understand and explain how the militant’s image was constructed throughout the dictatorial process and how the supposed slogans of defending family and property were increasingly used to persuade the population, garnering allies. In this way, the State justified the processes of torture and concealment/death of people. The discourse of the National Security Doctrine was used to legitimize this violent and cruel conduct as a care for the nation, for the “good” people, and for development. Thus, torture and disappearances were legitimized as strategies to save the homeland and for political care.

Beyond the effects that the ideological movement operated by Brazilian media outlets during the dictatorship had on the lives of Marxist militants and their families—demonizing their images, associating their resistance groups with terrorist organizations, and focusing the news on the crimes they committed against the regime instead of the constant human rights violations they suffered—it is clear that the reflection of this political choice extends to the present day, influencing the way media outlets handle similar events.

However, it is worth noting that, although this machinery is most transparently developed in the press, it causes the most damage within the Public Administration. Upon reviewing the documentary collection that comprises the case of the seven disappeared individuals from Monte Cristo, it becomes evident that the so-called “impartial agents” responsible for sentencing people are some

<sup>7</sup>Governo divulga fotos dos 7 presos que fugiram de presídio em RR por buraco na parede. [Government releases photos of the 7 prisoners who escaped from prison in RR through a hole in the wall]. At: <https://g1.globo.com/rr/roraima/noticia/governo-divulga-fotos-dos-7-presos-que-fugiram-de-presidio-em-rr-por-buraco-na-parede.ghml>.



of those responsible for this stigmatization process, illustrating that the adoption of an accusatory criminal system in Brazil, despite being enshrined in the fundamental precepts of the Federal Constitution and prominently featured in the Brazilian Code of Criminal Procedure, does not exist in practice.

In analyzing how the judicial authorities in Roraima dealt with the disappearance of the seven prisoners at MCAP, it becomes clear that the dynamics of condemning and imprisoning people reflect the natural forces of the capitalist state, which seek to maintain the status quo and continue legitimizing race and class oppressions. It is evident that the Brazilian judiciary is deeply rooted in the philosophy of “penal efficiency” (Andrade, 2013), which, in addition to ensuring that many are imprisoned, also guarantees that these imprisonments target the most vulnerable segments of society. Therefore, the efforts made by the police and the Public Prosecutor’s Office to solve a crime committed by prison officers are considerably lower than those directed against poor and racialized defendants, even for much less significant crimes.

Among the many factors, the reputation of these individuals is the most decisive for the state’s version of escape to be so readily accepted in Roraima. In research conducted in the Missing Persons Sector of the former Homicide Division in Rio de Janeiro, Letícia Ferreira (2013) identified, in addition to the irrelevance given to missing persons cases, a “reputation-building” artifact applied to residents of favelas and other marginalized areas of the city. According to her, police officers form a set of hypotheses to explain what may have happened to certain missing persons based on their phenotypes, “just by looking” at the photo brought by their relatives.

The review of judicial sentences that condemned these disappeared individuals showed that, through the use of emotional language and the biased selection of elements from the inquiry and the trial, they construct in the sentence a Manichean narrative where the police officers are heroes, and the defendants are villains and enemies of society who must be fought. These are the so-called “ontic enemies,” as Zaffaroni (2007) calls them, whose supposed existence legitimizes any lack of caution on the part of legal operators in containing them, and sooner or later results in their physical suppression.

One of the symptoms of this created narrative is the absolute trust placed in the police officers’ versions during the trial, who, within this created Manichean perspective, are the “heroes” of the situation. Just as in 1973, during the Chácara São Bento Massacre<sup>8</sup>, the news outlets at the time unquestioningly adhered to the public security forces’ version that there was an “intense exchange of gunfire between the militants and the police,” even though it later emerged that all the victims were unarmed (de Souza & Jacó-Vilela, 2019), it is observed that the judges seek to naturalize throughout the sentence clear demonstrations of individual rights violations by public security agents, such as entering residences

<sup>8</sup>The Chácara São Bento Massacre was a slaughter carried out in 1973 by the public security forces of the state of Pernambuco, in Brazil, against six left-wing militants who opposed the regime. On that occasion, they were arrested, tortured and murdered by the police.

without a search and seizure warrant.

In the famous case of journalist Vladimir Herzog, *Folha de S. Paulo* did not hesitate to publish and reinforce the DOI/CODI<sup>9</sup> version that he died by suicide, despite the fact that his body was found in a position that made spontaneous hanging impossible, and he was found with a belt that was prohibited for prisoners to use (Florentino & Trigo, 2017). Here, the judges also do not concern themselves with possible occurrences of torture inflicted on these defendants to obtain a confession, among many other “suspicious” actions included in this context (Coelho, 2020).

As Farge (1989) teaches, in discourse, lives are at stake in a few sentences, and it is through words that the risk of victory or defeat is assumed. The important thing is no longer to know if the reported facts occurred exactly in that way, but to understand how the narrative was articulated between a power that demands it, a desire to convince, and the use of words that one might try to discover whether they were borrowed from local cultural models or not.

Another symptom can be found in the judgment report, where the defendants are not referred to by their civil names, but by their criminal nicknames. Despite the supposed formality of the documents, in the description of the criminal dynamics, there is no Tomé, Tiago, and Tadeu, but rather Grilo [Cricket], Pé de Chumbo [Lead Foot], and Peitão [Big Breast]. It is not an individual with prerogatives and rights being seen here, but a delinquent to be neutralized. Just as those who were killed in the Chácara São Bento Massacre were not “victims” for the newspapers, but “terrorists” and “subversives,” the defendant here is not an individual, but a criminal. Moreover, it is also noteworthy that the judgment mentions purely moral aspects of the defendants’ lives, such as the fact that one of them was, at the time, involved with a 17-year-old woman, even though such a practice is not criminalized in Brazil and has no relevance to the crime charged.

Another symptom is the omission of defensive arguments from the case file. Just as the dictatorial press abandoned its mission to inform in favor of exclusively presenting the regime’s version, leaving no room for contrary views, here the judge abandons the principle of contradiction. On one hand, the prosecutorial allegations are cited exhaustively, as is the behavior of the accused described in the police inquiry documents; on the other hand, the allegations of the Public Defender’s Office, which in this context plays the role of advocating for the “villains” of the case, are rarely included in the judgment. In the pursuit of validating the imposed conviction, the possible relevance of these allegations to the cases judged is neither cited (and consequently, not challenged) by those who have the duty to do so.

Finally, among several other actions that contaminate the principle of due

<sup>9</sup>Vladimir Herzog was a Brazilian journalist and director of journalism who was tortured and murdered by the military regime in October 1975, accused of involvement with the Brazilian Communist Party (BCP). DOI/CODI was the repressive body responsible for coordinating intelligence actions and combating movements considered subversive.

process in the cases analyzed, it is evident that the use of discourse and the choice of narrative strategies discussed share a common denominator with the role of the hegemonic press, both during the dictatorial period and now: legitimizing deaths. None of the elements laid out in newspapers and legal documents are there by chance, as they serve to reinforce stigmatizations and define who can exercise their rights and who cannot.

Even before entering the prison, the disappeared men were already sentenced as lives that are disposable, that can be arbitrarily thrown into a cramped and unsanitary cell, given scant food, contract diseases, and even disappear without a trace, as they do not have the right to have their bodies mourned.

#### 4. Final Considerations

The “reputation-building” artifact that persists today, produced by both public and private entities, and that makes some people more vulnerable to dying at the hands of the state, is related to the “open wound” left by the Brazilian state’s attempt to implement a reconciliation between civil society and its ills from the past. The Brazilian dictatorial-democratic transition, by hindering the construction of a national memory that repudiates the crimes perpetrated during the military regime and the entire machinery that sought to legitimize it to public opinion, is a direct cause of both a judiciary and media in Brazil that are so committed to maintaining an unequal system of power and that are so insensitive to human lives.

The testimonies collected by former agents of the dictatorship’s repression, gathered since the Amnesty Law was properly enacted—especially during the work of the truth commissions—were clear in indicating that the work of “making disappear” was effective. In the film *Pastor Claudio*, former Brazilian Civil Police delegate Cláudio Guerra, responsible for killing and incinerating at least nineteen militants of the Brazilian Communist Party (BCP), while giving macabre details of his actions, asks something that he himself answers: “Why are there so many disappeared people in Brazil today? Because the technique of disappearance invented to make the bodies of political prisoners vanish continues to be employed against new enemies, now produced by the ideology of public security” (Araújo, 2019).

Although the unrestricted amnesty ensured that agents of repression could reveal the horrors they committed during the dictatorship more openly, thus contributing to a better dissemination of these historical facts, it is also evident that the very ease with which some of them felt more comfortable to recount their practices with almost obscene sincerity is a result of the impunity that the law allowed to fall upon them. This impunity is not only the result of a power structure that remains complacent with those who work in favor of capital, but also of the value judgment imposed over all these years on the dignity of their victims.

Just as it was with the “terrorist” opponents of the regime, the stereotype of

certain people being a “danger to society” is essential to the *modus operandi* that dehumanizes individuals and is responsible for keeping the necropolitical project alive in Brazilian society, placing such lives as of lesser value in the eyes of institutions and public opinion. Lives of partial and sporadic mourning, for which it is not worth making much effort to find.

To bring about a change in this scenario, a policy that combines the civil society’s reckoning with the ills left by militarism with the protection of the rights of people deprived of their liberty is necessary. The points of convergence between the two lie in the crucial role of education and awareness, guided by human rights, for public authorities and the Brazilian population in general, the importance of memory and truth policies, and, above all, the need for institutional review and strengthening to ensure that these rights are respected and protected.

To achieve this, it is essential, first and foremost, to reform military institutions, aiming to incorporate a democratic culture within the Armed Forces that eliminates the politicization that remains of the authoritarian period (Fico, 2010). Simultaneously, there should be continuous training of prison and police officers in human rights, considering the need for the exercise of disciplinary power in prisons to be regulated by ethical norms that limit excesses and the dehumanization of prisoners (Foucault, 1975). Equally important is a comprehensive reform by the Ministry of Education in Brazilian law schools, which, in Leal’s (2014) words, work towards depoliticizing and culturally alienating their students, producing judges who are distant from the sensitive issues affecting the modern sociability paradigm.

Secondly, it is imperative that the Brazilian State establishes the promotion of memory, truth, and justice as a permanent policy, since acknowledging past mistakes is directly linked to ensuring they are not repeated in the future (Safatle, 2012). A first and significant step could be the renaming of all national monuments and addresses that still bear the names of dictators and torturers. An example of this occurred in the capital, Brasília, where, after much popular pressure, the Legislative Chamber passed a law changing the name of one of the city’s most famous bridges, previously named Costa e Silva, one of the regime’s dictators, to Honestino Guimarães, a former leader of the student movement at the University of Brasília who was forced disappeared<sup>10</sup>.

Similarly, the development of a broad strategy to raise public awareness would counteract the punitive culture and support for abusive practices that are often the result of misinformation and stigmatization of prisoners. According to Carvalho and Teixeira (2018), awareness campaigns that demonstrate the importance of respecting human rights, such as the widespread dissemination of emblematic cases, education on the subject in schools, and the use of social media to mobilize support against institutional violence, are crucial to changing public percep-

<sup>10</sup>G1. Grupo troca nome de ponte no Lago Sul para Honestino Guimarães. [Group changes the name of a bridge in Lago Sul to Honestino Guimarães]. 2022. At: <https://g1.globo.com/df/distrito-federal/noticia/2022/12/23/grupo-troca-nome-de-ponte-no-lago-sul-para-honestino-guimaraes.ghtml>.

tion. Likewise, the creation of independent monitoring bodies for the prison system, comprised of members of civil society, NGOs, and international representatives, combined with the documentation and dissemination of cases of abuse in prisons, are necessary steps to raise awareness in society and prevent the continuation of these practices (Zaffaroni, 2007).

Finally, both reconciliation with the past and the protection of marginalized people's rights in the future depend on the Judiciary fulfilling its role in ensuring the fair application of the law, adequately investigating and holding criminally accountable those who violate human rights, conducting frequent inspections in penitentiary units through its auxiliary bodies, documenting all abuses committed, and constantly seeking to correct these flaws.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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