

This is the author accepted manuscript version of: Higa, G, Alvarez, MC & Pessoa Cavalcanti, R 2023, In defence of human rights: the political-academic experience of the Centre for the Study of Violence, Brazil. in S Tombs, V Canning & G Martin (eds), The Emerald International Handbook of Activist Criminology. Emerald Studies In Activist Criminology, Emerald Publishing Ltd.

It is deposited under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC) licence. This means that anyone may distribute, adapt, and build upon the work for non-commercial purposes, subject to full attribution. If you wish to use this manuscript for commercial purposes, please visit Marketplace.

## **In defence of human rights: The political-academic experience of the Centre for the Study of Violence, Brazil**

**[ Gustavo Lucas Higa; Marcos César Alvarez; Roxana Pessoa Cavalcanti ]**

### **PLEASE PUT THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR IN BOLD**

[Chapter Author 1: Gustavo Lucas Higa, University of São Paulo]

[Chapter Author 1 Email [gustavo.higa@usp.br](mailto:gustavo.higa@usp.br)]

\*[Chapter Author 2 Marcos César Alvarez, University of São Paulo]

[Chapter Author 2 Email [mcalvarez@usp.br](mailto:mcalvarez@usp.br)]

\*[Chapter Author 3 Roxana Pessoa Cavalcanti, University of Brighton]

[Chapter Author 3 Email [r.p.cavalcanti@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:r.p.cavalcanti@brighton.ac.uk)]

### **Author/s Biography/ies:**

Gustavo Lucas Higa is a Brazilian sociologist, currently a Ph.D candidate in Sociology at the University of São Paulo. He has a scholarship from the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (Fapesp) and is a researcher at the Center for the Study of Violence. His research focuses on historical sociology, documentary research, sociology of violence, punishment, authoritarianism, human rights, discourse analysis and moral panics. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4459-5002>

Marcos César Alvarez is a Brazilian sociologist, professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of São Paulo. He develops teaching, research and extension activities in the domains of social theory and methodologies, especially the Sociology of Punishment and Social Control, focusing on the Brazilian historical and social context. He is the coordinator of the Center for the Study of Violence. <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5984-9082>

Roxana Pessoa Cavalcanti is a British-Brazilian principal lecturer in Criminology at the University of Brighton, UK, where she currently also works as ambassador for early career researchers. Her research focuses on the examining and contesting the criminalisation of poverty and dissent. She has written about on violence, feminism, cities, criminology, police violence and insecurity. Her work is centred on issues of (in)justice, human rights and the theorising interlocking social inequalities relating to class, gender, race and ethnicity in Latin America. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3885-8603>

### **Acknowledgements:**

Cavalcanti thanks the University of Brighton for the Sabbatical awarded in 2021. Higa and Alvarez thanks the University of São Paulo and Centre for the Study of Violence for all support.

**ABSTRACT:**

This chapter makes a brief incursion through a trajectory of over three decades of activism by the Centre for the Study of Violence at University of São Paulo (*Núcleo de Estudos da Violência, NEV*) in Brazil, recovering the legacy of its forms of activism and academic reflection, while analysing the interfaces between violence and democracy in Brazil. The 1980s in Brazil were marked by expectations of profound political and social changes in the context of democratic transition. After twenty-one years of dictatorship (1964-1985), the military gradually withdrew from government, returning the state's executive branch to civilian representatives. This was a moment of optimism for progressive groups and social movements, which had fought to dismantle the tradition of arbitrariness and violations of rights perpetrated by the state during the military dictatorship. In this context, NEV was founded as a research unit linked to the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences. Its core academic objective was to analyse and scientifically denounce the conjuncture of violence and human rights violations that remained recurrent; consequently, it demonstrated the continuity of unequal power relations, social and cultural practices that fuel authoritarianism in times considered not authoritarian.

**KEYWORDS:**

1. Authoritarianism.
2. Human rights.
3. Academic activism.
4. Violence.
5. Brazil.
6. Centre for the Study of Violence.

## Main Body:

### Introduction: The borders of activist criminology and academic activism

*What impresses me is the crystallization of this situation in which we live. (...) We didn't realize what was brewing "underneath". But what has been created is a society that, in Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro's definition, is characterized by "social authoritarianism". It is this authoritarianism that matters. The institutional can be openly challenged, yet the social is deep-rooted where least expected.*

(Gabriel Cohn 2020, p.395, *our translation*).

Gabriel Cohn (2020) points to the concept of 'socially implanted authoritarianism' developed by Pinheiro (2002; 1991), one of the founders of the Centre for the Study of Violence in Brazil. The concept has provided a foundation for developing continuing analyses and actively challenging the conjunctures of violence and democracy in Brazil. This chapter is a brief account of this ongoing struggle, detailing why and how this activist work has been done for over more than three decades.

In her presidential address to the American Society of Criminology, Belknap (2015) defined 'criminology activism' as a commitment to advancing social and legal justice causes, which entails various forms of activism, including in research, service, teaching, and the pursuit of diversifying the representation<sup>1</sup> of criminologists. The activism of the Centre for the Study of Violence (*Núcleo de Estudos da Violência* in Portuguese, or NEV) has contributed to all these spheres, particularly with a focus on research as activism, speaking truth to power, challenging authoritarian narratives, practices and policies (Pinheiro, 1991), documenting and studying immoral and illegal acts, including State crimes and violence committed against the most marginalised members of Brazilian society. As Kramer (2016) pointed out, this approach is founded in a commitment to public scholarship aimed at countering the denial and normalisation of state crimes, as well as striving to strengthen democratisation and curbing harms committed by representatives of the state and other powerful offenders. This is then an activist version of what has been referred to as public criminology<sup>2</sup>, i.e., scholarship "that takes as part of its defining mission a more vigorous, systematic and effective intervention in the world of social policy and social action" (Currie 2007: 176).

---

<sup>1</sup> Belknap (2015) pointed to the limitations of the 'new criminology' or critical criminology in addressing intersecting oppressions relating to gender, race, and sexuality.

<sup>2</sup> Public criminology is a contested term. Loader and Sparks (2010) point to various models of public criminology (the scientific expert, the policy advisor, the observer-turned-player, the social movement theorist/activist, and the lonely prophet). The bleak outcome of all these models is the 'successful failure' (Loader and Sparks 2008: p. 18) of criminology with its booming courses, journals, books, associations, prizes happening in parallel with two processes: (1) increasing turns to punitive approaches to crime and security issues, and (2) the rising importance of crime in popular culture and politics.

These commitments and forms of criminological activism require at least a note of caution. Criminology in Latin America has taken different social and historical routes when compared with the discipline established in English speaking countries. Beyond the English-speaking world, critical criminology developed with varying degrees of intensity, marked by a series of peculiarities relating to diverse national and academic fields (Alvarez, Sozzo & Chies-Santos 2020: 7). Some of its key authors were not sociologists but rather lawyers previously dedicated to penal law, who in some cases self-identified as critical criminologists, while in others as 'sociologists of the law' or penal sociologists (ibid). The very notion of 'criminology' to refer to an intellectual discourse has had limited penetration among sociologists in Latin America, even though many of these scholars dedicate themselves to the study of crime or crime control. This is partly due to the term 'criminology' remaining, for many academics, irreparably associated with its imperialist roots, positivism and preoccupations with biological and psychological factors or individual factors of the analysis of the causes of crime (Agozino 2003; 2019; Alvarez 2003; del Olmo 1981).

As Young (2011) argued, mainstream criminology constitutes positivist 'social and methodological fundamentalism' (177). However, the 'new criminology' or critical criminology challenges and opposes orthodox mainstream criminology (Taylor, Walter and Young 1974). More recently, a range of new critical developments have flourished expanding the lenses of critical criminology, including Southern Criminology (Carrington *et al.* 2019; Cavalcanti 2020), Green Criminology (Goyes 2019), Queer Criminology (Woods 2014) – to mention just a few. These new perspectives challenge the silences, universalism, Eurocentrism, and flawed frameworks espoused by the mainstream fields of the discipline, including by confronting positivist schools of thought and derailing classical and neo-classical criminology. Given this history, while we contribute to a debate on critical and activist criminologies, we write chiefly from the position of critical and activist social scientists.

The research and writing by academics at NEV have played a role in calling out and making harms visible through research and advocacy, disseminating critical knowledge, engaging with wider audiences, and establishing difficult dialogues with social actors that often have conflicting views and incompatible social functions. As such, the writing and research are tangible expressions of activism in the struggle for social justice, taking a stance against the structural social relations that marginalise dissent (Arrigo 2016). By way of example, Mesquita Neto (1997) argued that NEV was not only successful in capacity building, training multiple generations of researchers at various levels and specialties, but also in synchronising purely theoretical and applied research. In other words, NEV simultaneously qualifies theoretical and methodological discussions to help improve public policies that aim to address violence, promote human rights, and consolidate the rule of law, combining

scientific development with public intervention. Through this path, it is plausible to discuss NEV's work and history in relation to the debates around Activist Criminology, as detailed below.

### **The Teotônio Vilela Commission**

On 9<sup>th</sup> January 1983, the Military Police of the State of São Paulo, in the Southeast region of Brazil, summoned a special force known as Rondas Ostensivas Tobias Aguiar (ROTA)<sup>3</sup> to curb a rebellion in the *Hospital Judiciário*<sup>4</sup> (a prison type of psychiatric hospital) of Franco da Rocha, a city in the interior of the state. ROTA's intervention and the confrontation with the mutineers resulted in the death of six inmates and one employee. Given this tragic outcome, Brazilian senators Teotônio Vilela and Severo Gomes, together with Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, then a professor in the Political Science department at the University of São Paulo, decided to visit the site together to investigate the situation. Immediately after, they invited public figures politically engaged in the struggle for human rights and called on friends interested in this agenda to join their efforts (Pinheiro and Braun, 1986)<sup>5</sup>.

Months later, the group would become known as the Teotônio Vilela Commission (Comissão Teotônio Vilela in the Portuguese or CTV), named after the senator who died in October of that same year. In addition to their political influence, they all had similar convictions regarding the need to democratise the country through a political agenda for the promotion and protection of human rights. In general, CTV's intervention followed a consistent method after a complaint about a human rights violation: they visited the denounced place (often unannounced), carried out an inspection, wrote a report, notified the authorities, and kept track of the developments of the case. The press was an essential element for disseminating information about these complaints, especially the national newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, which periodically published texts, articles, interviews, manifestos, as well as the reports themselves. CTV wrote a new chapter in Brazil's political and social history by being one of the pioneering civil society organisations to promote public debate on human rights,

---

<sup>3</sup> The ROTA is a special operations troop of the General Command of the Military Police of the State of São Paulo equipped with heavy weaponry.

<sup>4</sup> This 'hospital judiciário', or Judicial Hospital, is part of the Juqueri Psychiatric Hospital, one of the oldest psychiatric institutions in the country, founded in 1898. The Psychiatric Hospital housed subjects considered a threat to the social order, justified by mental illness. In 1934, in the same place, the Judicial Hospital opened to house criminals with mental illness, perform mental health exams and give treatment. There were criticisms regarding the conditions and criteria of internment, which would serve more as social control and punishment, since among the inmates there were immigrants, drug and alcohol users, "vagabonds", homosexuals and prostitutes, for example.

<sup>5</sup> According to the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo*, on January 12, 1983, p. 11, the following members joined the trio: state deputy José Gregori, jurist Hélio Bicudo, priest Agostinho Duarte de Oliveira, writer Fernando Gabeira, psychoanalyst Hélio Pellegrini, president of the Justice and Peace Commission of São Paulo Margarida Genevois, and professors Francisco Weffort, Marilena Chauí, and Antonio Candido.

monitoring and denouncing grave violations by public agents and state institutions such as prisons, asylums and detention centres for adolescents, as well as actively operating for over thirty years in countless changes in Brazil's political scenario<sup>6</sup>.

### **The Centre for the Study of Violence**

Over the course of CTV's intervention activities and the emerging challenges amid Brazil's democratic transition, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro saw the need for the support of a specialised research centre to promote a scientific approach to the country's debate on violence and human rights. According to Pinheiro, CTV's political actions would garner further support with the university through a broad intervention front alongside the promotion of teaching and research (Alvarez, Benett, Higa, Novello and Funari, 2022).

Inspired by international institutions such as Human Rights Watch and the Centre for the Study of Human Rights at Columbia University, Pinheiro got in touch with Sérgio Adorno, a professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of São Paulo (USP), who also foresaw the urgency of forming a research centre to address the topic. At the time, the 1980s, Brazil was going through significant social and political transformations fuelled by increasing articulation and solidarity among social movements that challenged the violence and human rights violations inflicted by the military dictatorship. This included diverse groups and campaigns, including the famous *Diretas Já* (movement for direct elections of a civilian president), and many other movements, such as the landless movement, the workers movement, environmental, anti-racist, women's and feminist movements, all of which challenged the state, the military dictatorship and human rights abuses (Hochstetler 1997). So, the work of the founders of NEV was situated in this context – it was not an individual but a collective endeavour. Academically, both Pinheiro and Adorno were considered pioneers in consolidating the debate around the sociology of violence in Brazil (De Lima, Ratton & Azevedo, 2012). A task in which they faced institutional resistance, as Pinheiro explained in an interview:

“The few people who dealt with the themes of violence and police lethality were not at university. It was a battle because many colleagues at USP did not think violence was a theme for sociology, neither for political Science. Alfred Stepan and Guillermo O'Donnell were some of the few who drew attention to violence [...] The alliance to create the centre (NEV) with the department of Sociology, thanks to Sérgio Adorno, helped a lot. He had more legitimacy than I at USP. (...) Perhaps, had it not been for the association with Sérgio, I wouldn't have managed

---

<sup>6</sup> CTV formally ended its activities in 2016, leaving all its documents and files under the care of the Public Archives of the State of São Paulo. See at: <http://icaatom.arquivoestado.sp.gov.br/ica-atom/index.php/comissao-teotonio-vilela-de-direitos-humanos> (Accessed on: 03/23/2021).

it. Because in the Political Science Department, without citing names, resistance to the studies of violence was enormous” (*Alvarez et al, 2021, p. 311 and 319*).

Nonetheless, in 1987, they founded the Centre for the Study of Violence (NEV), a centre devoted to interdisciplinary research on crime, violence, and human rights in Brazil, connected to the Faculty of Philosophy, Literature and Human Sciences (FFLCH) at the University of São Paulo. In 1989 Nancy Cardia, a social psychologist, joined NEV, thus forming a triple coordination team that would co-lead NEV for the next thirty years.

It is important to remember that Brazil was undergoing a troubled political transition process at the time, in which a decades-old military dictatorship (1964-1985) gradually left the scene as formal democracy gained shape through contentious politics (Napolitano, 2014). Amid this scenario, NEV was attentive to the myriad processes of ruptures, changes, and continuities of authoritarianism, especially the grave human rights violations in the country. We can say that CTV and NEV were mutually supportive institutions, while the former operated through public interventions, steering the debate in the political sphere, the latter conducted scientific analysis, teaching, and dissemination of knowledge through the university<sup>7</sup>.

Several initiatives, focused at the time on tackling serious human rights violations within public security and criminal justice institutions, began to face opposition as the country’s democratic transition advanced. For example, still in the state of São Paulo, the first elected governor enacted measures to improve the material conditions of the state’s prison system. However, such measures, baptized at the time as “the humanization of prisons”, soon became the target of political sectors that publicly manufactured forms of moral panic to denounce an alleged expansion of organized crime inside prisons, thus leading to a blockade of the initiatives (Alvarez, Salla & Dias, 2014; Higa and Alvarez, 2019). Subsequently, these political groups gathered around agendas that derogatively defined human rights defenders as “protectors of criminals” (Caldeira, 2000, p. 344), going as far as creating state and national parliamentary fronts championing such proposals (Novel, 2018).

NEV-USP researchers realized, from their own challenging experience of the re-democratization process in the country, that the control of violence, especially by state institutions, would not be a simple peaceful process. Thus, NEV soon directed its analytical focus to the obstacles and shortcomings of democracy in the country, as well as towards activism through research activities.

In this regard, NEV’s first research project, entitled “The Criminal Justice Administration System” (1987-1994), found a lack of synergy among key institutions for democracy, above all within

---

<sup>7</sup> The partnership not only included Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro as the main articulator between both institutions, but also CTV’s very own headquarters were located inside the premises of NEV.



the justice system itself. The lack of communication in the system not only spawned major administrative challenges, but also created obstacles to the consolidation of new public policies by perpetuating authoritarian management models dating back to the military dictatorship era. The diagnosis of an enduring authoritarianism thus unfolded into a vast research agenda, focused on the continuity of serious human rights violations even after the advance of the re-democratization process. The research also drew attention to long-rooted sociohistorical authoritarian practices and their realization within political culture and everyday life. Two other studies formed this agenda: “Socially Implemented Authoritarianism” (1987-1991), and later “Authoritarian Continuity and the Consolidation of Democracy” (1994 to 2000)<sup>8</sup>. From their initial findings, NEV warned that the most pressing challenge to a consolidated democracy in the country was the lack of reforms within the scope of state institutions. It would therefore be necessary to consider the historical configuration of the political culture itself as well as the practices of both state and non-state actors, as many were still pervaded with an ancestral authoritarian structure. One of the major contributions of this agenda was the development of the notion of Socially Implemented Authoritarianism (Pinheiro, 1991), detailed further below.

In its first 10 years, different government authorities invited NEV to take part in major interventions in the public debate, particularly the creation of the National Human Rights Plan (1996)<sup>9</sup>, the State Human Rights Plan (1997)<sup>10</sup>, the Seminar “São Paulo Without Fear” (1997)<sup>11</sup>, and the São Paulo Institute against Violence (1997)<sup>12</sup>.

In its second decade, NEV expanded its activities, especially after it became part of the São Paulo’s Research Foundation (*Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa*, or FAPESP) program Research, Innovation and Diffusion Centres (In Portuguese, *Centros de Pesquisa, Inovação e Difusão* or CEPID)<sup>13</sup> in 2000 with funding to expand the range of possibilities for recruiting researchers and enabling research in the following ten years. At first, the research project was structured around five axes: I. Monitoring Serious Human Rights Violations; II. Devising Public Security Policies; III. Study of Criminal Impunity; IV. Representations of Human Rights, Justice, and Punishment; and V. Integrated Theory of Human Rights.

---

<sup>8</sup> These studies were supported by the Ford Foundation, the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP/process n. 92/3141-0), and the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq/ process n. 521271/96-7).

<sup>9</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/noticias/plano-nacional-de-direitos-humanos-pndh/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/noticias/plano-estadual-de-direitos-humanos-pedh/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/evento/seminario-sao-paulo-sem-medo/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/1997/11/26/cotidiano/37.html>

<sup>13</sup> For more information: <https://cepid.fapesp.br/en/centro/24/>

FAPESP is a public foundation and one of the main agencies for promoting scientific and technological research in the country, with autonomy guaranteed by law. Even during the dictatorship, it was controversial to interfere openly with FAPESP. Despite being a government institution, its relative autonomy made it possible to support research projects that were critical of the government. With regards to this relationship, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, commented in a recent interview:

"It was with him [Michael M. Hall] that we created, more than forty years ago, the archive of Social History Edgard Leuenroth, AEL, who was a great anarcho-syndicalist leader. The archive was acquired by the director of Unicamp [State University of Campinas], Zeferino Vaz, with the support of FAPESP, in the midst of the military dictatorship" (Alvarez et al, 2021, p.304).

During the dictatorship, FAPESP sponsored an archive named in honour of an anarcho-syndicalist. FAPESP was composed of and associated with Brazil's intellectual elite and it was neither simple nor advisable to intervene with it directly. It is also important to remember that FAPESP was linked to universities, that is, places where there was a level of concern, but not everyone was scared, not everyone was persecuted by the government, only those linked to "communist" parties or social movements. So, even research that criticised the government happened routinely.

It is worth emphasizing that the support of the University of São Paulo and state funding agencies, such as FAPESP, have always been vital for NEV's institutionalization, by guaranteeing autonomy and funding stability for the development of large-scale and long-lasting interdisciplinary research. These investments have enabled NEV to expand its activities in the field of education, outreach, and dissemination of knowledge towards a non-academic audience. Some significant examples in this regard include 'Observatories of Human Rights in the Press', the website *Guia de Direitos* (2005)<sup>14</sup> and the project "Promoting the Right to Healthy Development of Pregnant Teenagers and their Children: a pilot program of home visits for primary prevention of violence" (2006 – 2007)<sup>15</sup>. NEV has also produced a series of support materials for Public Security and Criminal Justice operators, among which: the *Police and Society* book series<sup>16</sup>; the *Human Rights* book series<sup>17</sup>; the manuals on 'Violence in Schools and Community Policing'<sup>18</sup>; the Organizational Management Course

---

<sup>14</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/noticias/guia-de-direitos/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/pesquisa/promovendo-o-desenvolvimento-saudavel-de-adolescentes-gravidas-e-seus-filhos/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/publicacao/srie-de-livros-polcia-e-sociedade/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/noticias/serie-de-livros-direitos-humanos/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/publicacao/manual-de-policiamento-comunitrio-polcia-e-comunidade-na-construoda-segurana/>

in Public Security and Criminal Justice<sup>19</sup>; and the development of a police lethality monitoring Methodology for the ombudsmen<sup>20</sup>.

In 2012, an important event would underpin NEV's research agenda for the next 10 years: the renewal of the "Research, Innovation and Diffusion Centres" program (Centros de Pesquisa, Inovação e Difusão CEPID/FAPESP), only this time with novel approaches. The research program entitled "Building Democracy Daily: Human Rights, Violence, and Institutional Trust" analyses how the legitimacy of fundamental institutions for democracy is shaped or jeopardized in everyday life from the relationships between citizens and public services authorities. The major novelty compared to NEV's longstanding research tradition was the adherence to the issue of legitimacy alongside the themes of democracy and violence. Among the newly emerging outreach projects, the Observatory of Human Rights in Schools (*Projeto Observatório de Direitos Humanos em Escolas* in Portuguese, or PODHE<sup>21</sup>) stands out as an initiative aimed at expanding the knowledge and training of adolescents in human rights. The activities have taken place since 2017 in three public schools in the city of São Paulo, with weekly workshops through different mediums, such as theatre, storytelling, music, conversation circles, games, videomaking, school newspapers and writing. Topics covered also include listening, life history, ancestry, empathy, gender equality, ethnic-racial diversity, and emotional health. As such, the knowledge developed within the university also reaches basic education, a foundational stage for understanding and experiencing human rights in the intellectual formation of individuals.

### **Authoritarianism, Violence, and Social Structure**

In light of NEV's scientific research, it is worth mentioning, even if briefly, the theoretical dimensions of two aforementioned NEV-USP studies: "Socially Implanted Authoritarianism" and "Authoritarian Continuity and Consolidation of Democracy", developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. As mentioned, the theoretical horizon of this agenda was the sociohistorical dimension of deep-rooted authoritarian practices in the country. It was through this perspective that Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro developed the notion of Socially Implemented Authoritarianism (Pinheiro, 1991), in order to problematize the theme of violence from the triad State, Society and Culture. At the time, this perspective questioned the excessively institutionalist approach to the democratic transition processes and its many obstacles, championing the notion that an effective control of state violence would not stem simply from removing the military from the government or through reforms in political

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/noticias/curso-a-distancia-de-gestao-organizacional-em-seguranca-publica-e-justica-criminal/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/publicacao/metodologia-para-o-monitoramento-dos-casos-de-letalidade-policia/>

<sup>21</sup> <https://nev.prp.usp.br/projetos/projetos-especiais/podhe/>

institutions, but rather demanded paying attention to broader social practices that remained pervasive within enduring authoritarian structures.

What is meant by authoritarianism in this problematization? After all, the term carries a myriad of meanings. According to Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes (2020 [1978]), authoritarianism would be an ambiguous concept from a logical standpoint, referring both to the abuse of power and excessive authority. Within the social sciences, Max Weber was a pioneer in a more precise characterization of the phenomenon. For this purpose, the author defines what he understands by power and domination. Authoritarianism was defined as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests” (Weber 1978: 53), and later “as the probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Weber, 2009, p. 212). Further on, the author adds:

Domination (‘authority’) in this sense may be based on the most diverse motives of compliance: all the way from simple habituation to the most purely rational calculation of advantage. Hence, every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance, that is, an interest (based on ulterior motives or genuine acceptance) in obedience. (Weber, 2009, p. 212)

According to the criteria exposed above, Weber considers power and domination as distinct phenomena, even if they share complementary affinities; after all, relations of authority operate and prevail within forms of domination. Florestan Fernandes (2020 [1978]) addressed this issue in his writings on capitalism and bourgeois democracy in Brazil, warning that economic, social, and cultural inequality are constitutive elements for the emergence of an authoritarian spectrum. The resonance between inequality and authoritarianism, as indicated by Fernandes, serves as a valuable starting point for our purposes considering the following assumption: Brazil is one of the most unequal countries in the world, and this characteristic is historically constitutive of Brazilian society<sup>22</sup>.

An analysis of Brazil’s historical formation reveals a varied range of processes behind the country’s consolidated inequalities. It thus becomes inevitable to refer to the nation’s colonial past (16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) and to the modes of domination that operated and organised the social structure: rigid hierarchies, high concentration of land ownership in the hands of elites, and the slave system (De Carvalho Franco, 1997; De Holland, 2015). According to sociologist Sérgio Adorno (1996), in Brazil’s traditional agrarian society, violence was regularly incorporated into the daily life of free, freed, and enslaved people, presenting itself as a primordial solution to social conflicts, especially in

---

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://exame.com/economia/brasil-e-nono-pais-mais-desigual-do-mundo-diz-ibge/>

the private sphere. With the consolidation of modern capitalism and the implementation of the republican government in 1889, Brazil entered a new realm of expectations towards conflict resolution with the emergence of public institutions for controlling violence, based on universal laws and a wide-ranging justice system designed allegedly to provide security for citizens. Despite the expectation of control, practices of violence endured, in everyday life, and in a contradictory way projected themselves in institutions tasked with controlling social conflicts, which in turn reproduced these same conflicts (Adorno, 1996, p. 50). One of the contemporary explanations for this phenomenon is that land-owning/economic elites have also become political elites, moving between public and private interests as leaders of such institutions (De Holanda, 2014, p. 175).

Still according to Adorno, forms of violence have gradually connected actors and institutions, comprising a complex network that intersects environments such as family, work, school, police, and prisons, converging towards an authoritarian subjectivity embedded in social practices and expectations (Adorno, 1996, p. 51). That said, the problem is in tandem with Brazilian sociologist Gabriel Cohn's definition of authoritarianism, who considers this phenomenon as the absolute expression of authority (in Weber's meaning of the term), a form of exercise of power with different contents, i.e., the systematic use of organized power in the form of violence (Cohn 2020: p.394). We may therefore understand authoritarianism as a set of social forms grounded on excessive practices of authority and violence, modelled according to different contexts. Such practices are widespread in social life – explicitly or covertly – and constantly realized through actors, interest groups, institutions, and government programs. Many of the discussions in the field of sociology of violence in Brazil have followed the same path, emphasizing the deep-rooted violence both in state actions and in the network of social relationships (Campos & Alvarez, 2017)

Even if diagnoses about violence in Brazil signal the enduring power of the past, this does not imply the acceptance of historical inevitability. It is in fact quite the opposite: we must permanently update the struggle against authoritarian practices in the country. When reflecting on this issue in a recent interview (Alvarez *et al.*, 2022), Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro presented two important arguments: first, that even in democratic regimes, authoritarianism still casts a shadow on state violence; second, that one of the ways to control this arbitrary inclination would be the consolidation of democracy and defence of human rights. These are the main precautions against authoritarianism and its perverse ramifications. These have been the guiding themes throughout NEV's decades of academic activism, as the centre continues to critically articulate knowledge for the defence of the human and struggle against violence.

### Final Considerations

As detailed throughout this text, NEV-USP has not only paved a successful research path but has also strived towards activism and dissemination of information in topics such as violence, democracy and human rights in Brazil. Undoubtedly – and despite the numerous enduring challenges for strengthening democracy in the country – regional research centres have proliferated throughout Brazil, most often within public universities and addressing similar themes to those addressed by NEV-USP. The field of activism has also gained further ground with the burgeoning of non-governmental organizations focused on monitoring human rights in the country. Brazil's prison system has generated urgent problems for researchers and human rights activists. In line with countless other countries in recent decades, Brazil has seen an accelerated growth in incarceration, with local prisons continuing to pose themselves as spaces of violence, arbitrariness, and human rights violations (Salla, Lourenço & Alvarez, 2021). An entire field of political disputes, in which governmental and non-governmental actors and institutions position themselves, has organized itself around mass incarceration, invariably leading to both progress and setbacks in the promotion of human rights in prison (Telles *et al.*, 2020). In this contemporary context of conflicts and disputes over democracy and human rights, it would be unlikely for entities to reproduce the public role of CTV. But this situation has prompted a decisive focus on scientific/academic research and NEV maintains its longstanding tradition in human rights training and disseminating quality information to society, articulating scientific research and activism in the defence of democracy and human rights in Brazil.

### References:

- Agozino, B. (2003) *Counter-Colonial Criminology: A Critique of Imperialist Reason*. London: Pluto Press.
- Agozino, B. (2019) Humanifesto of the Decolonization of Criminology and Justice. *Decolonization of Criminology and Justice*, 1(1), 5-28. <https://doi.org/10.24135/dcj.v1i1.5>
- Alvarez, M. C., Benett, P. R., Higa, G. L., Novello, R. H. & Funari, G. (2021) Revisitando a noção de autoritarismo socialmente implantado Entrevista com Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro. *Tempo Social*, 33, 301-332.
- Alvarez, M.C., Sozzo, M. & Chies-Santos, M. (2020) Apresentação. Dossiê – Sociology and Criminology: Overlapping, Strains and Conflicts. *Tempo Social, Revista de Sociologia da USP*. V. 32 (3): 1-30.
- Alvarez, M. C., Salla, F. A. & Dias, C. N. (2013) Das Comissões de Solidariedade ao Primeiro Comando da Capital em São Paulo. *Tempo Social*, v. 21, p. 61-82, 2013.
- Arrigo, B. A. (2016) Critical Criminology as Academic Activism: On Praxis and Pedagogy, Resistance and Revolution. *Critical Criminology*. Vol. 24: 469-471.

Belknap, J. (2015) Activist criminology: Criminologists' responsibility to advocate for social and legal justice. *Criminology*. Vol. 53 (1): 1–22.

Carrington, K., Hogg, R., Scott, J., Sozzo, M. & Walters, R. (2019) *Southern Criminology*. Routledge: Abingdon.

Campos, M. S. & Alvarez, M. C. (2017) Políticas Públicas de Segurança, Violência e Punição no Brasil (2000 - 2016). In: S. Miceli & B. Martins. (Orgs.). *Sociologia brasileira hoje*. 1ed. Cotia, São Paulo: Ateliê Editorial, v.1 , p. 143-213.

Caldeira, T. P. R. (2000) *Cidade de muros: crime, segregação e cidadania em São Paulo*. São Paulo: Editora 34.

Cardoso, I. A. R. (2001) Para uma crítica do presente. São Paulo: Editora 34.

Cavalcanti, R. P. (2020) *A Southern Criminology of Violence, Youth and Policing: Governing insecurity in urban Brazil*. Routledge: London and New York.

Cohn, G. (2020) Afterword. In: Fernandes, F. *A Revolução Burguesa no Brasil: Ensaio de Interpretação Sociológica*. 6th ed. São Paulo: Editora Contracorrente.

Currie, E. (2007). Against marginality: Arguments for a public criminology. *Theoretical Criminology*. Vol. 11 (2): 175–190. DOI: 10.1177/1362480607075846

De Carvalho Franco, M. S. (1997). *Homens livres na ordem escravocrata*. São Paulo: Unesp.

De Holanda, S. B. (2014). *Raízes do Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

De Lima, R. S., Ratton, J. L. & de Azevedo, R. G. (2012) Crime, polícia e justiça no Brasil. Editora Contexto.

De Mesquita, P. (1997) A experiência do núcleo de estudos da violência da USP. *Comunicação & Educação*, n. 9, p. 107-111.

Del Olmo, R. (1981) *América Latina y su criminología*. Mexico, D.F. and Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores.

Fernandes, F. (2020). *A revolução burguesa: ensaio de interpretação sociológica*. São Paulo: Editora Contracorrente.

Gaspari, E., & Sacerdote, O. (2003). o Feiticeiro: A Ditadura Envergonhada..

Goyes, D.R. (2019) *Southern Green Criminology: A Science to End Ecological Discrimination*. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Higa, G. L., & Alvarez, M. C. (2019). Humanização das prisões e pânicos morais: notas sobre as “Serpentes Negras”. *Estudos Avançados*, 33, 69-90.

Hochstetler, K. (1997) democratizing pressures from below? Social movements in new Brazilian democracy. Paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association XX International Congress, Guadalajara, Mexico, April 17-19, 1997. (Available online) URL: <http://biblioteca.clacso.edu.ar/ar/libros/lasa97/hochstetler.pdf> [Accessed 6th July 2022]

Kramer, R.C. (2016) State Crime, the Prophetic Voice and Public Criminology Activism. *Critical Criminology*. Vol. 24: 519–532. DOI 10.1007/s10612-016-9331-x

Loader, I. and Sparks, R. (2008) ‘What are we gonna do now?’ Revisiting the public roles of criminology. *Centre for Crime and Justice Studies*. URL: <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/09627250802057898.pdf> [Accessed 06th July 2022]

Loader, I. and Sparks, R. (2010) *Public Criminology?* London: Routledge.

Napolitano, M. (2014) 1964: *História do regime militar brasileiro*. São Paulo: Editora Contexto.

Novello, R. (2018) “*Bancada da Bala: discursos e práticas sobre punição, crime e insegurança na Assembleia Legislativa de São Paulo*.” Dissertação de mestrado, FFLCH-USP, São Paulo.

Pinheiro, P. S. (1991). Autoritarismo e transição. *Revista Usp*, n. 9, p. 45-56.

Pinheiro, P. S. (2002). The Paradox of Democracy in Brazil. *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 8(2), 113–122. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24590249>

Pinheiro, P. S. & Braun, E. (1986). Democracia x Violência: reflexões para a Constituinte. *Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra*.

De Rezende, M. J. (2001). *A ditadura militar no Brasil: repressão e pretensão de legitimidade, 1964-1984*. Londrina: Editora UEL.

Salla, F., Lourenço, L. C. & Alvarez, M. C. (2021). Adults in the Brazilian Prison System. In: S. Gomes, M.J.L. de Carvalho & V. Duarte (eds.) *Incarceration and Generation, Volume I*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. pp. 225-253.

Taylor, I. R., Walton, P. & Young, J. (2013). *The new criminology: for a social theory of deviance*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Telles, V. D. S., Godoi, R., Brito, J. M. & Mallart, F. (2020). Combatendo o Encarceramento em Massa, Lutando Pela Vida 1. *Caderno CRH*, 33: 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.9771/ccrh.v33i0.32931>

Weber, M. (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, Vol. I*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Weffort, F. (1984). *Por que Democracia?* São Paulo: Ed Brasiliense.

Woods, J. B. (2014). Queer Contestations and the Future of a Critical “Queer” Criminology. *Critical Criminology*. Vol. 22: 5–19. DOI 10.1007/s10612-013-9222-3

Young, J. (2011). *The criminological imagination*. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity.