

“The Minor Subversive Element”: Reflections on the Juvenile Trajectory of Children of Militant for the Civil-Military Brazilian Dictatorship

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Abstract

The events of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil carry disputed narratives concerning the episodes of the aforementioned regimen, precluding, above all, the narratives of those whose lives were marked by violence, torture and exile promoted by the Brazilian State, by the actions of the armed forces and the civil support and the US endorsement. Based on this socio-historical context, the following study addresses the narratives of adults who had their childhood and teenagerhood tormented by the Military Regimen in Brazil. The collected narratives were extracted from the book “Stolen Youth”¹, organized by the State Commission on Truth of São Paulo. The results express that the children of the cause survived to torture, drastic violation of human rights and the death of close relatives. Their youths were filled with memories they try to forget, and, when reaching adulthood, the reparations offered by the Brazilian State were insufficient to rectify the consequences caused by the experiences of the authoritarian regimen.

Keywords

Military Dictatorship, Childhood, Hannah Arendt, Authoritarianism

1. Introduction

The history of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship still bears significant controversies. There are currently multiple narratives about the events of the men-

¹“I was 2 years and 3 months old, and I was treated as ‘Minor Subversive Element’, as terrorist and I was banished from the country by a presidential decree, as described in the documents in the archive of the State of São Paulo” (São Paulo, 2014: p. 139, free translation). Testimony given by Ernesto Carlos Dias do Nascimento in the book *Infância Roubada* (Stolen Youth).

tioned regimen, which considerably preclude the narratives of those who had their lives marked by the violence, torture, and exile promoted by the Brazilian State, by the actions of the Armed Forces, of the civil and US support. Based on this historical and social context, the study addresses the narratives of adults who had their childhood and teenagerhood tormented by the Brazilian Military Regimen.

The terminology used in this study to indicate the children and teenagers will be “children of the cause” (Costa & Castro, 2015), given that this term specifically refers to the children of militants who were, directly or indirectly, involved in the fight for resistance to the Military Regimen. It is important to make this distinction once there were other groups of children and teenagers who suffered within other institutions, such as the State Foundation for the Welfare of Minors (FEBENS), for reasons other than the mentioned here.

The bibliography landmark used to understand and debate the narratives is based mainly on the writings of the thinker Hannah Arendt, who raises pertinent questions and descriptions regarding authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, in a phenomenological perspective. With that, we highlight that, for Arendt (2012), there are differences and approximations among authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, which will be mentioned in a specific topic.

Overall, this study seeks to describe some events that have collaborated harmoniously with the Brazilian regimen, going through Arendt’s concepts that are essential for the political understanding. The methodological procedure is outlined by a descriptive analysis that was conducted by the cooperation among social actors—in their public reports transcribed by the National Commission on Truth and by the National Archive—and by the researchers seeking interpretations and results, that is, an act of signification (by the researcher) and resignification (by the actors) about the child-youth nuance in the Brazilian authoritarian regimen (Cardoso & Carvalho, 2018; Gerhardt & Silveira, 2009).

2. Public Space, Political Action, and Historical Memory: Arendtian Dialogues

The thinker Hannah Arendt (2012) theorized about totalitarianism and analyzed its previous and later effects in certain regimes. She reflected about violence and the post-war context that led to the Cold War and to ideological disputes with the control of individuals and the restriction of their plurality in the public space. Arendt lived, as a German Jew, during the Second World War and as a refugee in the United States during the post-war period. Her experiences have constituted a philosophy that values the love for the world, for political action, and for understanding.

It happens that the Cold War changed the existing concepts about a war. Before, war was associated with armed conflicts between armed forces, whose countries sought to conquer a territory or place of political interest. During the Cold War, the countries were not attacking each other in the physical plan, but

in the ideological one. They did not promote direct armed conflicts but produced instability and division among countries. In Hannah Arendt's view (2004: p. 4) "the technical development of the implements of violence has now reached the point where no political goal could conceivably correspond to their destructive potential or justify their actual use in armed conflict."

In this sense, there is a shift in the global warfare structure so to develop forms of violence beyond the conventional one. Violence combined with the mode of production so to coexist complementarily and harmoniously: the prosperity of capitalist is due to the violence perpetuated in the Cold War as a way of establishing it once and for all as the reigning mode of production in comparison to the Soviet socialism.

Based on this context of change in the forms of violence, the accountability conflict arises, which lasts to this day. About accountability, Arendt understands that:

If, in accord with traditional political thought, we identify tyranny as government that is not held to give account of itself, rule by nobody is clearly the most tyrannical of all, since there is no one left who could even be asked to answer for what is being done (Arendt, 2004: p. 24).

Therefore, understanding the context means, in this case, leading us to possible repairs, adjustments, modifications. Using the Benjamin's language, we must pull emergency brake of the engine of history, once "without a correct interpretation of history, it is difficult, if not impossible, to fight Fascism effectively" (Löwy, 2005: p. 25). Based on this idea, knowing and analyzing the implements of violence used throughout history is a form of fighting authoritarianism in the political space.

Given that range of implements produced during the Cold War, we highlight the development of a psychological or ideological war. That is, in a simplistic way, the combat to an idea. This combat happened in many ways and was infiltrated in all society. There was control of the media (sources of news and opinions), of social movements, organizations, education, traditional peoples, and all those who dared go against (or at least to criticize) the capitalist mode of production. These people would be accused of being communists, which was used as a pejorative term.

The construction of this warfare-industrial context goes through the history of Brazil deeply during the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship, once it was funded and articulated by the United States (a country that represented and defended capitalism at that time and was one of the main articulators of the Cold War). Brazil was not a protagonist of the Cold War, on the contrary, it was used as a puppet by the USA to (re)produce the National Security Doctrine, which sought to exterminate—based on parastatal agencies—groups that were considered communist.

Therefore, the control of information that circulated through the country happened by the repression of democratic speeches and by the mass dissemina-

tion of the ideals of order, moral, and progress. The discourse was then an important field on which the war was waged and triggered many conflicts, which often led to torture, persecution, and exiles. To understand the role of discourse and its influences within society, we will first analyze the concept of public space and political action, based on Hannah Arendt's views.

For Arendt, the public space is made through the plurality of singular individuals, that is, since we are different individuals from those who have already gone through this world and from those who are yet to be part of it, we need a place to expose actions, language and to debate ideas. Arendt sees the dynamic within this space based on natality. That is, at each birth into this world, we have a start, the beginning of a singularity, a history and an individual who will contribute to the web of human relations (Silva, 2018).

And that is why equality is an essential requisite in this sphere, once, given that we are different, we need to occupy a place in the world without having these differences interfering with this occupation, considering that:

Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness. [...] They are modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but qua men. [...] A life without speech and without action, on the other hand—and this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word—*is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men* (Arendt, 2007: p. 176).

Based on these concepts, Arendt is able to fixate the importance and extreme need of the existence of a space where subjects can position themselves and externalize their thoughts and identities once, given the author's thinking, the private life is the mirror of hierarchies, inequalities, and of the suppression of needs. Given that, the public sphere is the place where differences among individuals are considered irrelevant and freedom prevails amongst equals (Arendt, 2007).

If we remove the right to political participation from subjects in the public space, restricting them to the private sphere, we remove them of their fundamental right to be part of a social group, of their freedom and perhaps of their existence, their human condition, removing them from humanity (Müller & Giro, 2009).

That said, in the sphere of debates on human subjects, histories are produced through the web of human relations by action and speech, whose narrative is constructed through the experience of those narrating it (Lara, 2015). About the memory constructed in the scope of political action, Arendt says that:

All things that owe their existence to men, such as works, deeds, and words, are perishable, infected, as it were, by the mortality of their authors. However, if mortals succeeded in endowing their works, deeds, and words with some permanence and in arresting their perishability, then these things

would, to a degree at least, enter and be at home in the world of everlastingness, and the mortals themselves would find their place in the cosmos, where everything is immortal except men. The human capacity to achieve this was remembrance, Mnemosyne, who therefore was regarded as the mother of all the other muses (Arendt, 2016: p. 43).

That is why we can no longer choose which heritage from the past we will accept (Arendt, 2012), given that historical events have become actions with elements permanent to time, consistent in the idea of collective memory, belonging to the political group of individuals of a society.

Complementarily, Halbwachs (1990), when problematizing the theme of the collective memory, explains the importance of a seed of remembrance in the context of a social group as a way of keeping the signification of the past alive, once, if individuals are unable to find a relation between their identity and past events—which they have not witnessed themselves—approximation mechanisms are needed to construct a consistent mass of memories (Halbwachs, 1990: p. 28).

Likewise, Benjamin (1987), for having experienced the genesis of the 20th century problems, observes that the past has become an endless series of catastrophic defeats covered by the ideal of an automatic, continuous, endless progress founded on the quantitative accumulation, on the development of productive forces, and on the growth of the domination over nature (Löwy, 2002: p. 205).

Besides that, memory does not consist only of storing events that will lead humanity to progress. Therefore, it does not belong to the past, but to the present, in which we handle it, revisit it, and conceive narratives, symbols, and other places that will represent and define history, a moment, or an event that does not belong only to the winners.

It happens then that the production of history is derived from the narrative, which precedes experience and through, even though this experience may not be actually experienced by the one narrating it, it carried countless interpretations, identities, and through of the one telling it. On the other hand, the so-called “official” history chooses which narratives will be considered factual, while the others will be disregarded by not having the objective scientific verification (Laffer, 2007; Arendt, 2016).

Based on the action of revealing oneself, the subject weaves an action within the status quo of the web of human relations, leading to a change, however small it may be. And it is through this action that histories are produced with the same naturalness that the homo faber produces tangible objects. The historical construction in the public sphere is also made by using the past and the memory construction about it through speech. It is not right to extract from this past only what is considered good and disregard what was wrong. Evil is also our heritage and our historical burden that must be carefully and cautiously carried, so that it is not forgotten and does not come back into reality with new clothing and old human speeches (Arendt, 2007, 2012).

Authoritarian and totalitarian speeches gain strength in the public space in moments of economic, political, and social crises, contributing to the annihilation of this space. In extreme cases—in totalitarian regimes, for example—besides annihilating the public space, the plurality and specially the individuality of the agents are exterminated through the control and hierarchization of the public space, with propaganda filled with lies and in the promotion of the hatred of others, considering them as enemies of the State-Nation.

The extinction of the public sphere leads to the death of plurality and of the freedom to act and speak, leading subjects to rearing stuck to the social, making their human essence torn apart after making it impossible to practice the most human existing action: being with the other. Totalitarian regimes of the 20th century have brought this “news” to the politics: the gradual annihilation of the human being and the transformation of men and women into mass-men.

Within this context, the ones that can interfere in the web of human relations are those who think just as the leader, who above all obeys to the orders established by the bureaucracy and who no longer think by themselves. Plurality dies, natality is no longer hope, and human beings lose what, in theory, was always natural of their existence: the freedom of political thought.

Giorgio Agamben (2008), in his turn, shows that the memory of dark times belongs to the dead, since those who survived certain periods enjoyed some kind of privilege and, for that reason, did not actually experienced the worse of that time. This does not mean that their testimonies are not needed, just that the fact differs from the testimony of those who perished as victims of the atrocities of the 20th-century regimes.

However, even with this observation, one must consider the importance of the testimony of survivors once, even though they had minimal privileges, the witness “usually testifies in the name of justice and truth, and as such his or her speech draws consistency and fullness” (Agamben, 2008: p. 34). A witness always testifies for those who are no longer among the living since those unfortunately are only important for the statistics of dead and missing persons. The one who live remain with the weight of a memory that can never be forgotten but is often silenced.

The problem at issue is currently reflected when one questions the reasons why we still have speeches that are considered authoritarian and totalitarian in the political scope. Understanding the perpetuation of these speeches means to locate where we have failed in the construction of the memory about certain facts.

3. Discursive and Repressive Strategies by the Federal Agencies during the Military Dictatorship Performed against the Childhood and Youth

Preliminarily, it is important to mention that the Brazilian Military Regimen does not correspond to the same context of the totalitarian regimes that emerged in Europe after the World War I. However, there are aspects of the Brazilian

dictatorship that recall certain totalitarian ideals, since Arendt relates the authoritarianism as being from the same family than totalitarianism, due to the presence of some elements of this exception regimen in dictatorships, especially based on the implementation of the National Security Doctrine (NSD) within Brazilian military institutions.

The NSD developed in the War College (WC) originates from the training performed in Germany with some Brazilian military soldiers in the improvement of war techniques. Above all, it was important to preserve the country's sovereignty through an internal war, fighting the 'communist enemy'. Therefore, it is understood that, for the War College, strengthening the Brazilian State depended on combating the internal enemy. Besides that, it was necessary to side with strong States. When the War College was created, with the world divided between the North American and Soviet potencies, it became necessary to endow the 1964 actions with the anti-communist weight that was deeply rooted within the Armed Forces (Tibola, 2007: p. 39).

Given that, distinguishing between the German World War II context and the Brazilian Military Regimen is extremely important once that totalitarianism, according to Arendt (2012), consists of the regimen that executes total domination over human beings, affecting their existence and removing their freedom of action and of thought. While authoritarian regimes do not remove the freedom of acting and thinking, but work in a repressive manner in case these actions are in disaccord with the regimen's parameters, but there are many totalitarian elements that appear in authoritarianism, such as the creation of an objective enemy, tribal nationalism, manipulation of the masses, use of propaganda to create fake news, creation of an atmosphere of distrust and paranoia.

Therefore, the procedures adopted by the Brazilian Civil-Military Regimen consisted of the annihilation of the communist thinking or any similar proposal (objective enemy), based on the idea that, by extinguishing the Marxist ideology, we would be ridding the country of something much worse. However, the truth is that Brazil has never come close to a socialist dictatorship or of having communist leaders in power. The president at that time, João Goulart, had bigger concerns than an ideological war, such as the base reforms, a program of reforms in the educational, bank, tributary, and agrarian areas.

This ideological clash was fomented by propaganda, which can be used as a strong tool to manipulate masses within a society. First, masses are characterized by Arendt (2012) as most of the neutral and politically indifferent people, who do not affiliate to any political parties and despise the power of vote and of the exercise of citizenship. Along with the masses, we have propaganda, whose use by the Military Regimen had a common goal: the creation of the imminent danger of the communist thinking. Considering this, Arendt mentions that:

Before mass leaders seize the power to fit reality to their lies, their propaganda is marked by its extreme contempt for facts as such, for in their opinion fact depends entirely on the power of man who can fabricate it

(Arendt, 2012: p. 350).

It is also observed that the Brazilian dictatorship has a civil aspect, considering the support given by the mainstream media, by the business class, and by the US White House (Taveres & Ladeia, 2013). Without the support and maintenance of these three groups, the regimen would not have lasted that long, let alone the coup would have been executed; therefore, the regimen had the military visibility with civil support (Campos, 2018).

With the growing opposition to the regimen—coming from student, artist, and intellectual groups—the military forces started to use the tool of violence for the maintenance of the coup. Therefore, the Institutional Act Number Five, from 1968, effectuates a State terrorism consolidated in the NSD in parallel to the constant institutionalized persecution, exile, torture, and violence.

Torture was often used to collect information. The information was collected through illegal arrests and tortures, such as: pau-de-arara², electric shock, electric chair, drowning, among other method. Among the cruel forms of torture, it was sought to extract information by kidnapping relatives of the said subversives—especially minors—to make use of emotional extortion over the parents of the minors, such as the phrase: “if you do not give the information, I will torture your child”, among others.

These techniques were imported from other countries and, besides that, were implemented in many institutions of the armed forces and in those created by the state power, but considered semi-clandestine:

The various DOI-CODIs, as they became known, became yet another operational body engaged in repression along with the Centro de Informações do Exército (CIE), the Centro de Informações da Marinha (CENIMAR) and the Centro de Informações da Aeronáutica (CISA). Together, these bodies were responsible for the bulk of the most violent repression. Torture became a regular procedure in military prisons. According to the statements of military officers who took part in the repression, other countries, especially the United States but also Britain, Germany, Israel and, above all, France (drawing on its experience in Algeria), helped with training in investigative procedures and “interrogation techniques” (Bethell, 2008: p. 192).

In contrast, Brazil experienced the economic miracle between 1969 and 1973, which served as cover up for the internal and international policy about what was happening in the cellars of the repression mechanisms. The population turned a blind eye to the persecution, once that:

Taking advantage of its success in the economic field—and Brazil’s victory in the 1970 World Cup—the military regime encouraged excessive demonstrations of national pride (ufanismo) and promoted the idea of Brazilian *grandeza* (greatness) with slogans [...] in the United States, there was a

²A torture method which consists of tying the victim upside down by the ankles and wrists over a pole.

growing belief that the country was finally ready to exercise greater influence in the international system (Bethell, 2008: p. 198).

Given this scenario, Arendt's thinking about masses served as an apparatus to question why the population accepted a regimen that tortured, persecuted, and killed. For that, we clarify that:

The effectiveness of this kind of propaganda demonstrates one of the chief characteristics of modern masses. They do not believe in anything visible, in the reality of their own experience; they do not trust their eyes and ears but only their imaginations, which may be caught by anything that is at once universal and consistent in itself. What convinces masses are not facts, and not even invented facts, but only the consistency of the system of which they are presumably part (Arendt, 2012: p. 351).

That is, it did not matter what was in fact happening in the cellars of the state agencies, the lives and families that were being destroyed did not matter, the mental situation of the children that were forced to watch their parents imprisoned in a pau-de-arara, beaten up and unconscious did not matter. None of it weighted more than the fact that the middle class was experiencing the peak of consumerism, of modernization, and of progress. Brazil was above all. Read "Brazil" as a synonym for economy and individual interests.

On the other hand, censorship, repression, and fear knocked on the door of each household where there were militants, students, artists, journalists, etc. In these houses, there were children and teenagers who were inserted in a family context that became turbulent due to the regimen and that brought irreversible consequences, such as the loss of a family nucleus, of cultural identities, and mainly of a childhood for those who were direct victims of the dictatorship actions.

Moreover, these violations related to these stolen childhoods were only investigated over two decades after the end of the regimen, when the Brazilian democracy chose to create the National Commission on Truth (NCT) as a phase of atonement for the country's authoritarian past and, with that, chose to also seek for atone for the childhoods that were stolen and changed by the hands of the regimen and its atrocities.

Given that, the book "Stolen Childhood" was published and brought up the violence and memories of the children of the militants, the children of the cause, considering that, in 2014, 30 years after the end of the dictatorship, there were still confidential files, unknown histories, and a very fragile democracy. Thus, listening and disclosing the children of the militants, of former political prisoners is essential for the collectivity around the events so that it is actually possible to understand what was like to experience that time (São Paulo, 2014).

Based on this context, to exemplify the hideous dimension of this little disclosed face of the dictatorship, the testimony of Ernesto Carlos Dias do Nascimento is essential to translate the way the state machine and the semi-clandestine institutions saw and treated the children of the supposed enemies of the

country, since:

On the 18th of May 1970, I was arrested in São Paulo, with my mother. I was only 2 years old. We were taken to Oban, where my father was tortured in front of me. I also went through the prisons of DOPS, Tiradentes Prison, and DOI-CODI/SP. After some time, they separated me from my mother and I went to an uncertain place, maybe a Juvenile Court [...] I was kept there as any other political prisoner, and they took me many times to the torture sessions to see my father tied in the pau de arara. To make him speak, they simulated torturing me with a rope, in the next room, separated only by a screen [...] I was 2 years and 3 months old, and I was treated as “Minor Subversive Element”, as terrorist and I was banished from the country by a presidential decree, as described in the documents of the archives of the State of São Paulo (São Paulo, 2014: p. 139, free translation and our emphasis).

Therefore, the psychological and moral torture suffered by Ernesto Carlos is a portrayal of how children were seen by the State: it was a precarious, naked life. There was no respect, ethics, and reason regarding these lives, especially regarding the children of the cause, who were seen as criminals, dangerous, and threats to the nation. Children in physical and, especially, psychological development phase, a development that was never finished, once there is those who are today still suffering with the existing marks and memories of a childhood that never existed.

Ernesto José de Carvalho carried as the last memory of his father the violence that OBAN did with the image of the deceased man:

When my father was killed, in April 1971, I was 3 years old and my Brother, Carlinhos, was 7. [...] My brother and I watched it all and, afterwards, were taken to OBAN. When we got there, there is a painful detail, but that is important to say, because gives an idea not only of the physical violence, but of the moral one. Some policemen were using my father’s personal objects, such as a jacket and a watch (São Paulo, 2014: p. 171, free translation).

Given this situation, it is possible to see how the operation and postures of those who integrated these institutions reflect ideologies behind the regimen, the lack of decency and the perversity that were sometimes masked by the media and by history as being a moral and economic progress. The ones that were labelled as “subversive” should be exterminated, in a situation of clear moral eugenics. There were no filters, rules, ethics, or anything that prevented or mitigated the action of these agencies. The barbarity was so much, as told by Crimeia Alice Schmidt de Almeida, that:

On December 29th, 1972, being six months and a half pregnant, I was kidnapped by the DOI-CODI/SP. The fact that I was in an already advanced stage of the pregnancy was no obstacle to the physical and psychological tortures. I got shocks in the feed and hands, had many beatings, was

threatened to be killed by firing squad, and other kinds of violence. And the worse, the threat to kidnap the baby, in case he was born white, healthy, and male. [...] During this time, the fetus had hiccups that I tried to ease by caressing the belly and singing low to him. Until today, during moments of tension, my son had hiccups (São Paulo, 2014: p. 276).

So, no matter how much we seek authors and scientific bibliographies that can describe torture and its physical and especially psychic harms for the childhood, nothing is truer, more reliable and right than the testimony by Mariluce Moura, given her experience as a woman and a expectant mother, once torture had marked herself and her son:

Torture is always vile, destructive, crushing, annihilating—a kind of terror that is unreachable by the intelligence of those who suffer it. The torture over a pregnant woman's body is all that not in a double dose but raised to a potency that is impossible to determine in mathematical terms. Yes, it reaches immediately both linked biological scopes, a being and one that is to come. But, because this unconscious who is to come does not even know where do these terrible tremors, these haunting spasms of the body-place where it is nested come from—to change for good the tone of the event in the environment that shelters it and from where their first and most primitive perceptions—the impact, the dimension of the violence of the torture over this being will remain at the heights of an immeasurable potency (São Paulo, 2014: p. 290).

Besides these tragic reports, resuming the idea by Agamben (2008) that the memory of a dark past belongs in fact to those who were marked by the events, one must recall the testimony by Carlos Azevedo, a victim that carried the pain of a life marked by violence.

As I was taking too long to arrive, they took the child and the nanny to DOPS. They were both kept with no food, no water, nothing for a long time. To my surprise, I saw that there as a lateral cut on my son's mouth. The girl told me that [the policemen that] were at home said: 'Where is your mother? Your mother is not here, not even to feed you'. The boy started crying of hunger. Then the policemen slapped him so strongly that it cut the child's mouth (Carlos Alexandre was an year and 8 months old at the time of these events. Report given by Darcy Andozia about Carlos Alexandre Azevedo).

The most shocking is to verify that the torture leaves imperishable marks, annihilating the will to live in many of those who suffer it, destructing them so intensely that living with pain becomes unbearable, as it happened with Carlos Alexandre de Azevedo, according to the investigation of the São Paulo Commission on Truth:

CARLOS ALEXANDRE AZEVEDO (1972-2013) eldest son of Darcy and

Dermi, was a child marked by the dictatorship since early. As an adult, he suffered from depression and social phobia. At 37 years old, he had his condition of victim of the dictatorship recognized and received an compensation, but he could never work regularly. He was a computer technician. He committed suicide at 40 years old (São Paulo, 2014: p. 302).

Many outcomes of the consequences of torture on victims remain open, waiting for the wound to close, for damage repair and, especially, for the hope that the past had remained in the past, and that the future will be done through natality, plurality, and memory. Since, as well phrased by Primo Levi:

We can perhaps ask ourselves if it is necessary or good to retain any memory of this exceptional human state. To this question we feel that we have to reply in the affirmative. We are in fact convinced that no human experience is without meaning or unworthy of analysis, and that fundamental values, even if they are not positive, can be deduced from this particular world which we are describing (Levi, 1998: p. 99).

Despite all, it is necessary to interrupt the perpetuation of authoritarian discourses in the public space, since we know that the democratic institutions still have remnants of these hygienist, authoritarian, and clandestine policies. Besides, we seek to value the memory and respect for those who are gone and of those who keep on mourning for the losses and violations experienced throughout life.

4. Consequence in Relation to the Serious Violation of Human Condition Present in the Narratives of the National Commission on Truth

The children of the cause have survived torture, the drastic violation of human rights and the death of close relatives. Their childhoods were filled with memories they try to forget, or that their own minds sought to forget as a way of blocking those bad situations. There are reports of children that were tortured even before they were born, or that suffered torture as soon as they were born, as well as narratives of children and teenagers who grew and survived in midst of many violations promoted by the repression agencies.

For that reason, exile was often an alternative to death. Leaving the country in a hurry to survive within another culture, another tongue, a past left behind and with the restart of something that had never begun: childhood. Under Hannah Arendt' view, who had sought refuge from the German Nazi regime, exile can be felt as soon as:

We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives (Arendt,

2007: p. 264).

We highlight again that the Nazi totalitarian experience is not to be confused with the dictatorial regimes of the 20th century, but the experience of leaving the country in a hurry with the eminent danger of death was present in both cases, according to their contexts. Therefore, one can imagine how it is for a child to experience deportation without having at least time enough to say goodbye to friends and family.

Thus, it was within this context that many boys and girls were expelled from the country, along with the ones responsible for them, many of them even without the minimum documentation to legally prove their belonging to Brazil. In this sense, Nascimento tells us that:

When we left the country, we had no documents. So, when my uncle sent my birth certificate to Cuba, it was impressive. Only then I discovered my real age. [...] I did not know my birth date, for example, nor my exact name (São Paulo, 2014: p. 130, free translation).

The testimony given by Zuleide Aparecida do Nascimento portrays what was like to live a large part of her childhood and youth abroad, but with the constant feeling that one day they would come back to Brazil and would be able to reestablish their lives here. This time uncertainty experienced in another culture, with new habits and new experiences—both enabled by the individual development phase and the external events—has created a certain connection among the individuals and the geographic-cultural territory. In turn, after the Law 6.683/79, known as the Amnesty Law, they returned to their country with the hope of reestablishing the connection that was lost with their past, culture, and family.

What they actually found was a country that did not receive nor shelter them. A country that has never apologized for the crimes it has committed and, above all, a country that is indifferent towards these people. The result of these actions is a new trauma, a lack of identification with the country and a feeling of guilt.

We never found this identity. Until today, I am a person completely without identity. I know that I am Brazilian because I was born Brazilian. But I do not feel Brazilian, but Cuban. I know that I am not Cuban, so it is a great mess. Then I usually say, as I carry the militant flair, that I am Latin-American. I think it is easier (São Paulo, 2014: p. 131, free translation) by Zuleide Aparecida do Nascimento.

Along with these issues, there is the fact that the Brazilian State used to not recognize the education provided by foreign countries, let alone university diplomas. Consequently, by returning to Brazil already as teenagers/adults, these people were unemployed and undervalued by the country, thus resulting again in violations of Fundamental Rights (Brazil, 2009):

We left here that way as children, we were exiled involuntarily, and when you come back to your country, your own State, the Ministry of Education,

looks at you and says: “No, what you have studied won’t do, we will not recognize it”. You feel rejected once again; feel like you are not a child of this country once again (São Paulo, 2014: p. 61, free translation) by Suely Coqueiro.

But what happened with these brilliant people when they returned to Brazil after the Amnesty? Our brilliance had to face the political-social prejudice imposed by the reactionary media, the lack of knowledge and legalization of our studies and diplomas acquired in Cuba by part of the authorities. The Amnesty was just for the torturer executioners, I only had my diploma recognized by the Amnesty Commission of the Ministry of Justice in June 2012 (São Paulo, 2014: p. 142, free translation) by Ernesto Carlos Dias do Nascimento.

The violations go beyond watching relatives being tortured; a history of rejection throughout life is included. Feeling rejected within one’s own house is one of the worse feelings anyone can feel. Brazil was the home of these people, of this generation, which seeks daily the cry for democracy that was never fulfilled in 1979.

For that reason, we emphasize that the 1979 Amnesty Law covered only the condemnations during the Military Regimen period, and not the facts that occurred during it. Therefore, the accountability was always an option given the problems faces to overcome the events of the mentioned regimen. However, holding the torturers responsible was never an option for the Brazilian transition justice, considering there was process of rupture regarding the regimen. The military themselves made the amnesty, that is, the country pardoned itself, which, according to Laura Bittencourt Silva, to grant amnesty is to forgive, to self-pardon is to cover up (Silva, 2020: p. 105), that is, the regimen itself was in control of the transition to democracy.

In 2010, the Federal Supreme Court chose, through the argumentation of Breach of Fundamental Precept no. 153, to cover up and draw a line over the facts and the violence promoted by the State apparatus. The result is perceived in the current moment in Brazil: the country elected a captain who has as one of his “guides” the torturer Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, mentioned in 6 reports of the book *Stolen Childhood* (2014).

In fact, there is not right to forget an action by a public agent (torturer), there is no amnesty in these cases, and in fact, there was none. But worse than forgetting is the distorted memory and discourse that see violence as a positive factor for the growth of the country. However, with the advent of the National Program of Human Rights 3 (PNDH), there was a wider range of possibilities to prosecute torturers. It is understood that there is no sense in applying imprisonment, once this is even part of the military training. The biggest way to affect them is through rank reduction, leaving a mark of deep impunity to the violations of human rights promoted in the cellars of the dictatorship.

Recognizing these crimes is a fundamental step to atone for them. The under-

standing of the atonement of the facts is way beyond economic, we highlight, especially the politico-social reparation, through the emission of certificates, divorcements, declaration of disappearance, etc. Besides the legal issue, there is, especially in the social scope, the need to respect the image and memory of those who went missing during that period once; unfortunately, the militants are still seen as terrorists, in a great distortion of history.

Given the mentioned issues and after the condemnation of Brazil in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in 2010, the year of the Gomes Lund and Others case (“Araguaia Guerilla”) VS. Brazil, the Law 12.528/11 was created, which instituted the creation of the National Commission on Truth (NCT), with the aim of examining and clarifying the grave violations of human rights promoted in the period, so to enforce the right to memory and to the historical truth, and to promote National reconciliation (Brazil, 2011).

NCT was a State commission created with the intention of enforcing the Brazilian transition justice through the clarification of information and of the access to the right to memory and to the truth by part of the whole Brazilian population. Within the state scope, there were state, municipal, and sectorial commissions installed all over the country, with which the NCT had partnerships, and which helped to clarify histories of local repercussion.

In a brief analysis of the State Commissions, it can be observed the relevance of the Commission on Truth of the State of São Paulo, Rubens Paiva, and the one from Pernambuco, the State Commission on Memory and Truth Dom Helder Câmara, places in which the regimen acted strongly on repression. The São Paulo commission promoted an extremely important work with the publication of the “Stolen Childhood” book:

The book brings a different look over the dictatorial period in Brazil. It is the perspective of the children who had their childhood stolen. As a generation of Brazilians, they grew during a period of serious violations to human rights and aggressions to the right to citizenship. But they have received deep and particular marks. They were not responsible for the political choices of their parents or for the situation of the country. Their testimonies, always emotional ones, translate what they could understand of those very difficult days for the country and for their lives (São Paulo, 2014: p. 9).

Besides that, the role of the National Commission on Truth is to clarify facts, promote reparations and, after its dissolution, the creation of public policies that would continue to promote the right to memory and truth as an integral part of the right to access justice. There are fundamental critiques to the NCT, once it was unable to really access all documents of the period, since the Armed Forces claimed that these documents had been burnt. With that, it is regrettable that the Commission was unable to have the necessary reach, adding to the fact that there, after it ended, there was no perpetuation of public policies, a proof of this is the speech by the current President regarding it.

Do you believe in the Commission on Truth? What was the composition of

the Commission on Truth? They were seven people who were appointed by who? By Dilma [Rousseff, former president] [...] We want to solve crimes. The questions of 64, there are documents of who killed, who did not kill, that's rubbish (Mazui, 2019, free translation).

We highlight again that the NCT is a State commission, not a government one. It acted completely independently and was committed only to the law and to the democratic Brazilian institutions. Allegations of unworthiness, such as saying that the NCT was rubbish, are equal to attempt to belittle democratically consolidated institutions and discredit the whole history of the country, its citizens, and their memory. Respect is a base-value for the construction of democracy, of justice, and of the common public space.

Moreover, an aspect that deserves the dully attention is the way a memory about this period was constructed once the amnesty did not promote the accountability and the NCT was unfortunately unable to be completely effective in its role. Before entering the issue of the collective Brazilian memory about the dictatorship, it is worth drawing attention to the aspects pertinent to the memory itself. Memory does not exist individually in social processes, it comes along with forgiveness, reconciliation, oblivion, and promise

Without memory, a society would be unable to give itself an identity, or to intend to any perpetuity, but, without forgiveness, it is exposed to the risk of a compulsive repetition of its dogma, of its ghosts. In exchange, as we have seen, forgiveness without memory recalls us to the initial chaos of interest calculations or to the confuse tendency to forget. Without promise, society was, from here to there, as people used to say about vagabonds, people “without recognition”, “without a penny”, but, without the resumption of the discussion, sooner or later the law oppresses and the social contract exploits (Ost, 2005: p. 42, free translation).

The memory addressed here in this study is social and it operates based on the present, as the example of the speech of the current president, who tries to belittle the NCT. If there was in fact a memory about the period and a condemnation of the promoted violence, the society would have refuted the speech of the chief executive; however, there was silence, proving that this history was built on sand.

Legally, memory is fundamental within democratic institutions, once it composes the bases that justify acts that must not be frequent, and, when this pillar is absent in the institutions, one runs the risk of anomie and social fluidity regarding the events that characterized a period (Ost, 2005). That is why memory is important as a way of consolidating democracy. Knowing why we have reached a democracy is of the utmost importance for its maintenance. It is the same that leaving a city to another one without a goal, the trip becomes boring, meaningless, and, when we arrive at the destination, we feel lost.

However, memory is not what was, but what is. It means to say that we can build a memory in the present about past events. There is information, national and international documents, reports, histories, bones, which trace all steps tak-

en by the government in detail. So, what is lacking for society to become aware and repudiate any type of violence-promoting behavior? (Soares, Santos, & Freitas, 2013).

We highlight Arendt's speech, which is extremely pertinent to the history of Brazil:

We can no longer afford to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury in oblivion (Arendt, 2012: p. 13).

If we exercise the action of drawing a line over the events that harmed our society and leave them to oblivion, we will incur in fascist, totalitarian, and authoritarian speeches, whose seed is constantly hovering the political mean and waiting for breaches to ascend and multiply to the point in which there is no longer control and the State violence can be instituted once again (Arendt, 2012).

Hope lies then in the natality that interferes daily with the web of human relations and in the action belonging to the public space (Arendt, 2007). The constructions of a political society based on truth, respect, and memory begin in the instant known as "now". The childhood of those who grew in midst of repression serves as a sufficient example so that no other childhood can be stolen and that, especially, our society does not go through these atrocities again. Our hope lies on now and on what we can build and reflect about an unforgettable period in the history of Brazil.

5. Final Remarks

The journey of this study indicates the vulnerability of a social group that suffered the harms of 1964 authoritarianism. Attacking childhood means to harm greatly the future of a nation. Likewise, attacking children and teenagers represents the annihilation of the feeling of humanity and to essentially harm Human Rights. As adults, the children of the cause carry along them the testimonies of a perverse historical period, which cannot be forgotten.

The problematic of this study demonstrates that disturbing the childhood and youth of the children of the cause goes beyond the dictatorial context, it is an oblivion policy founded on the institutional violence promoted against childhood, based on the invalidation of the fights that happened between 1964 and 1985 and of the memories that remain without the necessary strength to promote democracy. The adults of today are children who carry in their memory family tragedies and tortures suffered at a tender age.

The memory that recalls this period as constructed so to derail the subjects who were victims of institutionalized violence. The 1979 Amnesty Law did not hold public agents responsible, while the NCT was unfortunately unable to be completely effective in its role, given that it was not enough to clarify all the illegal prisons and the whereabouts of the political missing persons. The historical

reparation of this period becomes necessary in daily life, so that childhoods can no longer be conceded to the cellars of repressive forces.

Conflicts of Interest

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

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