

'You catch me alive, I escape dead': the commemoration of the death of students in the resistance against the military regime

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RESUMO

Este trabalho apresenta uma análise dos “usos políticos do passado” feitos pelos militantes do movimento estudantil nos anos de 1970, no intuito reforçar a identidade associativa e legitimar a resistência contra a ditadura militar. A instrumentalização do passado se fez a partir da ênfase no martírio de estudantes vítimas da repressão: a morte de Alexandre Vannucchi Leme (aluno da Geologia da USP e militante da ALN) pelos agentes do Exército em 1973, e o “desaparecimento” de Honestino Guimarães (último presidente da UNE na clandestinidade). Nesse culto às vítimas da ditadura, também será relembrada a morte do estudante secundarista Edson Luis, baleado por policiais durante uma manifestação de rua, em 1968.

Palavras-chave: uso político do passado; movimento estudantil; ditadura militar.

ABSTRACT

This paper presents an analysis of ‘political uses of the past’ made by activists from the student movement in the 1970s in order to strengthen associative identity and legitimate resistance to the military dictatorship. The instrumentalization of the past was made through an emphasis on the martyrdom of student victims of repression: the death of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme (a geology student in USP and ALN militant) by army agents in 1973 and the ‘disappearance’ of Honestino Guimarães (last underground president of UNE). In the cult of victims of the dictatorship also remembered is the death of Edson Luis, a secondary school student shot by the police during a street demonstration in 1968.

Keywords: political uses of the past; student movement; military dictatorship.

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Among the striking moments of the student movement's (SM) resistance to the military regime during the 1970s certain actions can be highlighted which served as different 'orders of time' for the carrying out of proposals of symbolic resistance. I understand as 'orders of time,' or 'historicity regime,' a reference used by François Hartog, the 'sewing' together of different regimes of temporality which translate and order experiences of time articulating the past, present and future and giving meaning to the relationship between the different temporalities. Hartog refers to a historicity regime understood as the manner through which a society treats its past and how it proposes to use it.¹

In this article, a part of my doctoral dissertation on the resistance of the SM to the military regime during the 1970s, I highlight how the death of students was politically instrumentalized by representatives of the SM. I intend to analyze how the death of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme, a student in the University of São Paulo (USP), in 1973 was used throughout that decade as a political instrument by students and as a way of fighting the regime. In addition to the death of Alexandre, another two deaths were instrumentalized by the students: that of the then president of the National Union of Students (*União Nacional dos Estudantes* – UNE) Honestino Guimarães, arrested in 1973 and who became a '*desaparecido político*' (i.e., he 'disappeared' after being arrested) and the secondary school student Edson Luís de Lima Souto in 1968. I try to reflect on the differences in the historic sphere and the similarities in the memorial sphere in which the three deaths mirrored, observing why the death of the student (who was not necessarily an activist) Edson Luis became an important 'point of memory' when compared to the other two.

It should be highlighted that all and any use of memory presupposes work about the past which Paul Ricoeur refers to as working with the instrumentalization of memory.² This pragmatic use of memory does not signify Machiavellianism or opportunism, but is related to a scenario of struggle between different actors who attribute different meanings to the past. In the case of the SM, the struggle for memory is related to the fight against the dictatorship. Maria Helena Capelato, based on the studies of Elizabeth Jelín, in her work about the memory of the military dictatorship in Argentina, stated that there does not exist a sole interpretation of the past, with their being oppositions between rival memories: a 'struggle of memory against memory.' The Brazilian historian shows that memories "are objects of disputes and conflicts in which the participants play an active role as producers of the meanings of these struggles." In this case, according to Capelato, "the debate

about the past is placed in the public sphere and the intention is to establish, convince, and transmit a narrative that can be accepted."³

I also seek to show how the SM in the 1970s took advantage of a certain temporal dimension (with projections both for the past and for the future), creating in this case a historicity regime aimed at forging a group identity, through which 'myths,' 'martyrs' and 'heroes' were constructed, which fed and sustained the resistance against the regime in power. It should be emphasized at the very beginning that death linked to violence and patriotic sacrifice⁴ constitutes a privileged element for its political instrumentalization, which transforms it into an event charged with a strong symbolic connotation on the part of those that appropriated it, even managing to transcend it,⁵ through the reworking of the characteristics of the personalities on the part of those who use them.

The killing of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme by DOI-Codi (*Destacamento de Operações de Informações - Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna* – Information Operations Detachment – Center of Operations for Internal Defense; subordinated to the army) on 16 March 1973 has already been the subject of a number of works, such as the book *Cale-se* by the journalist Caio Túlio Costa, which describes, based on statements made at the time, the activities of the student movement in USP during the period between the death of Alexandre and Gilberto Gil's concert in the Escola Politécnica in May 1973. Alexandre, also known as Minhoca, was 22 at the time, and was a fourth year Geology student in USP (and had achieved first place in the *vestibular* (university entrance exam) as various documents emphasize). An ALN (*Ação Libertadora Nacional* – National Liberation Action) activist, as Victória Langland explains, he was the political coordinator of the organization within USP, serving as a connection with the underground groups.⁶ This was the motive used by the authorities to justify the death of the 'terrorist.'

His death was already surrounded by ambiguities on the part of DOI-Codi reports. The Brazilianist Kenneth Serbin⁷ points to two different information sources that were distributed by security agents: the first, for 'public consumption,' was sent to the press on 22 March and stated that the student had been run over by a truck when trying to flee from the police. *O Globo* newspaper repeated this version in the following terms:

The security agencies revealed that the terrorist Alexandre Vannucchi Leme, known as 'Minhoca,' died after being run over by truck when he tried to escape from being brought by agents to a meeting with another terrorist, on the

intersection of Bresser and Celso Garcia Streets ... Three persons reported that they witnessed the accident in which the terrorist died. [One of them] Alcino Nogueira de Souza, an attendant in Confeitaria Santa Cruz ... even served the terrorist beer. He saw him look to one side and then the other, run across the street and be hit by a truck.⁸

The witnesses who were part of an inquiry about the ALN organization (AEL/BNM 670), the reason for which Alexandre was arrested, so that the inquiry was also about his death, followed the same line: Alcino Nogueira de Souza, André Corte (a shoeshine boy) and Josué Sales Bitencourt (who worked in the Videira bar) presented the same version, with some precise details about the 'event' and others that were completely bizarre. For example, the shoeshine boy André reported that he had his back to the road and since he had 'a hearing problem' he did not hear the truck hitting Alexandre and only realized what had happened when the student was thrown on top of him.⁹ According to Kenneth Serbin, another version was given to those in DOI-Codi detention: Alexandre had committed suicide. Adriano Diogo, arrested two days after Alexandre, remembered that in the middle of a torture session he heard from a repression agent that the student had died. So he asked: " 'How come? He went to check something and threw himself under a truck?' [The agent replied], he was here under arrest since yesterday and just died. That cell you saw, all wet, it was his, we washed the cell and you entered" (Statement of Adriano Diogo to *Projeto Memória do Movimento Estudantil* – the Student Movement Memorial Project, São Paulo, Nov. 11, 2004). Alexandre's parents was also told the two versions by different police *delegados* (police chiefs): *Delegado* Fleury referred to suicide, while Edsel Magnotti said that he had been knocked down.¹⁰ To help cover up the conflicting versions the parents were denied the right to see the body of their son, who was buried as an indigent, thereby increasing the suspicions that he had been murdered by the agents of repression. His parents only gained access to the remains of Alexandre ten years later.

It is important to note that the death of Vannucchi Leme occurred in 1973, the year of the commemoration of the 25 anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which served as a 'motto' for the incrimination of the dictatorship in the murder of the student. Throughout the year numerous student newspapers from all over Brazil presented reports on the subject. Also during this year the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (*Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil* – CNBB) led a campaign against the violation of human rights. Another point deserves to be highlighted: at the

beginning of the 1973 school year, as part of the *Bichusp* (the reception of freshmen to the university), students sought to continue actions which had gathered steam at the end of the previous year after the holding of a referendum on paid education in which more than 90% of ten thousand students voted against. This also had an impact in the mainstream press, which was not common during the *anos de chumbo* (years of lead, the grimmest time of the dictatorship). In the case of the death of Alexandre the press restricted itself to printing the official note distributed by DOI-Codi, showing the censorship practiced.

From the above it can be seen that the actions triggered by the death of the USP student were not 'isolated' events in history, as some works demonstrate,¹¹ but were part of a process of opening of channels of resistance to the regime. Taking this into account, the rapid and powerful actions undertaken by USP students when they received notice of the death of Alexandre in the university are understandable. Geraldo Siqueira Filho remembers:

[Someone] appeared completely pale in the geography center saying: 'They killed Minhoca! Tomorrow the school will explode!' I said: "Wait, we have to leave together. Anyone who goes alone will be massacred.'" So there was an uprising in USP: isolated assemblies, black cloth in the place of the Brazilian flag... (Statement of Geraldo Siqueira Filho to *Projeto Memória do Movimento Estudantil*. Brasília, Dec 1st, 2004)

An important point, already noted by Caio Túlio Costa, is that the different political forces which existed within USP, with their different visions of Brazilian reality, united to denounce the death of their colleague in a joint action. So much so that the first student action was the manifesto on the death of Alexandre prepared by the Council of Academic Centers of USP (*Conselho de Centro Acadêmicos* – CCA) in which it was stated that "all the colleagues of USP and of some schools in PUC-SP are in mourning."¹² The manifesto referred to the question of human rights, seen as the principal demand of the moment. The document cited the arrest of Alexandre in a clandestine form, as was the habit of that period, but implying that this impinged the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which Brazil was a signatory. The manifesto stressed the qualities of their colleague:

Alexandre enjoyed an excellent reputation among the students and professors of his school. An exemplary student, he passed in first place in the *vestibulares*

(university entrance exams), he was an active participant at all levels of university life. His dedication to the course and the profound respect and esteem in which his colleagues held him, led him to being elected as an official representative of the students in the Congregation of the Institute of Geosciences.¹³

The regime sought to legitimate its acts with the justification of fighting terrorism. To prevent Alexandre from being labeled as a terrorist, the students highlighted his positive image (a correct person, good friend, studious, 'fair').¹⁴ The history of Alexandre, reconstructed through his absence, served as a discourse of the present. The image of the geology student who was a 'victim of repression' came to be used by students to legitimate the struggle against the dictatorship, which represented a 'shot in the foot by the regime.'

The events which followed allowed the dictatorship be contested by part of the movement. They show that the official discourse, propagated by the army, and often seen as a 'unique and definitive' truth by a large part of society, could be used as a way of showing the ambiguities of the regime, collaborating to undermining its image. It is also necessary to take into account, as stated by the historian Marcelo Santos de Abreu, the feeling of cohesion that the struggle awakened, to understand its integration in the 'civic' culture then being forged.¹⁵ In this context the deliberate strategy to use the death of their colleague from the very first manifestations is clear. The actual communiqué about the death, signed by the CAs of USP, stressed them: "mourning that translates not only our immense sorrow at the irreparable loss of our colleague Alexandre, but also our union to repudiate this ignominious state of events to which we find ourselves submitted and to consciously assume the position of saying enough."¹⁶ Note the reaction to the loss, characteristic of mourning according to Freud:¹⁷ in this case action takes the place of absence.

The geology students had the idea of celebrating a mass in commemoration of Alexandre which was quickly approved by the CCA. Why celebrate a mass? Some hypotheses can be raised. First, to try to attenuate a dual absence: that of the physical presence of Alexandre who could no longer be among his loved ones and also the gap caused by the lack of a burial, which could not be carried out. The act of burial, according to Ricoeur (2000), is not limited to the moment since, its gesture remains and, like struggle, transforms into an interior presence the physical absence lost. Second, a mass is a ritual, it has a symbolic function and uses metaphors to externalize an ontological discourse. Without a doubt the holding of a mass carrying all its representations, was the way found to externalize a reality that could be exposed through a religious

meaning. In the middle of the fragility of the situation, the religious field could be the place for the meeting of protection, console, and action.

The proposal was to hold it within USP with the recently nominated Cardinal D. Paulo Evaristo Arns. D. Paulo suggested that the event be held in the Sé Cathedral (or São Paulo Cathedral), which would attract even more attention. The students managed to surround themselves with support, not only as a form of getting 'protection,' but also as a way of showing strength: the OAB (*Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil* the Brazilian Bar Association), the ABI (*Associação Brasileira de Imprensa* – Brazilian Press Association), the MDB (*Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* – Brazilian Democratic Association) and the Archdiocese supported the event proposed by CCA. The holding of a mass in memory of the student murdered by the dictatorship became a weapon to denounce the regime and its criminal acts, a manner found to bypass censorship, making the denunciation of the dictatorship go beyond the university campus, where it had been restricted in previous years. The act in itself showed the engaged political planning of a group of students in the struggle against the regime. In addition to seeking the support of entities which were positioning against the regime, the students publicized the event. The invitation to the mass contained a poem written for Alexandre on its back:

*Liberty flies
They cut your wings
Life is a race
They broke your legs
Hands, some asking
Others, denying
Yours, offered
The torturers handcuffed them
Bodies which moved
And agonized in natural selection
Of daily life
Yours, they put to sleep
None of this brings fear
Your blood runs in the veins
Of your brothers
They have not died
The truth still survives.¹⁸*

The symbology used to deal with the questions referring to the regime, expressed through newspapers and university murals, gained clearer contours in this solemn event sacramented against the dictatorship. In these verses the slogans of the moment were transformed into poetry, which also had the meaning of denouncing the present being experienced and nurturing the hope of changing the future. I would like to call attention to the fact that in this episode tension is present between two historic categories constructed by Koselleck to explain the relationship between past and future: the field of experience and the horizon of expectation.¹⁹

The holding of the mass in the Sé Cathedral on 30 March involved the participation of 25 priests and around 5000 people, most of whom were students. It was the first large public manifestation during the dark times of the regime. The enormous military apparatus placed a machine-gun facing the Cathedral and cameras from TV Gazeta filmed those who were present face by face, under the 'pretext of transmitting the mass.' The celebration was charged with the solemnity that was appropriate to it and allowed. The words gave content to it. In his sermon D. Paulo Evaristo Arns proclaimed:

Only God is the owner of life. From Him the origin and only He can decide its end ... Christ himself wanted to feel the tenderness of his mother and the heat of his family when he was born. And after death his body was returned to his mother, friends and family. This justice was done by the representative of the Roman power, although it was totally foreign to His mission of the Messiah ... 'Where is your brother? The voice of the blood of your brother calls from the land for me!' ... Who did justice – asks the supreme judge who takes care that the truth is said and that love has its time? (Serbin, 2001, p.395)

Inserted in the rituals of the Church, remembering the life of Jesus – this foundational event (Hartog, 2003, p.167) – expressed the present that was being lived. It was the manner found to work with the categories of presence and absence, the visible and the invisible: it was the moment of denouncing what could not be denounced through a discourse anchored in history aimed at a future different from the present being lived. Marcos Napolitano, in another context, analyzed the ceremony for Vladimir Herzog in 1975, showing the appropriation of Christian religious representations used in a perspective of political protest.²⁰ The evocation of the figure of Christ to characterize the martyr²¹ (in this case, Vladimir Herzog) had antecedents: the religious act in commemoration of a victim of dictatorship had occurred in 1973 with a

different person, in this case Alexandre Vannucchi. In other words, in the two episodes the sacred and the profane, or the religious and political, intermix totally.

To finalize the mass in homage to Alexandre, the singer Sérgio Ricardo had a special role, singing his new song '*Calabouço*', written in honor of another student killed by the dictatorship: Edson Luis in 1968. The lyrics of *Calabouço*, as highlighted by Roberto Bozzetti, creates a tension between the words and their impossibility, between what was said and what was forbidden: 'the urgency of 'telling the truth' is referred to as an obstacle in the text of the song: "from the corner of the mouth runs/half of my song." The author also shows that the images of incompleteness, due to the action of external repressive force, are complemented with those of mutilation and death: "Half your body supported/on the crutch of the song /.../ the other rotting with gangrene /in the wounds of my refrain /.../half bed half coffin." ²² Sérgio Ricardo's lyrics were a metaphor of Brazilian reality, marked by the retrenchment of the word. The act in the Sé was the possibility found to explain not what was said, but was forbidden to say. It can also be said that in the cases mentioned the strategic and calculated use of the concept of 'victim' allows the resistance to the regime to be reinforced. The mass ended with another song sung by Sérgio Ricardo, but this time one written by Geraldo Vandré, *Pra não dizer que não falei de flores*, an icon of protest songs and runner up in the 1968 International Song Contest. The crowd which packed the Sé left singing Vandré's verses, as remembered by Geraldo Siqueira: "'Come, let's go, to wait is not to know,'... Everybody began to sing the song, to drive off the fear, because singing helped, didn't it?" (Statement of Geraldo Siqueira Filho to *Projeto Memória do Movimento Estudantil*. Brasília, Dec. 1st, 2004).

The repercussion of the act in the Sé was significant for the movement. The media was censored and could not report on events of this nature (unlike what had happened in the previous period when the death of Edson Luis was reported nationwide). However, while the news of the celebration in the Sé did not reach the majority of the population, the situation was otherwise in relation to its circulation in universities throughout the country. The newspaper *PoliCampus*, in an edition entirely dedicated to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, spread the first communiqué from the CCA about the death of Alexandre.²³ There were repercussions among the military, as remembered by Adriano Diogo, who was arrested at that day: "On the day of Alexandre's mass, how they cursed Cardinal Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns... They did not ask anything. They opened the cells and began to hit us, they did not even bring

us to the torture room, they attacked us with clubs!” (Statement of Adriano Diogo to *Projeto Memória do Movimento Estudantil*, São Paulo on Nov. 11, 2004).

Thus, it can be stated that the death of the student was a motive for the organization of an event which confronted the dictatorship even when it was in its harshest period. All the symbology used shows the preparation – and we can even the maturation – of a group of students who, as far as it was possible, confronted the dictatorship. Confronting the dictatorship was to continue resisting, a resistance that was coated with a mythical dimension, according to Laurent Douzou.²⁴

Caio Túlio, in his reflections on the 1973 demonstration, states that the songs sung in the mass served as a connection between the manifestations of the time and those of the 1960, which were forcefully interrupted. According to the author, after several years this was, in terms of mass actions, “the first act of a renewed political presence of young people,” with a difference in relation to the forms of struggle: the young people came in peace (Costa, 2003, p.103). Nevertheless, this ‘first public act’ was only possible because of engaged activists who continued to carry out small actions within the universities, even after the mass actions had been interrupted. Without a doubt this was the moment when students and part of the clergy found a ‘breach’ to carry out a protest in the ‘years of lead’ of the dictatorship. And they knew how to take advantage of this. However, what calls most attention in Costa’s analysis, and I agree with his observation, is when he highlights a new form of struggle – a pacific one –, which was also the fruit of the self-criticism of those who had defended armed struggle. The 1973 demonstration did not signify a return to the 1968 demonstrations. Therefore, it can be concluded that the connection of dates takes place in the sphere of the generic ‘memory’ of struggles against the dictatorship, which is still a form of political use of the past, with the aim of legitimating resistance against the regime in the present.

Also in relation to the remembering of the past for political purposes, it should be noted that the deaths of Alexandre and Edson Luís happened on dates close to the civic commemorations that occurred at that time on the anniversary of the ‘revolution.’ Given the proximity of dates, the SM, which at that time was one of the few channels which could show moderate opposition, traced its own calendar of commemorations, with the aim of transforming them into political acts. The dates of the death of the two students came to represent a struggle of ‘good against evil’ and served as a reference for activists in subsequent years. Throughout the 1970s this calendar was constant, as

Victória Langland points out, who also demonstrates its regular 'disuse' after this period (Langland, 2006, p.61), which highlights its need for instrumentalization in the previous period. Undoubtedly, the historic memory of the death of the students was constructed on its 'weight' and the choice of the manner of using this past oscillated between moments of greater and lesser visibility (Capelato, 2006, p.76) in accordance with the situation being experienced.

Victória Langland shows that these commemorations served to 'unite' successive generations of students (Langland, 2006, p.23), highlighting the innocence of students as a common point. Despite agreeing with the historian, my work adds that the 'union' achieved in the memorial sphere served as a form of resistance in the historical sphere. Despite being united by the same historical time – that of the dictatorship –, the great conjunctural difference between the two moments has to be taken into account: 1968 and 1973, as well as the specific circumstances of the deaths of the two students.

Edson Luis had a different trajectory: he was not an activist engaged in the struggle against the regime.²⁵ He embodied the ideals of a poor young person from the north who had come to Rio de Janeiro to study in search of 'a place' within society, as Langland states (2006, p.27). For this reason the image of innocence raised by the Brazilianist expresses this case. Moreover, the death of the student was a 'new' factor at that historic moment in 1968, which came to be used very well by the students who were nationally organized at that moment and later. Langland also highlights the important journalistic coverage of the death of the student from Pará, although she does not show that at the same moment the liberal elites were starting to turn against the regime that had gained power four years previously. The national mobilization of students was echoed on the pages of the newspapers and magazines from the mainstream press (as well as the opposition press), which meant that the event had great repercussion, making it a 'point of memory,' not just in the history of the SM, but also being remembered by society in general. Tying one short space of time to another one, it can be compared to the repercussions over the death of Vladimir Herzog, which also transcended the limits imposed by the moment through the active role of the press, even though this was at a lesser scale. In addition, the meaning of Edson Luís' death was reappropriated by the movement itself which forged a myth²⁶ around him: the student 'reemerged' as an icon of student resistance.

Alexandre Vannucchi Leme was an activist who was arrested, tortured and deliberately killed by the dictatorship for fighting for ideals opposed to the

regime. His death was exploited in order to exalt his sacrifice in name of the common cause and, thus, he became a martyr. I share Langland's reflections when I state that the SM (also) used the image of 'innocence' and victim, leaving aside Alexandre's leftwing activism in that context. The death of the geology student was the motive found by the students with the aid of the Church to bring the manifestations against the regime outside the walls of the university, at a time which all forms of protest were censored. It also served as a reference for the students' struggle, to show the resistance that they themselves had been practicing against the dictatorship, thereby affirming a symbolic policy that supported the political struggle *stricto sensu*, a struggle which would continue to be carried out over the following years.

In this way with different historical trajectories the deaths of the students came to be re-signified in the sphere of memory evoked by the movement. If it is taken into account that the act of memory finds its meaning through the context in which it is enunciated,²⁷ it is easier to understand how and why these 'changes of meaning' happen. Furthermore, as stressed by Jean Duvignaud, history is not a construction crystallized by a group established to defend itself against the permanent erosion of change.²⁸ It is in a state of permanent construction, in constant adaptation. Therefore, it can be inferred that the connections of image between Edson Luís and Alexandre extend much more in the field of memory,²⁹ pointing to a deliberate strategy of Alexandre contemporaries to use the past in order to corroborate the practice of resistance against the regime.

Through the construction of mythic resistance the figures of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme and Honestino Guimarães, whose trajectories are somewhat similar, are linked to Edson Luís through 'remembering,' both becoming 'martyrs' of the student movement. The representations constructed by the leaders of the movement justified at the same time the need for resistance and strengthened the SM, through the construction of an imagination in which these people gained meaning that was at the same time heroic (epic) and religious. I agree with Marie Claire Lavabre when she states that the collective imagination serves to organize the 'collective memory' and that it is constructed due to the wish to interpret the past, aiming at projecting the future (Lavabre, 1991, p.182). I believe that the imagination constructed by the organized student resistance is guided by these purposes: in this are inserted the political uses of the past, through the remembering of the most important moments of the SM's resistance struggle and the commemorative celebrations of names and dates related to its 'martyrs.'

This was the case of the attribution of the name of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme to the first free DCE in Brazil, in 1976 in USP. The creation of a body free from the 'dictatorial fetters' was the result of actions and discussion that occurred in previous years. The act and its symbology had the aim of defying the system in power: in this case the intersection between the functional and symbolic use of these representations evoked a 'place of memory' provided by the regime and instrumentalized by the students.

When the *III Encontro Nacional de Estudantes* (Third National Meeting of Students – ENE) was held in 1977, among the resolutions approved was the holding of a national day of protest to be commemorated on 28 March 1978, marking the tenth anniversary of the death of Edson Luis and the fifth of Alexandre. The pamphlet distributed for this event in the Faculty of Medicine in USP, calling on São Paulo students to the demonstration in memory of the two students in the following terms: "you arrest me alive, I escape dead / suddenly, look, I again..." (Arquivo Cedem/Unesp fundo Cemap cx 036). It is thus worth noting that it is always due to the present and the future that the dead are resuscitated. On the date set the mother of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme, Eglê Maria, was present at the event reading a letter she had sent to Pope Paul VI, reporting the death of his son. However, in Rio de Janeiro Cardinal Eugênio Sales prohibited ceremonies from being held in memory of the students, alleging that these were only being held for political reasons. Nevertheless, the opinions of the cardinal about the SM's actions did not prevent assemblies and meetings from being held in faculties in UFRJ, UFF, Uerj, FGV, Fefierj (*Federação das Escolas Federais Isoladas do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*, which became UniRio in 1979) and Universidade Rural, which served as preparatory meetings for the act that would be held in PUC-Rio. UFMG also commemorated the death of José Carlos da Mata Machado, killed in the same year as Alexandre. The attempt to hold a public act in the Faculty of Law were prevented by tear gas and the marches that were attempted were dissolved with violence. Manifestations such as this also occurred in UFBA, UnB, in various universities in Porto Alegre and in parts of Rio Grande do Sul.

Victória Langland makes an important observation about that moment: the commemorations of the students came to emphasize other characteristics which originally were not linked to their images. The image of 'innocence' linked to Vannucchi Leme in 1973 five years later came to be recorded as a 'virile warrior in the struggle for freedom of political expression" (Langland, 2006, p.59). A dislocation of the significant meaning can be seen here: the images of Alexandre and also of Honestino Guimarães, which reflected the

figure of the ‘just,’ to a large extent came to incarnate part of the ideals preached by Che Guevara in his text on the *new man*, as emphasized by the historian Mariana Villaça. According to her the ideal of this man is a volunteer, solidarity, an activist willing to undertake any sacrifice, politically aware of his role as a citizen, as well as of the importance of the political conscientization of the people (Villaça, 2004, p.2). In this reallocation of meanings Langland observes that the figure of Edson Luís also came to be seen as a “defender of democracy” (Langland, 2006, p.59).

The dead to which the SM honored gained a political meaning, by inserting the individual destination in a historical context charged with meaning, as Jörg Echternkamp states. The joint commemoration of the past should then be understood as a political process aimed at the present and the future.³⁰ The SM martyrs were converted into symbols in the disputes which occurred in the political field aimed at the struggle for the redemocratization of the country. In this case the ‘martyrs’ came to be remembered as figures who gave their lives in the name of a cause, which in these conditions served as a component in the construction of identity and reorganization of the movement, as well as its importance for resistance against the regime. The characteristics identified in the students transcended their deaths, as ‘examples to be followed.’ The fact thus shows how much the political use of the past is malleable and that the commemoration of the ‘cult of the death’ constitutes a representation of the past that was repeated year after year, each time with a different meaning.

The instrumentalization and crystallization of the figure of Honestino Guimarães as the ‘eternal president’ of UNE had as a ‘key’ moment the congress in which the entity was reconstructed (1979). At the podium on the opening night the central chair of the ‘presidency’ was left vacant and a large photo of Honestino was placed in the center of the hall.

Honestino’s statue president of UNE reflects the ambiguities between history and memory. Vice-president elect in 1969, he took over the coordination of the work of UNE, when the then president, Jean Marc von der Weid, was arrested. The dispute between political forces about whether or not the congress that elected Honestino president of UNE in 1971 was effective, was weakened in light of a memory that came to be used by students of the last president of UNE before the entity was reconstructed (an image still used today).

The speeches which came after the opening of the congress emphasized the ‘praise of the martyrs’ of student activism and their connection with the democratic question. It showed the weight of the past of the entity and how

the 'choice' of this past was made, and passed on to the activists at that time. The speech of the former president of UNE in 1963-1964, José Serra, loaded with the symbolisms that permeated the history of the entity, emphasized "that the memory of those who fell continues to be present. Disappeared or dead, Honestino Guimarães continues to be our comrade each day, and we remember the need for the restoration and the deepening of democracy" (Romagnoli; Gonçalves, 1979, p.47). Referencing Honestino as 'our comrade each day' is still a connection with the 'epic dimension of reality' to the reality experienced, with the aim of projecting a future. As Laurent Douzou states, resistance above all, is an individual 'adventure', but also collective, and its characteristics, such as underground life, with all the risks implied by this option, forged the epic dimension of the act (Douzou, 1996, p.74). In this case the project of the image of Honestino by the activists served as a reference, as a 'guide' for the new activists. It also served the intentions of that moment in which the figures of Honestino and UNE were intermixed and he was presented as a unifying spirit of the movement.

Victória Langland concludes that the creation and observance of a political calendar of the movement in relation to their murdered colleagues serves to sustain, or even to regenerate, their political identity during the period of repression (Langland, 2006, p.62). Tracing the 'invisible presence' of the dead each year was a form of emphasizing the continuity of the movement. This movement perceived in the past a field of disputes for a possible and desirable future. This highlights not just one of the characteristics of the act of commemorating, which also expresses a type of 'order of time:' a manner of using a 'patrimony' – the past experienced and reappropriated – in the continuity by the resistance against the military regime. Remembering the dead so that it will not be forgotten that they lived in a dictatorship. In this way those students transformed the sacrifice into a symbol of the struggle for the victory of democracy.

NOTES

¹ HARTOG, François. *Regimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps*. Paris: Seuil, 2003, p.19.

² RICOEUR, Paul. *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*. Paris: Seuil, 2000, p.97.

³ CAPELATO, Maria Helena, Memória da ditadura militar argentina: um desafio para a história. *Revista Clio: Revista de Pesquisa Histórica*, Recife: Ed. Universitária da UFPE, n.24, p.64, 2006.

⁴ As highlighted by Christian Amalvi (*Les héros de l'histoire de France: recherche iconographique sur le panthéon scolaire de la troisième République*. Paris: Phot'oeil, 1979, p.246).

⁵ Mariana Martins Villaça recognizes this question in the songs written in memory of Che Guevara (“El nombre del hombre es el pueblo”: as representações de Che Guevara na canção latino-americana. Congresso Latino-americano da Associação Internacional para o Estudo da Música Popular, 5. *Anais...* Rio de Janeiro: Unirio/IASPM-LA, 2004, p.3. Available at: www.hist.puc.cl/historia/iaspmla.html. Accessed on: Jan. 10, 2010).

⁶ LANGLAND, Victória. “Neste luto começa a luta”: la muerte de estudiantes y la memoria. In: JELIN, Elizabeth; SEMPOL, Diego (Comps.). *El pasado en el futuro: los movimientos juveniles*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2006. p.49. (Colección Memórias de la Represión).

⁷ SERBIN, Kenneth. *Diálogos na sombra: bispos e militares, tortura e justiça social na ditadura*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2001, p.382-407.

⁸ Subversivo tenta fugir mas morre atropelado. *O Globo* (GONZALEZ, Marina. Assassinato de Alexandre Vannucchi Leme gerou protestos da sociedade. *Revista ADUSP*, p.73, May 2005).

⁹ Secretaria de Segurança Pública/DEOPS. Segunda Testemunha. Idem. Folha 82 (AEL/BNM 670).

¹⁰ ROMAGNOLI, Luiz Henrique; GONÇALVES, Tânia, *A volta da UNE: de Ibiúna a Salvador*. São Paulo: Alfa-Ômega, 1979. (História Imediata, 5). p.19.

¹¹ COSTA, Caio Túlio, *Cale-se*. São Paulo: A Girafa, 2003. Izabel Priscila Pimentel da Silva diz: “A morte e o funeral de Alexandre ... marcaram o início do processo de recuperação política do movimento estudantil universitário brasileiro.” SILVA, Izabel Priscila Pimentel da. Jovens, estudantes e rebeldes: a construção das memórias estudantis. In: ENCONTRO REGIONAL SUDESTE DE HISTÓRIA ORAL, 7., 2007, Rio de Janeiro. *Anais...* Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

¹² Comunicado sobre a morte do colega Alexandre Vannucchi Leme. *PoliCampus*. Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos. 25º aniversário. Março de 1973 (Arquivo dos DAs da FFCH/UFBA).

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Sarah Gensburger describes how a figure of resistance comes to be referenced as a just figure in the historical French memory of the occupation. She looks at how the figure of the just person is associated with Christian moral values which were precisely initial evocations of the resistance. Despite the different context dealt with by the author, the concept helps us understand how the figure of Alexandre was portrayed by the movement. For further details on this question, see two articles by the author: Les figures du juste et du résistant et l'évolution de la mémoire historique française de l'occupation. *Revue Française de Science Politique*, v. 52, n. 2-3, avril/juin 2002, p.291-322; Usages politiques de la figure du Juste: entre mémoire historique et mémoires individuelles. In: ANDRIEU, Claire; LAVABRE, Marie-Claire; TARTAKOWSKY, Danielle. *Politique du passé: usages politiques*

du passé dans la France contemporaine. Aix-en-Provence: Publications de l'Université de Provence, 2006, p.47-57. (Collection Le Temps de l'Histoire).

¹⁵ ABREU, Marcelo Santos de. Os mártires da causa paulista: culto aos mortos e usos políticos da Revolução Constitucionalista de 1932 (1932-1957). Dissertation (Doctoral) - Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Rio de Janeiro, 2010, p.154.

¹⁶ Comunicado sobre a morte do colega Alexandre Vannucchi Leme. *PoliCampus*. Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos. 25º aniversário. Março de 1973 (Arquivo dos DAs da FFCH/UFBA).

¹⁷ FREUD, Sigmund. Duelo y melancolía. In: FREUD, Sigmund. Obras completas Sigmund Freud. Volumen XVII (1917-19). De la historia de una neurosis infantil y otras obras. Traducción del alemán José Luis Etcheverry. Buenos Aires: Amorroutu, 1986, p.237-258.

¹⁸ Póstumas a Alexandre. Extract from the invitation to the Seventh Day mass of Alexandre Vannucchi Leme (COSTA, Caio Túlio, *Cale-se*, cit., p.90).

¹⁹ "Experience and expectation are two categories which, intercrossing the past and the future, are perfectly apt to thematize historic time. These categories can detect it (historic time) up to the domain of empirical research, since concentrated in their content, they guide concrete actions in the realization of political or social movement." (KOSELLECK, Reinhart. *Le futur passé*. Contribution à la sémantique des temps historiques. Paris: EHESS, 1990, p.310 - my translation).

²⁰ NAPOLITANO, Marcos. *Cultura e poder no Brasil contemporâneo* (1977-1984). Curitiba: Juruá, 2002, p.64.

²¹ We use the concept of martyr in its simplest meaning: emerging out of Christian terminology, a 'witness of God' according to the etymology, signifying the one who suffers the worst torments because of their faith, resulting in death. His exemplary behavior is emphasized in detriment to his 'failure' which leads to his sacrifice. Thus, it is a person who dies, who suffers in the name of a cause (ROBERT, Paul. *Le nouveau petit Robert: dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française*. Texte remanié et amplifié sous la direction de Josette Rey-Debove et Alain Rey. Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2002, p.1580 - my translation).

²² BOZZETTI, Roberto. Uma tipologia da canção no imediato pós-tropicalismo. In: VIEIRA, André Soares (Org.). Literatura, outras artes & cultura das mídias. *Letras*, Santa Maria, RS, Programa de Pós Graduação em Letras (PPGL), Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM), n.34, p.133-146, jan./jun. 2007. Available at: www.ufsm.br/mletras/arquivos/LETRAS/LETRAS_34/revista34.pdf. Accessed on: July 2, 2010.

²³ *PoliCampus*. Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos. 25º aniversário. Março de 1973 (Arquivo dos DAs da FFCH/UFBA).

²⁴ DOUZOU, Laurent. La constitution du mythe de la résistance. In: FRANCK, Christiane (Dir.). *La France de 1945: résistances, retours, renaissances*. Actes du colloque de Caen. Caen: Presses Universitaires de Caen, 1996, p.77.

²⁵ It is interesting to cite a statement obtained in 1968 by Dops: “Jaime Pereira dos Santos making his statement says: that he had known the student Edson Luiz Lima Souto since he had started to frequent the *Instituto Cooperativo de Ensino* (Cooperative Teaching Institute), which was beside the *Restaurante Central dos Estudantes*; this occurred six months ago; that at the beginning Edson Luiz did not sleep there; around the end of December he began to sleep there; that various times he had seen the student leaders who frequented the restaurant throw Edson Luiz out of the place, saying that he could not stay there; that Edson alleged that he was a student and how nowhere to sleep, so his presence there came to be tolerated...” (DOPS SI n. Sp/12 on 23.04.1968. Information - APERJ. Fundo Polícia Política setor estudantil. Notação 37. p.133).

²⁶ According to Raoul Girardet, the political myth can be seen as a confabulation, deformation or also an interpretation that objectively refuses reality. As the narration of legendary facts the political myth exercises an explanatory function, providing a certain number of keys to understand the present. A system of explanation and mobilizing message. For greater information about this question, see: GIRARDET, Raoul. *Mythes et mythologies politiques*. Paris: Seuil, 1986.

²⁷ LAVABRE, Marie-Claire. Du poids et du choix du passe: lecture critique du “syndrome de Vichy”. In: PESCHANSKI, Denis; POLLAK, Michael; ROUSSO, Henry (Dir.). *Histoire politique et sciences sociales*. Paris: Institut d’Histoire du Temps Present, 1991. p.181. (Cahiers de l’Institut du temps Présent, n.18).

²⁸ DUVIGNAUD, Jean. Préface. In: HALBWACHS, Maurice. *La mémoire collective*. 2. ed. Paris: PUF, 1968, p.XIII.

²⁹ It is understood here that memory uses symbolic images and constructions from the past, which are recorded in our sensibility (GENSBURGER, Sarah, Les figures du juste et du résistant et l’évolution de la mémoire historique française de l’occupation, cit., p.293). Marie-Claire Lavabre suggests as a ‘memorial norm’ the tendency towards a ‘homogenization of representations’ with a meaning for present society and based on the social uses of the past (*Le fil rouge: sociologie de la mémoire communiste*. Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 1994.)

³⁰ ECHTERNKAMP, Jörg. Guerre totale, conflits de memoire et culte des morts em RFA pendant la guerre froide. *Vingtième Siècle: Revue d’Histoire*, n.104, p.101, Oct./Dec. 2009.