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From resistance to denial: An analysis of the relation between the Armed Forces and the National Truth Commission*

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the relationship that different sectors of the Brazilian Armed Forces have established with the National Truth Commission (NTC). The analysis proposed for this study is carried out in three moments. In the first of them, the discussions, crises and setbacks that preceded the creation of the Commission are analyzed. Next, the focus shifts to the way in which different sectors of the Brazilian Armed Forces interacted with the NTC during its work. Finally, it is observed how these sectors positioned themselves and acted, from December 2014, in light of the results produced by the entity.

Keywords: National Truth Commission; civil-military dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985); Brazilian Armed Forces

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar a relação que diferentes setores das Forças Armadas brasileiras estabeleceram com a Comissão Nacional da Verdade (CNV). A análise proposta para este artigo é realizada em três momentos. No primeiro deles são analisadas as discussões, crises e retrocessos que antecederam a criação da Comissão. Na sequência, o foco recai na forma que diferentes setores das Forças Armadas brasileiras interagiram com a CNV durante o seu mandato. Finalmente, observa-se como estes setores se posicionaram e atuaram, a partir de dezembro de 2014, diante dos resultados produzidos pela entidade.

Palavras-chave: Comissão Nacional da Verdade; ditadura civil-militar no Brasil (1964–1985); Forças Armadas do Brasil

Introduction

Between 1964 and 1985, Brazil lived under a civil-military dictatorship aligned from an ideological point of view to the precepts of the National Security Doctrine (in Brazilian Portuguese: Doutrina de Segurança Nacional – DSN) (Martins, 1988; Padrós, 2008). Initiated with the deposition of the João Goulart government (1961-1964), the Brazilian dictatorship was not an isolated

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event in the Latin American region, specifically in the Southern Cone countries, since Argentina (1976-1983), Chile (1973-1990) and Uruguay (1973-1985) also went through similar authoritarian regimes between the 1960s and 1990s.

Installed in a context marked by the Cold War, the increased anti-communism in the region (due to the success of the Cuban Revolution in, 1959) and the economic crisis, the Brazilian dictatorship was responsible for massive human rights violations. The persecution, revocation of rights, imprisonment, exile, torture, death and disappearance of anyone who could be identified as an opponent of the authoritarian regime was something recurrent in the period. Relying on a repressive apparatus structured in all regions of the country, the dictatorship left, as a result of its repression, hundreds of dead and missing individuals, thousands of political prisoners and exiles, thousands of people who lost their jobs (public and private) and parliamentary mandates (Comissão Nacional da Verdade, 2014).

In 1974, anticipating the exhaustion of the regime's economic project (which would be interrupted, among other factors, by the international oil crisis) and, also, the intensification of the strengthening of the consented opposition, the new dictator-President, Ernesto Geisel, began the process of "slow, gradual and safe" detente (Arturi, 2001). Highly controlled, the process of transition to democracy in the country was carried out until 1985, when the last of the dictators-presidents (João Figueiredo, 1979-1985) ended his term.

It is important to note that the transition in Brazil did not take place in a linear way. On the contrary, the long process, that lasted more than over a decade, is marked by moments of conflict between the regime and the opposition, including clashes among different sectors within the authoritarian regime's support base, which were not favorable to the end of the dictatorship (Arturi, 2001; Gugliano & Gallo, 2013). Disputes aside, the control of the process remained predominantly in the hands of the dictatorial government, which was gradually liberalizing the regime, as had been planned, prior to 1974 by the Geisel-Golbery alliance.

With the end of the authoritarian regime, the Brazilian state, as occurred in other countries in the region, began to address the aftermath of the political repression practiced during the dictatorship and established policies (of memory) aimed at the reparation of the victims and their families. Memory policies aimed at rehabilitation or, in other words, reparation of victims, vary greatly according to each context, and, above all, according to the target audience for which they are intended. These can be accomplished through measures that provide symbolic reparation, monetary compensation, pensions, the provision of services, the guarantee of rights such as scholarships or medical assistance, reintegration into the public service, among others (Solís Delgadillo, 2015).

Specifically, the reparation of the victims of the Brazilian dictatorship, unlike what occurred in other countries, was carried out gradually, slowly, and, above all, belatedly. Effectively initiated from 1995 on, with the enactment of Law No. 9.140 (intended for the families of political deceased and disappeared individuals), the reparation of the victims of political repression begins to progress more than a decade after the last dictator-president left the office, concluding the transition process to democracy. In 2001, through a provisional measure converted into Law No. 10,559 of 2002, the Amnesty Commission was created, being responsible for extending reparations to other sectors of the population that had been persecuted by the dictatorship. In 2011, finally, Law No. 12,528 was approved, which created the National Truth Commission (NTC).

Considering the above, this study aims to analyze the relation that different sectors of the Brazilian Armed Forces have established with the Nacional Truth Commission. The analysis proposed for this study is carried out in three stages. In the first of them, the discussions, crises, and setbacks (involving the Federal Government, the Ministry of Defense and sectors of the Armed Forces) that preceded the creation of the Commission are analyzed. Subsequently, the focus shifts to how different sectors of the Brazilian Armed Forces interacted with the Nacional Truth Commission (NTC) during its work, either cooperating or not in the reconstitution of facts related to the political repression practiced by the civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985). In a third moment, it is observed how these sectors positioned themselves and acted, starting from December 2014, in the face of the results produced by the entity.

It is important to mention that, for this study, the approach on the Armed Forces – NTC relation occasionally takes into account the statements issued by the Military Club regarding the memory policies implemented in the country. The Military Club is a civil society association formed by reserve military servicemen and their families. It is not to be confused, therefore, with the Armed Forces as an institution of the Republic. Although it is not possible to treat as synonymous what is said by the Military Club with the institutional positions of the Brazilian Armed Forces, it is a fact that both institutions have a high degree of affinity regarding topics such as the memory of political repression.

Between resistance and concession: the Armed Forces before the creation of the NTC

Regarding the Brazilian case specifically, it can be observed that the development of human rights policies has advanced significantly since the Vienna Conference in 1993. In addition to reinserting the topic into the discussion agenda, the Conference suggested that countries concerned with the protection of human rights could reorganize them internally (Koerner, 2003) by creating a "National Human Rights Action Plan" (NHRAP): a document that aimed to make the countries participating in the meeting establish a national agenda to formulate policies for human rights and, furthermore, align it with the international standards set within the scope of the conference.

In Brazil, the first two editions of the document, NHRAP-1 and NHRAP-2, were launched respectively in 1996 and 2002, during the governments of the President Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002). However, it is with the publication of NHRAP-3, in December 2009, that a significant expansion of addressing the memory of repression in the country takes place, dedicating to the theme (in this new edition of the document) a specific Guiding Axis: Axis VI, named "Right to Memory and Truth" (Brasil, 2010). As equally important as the existence of an Axis dedicated to the topic, however, was the original content of this section of the document. In addition to establishing the need to preserve and promote the memory of the period (directive No. 24), and the revision of legislation that, produced by the military and based on the National Security Doctrine, continued to be applied in the country (directive No. 25), the creation of a national Truth Commission was also foreseen (directive No. 23).

Before the launch of the new edition of the Program, in December 2009, there was an attempt to have its provisions to be scrutinized by all ministries, in order to assess greater legitimacy to the guidelines established by the conferences that drafted the document (Brasil, 2010, p. 11). The launch of the Program was delayed for almost a year due to the presentation of an opposing

position, by the Ministry of Defense, to the investigation of violations that occurred during the authoritarian period (IPEA, 2010, p. 285).

Between the end of 2009, when NHRAP-3 was published, and the beginning of the year 2010, there were a series of public statements and controversial discussions about the release of the new edition of the program, and especially about the content of Guiding Axis VI. Involving human rights advocates on one side and the Armed Forces represented by Defense Minister Nelson Jobim on the other, the controversies highlighted the strength with which some ideas have resonated within public opinion since the transition to democracy.

Evoked the thesis of reciprocal amnesty, that is, the idea that everything that happened should be forgotten since many crimes were also committed by left-wing militants, the discussions that took place generated significant tension, leading to a retreat of the Federal Government, which in May 2010 issued Decree No. 7,177, amending provisions of the Program. At the height of the crisis, it is important to mention, the Minister of Defense and the commanders of the 3 Armed Forces threatened to collectively resign from their positions, if the document remained unchanged by the Federal Government (Passarinho, 2010; Samarco & Lopes, 2009).

With the Decree, the time frame to be investigated by the National Truth Commission, which in the original version of NHRAP-3 was referred to as the period of dictatorship, would come to include all crimes committed by the Brazilian State between 1946 and 1988, with the Amnesty Law (Law No. 6,683 of, 1979) been reinforced, as an objective limit to its work. Thus, the organization would be responsible for clarifying the crimes committed by the repression but could not punish those responsible.

The votes on the Project in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate were finalized respectively in September and October 2011, the first year of President Dilma Rousseff's term. Before the presidential sanction, however, and upon being approved by the Chamber of Deputies including amendments proposed by the DEM (Democratas - Brazilian center-right political party) and the PSDB (Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira - Brazilian center political party), the text was taken to vote in the Senate with *extremely urgent urgency*, being there approved without amendments. In accordance with the provisions of the amendments approved by the Chamber of Deputies, limitations were added to the appointment of NTC members, who could not, for example, be affiliated with any political party.

The parliamentary debate on the Law Project that created the NTC, according to Janaína de Almeida Teles (2020, p. 247), was marked by pragmatism, immediacy, and the logic of "national reconciliation". At that time, the then-Deputy Jair Bolsonaro, at the time affiliated with the PP/RJ (Partido Progessista/Rio de Janeiro - Brazilian center-right political party), was one of the main voices opposed to the creation of the Commission, basing his statments on the idea of revanchism, reaffirming the need to investigate the left-wing crimes and classifying it as an attack on the military (Sainz et al., 2020). According to the survey made by Antonio Teixeira de Barros (2020, p. 9), although the parliamentary debate on the NTC was mostly carried out by deputies and senators from parties on the left-wing of the political spectrum, Jair Bolsonaro was, among all, the parliamentarian who made the largest number of pronouncements addressing the issue.

The fact is that the controversies and twists that arose from the disclosure of the new text of the NHRAP delayed the proceedings of the Law Project that would create The Truth Commission (Law Project No. 7,736 of, 2010). Being approved by both Houses of the National Congress

only in October 2011, and its creation Law (Law No. 12,528/2011) sanctioned by President Dilma Rousseff in November of the same year, the NTC began its activities on May 16, 2012 (almost two and a half years after the launch of NHRAP-3).

As if it weren't enough for the period to be investigated by the Commission to be expanded to include crimes committed in a Democratic political scenario (from, 1946 to the, 1964 Coup), human rights advocacy groups had their expectations relativized by two other limitations. The first, concerns the limited number of members: only 7 individuals to analyze crimes committed in almost 50 years of history, in a country that has a territory that is as vast as Brazil. The other limitation was related to the duration of the Commission's work: initially, it would be only 2 years, however, in December 2013, the Presidency of the Republic extended its duration, and the deadline for the closure of activities was extended until December 2014, when its Final Report would be delivered.

Limited or not, the fact is that the creation of the NTC ended up being accepted by wide sectors of the political spectrum of the country, inside and outside the representative institutions. An element that demonstrates the arrangement established around its installation is the meeting, on the solemnity that marked the beginning of its work, of all the former Presidents of the period of the New Republic. The Armed Forces, in this scenario, transitioned from a posture marked by resistance to the concession, by ensuring that the hegemonic interpretation of the amnesty would be respected by the entity. Concession, however, is not synonymous with unrestricted acceptance of its existence. Especially by sectors opposed to the reparation of the victims of the authoritarian regime that continued to exist.

Between collaboration and insubordination: the Armed Forces during the work of the NTC

Between May 2012 and 2014, the NTC conducted or supported 80 public hearings (in various regions of the country) with victims of the dictatorship, witnesses, and even with agents of repression who were summoned to provide testimony. More than 1,000 testimonies were collected in public activities or in a private form. During the same period, the work teams that were created within the framework of the Commission conducted investigations and documentary research in various public institutions and archives. On December 10, 2014, the NTC delivered its final report of its activities to President Dilma Rousseff.

With two thousand pages, the final report was divided into 3 volumes. The first, set out the objectives of the Commission, presents an overview of political history in Brazil from 1946 on, details how the repressive structure worked in the country and the techniques used by State agents during the dictatorship, highlighting the links between the Brazilian repressive structure and neighboring countries, which acted in a coordinated manner within the framework of an international repressive connection: "Operation Condor". Having done that, exposing the chain of command existing in the period, it assesses the balance of repression and, naming 377 direct or indirect responsible for the crimes committed in the period (many of them already deceased), establishes a set of 29 recommendations.

In the second volume, the role played by parts of civil society and businessmen in the Coup and during the dictatorship is analyzed, as well as the various forms of opposition and resistance to the military's seizure and occupation of power in the country. In addition, data regarding the repression that was practiced against specific segments of Brazilian society is presented: from

members of the Armed Forces who were opposed to the seizure of power in 1964, to urban workers, peasants, indigenous people, religious individuals, people from the LGBT+ community, university teachers and students.

The third and final volume of the report lists and profiles 434 individuals who were recognized as deceased or missing as a result of political violence between 1946 and 1988. Referred to, in the "introduction to Volume 3", as a list that can be revised, it is also recognized by the members of NTC as limited, such limitations being attributed to the constant lack of collaboration on the part of members of the Armed Forces. As stated in the document:

The gaps in this history of executions, torture and concealment of corpses of political opponents of the military dictatorship could be better elucidated today if the Armed Forces had made available to the NTC the collections of archives of CIE (Army Information Center – in Brazilian Portuguese: Centro de Informações do Exército), CISA (Air Force Security Information Center – in Brazilian Portuguese: Centro de Informações de Segurança da Aeronáutica) and Cenimar (Navy Information Center – in Brazilian Portuguese: Centro de Informações da Marinha) produced during the dictatorship, and if, similarly, all the required information had been provided, as reported in Chapter 2 of volume 1 of the NTC report. The military authorities have chosen to maintain the pattern of negative or insufficient response that has been in place for fifty years, preventing, in this way, the circumstances and perpetrators of serious human rights violations that occurred during the military dictatorship from being known.

To prevent the reproduction of anti-democratic behavior by the Armed Forces, to mitigate the maintenance of these sectors as *veto players* of the new democracy, and to put an end to the impunity of crimes commited in the name of the authoritarian regime, the NTC, within the set of 29 recommendations presented in its final report, suggested, among other measures: a) that the Brazilian Armed Forces publicly acknowleged the repression practiced by its agents during the period investigated by The Truth Commission; b) that the civil, criminal and administrative responsibility of those involved in human rights violations during the dictatorship be investigated and attributed, with the application of the Amnesty Law being removed in these cases; c) that the the curriculum of the military academies should be reformulated based on democratic values and respect for human rights; d) official activities commemorating the 1964 Coup should be prohibited; e) a national system for preventing and combating torture should be improved and strengthened; f) the National Security Law should be repealed; f) the state Military Courts should be abolished; and g) the right of access to the archives of repression should be made effective.

Although limited, the document represented a progress in the addressing of the issue on a national level. In addition to identifying those responsible for a range of human rights violations, and recommending a series of measures against the persistent impunity, the final report incorporates into the debate on the civil-military dictatorship the recognition of at least three important aspects, which concern: 1) the existence of an organized repressive apparatus, which, operating in all regions of the country, systematically committed violations during the dictatorship; 2) the scope of repression: according to the data provided in the report, political repression was not restricted to sectors of the armed conflict, affecting urban and rural workers, university teachers and students, dissident military personnel, Indigenous people and people with different sexual orientations; 3) the involvement of civilian segments in the Coup and the dictatorship,

with the role of businessmen who benefited from the economic modernization carried out by the dictatorship being essential to the maintenance of the regime.

During the work of the Commission, the collaboration of the Armed Forces as an institution, as mentioned, was restricted. There was, therefore, no facilitation of the investigative work carried out by the working groups created within the scope of the NTC. Either because the institutions repeatedly denied the existence of documents on the period. Being also because their active and/or reserve members, for the most part, refused to effectively cooperate with their testimonies. When appearing before the commissioners to testify in this regard, most of the agents of repression opted for silence (Lourenço, 2014).

When they spoke, which is the case of the testimonies of Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, a retired colonel and agent of repression recognized for his work with the DOI-CODI of São Paulo (Operations Information Detachment – Internal Defense Operations Center – In Brazilian Portuguese: Destacamento de Operações de Informações - Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna), and Paulo Malhães, a retired lieutenant colonel and member of the Army Information Center (CIE), their demonstrations served to reiterate elements that, hegemonically, constitute the corporation's thinking since the 1964 Coup. Ustra, for example, referred to the victims of the dictatorship as "terrorists" and denied that they died in offices under his command (Mendes, 2013). Malhães, although he did not deny the practice of torture and disappearance, stated that he had fulfilled his duty and had no regrets for the human rights violations committed during the dictatorship (Jornal Nacional, 2014).

As a rule, the Armed Forces institutionally refrained from issuing any comment when asked by news agencies to take a position on the work of the NTC. When something displeased active-duty and reserve members, as it happened in September 2014, when Defense Minister Celso Amorim acknowledged the existence of crimes committed by the dictatorship in a letter sent to the Commission, the voice of the corporation was heard through a manifesto signed by 27 generals who, although belonging to the reserve, did not constitute dissonant voices on the part of the active-duty officers (Mendes, 2014).

If before the approval of the law that created the NTC the position of the Armed Forces transitioned from institutional resistance, through the Ministry of Defense, to concession, during the work of the entity, the situation changed significantly from May 2012. As an institution, the Armed Forces avoided, whenever possible, open confrontation with the Commission and its members. For the media, the general rule was to remain silent. Within a bureaucratic perspective, there was some degree of collaboration, although the denial of the existence of documents and archives, however, bordered on insubordination. The fact that former agents of the repressive apparatus appeared to testify can also be understood as a sign of collaboration with the agency, even though the silence has guided most of these participations. A sort of indirect insubordination, however, was present in the voices of Agents of repression who provided testimonies, as well as in those of reserve and/or Military Club members, who verbalized what active-duty officers were prevented from saying publicly by duty of office.

From criticism to denial: the Armed Forces after the work of the NTC

On December 10, 2014, during the morning, the final report of the NTC was delivered to President Dilma Rousseff in a solemnity held at the Planalto Palace. On the same day, the first elaborate criticisms by sectors associated with the Armed Forces began to circulate. As the institution

was silent regarding the subject, the Military Club, for example, spoke out, vehemently criticizing the report, having stated that:

> [...] The report could only be a collection of half-truths, slanders, and whole lies, packed with pieces of truth whose disclosure confirms the socialist orientation of the commissioners. Of its 29 recommendations, several directly target the Armed Forces as agents of the state. None refers to the actions of terrorists, guerrillas, kidnappers and leftist assassins who tried to seize power by force and establish a Soviet, Chinese or Cuban style of a communist totalitarian government in the country. [...] (Salomão, 2014).

After the publication of the report, even active-duty military personnel spoke out publicly, since they felt personally affected by information contained in the document. This is the case, for example, of the Army general Sérgio Etchegoyen, whose father was listed in the report as responsible for human rights violations during the dictatorship. In a statement, the general and his family affirmed that the work of the NTC was superficial (Gazeta do Povo, 2014).

The criticisms that circulated, although they may have been momentarily diluted amid a significant set of materials and opinions favorable to the outcome of the NTC's work, can be considered as the tip of the iceberg (along with the Armed Forces) on the subject. Much more than residual or random, such public demonstrations, led by sectors associated with the Armed Forces, whether active-duty or reserve members, showed that, within their walls, representative portions of the corporation never accepted the progress promoted by memory policies in the country. If there has been progress in the scope of this agenda, it is because exogenous conjunctural circumstances (external to the Armed Forces) favored its realization. The silent institutional concession towards reparative measures, therefore, has always been covertly guided by the resignation demanded by hierarchy and/or the resentment shared, typically, only among *inter pairs*.

Recently, in a book organized by Celso Castro (2021), General Villas Bôas, commander of the Brazilian Army between 2015 and 2019, stated, in an interview with the researcher, that the creation of the NTC was a breaking point in the relationship between the Armed Forces and the PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores - Brazilian center-left political party) governments, directly affecting the support given by its members to the removal of President Dilma Rousseff. Added to the other reparation measures implemented throughout the 1990s and 2000s, NTC would have represented a sort of "last straw" in terms of tolerance towards memory policies.

Analyzing retrospectively, it is possible to observe that the months that preceded and followed the completion of the work of The Truth Commission in the country were marked, respectively, by the 2014 elections and their consequences. In October 2014, President Dilma Rousseff was re-elected in a tight race against candidate Aécio Neves (PSDB). For the first time since direct elections for the presidency resumed, the defeated candidate questioned the result of the polls, casting doubt on the integrity of the electoral process. Despite the Superior Electoral Court (in Brazilian Portuguese: Tribunal Superior Eleitoral – TSE) having reaffirmed the outcome achieved through the voting, there was something different forming on the horizon.

In March 2015, a few months after the presidential inauguration ceremony for the beginning of the President's second term, the streets of the country began to be occupied, frequently, by large anti-government demonstrations. Orchestrated by sectors of the right-wing and extreme right-wing, the acts started a phenomenon that has become recurrent in street demonstrations in

the country: people carrying banners and posters calling not only for the end of the government and corruption, but also requesting the return of the military to power, defending torture, and saluting former agents of repression.

Considering the events mentioned, it is clear that the recent political conjuncture, marked by the approval of the *impeachment* of President Dilma Rousseff, in 2016, and the presidential election of 2018, in which a far-right politician was elected to the office, directly impacted the execution of activities related to the main reparation policies in place in the country since the 1990s.

Within the scope of the Amnesty Commission, specifically, from August 2016, when the parliamentary Coup that removed Dilma Rousseff from the presidency advanced and her vice president, Michel Temer, took office, the Commission underwent a deep restructuring that had repercussions on the range of its actions (Carta Capital, 2017). In addition to the fact that the new government significantly and arbitrarily changes the composition of the commission, the change in the pace and format of its work is visible. The trial caravans no longer occur, the public apologies likewise, and furthermore, an attempt to undermine their functions is denounced. Supporting the accusation, in addition to the change in the publicity of the commission's work, was the fact that its autonomy had been reduced, and its decisions were subject to the evaluation of the Attorney General's Office (in Brazilian portuguese: Advocacia Geral da União – AGU), which issued orders denying the granting of certain compensations (Calvi, 2018).

As of January 2019, with the inauguration cerimony of Jair Bolsonaro as president of the Republic, the Commission undergoes new changes, which deepen the measures that had been taken since the Temer government (2016-2018). The first of these concerns the relocation of the agency, which was linked to the Ministry of Justice since its creation, to the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights (MWFHR). Although the relocation to a ministerial department dedicated to human rights seems appropriate, because it has a self-evident thematic affinity, the change is more complex than it seems. The MWFHR was created by the new government after a ministerial reform marked by controversies, with the department headed by Damares Alves, a figure associated with the "ideological wing" of the government, representing evangelical and conservative sectors linked to the new president.

This is a change that represents a significant symbolic and political rupture, on the part of the Federal Government, regarding the way the issue of reparations to the victims of the dictatorship had been treated for more than fifteen years in the country. Closely associated with Justice, the issue now falls within the purview of a Ministry that, even though it bears the term "human rights" in its name, was clearly created with the intention of subordinating the guarantee of such rights to a stereotypical, conservative, and religious vision of them.

The relocation to a new Ministry posed other problems, objectives, regarding the work of the Amnesty Commission. Changes in the composition of the entity, loss of transparency in the dissemination of information, changes on the website, with the suppression of materials (books, magazines, reports) produced by the Commission over the years, all contributed, during the first year of the Bolsonaro Government, to the slowdown and dismantling of a public policy that, for years, had been successfully implemented. Regarding specifically the way in which the analysis of applications was carried out, the format implemented since 2016 has been consolidated under the new ministerial department. That is, the trials, which before were often held in public sessions and with apologies to the victims, began to be held behind closed doors, im-

personally. A significant modification was the change in the Commission's regulations, aiming at reduction of possibilities for administrative appeals presented against the decisions made by the entity. Only one appeal can be filed by those who have had their application rejected or partially denied.

Another controversial change that came with the new administration was the disassociation of the recognition of the condition of political amnesty from the granting of eventual pecuniary compensation to victims. Previously, the amnestied person had defined, in the same decision, whether to grant monetary compensation for damage caused by political persecution. As of 2019, in order to receive such compensation, it is now necessary for the interested party to file a court application in this regard. According to Victor Neiva, representative of the political amnesties in the Commission, who would be exonerated by Minister Damares Alves in October 2019, the measure represents a major setback for the victims of the dictatorship, who, in addition to waiting years for the granting of amnesty, will have to wait, indefinitely, and via judicial process, to receive pecuniary reparation (Leitão, 2019).

As if the aforementioned problems were not enough, other facts related to the Commission during the year 2019 serve as elements that synthesize the entity's directions under the new government. In March, Minister Damares Alves said publicly that she would open the" little boxes " of compensation granted by the Amnesty Commission, in a speech that suggests that decisions favorable to the victims of the dictatorship would have been excused (Turollo Jr., 2019). In September, it became public knowleged that the guidance given to the Commission was to "deny requests en masse", which in practice, occurred. Of the 80 applications considered until September 2019, 74 were denied (Coletta, 2019). In 2021, the trend continues, with around 90% of requests for reparations being denied, and, according to an article published by *El País* (Benites, 2021), members of the Federal Government aim to extinguish the Commission by 2022.

The deep changes and setbacks intensified since the beginning of the new Federal Government have not been restricted to the Amnesty Commission. Regarding the CEMDP (Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances – in Brazilian Portuguese: Comissão Especial Sobre Mortos e Desaparecidos Politicos), it has also been the target of measures implemented by both the Temer and current governments. Responsible for investigating the cases of deaths and disappearances that occurred during the dictatorship and for granting economic reparations to the families of the victims, CEMDP had also been working in recent years to identify the remains of political militants persecuted by the repressive apparatus. With the arbitrary alteration of its composition (first in 2016, then in 2019), combined with the ongoing reduction of the budget allocated to the aforementioned organizations, the Bolsonaro Government, although it cannot be accused of extinguishing memory policies in the country, can be identified as responsible for their weakening, as well as for their impracticability (Gallo, 2023).

Regarding the NTC, the prospect presented is completed by the fact that most of the recommendations contained in the final report have not been implemented. Of a total of 29 recommendations made by the Commission, 22 remain only on paper, according to a survey by the Center for Transitional Justice Studies (J. Castro, 2021). Even those in which there has been some progress, in some cases, it is still quite limited. Criminal proceedings regarding the crimes of the dictatorship have been initiated, but no agents have been punished. The Amnesty Law and the National Security Law enacted by the authoritarian regime remain in force. Files regarding the repression held by the Armed Forces remain inaccessible.

Significant changes in the Brazilian political scenario since 2015, deepened in 2016 with the deposition of the President and the Temer Government, and again between 2019 and 2022, during the Bolsonaro Government, attest to the change of perspective, through the executive and its ministries, towards the theme of the memory of the dictatorship and the reparation of the victims. Added to the perception of former President Bolsonaro about the authoritarian past, the growing presence of active-duty and reserve military in positions that, in previous administrations, were occupied mostly by civilians, is a central element for understanding the direction of memory policies in the country, and not only for the deployments of the NTC. In summary, it is observed that the corporation transitioned from concession to denial, perhaps feeling supported by the changes in the political conjuncture.

Considerations

The main objective of this study was to analyze the relation established between the Armed Forces and the NTC. The intended analysis was performed in three stages. The first one, focusing on the context prior to the installation of the Commission. The second, dedicated to the period between 2012 and 2014, when it served its mandate. And the third, focused on the developments after the delivery of the Final Report produced within the framework of the Brazilian Truth Commission.

As mentioned in the introduction, although the Brazilian Armed Forces cannot be confused, institutionally, with private associations formed by reserve military personnel and/or their families, it is a fact that the positions issued, for example, by the Military Club, reverberate ideas firmly rooted in the corporation. Thus, there is no way to dissociate, precisely, what is said publicly by a private institution from what, ultimately, makes up the worldview that is shared by active-duty military.

The data analyzed here allowed to draw a scenery regarding the (tense) relations between the Armed Forces and the NTC, from which the changes in how sectors associated with the military corporation positioned themselves, either supporting or hindering the efforts of the entity responsible for addressing the issue of dictatorship memory in the country, became evident. Initially, the behavior oscillated from resistance, via the Ministry of Defense, to concession, to the extent that, trimmed "edges" in the Law Project that provided its creation, it ended up being accepted.

Between 2012 and 2014, during the Commission's mandate, the tension escalated. The Armed Forces, as a state institution, kept silent about the actions of the NTC, its commissioners and working groups established by it, collaborating within the required bureaucratic limit. They responded by reiterating the absence of archives and the absence of documents. They acted on the edge, so that their actions could not be considered as insubordination. Former agents of repression, in their turn, when summoned to testify before the members of the Commission, surprised. Either because they attended, but also, in some cases, because they verbalized what they wanted to record for public opinion. Somehow, it was through the voices of former agents of repression and the Military Club, which continuously criticized the work of the NTC, that the voice of active-duty officers who, out of duty, tried to remain impartial was indirectly heard.

The breaking point in the relation occurred, precisely, after the delivery of the Final Report and the end of the NTC's mandate, in December 2014. Criticism, more than expected, gave way,

in a short time, to denialism. Reserve and active-duty officers publicly criticized the document produced by the commissioners, questioned the veracity and impartiality of the Commission, publicly evoked ideas repeatedly disseminated at the height of the dictatorship, attacking the victims, relativizing the violations, and denying events.

As part of the "slow, gradual and safe" transition project carried out in the country between the 1970s and 1980s, the Armed Forces were preserved as actors with high veto power in the political scenario of the New Republic, being the guarantee of their impunity related to the crimes of the dictatorship one of the main prerogatives they were assured (Arturi, 2001). It is not by chance, in this sense, that even though they have adapted to the new context, and, over the years, allowed advancements such as the creation of the Ministry of Defense in 1999, the institution has always resisted in some way when the subject was the memory of the dictatorship and the issue of the validity of the amnesty (D'Araujo, 2010, 2012).

Faced with a conjuncture of successive crises such as the one that has been experienced since 2015 in the country, it is not surprising, therefore, that sectors committed to impunity, oblivion and denial of the facts that occurred between 1964 and 1985 have gained space, little by little, making it impossible to comply with the recommendations of the NTC and the continuity of the reparation measures that had been implemented. Who wins, in a situation like the one described, is easy to identify. Who loses is democracy, and all those who depend on it.

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