

A violent structure. Southern perspective on the practice of forensic anthropology as a public service

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ABSTRACT: Global South perspective rarely reaches the academic vanguard. While they represent over 80% of the world population, the voices from less developed regions often are ignored in academic debate. This fact produces an important disequilibrium in relation to the dissemination of knowledge, sharing of experiences and exchange of thoughts and, consequently, undermines and hinders the development of scientific disciplines. Forensic anthropology is no exception in this trend.

The present article brings up the subject of the context of forensic anthropology in Brazil to demonstrate the interconnection of the professional situation of this discipline, its structural and bureaucratic limitations and their effect on the perpetuation of human rights violation. Various aspects of daily practice of forensic anthropology in a context devoid of basic resources generate a setting that affects both the victims and their families. Despite an outstanding performance and dedication of professionals, structural limitations often substantially affect the effectiveness of their service. The present article discusses these aspects in a conceptual framework of the relation between the practice of forensic anthropology and human rights violation. In this research, Brazil serves as a case-study, an intensively studied subject that brings interpretations that can be applied in a broader context.

The article aims at opening a broader, international debate that would increase the visibility of the relationship between the practice of forensic anthropology and the structure generating and/or maintaining violence in a specific economic and legislative context especially present in the countries of the so-called global South.

KEY WORDS: forensic anthropology, human rights, Global South, Brazil, infrastructure, violence, structural violence, theory.



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Introduction

The so-called Global North and Global South represent contrasting contexts in terms of economy, technological advancement, political stability and population growth, among others (Odeth 2010). When it comes to knowledge production and exchange, Global South perspectives are rarely given voice and often pass unnoticed in international academic debate. This creates an important disequilibrium in relation to the dissemination of knowledge, sharing of experiences and exchange of thoughts and, consequently, undermines and hinders the development of scientific disciplines, as these are factors that strongly contribute to the advancement of science (Peters 2006; King 2011; Collyer 2018).

Forensic anthropology (FA) is an applied field of sciences which is often, yet not exclusively, linked to death. Forensic anthropologists focus their efforts on establishing the identity of unknown human remains found either skeletonized or in an advanced stage of decay. For this purpose, a set of internationally validated and recognized methodologies is used in order to estimate the biological profile of an individual (sex, age at death, stature and sometimes ancestry/biological affinity) with the aim of narrowing down the number of possible suspects. Additionally, possible trauma, pathological lesions, and other individualizing characteristics that can facilitate the process of identification are observed. Forensic anthropologists may also assist in establishing the cause of death, should any death marks/indicators be visible on skeletal material (Cunha and Cattaneo 2006).

The fact that forensic anthropologists often focus their professional activity on dead individuals brings an important set

of issues related to human rights and ethical aspects of their work. Both the treatment of the dead and the rights and feelings of the living constitute aspects that must be taken into account when considering the ethical dimension of the service of forensic anthropologists. While the sole act of death can be a result of a violent action that critically affects the right to life of the victim, death and the subsequent treatment of the dead body can constitute important factors related to unnecessary physical and/or mental suffering of the living relatives and friends (Squires and Garcia-Mancuso 2021). Forensic anthropology, by definition, should mitigate this process by providing answers and information that can be helpful in the course of obtaining justice, by delivering a set of data that can facilitate the identification of an individual who might have been sought for, sometimes for an extensive period of time, by his/her relatives. However, this process may sometimes be challenged by factors that are independent of, yet strongly influence and affect the performance of forensic anthropologists. Adequate working conditions and access to necessary means and tools are extremely important for a specialist to be able to complete the process of an anthropological analysis of skeletal remains in a forensic context, that is, to deliver a positive identification of the victim. Similarly, administrative, legislative and structural limitations, often existing in forensic anthropology contexts, highly impact the possibility of conducting efficient expertise.

Theoretical research in forensic anthropology is rather scarce. This fact has been recently brought up and the importance of theoretical approaches within this discipline has been emphasized (Clifford Boyd and Boyd 2011, 2018). Concep-

tualization of ideas and interpretations brings a wider perspective and better understanding of processes that form a part of a given contextual dimension. Moreover, the possibility of impartial studying, documenting and reporting on realities that are somehow disregarded helps to bring visibility, broadens our perspectives and opens up a space for a dialogue. The present theoretical-philosophical reflection focuses on a subject that has been greatly overlooked in studies regarding forensic anthropology. With a reference to the situation of this discipline in Brazil as a case study, the present article aims at proposing a debate on how structural factors and political decisions influence the perpetuation of violence towards the victims and their families in a setting which, by definition, should be working against violence and its consequences. This paper is aimed at presenting reflections upon the existence of a relationship between (infra)structural, legislative and bureaucratic factors that may be affecting the service of forensic anthropology and a simultaneous context in which basic human rights are being violated.

Human Rights in Forensic Context

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, introduces the concept of a basic equality among people. It covers the rights inherent to each person, regardless of skin colour, sex, nationality, ethnicity, religion or any other aspect of identity that could, in any circumstance, be used as a means for justification of differentiation and discrimination between people (UN 2020).

A violation of human rights is a situation that evidently affects its direct victim(s) – a person(s) who has suffered in-

justice, discrimination or even death due to the violation of some of their basic and universal rights. Nevertheless, our social nature often implies that injustice or violence suffered by one individual transfers to a broader circle of subjects – people close to the victim, their immediate family, friends and more distant family members. The International Commission of Missing Persons indicates that human rights, apart from the right to life and liberty, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to work and education, also includes issues far less frequently automatically considered as such, for example, the right to recognition of the victim as a person under the law, the right to effective investigation, the right to due process of law, or even the rights of surviving relatives to know what happened to their family member(s), or the right to burial and dignified farewell to a loved one (ICMP 2020). These aspects involve equally the direct victim(s), but also their families and friends. In case of a disappearance of a person, especially a forced one, or in case of dead victim(s) whose identity is initially unknown, and in situations in which the process of identification is deficient, ineffective or for any reason cannot be completed, various of those rights are put at risk of being abused or even violated.

Violation of human rights is a constant and daily aspect present in the service of Medico-Legal Institutes (IMLs), where medical examinations on living and dead victims are performed for legal purposes. When a case involves skeletonized, severely mutilated or heavily decomposed corpse, or in a case in which for any other reason traditional methods of forensic medicine cannot be applied, the service of forensic anthropology is usually requested. Anthropological analysis of the

skeletal material permits the estimation of a biological profile of the victim (probable: sex, age, height and biological affinity) and this way narrowing down the number of people that can be considered possible victims. A subsequent comparative analysis of the skeletal remains with available antemortem data (e.g. medical records, dental records, photographs) allows for further positive identification of the victim and a certain closure of their circle of life. It is pertinent to acknowledge here that the concept of ancestry or biological/population affinity raises important debates and its use in the context of forensic anthropology has been recently extensively contested (Smay and Armelagos 2000; Albanese and Saunders 2006; Bethard and DiGiangi 2020; Cunha and Ubelaker 2020; Dunn et al. 2020; DiGiangi and Bethard 2021; Ross and Pilloud 2021; Ross and Williams 2021). This issue is even more relevant in the Brazilian context, as the extremely high miscegenation of the population creates a biological space that strongly supports the concept of the groundlessness and inutility of categorization of people into certain geographic groups based on *a priori* defined sets of morphological variables (either metric or macroscopic).

Under ideal circumstances, in which working conditions are adequate and the specialist has full access to all necessary comparative data, the application of anthropological methods would permit the solution of practically every case involving sufficiently preserved skeletal material. Nevertheless, this is rarely the case. Administrative, bureaucratic and legislative limitations together with the lack of access to necessary means and tools required for an effective expertise represent a frequent reality of many forensic anthropology services (Górka and Plens

2021). It is relevant to mention that these circumstances are not exclusive to Brazilian context and similar limitations affect the work of many forensic anthropologists around the world. Such situations leave the affected professionals in an institutionalized limbo which significantly disturbs and hinders their potential of identifying the deceased person. As a result, the circle of life of these people (the victims) does not close, and they often remain marked as N/N in the IMLs records, with their bones kept in an ossuary and which, in the best scenario, can still serve as teaching or research material. In such circumstances, often independent of practitioners' will and efforts, the role that forensic anthropology plays in the context of violence prevention and crime solving transforms into another factor that maintains and perpetuates the abuse and violation of human rights of both the victims and their relatives.

Material and Methods

In the present article Brazil serves as a case study in order to bring broader, generalized reflection on the subject that could be applied in other local contexts. The text is based on extensive field research conducted by the author in Brazil in 2018. It consisted of in-person visits to nine Medico-Legal Institutes across Brazil, covering all five geographic regions of the country (North, Northeast, Centre-west, Southeast, South) and a total of 33% of Brazilian states. A series of personal interviews were conducted with 16 professionals acting in the field of forensic anthropology in Brazil following an *a priori* prepared semi-structured questionnaire. This number accounts for about 32% of specialists actively working on anthropological cases in this country,

however, no official statistics on their number are publicly available. The approximate number of professionals was obtained from the private records of Dr. Trindade Filho through personal communication on 29th of May 2018.

The main aim of that research was to “report the information gathered directly from professionals acting in the field, their opinions, concerns, and difficulties encountered in their daily practice, with the aim of highlighting the challenges of the discipline and this way contribute to the advancement and development of forensic anthropology in Brazil” (Górka and Plens 2021). Detailed results of the above mentioned research have already been published (Górka and Plens 2021), yet they do not focus on issues addressed herein. In an attempt to avoid an unnecessary repetition of information, interested readers are directed to the source publication. However, in order to conceptualize the context of forensic anthropology in Brazil for the purpose of the present paper, where necessary, certain aspects will be presented in a summarized manner with an adequate reference to the original work.

Results

Medico-Legal Institutes and forensic anthropology in Brazil

With the area of over 8.5 million square kilometres and the population size above 213 million (IBGE 2020), Brazil is the world’s fifth-largest country and the sixth most populous. The country is divided into five geographic regions and its federal administration is composed of 27 units (26 states and one Federal District). The states are entities with semi-autonomous governments and relative financial independence.

Medico-Legal Institutes (IMLs) are public offices, in majority under the administration of the State Secretary for Public Security or the Civil Police. They deliver specialized expertise for legal purposes in various areas (necropsies, toxicology, body injuries, sexual violence, mental health, age verification, etc.). In Brazil, there are currently 381 such entities (SENASP 2012). The service of forensic anthropology falls under state governance as it is performed within the Medico-Legal Institutes’ realm. This type of administrative organization results in a series of important consequences for the performance of work by professionals in the area of forensic anthropology, as well as in other specialties. The lack of a joint and central administration makes each state of the Union apply different policies and distribution of resources to the Medico-Legal Institutes under their management. This type of administrative organization of the country gives the states the autonomy to decide on various aspects of their policies, but at the same time makes it difficult to develop homogeneous strategies across the country in areas of national public interest, such as forensic anthropology.

Furthermore, in the whole country, there are only 15 locations distributed within 13 of the 27 administrative units, where a more or less formally structured FA service exists (Trindade Filho 2018). In most cases, there is a single forensic anthropology sector (Department, Section) in the IML of the state’s capital (Bahia, Ceará, Distrito Federal, Goiás, Minas Gerais, Paraíba, Paraná, Pernambuco, Rio de Janeiro, Rio Grande do Sul, Roraima, Santa Catarina), with São Paulo being the only exception (there are two other forensic anthropology centres, one in Ribeirão Preto and one in São José do

Rio Preto). Such a small number of entities specialized in forensic anthropology, in a country where the rate of violent deaths is one of the highest in the world (UNODC 2019) and the brutality of homicides together with unfavourable climatic conditions accelerate the decomposition of bodies is far from being sufficient for the existing demand. This varies greatly from state to state and oscillates within the range ~12 - 1000 cases per year (Górka and Plens 2021).

A very limited number of specialists is another urgent issue affecting the service of forensic anthropology in Brazil. There are no official data available regarding the number of professionals working in the field of forensic anthropology in Brazil. Their approximate number oscillates around 50 for the whole country (Trinidade Filho 2018). Due to mainly historical circumstances (Gaspar Neto 2017), biological anthropology, which is internationally considered as a basic discipline for further specialization in forensic anthropology (Christensen et al. 2019) is practically not being taught in Brazil (Gaspar Neto 2017). As a consequence, if we consider as an anthropologist a person with academic background in anthropology, Brazil does not have any practicing forensic anthropologists¹ and their tasks are usually taken over by either odontologists or medical practitioners, as according to the current legislation, only these professionals can act as such (Górka and Plens 2021). By no means does this fact diminish the competence of professionals working in this field, yet, as they state themselves, it greatly hampers the beginnings of their career as they gener-

ally enter the field without proper theoretical and practical training and often spend a long time "learning by doing". Such circumstances also undermine the search for potential future personnel, as professionals with adequate initial qualifications are rare.

All this leads to a situation where citizens of the same country cannot expect to receive the same quality of service from the same public agencies in different states. This fact represents a highly detrimental context to the society and, in the case of forensic anthropology, can be considered a violation of human rights (Baraybar and Blackwell 2014). It also constitutes an important obstacle for the development of a democratic society through institutions that are trustworthy, effective, accountable and fair (ICMP 2020).

Forensic Anthropology and Human Rights

The first measurements taken on human skeletal material were recorded in the eighteenth-century France, and the application of forensic anthropology in a legal context goes back to the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century, within the area of physical anthropology in the United States (Klepinger 2006). However, the use of forensic anthropology in the situations of human rights violations is a much more recent event. The creation of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF) in the 1984 to investigate crimes committed by the State during the period of the Military Dictatorship (1976–1983) is usually considered as a pioneer application of anthropological methods in such context. The Balkan War (1992–1995), especially the atrocities committed against the Muslim population in this region and the Rwanda genocide of the Tutsi population in

¹ As of December 2022 there are two professionals certified by the FASE (Forensic Anthropology Society of Europe).

1994 generated a large demand to identify the thousands of victims found in mass graves, bringing more visibility to the field of forensic anthropology (Ferlini 1999). Currently, all over the world, in (post)conflict zones, several forensic anthropology groups work with the aim to denounce human rights abuses using anthropological methods (Hughes 2001).

Such cases represent clear examples of State-committed crimes during turbulent times, in which forensic anthropology could contribute significantly. However, the application of forensic anthropology in the context of human rights abuses is not solely limited to scenarios of war or mass atrocities. Every death resulting from a violent action constitutes an act of violation of the most basic right of every human being – the right to life. What is more, multiple human rights abuses happen in cases when the victim had been kidnapped and/or tortured before his/her death, which often occurs, for example, in the context of organized crime. As a consequence, the experts at Medico-Legal Institutes are immersed in a context of human rights violations on a daily basis and do not need to travel to places of armed conflicts for their work to be of equal importance.

Crimes involving a person's disappearance, especially a forced one, constitute cases in which various human rights, both of the victim and his/her family, are being violated (e.g. the right to safety, freedom, dignity, life and not to be subjected to torture or ill-treatment, the right of the victim's families to know what happened to their relative) (ICMP 2020). Moreover, an inadequate and deficient response of the authorities responsible for resolving the case may lead to subsequent human rights abuses (for example, the right to due process or recog-

nition of the victim as a person before the law), especially in the absence of an official, effective, transparent and independent investigation or some other form of omission on the part of the State and its agencies. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that national and local governments and law enforcement bodies should cooperate in a joint effort to locate and identify missing persons in any case of disappearance and violent death, so that the investigation is effective and brings the necessary answers to families and society (UN 2020).

Forensic Anthropology

and the Violation of Human Rights

Participation in a crime solving framework constitutes a part of forensic anthropologist's service. At the same time, the inability of delivering an effective outcome of the work resulting from e.g. (infra)structural limitations creates a context in which unintentional violation of human rights may occur.

In order to complete the process of anthropological analysis in forensic context a professional should dispose of adequate working conditions and access to necessary comparative material and relevant information from the police investigation. This, by default, implies their existence (in the case of comparative material), and secondly, a cooperation between different branches of law enforcement agencies, as well as between different IMLs and even between various departments of the same IML. Insufficient infrastructure and scarceness of equipment have a significant impact on the work effectiveness. Working conditions deficient in these matters provide a framework in which effective performance of forensic anthropology service is hampered. As a result, the positive contribution of this

discipline to criminal cases is seriously weakened. This automatically transfers to the failure of forensic anthropology to fulfil its potential related to the respect of human rights of both the victims and their families, and consequently creates a context in which these rights are not respected, and hence abused/violated. It is important to emphasize that these circumstances are independent of the abilities, knowledge and potential of professionals working in this area. Nevertheless, they are inseparably linked to the outcomes of their work.

What is also quite relevant to this discussion is the fact that the field-work performed by Górka and Plens (2021) was conducted in IMLs in nine state capital cities. The 366 remaining Medico-Legal Institutes across the whole country do not have a formal forensic anthropology unit in their structure, neither they have trained specialist in this area. Considering the fact that capital cities usually dispose of a relatively higher budget than the cities in the interior parts of a state, together with the fact the above mentioned research was mainly performed in wealthier states and the authors encountered a set of challenges and difficulties in those localities, it becomes relevant to question how forensic anthropology cases are handled in the remaining locations. Whether anthropological examinations are performed at all? If so, are they performed properly? What are the working conditions in which the anthropological examinations are performed? Are they adequate for this type of expertise? Do the professionals have access to adequate tools and resources? Are they properly trained to conduct this kind of examination? Does the population have access to forensic anthropology service? Is its quality adequate?

Knowing the answers it would be possible to more precisely assess the level of human rights violations in relation to forensic anthropology in Brazil. What we know is that important challenges and limitations are present even in the wealthiest and most developed locations (Górka and Plens 2021). As a result, it is relevant to contemplate the possibility that the situation of forensic anthropology is probably even more challenging in the remaining regions, especially those with lower incomes and higher levels of violence. In such context, the systemic deficiency of forensic anthropology transfers and directly affects the citizens and families that require such service in order to find and identify their disappeared or dead relative(s). The inability of a state to provide an adequate service for such specialized cases forms a context of systemic and systematic violation of basic human rights of the citizens, and these include both, direct victims and their families and relatives. Although this situation does not have easy and quick solution, it should not be ignored and viewed as non-existent.

In order to improve the situation, coordinated and institutionalized actions should be implemented. The work of professionals, however adequate and well-intentioned, is insufficient to change the reality of forensic anthropology in Brazil, which is immersed in a historical lack of attention and institutional interest on the part of the State in different fields.

Discussion

The Role of the State and Violence by Omission

Violence is a multidimensional phenomenon affecting every human being at some point in one way or another. Hu-

man rights violations constitute a particular form of violence that is directed towards both individuals, but also whole groups and societies. By default, we usually assume that human rights violations happen in extreme situations, such as wars, tortures, etc., and considering any act of violence, we usually think of an aggressor who, through a direct action, causes some kind of harm to the victim. Nevertheless, a single act of violence can have more dimensions than a simple direct action with harmful consequences. The most common form of violence is a direct violence – when someone does something. But violence also happens when someone does not do something – violence by omission (Bufacci 2007). This form of violence is way less obvious, perceptible and can occur in different forms, e.g. abandonment, negligence or simply lack of knowledge or disregard for situations that can generate a context of violence.

Situations, in which a State performs direct acts of violence towards its own citizens are known and often highly publicized. Nevertheless, States, quite often operate, intentionally or unintentionally, causing violence directed at its citizens through omission. This type of violence is defined by Galtung (1969) as structural violence – a deliberate disengagement of basic human needs by power actors, which involves failure to take action that could improve the lives of citizens or prevent the violation of their basic rights. Because of the nature of such violence, the detection of a direct correlation between the perpetrator and the victim in such situation is often more difficult compared to direct violence. This results in a fact that violence by omission often goes unnoticed, ignored and/or disregarded. However, unlike direct violence,

violence by omission often follows a continuous pattern perpetuating systemic structures of oppression (Bufacci 2007). It is much easier for governments to act in favour of maintaining the status quo – even if this may generate a context that somehow violates the population's basic rights – than to take a proactive attitude to change it.

Such circumstances create a double role of a State in relation to human rights. On the one hand, the State plays a crucial part in combating the violation of human rights. On the other hand, it can and often does act, more or less intentionally, in parallel, violating the same rights.

By default, government authorities and officials at each level of the administration should, and often do act in favour of promotion and help in reducing human rights abuses. Nevertheless, the systemic ignorance or disregard of issues related to human rights abuses, legislative omission and unwillingness to solve problems that can be solved solely through administrative decision, together with insufficient distribution of resources to areas directly related to work against such situations create a context in which human rights are being systemically and systematically violated. This can happen even without any intentional involvement of anyone in this regard.

When applying such an approach to the analysis of the current situation of forensic anthropology in Brazil, the impact of a State induced violence by omission on the Brazilian population can be easily perceptible. The most noticeable aspect of human rights violation in relation to forensic anthropology in Brazilian context is the enormous inequality among citizens when it comes to access to the

service. Only 4% of the 381 Medico-Legal Institutes across the country have a structured, more or less formal, forensic anthropology department, section or unit (Górka and Plens 2021). Locations without designated forensic anthropology sections in the IML structure and those without experts properly trained in this area often either leave anthropological cases unanalysed or perform only a simple registration of the collected material without actual anthropological examination (Górka and Plens 2021). Considering that such circumstances characterize the majority of the Brazilian IMLs, the availability of service for the populations remains extremely scarce and precarious. This issue has been already raised by the Brazilian Medical Federation who indicated in its report in 2016 that: "A high amount of IMLs does not mean that services are available to the population" (FMB 2020). The National Secretary for Public Safety (SENASP) recognizes that the service of the IMLs is: "... fundamental for the protection of human rights and for the strengthening of the evidential framework and the consequent reduction of impunity" (SENASP 2012). The same quality and type of service should be available to the entire population of a country, if public institutions of such importance in solving crimes, reducing impunity and improving public safety aim at fulfilling its mission.

In complex anthropological cases that require specialized knowledge and training, together with adequate physical condition and equipment of a laboratory this is particularly important. The lack of comparable access to such service for the entire population produces a context of a significant inequality that greatly hampers the fulfilment of basic human rights (right to effective investigation, right to

recognition as a person before the law, due process, rights of surviving relatives at burial and dignified farewell of a loved one, etc.).

The administrative structure of the country, together with state differences in the management of public funds and the management of the IMLs appear as the main contributing factors of this situation. Linked to the National Secretary of Public Security or the Civil Police of each state, Medico-Legal Institutes work within the political context of each one. The federal organization of the country gives the states the autonomy of resource distribution and organization of legislative, economic and social priorities according to their particular political interest and the decisions of their governors. In such context, changes that would imply benefits for the entire population of the country would require centralized, coordinated, institutionalized and universal actions and creation of national strategies in areas of high public interest, such as forensic anthropology. Only this way, universal access to the same quality of service for every citizen could be guaranteed.

When experts work in settings without proper, or sometimes even minimal physical and/or technical conditions (FMB 2020; Górka and Plens 2021), the verification and validation of the evidence is put at risk and, together with an effective investigation, can be compromised. Unsolved cases accumulate, and new ones arriving daily already surpass the processing possibilities of the experts. This situation creates yet another problem. The accumulation of unsolved, not analysed and/or not claimed material demands adequate and dignified storage space that many IMLs have difficulty to designate due to their limited physical capacity (Górka and Plens 2021).

The lack of a national database of missing persons, despite the existence of several local and unintegrated registries, creates another major problem in Brazilian forensic anthropology (Calmon 2019). The importance of a forensic anthropologist work lies in the possibility and ability to conduct a comparative analysis of unidentified skeletal remains with antemortem data from a suspect of identity in order to confirm or reject a possible match. For a person to be considered the subject of an analysis, it is necessary to have information about his/her disappearance. Experts working in the field of forensic anthropology are able to perfectly reconstruct the biological profile of the victim (sex, height, age). They also have the ability to recover some individualizing information about that person from the skeletal material (fractures or previous surgeries, pathological lesions, dental treatment or other individuality of denture or skeleton, etc.). These, compared with medical and/or dental records or even simple smile photographs (Silva et al. 2008, 2016; Miranda et al. 2016; Mazur et al. 2021) may be sufficient to confirm the individual's identity.

A high level of internal migration in Brazil (de Lima Amaral 2013) constitutes a factor which often determines that a disappearance of a person is notified to the relevant authorities in the state of the victim's origin and not always in the state where the person disappeared or was translated to after a forced disappearance. The continental dimension of the country and the context of economic vulnerability of a great part of internal migrants frequently contribute to this fact. At the same time, the relevant authorities of the administrative unit where the victim's body is found will

work on the case and possibly will not have access to the information about the victim's disappearance if this record was made in another state. This is because the existing local databases of missing persons are managed by the states and are not integrated at a national level. Additionally, the data introduced within the state databases is not always consistent with each other, which significantly hinders and undermines effective investigations (Calmon 2019).

Until 2017, Brazil did not have any integrated national policy or tool for the management of missing persons' records. In 2017, the National System for Locating and Identifying Missing Persons (SINALID) was created, with the purpose of fostering the cooperation of various agencies and public institutions working with missing persons. As of the date of writing (October 2022), over 85.000 cases from 20 states are registered in the database, however the system is not yet fully operational in all federative units (SINALID 2022). In 2019, the law nº 13.812/2019 was established, creating the National Policy for the Search of Missing Persons and launching the National Registry of Missing Persons, yet the system is still under construction (Ministério de Justiça e Segurança 2021a). In 2021, a week-long national campaign for the collection of biological material (DNA) from the relatives of missing persons was launched with the aim of creating the National Bank of Genetic Profiles (Ministério de Justiça e Segurança 2021b).

Nevertheless, these are only very recent initiatives. The long-term omission and lack of initiative by the federal authorities, relevant agencies and the legislative powers, regarding the creation of a national and functional database of missing persons falls under another form

of human rights violation by the State against the Brazilian population. Access to such registries is a fundamental factor in the process of solving crimes and combating impunity. The existence of such a tool is also crucial within the field of forensic anthropology and opens up space for better and more effective work by specialists in this area as the process of positive identification is incomplete without comparative material from possible suspects of identity. In fact, this factor was commented by professionals as one of the main reasons why the majority of forensic anthropology cases in Brazil remain unsolved/unidentified (Górka and Plens 2021). Therefore, mentioned initiatives are extremely important steps in the direction of providing the Brazilian population with tools that would facilitate the service of public and law enforcement agencies that work within the context of missing persons.

All from the above indicated problems arise as an effect of administrative decisions within the structure of a country, state and of an IML itself. The omission of those responsible for addressing these issues in order to improve the situation and create adequate spaces for carrying out anthropological examinations is an important factor in perpetuating the context of violation of basic rights of the population.

The potential and future of forensic anthropology in a global perspective

Forensic anthropology is gaining a lot of attention and recognition within both forensic sciences and popular consciousness. Over the years, the field has undergone an important developmental shift from a pure application of anthropological methods in a legal context to a highly independent field of science (Dirkmaat et al. 2008; Cunha 2010; Pas-

salacqua et al. 2021). Recent advances created a certain theoretical void (Adovasio 2011) that began to be addressed over the past years (Clifford Boyd and Boyd 2011, 2018; Winburn and Clemmons 2021). However, there are still certain theoretical aspects related to the practice of forensic anthropology that have not received much attention and which, nevertheless, significantly affect the performance of specialists in some regions.

For the field of forensic anthropology to fully contribute in the defence of human rights, without creating context of their violation, it must be ensured that its entire potential is used in forensic cases. This can be achieved only if a sufficient number of properly trained experts is available for the existing demand and their distribution is coherent with the needs of the entire population. Appropriate working conditions and a national database of missing people are essential factors for effective forensic investigations that would guarantee due process of law of a case. Such context would allow us to consider that the system in which the field of forensic anthropology operates does not violate the rights of the population. The characteristics of the structural violence inflicted by the State in relation to the practice of forensic anthropology must be addressed in a coordinated, institutional and urgent manner.

The progress and development of forensic anthropology needs a coherent, universal, well-structured and national plan, which can be applied to all units destined to perform anthropological expertise. When creating strategies, it is important to remember not to start building the house from the roof. Solid professional and academic foundations of the discipline are crucial for the rest of the field to begin forming a stable structure.

The outstanding performance and efforts of the professional community in this field need the support of authorities at all levels of the country's administration. It is through this that proposals and initiatives that arise from those who know the field and its challenges first-hand can be materialized and, thus, promote the advancement of this discipline that can directly contribute for the basic rights of the Brazilian population to be respected.

It is important to acknowledge that the circumstances, as presented here, may not be true for every forensic anthropology unit around the world, yet, quite likely they are also not exclusive to the Brazilian context only. As scientists, even though it may not affect us personally, we cannot turn a blind eye on the fact that professional realities differ, and they differ greatly between geographic regions, often due to important social, political and economic disequilibrium existing among the countries of the so-called Global North and South. This imbalance directly affects multiple aspects of various areas of life, including the practice of forensic anthropology. As Sabzalieva et al. (2020) state: "...global asymmetries in the production of science shape mechanisms of recognition." Despite being a leader in scientific production in the region, Brazil continues as a peripheral actor in global science (Martinez and Sá 2020). Consequently, as Brazilian perspective rarely reaches the international academic vanguard, the issues affecting various fields of science that are being raised by national researchers and practitioners remain at a rather local level. Highlighting difficulties and challenges faced by professionals from academically marginalized regions to a broader audience helps break the bubble of "North-centric" perspectives by presenting realities that are distant yet real.

It broadens the possibility for exchanging knowledge and experience and opens up space for international collaborations that ultimately can lead to an improvement of the situation by creating joint proposals, applicable strategies and actuation plans based on contrasting experiences.

Conflict of interests

Author declares no conflict of interests.

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