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# THE ECONOMIST COVERAGE OF HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES IN BRAZIL (1964 TO 2010)[1]

# A COBERTURA DA ECONOMIST SOBRE DIREITOS HUMANOS NO BRASIL (1964 A 2010)

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**Abstract:** The paper focus on how The Economist dealt with the human rights affairs in Brazil between 1964 and 2010. Through content analysis texts addressing the topic directly or indirectly were visited and analised. The Economist position was also compared with The Times and The Guardian, as well as with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) dispatches. The ambition is to make a portrayal of the publication's behaviour about human rights in Brazil, clarifying the evolution of its perspective about the theme. It is possible to suggest that political issues had had low priority, mainly during the so called "economic miracle".

**Key-words**: Brazil. Human Right. Media. The Economist

**Resumo:** O foco do artigo está em descrever como The Economist tratou a questão dos direitos humanos no Brasil entre 1964 e 2010. Por meio da análise de conteúdo, Textos que abordam o tópico direta ou indiretamente foram analisados. A posição da Economist também foi comparada com The Times e The Guardian, bem como com os despachos do Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). A intenção é retratar o comportamento da publicação sobre direitos humanos no Brasil, esclarecendo a evolução de sua perspectiva sobre o tema. É possível sugerir que as questões políticas tiveram baixa prioridade, principalmente durante o chamado "milagre econômico".

**Palavras-chave**: Brasil. Direitos Humanos. Mídia. The Economist

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## 1 Introduction

The paper will focus on how The Economist, a publication with an overtly liberal and global vocation, addressed human rights issues in Brazil during the dictatorship and in the subsequent democratic period. Additionally, this paper aim to identify how The Economist changed its approach to the subject. Through qualitative content analysis, from a broad selection of articles and editorials about Brazil, fragments addressing the topic directly or indirectly were visited (BARDIN, 2007). In total, 37 texts from The Economist, 13 from The Times and 4 from The Guardian, that dealt with the topic directly were analysed. In addition, for comparative purposes, 9 documents from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) were included in the analysis corpus[3]. The construction of the sample followed the guideline purposed by Bardin (2007): 1) exhaustivity; 2) representativity; 3) homogeneity and 4) pertinence. The texts were selected and classified by themes and by the approach to human rights. Thus, The Economist's position could be contrasted with different publications and the official United Kingdom posture.

Researches about the relationship between media and politics are being developed both in Political Science and Communications fields but analyses involving greater spans of time are still rare. Considering that the importance of media as a mediator of the symbolic forms of modern life cannot he ignored it is important to note that the media impact on politics and representation has been the object of classical studies, but its impact in other areas still needs attention (COHEN, 1963; COOK, 1998; HALLIN; MANCINI, 2004; MANIN, 1997; MIGUEL, 2002; PITKIN, 1967). The media constitute a social space that represents interests and discursively produces the importance of some topics, sharing world views (CHAMPAGNE, 1998; FAUSTO NETO, 1994; WOLTON, 1995). Moreover, we understand that international media play a key role constructing and galvanising images of States and in this approach the way, important publications such as The Economist, dealt with the theme of human rights in Brazil seems to be relevant (WENDT, 1999; SALES, 2016).

[3] These were consulted at The National Archives in London/UK.

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This paper comprises three sections apart from this introduction and the conclusions: the first concerns the Economist coverage of human rights in Brazil during the military dictatorship. Then the similarities and differences between the newspaper and the FCO are analysed. Finally, the third part elaborates on the humanitarianism and its repercussion after the democratization. The ambition was to make a portrayal of the publication's behaviour about human rights in Brazil, clarifying the evolution of its perspective about the theme during a relatively long period of time.

## 2 The Economist and the violation of human rights in Brazil

In the late 1960s and early 1970s two images of Brazil were particularly important. One of them was the economic miracle; the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was on average 10% per year. The second refers to the Years of Lead (Anos de Chumbo) marked by the incidence of serious human rights violations. According to the "Brasil Nunca Mais" report, in 1969, 1027 alleged cases of torture were made to the Military Courts and from 1970 to 1973 another 3479 were recorded (ARNS, 1985). Brazil's National Truth Commission found that from 1964 to 1969 there were sixty-one deaths and twelve disappearances, rising in 1970 to 1973 to over seventy-six deaths and 142 disappearances. During the year of 1974 alone, fifty-three people were deemed missing (BRASIL, 2014).

The word torture first appeared in The Economist, in 1969: "At last there are signs that the as yet unmentioned subject, the torture of political prisoners, is getting under the uniformed skins of Brazil's leaders" (WHO ARE…, 1969, p. 41). Both the Daily Telegraph and The Times had already reported that the treatment of political prisoners in Brazil involved torture. The latter newspaper published Mr. Onofre Pinto's testimony: "I have been tortured by beatings and electric shocks applied to all parts of my body. This is the standard treatment of political prisoners in Brazil" (WIGG; ONIS; HEREN, 1969, p. 1). However, The Economist did not understand these practices as systematic. They were treated as excesses, incidents or exceptionalities.

About the emblematic case of Mother Maurina, The Economist wrote that:

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> In November the police announced the smashing of a plot in Ribeirao Preto [...]. The most spectacular feature was the alleged involvement of a nun Mother Maurina Borges, in the conspiracy. Church sources said that she had been tortured with electric shocks […]. This incident came closely after the sensational implication of Dominican friars in Sr. Mariguella's murder (WHO ARE…, 1969, p. 41).

The torture of religious people was reported by other media in the English press. But it was *only* in those circumstances that The Economist spoke out. The conduct of The Times was different, treating torture as state policy. The newspaper pointed out that mistreatment of political prisoners was a regular occurrence and reported that:

> By November, 19, possibly 30 priests and other members of religious orders were detained. Although torture is a commonplace in Brazil and the torture of priests not exceptional, says *Herder Correspondence*, the torture of a nun apparently represents a new low; Sister Maurina Borges Silveira, charged with letting guerrillas use her convent, was given electrical shock torture. […] Informed Brazilians know that torture of political prisoners is used systematically by military police to obtain information (P.H.S, 1970, p. 10).

The Times's tone towards leftist actions was different from the one observed in The Economist, stating that "It has been in the name of social justice that Brazilian lawyers, journalists, bank clerks, Roman Catholic priests, former officers and N.C.O.s but above all, students of both sexes, have taken during the past year to conspiring as the only way left to oppose the military regime" (WIGG, 1970, p. 7).

Thus, torture was not applied solely against urban guerrillas, but against any opponent bearing arms or ideas (TORTURE IN…, 1970). In reporting the kidnapping, by left organizations, of Japan's Consul, Nobuo Okuchi, in the article "Balance of Terror", The Economist acknowledged the use of violent interrogation methods, but did not see it as a systematic practice, nor did it believe the Brazilian State should be held to account (BALANCE…, 1970, p. 32)[4].

At this time, International Organizations begun to focus their attention on human rights in Brazil. This was the case, in 1970, of the International Commission of Jurists that published

[4] The term terrorism was used to designate the leftist actions until 1980. In The Economist compare with: Guns… (ed.) (1980).

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the report "Police Repression and Tortures Inflicted upon Political Opponents and Prisoners in Brazil" based on reports of the forty prisoners released in case involving the kidnapping of the German ambassador. The Times made news of the report and concluded that torture in Brazil was a practice of security agencies and was developed and executed in a systematic and scientific way. Citing the work of doctors, the newspaper inventoried the main types of abuse, including the rape of women, torture of children and the deprivation of water and sleep (MERLINO, 2014; MARTINS FILHO, 2017). The following day, the Brazilian government's response was published. The Justice Minister Alfredo Buzaid denied that there were any political prisoners and announced the creation of an office to counter international criticism (BRAZIL DENIES…, 1970; MCGREGOR, 1970). In The Economist the only reference to the report was as follows: "A report by the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva painted a *ghastly* picture of torture as a political weapon in Brazil" (KILLERS…, 1970, p. 34, my emphasis).

Violations of human rights continued as a relevant topic, internally and internationally. In 1972, it was Amnesty International that issued a "Report on allegations of torture in Brazil" (POWER, 1981). In that year The Economist published its first survey of the country[5]. The case made by Amnesty International was not mentioned. The topic of torture was invisible, at least until 1975, which did not happen for other British newspapers. In The Times, between 1973 and 1974 about twenty articles addressed the matter, similarly for The Guardian (BISHOPS…, 1973; THE POPE'S…, 1973; 'TORTURE…, 1973; BRITISH…, 1974; GROWTH…, 1974; KEATLEY, 1974; ROPER, 1973; STEPHENS, 1973). For example, the disappearance of a teacher named Ana Rosa Kucinski Silva was widely reported. In the United States, it made headlines in the New York Times and the Washington Post. In the UK, The Guardian chronicled the search by the teacher's father and brother, calling disappearances in Brazil "epidemic" (ROPER, 1974). The Times published a letter from Christopher Roper and other 9 people, entitled "Life in Brazil" (ROPER; RETTIE; TAYLOR *et al.*, 1975).

[5] Surveys are special reports, with liner notes and pagination. The survey of September 3rd, 1972 had on its cover: "The moving frontier – a survey of Brazil". There were 25 articles distributed in eighty pages. The under editorship was by Robert Moss, a correspondent for The Economist between 1970 and 1980.

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In The Economist, only the death of Vladimir Herzog, on October 25th, 1975, made the theme reappear, unequivocally writing that: "A well-known Brazilian television journalist, Vladimir Herzog, was found hanging in a room in the São Paulo military headquarters with his feet still on the ground; military police lamely explained that he had confessed to being a communist and committed suicide" (WE SET, 1975, p. 58).

The Herzog case aroused the publication. "Strange suicides" is the first article in which the criticism tone is raised up. The official version appeared contested and a further incident in the same police station is reported. The article concludes that "The treatment of political prisoners, usually accused of links with the banned Communist party, remains the most conspicuous boil on Brazil's body politics" (STRANGE…, 1976, p. 53). Still, the actions of Geisel and the resignation of General D'Ávila Melo, chief of the Second Army, one of the most known torture centres, were praised by the publication.

The coverage of the Herzog case was exceptional. In 1976 as a new Economist survey on Brazil appeared, only one of the thirty articles mentioned the human rights abuses[6]. In the leaders, torture was mentioned only in 1980 while accusing the organizations who fought against the dictatorship in Brazil as the perpetrators of terrorism. It read that:

> Many Latin American countries (Uruguay, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil) have discovered that terrorism can be virtually stamped out if the security forces are given a free hand. When the police can control people's movements, search buildings at will, round up suspects and torture them, and put pressure on their relatives and friends, fear soaks up terrorism support. But the price of a no-holds-barred struggle is large (INTO TERRORIST… (ed.), 1980, p. 18).

We might expect to find more references to torture in articles than in the editorials, not only because there were more of them, but also because writers might have greater freedom, yet silence was the norm between 1964 and 1980. By not reporting these cases, The Economist contributed towards a more positive image of the country, more attractive for business. Thus, it is remarkable what the newspaper chose not to publish. The de-emphasis on the issue of human

[6] The title of the survey is "Change in Direction: a survey of Brazil". The special report had 64 pages with the editing of Robert Harvey, assistant director of The Economist, a politician of the British Conservative Party. In The Economist compare with: You… (1976).

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rights seems to be a trend, which coincides with the most favourable news period of the economic miracle.

By contrast to The Times and The Guardian, The Economist was more moderate in its denunciation of human rights abuses, not taking a clear stand, which was unlike the newspaper's typical attitude to most other topics it covers. It is believed that they made a choice, since economy, trade and investments were above political issues. Human rights were not an editorial priority.

Another crucial moment of The Economist coverage on Brazil was the visit of President Geisel to England in 1976. The British Labour Party and the left-wing press objected to, but the newspaper approved the visit. Maintaining good relations, especially in terms of trade, was more important than the wishes of a segment of Britain's polity, stating:

> Now the Labour party's national executive committee has thrown a whopping spanner into the works by passing a resolution on Wednesday that General Geisel, as a 'head of one of the most repressive regimes in Latin America' should have his visit cancelled. […] General Geisel may take umbrage and cancel his visit. That would be a pity. Britain has a number of sound reasons for keeping on civil terms with Brazil and it is anyway very rude to tell an invited visitor that he is not welcome (RUDE, 1976, p. 47).

This was followed by a series of protests against the visit. Among them, a motion of repudiation, a letter from the British Labour Co-operative Mr. Stan Newens and protests of the labour union of journalists, as well as the Catholic Institute for International Relations. In addition, it was also published by The Times, a letter of Professor Emanuel de Kadt, published by The Times:

> There are good reasons for improved diplomatic, cultural and trade relations with Brazil. But my hope is that most of those who 'know what Brazil is really like' (though clearly not Mr Evans) will also understand why it was a moral mistake for a Labour government to sponsor a state visit by the president of a country where social justice and human rights are still so widely disregarded (KADT, 1976, p. 13).

On the first day of visits, a letter with fifty signatures of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Human Rights was delivered to Geisel and The Times published a letter from the Archbishop of Westminster, Basil Hume (CANTARINO, 2014).

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The relationship of the Brazilian dictatorship with the British democracy seemed to be important to both governments. The negative coverage of torture in the American and European press did not affect the welcome of the Brazilian Head of State. The labour government, interested in good industrial and commercial deals, decided that the visit would have more pros than cons; the same view was taken by The Economist.

A new wave of news on the topic was due to preparatory activities to the visit of Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to Brazil. According to The Economist, the opposition group had been encouraged by the United States' concern for human rights. The expectation of the visit moved the defenders of humanitarian causes and did not please the leaders of the regime (NOT VERY…, 1977; BAD…, 1978).

The arrival of the American President in March 1978 coincided with the celebrations of the coup's fourteen year. According to the newspaper, the Foreign Minister said it was Carter who requested the visit, hinting that the government did not wish it. The new leader of the United States, Carter, highlighted three aspects of the bilateral relations: the "Memorandum of Understanding" which singled out Brazil over other countries in Latin America, the silence of the Nixon and Ford administrations on human rights and finally, their compliance on the nuclear issue. According to the newspaper, the government's reaction to the report on human rights, presented at the American Congress on March, 1977 as well as the visit itself showed how Brazil had departed from its alliance with the United States.

## 3 The Economist and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

A gap exists between the proclamations of foreign policy and real action. In this section, we intend to analyse The Economist alignment with the positions established by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) concerning human rights violations in Brazil. I aim to demonstrate that the publication took a realist approach in its international analysis, aligning to the diplomatic body.

The issue of human rights arose more frequently in diplomatic communications after the promulgation of the Institutional Act number five (AI-5), a decree, issued by the military

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government which abolished the fundamental rights and guarantees provided by the Constitution, including habeas corpus and freedom of expression[7].

The situation in 1968 was described by The Economist as unstable and the approach of the newspaper was close to the one of the representatives of British diplomacy by assigning the context of social unrest as a considerable part the government "necessity" to promulgate the Institutional Act 5. On the diplomatic dispatch "A Revolution within the Revolution" the British Ambassador, Sir John Russell, described: "They had been unsettled by the student demonstrations earlier in the year, irritated by constant press attacks and worried by the Church's militant campaign for reform" (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1968)[8].

Both The Economist and the FCO argued that the coups in Latin America had been agreed strategies. Economic stability mattered more than democracy, as trade relations between the two countries had been growing stronger. Ambassador Russell believed that "History, I think, will say that in the long-term interest of Brazil the Revolution of 1964 was beneficial and even necessary. The unchecked alternative was almost certain disaster. By extensions a case could initially be made for the reassertion of that revolution in December 1968" (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1969b)[9].

The alignment between the FCO and the newspaper can also be seen in their joint praise for the success of the Brazilian authorities in dismantling the guerrilla forces (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1971b)[10]. The Embassy referred to the leftist actions and to torture in two documents: Terrorism in Brazil and Torture in Brazil. The first document emphasized the kidnapping of the US ambassador and death of Carlos Marighella. Torture was mentioned without judgment, other noting that it had been news in the UK and stating that: "The police authorities are clearly being zealous in their pursuit of terrorists; but stories of the torture of prisoners are starting to seep out and, as you will know, have already been taken up by the international press, including the Daily Telegraph" (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1969a, emphasis in the original). The second document dealt with the government's

[7] It was signed on October, 13th, 1968.
[8] In The Economist compare with: The gnat… (1968); Let… (1969); Change… (1968).
[9] In The Economist compare with: Even for… (ed.) (1978); The end… (1973).
[10] In The Economist compare with: Where… (1972); Death… (1971).

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response to complaints (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1969c). David Hunt, British ambassador to Brazil from 1969 to 1973, wrote that:

> Thus bad publicity has tended to obscure both the notable success achieved by the security forces and the fundamental weakness of the terrorists. The police and the army have killed several of the more important terrorist leaders and there is good evidence that police action has successfully prevented the terrorist organizations from achieving a coherent line of action (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1971a).



As we have seen, the reports of Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists did not merit the attention of The Economist. After the release of the report, Amnesty International began sending letters to the FCO demanding strong action against torture in Brazil and stating that the increase in trade relations between the two countries was an endorsement of such practices. The letters were answered in standard form, saying that Britain would not interfere in individual cases. However, the issue was discussed internally:

> The number and the frequency of the representations we receive about political prisoners in Brazil indicate that public opinion in this country is quite genuinely concerned about their treatment. Judging by the frequency and volume of correspondence this seems to be most "popular" human rights cause to come to the attention of the Human Rights desk (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1972b).

Soon after in mid-1972, the FCO commissioned a report on torture. In this report, Hunt stated that the data provided by the government were more reliable than those reported by the press, deeming that: "Though I have no doubt that there have been cases of torture in the past, possibly many of them, there are a number of indications that it has not been normal practice" (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1972a). Similarly, as mentioned, The Economist never treated torture as a systematic policy (WHO ARE…, 1969; BALANCE…, 1970; INTO TERRORIST… (ed.), 1980).

However, the death of journalist Vladimir Herzog was a turning point. At first, the official version was accepted by the FCO which reproduced the statement of the Second Army:

> Hertzog (sic) was invited to answer questions on 25 October and after initial reluctance when confronted with those who had given evidence against him,

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> he admitted his activity within the Communist Party. He was left alone about 3 PM and wrote out a declaration (reproduced textually in the communique) admitting to have been a party militant since 1971 or 1972. His contacts were made through his colleagues Rodolpho Konder, Marco Antonio Rocha and 5 others (also named). That he allowed his residence to be used for party meetings and that he was no longer interested in taking part in party militant activities. About 4 PM when his cell was entered Hertzog (sic) was found hanging dead (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1975b).

The official account was becoming less credible as "too many people appear to have taken their own lives in doubtful circumstances" (FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH OFFICE, 1975a). Similarly, the article of The Economist has the suggestive title "Strange suicides" (STRANGE…, 1976).

It can be said that in the newspaper and in the FCO, the death of journalist Vladimir Herzog brought an attitude change. At first, the subject of torture reappeared after being virtually hidden for some years and the FCO began to question the official version of facts. At the same time, one cannot say that the episode led the press or the diplomatic body to a critique of Brazil's national security policy.

## 4 Human Rights coverage after re-democratization

During more than twenty years of military dictatorship, the coverage that The Economist gave regarding the systematic violation of human rights in Brazil was distinctive. Although reporting the major scandals, the newspaper did not join the chorus of European and American press which, together with Amnesty International and the International Commission of Jurists, strongly denounced the torture, killings and forced disappearances. The newspaper's editorial line tended to subordinate politics to economic concerns and valued the momentum that business was receiving in those years. In this sense, the growth rates of the economic miracle stood out and there was modest consideration given to the allegations of torture. This outlook changed in the re-democratization period.

Since 1985, in the new political moment, the country was no longer in the spotlight over violations of human rights. Although there were few articles on the subject, the approach had

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changed. It is difficult to specify the moment of the shift, but I can suppose that it was not caused by re-democratization. The newspaper supported in the name of political and social stability, Tancredo Neves's decision not to prosecute the military and it deemed as more humane Brazil's record in comparison to Argentina's (DEMOCRACY CAN, 1985; EVEN IN, 1985; THE WORLD'S (ed.), 1985; THE ASH, 1986; DEMOCRACY IN, 1987)[11].

With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of new themes the matter was gradually settled. The newspaper began to link human rights to urban violence and the slow pace of justice (BRAZIL'S FRONTIER, 1991). Most of the victims in this period were residents of the Amazon region and those who lived in the slums and on the streets, their executioners were often the police, citing "According to Human Rights Watch" The Economist reported that "1,470 of the 20,274 deaths last year in São Paulo alone was attributable to the police (THE OTHER, 1993, p. 25).

For The Economist the country was trying to follow the democratic normality, however, had to face issues such as lynching, death squads and massacres, decrying that "Meanwhile 32m Brazilians will continue to go hungry, and sleeping street-children will still be shot outside the churches of Rio de Janeiro" (ONWARDS, 1993, p. 19). The newspaper also showed concern for indigenous issues, classifying the dispute between the Yanomami people and prospectors in Roraima as a massacre (VICTIMS…, 1993).

In the late 1990s, The Economist drew lessons from this experience. The newspaper considered that the dictatorship in Brazil had been less traumatic than in other Latin American countries and, it evaluated the Brazilian decision not to prosecute the military during the transition to democracy as prudent because it had avoided major upheavals in the established power structure (THE GUEVARA (ed.), 1997).

However, a change of position can be ascertained when the newspaper also claimed that, when established, the new democratic government had the duty to investigate crimes committed during dictatorship so that the history would not be repeated. In Brazil, it recalled that the slow and gradual transition, made with the active participation of the military, prevented that crimes

[11] Tancredo Neves of the PMDB, was indirectly elected President of Brazil in 1985. He died before taking office, but made a commitment to maintain the country's political stability during the campaign.

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committed during the dictatorship would be judged. It lamented that the righteousness was selective and that torturers and murderers were unpunished. About the Truth Commissions, it opined that: "The trials and truth commissions of recent years have not really been about the past. Rather, and rather more sensibly, they have been about building a future in which the rule of law prevails, especially over the rule's themselves" (CONFRONTING (ed.), 1997, p. 16). By positioning itself for a reckoning with the past regarding human rights violations, the newspaper adjusts its frame. As indicated, human rights were among the new topics of interest.

During the years of Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government, human rights issues would not appear often in the news. However, when it happened, they were associated to state violence, breaches of human rights undertaken by officials responsible for public security, now in a democratic context. Police violence, both in the periphery and in the repression of social movements, was unequivocally denounced by The Economist (LAND, 1996).

By declaring that the records on human rights in Brazil were somber, the publication considered the militarization of the police as being at the core of the problem. Formally controlled by the governors of the states, they would operate according to their own logic:

> True, the police face a sharply rising level of crime which, thanks partly to the drug trade, has become increasingly violent. But too often police guns are turned – at times fatally – on more or less defenceless victims: protesters, street children, petty criminals, the poor and the black. And those who make it to the police station are routinely tortured there (HUMAN, 1996, p. 65).

After the episode in which police were filmed committing crimes of murder and torture in Diadema (São Paulo) the newspaper gave suggestions for its reform. Quoting a survey by *Folha de São Paulo* it reported that nearly half of the respondents were more afraid of police than of criminals. According to the weekly, the Human Rights National Plan was moving at a slow pace and the military police continued to operate on the same logic of the dictatorship years (POLICING, 1997).

The Economist deemed as human rights violations on the repression of social movements, the death of nine protestors in Rondônia in 1995, as well as the murder, by the police, of three militants of the housing movement in 1997 and, more emblematically, the case of Eldorado dos Carajás in 1996 where nineteen people were also killed by the police (GOL,

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1996; HUMAN, 1996; LAND, 1996; BRAZIL'S BOUGHT, 1997). Reacting to the trial of 150 defendants for Carajás:

> The slaughter caused national outrage: it prompted President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's government to embark on a huge program f land distribution and to announce a new human-rights plan. [...] The Eldorado is not an isolated case: Brazilian police are often accused of murder, torture and other crimes. [...] The police often shot first and ask question later (POLICE, 1999, p. 46).

Another episode that deserved attention was the bus 174 hijacked in Rio de Janeiro. In the episode, the hijacker was arrested alive but died from asphyxiation after being taken in a police car. According to the newspaper, inasmuch as there is an increase in crime, there are also higher levels of crude policing that was deeply embedded in the culture of security forces in Brazil. The precarious condition of children and their vulnerability to human rights abuses revealed the social failure of Brazilian democracy and its reform (BRAZIL GRAPPLES, 2000; DOWN, 2000).

**Final remarks**

The article aimed to analyze how the English publication The Economist dealt with the issue of human rights in Brazil between 1964 and 2010. The narratives drawn by the magazine were compared with some positions from The Times and The Gauardian and, mainly, with official documents from the Foreign and Commomweath Office.

It was argued that The Economist had a realistic outlook on human rights in Brazil during the military dictatorship, in line with FCO's position and in contrast to the moral stance of other publications. So, it is possible to say that coverage had different faces, condemning abuses on different moments and degrees. During the 1970's political issues had low priority, shadowed by the so called "economic miracle". Along with that, there was less emphasis on tortures and other forms of human rights violations since Brazil's considered good economic performance overlapped with issues of political background.

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Such approach changed after the murder of the journalist Vladimir Herzog in 1975, and human rights gained relevance in the editorial line as result from several features, such as The Amnesty International campaigns, the Jimmy Carter's government policies and Britain's new official position. The Economist has since pushed human rights to the top of public awareness and debate. Inasmuch as Brazil is concerned, that discussion has linked up with environmental and indigenous causes, with urban violence and the reform of the judiciary and penitentiary systems.

It was possible to trace, within the extended period studied, an overview of the publication behaviour on issues related to human rights in Brazil, elucidating the evolution of its perspective about the theme.

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