

Historical Negationism and the Emergence of the Far Right

The Crisis of the Modern Regime of Historicity in Brazil (2019-2022)

Negacionismo histórico e emergência da extrema direita

A crise do regime moderno de historicidade no Brasil (2019-2022)

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ABSTRACT This article discusses how denialism of the civil-military dictatorship constitutes a pivotal element in the political propaganda of Jair Bolsonaro and the Brazilian far right. We aim to understand the connections between, on the one hand, the disavowal of our last dictatorship and state terrorism and, on the other, political attempts to undermine the legitimacy of human rights and social movements during the New Republic (1985-2020). We posit that Bolsonaro's vision for consolidating power entails a reimagining of the republic's foundations. Crucially, this endeavor involves an attempt to reshape the hegemonic memory regime first established during the redemocratization process. In this sense, the central hypothesis of this article is that historical negationism constitutes a fundamental and structuring axis in the power project of the renewed far right, emerging in a moment of crisis in the modern regime of historicity alongside the rise of presentism. In this regard, the political use of the recent past by the Bolsonaro government

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hinges on authoritarian political culture, anticommunism, and the purported crusade against corruption. These uses intend to undermine any rights-based agenda, thereby paving the way for the consecration of the neoliberal model.

KEYWORDS Bolsonarism, historical negationism, presentism

RESUMO O objetivo deste artigo é promover uma reflexão sobre o negacionismo da ditadura civil-militar como parte da ação política de Jair Bolsonaro e da extrema direita brasileira na criminalização dos movimentos sociais. Busca-se compreender como a negação do terrorismo de Estado promovido pela ditadura está relacionada à tentativa política de esvaziar a legitimidade dos direitos humanos e dos movimentos sociais na Nova República (1985-2020). Propomos que o projeto de poder de Bolsonaro inclui uma refundação das bases republicanas, sendo fundamental nesse processo alterar o regime de memória hegemônico construído a partir do processo de redemocratização. Nesse sentido, a hipótese deste artigo é de que o negacionismo histórico é um eixo estruturante no projeto de poder da extrema direita renovada e ocorre em um momento de crise do regime moderno de historicidade e de emergência do presentismo no Brasil. Nesse sentido, o uso político do passado recente pelo governo Bolsonaro se apoia na cultura política autoritária, no anticomunismo e no suposto combate à corrupção. Esses usos pretendem esvaziar qualquer agenda de direitos, favorecendo a consagração do modelo neoliberal.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Bolsonarismo, negacionismo histórico, presentismo

INTRODUCTION

This article aims to analyze the negationist narratives¹ about the civil-military dictatorship that were developed by the Brazilian state during the

1 The concept of historical negationism discussed in this article follows the proposals of Henry Rousso (1987) and Enzo Traverso (2012) to examine the denial of the past by groups associated with the far right. Historical negationism seeks to deny the oppressive and human

Bolsonaro government (2019-2022). The analysis is based on two interpretive keys: the emergence of the phenomenon of presentism in Brazil and the crisis of the politics of coalition that marked the New Republic (1985-2023). The objective is to investigate the political uses of the past in the creation of a public narrative that legitimizes the authoritarian guidelines produced by the far right. We believe that negationist narratives constitute an important strategy in the search for legitimacy for the authoritarian project, which is based on the use of old and new fears, now amplified by the indiscriminate use of social networks to spread hate and fake news.

The article proposes a reflection on one of the faces of Bolsonaroism, understanding the political uses of the past undertaken by this group as part of the construction of an authoritarian and neoliberal project. This project includes the weakening of democratic political institutions and the questioning of the legitimacy of social movements in the New Republic. As José Murilo de Carvalho (1990) suggested, when examining the construction of the Brazilian Republican imaginary in its inaugural decades, the “conquest of souls” is just as important for the legitimacy of any political project as the other actions to occupy of the state.

Our analysis of the political uses of the past will focus on the speeches and actions of the then President of the Republic, Jair Bolsonaro, and representatives of the Brazilian state during the so-called commemorations of March 31. Throughout the four years of his term, contrary to the transitional justice process previously undertaken, an official discourse was constructed that glorifies the recent dictatorship, denies state terrorism, revives anticommunist narratives, and insists on the necessity of maintaining order and national security for the development of the

rights-violating experiences promoted by states in modernity, with a particular emphasis on the denial of the Holocaust – the extermination of Jews and the existence of concentration camps established by the Nazi regime. Currently, the production of negationist narratives about the past extends beyond European experiences and also focuses on the denial of torture, killings, forced disappearances, and other human rights violations perpetrated by Latin American dictatorships in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, as well as the denial of the horrors of European colonialism and its cruelest aspects: modern slavery and the indigenous genocide (VALIM; AVELAR; BEVERNAGE, 2021).

nation. This discourse incorporates elements of long, medium, and short-term perspectives, structured around the Brazilian political culture of using state violence against social movements. This includes maintaining privileges for economically dominant sectors and restricting full access to citizenship for the majority of the population. In a recent article, Daniel Aarão Reis (2020) suggests that the phenomenon of Bolsonarism needs to be analyzed through these three dimensions of historical temporality: the long term, considering the authoritarian traditions that mark the republican period; the medium term, spanning from the approval of the 1988 Constitution to the present day; and the short term, marked by recent events. It is through the intersection of these three temporalities that we can comprehend the mobilization of denialist narratives in the public sphere, widely tolerated and supported by sectors of society. Additionally, there is a timid transitional justice, based on accommodation and the avoidance of confronting conflicting memories.

This article builds upon the contributions of the history of present time, recognizing the non-contemporary within contemporary times (DELACROIX, 2018). In this sense, the concept of political culture provides us with non-contemporary elements that still remain present (tradition of criminalizing social movements, anti-communist threats, the image of the Armed Forces as unquestionable defenders of national interests), associated with the political crisis that began in 2013 and the rise of far-right leadership to the Presidency of the Republic. Historian Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (2018) presents two characteristics of the dominant political culture in Brazil: personalism and accommodation/conciliation. In the case of personalism, the Brazilian political tradition favors the overvaluation of a political leader at the expense of strengthening democratic institutions. Accommodation/conciliation involves a process typically carried out within elites, with the containment of popular participation in the political game.

The actions of the Brazilian state regarding the civil-military dictatorship during the governments of the New Republic (Fernando Henrique Cardoso, Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, and Dilma Rousseff) acknowledged the pecuniary and administrative rights of the victims

and the duty of remembrance, albeit in a piecemeal manner. However, without the effective adoption of justice, the state facilitated a space for suspicion, quickly filled by denialist discourses. Moreover, the maintenance of military privileges and the Amnesty Law of 1979² demonstrate the Armed Forces' ability to intervene in Brazilian politics throughout the New Republic. The departure of the military from the Executive Branch did not prevent the Armed Forces' elite from continuing to influence Brazilian politics, highlighting the fragility of civilian control and republican institutions (D'ARAÚJO, 2012; FICO, 2012). In the political game of the New Republic, the military retained a veto power over transitional justice actions, preventing measures to promote justice and limiting the systematic expansion of memorial policies (CUNHA, 2010; ZAVERUCHA, 2010).

In the 1980s and 1990s, we witnessed the emergence of new social movements, driven by identity issues and the pursuit of rights. In contemporary times, newer collectives have been presenting a myriad of demands and actively engaging in social media. Both have led to questioning the culture of accommodation/conciliation within the elite that has prevailed in Brazil since the 19th century. The presence of new actors in the political space, associated with the advancement and impact of social media, has facilitated the emergence of discourses and political agendas distinct from the narratives constructed by conciliatory sectors of politics. These narratives are thus far removed from the accommodation process that characterized the dominant political culture.

Marcos Napolitano proposed a significant intervention in this debate, emphasizing that the crisis of the current governability model resulted from the exhaustion of “coalitional presidentialism”, an expression of this conciliatory political tradition:

From a political standpoint, there is a noticeable wear and tear on a model referred to by experts as “Coalitional

2 BRAZIL. Lei nº 6.683, de 28 de agosto de 1979. Concede anistia e dá outras providências. Available at: https://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/l6683.htm. Access on: 19 May 2023.

Presidentialism”. This system, largely a product of the tense balance between the Legislative and Executive Branches established by the 1988 Constitution, requires the elected President to form majorities in a fragmented and often transactional party system. This system groups together based on direct material interests in occupying positions and benefits, rather than being driven by government programs. The voting system in Brazil, majoritarian for the Executive Branch and proportional for the Legislative Branch, without threshold clauses or district focus, encourages this system. The result is a confusing and informal blend of the political principles of a parliamentary regime – with real veto power of the congress over the Executive Branch – without a party culture or constitutional clauses that provide political stability to the system.³

From the 1980s onwards, both left and right-leaning sectors of the political spectrum began building new channels for participation and dialogue with their respective audiences, featuring agendas distinct from those highlighted by segments of the mainstream media, which, in general, aligned with the culture of accommodation. The criticism of the culture of elite accommodation sparked different responses within

3 NAPOLITANO, Marcos. A crise política brasileira. In: *KoBra*, 9 Nov. 2016. Available at: <https://www.kooperation-brasilien.org/pt-br/temas-1/politica-economia/a-crise-politica-brasileira-perspectivas>. Access on: 19 May 2023. Freely translated: “Do ponto de vista político, percebe-se o desgaste de um modelo chamado pelos especialistas de ‘Presidencialismo de Coalizão’. Este sistema, em grande parte fruto do equilíbrio tenso entre Legislativo e Executivo sacramentado pela Constituição de 1988, exige que o Presidente eleito forme maiores (sic) parlamentares em um sistema partidário fragmentado e, via de regra, fisiológico, que se agrupa por interesses materiais diretos na ocupação de cargos e benesses, e não a partir de programas de governo. O sistema de voto no Brasil, majoritário para o Poder Executivo e proporcional para o Poder Legislativo, sem cláusulas de barreira ou foco distrital, estimula este sistema. O resultado é que temos uma mistura confusa e informal dos princípios políticos de um regime parlamentarista – com capacidade de veto real do congresso sobre o Poder Executivo – sem uma cultura partidária e cláusulas constitucionais que deem estabilidade política ao sistema”.

the left and the right. While the left demanded an expansion of social participation, moving towards an increasingly deliberative democracy with the presence of historically silenced subjects, right-wing sectors fueled fear, produced fake news, and embraced the resentments of the middle layers of society. This crisis is still ongoing, as the 2022 elections did not expel the far right from power. The victory of Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, from the Partido dos Trabalhadores [Workers' Party] (PT), was crucial for the maintenance of democratic institutions, but incapable of immediately resolving the current political crisis. The agendas of the far right continue to circulate freely on social media and have a wide reach among important sectors of society. The failed coup attempt on January 8, 2023, also demonstrates the need for the reconstruction and appreciation of democracy, as it revealed the existence of a complex network of supporters and wealthy people willing to sponsor coup attempts. Despite being unsuccessful, the invasion of the branches of the Republic and the destruction of public property show that Bolsonarism remains active and has followers, even among the public security forces.

The rise of the far right in Brazil and the world today has been based on the crisis of the state as a promoter of social welfare and the questioning of democracy as a space for dialogue, alterity, and dissent. In the case of Brazil, the culture of accommodation inside the elites is marked by the criminalization of social movements, the defense of structures that perpetuate social inequalities, state violence against minority and marginalized groups, and the restriction of access to citizenship. This political culture persisted despite the advancement of social policies during the PT governments, and we witnessed the growing resentment among middle-class layers of the population in the face of the loss of their privileges:

The Brazilian social structure also poses significant challenges to the stability of the political system and governance. There's a historical "debt" in social policies, exacerbated by a long-standing political and social exclusion that has solidified Brazilian society as one of the most unequal in the world,

despite recent achievements. Public services are deficient, taxes are regressive (penalizing consumers and wage earners while preserving large fortunes, properties, and financial incomes), and the middle class with some resources finds itself burdened by purchasing expensive private services to fulfill basic rights such as healthcare and education. This, in part, explains their visceral anti-government sentiment. At the same time, this same middle class has seen its system of privileges over the poorer segments diminish in recent years, notably in the use of popular labor for domestic and private services. This has brought forth their social elitism, blaming the PT for this social “inversion”.⁴

The elections held in October 2022 demonstrated the strength of the far right and Bolsonarism. Despite being defeated in the presidential elections, the extreme right emerged victorious in various state governments and secured numerous seats in the Legislature. For the presidency, Lula won with 50.9% of the valid votes in the second round. The overt use of public resources and the network of fake news mobilized by Jair Bolsonaro and his supporters directly influenced the outcome. Lula’s narrow victory over Bolsonaro indicates that the far-right agenda finds space in the political arena and that authoritarian projects have significant traction in Brazilian society.

4 NAPOLITANO, Marcos. A crise política brasileira. In: *KoBra*, 9 Nov. 2016. Freely translated: “A estrutura social brasileira também apresenta desafios importantes à estabilidade do sistema político e à governabilidade. Há um ‘passivo’ histórico de políticas sociais, agravado por uma secular exclusão política e social que consolidou a sociedade brasileira como uma das mais desiguais do mundo, em que pesem as conquistas dos últimos anos. Os serviços públicos são deficientes, os impostos são regressivos (penalizando os consumidores e os assalariados, e preservando as grandes fortunas, propriedades e rendimentos financeiros) e a classe média com algum recurso se vê onerada pela compra de serviços privados caros para suprir direitos básicos, como saúde e educação, o que explica, em parte, seu antigovernismo visceral. Ao mesmo tempo, esta mesma classe média, nos últimos anos, está vendo seu sistema de privilégios sobre os mais pobres – materializada no uso de mão de obra popular para os serviços domésticos e privados – diminuir, fazendo aflorar seu elitismo social e culpando o PT por essa ‘inversão’ social”.

THE BOLSONARO GOVERNMENT, HISTORICAL DENIALISM, AND THE CRISIS OF THE MODERN REGIME OF HISTORICITY

The first cases of COVID-19 were registered in the country at the end of February 2020 and, since then, the former President of the Republic, Jair Bolsonaro, has starred in several public scenes denying the guidelines of national and international scientific entities. His denialist practices on COVID-19 have included debauchery about the seriousness of the pandemic, the demoralization of state policies on social isolation, the defense of the use of drugs with no scientific efficacy, as well as promotions of all kinds of agglomeration – such as his visits to states and the famous *motociatas* [motorcycle parades]. This attitude towards the pandemic was not an isolated case of Bolsonaro's denialism, but was part of a systematic government policy of denying science, promoting anti-intellectualism and obscurantism, aiming at a project of reframing the republican foundations and dismantling the rule of law built around the 1988 Constitution. This project is based on the advancement of the far right, on the institutional fragility of Brazilian democracy, and the revival of the authoritarian project, in face of the crisis of the accommodation within the elites that marks Brazilian political culture.

The political elites traditionally organized in parties, unions, and institutionalized organizations are unable to meet the demands of new actors who found on social media an unprecedented space for interaction and empowerment. The emergence of this new public space has transformed forms of communication and interaction, causing a revolution in the way people produce narratives and adhere to political projects. Added to this new communicative experience is the recent crisis of “presentism”, in other words, the loss of reference to the dynamics of time, with the primacy of a continuous present and hopelessness towards the future.⁵

5 For a detailed analysis of the crisis of the experience of time in modernity and its direct result, presentism, that is, the feeling of living in a time marked by the supremacy of the present, given that the past is a set of experiences that have little to do with the present, and the future is no

The 1988 Constitution has consecrated the rule of law, the recognition of the protagonism of social movements, and the search for effective citizenship, defining the role of the state in promoting social welfare. Throughout the PT governments, that is, Lula and Dilma Rousseff, we can still see the growth of a radical democracy, marked by the presence of segments of civil society in deliberative spaces and in the organization of public policies. It is against the political project of expansion and implementation of the rights established by the Constitution, defended by the social movements, that the negationisms are triggered. Jair Bolsonaro promoted and used a variety of denialisms and fake news to expand and maintain his political support among different social segments susceptible to authoritarian power projects. The motivations for the support of different class strata to the far right's proposals are multiple: the economic elites are particularly interested in adopting the neoliberal model; the middle classes feel threatened with losing the privileges that offer them distinction; and socio-economically fragile sectors of the population are frightened by the economic crisis and daily insecurity in multiple dimensions.⁶ Added to this is the phenomenon of *antipetismo* [harsh opposition to the PT], which incorporates an anti-communist tradition widespread among the population (MOTTA, 2019).

Even with a favorable scenario for adherence to authoritarian projects, Jair Bolsonaro has seen a tentative drop in his popularity since 2021, according to a Datafolha poll.⁷ Faced with this situation, Bolsonaro opted to take the streets in search of political support from the population. The then president began a series of trips throughout different states of the federation, especially in the Northeast and South regions, promoting inaugurations and presenting himself directly to the people, in a face-to-face encounter that had been unusual for his

longer the horizon of new and qualitatively better expectations, see: François Hartog (2022; 2013).

6 NAPOLITANO, Marcos. A crise política brasileira. In: *KoBra*, 9 Nov. 2016.

7 A ÚLTIMA pesquisa Datafolha em 10 pontos. In: *G1*, 9 July 2021. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2021/07/09/a-ultima-pesquisa-datafolha-de-7-e-8-de-julho-de-2021-em-10-pontos.ghtml>. Access on: 19 May 2023.

political practice before. Up until that point, Bolsonaro had concentrated on intense use of social networks, fawning over his supporters in front of the Alvorada Palace, and seeking the spotlight in traditional media. Since the presidential campaign, and especially after the attack he suffered in Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais, in 2018, Bolsonaro had directed his political propaganda mainly at social media. However, with his popularity wavering and cornered by a series of investigations involving his closest relatives in illicit payment schemes, the famous “rachadinhas”, he took to the streets, in the traditional body-to-body model, trying to rescue his popularity and reinforcing his denialist speeches. After all, if for him COVID-19 was “a little flu”, what would be wrong with being on the streets and ignoring the instructions to isolate or socially distance? Bolsonaro made a point of opposing all the health agencies, embodying his own negationism by hugging supporters, not wearing a mask, promoting the use of medicines with no proven efficacy, and denying the vaccine, as if we had not already buried approximately 700,000 COVID-19 victims in the country.

Let’s go back to July 31, 2020. On that day, as part of his travel schedule, Jair Bolsonaro disembarked in Bagé, a municipality in the countryside of Rio Grande do Sul, for the inauguration of a low-income housing complex and a military-civic school. A Landau car was waiting for him at the airport to transport him to the planned locations.⁸ This car had belonged to former dictator President Emílio Médici (1971-1974), who had gifted it to his hometown in 1972. Supporters at the city’s airport greeted Bolsonaro, and he quickly waved at supporters with a box of hydroxychloroquine in his hands.⁹ Medical and historical negation-

8 MATOS, Kelly; MATOS, Eduardo. Os bastidores sobre o carro de Médici à espera de Bolsonaro no RS. In: *Gaúcha ZH*, 31 July 2020. Available at: <https://gauchazh.clicrbs.com.br/colunistas/kelly-matos/noticia/2020/07/os-bastidores-sobre-o-carro-de-medici-a-espera-de-bolsonaro-no-rs-ckdac1yqg001c013ghq0wiia7.html>. Access on: 19 May 2023.

9 MOURA, Thiago Rolim de. Bolsonaro mostra cloroquina para apoiadores no RS e causa aglomeração. In: *UOL*, 31 July 2020. Available at: <https://noticias.uol.com.br/politica/ultimas-noticias/2020/07/31/bolsonaro-cloroquina-bage-aglomeracoes.htm?cmpid=copiaecola>. Access on: 19 May 2023.

isms converged in a scene skillfully staged to reaffirm his daily positions. Here, orchestrated political action for the production of denialisms made explicit the authoritarian escalation we were experiencing. A former dictator's car was picking up a president in a current democracy. This was not the first time Bolsonaro had promoted actions or speeches in defense of the dictatorship. However, it is emblematic that he incorporated two forms of denialism simultaneously as part of his political propaganda, attempting to regain the support of part of his electorate and, again and restlessly, reaffirm his political-ideological choices.

We propose that historical negationism about the dictatorship should be evaluated as part of the agenda of the former president and the renewed far right, not limited to the realm of resentment among old military officials and some branches of the Armed Forces. As proposed by Patrícia Valim, Alexandre Avelar, and Berber Bevernage (2021, p. 15), “historical denialism can be thought of as a mosaic of discourses, practices, and representations mobilized with the aim of legitimizing certain interpretations of our sensitive pasts – especially their violence, exterminations, and domination of the most vulnerable.”¹⁰

This is not exclusively a battle in the realm of memory but rather a political use of denial of the dictatorship to impose a project of re-founding the New Republic and reconfiguring the pillars that shaped the 1988 Constitution. A highly exclusionary project aimed at retaining power. On March 31, 2022, Bolsonaro, in an official speech at the Planalto Palace about the coup and the dictatorship, stated:

Today, March 31. What happened on the 31st? Nothing. History does not record any president of the Republic losing their mandate on this day. So why the lie? Who does it serve?... Those who were in government at that time did

10 Freely translated: “o negacionismo histórico pode ser pensado como um mosaico de falas, práticas e representações mobilizadas com o objetivo de legitimar certas leituras dos nossos passados sensíveis – sobretudo de suas violências, seus extermínios e dominação dos mais vulneráveis”.

their part. What would Brazil be without the works of the military government? It would be nothing; we would be a little republic.¹¹

Márcio Seligmann-Silva (2022) argues in a recently published book that denialism is a part of necropolitics and is instrumentalized for the adoption of neoliberalism. According to the author, denialism about the past dictatorship is integral to the necropolitics of radical neoliberal governments, functioning as part of a dystopian process of seizing power: “Radical neoliberal governments implement necropolitics that turn against the past, the present, and limit the future”¹² (SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2022, p. 228). Similarly, Daniel Aarão Reis (2020) analyzed the phenomenon of Bolsonarism based on two interpretative keys: the crisis of democracy and the advance of neoliberalism. According to the historian, Bolsonarism is a phenomenon sustained by distrust in political parties, devaluation of trade unions, criminalization of social movements, and the advancement of neoliberalism – a model based on minimal state intervention, for which the rule of law becomes an impediment. In our analysis, engaging in a direct dialogue with the analytical proposals of Aarão Reis and Seligmann-Silva, we introduce a third explanatory key to the phenomenon: the rise of historical denialism as part of the crisis of the modern regime of historicity experienced in Brazil since 2013, and the emergence of presentism through the denial of the liberal memory regime regarding the dictatorship. This crisis,

11 Cited by: MAZUI, Guilherme; RODRIGUES, Paloma. Em discurso no Planalto, Bolsonaro defende militares e deputados réus por atos antidemocráticos. In: *GI*, 31 Mar. 2022. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/politica/noticia/2022/03/31/em-discurso-no-planalto-bolsonaro-defende-ditadores-militares-e-deputado-reu-por-atos-antidemocraticos.ghtml>. Access on: 19 May 2023. Freely translated: “Hoje, 31 de março. O que aconteceu em 31? Nada. A história não registra nenhum presidente da República tendo perdido o seu mandato nesse dia. Por que então a mentira? A quem ela se presta?... Quem esteve no governo naquela época fez a sua parte. O que seria do Brasil sem obras do governo militar? Não seria nada, seríamos uma república”.

12 Freely translated: “Governos neoliberais radicais implantam a necropolítica que se volta contra o passado, o presente e que tolhe o futuro”.

therefore, also permeates the uses and appropriations of the past and has favored the construction of a memory regime that requalifies the dictatorship and condemns social movements and their political actions through the distortion of the past.

To counteract this degenerative process of Brazilian democracy, we observe an increase in debates about the history of present time in Brazil. Historians have been studying the crisis of democracies, the phenomenon of Bolsonarism, religious fundamentalisms, and the presence of the far right in the political field (CALDEIRA NETO, 2020; MOTTA, 2020). All these factors indicate a change in the prevailing modern regime of historicity, with the hypertrophy of the present and the crisis in politics and economics, combined with the tragedy of COVID-19 in recent years. Presentism, identified as a crisis of modernity by Hartog (2013; 2022), emerges from the hypertrophy of the present, neglect of the past, and pessimism about the future. The tension between past and future lived through in the present in the modern experience is emptied, constituting an experience dominated by the present moment. The crisis of social democracy and its promises of economic development with social justice has led to a widespread sense of pessimism. In this context, we observe the emergence of far-right and religious fundamentalisms, strongly fueled by the use of fake news and the production of denialisms, including historical negationism.

In this sense, we reiterate our hypothesis: denialism about the dictatorship produced and propagated by the far right is a symptom of the crisis of the modern regime of historicity (presentism) and the need for these groups to reframe the foundations of the New Republic, replacing the crisis-ridden coalition presidentialism with an authoritarian and exclusionary power project.

The crisis of times, or the new regime of historicity, as proposed by François Hartog (2013), is characterized by the coexistence of two forms of time experience in an asymmetric condition: expectations of a new and qualitatively better future are diminishing and coexisting with the growth of pessimism about the future and the resulting hypertrophy of the present. In Brazil, expectations of a promising future have

drastically decreased in recent years, marked by the pandemic, the rise of the far right, economic crisis, and the abusive use of the internet and social media. Before the pandemic, in 2018, *Época* magazine¹³ reported a 34% pessimism rate among children and young people about the future. Post-pandemic, in January 2022, a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey indicated that 69% of young Brazilians under the age of 24 believed that the world was getting worse.¹⁴ Although the causes of pessimism have multiple factors (political, economic, and cultural), there is indeed a crisis in the perception of the future promised by modernity, which indicates a crisis in young people's own relationship with the experience of time.

Some political events in Brazil illustrate the workings of the phenomenon of presentism: the detrimental actions of the Operação Lava Jato [Operation Car Wash]; the parliamentary, media, and legal coup against President Dilma Rousseff in 2016; labor and pension reforms that create a future of social insecurity regarding old age; the impulsive and irresponsible actions of the press; the arbitrary conviction and imprisonment of former President Lula – who, at the beginning of 2018, had a strong chance of electoral victory according to opinion polls –, which played a decisive role in the election of the far right candidate Jair Messias Bolsonaro – a Federal Deputy whose history of disrespect for human rights and constitutional principles was widely known. Elected in the second round of the 2018 election, Bolsonaro began his government with extensive use of denialism, obscurantism, and attacks on science, leading to thousands of unnecessary deaths in the pandemic, an increase in illegal mining and wildfires in the Brazilian Amazon, a decline in educational achievement, a low vaccination rate for children

13 FAUSTINO, Rafael. Jovens brasileiros são mais pessimistas com o futuro do país, mostra pesquisa. In: *Época*, 28 Sept. 2018. Available at: <https://epocanegocios.globo.com/Mundo/noticia/2018/09/jovens-brasileiros-sao-os-mais-pessimistas-com-o-futuro-do-pais-mostra-pesquisa.html>. Access on: 19 May 2023.

14 FERREIRA, Alex. Pessimismo com o futuro cresce entre jovens no Brasil, diz pesquisa. In: *O Tempo*, 19 Jan. 2022. Available at: <https://www.otempo.com.br/interessa/pessimismo-com-o-futuro-cresce-entre-jovens-no-brasil-diz-pesquisa-1.2597746>. Access on: 19 May 2023.

and adults, an increase in hunger and poverty, and a loss of international influence for the country.

However, pessimism about the future and the production of forgetfulness about the past do not necessarily indicate the unquestioned victory of far-right projects, which are currently present in Western democracies with significant political influence. There is a cultural war in progress, identified by Seligmann-Silva (2022) as a war of images, associated with a discursive war that makes extensive use of propaganda to requalify the uses of the past within the necropolitical project. Nevertheless, this project encounters spaces of resistance, particularly in the cultural sphere – in the arts and among intellectuals –, willing to establish new relationships with society in the creation of an alternative possible world.

MEMORIES OF THE DICTATORSHIP: A CONTESTED FIELD

The systematic attack on the humanities and the discipline of history, carried out through research funding cuts and the disqualification of the humanities, is crucial in this strategy to reshape the foundations of governance in the New Republic, based on an authoritarian project linked to the ideals of the new far right. History, understood here as the epistemological construction of knowledge in modernity, is currently engaged in support of democracy, science, and human rights, on which it depends. Among the various topics and objects of interest to historians, those dedicated to recent history, particularly the dictatorships of the 20th century, have been targets of denialism in the midst of emerging anti-intellectualism and a politics of hatred that disregards others, their differences, rights, and pluralities. In this regard, this article has undertaken an ethical and political commitment to publicly reflect on denialism, focusing on the manipulations of denialism regarding the Brazilian military dictatorship.

Historical negationism is a phenomenon involving the denial or softening of human rights violations deliberately caused by individuals, state agencies, or organized groups. It is worth noting that this phenomenon of the far right was originally associated with the denial of

the Jewish Holocaust. The Holocaust was a defining event that imposed the need to prioritize human rights in the 20th century, also marking the emergence of the central role of victim testimony in constructing the social memory of that terrible event (TRAVERSO, 2012). In this debate, the concept of revisionism was developed to describe interpretations that attempt to downplay events marked by systematic violence and terror in the 20th century. Moreover, denialists often use the concept of revisionism to self-identify in an attempt to seek legitimacy or establish logical authority for their unfounded narratives (which, when not distorting the past, negatively manipulate it). To avoid downplaying the phenomenon and seeking to mitigate the many confusions surrounding the concept of revisionism, considering the existence of a critical revisionism inherent to the work of historians, we have chosen to use the concept of historical negationism to address the political uses of the recent dictatorial past by the government of Jair Bolsonaro.

In Brazil, historian Sônia Meneses (2020) traces the emergence of the concept of denialism regarding the military dictatorship in the media. According to her, the concept only appeared in the Brazilian press as a significant phenomenon in 2014. Starting in 2018, the phenomenon took on new contours with the electoral competition that brought Jair Messias Bolsonaro as a potential candidate for the presidency, a fact confirmed in the second round of elections. The candidate was already known for his speeches in parliament in defense of the military during the dictatorship. As president, despite being in a democracy, he maintained his stance and continued to deliver speeches and take actions such as ordering the “appropriate celebrations” for March 31, denying the coup and the existence of the dictatorship. The spokesperson for the Presidency, General Otávio Rêgo Bastos, stated on March 25, 2019: “Our president has already instructed the Ministry of Defense to hold the appropriate celebrations for March 31, 1964, including the order of the day, sponsored by the Ministry of Defense, which has already been approved by our president.”¹⁵ The Associação Nacional de História

15 BOLSONARO determinou “comemorações devidas” do golpe de 1964, diz porta-voz. In: *Portal*

[National Association of History] (ANPUH) issued a statement of condemnation a few days later in the following terms:

The ANPUH-Brazil strongly repudiates the decision of the presidency of the Republic to determine “appropriate celebrations” for the Military Dictatorship that began on March 31, 1964, and lasted for 21 years. People who research and teach history are aware that there is nothing to celebrate when the documentation from the Truth Commission and even that produced by those in power at the time shows authoritarianism, lack of freedom, censorship, persecution, torture, imprisonment, death, and disappearances. Young people, children, women, adults, and the elderly were not spared. In view of this, ANPUH-Brazil calls on its members to, starting from April 1, hold lectures, roundtable discussions, film debates, and social media posts that depict torture, lack of democracy, violence, and inhumanity committed by the state, which marked the 21 years of military dictatorship in Brazil.¹⁶

T5, 25 Mar. 2019. Available at: <https://www.portalt5.com.br/noticias/single/nid/bolsonaro-determinou-comemoracoes-devidas-do-golpe-militar-de-1964-diz-porta-voz/>. Access on: 19 May 2023. Freely translated: “Nosso presidente já determinou ao Ministério da Defesa que faça as comemorações devidas com relação ao 31 de março de 1964, incluindo a ordem do dia, patrocinada pelo Ministério da Defesa, que já foi aprovada pelo nosso presidente”.

- 16 ASSOCIAÇÃO NACIONAL DE HISTÓRIA (ANPUH). Nota de repúdio da ANPUH-Brasil: Comemorações 31 de março. In: *ANPUH-Brasil*. Available at: <https://anpuh.org.br/index.php/2015-01-20-00-01-55/eventos/item/5209-nota-de-repudio-da-anpuh-brasil-comemoracoes-31-de-marco>. Access on: 19 May 2023. Freely translated: “A ANPUH-Brasil vem, com veemência, repudiar a decisão da presidência da República de determinar ‘comemorações devidas’ à Ditadura Militar iniciada em dia 31 de março de 1964 e que durou 21 anos. As pessoas que pesquisam e ensinam história têm consciência de não ter o que comemorar quando a documentação da Comissão da Verdade e mesmo aquela produzida pelos que estavam no poder, na ocasião, mostram o autoritarismo, a falta de liberdade, a censura, as perseguições, a tortura, a prisão, a morte e os desaparecimentos. Não foram poupados os jovens, as crianças, as mulheres, os adultos e os idosos. Diante disso, a ANPUH-Brasil conclama seus associados a fazerem, a partir de 01 de abril, palestras, mesas redondas, debates de filmes, divulgações nas redes sociais que retratem a tortura, a falta de democracia, a violência e a desumanidade, praticadas pelo Estado, que marcaram os 21 anos de ditadura militar no Brasil”.

In December 2019, the then Minister for Women, Family, and Human Rights, Damares Alves, expressed her desire to terminate the Amnesty Commission in 2020, claiming that it had lost its purpose. After all, she argued, “the law is very clear. It is meant to analyze requests from people who were politically persecuted during a period. Most of these individuals are very advanced in age. I cannot envision young people filing applications now”.¹⁷ Once again, ANPUH issued a statement condemning this proposal. Since it was the victims of state terrorism who applied to the Commission, the advanced age of the applicants was a foreseeable characteristic. The disregard for memory policies reveals the adoption of a policy of forgetting, already noticeable in previous governments but intensified during Jair Bolsonaro’s administration.

The demonstrations of denialism about the dictatorship are generally based on four assertions: the coup was a counterrevolution against a supposed communist threat; any human rights violations were the result of individual excesses by poorly trained public agents and not a deliberate state policy; the dictatorship was not a dictatorship because there was a functioning legislative and judicial apparatus; the dictatorship was a period of prosperity and security, largely due to the memory of economic growth during the Médici government. All these denials have already been thoroughly debunked by historians who have studied the period.

For Mateus Henrique de Faria Pereira (2022), denialism about the dictatorship should be understood as a cultural war marked by the interaction between the virtual, the current, and the real. The author analyzes the internet as a medium of memory that promotes a debate in the public space through a war strategy. The very conception of

17 Cited by: KADANUS, Kelli; DESIDERI, Leonardo. Damares quer acabar com Comissão da anistia até o fim de 2020. In: *Gazeta do Povo*, 17 Dec. 2019. Available at: <https://www.gazetadopovo.com.br/republica/breves/damares-quer-acabar-com-comissao-de-anistia-ate-fim-de-2020/>. Access on: 19 May 2023. Freely translated: “a lei é muito clara. É para analisar requerimentos de pessoas que foram perseguidas politicamente num período. A maioria dessas pessoas está com idades muito avançadas. Eu não consigo ver pessoas jovens entrando com requerimento agora”.

historical time in these cultural wars¹⁸ follows a fatalistic, homogeneous, and deterministic interpretation. The coup would be inevitable, and only it could save us from the communist threat. This type of reading prevails in various denialist productions found on the internet and in articles on *Metapedia*¹⁹ – where there are no clear criteria for verifiability or control of the information displayed. Other denialist narratives are produced by websites and groups like Brasil Paralelo [Parallel Brazil], circulating with significant visibility. According to Pereira (2022), such publications and audiovisual products are part of a political project involving groups, whether coordinated or not, that question the republican and democratic foundations established with the 1988 Constitution.

Historian Caroline Bauer (2018), who specializes in the uses of the past in the present time, highlights the specificity of denialism about the dictatorship in Brazil. For Bauer, in the Brazilian case, it is not a denial of the existence of the dictatorship but rather of its meanings and significance. In this case, what denialist discourses intend is not simply a rehabilitation or attenuation of the dictatorship, as in the unfortunate expression *ditabranda* [soft dictatorship] that circulated in the press some years ago.²⁰ Negationism is part of the ongoing memory battle for the meanings of the Brazilian dictatorial experience, and it does not exist in isolation from other narratives about the dictatorship, nor does it disregard the existing battlefield.

One of the political images constructed during the New Republic was the protagonism of social movements in expanding democratic rights. It is a hegemonic memory widely disseminated (NAPOLITANO,

18 Another important researcher who used the concept of cultural warfare was João Cezar de Castro Rocha (2021), when analyzing the escalation of the far right in Brazil through the construction of a discourse of hatred, authoritarianism, anti-communism, and *antipetismo*.

19 *Metapedia* is a virtual encyclopedia similar to *Wikipedia*. However, unlike *Wikipedia*, it does not establish reliable information verification processes, favoring the production of fake news and denialism.

20 The term gained popularity following a critical editorial about the Venezuelan government published by *Folha de São Paulo* in 2009. See: LIMITES a Chávez. In: *Folha de São Paulo*, 17 Feb. 2009. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/opiniaio/fz1702200901.htm>. Access on: 19 May 2023.

2017; 2018; 2020). The period from 1979 to 2013 witnessed an intense political participation of minority groups that had previously been invisible and silenced. The return of exiles and the advance of democratization, civilian mobilization for *Diretas Já* [Direct Elections Now], the Constituent Assembly and the approval of the new Constitution, control of inflation with the Real Plan, the adoption of reparation policies (although limited), the advancement of identity agendas, the presence of diverse social movements in the public sphere, increased educational attainment, and access to higher education through the expansion of technical schools and federal universities, redistributive policies and economic growth during the PT governments (2003-2016) generated a belief in a new and qualitatively better future with greater social equity.

It is within this context of optimism and hope for the future that a hegemonic memory was constructed about the resistance to the dictatorship and the participation of social movements in the process of democratization. This memory, on the one hand, silenced accommodations, ambivalences, collaborations, and the participation of important sectors, such as the mainstream media, in the coup and the dictatorship.²¹ On the other hand, it also produced positive aspects such as the perspective of political mobilization, autonomy of social collectives, empowerment, and the protagonism of various social sectors in democratization. In other words, this memory favored the perception that there was a political space in the New Republic for various social sectors to fight for the implementation of the rights expressed in the Constitution and to expand them toward a more equal society.

Even though sectors like the mainstream media framed social mobilization as a struggle for the return of regular elections, freedom of the press, the end of censorship, and the adoption of a new Constitution, the fact is that alongside these important banners, there were

21 There is a vast and well-established Brazilian historiography dedicated to the relationships of ambivalence, consent, and consensus between society and the Brazilian military dictatorship, demonstrating the simplifications of binary analyses of democratic civil society versus military dictatorship. See: Reis (2000); Rollemberg; Quadrat (2010); Maia (2012); Cordeiro (2015).

organized groups around democratization demanding the expansion of agendas and, consequently, of rights: the Black movement, LGBTQIA+ groups, human rights groups, former political prisoners and their families, the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra [Landless Workers' Movement] (MST), the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Teto [Homeless Workers' Movement] (MTST), the feminist movement, among others. The broad political spectrum that had composed the mobilization for democratization, therefore, would also make different uses and appropriations of this memory in the present time. While there is a hegemonic memory of a liberal nature that defends the political model of representative democracy, it is subject to different appropriations by the sectors that activate it in the years following the democratization process.

In addition to the construction of this hegemonic memory circulating among civil society sectors, the actions of the Brazilian state regarding its recent authoritarian past have oscillated between silence (José Sarney and Fernando Collor/Itamar Franco governments), circumstantial administrative measures (Fernando Henrique Cardoso), partial opening of archives (Lula), and, more recently, the valorization of memory with the Comissão Nacional da Verdade [National Truth Commission] (CNV) during Dilma's government in 2014. The promotion of justice, reformulation of education in military institutions, and combating of authoritarian legacies were not effective. The state's silence regarding human rights violations caused by the policy of forgetting promoted by the Amnesty Law favored the maintenance of a political culture of conciliation among elites, limiting the human rights debate in Brazil to the victims or relatives of dictatorship victims. In the rest of society, remained the absence of discussions about the tortures, the murders and forced disappearances, just like every violation of rights committed by the dictatorship.

The impunity was part of the conciliatory project of our transition negotiated within elites. However, the cost of this negotiation was to produce a low-quality democracy, in which images, actions, and discourses connected to violations of human rights were normalized or considered isolated excesses – when, in fact, they were part of a

necropolitics aimed at containing the undesirable. The absence of a systematic human rights valorization policy and the lack of promotion of transitional justice that included the punishment of torturers allowed for the persistence of a space that enabled discourses that presented social movements and human rights defenders as promoters of disorder and partisans of chaos. The politics of forgetting adopted by the state favors both new human rights violations by public agents and the existence of what we call a “space of suspicion”, occupied by the far right eager to criminalize social movements and promote denialism as a political strategy to combat the construction and expansion of rights.

In recent articles, Marcos Napolitano has been presenting a more sophisticated debate on memory battles regarding the Brazilian dictatorship. Without entering into the classification proposed by the author, with its nuances and intersections, it is worth noting what Napolitano (2015; 2018; 2020) identifies as the hegemonic memory constructed after the democratization process, based on three pillars: 1) the so-called “democratic resistance”; 2) civil society as radically opposed to the military; 3) Brazilian society as an unequivocal defender of human rights. This memory would bring together different political forces and incorporate some demands of former political militants or the families of the dead and disappeared as long as they did not go beyond the administrative and memory fields, but without justice.

The limits or possible simplifications of this hegemonic memory may have favored silences regarding collaborations/accommodations or even obscured the fact that we had a transition that was also negotiated from the top.²² In spite of its limitations, this hegemonic memory con-

22 There is an intense historiographical debate about the Brazilian redemocratization process, which can be summarized as follows: some researchers argue that redemocratization was the result of a broad political spectrum identified as democratic resistance (ARAÚJO, 2004); a second group contends that it was a project within political elites led by the military, in which democratic mobilization had little influence on the process of returning to democracy (FICO, 2012; D'ARAÚJO, 2012); and finally, some historians argue that the redemocratization process is the result of external political and economic conditions, the leading role of the military, and systematic opposition, albeit influenced by the Brazilian political culture of negotiation and accommodation (SILVA, 2003).

solidates the idea that different civil groups should defend democratic freedoms, contributing to the emergence of various legitimate social movements. In the late 1970s, but especially throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the new left presented itself as a protagonist in the political field and began to demand the construction of a state of rights. These were plural, diverse rights that respected differences in ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. The 1988 Constitution is popularly known as the *Constituição Cidadã* [Citizen Constitution] precisely because it incorporated a series of rights originating from the demands of these social groups. The memory that there was a dictatorship and a democratic resistance by different groups and social movements organized in favor of human rights not only disqualifies the dictatorship but also strengthens the role of social actors who were previously silenced or invisibilized as subjects with rights and the potential to gather to fight for their rights.

In the current scenario of broad and heterogeneous participation in the political field, which is associated with the crisis of the political coalition model, the far right is compelled to construct a new memory regime that silences the voices calling for the expansion of rights. The extreme right seeks to disqualify the actions of social movements during the democratization process. After all, from the negationist perspective of these political sectors: if the coup was a preventive countercoup to prevent the advance of communism, human rights violations were isolated and sporadic, and the dictatorship was a prosperous period of social peace, what role did social movements and their quest for rights play starting from the second half of the 1970s? The far right's response is: to threaten the Brazilian family, order, national security, and implement "cultural Marxism". Denialism is part of the cultural war that attacks democracy and human rights, and its propagators accuse any progressive group of being linked to "cultural Marxism", chosen as the new enemy.

Brazilian democracy was born under the hegemonic memory of the reconquest of rights, even though it was marked by authoritarian legacies. Social movements strengthened the perspective of direct and broad participation in the state, no longer accepting the supporting role in Brazilian politics. These rights and mobilizations make it difficult to

adopt a neoliberal state based on a market economy. The extreme right's proposal to construct a new regime of memory favors the adoption of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism targets precisely a set of rights that have been activated as necessary for the reconstruction of Brazilian democracy since the late 1970s. The emergence of social groups that were previously invisible in the public sphere occurred precisely over the 35 years of the New Republic. The struggle is against the triumphant hegemonic memory and the memory of the victims, a strategy that includes emptying the role of social movements in the exercise of democracy. Therefore, the question that arises is the use of historical denial as part of the political project to refound the republican regime, built in the last 35 years, which excludes the social actors that emerged in the social scene and began demanding compliance with the Constitution and the adoption of new rights. Emptying the memory that enshrined the participation of sectors and social movements in the redemocratization of the public space through the denial of the nefarious meanings of the dictatorial regime favors the adoption of new memories manipulated by the political interests of the far right.

Historical denial, therefore, is part of the digital political marketing of the extreme right, which made extensive use of fake news not only during the electoral period but also during the term in office. It is no coincidence that this denialism was incorporated by the government of Jair Bolsonaro, although it was not produced exclusively by him. Denialism is still part of the new political propaganda, which no longer focuses on presenting the glorious achievements and successful undertakings of a regime/leader, as was the case during the civil-military dictatorship (FICO, 1997).

We are no longer in the 20th century. Nowadays, the purpose of far-right political propaganda is different and has acquired several new aspects, although we can observe the reissue of characteristics of fascism. As Giuliano Da Empoli (2019) demonstrated in *Os engenheiros do caos* [*The Engineers of Chaos*], Boris Johnson, Jair Bolsonaro, and Donald Trump will saturate the media with the “grotesque”, the “abominable”, and the “scandalous”, always presented under the sign of

the political leadership's spontaneity – when, in fact, this constitutes part of the political marketing at the service of these leaders. This extreme right mobilizes fears and resentments, producing a culture of hatred that seeks to eliminate dissent, dialogue, and diversity in public debate. While it may reiterate some characteristics of fascism, the mobilization will now take place through a new channel, apparently less hierarchical and therefore more difficult to combat: cyberspace. Social networks have made direct contact between populist leadership and their voter-consumers possible. There are companies and robots sending thousands of messages, which do not follow a well-defined ideological base, daily. Da Empoli (2019) himself demonstrates the ability to adapt their speeches to the desires expressed by these voters, easily mapped by the exposure of our consumption data and opinions on social networks. It is a power project with great reach, as it can be easily adapted to different demands of the more conservative social groups in the field of customs or neoliberal in the economic field. This project aims to reach and stay in institutionalized power, not implying the achievement of anything. On the contrary, the goal is to maintain the adherence of voter-consumers willing to engage in any simplistic discourse that apparently meets their immediate demands.

The ideological void left by these leaders will quickly be filled – hence the constant presence of religious radicalism with its conservative view of society and neoliberalism. Denialism and the extreme right are not subordinated to neoliberalism. Neoliberalism serves them, in a delicate balance. Nationalism, on the other hand, will be invoked as discourse because it is a factor of adherence, but this will not imply a reinforcement of policies to enhance the role of the state. On the contrary, the dismantling of the state reinforces the role of leadership because, with a smaller state, we have fewer institutional mechanisms of mediation – leaving the political leadership with direct control over civil society. In a recent article, Renato Lessa (2020, p. 56, emphasis in the original) defines what he considers *Homo bolsonarus* from an anthropological perspective:

We are now facing an artificial being with distinct characteristics from both historical fascism and the Brazilian republican tradition after 1930. It is not about placing society within the state, but about *returning society to a state of nature*; removing from society the degrees of “stateness” it contains, to bring it closer to an ideal of spontaneous state of nature: a scenario in which human interactions are governed by wills, instincts, pulses, and in which artificial mediation is minimal or even nonexistent. This is the matrix of bolsonarist libertarianism.²³

Neoliberalism has found its ideal partner in the extreme right. The advancement of minorities in the public space meant the advancement of democracy, the expansion of the rule of law with inclusive policies, the rise of groups that were previously invisible in the political field and public arena, with their demands, preferences, ways of life, and above all, the demand to be recognized as subjects with rights. Rights that could only be implemented with the presence of the state in society and the expansion of social achievements. The neoliberal project is not compatible with the citizenship agenda. Getting closer to religious and ideological radicalism, negationism was the formula found to implement the desired reforms. Neoliberalism realized that the rule of law built in Brazil through democracy, whose hegemonic memory is based on the extensive participation of democratic resistance – that is, social and human rights movements – in the reconstruction of democracy, whose greatest symbol was the 1988 Constitution, is a

23 Freely translated: “Estamos hoje diante de um animal artificial com características distintas tanto do fascismo histórico como da própria tradição republicana brasileira pós-1930. Não se trata de pôr a sociedade dentro do Estado, mas de devolver a sociedade ao estado de natureza; de retirar da sociedade os graus de ‘estatalidade’ que ela contém, para fazer com [que] se aproxime cada vez mais de um ideal de estado de natureza espontâneo: um cenário no qual as interações humanas são governadas pelas vontades, pelos instintos, pelas pulsões, e no qual a mediação artificial é mínima, ou mesmo inexistente. É essa a matriz do libertarismo bolsonarista”.

hindrance. Therefore, it is necessary to refound this memory so that social movements excluded from public debate and discredited in the political sphere are defeated, and neoliberal reforms can be more easily implemented.

CLOSING REMARKS

This article brings some reflections and many concerns. We already have access to a thriving and qualified historiographical production on topics such as traumatic memories, negationism, the rise of the extreme right, and the impact of digital history on the formation of historical consciousness. On the other hand, there are still numerous questions to be answered, which will depend on future investigations.

Here, we analyze denialism about the dictatorship as part of a broader, albeit multifaceted, political movement to rebuild Brazilian republican foundations based on the emergence of the far right in the political landscape and the attempt to consecrate the neoliberal model. This phenomenon is only possible in the face of the crisis of the modern regime of historicity and the resurgence of presentism. The fact is that the dominant political culture, based on intra-elite accommodation, which used to drag with it middle-class sectors and conservative groups in terms of behavior, entered a crisis with the emergence of new identity agendas and the behavioral revolution expressed rapidly by Web 2.0. Channeling the diffuse resentments of conservative segments of society, nostalgics of the dictatorship, and radical religious groups, who perceive behavioral changes as a threat, was crucial in building this political project.

Why do these denialisms manage to spread widely in society? We still lack research on this. And in this sense, we are only at the beginning of reflections. If questions about resentment have been very fruitful for analyzing the strength of negationism, we need to be attentive to the consumer audience of these forms of denialism.

How can we, as historians, contribute to preventing the consolidation of a denialist regime that undermines our social achievements of recent decades? Many fellow researchers have stressed the importance of public history and occupying social networks, beyond what we have already done. We have made significant progress in this occupation, although we are learning how to reach a young, diffuse, non-academic audience. It is not an easy transition, and we are not digital natives, but we hope to make further progress in this regard. Elsewhere, internal reflection on our ability to produce objective knowledge, without ignoring the importance of the linguistic turn in reassessing our work, has been fundamental. Historians work with a method, are capable of controlling subjectivity, and our activity cannot be reduced to voluntarism or a mere dispute between narratives. Historians do their work based on sources and evidence, build logical thinking, and, above all, engage with pre-existing knowledge through peer debate. Investing in defending history as knowledge capable of contributing to the development of citizenship is a present-day challenge. The social function of history is to contribute to the advancement of citizenship, which, since the 1970s, with the end of the Cold War and the third democratic wave, has been understood as the promotion of human rights, democracy, plurality, differences, in search of a more just society.

We hope that democracy prevails, that the rule of law guarantees freedom of opinion and research, and that the promotion of justice against any abuse and violation of human rights is understood as an unquestionable value in the countries of the Southern Cone. History is the knowledge that proposes to contribute to the full realization of these values, always reaffirming its ethical commitment to knowledge as the basis for promoting social equality and collective life.

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