

# Digital Memory in Brazil

*A Fragmented and Elastic Negationist  
Remembrance of the Dictatorship*



*Leda Balbino*

DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND SOCIETY

# DIGITAL MEMORY IN BRAZIL

# DIGITAL ACTIVISM AND SOCIETY: POLITICS, ECONOMY AND CULTURE IN NETWORK COMMUNICATION

The *Digital Activism and Society: Politics, Economy and Culture in Network Communication* series focusses on the political use of digital everyday-networked media by corporations, governments, international organisations (Digital Politics), as well as civil society actors, NGOs, activists, social movements and dissidents (Digital Activism) attempting to recruit, organise and fund their operations, through information communication technologies.

The series publishes books on theories and empirical case studies of digital politics and activism in the specific context of communication networks. Topics covered by the series include, but are not limited to:

- the different theoretical and analytical approaches of political communication in digital networks;
- studies of socio-political media movements and activism (and ‘hacktivism’);
- transformations of older topics such as inequality, gender, class, power, identity and group belonging;
- strengths and vulnerabilities of social networks.

Series Editor

Dr Athina Karatzogianni

About the Series Editor

**Dr Athina Karatzogianni** is an Associate Professor at the University of Leicester, UK. Her research focusses on the intersections between digital media theory and political economy, in order to study the use of digital technologies by new sociopolitical formations.

Published Books in This Series

*Digital Materialism: Origins, Philosophies, Prospects* by Baruch Gottlieb

*Nirbhaya, New Media and Digital Gender Activism* by Adrija Dey

*Digital Life on Instagram: New Social Communication of Photography* by  
Elisa Serafinelli

*Internet Oligopoly: The Corporate Takeover of Our Digital World* by Nikos Smyrnaiois

*Digital Activism and Cyberconflicts in Nigeria: Occupy Nigeria, Boko Haram and MEND* by Shola A. Olabode

*Platform Economics: Rhetoric and Reality in the 'Sharing Economy'* by Cristiano Codagnone

*Communication as Gesture: Media(tion), Meaning, & Movement* by Michael Schandorf

*Chinese Social Media: Face, Sociality, and Civility* by Shuhan Chen and Peter Lunt

*Posthumanism in Digital Culture: Cyborgs, Gods and Fandom* by Callum T.F. McMillan

*Media, Technology and Education in a Post-Truth Society: From Fake News, Datafication and Mass Surveillance to the Death of Trust* by Alex Grech

*Environmental Security in Greece: Perceptions From Industry, Government, NGOs and the Public* by Charis(Harris) Gerosideris

*3D Printing Cultures, Politics and Hackerspaces* by Leandros Savvides

*Fantasy, Neoliberalism and Precariousness: Coping Strategies in the Cultural Industries* by J r my Vachet

*Crisis Communication in China: Strategies Taken by the Chinese Government and Online Public Opinion* by Wei Cui

*Digital Politics, Digital Histories, Digital Futures: New Approaches for Historicising, Politicising and Imagining the Digital* by Adi Kuntsman and Liu Xin

#### Forthcoming Titles

*Duty to Revolt: Transnational and Commemorative Aspects of Revolution* by George Souvlis and Athina Karatzogianni

*Massively Marginal: Kuaishou as China's Subaltern Platform* by Dino Ge Zhang, Jian Xu and Gabriele de Seta

*Algorithmic Governance: Institutional Design and Organisational Innovations* by Ioannis Avramopoulos

*Fractal Leadership: The Technosocial Transformation of Leadership in Social Movements* by Athina Karatzogianni and Jacob Matthews

This page intentionally left blank

# DIGITAL MEMORY IN BRAZIL

## A Fragmented and Elastic Negationist Remembrance of the Dictatorship

BY

**LEDA BALBINO**

*Manchester Metropolitan University, UK*



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India  
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited  
Howard House, Wagon Lane, Bingley BD16 1WA, UK

First edition 2023

Copyright © 2023 Leda Balbino.  
Published under exclusive licence by Emerald Publishing Limited.

**Reprints and permissions service**

Contact: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without either the prior written permission of the publisher or a licence permitting restricted copying issued in the UK by The Copyright Licensing Agency and in the USA by The Copyright Clearance Center. Any opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the authors. Whilst Emerald makes every effort to ensure the quality and accuracy of its content, Emerald makes no representation implied or otherwise, as to the chapters' suitability and application and disclaims any warranties, express or implied, to their use.

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-80262-804-3 (Print)  
ISBN: 978-1-80262-803-6 (Online)  
ISBN: 978-1-80262-805-0 (Epub)



**ISOQAR**  
REGISTERED

Certificate Number 1985  
ISO 14001

ISOQAR certified  
Management System,  
awarded to Emerald  
for adherence to  
Environmental  
standard  
ISO 14001:2004.



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To my parents.*

This page intentionally left blank

# CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>About the Author</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>xxi</i>
1. Brazil's Digital Memory and Its Discontents	1
2. Patterns of a Fragmented Memory	27
3. Overstretched Elasticity of a Fragmented Memory in the COVID-19 Era	41
4. Objectives and Strategies of a Fragmented Memory	59
5. Conclusion: The Future of Digital Memory in Brazil	79
<i>References</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>List of Twitter and YouTube Posts</i>	<i>111</i>
<i>Index</i>	<i>121</i>

This page intentionally left blank

# LIST OF FIGURES

## **Chapter 3**

- Figure 1. Social Media Enable Bolsonaro and Sons to Show How They are Accessible to Supporters. 47

## **Chapter 4**

- Figure 1. Video Visually Shows Discursive Dichotomy Opposing Communism and the Brazilian Army. 64
- Figure 2. Stripped from the Presidency's Formality, Bolsonaro Has His Hair Cut While Talking About the Dictatorship. 69

This page intentionally left blank

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AI-5	Institutional Act 5 – Ato Institucional Número 5
BNM	Brazil Never More Project – Projeto Brasil Nunca Mais
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CIE	Army Information Center – Centro de Informação do Exército
CNV	National Truth Commission – Comissão Nacional da Verdade
GSI	Institutional Security Office – Gabinete de Segurança Institucional
LAI	Access to Information Law – Lei de Acesso à Informação
OAB	Brazilian Bar Association – Ordem dos Advogados do Brasil
PF	Federal Police – Polícia Federal
PGR	Attorney General Office – Procuradoria Geral da República
PT	Workers’ Party – Partido dos Trabalhadores
STF	Supreme Federal Court – Supremo Tribunal Federal

This page intentionally left blank

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Leda Balbino** is a journalist with experience in coordinating Foreign Desk teams at print, digital and broadcast newsrooms in Brazil, including at O Globo, Folha de S. Paulo, and Estado de S. Paulo newspapers and GloboNews all-news cable television. She was selected as a fellow of the World Press Institute in 2012, when she covered the Democratic National Convention and the United States presidential election. In 2013, she reported the 68th Session of the UN General Assembly as a fellow of the Dag Hammarskjöld journalism programme. She has also reported from Cuba, Ecuador, Estonia, Israel and Jordan. In 2021, she completed with Distinction the Masters in International Relations and Global Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University.

This page intentionally left blank

# PREFACE

## IN SEARCH OF ANSWERS

While in concluding phase of this book, a quote from the 1982s book *Memorial do Convento* (*Baltasar and Blimunda*, in the English version) by the late Portuguese writer and Nobel Literature winner José Saramago emerged from the back of my memory: ‘Everything in the world is giving answers; what lingers is the time of the questions’. As it spontaneously re-played in my mind, it layered another meaning in my past interpretation of first solely relating it to life’s truthful significance as missed while we inattentively carry on. Resurgent in a present where I was attentively trying to articulate answers for a changing political scenery in my home country, Brazil, it made me remember when I started to intuit the need for questions.

The year was 2013 when national mass protests mobilised through social media, later called the June Days, spiralled against the political establishment after police violence, with the first street signs of authoritarian reminiscence. I remember a specific discomfort while watching on TV demonstrators in Brasília taking the Esplanade of the Ministries, occupying Congress’s marquee and trying to invade Itamaraty (the Brazilian Foreign Ministry), including by breaking some of its window panes. With heterogenic agenda and actors, they seemed a catharsis for the sake of protesting, a movement aiming to replace the status quo without a clear picture of how and why. In the following years, political instability increased with the Car Wash anti-corruption operation and an impeachment movement against the left-wing president Dilma Rousseff. Plus, there was also an overwhelming economic crisis and recession. During this time, the first spread-out mobilisation grew around the former captain Jair Bolsonaro, who managed to homogenise and centralise a disperse discontentment feeling in his far-right figure.

The 2018 elections arrived as challenging times. I became obsessed with following political news and going down the rabbit hole of Facebook pages with right-wing content. They revealed an unknown Brazil, where concepts of democracy, communism and socialism seemed disrupted, concerning a different language than mine. Foremost, the then-polarised electoral context

disclosed colleagues and relatives having the corruption topic as a tie-breaker for their votes. Although a crucial matter, the non-negotiable aspects for me were the principles of human rights and not voting for someone praising the Brazilian dictatorship. Or the manipulation of religion for political gains, putting aside the secularism feature of the state. Or the apology for bearing arms as a solution to security problems. In a random encounter at a bakery, I discussed with a former school-time acquaintance because I had seen her sharing disinformation on social media. At the time, journalists denouncing irregular electoral campaign tactics in the digital environment became a target of online militias. During a trip, I felt sad after knowing a person I have always admired would vote for Bolsonaro out of his aversion to the left-wing party not long ago in power.

Despite not being an enthusiast of this left-wing party myself, evaluating it needed restructuring within the progressist camp, leadership renovation and most self-criticism concerning the series of errors, ethical misdemeanours and mismanagement committed while governing Brazil, I felt an urgency for what I considered as at stake at the time. The democracy recovered over three decades ago, at the corner of Brazilian history, was at risk. And this fear moved me passionately. Although a military coup like the ones staged in South America during the Cold War seemed unthinkable, the fraying of the democratic tissue was at reach. There were multiple examples outside Brazil, with the rising of radical right populism in Europe, the United States, Asia and the Middle East. Thus, Bolsonaro was not a phenomenon limited to Brazil. His emergence told a story far-reaching than my country. As many people choosing to vote for him were reasonable and intelligent, the puzzlement of why he constituted a large base of support within Brazilian society became more pressing. One day at the newsroom, I told a friend: ‘We need to study what is happening’. Hence, the urge for understanding put me on track for writing this book.

In 2019, the first year of Bolsonaro in power, I stopped delaying the plan of studying abroad and moved to the United Kingdom to undertake my MA in International Relations and Global Communications at Manchester Metropolitan University. It was a challenging journey of learning and discovering theories, concepts and studies previously uncharted. Above all, it was a privileged time in which I could distance myself from Brazil to encounter the best instruments to assess it with brand-new eyes. Brazil under Bolsonaro became my dissertation topic, which I had to finish in my home country due to the pandemic and personal issues, cutting short my planned stay in the United Kingdom up to the expiration of my student visa.

This MA final work is the base for the present book. It adds 2020, the first pandemic year, to the 2019 data concerning how Bolsonaro and two of his

sons constructed the digital memory of the Brazilian dictatorship. After returning, I sometimes resented not staying abroad as long as I wished. But this research in this final format made me perceive Brazil as the only place I could write this book, applying the foreign tools gathered in my lived reality, eye-witnessing the implications of this government from inside. It was a process of unravelling to myself the discoveries made through this journey, with a mist of anguish and joy for transforming the initial seemingly unattainable distress into logical words on paper. I made something out of the initial discomfort, not letting it settle down, which turned into a source of humble pride. First, I could translate to myself a language seemingly unlearnable at the beginning. With the apprehension of its populist mechanisms, the facts evolving in 2021 and the last election in 2022 stopped feeling nonsensical. The performative acts of Bolsonaro's government had their own rationality and logic, as pointed out by Lacan (2005) concerning populism. Thus, after dwelling on it, I could finally attain what they mean when saying democracy, communism, coup, dictatorship, the people, popular sovereignty and liberty.

Consequently, it was a personal task but hopefully useful for a larger crowd than my own mind. By bringing this book to the public, I hope it is a helpful tool to explain relevant aspects of the Presidency of Bolsonaro, primarily concerning the digital environment and how his movement can still be alive even with him out of office after losing the 2022 election. Besides, this work can handle applicable instruments for researchers in other countries who testify to the ascendancy of far-right movements, especially concerning memory use in the digital space. In that sense, it would be a never-ending work. While potentially enabling conversations with researchers inside Brazil and outside, it can result in better questions. Without, expectantly, lingering on the world's answers.

This page intentionally left blank

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I must thank my parents for the conclusion of this book. They have built a beautiful journey despite their humble starts and not having the privilege of completing their education. As I have moved forward with mine, I pay respect to their sacrifices to guarantee a better life for our family, making me and my siblings dream with more than the immediate surroundings. They made me see as attainable the privilege of not just studying but doing so in a country and language stranger to ours. This book is a direct result of such inspiration.

Secondly, I must thank my siblings, especially my sisters, with whom I most shared our family hardships in the last years, enabling me to find mental space for this project. They, and many of my amazing friends, were a crucial part of this experience, advising me, rooting for me and giving me attentive ears. Last but not least, I must thank Adi Kunstman, the inspiring teacher and supervisor with whom I had the privilege to learn while at Manchester Met. Adi has helped me with my second guessing, guiding me through my potential. In that sense, she enabled me to trust in accomplishing more than I had first foreseen. Thank you so much for showing me the way.

This page intentionally left blank

## BRAZIL'S DIGITAL MEMORY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

The memory of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985), initiated by a civil-military coup that ousted a democratically elected civilian government in 1964, is still under dispute in Brazil after almost 40 years of the democratic transition. Despite not being the only Latin American country staging authoritarian regimes during the Cold War (1947–1991), Brazil was the most unhurried to implement policies to tackle this past. While Argentina and Chile created Truth Commissions soon after the end of their dictatorships, prosecuting former human rights violators (Schneider, 2020), Brazil first adopted financial reparations to compensate victims (Iecker de Almeida, 2019). Besides, Argentina and Uruguay's Amnesty laws got revoked, and, although Chile has never nullified its, international human rights law excels the Chilean national legislation (Schneider, 2020). In Brazil, the Amnesty negotiated in 1979 as part of the political transition under the Armed Forces control is still in effect. It concerned central questions such as the reintegration of the purged from the political system, the position towards the criminalities committed by repressive agents and the memory of the dictatorship (Motta, 2021). The Military Dictatorship outlined the 1979 law as a reciprocal amnesty benefiting both persecutors and repression targets (Schneider, 2020). But while its first paragraph meant pardoning *crimes of any kind* (such as torture) committed by military and police officials who perpetrated the repression, the second excluded from forgiveness participants of the armed struggle who committed *terrorism, robbery, kidnappings and personal attack* (Castro Rocha, 2021; Motta, 2021). Thus, as Castro Rocha puts it, by making this differentiation, 'Amnesty's true sense was conciliation through forgetting the crimes of the military' (2021:238).

This policy of forgetting the authoritarian past (Motta, 2021) shadowed the memorialisation of the dictatorship (Iecker de Almeida, 2019), opening space for disputing narratives that, since the first decade of the twenty-first century, has increasingly revealed the internet as a new battlefield and put into question the hegemonic memory critical to the military regime (Napolitano, 2015). For the present research, the work *Orvil – Power Grab Attempts* is a relevant example of this development. Elaborated through 1985 and 1988 by CIE (Army Information Center) agents to offer the military version of the combat between state bodies and leftist groups during the dictatorship, it remained in secret after having, at the time, its publication forbidden (Almada, 2021). But some of its excerpts got gradually published on a website in May 2000, and its integral content of 953 pages started to circulate online in 2007 (Castro Rocha, 2021). Coincidentally (or not), it was the same year of the launch of the report *Right to Memory and Truth – Special Commission on Political Deaths and Disappearances*, the first Brazilian federal government document acknowledging the occurrence of crimes during the military regime and the killing of citizens while in the custody of the state (Iecker de Almeida, 2019).

The digital dispute grew as the Brazilian state adopted measures to comply with the re-democratisation commitment for human rights, the increasing debate about the Amnesty Law revision (Pastor Oliveira and Marinho, 2013), and the institution in 2012 of the National Truth Commission (CNV, henceforth) (Pereira, 2015). Created just 27 years after the end of the Brazilian dictatorship, the CNV was the first major official initiative charged with investigating the human rights crimes committed by the military regime, differently from previous ones that focused on the reparation of victims (Motta, 2021). Although its investigative time-space was vast – between 1945 and 1988, years amidst two democratic Brazilian Constitutions (Napolitano, 2015) –, effectively it concentrated on the military regime, not only trying to clarify its violent actions (torture, murder, forced disappearance, corpse concealment) but also to identify places and responsible institutions (Motta, 2021). The CNV submitted its report on December 2014, counting 191 dead and 243 missing political dissidents. Techniques for disappearing the remains ranged from incineration, unmarked burial, and disposal in rivers or the sea. In addition to destroying the evidence of the crimes committed, vanishing the bodies spared the dictatorship from domestic and external criticism and served as a psychological weapon against opponents (Motta, 2021). The CNV report also estimated the number of people tortured between 2,000 and 20,000 and identified almost 400 people directly or indirectly responsible for the violations (2014a).

The relatively inferior Brazilian state murders in comparison with other military regimes in Latin America, such as Argentinian more than 8,500 deaths and disappearances (Informe RUVTE, 2015) and Chilean more than 3,000 (Valencia, 2013), helped apologists of the regime to underestimate its crimes. Nonetheless, although CNV chose to use direct state actions and political reasons as the main criterium for counting the victims of the dictatorship, some of its complementary reports also tally the violence against indigenous people and peasants (Motta, 2021). Concerning indigenous, it reaches a total of more than 8,000 deaths during the military regime's push to develop the Amazon (Bevins, 2018). Thus, if the criterium included crimes perpetrated most by private groups under state omission, the total number of victims would grow substantially (Motta, 2021). And independently of the number of dead and disappeared, the Brazilian military dictatorship played a role beyond the country's frontier. It helped shape the Latin American region while supporting a coup in Bolivia, preventing the electoral victory of a left-wing coalition in Uruguay, undermining left-wing Salvador Allende's government in Chile, and helping to establish Operation Condor, an international network of extermination across South America (Bevins, 2018).

Despite the facts, the denialist view on the dictatorship got traction. One of the leading digital exponents of this alternative stance is the far-right former Army captain Jair Messias Bolsonaro, whose position can get described as negationist for dismissing facts and science to deny history (Pereira, 2015; Almada, 2021). During his seven consecutive terms as a federal House representative (1991–2018), Bolsonaro has never been regretful about the military regime (Resende and Chagas-Bastos, 2021) with the wall behind his office seat exposing framed photos of the generals who commanded Brazil over that period: Humberto Castelo Branco, Artur da Costa e Silva, Emilio Garrastazu Médici, Ernesto Geisel and João Batista Figueiredo (Dieguez, 2022). According to a data analysis carried out by Menegat (2019), he mentioned the authoritarian period in one-fourth of the speeches delivered in Congress from 2001 to 2018, usually in nostalgic tones. Bolsonaro got elected Brazilian president in October 2018 with 55.13% of valid votes (57.8 million votes) despite his public despise for human rights, apology of torture, racist remarks against black and indigenous people, and misogynist and homophobic comments (Iecker de Almeida, 2019). Running for a small party, he compensated for his small time on the radio and television free electioneering with a well-orchestrated digital strategy on social media (Santos Junior, 2019). Given his military background, Bolsonaro mobilised the political support of high-ranking officials of the Armed Forces and chose a retired Army General as vice president (Resende and Chagas-Bastos, 2021). He also strongly

attracted the evangelical vote while defending the ‘traditional family’. His campaign explored the increasing polarisation in Brazil and the decreasing trust in established parties, particularly in the social democratic Workers’ Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores or PT, henceforth), which remained 13 years in power (2003–2016) and since 2005 got involved in corruption scandals (Rocha, 2018). The wrongdoings involved former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003–2011), who remained 580 days in prison from 2018 to 2019 after a conviction.

Besides denying a civil-military coup in 1964, Bolsonaro describes the 21 years of the subsequent authoritarian regime as the Army protecting the Brazilian democracy and averting a communist regime in the country (Iecker de Almeida, 2019). Thus, Bolsonaro was the first president since Brazilian re-democratisation who rejected the historic scientific consensus recognising the 1964 coup and the dictatorship until 1985 (Benetti et al., 2020). During his Presidency (2019–2023), he also militarised the government: over 6,000 active or retired military officers had positions in the federal civil service, including high-level officials in ministries (Resende and Chagas-Bastos, 2021). Moreover, Bolsonaro has often referred positively to other violent authoritarian Latin American governments, such as the Chilean dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet, the Paraguayan regime under Alfredo Stroessner, and the Peruvian government under Alberto Fujimori (Camargo et al., 2020; Schneider, 2020). This ‘authoritarian reading of history’ (Motta, 2021:17), decisive in the formation of the Bolsonaro family mentality (Castro Rocha, 2021), was a driving axis of his government. As a former captain, Bolsonaro makes part of the Armed Forces’ ‘community of memory’ on the Brazilian dictatorship stable since the 1960s (Bauer, 2019) and that, from 1986 on, got published on military memorial works as a response to books of exiled people and former political prisoners and other productions narrating dramatic experiences, particularly torture, during the worst years of repression (1968–1975) (Martins Filho, 2002). Former members of the military dictatorship felt the rescue of this memory by the left was a way of trying ‘to win with words a clash lost with weapons’, a revengeful reminiscence and a violation of the Amnesty Law principle of compromising, ‘thus forgetting’ (Martins Filho, 2002:180).

According to an in-depth analysis of Castro Rocha (2021), *Orvil* is the key-document serving as the narrative model of *Bolsonarism* concerning the memory of the period. The work intends to be the inside out of *Brasil Nunca Mais* (Brazil Never More, BNM henceforth), a project organised under the responsibility of Cardinal Paulo Evaristo Arns that revealed the legislative apparatus that enabled repression, examining the torture as a system and a state policy (Martins Filho, 2002). The project, published as a book in 1985

after over five-year secret research, bases its information on 707 complete processes of the Military Supreme Court, taking advantage of some flexibility to access the judicial situation of political prisoners and exiled people after the enactment of the 1979 Amnesty Law (Castro Rocha, 2021). Besides aiming to counterattack the BNM denunciations by exposing crimes committed by the left armed-struggle, *Orvil* also objectives to project a red scare by asserting communism has tried with the help of an international movement to reach power in Brazil since 1922 (the year of the Brazilian Communist Party foundation) and, after three failed attempts through arms, has opted for a pacific strategy of infiltrating society and institutions from 1974 on (Castro Rocha, 2021). Relevant to say this year is not random: it marks the inauguration of Ernesto Geisel, the fourth military president who initiated the so-called *slow, gradual, and safe* long distension process (Pastro Oliveira and Marinho, 2013). As it portrays communism as a continuous threat, *Orvil's* narrative aims for the future, since it wants to dispute with the left the 'hearts and minds of those who were not born or were too young' during the purportedly failed attempts to seize power (Castro Rocha, 2021:256). According to CNV (2014b), more than 80% of the Brazilian population was born after the civil-military coup.

First published online in 2007, *Orvil* got its print version in 2012, the initial work year of the CNV, seen as an affront by the majority sectors of the military corporation for indicating a revenge disposition of the then-left-leaning government despite the committee's commitment to not contradicting the Amnesty Law (Motta, 2021). Colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, chief of the São Paulo Doi-Codi torture unit in the 1970s known as *Hell Branch*, signed the presentation of the printed volume and explained the idea for the name *Orvil*: the inverted spelling of the word *livro*, or book in Portuguese (Castro Rocha, 2021). Ustra is also the author of two military counter-memories: *Breaking the Silence* (1987) and *The Suffocated Truth – The Story the Left Doesn't Want Brazil to Know* (2006), which names an eponymous website and has been often cited by Bolsonaro and his family as a must-read. In 2016, during the impeachment process of Dilma Rousseff for breaking fiscal and budget laws, the then congressman Bolsonaro dedicated to Ustra his vote against the left-wing president: 'They lost in 1964, they lost in 2016. Against communism, against Foro de São Paulo. To the memory of colonel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra, the dread of Dilma Rousseff', he said. The Foro de São Paulo mentioned is a left-wing initiative pursuing alternatives to neoliberalism after Berlin's Wall fall. Critics, such as Bolsonaro, consider it a Soviet continuity project and a criminal and secret ideological domination, whose accomplices are the press and public universities (Santos Junior, 2019).

Despite his statement being notably infamous because Rousseff had been tortured by Ustra as a teenage guerrilla fighter during the military dictatorship, the Ethics Council of the Brazilian lower house cleared Bolsonaro of advocating for the crime of torture (Schneider, 2020). As the reasoning concerning the dictatorship has been a central part of the political career of Bolsonaro, including the 2018 electoral campaign and his government, it seemed imperative to investigate how Bolsonaro uses the internet, especially social media, to convey a negationist memory on this Brazilian historical period.

This type of research matters because memory is a crucial component of the narrative created by authoritarian governments, especially of a populist or fascist nature (Agostinone-Wilson, 2020), to reach power and potentially harm democratic systems. In an age when lives get increasingly mediated digitally, specific studies on the impact of historic memory transmitted in this environment are of utmost importance. Which digital strategies are employed by negationists such as Bolsonaro to rewrite history, changing how facts are remembered and, maybe, more importantly, forgotten? Moreover, how does the digital environment impact not just the dissemination, but also the creation, of such negationist memory?

Despite his loss in the 2022 election, the results of the Bolsonaro government's digital manipulation of this memory got displayed to the world while thousands of his supporters stormed and destroyed the Brazilian Congress, presidential palace, and Supreme Court (STF, henceforth) on 8 January 2023, asking for military intervention after the return to power of PT's Lula. Barred to run in the 2018 due to the corruption conviction, he could participate in the 2022 election after the STF ruled the year before his trial happened without proper jurisdiction. Besides, it declared that judge Sergio Moro, who oversaw Lula processes under the Car Wash corruption investigation, had been biased in his decision to convict the former president (Da Ros and Taylor, 2022). The date of the attack to the Brazilian institutions seemed not random since it was practically two years later than the US Capitol invasion by backers of the former American president Donald Trump (2017–2021) on 6 January 2021, which displays the importance of this book into a broader context. The rise of Bolsonaro to power is not an isolated right-wing populism phenomenon in the twenty-first century. Besides him and Trump, there are also figures such as Andrzej Duda in Poland, Narendra Modi in India, Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, and Viktor Órban in Hungary. Although from different nations, their playbook has some similar features, such as a discourse implying a lost past must be restored (Agostinone-Wilson, 2020). If this idea got summarised by Trump's motto *Make America Great Again* in the United States, in Brazil, it is through the former president's discourse praising the dictatorship. Another

feature of the new right-wing populist governments is to use the state structure to favour and accommodate loyalists, especially the political family, as a mafia state (Müller, 2019). In Brazil, this can be exemplified by the participation of the sons of Bolsonaro in the daily affairs of the former Brazilian government despite their Legislative posts (Uribe et al., 2020). That is why, in addition to Bolsonaro, my book also analysed the social media of two out of three of his sons with public offices. Thus, besides the importance for Brazil, this project contributes to the international study of this new right-wing populist trend as it analyses the Bolsonaro government's tactics in the digital sphere to portray a denialistic past and control the narrative of the present.

### 1.1 DIGITAL MEMORY THEORIES AND DISPUTED MEMORY IN BRAZIL

Academia has started to explore the impact of digital technologies in the production and perceptions of the past since the 2000s, developing a discipline examining memory under the context of the current globally hyperconnected online environment in which our daily lives are increasingly interwoven. This scholarship perceived such development as not marginal. For example, my father does not have a single photograph of my grandfather. He was born in 1936 in an impoverished Arapiraca city, in the semi-arid Northeastern Alagoas Brazilian state, and, at that time in the distant twentieth century, pictures were not omnipresent as nowadays. One afternoon he mentioned not remembering his father's face. He tries to remember, but his mind seems to have obliterated this memory. His sad look showcased his lament for not having a printed photo in which to remind himself about his paternal figure. This complete impossibility of rescuing a remembrance seems unthinkable to the generations immersed in and dictated by the Digital Age, in which everyday life experience is easily *recordable*, generating memories portable within pockets, accessible with a scroll at hand, and transferable in real-time or near-instantaneous communications. Hence, this scholarship perceived the digital as more than just a new mediator. As a new context in which the process of remembering and forgetting get embedded, it obligatorily impacts the structuring of discourse, forms, and practices related to memory (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009; Zvereva, 2019).

Before digital media technology's advent, the past framed by memory was steadier and more coherent as bounded by spatial archives, organisations, institutions, and geographical locations (Hoskins, 2018b). It remained as a

reified object encapsulated in monuments, memorials, texts, photographs, and artefacts, belonging to communities represented by nation, family, and society (Bond et al., 2017). It was not at hand. The available option was to travel distances to an archive, monument, museum, library, another city, country, or even from the bedroom to a cabinet hiding dusty personal photo albums forgotten by time. When the broadcast media era relaxed access by enabling historical celebrations and political and social developments to be directly at home, it remained bound by the centralisation of television, radio, and news networks, with top-down standardised and authoritative dissemination to the public, in a one-to-many approach (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009). But since the spin from the 'Web 1.0, the internet of presentation, to the Web 2.0, the Internet of participation' (Pfanzelter, 2017:139), dubbed by Hoskins as a 'connective turn' (2011), new memory dynamics and forms of engagement arose in people's social lives (Reading, 2013) as the era of scarcity came to an end. This new memory ecology (Hoskins, 2011) enabled the convergence of earlier technologies of memories, such as written texts, videos, photos, and audio, with a new set of representations only possible in the ever-expanding space of the virtual sphere. Foremost, it turned outdated to be just uniform *viewers* passively *consuming* events and roughly systematised content *delivered* by a centralised institution. The current post-broadcast era changed human agency at large since diverse people and groups are now *users* easily *interacting* and actively *producing* and creatively *constructing* content and information to be shared (Hoskins, 2009), without curatorial constraints, in a peer-to-peer and bottom-up approach (Garde-Hansen et al., 2009). In this new hyperconnected world, the above-mentioned analogue memory sites have dissolved and reassembled into a fluid, fragmented, and constantly changeable locus, as it cannot be restricted by any format (*transmediality*), territory, institution (Lagerkvist, 2017), technological device (tablet, smartphone, computer) and any person alone. Uncurbed, this digitally spread-out memory is impossible to continually track down and ultimately obliterate, opening space for researchers such as Eichhorn even pointing out 'The End of Forgetting' (2019).

Although this radical idea can be easily put into question by socio-technological mutability and the vulnerability caused by technological obsolescence (van Dijck, 2007; Lagerkvist, 2017), the supposed end of oblivion derives from another feature. The hyperconnectivity driven mainly through mobile phones and social media brought about a self-centred culture, in which the personal experience is unprecedentedly and obsessively captured, edited, and exposed aspiring for broader use and audience, in a hybrid of private and public that Hoskins labelled as a *social network memory* (2009).