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**A Patchwork Way to Democracy: Brazil's Struggles to Remember its Past and the Role of Arts
to Create an Anti-Authoritarian Culture**

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‘a frame is not what is being shown, but what is hidden’, Eyal Sivan

This research was neither the beginning nor the end of a journey, but I hope it can also be a means to deliver some value to the world, considering the immense value it has added to myself. Therefore, I would like to express my gratitude to the Global Campus of Human Rights, particularly to Orla Ní Cheallacháin and Inge Zwart, who provided the support needed to keep me going throughout this year, and to the University of Bucharest, represented by professors Radu Carp and my research supervisor Caterina Preda. To my family and to the friends who are my family too - they know who they are, thank you for so many moments in which I felt embraced and for being so close even when far away. To Michael, without whom this project would not have been possible, thank you, and what a privilege it was to share this adventure with you. And to the memory of my father, Paulo, who in life knew a *masterina* but not an expert, and with whom I shared the passions for politics and for Brazil.

Abstract

Abstract: The aim of this thesis is to analyse Brazil's long history with authoritarianism and investigate whether and to which extent the country succeeded to overcome the twenty one years under the military rule. A historical overview is provided in order to give visibility to a range of different elements that has impacted the country's political environment and cultural identity. The investigation continues as we understand the intrinsic elements that composed the Brazilian authoritarian regime and the governmental initiatives towards the building of democratic values, the respect for human rights and the memorialisation of past atrocities. In the final chapter, the relevant role of civil society is assessed even though the nation is still battling with a culture of violence and social fragmentation. It leads to the elaboration of the contributions brought by arts and culture in the transitioning process and whether it is a valid mechanism or not to achieve reconciliation.

Key words: Brazil, transitional justice, memory studies, latin american studies, arts and human rights

Table of Abbreviations

WWI - World War One

WWII - World War Two

U.S. - United States of America

OAS - Organization of American States

AI-5 - Institutional Act Number Five

DOI-CODI - Department of Information Operations - Center for Internal Defense Operations

SNI - National Information Service

CNV - National Truth Commission

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

CEMDP - Special Commission for the Dead and Disappeared

FHC - Fernando Henrique Cardoso

PNDH-3 - third version of the National Human Rights Program

OAB - National Bar Association of Brazil

STF - National Supreme Court

ABDFT - Association of Relatives of the Disappeared

Coup - Brazil's 1964 coup d'état

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Introduction

This research originates from many questions that intersect with memories, feelings, and concerns in understanding the reality that surrounds us. The history of Brazil is deeply marked by periods of profound political upheaval, the most significant of which was the military dictatorship that spanned from 1964 to 1985. This era was characterised by severe repression, censorship, and human rights abuses, leaving an indelible impact on the nation's collective memory and shaping its contemporary political landscape. The transitional justice process, initiated to address the legacies of the dictatorship and promote democratic values, has been complex and multifaceted, marked by both achievements and ongoing challenges. Central to this process has been the role of civil society, culture, and arts in re-signifying history, fostering public engagement, and promoting truth and reconciliation.

I believe that the starting point for understanding present-day Brazil is its past. By navigating through the events in the political and social development of the newly-born nation, such as the Old Republic and the Estado Novo, we encounter a long history of subjugation, violence, and the military order being positioned/viewed as the only possible 'saviour of the nation.' Although it was not within the scope of this research, revisiting the past led me to question whether certain countries subjected to colonialism—especially those in the Global South—will ever be able to completely decolonise and shed the remnants left behind for their independence without it being an unhealed wound.

The country entered the first decades of the 20th century stitching together the beginning of a Brazilian identity, especially through art and culture, while also experiencing unstable governance and witnessing its first dictator in the form of a populist military figure. The social fragmentation of the country, as well as the high levels of inequality that have long accompanied it, demonstrate reasons why human values are often treated individually and relativistically by much of the population. This has impacted the country's institutional order (political and judicial powers, public security, and others), which from time to time benefits from social fears, manipulating the political landscape to its advantage. It was through this scenario, international support—mainly from the United States—and support from certain civil communities in the country that the 1964 coup d'état was realised, with the military group seizing power.

Brazil then went through twenty-one years under authoritarian governance, which both aligned with and diverged from the dictatorships present in neighbouring countries through its particular characteristics. In 1979, Brazil saw the passage of the bilateral Amnesty Law approved within a context of 'opening,' meaning a negotiated transition to democratic order, and the consecration of a new federal constitution in 1988, while the country remained immersed in a long period of politics

of silence (forgetting). Although the country returned to a model of democratic governance, many questions remain about events within the authoritarian regime (considering that military and some national archives remain classified) and its legacy on the national stage. The authoritarian period seems like a ghostly companion in the country, with the continued political influence of the military group and its spread of side effects.

Important developments were made possible through transitional justice mechanisms in the country with some governmental and civil support, especially with support for the politics of memory (truth). However, both sides have proven to be volatile: civil society finds little support from the political class, and the actions implemented have limited reach. At the same time, even left-wing political coalitions in the country have been avoiding displeasing the military class ('showing respect') and maintain a non-confrontational and silent stance. Artistic and cultural production, which has been a constant in the national scene through roots of counter-narratives, marginalised voices, and political agency, has also shown a decline in interest in the topic or has turned to other, more contemporary issues.

As a researcher born in Brazil and having lived in the country for twenty-six years, the prominent presence of the dictatorial legacy reflected in the collective imaginary and political discourse in the country led to some questions about this process/subject marking the birth of this research. Has Brazil ever been truly capable of developing democratic values on its own terms, or did they never exist? What transitional justice mechanisms have been applied in Brazil, and what are the main challenges encountered in practice? Can it be said that the aspirations for their realisation are tied to a larger process of true rupture (political, economic, social, and cultural transformation)? Regarding policies of memory, truth, and justice, can success be identified considering that society remains confused and divided regarding the topic? And what role do culture and the arts play in the intergenerational transmission of memories related to past traumatic events? The aim was to explore these mentioned questions with due academic depth, although at this stage, few conclusive answers are possible, and many questions about the subject remain.

This research aims to investigate the political construction of the Brazilian state leading up to the coup d'état and the establishment of a military regime, exploring the intrinsic elements of the dictatorship and the subsequent public initiatives for transitional justice. The analysis of these mechanisms seeks to determine whether they have fulfilled the societal goals of justice, memory, and truth, which are essential for developing a historical-critical mindset and democratic values. Furthermore, by highlighting the successes and limitations of these efforts, the study seeks to underscore the importance of a comprehensive approach to transitional justice that incorporates legal, social, and cultural dimensions. Additionally, the study highlights the crucial role of civil society in

documenting and publicising the quest for truth and justice and the significant transformative power of arts and culture in mediating political sentiments and facilitating the recognition of complex historical truths as part of the tapestry of justice, memory, and reconciliation.

Ultimately, by developing this research within the framework of the sixty years since the military coup in the country and in light of recent events in the national political landscape (following the international phenomenon), with the rise of the far-right, the goal is to foster a more inclusive and resilient democratic society in Brazil, capable of confronting its past and building a different future. This endeavour requires a multifaceted approach that not only addresses the legal and political dimensions of transitional justice but also incorporates cultural and educational initiatives to ensure a comprehensive reckoning with the past. By examining the interplay between historical narratives, societal memory, and contemporary political dynamics, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Brazil as it navigates its path towards democracy.

I deeply believe that it is through the collective efforts of communities, educators, policymakers, and artists that Brazil can cultivate a robust democratic ethos that values transparency, accountability, and human rights. The lessons learned from Brazil's authoritarian past and the ongoing struggle for justice and truth serve as crucial reminders of the need for vigilance and continued advocacy in the face of emerging threats to democracy.

1. *Historical Perspectives*

a. *Brazil's 'Old Republic' (Republica Velha), 'New Republic' (Estado Novo) and the Military Trends in Brazilian Governance*

In order to delve into the following developments of Brazil's modern history and to construct a more comprehensive understanding of the key concepts brought onto this thesis, it is essential to brush on some important historical facts and a reality check present at the time preceding the military coup of 1964 in the country. Brazil's 'Old Republic' (República Velha) and 'New Republic' (Estado Novo) were periods that significantly shaped the nation's rise and long legacy of military power over the Brazilian political landscape combined with the interest of elites. The coup did not occur in a vacuum; it was the culmination of a series of socio-political tensions and crises that had been building up for decades.

After enduring with approximately 322 years as an extractivist colony (1500-1822) 'Brazil has been an independent nation since 1822'¹ and a federalist republic since 1889. The range of inequalities and power imbalance found in Brazil has been continuously marked by and deeply connected to the nation's political institutions and ruling classes in its post-colonial and post-imperial history. According to Harvard Political Review 'similar to various other countries, its many disparities are a result of a historical accumulation of exclusionary political and social institutions that hamper the adequate distribution of wealth and opportunities for all citizens'². In this interplay, Brazilian institutions tended to 'protect people at the top of the economic pyramid and make the bottom-level population extremely vulnerable'³. This will be a decisive aspect in the relationship of Brazil's population with the Estate and democratic values, as well as shared cultural perceptions.

From what would be called the Brazilian 'Old Republic' or 'First Republic' (1889-1930), two military leaders, Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca and Marshal Floriano Peixoto, were the first ones to take over leadership of the republican government while professing alignment with democratic politics, although Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca ruling (1889-1891) has been named a 'near

¹ From 1822 until 1889 the Império do Brasil (Empire of Brazil) comprised modern-day Brazil and Uruguay territories.

² "Brazil's Social Inequality Crisis: A Historical Perspective." Harvard Political Review, 2023. Available at: [Link](#)

³ Interview with Brazilian economist and Johns Hopkins University professor Filipe Campante. [Link](#)

dictatorship⁴. According to Green, the military's 'lack of confidence in real-life politicians and their belief in their own righteousness combined to make them see military intervention as necessary and good for the nation'⁵. The moment signalled the beginning of Brazilian armed forces acting as the explicit protector of constitutional order placing themselves 'above the law and order of everyday society, and thus legitimised its intervention into the political arena⁶'. The first Constitution of the Brazilian Republic was promulgated in February, 1891 envisioning Brazil as a liberal, federal republic under a presidentialist government system and mainly inspired by the United States one.

At the time, several historical factors shaped Brazil's political landscape, marked by the absence of robust democratic institutions and widespread illiteracy, facilitating the entrenchment of 'coronelismo' where personalistic and clientelist politics prevailed. The genocide of the native indigenous population in the territory and the use of land for growing crops, the extraction of precious minerals or timber, the mass import of slaves from the african continent with its abolition taking place in 1888, and the various waves of Portuguese colonization and settlement producing landowners oligarchs - these factors combined led to a power vacuum that regional elites, known as 'coronéis', quickly filled⁷. The coronéis (rural boss) wield significant local power, controlling political and economic life in their regions through patronage and coercion.

Brazil's First Republic lack of a strong central governance added to the vast dimensions of the country's territory and the generated social imbalance resulted in a decentralised political structure that further empowered these specific manifestations of private power of these local businessmen, 'an adaptation whereby the residual elements of a previously extravagant private power have been able to coexist with a political regime⁸. This coexistence was characterised by the blending of traditional oligarchic control with emerging republican institutions. Additionally, the adoption of federalism in Brazil during this period granted considerable autonomy to state governments. This federal structure allowed coronels to manipulate electoral processes effectively⁹, ensuring their continued dominance and control over local and regional politics.

⁴ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Series on Transitional Justice N. 29. Intersentia, 2023, p. 4.

⁵ "Military in Politics." *Five Centuries of Change*, Brown University Library. Available at: [Link](#)

⁶ Kruijt, Dirk. "Politicians in Uniform: Dilemmas about the Latin American Military." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, no. 61, December 1996, pp. 7–19.

⁷ Roniger, Luis. "Caciquismo and Coronelismo: contextual dimensions of patron brokerage in México and Brazil." *Latin American Research Review* 22.2 (1987): 71-99.

⁸ Leal, Victor Nunes. *Coronelismo: The Municipality and Representative Government in Brazil*. Translated by June Henfry, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 1.

⁹ Roniger, Luis. "Caciquismo and Coronelismo: contextual dimensions of patron brokerage in México and Brazil." *Latin American Research Review* 22.2 (1987): 71-99. P.81

In the first two decades of the 20th century, meanwhile ‘a growing urban working class, the rise of a new industrial elite, and the expansion of certain segments of the urban middle class’¹⁰ and cross-border conflicts (including 1929 Stock Market Crash) were affecting Brazil, groups of military leaders sharing critical views on civilian government and sustaining ideas of an interventional policy inaugurate the *nationalist military movement* in the country ‘which viewed the military as a key tool of development, modernization, and national unity’¹¹. It laid the groundwork for the military’s increasing and consistent influence in Brazilian politics.

The nationalist military movement in place at the time was responsible for the proposing of the universal conscription law (Obligatory Military Service Law) made mandatory in 1906, in which every male is subjected to military service in the country, renamed Lei do Serviço Militar (Military Service Act) in 1964 and in force until present time. It is important to mention that the military institutions were - and remain being, for a relevant share of the country’s population an appealing opportunity to guarantee access to formal education, playing a role of a social leveller for some aiming to gain recognition and grow in the social hierarchy: ‘for the middle classes, military service was seen as a way to spread their virtuous values to the population and lead to the desired social leveling of such groups’¹². Olavo Bilac, Brazilian controversial scholar and journalist, in 1915 classified it as ‘the complete triumph of democracy’¹³.

Internal disagreements among various military factions and dissatisfaction with the prevailing policies led to significant tensions in Brazil during this period. The state's approach of trading ‘social benefits and labour rights for political access and support’¹⁴ at the time exacerbated these conflicts. Populist politicians leveraged these social benefits to gain the favour of the working class, while military officers grew increasingly frustrated with their diminishing influence. This struggle intensified the rift between populist leaders and military officials, leading to a series of revolts and widespread instability. The economic decline further fueled the discontent of a newly emerging middle class, who were increasingly dissatisfied with their economic prospects and the political turmoil. This volatile environment set the stage for heightened political confrontations and a more polarised society.

¹⁰ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Series on Transitional Justice N. 29. Intersentia, 2023. p. 6

¹¹ "Military in Politics." *Five Centuries of Change*, Brown University Library. Available at: [Link](#)

¹² Ferraz, Francisco César Alves. "The Brazilian military service and preparation for the Second World War." *Brasiliana: Journal for Brazilian Studies* 10.2. P. 183

¹³ Bilac, A. "A defesa nacional." In "The House, the Street, and the Barracks: Reform and Honorable Masculine Social Space in Brazil, 1864-1945." *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 76, no. 3, 1996, pp. 439–474. Available at: [Link](#)

¹⁴ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Series on Transitional Justice N. 29. Intersentia, 2023. p. 7

In 1930 Brazil would know its first dictatorial regime. The 14th President of Brazil Getúlio Dornelles Vargas, a lawyer dismissed from the national army and son of a military general, marked the beginning of the new Estado Novo (New Republic) era and remained a total of fifteen-years in power (1930-1945) firstly as provisional chief, then as elected president and finally taking the form of a populist dictator. He was ‘the sole commander of a civilian dictatorship, backed by the armed forces, and sustained by populist policies’¹⁵. Later in Brazil’s political history (1950) the former dictator ‘reemerged as a prominent political force when he ran for president as the candidate of the Brazilian Labor Party’¹⁶ and through a free and secret ballot was democratically elected the 17th president of Brazil.

*b. The Path to the 1964 Coup: National and International
Political Frameworks*

The 1950s were a transformative period for Brazil, characterised by significant economic growth, social change, and political dynamics that laid the groundwork for the events of the 1960s and beyond. The decade epitomised the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961) and his vision of accelerating Brazil's progress through industrialization and modernization of the country. With a political slogan ‘50 years in 5’ Kubitschek's Plano de Metas (Target Plan)¹⁷ included the construction of highways, power plants, and the new capital city, Brasília, which was inaugurated in 1960. During that time, the fostered governance principles of urbanisation and economic expansion were made possible through foreign investment resulting in an increasing national foreign debt and inflation.

The large-scale industrial and infrastructural incentives accelerated the expansion of cities and the migration of people from rural to urban areas in search of opportunities. This movement reinforced long standing social inequalities in the country: Some segments of society grew as a new urban middle class and benefited from economic comfort whereas many rural and urban poor remained marginalised and the hierarchies between a white wealthy elite and black impoverished masses became more pronounced. Forging a national identity ‘depended upon high levels of denial: the misery of the interior, the poverty of most town dwellers, and the extraordinary lack of commitment to any institutionalised form of public welfare’¹⁸ and Brazil emerged from Estado Novo ‘with a profoundly

¹⁵ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. p. 422

¹⁶ Colomer, Josep M. *Political Institutions: Democracy and Social Choice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 111

¹⁷ Maram, Sheldon. "Juscelino Kubitschek and the politics of exuberance, 1956-1961." *Luso-Brazilian Review* 27.1 (1990): 31-45. P. 33-34

¹⁸ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. p. 430

mixed-race sense of beliefs and customs'¹⁹. A large part of this pronunciation was translated and disseminated through Brazilian cultural production.

The rise of Bossa Nova, conceived from the Brazilian national musical tradition 'as a way to take traditional samba rhythms and make them current and innovative'²⁰ with influences from North American jazz, is notorious for its one-of-a-kind melody combined with poetical lyrics. As expressed in the voice of Vinicius de Moraes 'Se hoje ele é branco na poesia / Ele é negro demais no coração'²¹ (If today it is white in poetry / It is deeply black at heart) referring to the origins of samba from the black communities in Bahia state which was reinvented as Bossa Nova by Rio de Janeiro's white middle class. Born in Rio in the late 1950's, Bossa Nova 'mark the dawn of a new Brazil - an urban, modernising society leaving behind its colonial past, open to the future and looking out at the world'²².

Brazilian cinema was also evolving at the time and gained its first international recognition sought to address social issues and portray the realities of Brazilian life under influences of post-WWII Italian neorealism and the French Nouvelle Vague cinema movements. In 1952 two congresses, the first São Paulo Congress of Brazilian Cinema and the first National Congress of Brazilian Cinema, took place in order to discuss new ideas for the production of national films, initiating the Cinema Novo movement. The movement produced a generation of filmmakers connecting 'art, violence and history, used as a means to explain Brazil'²³. These ideas can be found well represented in the film *Rio, 40 Graus* (Rio, 40 degrees, 1955), by Nelson Pereira dos Santos - the first filmmaker to depict Brazil's reality of poverty on the screen, abandoning the Hollywood aesthetic and converting into the language of film that 'underdevelopment must be identified in order to be confronted'²⁴.

In the early 1960s the political instability and economic challenges fueled one more time social unrest and the heightening of tensions in the country. President João Goulart, who took office in 1961 after the resignation of President Jânio Quadros, faced a deeply divided nation. Goulart's administration was characterised by its push for progressive reforms, including land redistribution (*reforma agrária*), improved labour rights, and educational enhancements²⁵, which were

¹⁹ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. p. 436

²⁰ "The Origins of Bossa Nova." *The Brazilian Report*, 8 July 2019. Available at: [Link](#)

²¹ Lyrics of the song 'Samba da Bênção'. Composed by: Baden Powell / Vinicius de Moraes.

²² "Bossa Nova." BBC Media Centre, 2013. Available at: [Link](#)

²³ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. p. 478

²⁴ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. p. 477

²⁵ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. p. 492

encapsulated in his Basic Reforms (Reformas de Base) agenda. However, these initiatives were highly polarising. The increasing social disparity continued as the country's economy was battling with inflation, stagnation, and a steadily growing national debt.

Goulart's attempts to address these economic problems through state intervention and progressive policies were supported by the working class and leftist groups meanwhile vehemently opposed by conservative political factions, business elites, and the military group allied in a political conservative agenda and shared anti-communist sentiment. Various groups were mobilised to demand changes: Peasant leagues advocated for land reforms, urban labour unions pushed for better working conditions, and student movements called for educational and social reforms²⁶. These movements raised fears among the bourgeois elite and middle classes who were alarmed by the influence of leftist ideologies influencing Brazil and arguing the reforms were veering the country towards socialism.

The geopolitical dynamics at that time played a significant role in the success of the coup of 1964 in Brazil. The Cold War context, with the United States and the Soviet Union vying for global influence and Latin America was a crucial battleground in this ideological struggle, with the U.S. keen on preventing the spread of communism in its side of the hemisphere, particularly after the 1959 Cuban Revolution. President John F. Kennedy in 1961 initiated the 'Alliance for Progress', a program aimed to promote economic cooperation and to prevent the spread of communism in Latin America through economic aid and development projects. A U.S. report stated that 'the objective of the communists was to convert the Latin American social revolution into a Marxist attack on the United States'²⁷. Therefore, it also provided a network for greater U.S. involvement in the internal affairs of Latin American countries and their willingness to support authoritarian regimes as long as it aligned with its anti-communist stance.

Also, Operation Brother Sam was a U.S. contingency plan to provide logistical and material support to the Brazilian military, including the provision of fuel, ammunition, and other supplies in anticipation of the coup²⁸. Another geopolitical framework was the Organization of American States (OAS) - a regional organisation established in 1948 aiming to promote regional solidarity and cooperation among its member states within the Americas, and its entity the Inter-American Defense Board focusing on defence and military cooperation. As neighbouring countries,

²⁶ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. p. 494

²⁷ DeWitt, John. "The Alliance For Progress: Economic Warfare In Brazil (1962-1964)." *Journal of Global South Studies* 26.1 (2009): 57. P. 58

²⁸ Parker, Phyllis R. "O papel dos Estados Unidos no golpe de Estado de 31 de março." *Civilização Brasileira* Rio de Janeiro (1977) 1964.

such as Paraguay, by 1964 were already under military dictatorial rule or on the making of it (1954, in Paraguay; in 1964, in Bolivia and Brazil; in 1973, in Chile and Uruguay; and in 1976 in Argentina²⁹), this wholesome landscape facilitated cooperation between various military groups in the South Latin American states with shared intelligence and strategies to curb the influence of what were perceived as leftist threats³⁰.

The military's adeptness at forming alliances with business and conservative sectors was equally crucial in the success of the coup and the subsequent establishment of a long-term authoritarian regime in Brazil. At a time when '75% of Brazil's population was illiterate and over 95% were followers of the Catholic Church'³¹, conservative politicians, landowners and members of the Catholic Church were alarmed by Goulart's progressive policies. That smoothed the path for the military to capitalise on their fears, presenting themselves as protectors of order, traditional values and private property. Many civil organisations participated in public campaigns to garner support for the military intervention, as seen per example in the March of the Family with God for Freedom (Marcha da Família com Deus pela Liberdade) when on March 19, 1964 over 500.000 people went to the streets in São Paulo city as part of a popular, religious and conservative movement and 'against the labour-oriented structural reform plans announced by Goulart'³². According to Barbosa, 'at that point that the leaders, who had long since been plotting the coup, realised it was the right moment'.

By March of 1964 the situation reached a boiling point when President Goulart's speech to a large rally in Rio de Janeiro advocating for his reform agenda and expressing solidarity with labour unions and leftist groups, granted momentum for conservatives and the military to take over control of the government. On March 31, 1964, military troops, led by General Olímpio Mourão Filho, started moving from Minas Gerais towards Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo encountering little resistance and consuming a swift and largely bloodless coup. The easy victory of the conspirators is still an ongoing debate between historians³³. What is known is that no relevant political resistance from the government in power or anyone else from the left opposition took such initiative.

²⁹ "Operação Condor e ditaduras na América Latina: entenda." Politize, 24 June 2022. Available at: [Link](#)

³⁰ This partnership established between the countries was later made official in 1975 through Operation Condor, an international repressive pact signed in the Chilean capital with the presence of representatives of the information services of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay and created to prosecuting and punishing people who demonstrated any behaviour in opposition to these dictatorships. 'The operation received intense support from the USA, which developed and disseminated the National Security Doctrine (DSN)'. [Link](#)

³¹ "Anatomy of a coup d'état: The United States' active participation in a president's deposition." Agência Brasil, 31 March 2014. Available at: [Link](#)

³² "What is Left of Bolsonaroism: The Many Faces of the Brazilian Far-Right" EURAC Research, Science Blogs. 14 May 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

³³ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. Brazil: A biography. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 511

c. *The Twenty-One Years of Absolutism*

The twenty-one-year military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985) was a complex interplay of authoritarian control, economic strategies and political repression marked by ‘the emergency powers, repression, controlled public information, and a conservative development and modernization economic plan’³⁴. The Brazilian absolutist system was built on traditional components of military absolutist regimes (suppression of political opposition, widespread censorship, and human rights abuses) added to attributes of its own kind. Throughout a ‘hybrid politics of domination endured by blending an engrained authoritarianism with vestiges of democratic legality’³⁵, the regime era profoundly affected and continues on impacting Brazil’s political landscape.

After a quick movement to consolidate their position in power, the military regime started implementing a series of authoritarian measures: Four hundred mandates had been annulled until March 1967 and ‘what remained of the Congress participated in the indirect election, for which there was only one candidate’³⁶ proving their pact with the regime. Defined by a ‘succession of generals exercising the presidency with imperial powers’³⁷, the military executed their control through institutional acts (Atos Institucionais), particularly Institutional Act Number Five (AI-5) in 1968, suspending constitutional guarantees, abolishing existing political parties, dissolving the National Congress, and censoring the media; purging any elements perceived as leftist or regime-dissident from the national institutions. AI-5 gave the appointed president the power to rule by decree and marked the height of political repression.

The dictatorship also engaged in widespread human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests, torture, forced disappearances, and extrajudicial killings. The DOI-CODI (Department of Information Operations - Center for Internal Defense Operations), the National Information Service (SNI) and others, played central roles in these abuses. According to Brazil’s National Truth Commission (2011-2014) report, estimated numbers suggest that around 191 people were murdered and 243 went

³⁴ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 516-517

³⁵ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Series on Transitional Justice N. 29. Intersentia, 2023. p. 10

³⁶ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 513

³⁷ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 517

missing³⁸ for political reasons, 208 of which never found³⁹. Thousands more were imprisoned, tortured, or exiled with around 50,000 people arrested, ‘7,367 indicted and 10,034 affected in the investigation phase, in 707 cases in the Military Court for crimes against national security’⁴⁰.

Recent developments point to a criticism regarding the work and outcomes of the National Truth Commission reproducing ‘the exclusion and discrimination of the ruling class against peasants and indigenous people’⁴¹. A military report from 1967 (the Figueiredo Report) found in 2013 documented mass murders, ill-treatment, slave labour, women and girls forced into prostitution by landowners and state agents throughout more than 130 indigenous reserves during the authoritarian regime⁴². Moreover, the research project ‘A resistência camponesa à ditadura militar’ (Peasant resistance to military dictatorship) led by the Universidade de Brasília has shown so far a number of ‘1,654 peasants were killed or disappeared from the 1964 coup until the promulgation of the Constitution in 1988’⁴³ from a total of at least 16,578 peasants ‘victims of some type of political repression’ in the period 1964-1988 in various forms, from murder to imprisonment, from physical attacks to attempted murder’⁴⁴. For these reasons, much of the data and information relating to the dictatorship period is still estimated.

Despite strict censorship of the media, including newspapers and television, and tight repression of literature, music, theatre, and cinema, Brazilian creativity continued to thrive in opposition to the regime. By raising awareness about social issues and inspiring political stands, artists and musicians devised ingenious ways to challenge authoritarianism through cultural expression and played a crucial role in Brazil’s both historical and cultural legacies from that period. On the grounds of its international acclaim, ‘arts were a thorn in the dictatorship’s side’⁴⁵ as they grasped that arresting intellectuals and silencing artists turned out to be a troublesome and laborious task.

³⁸ “Comissão da Verdade, criada para apurar crimes da ditadura militar, faz 10 anos” CNN Brasil, 17 May 2022. Available at: [Link](#)

³⁹ “Comissão identifica 421 mortos e desaparecidos durante a ditadura” El País Brasil, 13 November 2014. Available at: [Link](#)

⁴⁰ Araújo, Maria Paula, Pimentel da Silva, Izabel, Reis dos Santos, Desiree. “Ditadura militar e democracia no Brasil : história, imagem e testemunho” 1. ed. - Rio de Janeiro : Ponteio, 2013. P. 27

⁴¹ “60 anos do golpe militar: estudo aponta 1654 camponeses mortos e desaparecidos na ditadura” Brasil de Fato. 22 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁴² Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. Brazil: A biography. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 532

⁴³ “60 anos do golpe militar: Estudo aponta 1654 camponeses mortos e desaparecidos na ditadura” Apublica. 21 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁴⁴ “60 anos do golpe militar: Estudo aponta 1654 camponeses mortos e desaparecidos na ditadura” Apublica. 21 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁴⁵ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. Brazil: A biography. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 534

When the Tropicália movement emerged, Brazil's military dictatorship and left-wing ideologies both wielded significant influence. Led by musicians from Bahia state like Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and Gal Costa and later on moving to the cities of Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro where intellectual partnerships within a range of artists were shared, the result was a brew of traditional Brazilian styles with international rock-pop influences as an expression of sonic anarchism - or revolution, of strong opposition to the dictatorship⁴⁶. 1968 album *Tropicália: ou Panis et Circencis* is regarded as the movement's musical manifesto as well as the song "É Proibido Proibir" ("It is Forbidden to Forbid") 'composed by Caetano in 1968, which was one of the darkest years of the military dictatorship, with the creation of Institutional Act Number 5 (AI-5), which censored culture and the press'⁴⁷. To be a tropicalist (tropicalista) meant to reject both the conservative patriotism of the military and the ineffectual bourgeois anti-imperialism of the left, considering themselves 'an anarchic attitude toward the world and toward society'⁴⁸.

A core principle of Tropicália was the antropofagia. Originally proposed by poet Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 *Manifesto Antropófago* and further developed by the tropicalistas in the 1960s⁴⁹, the antropofagia is a form of cultural 'cannibalism' that promoted the incorporation of diverse influences from different times, places, and categories to create something distinctly Brazilian. This approach blurred the lines between high and low art forms, as well as between prestigious and marginalised artistic and political expressions, distancing itself from the previous Bossa Nova style. Some members of the Tropicália movement were arrested or tortured while others voluntarily escaped into exile in order to get away from repression.

Also disregarding the constraints, filmmakers persisted and gained international recognition through Cinema Novo (1960-1972) in a cultural response and archive tool against the authoritarianism of the military dictatorship. The film movement that emerged in the previous decade in Brazil, aligned itself with the revolutionary spirit of other Third Cinema movements worldwide portrayed by its emphasis on social realism and political denunciation. As a crucial platform for artistic resistance Cinema Novo evolved to a gritty, innovative style 'to define a truly Brazilian form of expression in film'⁵⁰. Often employing non-professional actors and on-location shooting, it depicted

⁴⁶ "Ditadura Militar no Brasil" Politize. 31 March 2021. Available at: [Link](#)

⁴⁷ "60 anos do golpe: 7 músicas para entender a ditadura no Brasil". Opovo, 31 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁴⁸ Dunn, Christopher, and Caetano Veloso. "The Tropicalista Rebellion." *Transition* 70 (1996): 116-138. P. 122

⁴⁹ Dunn, Christopher. "Brutality Garden: Tropicalia and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture" The University of North Carolina Press; 1st New edition. October 15, 2001. pp. 276.

⁵⁰ Paranaguá, Paulo Antonio. "Cinema Novo": a cultural revolution on the screen". *The UNESCO Courier: a window open on the world*, XXXIX, 12, p. 33-36, illus. (UNESCO Digital Library). Available at: [Link](#)

the stark realities of Brazilian life in original creations and contributed to ‘the national debate with an acuteness and lucidity seldom achieved on film’⁵¹. Filmmakers like Glauber Rocha, Nelson Pereira dos Santos, and Ruy Guerra used their films to expose the injustices perpetrated by the regime and criticise the socio-economic inequalities exacerbated by authoritarian rule. Rocha's seminal work "Terra em Transe" (Earth in Trance, 1967), for example, offered a poignant allegory of political corruption and the struggle for power in Latin America.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s ‘the situation in Brazil was portrayed in terms of two contrasting metaphors: ‘economic miracle’ and ‘years of lead’ (*anos de chumbo*)’⁵². While the country was seeing economic advancements (state-owned enterprises, influx of foreign capital, and high GDP growth), this economic prosperity came at a high social and political cost, enduring profound suppression and suffering. Over time, the combination of international human rights pressures, shifts in U.S. foreign policy, economic dependencies, and domestic economic crises created a context in which the Brazilian military regime found it increasingly difficult to maintain its authoritarian grip without reforms.

The economic instability eroded public confidence in the regime and increased social reactions. Labour movements showing increasing worker dissatisfaction and organising strikes and labour protests fueled the growing opposition to the military, particularly in the industrialised regions of São Paulo - exemplified by the metalworkers' strikes led by future president Luiz Inácio da Silva (Lula)⁵³. Broad segments of Brazilian society, including intellectuals, artists, students, and even some sectors of the business community galvanised the assembly of civil society in the movement *Diretas Já* (Direct Elections Now), campaign in the early 1980s with massive rallies and widespread public support for direct presidential elections, highlighting the demand for democratic reforms and increasing pressure on the regime⁵⁴.

The situation ignited a significant debate among politicians and businessmen about the need for a political transition in Brazil. Recognizing the mounting pressures and the potential for widespread unrest, these influential groups began to advocate for a carefully managed shift towards democracy, securing a ‘controlled policy of openness to democracy should be crafted to ensure that a

⁵¹ Paranaguá, Paulo Antonio. "Cinema Novo": a cultural revolution on the screen". The UNESCO Courier: a window open on the world, XXXIX, 12, p. 33-36, illus. (UNESCO Digital Library). Available at: [Link](#)

⁵² Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the tightrope. Series on Transitional Justice N. 29. Intersentia, 2023. P. 15

⁵³ "Ditadura Militar no Brasil" Politize. 31 March 2021. Available at: [Link](#)

⁵⁴ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. Brazil: A biography. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 558

change of power could be carried out in a safe manner (...) without any institutional risks⁵⁵. This strategy aimed to mitigate any potential institutional risks and prevent the kind of upheaval that could destabilise the nation, eventually risking accountability measures for the crimes committed in the course of the regime. By advocating for a gradual and supervised transition, it was justified to balance the demands for greater democratic participation with the need to maintain economic stability and social order.

Additionally, internal military divisions were a key contributor to what was later known as ‘abertura’ (opening). Within the military, there were significant internal divisions between hardliners, who favoured maintaining strict authoritarian control, and moderates, who advocated for gradual political liberalisation⁵⁶. Hardliners were determined to preserve the regime's repressive policies and resist concessions to civilian demands, in sight that a relaxation of control could undermine the military's authority and expose them to retribution for past abuses. In contrast, moderates, including influential figures like Presidents Ernesto Geisel and João Figueiredo, recognised that continued repression had become unsustainable and risked provoking a violent backlash from an increasingly restive society⁵⁷. The abertura process was initiated by Geisel - a ‘soft opening’ for political liberalisation, when the regime progressively started to relax some of the repressive measures, including the loosening of censorship and the release of political prisoners, and limited political reforms such as the gradual restoration of political rights.

This calculated strategy by the military to ensure a tranquil transition to civilian rule preserved their political influence and prevented accreditation for most of the past abuses. The gradual transition culminated in the mid-1980s led to the re-establishment of democratic institutions and was carefully manipulated to ensure that it did not jeopardise the military's interests. The liberalisation was seen as a way to regain public support and international credibility while gradual political opening would appease social mobilised groups and prevent a revolutionary upheaval. The military retained significant influence over the judiciary, police, and other state institutions to safeguard their interests during and after the transition. The regime also manipulated the political landscape to favour pro-military parties, candidates and a moderate opposition, overseeing the reintroduction of multiparty politics and indirect elections for the presidency, ensuring that the first civilian president, José Sarney, was a trusted ally who would not seek retribution against the military⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the tightrope*. Series on Transitional Justice N. 29. Intersentia, 2023. P. 15

⁵⁶ “Ditadura Militar no Brasil” Politize. 31 March 2021. Available at: [Link](#)

⁵⁷ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. *Brazil: A biography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 561

⁵⁸ Velasco, Sebastião; Cruz, Carlos Estevam Martins. “De Castello a Figueiredo: uma incursão na pré-história da "abertura". In: SORJ, Bernardo; ALMEIDA, Marília. *Sociedade política no Brasil pós-61*. Centro Edelstein de Pesquisas Sociais, 2008.

President Figueiredo continued this trajectory and initiated steps toward the election of a civilian president, piloting the passage of the Amnesty Law in 1979: A bilateral amnesty agreement allowing political exiles to return and prisoners to be released that also provided amnesty for military personnel involved in human rights abuses, protecting them from prosecution. According to Mezarobba ‘it is clear, therefore, that the Brazilian transition was handled so as to avoid what are now known as transitional justice mechanisms from being adopted at the start of the civilian government’⁵⁹. The question regarding the side-effects resulting from the Amnesty Law will be further elaborated at a later moment; At this point, it is enough to mention that the content of the Amnesty Law remains fully in force.

The military regime ended in 1985 with the indirect election of Tancredo Neves followed by the direct election of his vice-president, José Sarney, after Neves' untimely death, and the former president Figueiredo leaving the presidential palace by a back door and addressing the Brazilian people ‘I want you to forget me’⁶⁰. The new civilian government oversaw the drafting of a new democratic constitution in 1988 which is in use to this date.

2. *A Brazilian Way of Transitioning: The Role of State and Non-State Actors*

a. *The Skeleton of an Authoritarian Regime*

The characteristics of Brazil's dictatorial regime left a profound impact on the country's political and social sceneries even after the formal transition to democratic rule enshrined in the Constitution of 1988. The authoritarian governance lasted for twenty-one years⁶¹ marked by state-led economic policies and severe repression of political dissent. The military junta that ruled Brazil not only implemented ‘the suppression of public freedoms and the state practice of serious human rights violations, with widespread repression against citizens seen as opponents of the authoritarian regime, through arrests, forced disappearances, torture, exiles, homicides, banishments, rapes, among other forms of violence’⁶² as it has at the same time worn a democratic costume. Dissecting these

⁵⁹ Mezarobba, Glenda. “Between Reparations, Half Truths And Impunity: The Difficult Break With The Legacy Of The Dictatorship In Brazil”. SUR International Journal on Human Rights. v. 7 • n. 13 • dec. 2010 P. 12

⁶⁰ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. Brazil: A biography. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 537

⁶¹ Scholars do not agree about the official end of the regime. Some would argue it ended in 1988 with the Constitution, others would say 1989 with the first direct presidential elections, but the majority agrees on 1985 as a final mark.

⁶² Soares, Inês Virgínia Prado, Quinalha, Renan Honório. "Lugares de memória no cenário brasileiro da justiça de transição." Revista Internacional de Direito e Cidadania 10 (2011): 75-86. PP. 2-3

characteristics is crucial to understand their enduring effects and comprehending the complexities of Brazil's contemporary political environment, and the ongoing struggle for justice and reconciliation.

The military justified the coup as a necessary measure to save Brazil from communism and restore order. This milestone in the country's history was made possible by a combination of (geo) political casualties in addition to a careful and sophisticated strategy mastered by influential elites and the military group, reason why professor Aarão Reis pinned the term as a 'civil-military coup'⁶³ (Golpe Civil-Militar). The successful new political system put in place under the control of the armed forces exercising the country's governance was heavily supported by the Brazilian aristocratic and business classes. This collaboration agreement was signed between the military and sectors of society which saw the increasing coalitions amongst trade unions and rural workers to pose government opposition as a threat to their affairs of industrialization and economic growth. Moreover, there was a stirred urban middle class acting to protect their status⁶⁴. Among the main civil supporters of the *coup* were urban and rural businesspeople, some religious leaders, parliamentarians and bureaucratic elites mainly in the Judiciary.

Schneider points out to two key characteristics of the military regime in Brazil that influenced the ulterior memory work: 'its attempt to appear democratic while governing by dictatorial means (Smith, 1997: 187; Aquino, 2000: 275), and its long period of rule, which ended with a gradual and 'peaceful' transition'⁶⁵. I propose expanding the first point further and break it down into four elements of the Brazilian dictatorship that were pivotal for its aftermath: the two-party system, the maintenance of the National Congress, the economic emphasis and the multi representation. The long negotiations for an agreed transition to democracy will be further discussed at a later time.

The military dictatorship in Brazil instituted a two-party system 'making room for the construction of two new parties: Aliança Renovadora Nacional (Arena) and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), which aimed to ensure political support and opposition to the regime'⁶⁶. This system was designed to create a facade of political pluralism while ensuring the military's firm control over the political landscape. ARENA served as the regime's official party, endorsing and supporting the government's policies, while MDB was allowed to function as a token opposition, providing a controlled outlet for dissent without threatening the regime's stability.

⁶³ "Ditadura militar ou civil-militar? Saiba o que está por trás dos nomes". Agência Brasil, 31 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁶⁴ Schwarcz, Lilia M., and Heloisa M. Starling. Brazil: A biography. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018. P. 508, 509

⁶⁵ Schneider, Nina. "Breaking the 'silence' of the military regime: New politics of memory in Brazil." Bulletin of Latin American Research 30, no. 2 (2011): 198-212.

⁶⁶ Bringhenti, Taiane F. Da Silva, and Lara Agustina Sosa Márquez. "Fragments of an authoritarian state: the impact of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) on political daily life." P. 2

This bifurcated party structure was part of the regime's broader strategy to legitimise its rule domestically and internationally by simulating democratic processes. However, real political power remained centralised in the hands of the military leaders, with severe restrictions on civil liberties, freedom of the press, and political participation. The tightly controlled political environment under this two-party system stifled genuine democratic discourse and maintained the authoritarian status quo, reflecting the regime's overarching goal of perpetuating its dominance while mitigating internal and external criticisms.

Secondly, the figure of the National Congress was kept under Brazil's military dictatorship and existed primarily as a facade to maintain an illusion of democratic governance 'with "bionic" senators — indicated by generals without democratic election procedures'⁶⁷ and with a 'large part of the politicians gestured in support of the military'⁶⁸. Despite the formal continuation of the legislative body, its powers were severely curtailed by the regime. The introduction of Institutional Act Number Five (AI-5) in 1968 epitomised this erosion of legislative authority, granting the president the power to rule by decree, dissolve Congress, and override constitutional rights.

The Congress, when allowed to function, was heavily manipulated to ensure it did not pose a threat to the military's control. Legislative seats were often filled with regime loyalists⁶⁹ or those coerced into compliance, carving into the legislative body a decorative figure. The military's grip extended to the electoral process, with significant manipulation and restrictions ensuring that only pre-approved candidates could participate. This orchestrated political theatre was intended to present a veneer of normalcy and legitimacy, both to the Brazilian populace and the international community, while effectively neutralising any substantive legislative oversight or challenge to the dictatorship's authority. Consequently, the National Congress during this period served more as a tool of the regime's authoritarian governance rather than a true democratic institution.

Thirdly, Brazil's military dictatorship implemented a series of economic strategies centred on modernization and industrialization, achieving initial success through what became known as the 'Brazilian Miracle' from 1968 to 1973. During this period the country experienced

⁶⁷ Teles, Edson, Quinalha, Renan. "Scopes and limits to the transitional justice discourse in Brazil." *Legacies of state violence and transitional justice in Latin America: a Janus-faced paradigm* (2015) P. 14

⁶⁸ Bringhenti, Taiane F. Da Silva, and Lara Agustina Sosa Márquez. "Fragments of an authoritarian state: the impact of the brazilian civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) on political daily life." P. 7

⁶⁹ Klein, Herbert S., and Francisco Vidal Luna. *Brazil, 1964-1985: the military regimes of Latin America in the Cold War*. Yale University Press, 2017.

annual GDP growth rates of around 10-11%⁷⁰ and witnessed rapid economic growth driven by state-led large-scale development projects, with a strong emphasis on infrastructure (Trans-Amazonian Highway, Itaipu Dam), industrialisation and urbanisation, facilitated through significant foreign investment.

A key aspect of this strategy was the reduction of international debt through targeted industrial policies that promoted export-oriented growth and import substitution. State-owned enterprises were pivotal in sectors like steel, petrochemicals, and energy, ensuring that strategic industries remained under governmental control, creating what became known as a ‘cake’ economic policy. The reference was coined by the Minister of Finance at the time, Antonio Delfim Neto - one of the leads of the so-called ‘economic miracle’, that became famous for the quote: ‘fazer o bolo crescer, para depois dividi-lo’ (Eng: We need to make the cake grow, so we can then divide it)⁷¹. Despite these advancements, the economic policies also led to increased income inequality and set the stage for economic difficulties in the later years of the dictatorship, including high inflation and mounting external debt.

The fourth element is its multi representative character. Unlike many authoritarian regimes that revolve around a single dominant personality, Brazil's military dictatorship was characterised by a succession of leaders. In contrast to dictatorships such as Chile’s, for example, the generals governed the country alternating ‘the office of president, establishing a type of power rotation, in processes of succession in which only their peers participated’⁷² thus reflecting a multi representative nature. This structure saw different generals assume the presidency: Humberto Castelo Branco, Artur da Costa e Silva, Emílio Garrastazu Médici, Ernesto Geisel, and João Figueiredo.

Each leader's tenure would bring their own priorities with marked shifts in policies and strategies, reflecting broader interests rather than a consensus of the military group, distancing itself from the vision of a single dictator. For instance, Castelo Branco's initial focus on stabilising the economy and consolidating military power was followed by Costa e Silva's hardline approach and Médici's peak period of repression coupled with economic prosperity. Later, Geisel and Figueiredo initiated gradual political liberalisation and economic reforms aimed at transitioning from military to civilian rule⁷³. This rotation of leadership within the military hierarchy allowed for some degree of adaptability, helping the regime maintain its grip on power over two decades. However, it

⁷⁰ Sales, Camila Maria Risso, and João Roberto Martins Filho. "The economist and human rights violations in Brazil during the military dictatorship." *Contexto Internacional* 40, no. 02 (2018): 203-227. P. 211-2012

⁷¹ ‘Antonio Delfim Netto’ em ‘Os Personagens’ by Folha Uol. Available at: [Link](#)

⁷² Mezarobba, Glenda. “Between Reparations, Half Truths And Impunity: The Difficult Break With The Legacy Of The Dictatorship In Brazil”. *SUR International Journal on Human Rights*. v. 7 • n. 13 • dec. 2010 P. 9

⁷³ Soares, G.A.D.; D’Araujo, M.C.; Castro, C. “A volta aos quartéis: a memória militar sobre a abertura.” Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará, 1995. P 308

also highlighted the regime's reliance on the broader military institution rather than the charismatic authority of a singular leader, which in turn influenced the nature and stability of the dictatorship.

In conclusion, the proposed expansion of the first point into four pivotal elements of the Brazilian dictatorship - namely, the two-party system, the maintenance of the National Congress, the economic emphasis, and the multi-representation - provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the regime's enduring impact on Brazilian society. Each of these elements played a crucial role in shaping the political landscape during the dictatorship and influenced the country's trajectory toward democracy.

By examining these components in detail, we can gain a deeper insight into how the dictatorship's structures and policies have left lasting legacies that continue to affect Brazil's political, institutional, and social spheres. Furthermore, when compared to some of its neighbours who have been under military regimes, the Brazilian dictatorial regime was moderately quiet and understanding the global and domestic contexts provide indispensable elements that mirror the lasting impact of the events of that time amongst its own people. This multifaceted analysis underscores the importance of addressing the historical context to fully appreciate the contemporary challenges and opportunities in Brazil's ongoing democratic development.

b. A Kind-of Transition

The dictatorial abandonment in Brazil was a gradual and complex process marked by political negotiations, social movements, and economic challenges while trying to restructure the country and implement an unprecedented democratic framework. The Constitution of 1988 laid the foundation for the country's current institutions and fundamental principles by which the state is governed, under a coalition presidentialist system. Followed by the first direct presidential election since the dictatorship held in 1989, Fernando Collor de Mello became the first directly elected president in 29 years.

The transition from the authoritarian regime to a democratic form of government has undergone significant developments but also displays a continuous oscillating behaviour from the State and fragile progress. This process has been characterised by transactions between political forces, constitutional reforms, and fluctuating governance approaches within an heterogeneous set of discourses, norms, mechanisms, actors and practices. According to Soares and

Quinalha⁷⁴, democratic governments that succeeded the authoritarian regime - apart from rare and important exceptions, the majority has adopted 'a position of omission or inaction in relation to the serious violations of human rights that occurred during the military dictatorship' following the motto *forgive and forget* delivered through a pacifist discourse.

Fernando Henrique Cardoso's (FHC) presidency (1995-2003) marked the first time that addressing the legacy of military dictatorship grew in the priority ranking of the Brazilian government's agenda. In 1995, after increasingly pressured by members of various victims associations, the president 'was the first to officially acknowledge the murder and disappearance of dozens of regime opponents'⁷⁵ establishing the Special Commission for the Dead and Disappeared (CEMDP) for reparations [compensation payments] to victims' families, creating in 1997 the National Human Rights Secretariat to coordinate and implement policies related to the promotion and protection of human rights in Brazil. However, not only the burden of proof was taken away from the State's responsibilities and layed exclusively on the victims' families but also in 2002, three days before leaving the office, FHC issued a decree that prolonged the closure of governmental files to the public, ratified by the Brazilian congress in 2005.

Succeeded by the election of Lula as president of the republic (2003–2011), solid advancements were seen including specific measures to address past human rights violations and promote a culture of human rights. The 2006 project *Direito à Memória e à Verdade* ('Right to Memory and Truth') developed by the Special Secretariat for Human Rights in partnership with the Fundação Luterana de Diaconia, counting on the support of the Free Agency for Information, Citizenship and Education (Alice) developed forty *Pessoas Imprescindíveis* ('Important People') Memorials installed in municipalities in various Brazilian regions, toured more than sixty cities in Brazil and abroad with the photographic exhibition 'A Ditadura no Brasil 1964 – 1985' (The Dictatorship in Brazil 1964 – 1985) bringing a visual ambiance to an audience of over three million people and published in 2007 the homonymous book 'Direito à Memória e à Verdade' ('Right to Memory and Truth') which condenses 'the story of the more than 300 dead and missing people during the Years of Lead'.

Furthermore, by the time the president was serving his second presidential term, the country saw in 2009 the creation and launching of the third version of the National Human Rights Program (PNDH-3). The program outlined a comprehensive plan for truth, justice, and reparation with major culture-oriented initiatives, educational programs, monuments, museum exhibits,

⁷⁴ Soares, Inês Virgínia Prado, Quinalha, Renan. "Lugares de memória no cenário brasileiro da justiça de transição." *Revista Internacional de Direito e Cidadania* 10 (2011): 75-86. P. 2

⁷⁵ Schneider, Nina. "Bolsonaro in power: failed memory politics in post-authoritarian Brazil?." *Modern Languages Open* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1-11. P. 3

and official reports⁷⁶ and provoked an important change in norms and values since the end of authoritarianism.

For example, in PNDH3's Guideline 24 (Preservation of historical memory and public construction of truth) the creation and maintenance of museums, memorials and documentation centres about resistance to dictatorship is indicated as an action to fulfil the strategic objective of encouraging memory preservation initiatives historical and public construction of truth about authoritarian periods. One of its greatest achievements was the Centro de Referência das Lutas Políticas no Brasil (1964-1985) - Memórias Reveladas (Reference Center for Political Struggles in Brazil (1964-1985) - Memories Revealed) 'a milestone in the democratisation of access to information and is part of the context of the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'⁷⁷. In November, 2005 the Center was responsible for passing 'a decree regulating the transfer to the National Archive of the collections of the extinct National Security Council, General Investigations Commission and National Information Service, until then in the custody of the Brazilian Intelligence Agency (ABIN) and passed on to the Minister-Chief of Staff the coordination of the collection of files'⁷⁸ made available to the population.

Subsequently, the National Archive paved the way for the creation of the Amnesty Commission in Brazil. Within the scope of the Minister of State for Human Rights and Citizenship its purpose is 'of analysing amnesty requests that have unequivocal proof of the facts relating to the persecution suffered, of an exclusively political nature, as well as issuing an opinion on amnesty requests'⁷⁹. In the context of judging the requests, the Amnesty Commission also promoted the Amnesty Caravans (2008-2014). Adopted from 2008, the initiative expands the restricted limits of pecuniary reparation, promoting a figurative 'assumption of guilt by the Brazilian State before the entire society, as well as worshipping the memory of those who resisted to the dictatorship'⁸⁰. The Amnesty Caravans project has 'taken the judgement of requests made by victims to the public sphere, with sessions open to interested parties and in different regions of Brazil, normally related to the personal history and activism of the authors of the requests. The initiative, although within a context of financial reparation for victims, has a strong symbolic reparation content, either because the victim's community comes into contact with the official recognition of their situation of political and unfair persecution by

⁷⁶ Schneider, Nina, and Rebecca J. Atencio. "Reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil: The double-edged role of artistic-cultural production." *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 5 (2016): 12-28.

⁷⁷ "Memórias Reveladas" Arquivo Nacional. Available at: [Link](#)

⁷⁸ "Memórias Reveladas" Arquivo Nacional. Available at: [Link](#)

⁷⁹ "Comissão da Anistia" Ministério dos Direitos Humanos e da Cidadania. Available at: [Link](#)

⁸⁰ Soares, Inês Virgínia Prado, Quinalha, Renan. "Lugares de memória no cenário brasileiro da justiça de transição." *Revista Internacional de Direito e Cidadania* 10 (2011): 75-86. P. 3

the authoritarian regime, or because there is public request for forgiveness to the amnestied victim, made on behalf of the Brazilian State'⁸¹.

This human rights (political) endorsement can be considered a major shift in the country's policies 'from a 'politics of silence'' to a 'politics of memory''⁸² that for the first time was addressing the Brazilian society as a whole. Lamentably, the movement caused discomfort in several classes, including the armed forces discontent with the latest developments and seeking to dodge the topic of the Amnesty Law. Under (military) political influence, in December 2009 President Lula waters down the proposal for the Truth Commission⁸³.

Nonetheless, the following president of the republic Dilma Rousseff (2011-2016) left a significant human rights footprint in the country at the cost of sacrificing some of her political allies and popular support. The president, a former political prisoner who was tortured during the dictatorship, issued public apologies on behalf of the state to victims and their families. During her term, the establishment of the National Truth Commission (Comissão Nacional da Verdade - CNV) was consecrated. Working between 2011-2014 CNV worked collecting testimonies from victims, witnesses, and perpetrators, and gathering evidence related to the abuses to uncover the truth about the extent and nature of state-sponsored violence during the dictatorship period in Brazil. It is noteworthy that Brazil's National Truth Commission began its operations 'almost 30 years after the end of the dictatorship'⁸⁴, much later than similar bodies in other countries.

CNV's final report was published in 2014 with a 3,383-page and three volume size⁸⁵ containing 'a well-documented webpage and archival material (now in the Brazilian National Archives). The final report (CNV) includes a case-by-case study of 434 instances of deaths and disappearances, lists the names of 377 perpetrators (in both cases, these are conservative estimates) and, importantly, contains twenty-nine recommendations. The first recommendation stipulates that the armed forces acknowledge their responsibility for the gross human rights violations between 1964 and 1985, and the second posits the suspension of the blanket amnesty for crimes against humanity (CNV 964-5). Further suggestions include the implementation of reforms in the armed forces, law

⁸¹ Soares, Inês Virgínia Prado, Quinalha, Renan. "Lugares de memória no cenário brasileiro da justiça de transição." *Revista Internacional de Direito e Cidadania* 10 (2011): 75-86. P. 3

⁸² Schneider, Nina. "Breaking the 'silence' of the military regime: New politics of memory in Brazil." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30, no. 2 (2011): 198-212. P. 2

⁸³ Schneider, Nina. "Breaking the 'silence' of the military regime: New politics of memory in Brazil." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30, no. 2 (2011): 198-212 P. 6

⁸⁴ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the tightrope*. Series on Transitional Justice N. 29. Intersentia, 2023. P. 110

⁸⁵ The complete report can be found at: <https://www.gov.br/memoriasreveladas/pt-br/assuntos/comissoes-da-verdade/cnv>

enforcement and the criminal justice system; military education; and the separation of military and state police (recommendations 5, 6, 20; CNV 967, 971)⁸⁶.

According to Vladimir Herzog Institute, which monitors the implementation of measures by the state, after almost ten years of ‘the delivery of the final report of the National Truth Commission, Brazil has only fully complied with two of the twenty nine recommendations proposed by the collegiate’⁸⁷. On the scope of accountability, from the 377 public agents identified in the report who were involved in human rights violations during the period, ‘269 have already died without becoming defendants in court’⁸⁸.

Dilma Rousseff faced severe political and economic crises culminating in her impeachment in 2016 over charges of fiscal mismanagement. Her removal from office marked a contentious and polarising moment in Brazilian politics, with many viewing it as a politically motivated coup: ‘a ‘parliamentary coup’ (a paradoxical term) in the sense that its protagonists (politicians and protestors alike) aggregated to themselves the sovereign authority to suspend the legal order if it proved their only protection from cosmological evil. That authority did not answer to established rights to privacy, to impartial evidentiary regimes or to the separation of matters of fact from matters of law’⁸⁹. Michel Temer, her vice president, assumed the presidency, but his administration was plagued by corruption scandals and low approval ratings. The political climate was marked by widespread dissatisfaction, economic recession, and a crisis of confidence in political institutions. In this context, Jair Bolsonaro, a far-right politician and former military officer, rose to prominence with a campaign promising to tackle corruption, reduce crime, and revive the economy.

Bolsonaro’s election in 2018 reflected a dramatic shift to the right and highlighted the deep political and social divisions within the country. His tenure has been characterised by controversial policies, confrontations with the judiciary and media, and a polarising style of governance that has further intensified political tensions in Brazil. Bolsonaro has ‘staffed his cabinet with civilian and military personnel who praise violence and support his project to dismantle human rights and memory institutions. More than a third of the posts in his government, including the presidency and the vice-presidency, are staffed by former or active military personnel. In contrast to 1964, when military officers seized power without any legitimization by the Brazilian people, Bolsonaro

⁸⁶ Schneider, Nina. "Bolsonaro in power: failed memory politics in post-authoritarian Brazil?." *Modern Languages Open* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1-11. P. 3

⁸⁷ “Brasil só cumpriu plenamente duas das 29 recomendações da Comissão Nacional da Verdade” SBT News. 31 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁸⁸ “Brasil só cumpriu plenamente duas das 29 recomendações da Comissão Nacional da Verdade” SBT News. 31 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁸⁹ Ansell, Aaron. "Impeaching Dilma Rousseff: the double life of corruption allegations on Brazil's political right." *Culture, Theory and Critique* 59, no. 4 (2018): 312-331. P. 327

embarked upon the ‘militarization’ of the country after being elected in a formally democratic process⁹⁰.

The governance during his term was marked by an open and emphatical support to the past military regime making a U-turn in memory politics when ‘ordering the celebration of the 55th anniversary of the military coup’⁹¹ - called by him and his supporters as the *glorious revolution*⁹². In several instances statements that downplayed or denied the human rights abuses committed during the military dictatorship were publicly made by the president, homage to dictatorial leaders, praise for torturers, homophobic and racist remarks, threats to opponents and disregard to democratic values framing the dictatorial period as a time of order and progress. The fundings for the memory, truth and reparation policies were dramatically downsized and their access made difficult, dismantling the previous crescent moment in the country, the CEMDP created in 1995 went extinguished in 2022, and a conservative evangelical christian appointed as Minister of Family, Women and Human Rights as well as a *coup* negationist as the Minister of Education.

Bolsonaro left the presidential seat to give place to Lula's latest term (2022-2026), when the discussion and developments around the dictatorship topic have certainly improved again although not many innovations are being expected as the president has been maintaining a position on the safe side. According to G1 media outlet ‘there is a decision by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva not to provoke friction with the military’⁹³. At this point, the CEMDP received a positive political endorsement to be reactivated⁹⁴ but so far without any presidential endorsement, neither the initiative proposed by former Minister of Justice Flávio Dino to create ‘a Museum of Memory and Human Rights, focused on the period of the military dictatorship’⁹⁵ inspired by a similar project in Chile. Lula also provoked tensions and criticism from human rights movements in the country when ordering Minister of Human Rights, Silvio Almeida, to cancel an act that would remember the persecuted of the 1964 military coup at the Museum of the Republic, in Brasília, on March 31, 2024, declaring that instead of

⁹⁰ Schneider, N 2020 Bolsonaro in Power: Failed Memory Politics in Post-Authoritarian Brazil? *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 25 pp. 1–11. P. 5-6

⁹¹ Schneider, N 2020 Bolsonaro in Power: Failed Memory Politics in Post-Authoritarian Brazil? *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 25 pp. 1–11.

⁹² “Gestão Bolsonaro celebra golpe de 64 pelo quarto ano seguido” DW Brasil. 31 March 2022. Available at: [Link](#)

⁹³ “Depois de cancelar atos sobre ditadura, Lula desiste também de Museu da Memória e dos Direitos Humanos” G1 News. 19 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁹⁴ “Os “ajustes finais” para a recriação da Comissão de Mortos e Desaparecidos” Veja. 17 Mai 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁹⁵ “Depois de cancelar atos sobre ditadura, Lula desiste também de Museu da Memória e dos Direitos Humanos” G1 News. 19 March 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

dwelling on the past he is ‘going to try to move this country forward’⁹⁶. According to researcher Fabio Vitor ‘ten years ago there was a less ommissive attitude from the political class than there is now’⁹⁷.

For decades ‘Brazil was the only post-authoritarian country in South America that had neither established a truth commission nor tried state criminals for their actions during the authoritarian period, let alone reformed the military, police or judiciary’⁹⁸. The institutional reluctance to fully confront and address the legacies of its military dictatorship have evolved and also faced backlashes, with questions remaining towards the mechanisms used for it and their timely efficacy. Transitional justice in Brazil is furthermore criticised for its “logical discontinuity”⁹⁹ by alternating, without greater temporal or strategic systematisation, the development and implementation of policies on memory, truth and reparation in the country. Efforts such as the establishment of the National Truth Commission in 2011, while significant, came decades late and still face numerous challenges in implementation and follow-up. This fragmented approach has left many Brazilians with unresolved historical grievances and weakened trust in democratic institutions.

c. The Democratic Authoritarian Culture

The years following the end of military rule saw efforts to rebuild democratic institutions, address human rights abuses, and implement reforms. Despite progress, as Brazil marks sixty years since the military coup d’état of 1964, the country’s political trajectory has also been punctuated by episodes of instability, corruption scandals, and polarisation, reflecting the enduring endowments of its authoritarian past and undergoing a back-and-forth dynamic. Understanding the nuances of Brazil's post-dictatorial era requires an examination of how these authoritarian tendencies persist within its democratic framework, influencing contemporary political and social realities.

The influence of authoritarian practices is evident in the concentration of power, the position of authority still exercised by the military and enduring militarization of public security. These dynamics have created a fragile democratic environment where civil liberties are often undermined, and public trust in democratic processes remains low. Many political leaders and organisations have been reluctant to fully engage with this issue, fearing backlash or loss of support

⁹⁶ “Lula é criticado por entidades de direitos humanos após dizer que não quer ficar “remoendo” golpe militar de 64” CNN Brasil. 28 February 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁹⁷ “60 anos do golpe: a vigilância ao ativismo negro na ditadura” Podcast Café da Manhã (Folha de São Paulo). 1 April 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

⁹⁸ Schneider, Nina, “Breaking the ‘Silence’ of the Military Regime: New Politics of Memory in Brazil.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2011, pp. 198–212.

⁹⁹ McArthur, Fabiana Godinho. “Justiça de Transição: o caso brasileiro.” *MINISTÉRIO DA JUSTIÇA. Revista anistia política e justiça de transição* 7 (2012).

from certain segments of the population. As Bastos continues, ‘since the majority of Brazilians - and thus potential voters - appear to have taken little interest in such matters. Politicians have been able to easily shy away from confrontations with nostalgic defenders of the regime’¹⁰⁰.

One of the main triumphs achieved during the *abertura* process by the military leaders was the Amnesty Law (1979) granting ‘full amnesty to military officials involved in human rights violations and militant opponents of the regime alike’¹⁰¹, amnesty to political prisoners and those accused of political crimes and allowing Exiles to return to Brazil. At the time of its drafting the law was backed by popular support and seemed to the opposition to be a genuine - and temporary compromise to be settled in order to reestablish democracy in the country. Despite the fact that 1979 Amnesty Law was issued by the military regime ‘no post-1985 civilian government has annulled it since’¹⁰², remaining the subject of an ongoing debate in the judiciary, academic, political and social fields. However not being a distinction inherent to the Brazilian context, Chile for example has not revoked its Amnesty Law either but the amnesty is no longer being applied by their judicial system¹⁰³ while the Brazilian Supreme Court and local lawyers continue on resisting a normative shift.

In 2008, the Brazilian Bar Organization (Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil [OAB]) - group that participated of the elaboration of the Amnesty Law by the time of its draft, appealed to the Supreme Court (Supremo Tribunal Federal [STF]) to exclude acts of torture from the Amnesty Law, which grants full impunity to former perpetrators. However, on April 28, 2010, the Brazilian Supreme Court rejected this appeal, upholding the Amnesty Law by a vote of seven to two. Amongst the seven winning votes, the arguments presented would include that Brazilians should believe ‘in the path of dialogue and politics as a way of building solutions’, not possible ‘to judge the past with the eyes of today’, there is no pacific transition without ‘reciprocal concessions’ and finally Minister Peluso stated ‘If it is true that each people solves their historical problems according to their culture, their nature, their history, Brazil chose the path of harmony’¹⁰⁴. An appeal filed by the OAB against the decision has been stalled since then.

¹⁰⁰ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Cambridge: Intersentia, 2021. P. 147

¹⁰¹ Schneider, Nina. "Breaking the 'silence' of the military regime: New politics of memory in Brazil." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30, no. 2 (2011): 198-212 P. 1

¹⁰² Schneider, Nina. "Breaking the 'silence' of the military regime: New politics of memory in Brazil." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 30, no. 2 (2011): 198-212 P. 3

¹⁰³ "Chile - Report To The United Nations Human Rights Committee". 140th Session, 4 To 28 March 2024. Amnesty International. Available at: [Link](#)

¹⁰⁴ "STF rejeita revisão da Lei da Anistia" *O Estado de São Paulo*, Senado Nacional. Available at: [Link](#)

With the Amnesty Law still in force as well as its application and unresolved validity, most experts agree that it ‘had a major impact on the lack of public mobilisation’¹⁰⁵ and its maintenance is a measure of impunity. It is argued that the bilateral amnesty blocks ‘the revelation of historical truth, as well as the construction of memory, through the consecration of forgetfulness’¹⁰⁶ taking the pacification of society in overcoming the past in the country to follow a tortuous path. Pressure from civil society has led to increased recognition and reparations for victims of the regime although their continuous mobilisation shows that it hasn’t been sufficient. Hence, the individual reparations procedures - which leave the burden of proof exclusively on the victim’s side, perpetuate the matter ‘in principle to an individualized and private rather than a collective and public procedure’¹⁰⁷. The law, therefore, would not only be blocking ways of reconciling society but also access to the construction of facts and the memory of the tragic past.

Furthermore, secrecy has been a common trait found in different authoritarian regimes throughout the globe as a tool for maintaining hierarchies, manipulating social opinion and alimony of control. It leads to suspicion, conspiracy, fear and leaves societies alone in dealing with their subjectivities without the adequate means to build a social pact towards commonalities. The Amnesty Law is a crucial piece maintaining the secrecy of military archives from the dictatorship era in Brazil ensuring that detailed records of human rights abuses, torture, disappearances, and other state-sanctioned atrocities remain inaccessible to the public and to historians¹⁰⁸. By granting immunity to perpetrators, the law also hindered efforts to uncover the full extent of the repression and violence during the military regime and the sustained secrecy of these archives has been a significant obstacle for transitional justice efforts.

The maintenance of the Amnesty Law puts an obstacle on a comprehensive investigation of the truth, preserving the silence of the military group and opposing the state acknowledging the institutional terror committed to provide a proper apology to its people. By not disclosing access to the materials of their archives leading to the disclosure of the facts and admission of crimes committed during the dictatorial rulers and the institutions in power at the time, a categorical reaction of the general population, especially those who did not suffer a direct impact from the regime, is avoided. According to Schneider ‘a genuine state apology does not necessarily imply “retributive

¹⁰⁵ Schneider, Nina. "Too little too late'or 'Premature'? The Brazilian Truth Commission and the Question of 'Best Timing.'" *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 19, no. 1 (2013): 149-162. P. 7

¹⁰⁶ McArthur, Fabiana Godinho. "Justiça de Transição: o caso brasileiro." *MINISTÉRIO DA JUSTIÇA. Revista anistia política e justiça de transição* 7 (2012).

¹⁰⁷ Schneider, Nina. "Waiting for (an)"Apology": Has Post-Authoritarian Brazil Apologized for State Repression?." (2013). P. 10

¹⁰⁸ "60 anos do golpe: a vigilância ao ativismo negro na ditadura" Podcast Café da Manhã (Folha de São Paulo). 1 April 2024.

justice”—prosecution and imprisonment—but may also qualify as a mechanism of restorative justice in the form of an official apology, an act of forgiveness, and the official recognition and exposure of the perpetrators’ transgressions’¹⁰⁹ which has not yet been achieved.

The unrevealing of facts is followed by a permanent fear from the overall Brazilian political class from the military group, keeping the state away from a radical break with the past and equally distancing itself from an institutional, political and juridical reform. Seligmann-Silva points out that the way Brazil transitioned back to democracy in 1985 represents more the collapse of the left in Brazil than the end of the dictatorial era, in the following terms: ‘I wouldn’t say that in 1985 there occurred a pact between the right and left. What happened was more serious: it was a kind of drawing together and almost fusion of the two’¹¹⁰.

The role of the left, which, despite being historically aligned with human rights and memory preservation agendas, faces criticism for not sustaining a robust practice on these issues when in power. Left-wing parties, particularly during the administrations of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff, made notable strides in addressing historical injustices through initiatives like the National Truth Commission. However, their efforts were often perceived as insufficient and inconsistent, failing to comprehensively challenge the entrenched culture of impunity and fully contest the military influence.

The political class has often adopted the role of conciliators in this dichotomy and as Araujo affirms ‘you just have to look at the history of Brazil to see the armed forces conspiring with both sides, left and right’. Striving to balance the demands of various electorate groups without alienating any significant factions has resulted in a cautious approach to transitional justice, where calls for accountability and transparency are tempered by fears of military backlash and the potential for political destabilisation. Consequently, while there have been efforts to acknowledge and rectify past abuses, these have often been constrained by the broader political imperative to maintain stability and avoid deepening societal divisions, leading to a persistent impasse in fully addressing the human rights violations of the dictatorship era.

In addition, the consistent trend in the Brazilian military positioning itself above the law and intervening in political affairs¹¹¹ demonstrates a remarkable power of articulation

¹⁰⁹ Schneider, Nina. "Waiting for (an)“Apology”: Has Post-Authoritarian Brazil Apologized for State Repression?." (2013). P. 9

¹¹⁰ Seligmann-Silva, Márcio. “Narrativas contra o silêncio: Cinema e ditadura no Brasil.” *Letterature d’America* 130: 59–89 (2910).

¹¹¹ ‘rising up against its own hierarchical structure and the elitism of the national government, to establishing a new regime with a broader base of support, to overturning that government when it became unpopular’. [Link](#)

with various societal and political groups, a capability rooted in their long-standing influence and strategic positioning within the country. The 1964 Coup ‘was not only carried out by the armed hands of the military, but also by the interests of big capital, concerned with their profits, conservative politicians, willing to see their interests march against the popular will, and the mainstream media, eager to maintain its oligopoly. Support for this threat to democracy is nurtured and driven by these groups, as a guarantee of maintaining their interests’¹¹². In the present time, this articulation is reflected in their communion with the most influential lobbyist groups present in the Brazilian National Congress: the agribusiness, armaments industry and the evangelical christians ‘each of them has 45% to 70% of the members of Congress. (...) Together, they have enough weight to implement legislative agendas, negotiate with the government and even change the Constitution. When they work together, evangelicals, ruralists and armamentists form what is conventionally called the BBB bench – in allusion to the words bullet, ox and bible [*bala, boi e bíblia*]¹¹³.

Even though Brazil’s democracy has been scored as free (72/100, Freedom House) the same report also points out to endemic corruption ‘especially among elected officials, contributing to widespread disillusionment with and dysfunction in the political system. Independent journalists and civil society activists face harassment and violent attacks in reprisal for their work on politically sensitive topics. The population suffers from high rates of violent crime and impunity for police abuses that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and LGBT+ people’¹¹⁴.

Other indexes of Brazil’s political transformation and governance¹¹⁵ also reflect the challenges daily perceived in the domestic landscape. On one side, researchers such as Melo and Pereira¹¹⁶ argue that Brazil has indeed fully transitioned to a solid democratic structure, wrapping up with the legacies of the past and that not even with Bolsonaro’s election democracy was at risk in Brazil - as the institutions would be by now strong enough to shield it. On the other side, scholars as Schneider dispute this view and state that ‘a clear transition to democracy is wanting, whereby the

¹¹² Viégas, Diego Pereira, da Silva Della Vechia, Renato. "Políticas de memória, verdade e justiça de transição: Análise da experiência brasileira." *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social* 17, no. 01 (2024): e60011.

¹¹³ “Conheça As Três Bancadas Mais Poderosas Do Congresso” UOL Congresso em Foco. 10 November 2023. Available at: [Link](#)

¹¹⁴ Freedom House Summit Democracy Report 2021. Available at: [Link](#)

¹¹⁵ For a better overview, further reading on Brazil overall results can be found at BTI Transformation Atlas. Available at: [Link](#)

¹¹⁶ “Por que a democracia brasileira não morreu?” Podcast Cafe da Manhã (Folha de Sao Paulo). 22 June 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

human rights of citizens are truly guaranteed'¹¹⁷ and in the Brazilian case 'Bolsonaro's rise confirms, there is no widespread societal rejection of the military dictatorship'¹¹⁸.

The grounds for the lack of a clear condemnation of the military regime are complex and include 'omissions from above, lack of interest from below and a wider culture of impunity in the history of Brazil'¹¹⁹. This sociological perception has been labelled as a 'socially rooted authoritarianism'¹²⁰ and concludes that authoritarianism is 'deeply engrained in the mindset of the citizenry may still be seen inside Brazilian society'¹²¹. This phenomenon reflects how historical patterns of power and control have permeated social norms, influencing attitudes towards authority and governance.

The absence of justice and elucidating the facts has a direct impact on the process of reestablishing the country's democratic structure. As will be explored below, it is also crucial for society's general feeling towards the authoritarian regime and the building of its democratic values. By not knowing how to deal with the liabilities of a long-lasting authoritarian regime with great institutional penetration maintains a virtual social contract in Brazil of a veiled silence and polarisation. The pervasive nature of this authoritarian legacy suggests that many citizens continue to accept or even support undemocratic practices, thereby complicating efforts to foster a fully democratic political culture in Brazil.

3. *Dealing with the Authoritarian Past: Memory Work in Civil Society, Culture and Arts*

a. *The Social Building of Transitional Justice*

Civil society in Brazil has played a crucial role in addressing the legacy of the military dictatorship and the human rights abuses committed between 1964-1985. Various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), human rights groups, and victims' associations have been at the forefront of advocating for truth, justice, and reparations calling for a new form of democracy, political shift and institutional change. As empirical evidence from Latin America has shown 'transitional justice

¹¹⁷ Schneider, N 2020 *Bolsonaro in Power: Failed Memory Politics in Post-Authoritarian Brazil?* *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 25 pp. 1–11.

¹¹⁸ Schneider, N 2020 *Bolsonaro in Power: Failed Memory Politics in Post-Authoritarian Brazil?* *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 25 pp. 1–11.

¹¹⁹ Schneider, N 2020 *Bolsonaro in Power: Failed Memory Politics in Post-Authoritarian Brazil?* *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 25 pp. 1–11.

¹²⁰ Pinheiro, Paulo Sérgio. "The Legacy of Authoritarianism in Democratic Brazil", in Nagel, Stuart S. (ed.). *Latin American Development and Public Policy*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1994.

¹²¹ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Cambridge: Intersentia, 2021. P. 135

processes cannot be reduced to one-directional, top-down policies and that civil society plays a key role in addressing the authoritarian past (Jelin, 2007; Stern, 2006; 2010)¹²² with grassroots efforts often filling the gaps left by the state. The efforts of these organisations provoked positive advancements in the transitional process in Brazil and have been instrumental in documenting human rights abuses, supporting victims, and lobbying to pressure relevant reactions from the governance level.

With a primarily local nature, Brazil's civil society advocacy is formed by organised groups and institutions of victims or relatives of the victims of the abuse of the authoritarian regime, like the *Tortura Nunca Mais* group and the Brazilian Association of Relatives of the Disappeared (ABDFT). Moreover, there is also a part of a younger share of the society who is not familiar with that time in history and, seeking for clarity and the share of justice values, enrolled in active participation¹²³. These groups have succeeded in bringing attention to the atrocities committed during the dictatorship and influencing the government to acknowledge and address these past abuses.

For instance, their advocacy contributed to the establishment of the National Truth Commission in 2011. Besides, the organised groups across Brazil actively mobilise to spark significant public discussions through demonstrations, organising cultural events and creating online content 'campaigning for a decisive rupture with authoritarian forms of social relations and norms that have been safeguarded by all post-1985 civil governments'¹²⁴. Moreover, by using civil suits in their struggle for memory, truth and justice, family members obtained significant advances shouting damages and getting 'the courts to acknowledge that no statute of limitations applies to the serious violations suffered by the victims'¹²⁵. The suits seek a declaratory judgement and have turned to courts to declare State agents as torturers.

The "escrachos", for example, are public acts of protest aimed at exposing and shaming individuals who were involved in human rights abuses during the military dictatorship (1964-1985). Inspired by similar youth movements in Argentina and Chile the aim is to denounce 'the torturers of the military regime, whose stories were little known by society, publicising the crimes. This created possibilities for the reconstruction of memory and the punishment of those who committed crimes'¹²⁶. These demonstrations, typically organised by youth movements and human rights groups, involve activists gathering at the homes or workplaces of former torturers, military officials, and other

¹²² Schneider, Nina, and Rebecca J. Atencio. "Reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil: The double-edged role of artistic-cultural production." *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 5 (2016): 12-28. P. 18

¹²³ Such as the group *Levante Popular da Juventude* (Popular Youth Uprising)

¹²⁴ Schneider, Nina. "Waiting for a Meaningful State Apology: Has Brazil Apologized for Authoritarian Repression?." *Journal of Human Rights* 13, no. 1 (2014): 69-84. P. 12

¹²⁵ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Cambridge: Intersentia, 2021. P. 159

¹²⁶ "Escracho, um instrumento de luta pela democracia" *Brasil de Fato*. 05 May 2026. Available at: [Link](#)

perpetrators to publicly denounce their actions. Participants often carry signs, chant slogans, and paint graffiti to draw attention to the individuals' past crimes and the ongoing culture of impunity that protects them.

The *escrachos* serve as a form of social justice, seeking to hold these individuals accountable in the court of public opinion and have played a significant role in Brazil's broader struggle for transitional justice. By keeping the memory of past atrocities alive and highlighting the need for accountability, these protests have brought renewed attention to the histories of victims and the failures of the state to address these injustices adequately. By confronting former abusers directly, *escrachos* disrupt the silence and invisibility surrounding their actions, thereby challenging the official narratives that often seek to downplay or forget the dictatorship's brutalities.

Moreover, they empower younger generations to engage actively with their country's history, fostering a culture of remembrance and resistance through acts of civil disobedience. The Levante Popular da Juventude (Popular Youth Uprising), an organised popular movement of young people who aim to fight for social transformation, keep the *escrachos* practise alive and have transferred the mechanism not only to former perpetrators of the military regime but also to contemporary politicians, in defence of democracy. Some examples were political figures such as interim president Michel Temer and then federal deputy Jair Bolsonaro in 2016¹²⁷.

However, civil society's role has also been marked by contradictions and challenges. Despite the progress made, the group of people that got out of the dictatorial regime suffering a direct loss remain a relatively 'small' share of the population and achieves limited impact, when put in scale with the Brazilian geographical and demographic dimensions. Secondly, civil society groups are criticised for the lack of a sustained maintenance of a robust agenda for memory and human rights even though this is partly due to the sensitive nature of confronting the military, which remains seen as a powerful institution in Brazilian society. The military regime 'framed the 1979 amnesty law as a 'reciprocal amnesty' (Reis 47), which benefited both 'torturers' and 'survivors' alike. Despite efforts from the families of victims and the Amnesty and Truth Commissions, this image has never been systematically dismantled – neither from above nor from below'¹²⁸.

It means that the sustenance of the activism operated by civil society groups is oftentimes jeopardised by the category, or the framing, that dissidents of the regime were put into and still viewed as such. Furthermore, the advancing decline in social empathy and drifting together shows

¹²⁷ Levante Official website, News. Available at: [Link](#)

¹²⁸ Schneider, Nina. "Bolsonaro in power: failed memory politics in post-authoritarian Brazil?." *Modern Languages Open* 1, no. 1 (2020): 1-11 P. 4

the 'limited mobilisation of civil society for truth-seeking and 'justice' initiatives'¹²⁹ as fragmented new social movements failed to join forces and support the small but politically active group of families of victims.

This dynamic perceived in the social web suggests an inherent conflict between justice, history, and memory present in Brazil. The Brazilian case is emblematic 'precisely because it seemed, up until five or six years ago, that the country was moving in the direction of deepening democratic relations and that it would finally be possible to dream again of projects for a free, plural, solidary and fairer society. And this was only becoming a reality, it must be emphasized, because of the actions to comply with the constitutional provisions of the Brazilian transition, that is, the dimensions of transitional justice. Nevertheless, what we observe today is that this time seems very distant a few decades ago, such was the degradation of both political and social relations'¹³⁰.

The divisions in the political and social relations have been further enlarged by the most recent rise of anti-democratic mobilizations. Ultra-conservative groups and certain factions within civil society have organised movements that undermine democratic institutions and glorify the military regime. These groups often use misinformation and social media to gain support, promoting a revisionist narrative that downplays the abuses of the dictatorship. This trend poses a significant threat to the efforts of those who work tirelessly to preserve the memory of the past and ensure accountability and justice for the victims of Brazil's authoritarian regime.

Thus, while civil society in Brazil has undeniably driven significant progress in the realm of transitional justice, advocating for truth, justice, and reparations for the victims of the military dictatorship, it is not without its shortcomings. These efforts have led to important advancements, such as the establishment of the National Truth Commission and various reparations programs. However, cracks remain in the implementation and sustainability of these initiatives, including inconsistencies in maintaining a robust human rights agenda, political resistance, and the rise of anti-democratic mobilizations. These challenges highlight the complexities and ongoing struggles within Brazil's transitional justice landscape. Further elaboration on these issues will delve deeper into the persistent obstacles and potential pathways for overcoming them to ensure a more comprehensive and lasting reconciliation process.

¹²⁹ Schneider, Nina. "Too little too late' or 'Premature'? The Brazilian Truth Commission and the Question of 'Best Timing.'" *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 19, no. 1 (2013): 149-162. P. 7

¹³⁰ Almeida, Eneá de Stutz e. *The Brazilian transition [livro eletrônico] : memory, truth, reparation and justice (1979-2021) / Eneá de Stutz e Almeida ; translation Eneá de Stutz e Almeida*. Salvador, BA : Soffia10 Assessoria Socioculturais e Educacionais, 2022.

b. *Politics of Memorialization and Collective Memory*

One of the pillars and challenges of the Brazilian democratisation process has been the efforts to build, seek and preserve the history of the military regime ensuring that the atrocities committed during this period are not forgotten. Private and public actors and institutions have been working on memorialisation mechanisms to prevent the falsification of historical accounts ‘by recounting the systematic violence perpetrated under the dictatorship’¹³¹. Those initiatives were developed in order to preserve the memory of the dictatorship and aim to educate the public about the past, fostering a collective understanding that acknowledges the experiences of victims and reinforces the importance of human rights and democratic values. Memorials, museums, public commemorations and educational initiatives serve as tools to educate future generations about the nuances of authoritarianism while promoting that the horrors of the past must be remembered in order to not be repeated. However, the process of building and maintaining a social (or collective) memory in Brazil faces substantial challenges and a number of reasons can be pointed out in order to track it: it includes territorial and cultural landscapes, political resistance and attempts to revise or downplay historical facts.

The reunion of the country's political history combined with its complex ecosystem is reflected in singular social and political challenges epitomised in the collective consciousness about the past. The military regime in Brazil is oftentimes resembled as something good, a positive sense of stability that took place in the country, at the same time that it shares an equal electorate that views it as a worrisome period. In very broad terms ‘two competing political cultures coexist in contemporary Brazil: One faction continues to reproduce the rhetoric of the authoritarian regime, while the other has begun to mobilize in support of a clean break with the dictatorship’¹³². Bastos throughout her research was able to confirm the finding: ‘It is not unusual to find people in Brazil looking at the past in order to glorify the "order and progress" that the dictatorship supposedly secured, at the same time that there are competing and conflicting understandings and memories of the past, as occurred in the recent debate on the celebration (or not) of the 1964 *coup d'etat*’¹³³.

There are some important elements inherent to Brazil that must be considered for a better and intersectional understanding of its democratic and human rights developments, and the hindrance around the memorialisation process after the authoritarian regime. How the country was

¹³¹ Schneider, N “Bolsonaro in Power: Failed Memory Politics in Post-Authoritarian Brazil?” *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 25 pp. 1–11.

¹³² Schneider, Nina. "Waiting for a Meaningful State Apology: Has Brazil Apologized for Authoritarian Repression?." *Journal of Human Rights* 13, no. 1 (2014): 69-84. P. 12

¹³³ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Cambridge: Intersentia, 2021. P. 269

established and is organised are a few of those elements. Scoring as world's fifth-largest country by area and the seventh most populous¹³⁴, this continental amount of territory is translated into six different biomes (Amazon, Cerrado, Caatinga, Pantanal, Atlantic Forest, and Pampa) and socially composed by about 305 indigenous tribes¹³⁵, combined with 'the lion's share of the African slaves, nearly four million'¹³⁶ brought between 1550 and 1850, and 'three distinct waves of immigrants followed the end of the slave trade; each brought migrants from different countries who had varying motives'¹³⁷ (1850 to 1953). Furthermore, the population that in 1964 was estimated in 82 million, grew to around 136 million in 1985¹³⁸ and sums up to approximately 217 million in 2024¹³⁹ showing a growth of almost three times in the last sixty years.

What this picture of Brazil tells us is that during and even after the dictatorship ended 'a larger part of the population was excluded from politics. So, a lot of people didn't realise that. People who were more concerned with surviving than being aware of the national political scene'¹⁴⁰ with poverty being an important part of Brazilian everyday life. Therefore, not only a critical mass of people were occupied in striving for resources, visibility, and the enjoyment of basic rights, but the social groups were spread across the territory and would either repel or connect amongst themselves according to their realities and needs.

Between 1964 and 1985, when the country was immersed in the dictatorial period, regionalisms impacted on how one, or a group, could feel or perceive the authority (reality) of the regime. Peasants, resistance and opposition movements (guerrillas), labour movements, civil society and intellectual resistance (intellectuals, students, artists, and religious groups) and different urban populations 'felt' it differently. While groups such as National Liberation Action (ALN) and the Revolutionary Movement 8th October (MR-8) were enduring violence and repression, and musicians like Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, Chico Buarque and Rita Lee were in exile, there was also a share of a new middle class and the business-industrial class navigating their day-to-day lives smoothly and achieving economic stability. It means that 'in Brazil, military rule was persistently justified by the so-called economic miracle: the stunning economic growth achieved between 1968 and 1973 which contributed to a positive perception of the military regime in retrospect.'⁵⁹

¹³⁴ Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE)

¹³⁵ Out of the estimated 1,000 tribes that existed before the arrival of the Europeans in the territory.

¹³⁶ Out of the ten million forcibly taken to the New World. Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. "Silencing the past: Power and the production of history". Beacon press, 2015.

¹³⁷ "Shaping Brazil: The Role of International Migration" Migration Policy Institute. 1 June 2005. Available at: [Link](#)

¹³⁸ World Bank Group Data. Available at: [Link](#)

¹³⁹ Worldometer Data. Available at: [Link](#)

¹⁴⁰ "Entrevista: 'até Hoje, Parte Da Sociedade Brasileira Não Sabe Que Viveu Em Uma Ditadura', Diz Historiador" Intercept Brasil. 3 January 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

Continuing, the negotiated and amicable transition to democracy also makes a sustained impact on the Brazilian collective consciousness and the perception of the militaries as the defenders of order. This transition, characterised by compromises between the outgoing military leaders and incoming civilian politicians, allowed for a relatively stable and bloodless shift to democratic governance but also meant that many elements of the authoritarian past were left unchallenged. This has resulted in a complex legacy where the military's role during the dictatorship is often viewed ambiguously. On one hand, the transition facilitated the establishment of democratic institutions and the expansion of civil liberties. On the other, it left unresolved issues such as accountability for human rights abuses and the full disclosure of historical truths. This compromise has embedded a lingering ambivalence in the Brazilian *imaginary*, where the memories of the dictatorship are simultaneously remembered and oblivious.

Added to the prevalence of the amnesty law (1979-now), the military continued with their influence in politics and society coupled with a periodic glorification of the authoritarian period by certain factions and the lack of responsibility for the crimes committed - the military body has never admitted any involvement or participation with crimes of torture, murder and missing people, only that some unfortunate 'excesses' have happened. According to historian Rodrigo Motta, 'what happened was an action under the Amnesty Law, which at the time, between the lines, was agreed that the military should not be judged or touched'¹⁴¹.

The law seems not only to be obstructing victims and their families' access in pursuing the legal means of achieving accountability and justice but also shields the truth about the extent and nature of state repression through the ongoing secrecy of military archives. The absence of materiality keeps the facts partially obscured and society without the elements available to shape a historical narrative of the past. Scholars argue that rather than fostering a deepening of democratic relations, the amnesty law creates a link of continuity with Brazil's long standing culture of violence: 'The myth of the so-called 'reciprocal amnesty'⁶⁰, which benefited both 'torturers' and 'survivors' alike, further dramatized the fact that historically Brazilians were accustomed to high levels of state violence and impunity⁶¹' (Reis, Mezarobba, Pereira. Schneider, Nina. "Too little too late' or 'Premature'? The Brazilian Truth Commission and the Question of 'Best Timing." P. 8) with colonial exploitation, slavery, militarised policing, extrajudicial killings, rural conflicts and civil war scenarios. These examples highlight how a culture of violence has been deeply embedded in Brazilian society - that grew to be educated around conservative and christian values, and has been perpetrated by historical injustices, systemic inequalities, and weak accountability mechanisms.

¹⁴¹ "Entrevista: 'até Hoje, Parte Da Sociedade Brasileira Não Sabe Que Viveu Em Uma Ditadura', Diz Historiador" Intercept Brasil. 3 January 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

More recently, the violent assault of January 8, 2023, when thousands of supporters of former President Jair Messias Bolsonaro from all over the country stormed the Brazilian Congress, Supreme Court, and Presidential Palace, is a stark reflection of Brazil's persisting challenges of memory and reconciliation works. The protesters met at the army headquarters in Brasília and marched 'repeating Bolsonaro's accusations against the reliability of electronic voting machines, they questioned the legitimacy of the presidential election and called for "military intervention" in banners'¹⁴². By invading government buildings and vandalising offices, destroying furniture, and smashing windows - including defecating national symbols, damaging artwork and destroying historical artefacts¹⁴³, the attack on democratic institutions reveals deep-rooted divisions and a culture of violence that has persisted, or reemerged to the surface, since the authoritarian era. The actions and irreparable damages resulting from this event showed that democratic values can be still put aside by a parcel of the population claiming the army as the utmost protecting actor of the nation, a symbol of transparency and order.

How Brazil grew a particular type of democratic sentiment amongst its population, Bastos would describe it as a 'definite sign that the project to create an anti-authoritarian culture in Brazil may have failed'¹⁴⁴. Viegas and Della Vechia move a step further and confirm that transitional justice policies in Brazil have indeed failed as the 'result of a multifactorial and interdependent combination, which goes beyond the losses of its late implementation, or even the remaining legacy of a negotiated transition, as it is also permeated by a sociocultural variable innate to the Brazilian state'¹⁴⁵. In this case, one hypothesis is that maybe the policies of forgetting actually worked and too much time has passed since the fall of authoritarianism to demand from the people to recall it. Another one is that maybe Brazilians were never permitted to remember in the first place because of the absence of an object to memorise: According to H. Stalin 'the past has the function of providing repertoire for the present, to build projects for the future' and 'understand the elements we have to make our choices, elements that, when made public, provide tools for democracy'¹⁴⁶.

¹⁴² "8 de janeiro: as perguntas sem respostas um ano após ataques" BBC News Brasil. 08 January 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

¹⁴³ 'In Planalto, the painting "Mulatas", painted in 1962 by Di Cavalcanti, was punctured by protesters. Another damaged work was "Araguaia", a stained glass window by Marianne Peretti, from 1977, which is located in the green room of the Chamber of Deputies (...) and the sculpture "A Justiça", by Alfredo Ceschiatti, from 1961, was painted with graffiti. (...) A clock brought to Brazil by Dom João VI in 1808 was also destroyed. The object was designed by André-Charles Boulle and manufactured by French watchmaker Balthazar Martinot at the end of the 18th century, a few years before being brought to Brazil.' NSC notícias by Jean Laurindo, 08/01/2024. [Source](#)

¹⁴⁴ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Cambridge: Intersentia, 2021.

¹⁴⁵ Viégas, Diego Pereira, da Silva Della Vechia, Renato. "Políticas de memória, verdade e justiça de transição: Análise da experiência brasileira." *Dilemas: Revista de Estudos de Conflito e Controle Social* 17, no. 01 (2024):.

¹⁴⁶ "60 anos do golpe: a vigilância ao ativismo negro na ditadura" Podcast Café da Manhã (Folha de São Paulo). 1 April 2024. Available at: [Link](#)

Another group of scholars state that the missing piece for Brazilians to move away from authoritarian idealism is to go through an institutional reform and remove the remnants of the deposed regime with the transformation or extinction of correspondent institutions, policies and practices. The argument implies ‘the recognition that the authoritarian period needs to be interrupted and that the regime's mentality needs to be changed’¹⁴⁷. While the military group is still perceived as the equivalent of a political party, the sentiment of confusion and polarisation present in Brazilian society towards the subject of the authoritarian past will remain: ‘The historical and social context in which redemocratization took place made it difficult to achieve an adequate Transitional Justice - in the terms defined by International Law - especially regarding the attribution of responsibility to the agents of the regime and institutional reforms, fundamental for the construction of a collective memory that repels the systematic violation of human rights’¹⁴⁸.

Certain is that the reluctance to fully confront and address the dictatorship's abuses has left a lingering impact on Brazil's social fabric where undemocratic actions can find support. It underscores the importance of strengthening democratic values and institutions together, as Schneider would point out that ‘not all the blame rests with the state, however. The lack of public mobilization for the clarification and punishment of past torture has also been a decisive factor, since Brazil lacks a movement with broad appeal’¹⁴⁹. Even with important initiatives being taken by the Brazilian state to support and implement memory works (Pessoas Imprescindíveis, Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo, Memorial dos Povos Indígenas, Memorial da Anistia Política do Brasil, Centro de Memória, Verdade e Justiça [CMVJ], Comissão Nacional da Verdade [CNV], and others) the public perception is sometimes one of indifference or assentation, and other times one that ‘the repression was less intense relative to that of its South American neighbors and that in the eyes of ordinary Brazilians the violence of the present is more pressing than that of the past’¹⁵⁰.

I agree with Schneider’s vision that ‘Brazilian society’s view of the dictatorship has been so heterogeneous that it can best be described as an "unmastered past" (Rosenfeld 126–7), a historical legacy that does not have a settled status within "collective memory”¹⁵¹ or dominant memory, and this phenomena is here comprehended as a complex interplay of the elements presented

¹⁴⁷ Biscaia, Fernanda Vissoto. "Justiça de Transição no Estado brasileiro pós-ditadura militar." *Boletim CEPGE* 46, no. 6 (2022): 20-31 P. 28

¹⁴⁸ Biscaia, Fernanda Vissoto. "Justiça de Transição no Estado brasileiro pós-ditadura militar." *Boletim CEPGE* 46, no. 6 (2022): 20-31 P. 29

¹⁴⁹ Schneider, Nina, and Rebecca J. Atencio. "Reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil: The double-edged role of artistic-cultural production." *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 5 (2016): 12-28. P. 18

¹⁵⁰ Schneider, Nina, and Rebecca J. Atencio. "Reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil: The double-edged role of artistic-cultural production." *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 5 (2016): 12-28. P. 18

¹⁵¹ Schneider, N 2020 *Bolsonaro in Power: Failed Memory Politics in Post-Authoritarian Brazil?* *Modern Languages Open*, 2020(1): 25 pp. 1–11.

and analysed so far: Brazil's complex historical developments, the permanence of the military institution in political power, and institutional and socio-cultural facets. Moreover, I would argue that in order for Brazil to overcome the authoritarian past it requires a radical behavioural change from evasive, submissive and non-confrontational attitudes to high-reach impactful ones.

c. Re-Signifying History: The Role of Artistic and Cultural Narratives

The role of artistic and cultural expressions as a form of activism and political agency is a consistent trend in the Brazilian scheme. In the context of transitional justice, art 'calls attention to the failing of both the old regime and the mechanisms of transitional justice'¹⁵² and artistic and cultural narratives have the power to reinterpret and illuminate historical truths that official accounts may obscure or overlook. According to Oettler 'the images of history do not emerge only through official forms of memory, but primarily thanks to cultural forms of interpretation of the past'¹⁵³. In Brazil, the exchange between politics and the arts has been particularly significant in addressing the legacies of the military dictatorship. Through films, music, literature, theatre, and visual arts, artists have created ways of documenting state violence and its resistance, but also stimulated public dialogue and reflection about it.

In order to try and overcome a violent past, a real consideration of victims' interests is required for the renewal of relations between state and society, as both 'the rights of victims and accused complement each other in the search for the well-being of society in general'¹⁵⁴. These narratives are a source of history at the same time that they are able to offer alternative perspectives, challenging dominant discourses and providing a platform for marginalised voices by integrating politics and the arts. Therefore, the creative expressions serve as catalysts for societal change, encouraging a critical re-evaluation of history and promoting the values of justice, democracy, and human rights 'recognisable in the stages of translation and experience'¹⁵⁵. In short, those expressions based on interpretations of reality will propel the works of collective memory and foster a deeper understanding of past events.

¹⁵² Stan, Lavinia, and Nadya Nedelsky, *Encyclopedia of Transitional Justice*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. P.168.

¹⁵³ "Arte e luta social" DW. 09 December 2011. Available at: [Link](#)

¹⁵⁴ McArthur, Fabiana Godinho. "Justiça de Transição: o caso brasileiro." *MINISTÉRIO DA JUSTIÇA. Revista anistia política e justiça de transição* 7 (2012).

¹⁵⁵ Garnsey, Eliza. *The Justice of Visual Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 21

One significant aspect of the Brazilian democratic development is that it aligns with the group of ‘States less inclined to revisit the painful experiences of authoritarian repression, and, in those cases, they may seek to implement policies of oblivion, usually through a discourse of reconciliation’¹⁵⁶, as it has been shown previously in this research. Assuming that the transitional path in Brazil is still an ongoing process, this oblivion guideline has gone through transformations overtime and presents highs and lows greatly influenced by the views of state representatives elected. The cultural production, therefore, takes the form of a transversal politics exposing different frames on how the authoritarian regime was experienced following the principle of non-repetition: not forgetting to not repeat.

The meeting point between art and transitional justice comes from an account that ‘transitional justice without aesthetic dimensions is insufficient precisely because transitional justice “acknowledge[s] itself as a process inseparable from *feelings* of justice“’¹⁵⁷. Considering that justice work extends beyond the legal and institutional spheres, the medium of art communicates and creates emotional landscapes in the seek of justice when ‘coming to terms with past conflict and strengthening democratic institutions in the aftermath of state-sanctioned violence’¹⁵⁸. In its various forms, artistic and cultural productions pass on an experience that will be able to access and interact with a range of social groups allowing it to reach all sectors of society¹⁵⁹.

A manifestation of that symbolism was the *Bandeira das Liberdades Democráticas* (‘Flag of Democratic Freedoms’), a significant initiative within Brazil’s broader transitional justice efforts. Developed as part of the *Caravanas da Anistia* project, the *Bandeira das Liberdades Democráticas* was ‘sewn to each memory session of the Amnesty Commission between 2008 and 2014, having passed throughout all Brazilian regions along the Amnesty Caravans’ created from the sum of scraps of banners and symbols from institutions such as universities, unions, associations, collegiate bodies, churches and social movements - a tribute to those who resisted oppression and advocated for democratic principles during Brazil’s authoritarian period. It got to occupy an important role in the Amnesty Caravans’ work, demonstrating all the political forces committed to this cause. The patchwork process would strengthen ties ‘reaffirming commitments and aligning the frayed social fabric’¹⁶⁰ as a symbol of collective efforts and highlighting the importance of

¹⁵⁶ Arantes Ferreira Bastos, Lucia Elena. *Transitional Justice in Brazil: Walking the Tightrope*. Cambridge: Intersentia, 2021. P. 269

¹⁵⁷ Garnsey, Eliza. *The Justice of Visual Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 12

¹⁵⁸ Garnsey, Eliza. *The Justice of Visual Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 29

¹⁵⁹ “Arte e luta social” DW. 09 December 2011. Available at: [Link](#)

¹⁶⁰ “Retalhos da memória que tecem o amanhã: conheça a história da *Bandeira das Liberdades Democráticas*” Agencia Gov. 07 September 2023. Available at: [Link](#)

democratic freedoms and human rights in Brazil. Unfortunately, an attack on the postal transport in 2014 caused its disappearance.

The previous example shows how the materiality and legacy of art can be a platform for restorative actions through tangible representations of memory and truth and at the same time fostering a shared sense of community recognition. Moreover, a closer look at the proliferation and popularity of artistic cultural works in the Brazilian lifetime shows a larger phenomenon present in the country: ‘a tendency to address past human rights crimes outside the institutional sphere’¹⁶¹. Independent and collaborative artworks can be found when looking for truth, justice, and reconciliation efforts, calling for accountability and stimulating public dialogue.

This vibrant landscape of cultural responses, concerning the dictatorial period in the country, ‘presents a view of the past that is indebted to the present. That is, the past becomes imaginable, knowable through the present experience of the artwork’¹⁶² with an emphasis on people. Stories, testimonies and individual experiences are transported to a heightened meaning challenging hierarchical structures. This individual aspect is also trespassed and passed on to a collectivity so that ‘the past of one person becomes the present of many people so that they take on collective importance (...) establishing a shared collective vision of the past’¹⁶³. Thus, these works also work to fulfil a representational void and confront dominant narratives that often left out certain groups and perspectives.

Filmmaking, for example, continued on playing a relevant role in Brazil's transitional justice process by documenting human rights abuses and fostering public discourse about the military dictatorship. Notable films such as ‘Pra Frente, Brasil’ (Eng: Ahead, Brazil, Dir. Roberto Farias, 1982) and ‘O Que É Isso, Companheiro?’ (Eng: What is this fellow?, Dir: Bruno Barreto, 1997), based on the homonymous book from author Fernando Gabeira, instrumentalized through visual artwork the regime's brutality and historical memory. The films humanise the victims and provide insights into the era's repression, thus contributing to a broader understanding of the dictatorship's impact. From a different angle, ‘Tropa de Elite’ (Eng: Elite Squad, 2007) and ‘Tropa de Elite 2’ (2010) directed by José Padilha, explore police violence and corruption indirectly reflecting on the legacy of authoritarian practices in contemporary Brazil. Also, the 2019 Brazilian film ‘Democracia em Vertigem’ (The Edge of Democracy) displays director Petra Costa, daughter of parents that faced imprisonment because of their opposition to the military junta, narrating from the perspective of her

¹⁶¹ Schneider, Nina, and Rebecca J. Atencio. "Reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil: The double-edged role of artistic-cultural production." *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 5 (2016): 12-28. P. 18

¹⁶² Garnsey, Eliza. *The Justice of Visual Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 26

¹⁶³ Garnsey, Eliza. *The Justice of Visual Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 12

personal and family history the crafting of ‘state’s descent into populism and the fraying of the country’s democratic fabric’¹⁶⁴.

The music that once occupied the main stage in the cultural scene with Tropicália and Bossa Nova movements, moved on towards the MPB (Brazilian Popular Music) moment bringing a new wave of popular music holding the essence of traditional music with a contemporary expression. In the 1980s the band Engenheiros do Hawaii composed ‘Toda forma de poder’ (‘Every form of power’) as a critique to the country’s institutional use of power and political structures and ‘Que País é Este?’ (What country is this?) composed by musician Renato Russo, portraying a reflection about the impunity, corruption and class structures present in the country. Rapper Gabriel O Pensador sang ‘Indecência Militar’ (Military Indecency) as a protest against the universal military conscription and the complicity with the authoritarian institution.

The artistic reactions highlight the absence of justice as well as the complexities and possibilities in using art for transitional justice. These practices attempt to balance different points-of-view, enriched by the idea of a witness of the (a) truth, capable of mediating and facilitating a deeper understanding of past injustices. Meanwhile, it also debates the negotiation of rights within the social contract creating in-between spaces for dialogue and recognition. Gilberto Gil, musician from the Tropicalia movement and nominated Minister of Culture (2003-2008) advocated in his first official speech for ‘the centrality of culture as the only way to consolidate and bring to fruition the concepts of citizenship and nation for Brazilians’¹⁶⁵ defending the concept of *cultural citizenship*¹⁶⁶. The concept centralises that democracy should also be comprehended within the accessibility to the arts, that is, delivered to the masses and added to domestic significance.

Unfortunately, when looking back at the vast catalogue of artistic-cultural creations that were present during dictatorship and played a key role in the resistance movement (samba-enredos e marchinhas de carnaval [carnival compositions], theatre and dance pieces, and visual arts¹⁶⁷), the decay of the regime and the passing of time the topic seems to have become less appealing and outdated. To such degree, the perishing of people’s life constraints - scoring as one of the highest levels of inequality in the globe¹⁶⁸ and commercial changes in the industry also contributed to the turning in

¹⁶⁴ “The Edge of Democracy review – to the heart of Brazilian politics” The Guardian. 21 June 2019. Available at: [Link](#)

¹⁶⁵ “Discurso de Gilberto Gil, ministro da Cultura do Brasil” Instituto Gilberto Gil available at: [Link](#)

¹⁶⁶ ‘the understanding that a cultural citizen is a being in the world, imbued with his own identity, who places himself in relationship with the identities of others to, from this, be a participant in the decisions taken in that community where he exercises his citizenship’. Source: [Link](#)

¹⁶⁷ For further references: “Entenda a Ditadura Militar a partir de obras artísticas” at: [Link](#)

¹⁶⁸ According to Oxfam’s report: ‘It is clear that the ownership of shares and participations, in economic terms, reflects a plutocracy and not a democracy’. [Link](#)

the spotlight. Even though part of the cultural production left the dictatorial theme behind, when analysing the most recent cultural-political manifestations [turning to social justice, prejudice, discrimination, gender struggles, poverty, corruption] is possible to find support to the findings of why for Brazilian people the democracy of today is not feeling necessarily better, or different than the authoritarianism of yesterday.

While the role of arts in transitional justice can be one of preserving memory, fostering dialogue, and promoting healing, they are not without criticisms. One major critique is that artistic representations can sometimes oversimplify complex historical narratives, leading to a reductionist or sometimes romanticised view of traumatic events. This simplification can inadvertently distort the truth or omit significant details, thereby compromising the integrity of the historical record¹⁶⁹. Additionally, the commercialization of art related to transitional justice can lead to the exploitation of victims' suffering for profit, rather than serving the genuine purpose of education and reconciliation. There is also a concern that the focus on symbolic gestures and cultural expressions might divert attention and resources away from concrete legal and institutional reforms needed to address past injustices. Moreover, the reception of artistic works can be highly subjective, with interpretations varying widely among audiences, which might hinder a unified understanding of historical truths. Thus, while art is an essential component of transitional justice, it must be approached with caution and complemented by robust legal and institutional measures to ensure a comprehensive and accurate engagement with the past.

In a country with diverse cultural and social realities visualised in regionalisms, artworks could potentially fill those gaps by conveying 'a sense of shared humanity (...) accessible for different people'¹⁷⁰. The equation of incorporating cultural production into the framework of transitional justice, rather than solely emphasising political measures, allows for a more holistic approach offering complementary points of view capable of building commonalities as opposed to otherness. It also reveals a dynamic tool for a bottom-up approach that empowers individuals and communities, giving political agency to people and fostering political participation through cultural expressions. Despite the official silence on many aspects of the dictatorship, it is also clear that it can hijack the transitional work through ambivalence, commercial exploitation, reductionism or imbalance initiatives. As for the current stands, Brazilians should make use of all tools available in order to remember the dictatorship's horrors, challenge official narratives, and try to achieve a shared

¹⁶⁹ Schneider, Nina, and Rebecca J. Atencio. "Reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil: The double-edged role of artistic-cultural production." *Latin American Perspectives* 43, no. 5 (2016): 12-28. P. 22

¹⁷⁰ Garnsey, Eliza. *The Justice of Visual Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 19

understanding of human rights and democracy ‘projecting a collective narrative of a nation addressing its past’¹⁷¹. That requires imagining new possibilities in order to create a different future.

¹⁷¹ Garnsey, Eliza. *The Justice of Visual Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. P. 28

Conclusion

To develop a holistic understanding of the various challenges faced by certain democracies, it is essential to revisit significant moments in the past of that territory, which will be defining for the circumstantial development of the political, social, and transitional landscape of the country. Throughout this research, it was possible to clarify/elucidate some points related to the mistakes and successes in the democratisation process of the Brazilian state and the legacy of approximately twenty-one years under a military dictatorship that persists in the collective memory of its population. On the other hand, much remains unknown about the authoritarian years, and I conclude this thesis with even more questions to be pursued.

In the first chapter, aspects of the periods from the Old Republic to its evolution into the Estado Novo were revisited, along with some factors that enabled the military group's rise to power. The Old Republic period characterised the first republican period of the Brazilian state, preceded by the colonial and imperial periods. It is observed how the preceding periods marked the beginning of the tradition and legitimacy of the military group's participation/exercise of political power in the country, as well as social markers (racial, economic power, and political power). The military group formed the first representatives of the federal government, while regional elites represented by colonels (landowner oligarchs) exercised a form of decentralised and privatised political power.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, with the beginning of industrialization in the country and the reflections of global geopolitics (WWI and the 1929 Stock Market Crash), the Brazilian nationalist military movement was formed by a part of this same group, which viewed the military as a key tool for development, modernization, and national unity. Amidst a political crisis that was taking hold in the country, the so-called 'Vargas Era' emerged, with the rise of the first dictator to power in the country, promoted by a hybrid phenomenon between military support and populist policies. Later, in the 1950s, the same Getúlio Vargas would be elected President of the Republic of Brazil through free and secret ballot elections.

The post-WWII period, especially the 1950s, represented a time of vivid creative identity, modernization, and renewed hopes and spirits for Brazil. However, the disparity and tensions between classes grew, accompanied by the presence/strategic movements of the Cold War on the international stage. The decade consolidated cultural identities in the country as forms of creative expression and also as art-activism, gaining international recognition for the first time through Bossa Nova and Cinema Novo. However, between the late 1950s and early 1960s, the long-standing U.S. investment in defending liberal capitalist interests in the continent proved decisive for the establishment

of authoritarian regimes not only in Brazil but also in its southern cone neighbours. Allied with conservative groups and business elites, the scenario led to the successful coup d'état of 1964 and the almost unchallenged seizure of power by the military group.

Between 1964 and 1985, the Brazilian military regime was characterised by severe repression, censorship, and human rights abuses justified by the necessity of combating communism and maintaining order in the country. According to public and private archives/documents accessed and testimonies from victims and their families, it is known that the military regime maintained power through the political suppression of opponents, including members of the military class itself, and the suppression of all forms of resistance through censorship, imprisonment, torture, extrajudicial killings, and control of cultural production and the media. At the same time, the regime disseminated ideals of modernization in the country, developing internal infrastructure, creating state-owned enterprises, and economic projects that characterised the so-called 'economic miracle' during the first decade of its rule. Cultural movements once again played a significant role, not only in exercising freedom of expression but also in reporting the oppressive structure, gaining national followers and international attention.

As economic pressures began to overwhelm the regime, combined with the growing insurgency of social movements from the working classes and pockets of resistance, often led by students, intellectuals, artists, and political activists, as well as international pressures, the process of 'opening' began, easing repressive actions and gradually liberalising politics. The country's re-democratization occurred subtly and through negotiation, marked by the 1979 Amnesty Law under the 'forget and forgive' policies. Five defining elements of the dictatorship regime were identified and detailed: the two-party system, the maintenance of the National Congress, economic emphasis, multi-representation, and long negotiations for an agreed transition to democracy. These elements delineate not only the structure of the dictatorship in Brazil but also important components that shape the population's imagination/feeling about the period.

With the drafting of the new federal constitution in 1988 and the return to the democratic axis through direct presidential elections, Brazil's transitional justice process began belatedly, with the first official acknowledgment by the State of the violence committed in 1995 by then-President Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Although various mechanisms have been evaluated and applied during the elected federal governments, with varying degrees of emphasis/investment in the topic, moments of progress and setbacks are visible. The absence of institutional reform and the validity of the Amnesty Law legitimises the military class's continued power in national politics and makes the political class generally perceive them with fear and opt to ally with the group, avoiding potential tensions and controversies. Moreover, the persistent silence practised by the military class in the country until today is supported not only by political support but also by the country's legal protection and the

lack of social interest/search, resulting in a culture of impunity and leaving Brazil's democratic system/values in a vulnerable position.

In contrast, the role of civil society in Brazil is crucial in documenting, reporting, and publicising the movement in search of truth and justice in the country. However, besides facing criticism for a discontinuous and volatile agenda, NGOs, and groups of families directly affected by the regime's violence are still often socially compared to 'terrorists,' limiting the reach of their actions. This dynamic is also driven by the social inequalities/fragmentations present in the country and reinforces the dualistic or neutral perception within Brazilian social fabric regarding the authoritarian governance period.

Although public and private initiatives and significant efforts have been made to 'foster a collective understanding that acknowledges the experiences of victims, promotes truth, and reinforces the importance of human rights and democratic values,' the memory construction project in Brazil remains inconclusive or unsuccessful. As demonstrated in the first chapter, Brazilians have become accustomed to long-standing practices of violence, which makes the lack of access to human rights and civil and individual freedoms frequently relativized. Additionally, during the military regime, according to regional aspects and issues such as class, race, and ethnicity, the authoritarian regime was felt/perceived differently by certain population groups, and these narratives are often treated as individual rather than collective matters, culminating in an 'unmastered past.'

In the final topic, it is noted that several cultural and artistic production movements in Brazil stem from a tradition of counterculture and socio-political activism, playing a significant role in the resistance movement during the regime and in materialising and denouncing state violence. By encouraging dialogue and giving visibility to marginalised voices and alternative narratives to the dominant ones, the arts in Brazil represent an essential means of 'transversal politics' capable of mediating understanding and debate on rights. In recent decades, private cultural-artistic production has shifted its focus from the dictatorship theme to everyday social issues, revealing one of the field's limitations.

Throughout the research work, it becomes evident that the ongoing process of transitional justice in Brazil faces significant challenges, but it also holds tools with the potential for transformative change. The role of arts and culture in this process remains crucial, as they continue to provide innovative and impactful ways to engage with the past and promote democratic values. To fully realise the potential of transitional justice, it is essential to support and expand these cultural initiatives, ensuring that they are integrated into broader efforts to achieve accountability, reparations, and institutional reform.

Future efforts should focus on implementing the recommendations of the National Truth Commission, revising the Amnesty Law to allow for the prosecution of human rights violators, and strengthening the independence and capacity of judicial and human rights institutions. Additionally, educational programs should be expanded to include comprehensive accounts of the dictatorship and its impacts, fostering a culture of memory and respect for human rights.

Engaging new generations in the process of transitional justice is also vital. By involving young people in artistic and cultural projects, we can ensure that the lessons of the past are passed on and that the commitment to democracy and human rights is sustained. This intergenerational approach will help build a more resilient and inclusive society, capable of confronting its history and moving forward with a shared vision of justice and reconciliation.

The history of Brazil's military in power, the transitional justice process, and the role of arts and culture in this journey illustrate the complexities and possibilities of addressing past injustices and building a democratic future. While significant progress has been made, much work remains to be done. The vibrant cultural responses to the dictatorship, the ongoing efforts of civil society, and the engagement of new generations all point to the enduring importance of memory, truth, and justice.

As Brazil continues to navigate its path toward reconciliation, the role of arts and culture will remain central. These narratives provide powerful tools for re-signifying history, fostering public dialogue, and promoting political engagement. By supporting and expanding these initiatives, we can contribute to a more just and democratic society, where the lessons of the past are not only remembered but also used to inform and inspire future generations. In this way, the process of transitional justice in Brazil can serve as a model for other societies grappling with their own histories of violence and repression, demonstrating the transformative power of truth, memory, and culture.

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