

“The Little Prisoner”: Journalistic discourses about the “juvenile offender” in the 1970s in Chapecó - Santa Catarina

“O pequeno prisioneiro”: discursos jornalísticos acerca do “menor infrator” na década de 1970 em Chapecó – Santa Catarina

“El Prisionero”: Discursos periodísticos sobre el “joven infractor” en la década de 1970 en Chapecó, Santa Catarina

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze critically the discourses of the written press in Chapecó (Santa Catarina) regarding children and childhood in the 1970s. The newspaper *Correio do Sul*, published during that period, was chosen for this purpose. The journalistic discourse was analyzed based on the theoretical and methodological contributions of Michel Foucault. The text narrates the story of a boy arrested at the age of six and the machinations of the press to ascertain the facts and their veracity. In the context of the civil-military dictatorship, the newspaper's discourse emerged as a challenging one, seeking to denounce social problems of the period. Furthermore, it highlights the ways in which the State protected those considered offenders and how it attempted to frame them as threats to social harmony.

Keywords: Juvenile offender. Childhood. Press. Civil-military dictatorship.

Resumo: Este artigo busca problematizar os discursos da imprensa escrita de Chapecó (Santa Catarina) acerca da criança e da infância na década de 1970. Elegeu-se, para isso, o jornal *Correio do Sul*, editado naquela época. O discurso jornalístico foi analisado com base nas contribuições teórico-metodológicas de Michel Foucault. O texto narra a história de um menino preso aos seis anos de idade e as tramas da imprensa para apurar os fatos e sua veracidade. Na conjuntura da ditadura civil-militar, o discurso do jornal emergiu como de cunho contestador na busca pela denúncia de problemáticas sociais do período. Além disso, sinaliza as formas pelas quais o Estado tutelou aqueles considerados infratores e como tentou enquadrá-los como ameaças à harmonia social.

Palavras-chave: Menor infrator. Infância. Imprensa. Ditadura-civil militar.

Resumen: Este artículo busca problematizar los discursos de la prensa escrita en Chapecó (Santa Catarina) sobre la infancia en la década de 1970. Para ello, se eligió el periódico *Correio do Sul*, publicado en aquella época. El discurso periodístico se analizó a partir de las contribuciones teóricas y metodológicas de Michel Foucault. El texto narra la historia de un niño arrestado a los seis años y las maniobras de la prensa para esclarecer los hechos y su veracidad. En el contexto de la dictadura cívico-militar, el discurso del periódico se constituyó en un desafío, buscando denunciar los problemas sociales de la época. Además, destaca las formas en que el Estado controlaba a quienes consideraba infractores y cómo intentaba enmarcarlos como amenazas a la armonía social.

Palabras-clave: Delincuente juvenil. Infancia. Prensa. Dictadura cívico-militar.

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Introduction

The Brazilian childhood history is marked by narratives produced by different social devices acting decisively in the life of Brazilian children and young people. This article seeks to present traces that indicate the ways in which the State protected those considered delinquent, in which agents of power did not hesitate to classify them as dangerous and threatening to social harmony.

The written press, mainly newspapers, provide analysis material due to the access they offer to phenomena that comprise a given historical period. Analysis by scholars who survey their sources in the printed material show how the journalistic press contributes to the social construction of childhood and emphasize how the public representation of children is one of the most neglected areas in the media. In print journalism, children are imbued with symbolic and evocative power, much more to be seen than heard, transformed into a symbolic artifacts of adult world and in accordance with its own interests (Ponte, 2005).

Considering that, this article intends to narrate, in the field of childhood history studies, elements about the social condition of children considered offenders and the set of discourses/ statements produced about childhood during the dictatorial period in Brazil. To this end, we take as reference the theoretical contributions of Michel Foucault, for whom discourses are traversed by dynamics of power and knowledge of their time, making it necessary, firstly, to understand how they were produced and what conditioned their existence. Focusing on the news of that period, the article points out how discourses are characterized: firstly, as interconnected relations of power and knowledge; secondly, it outlines their discontinuities to highlight the series of successive events and their conditions of possibility.

The documentary sources selected are held by the Centro de Memória do Oeste de Santa Catarina (CEOM) [Memory Center of the West of Santa Catarina], located in the municipality of Chapecó (Santa Catarina - SC). The memory center was created in 1986 and was established as one of the first extension and research programs of the Fundação Universitária do Desenvolvimento do Oeste (Fundeste) [West Development University Foundation], which currently maintains the Universidade Comunitária da Região de Chapecó (Unochapecó)² [Community University of the Chapecó Region]. For this analysis, only two

² For further information access: <https://www.unochapeco.edu.br/ceom/info/sobre-o-ceom>.



issues of the newspaper *Correio do Sul* published in 1977, were selected. The newspaper, created in the late 1970s by a group of journalists who worked in the media in Chapecó, stood out with “[...] an editorial line that was attentive to social issues and detached from political parties” (*Correio do Sul*, Jan 28, 1978, p. 2). With articles addressing issues linked to social demands, the newspaper established dialogue with the community, characterizing a hallmark of Brazilian journalism of that period. Lohn (2014, p. 17, our translation) highlighted that great part of the national press, which had been supporting the military regime up to that point, starts to appear as “[...] one of the privileged voices of democratization and builder of a historical memory that consecrated the victory of certain social-political agents and sectors”.

In Santa Catarina, themes related to citizenship and rights became part of the newspapers’ agenda. *Correio do Sul*, founded within that context, showed greater independence in choosing its topics. Newly graduated journalists belonging to the newspaper team had experience from other press spaces such as *O Estado*, one of the main newspapers in Santa Catarina based in Florianópolis.³

The newspaper *Correio do Sul* was printed in the tabloid format, and the Graphic design marked a type of journalism considered modern. The cost of a copy of the newspaper varied between C\$ 3.00 and C\$ 7.00 during the circulation period. It was not possible to identify the price for a subscription or advertisements. We observed that the news reports occupied the first three pages of the newspaper with headlines and images covering approximately half of the printed page, mostly in color with italicized titles. The periodical contained an editorial titled *From the Editorial Staff*, always followed by the journalists’ names and signatures. On the fourth page, news from Chapecó and the West region were presented. Next, the newspaper dedicated two pages to sports. Pages nine and ten were dedicated to the main articles of that issue, many times with interviews with experts on the subject. The last pages of the newspaper presented several sections such as horoscope, variety, crossword puzzle, and a section *For Women*, with beauty advice, advertisements for services and companies, while the last page was dedicated to advertising from the Chapecó municipal government.

³ Our research revealed that journalist Marcos Bedin, who worked with the media group that managed the *Correio do Sul* newspaper, began his career at the newspaper *O Estado*, a widely circulated publication in Santa Catarina in the 1970s. This information was found in an interview with Marcos Bedin, available at: www3.carosouvintes.org.br. Accessed on: Aug 06, 2019.

The front-page headlines indicated, through the page number, what the reader would find inside the periodical. The graphic quality of the material is noteworthy, mainly for the photographic images that “dialogued” with the written text, in addition of being colorful. Reports occupied the first three pages with headlines and images covering approximately half of the printed page, mostly in color with italicized titles (Image 1).

Image 1: Minor in jail



Source: Correio do Sul (Oct 8, 1977, p. 1).

One characteristic of the *Correio do Sul* newspaper was the use of photography, or photojournalism. Its articles presented a narrative based on text and image, establishing a relationship between informing and giving an opinion about the event. Monteiro (2016) emphasized that photojournalism meets the production demands of a media outlet and aligns with its editorial line, seeking to present an event clearly, sharply and objectively for immediate consumption in the newspaper for a specific audience. For that author: “the photojournalist works with current events, aiming to show what is happening in the hit of the moment and with the language of the instant” (Monteiro, 2016, p. 72, our translation), which is a characteristic observed in this newspaper.



It seems relevant to highlight that the print media was a privileged locus in the production of discourses about childhood, especially in the 1970s. According to Ponte (2005), at the turn from the 1970s to the 1980s, news involving children gradually became agenda in many newspapers in Europe and North and South America. This fact is particularly associated with 1979, designated by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as the "International Year of the Child." In Brazil, with the movement for political reopening and strong denunciations of violations of the rights of boys and girls in the country's major urban centers, childhood also became a topic in the main national newspapers, such as *Folha de São Paulo*. In this regard, historian Silvia Maria Fávero Arend (2016, p. 1, our translation) states that the print media played a prominent role both in disseminating narratives and in producing "[...] informative and analytical content that supported the agents and movements that denounced the system".

The "little prisoner" history

In 1977, an article called the attention of regular readers of the local press in Chapecó. A child was arrested and was in the municipal jail since he was six years old. The news, which made the front page, prominently featuring an image of a boy "behind bars," likely moved city dwellers, who must have wondered: what could have led that "defenseless," "small" child to prison?

After flipping through the first page, the article, which spanned two full pages, narrates the journalist's journey to uncover the facts and discover what happened to the boy who would spend his childhood in prison. The reporter's investigative eye, after receiving the complaint at the *Correio do Sul* newspaper, quickly summoned his photographer to investigate the matter, which would certainly make a good headline. The two quickly head to the municipal jail to obtain concrete information. Upon arrival, they are stopped by one of the employees, who sternly stated that he knew nothing about the case and that if the reporter published any information, he would be held responsible for contempt and disobedience.

Even more intrigued with the history, the reporter decided to seek out the person responsible, who at the time was "Corporal Shenaider." His argument was that his task as a reporter was "[...] to save that child, or at least help him in any way possible" (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation). However, the jailer only stated that his entry



required authorization from the regional police chief, Pedro Fernandes Pereira, who at that moment denied it.

Time passed and the difficulties surrounding the reporter's access to the case became increasingly insurmountable. While he could not gain access to the prison to document the event, he imagined the conditions of the "[...] little prisoner, who could not even feel the sun," but that if the photographer could get into the prison, "everything could change" (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation). After several unsuccessful attempts, the reporter decided to contact another local authority, judge Rubem Odilon Cordova. However, at that moment, the journalist could not find him. Then, he turned to the public prosecutor Paulo Speck, who was already aware of the case and obtained authorization for him to enter the prison to photograph the boy (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation).

Satisfied and with authorization in hand, the reporter immediately went to the municipal jail and presented it to the delegate Pedro Fernandes Pereira, responsible for the prison, who immediately established some rules for that visit, being emphatic that "[...] the boy could only be photographed outside the jail". Disagreeing with that decision, the police reporter again approached Judge Rubem Odilon Cordova, stating that his intention was only to "help that unfortunate boy", reinforcing his intention to photograph him. The judge, convinced of the reporter's work, allowed him entry on the condition that he did not have access to the cell where the boy was and that he did not sensationalize the situation (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation).

The journey and obstacles encountered in the search for facts and verification of the allegations, as narrated in the journalistic piece, reinforce the journalist's desire to highlight the trajectory of a professional in pursuit of the truth. This was one of the characteristics of investigative journalism, which, at the end of the 1970s, began to become one of the "privileged voices of democratization" (Lohn, 2012, p. 140, our translation).

As highlighted by the historian Silvia Maria Fávero Arend (2016, p. 1, our translation):

A number of voices began to speak out about what was happening to children, adolescents, and young people perceived as needy or delinquent. The print media played a prominent role in this process, as it was a vehicle for disseminating these narratives, as well as producing informative and analytical content that supported the agents and movements that denounced the system (The notion of rights that begins to shape the journalistic discourse of the time).

Beyond the text itself, which prompted the reader to imagine the difficulties in capturing the facts, the images that made up the cover and the news story were crucial in calling one’s attention and provoking feelings about the situation. The cover image shows the boy with his head down, wearing clothes similar to those of an adult, apparently in very poor condition, sitting on the floor of a cell in the municipal prison. The headline in bold, with a denunciatory tone, states: “Minor in Chapecó jail since the age of six” (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 1). In addition to the editorial, the news story occupied two full pages of the newspaper (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation).

By leafing through the newspaper, it is possible, through the mosaic and alternating position of the images, to perceive the editors' work in imposing the predominance of photographs over text, in a journalistic practice that probably seduced its readers to follow the event. The images overlap the texts and characterize a single function, at least with regard to their distribution on the page: to denounce the fact, demonstrating the relevance of investigative journalism that records and proves social realities through photography. As Monteiro (2016) states, in journalism, sometimes it is the image that fulfills the function of headline, becoming a headline-image, which aims to capture the reader's attention and fulfill the role of visual synthesis of the journalistic piece.

The first photograph, on the left side of the page, at the top, shows the boy sitting on the floor of the jail, indicating a situation of abandonment since he was incarcerated since he was six years old. The second photo, on the right side of the page, also at the top, indicating its importance, represented the denouncement. The boy, conditioned by the photographer’s gaze, stands in front of the cell with his arms on the sides of the body, and looks straight at the camera with a slight smile. The caption reads: “Get me out of here!”. In the background of the photograph, the cell bars confirm the veracity of the facts. The third photograph records the boy's condition, almost disfigured; his face occupies the central space of the image, making photographer's direction visible by focusing his dejected gaze on the prison windowsill, as if he were waiting for salvation.

Image 2: In prison since he was six years old



Source: *Correio do Sul* (Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9).

Machado Júnior (2015) observed that the construction of photographic images goes through some arrangements between the photographed subject and the photographer, whose poses give new meaning to the photographer’s invisibility. The boy’s poses in each photograph, his framing within the image, indicate the presence of the photographer in the photographic act (Machado Júnior, 2015). The images translate a phenomenon in the history of poor childhood, the construction of dangerous childhood, and the ways the State protected children and young individuals considered abandoned, especially by parental bonds. Therefore, photography expresses meanings thus creating an event. Photography creates a cut in duration, freezing an instant in time and a cut in space through framing.

According to the article, which, in addition to the front page and editorial, occupied two full pages of the newspaper, José Machado was found in a deplorable state in jail. Blind, malnourished and suffering from physical problems. He slept in a cell under a staircase, and lived daily with dangerous, criminal prisoners, “[...] whose abuse was commonplace in the wee hours of the morning” (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation). The reporter noted that the boy had recently been allowed to spend a few hours a day at the police station, cleaning and sweeping the floor. Furthermore, it was found that several people, including the public prosecutor Paulo Speck and others not identified, were aware of the case and had already brought gifts (toys) to distract the boy during his time in prison. This indicates that,



during the six years he lived in the municipal jail, under extremely poor conditions that "disfigured" him, several people in the city were aware of the case.

According to the news report, six-year-old José Machado "[...] struck his sister on the head with a hoe, causing her death." The son of José and Maria Machado, the boy was brought from the municipality of Xanxerê, within the jurisdiction of the Regional Police Station headquartered in Chapecó and handed over to the police authorities of that city. His detention in the Chapecó Public Jail was authorized by the presiding judge of the court at the time, Rubem Odilon Antunes Cordova, because there was no "appropriate place to hold him" (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation).

The newspaper article summoned authorities such as the prosecutor and the judge to speak. They recognized being aware of the situation and confirmed having already appealed to assistance organizations, mainly the Santa Catarina Foundation for the well-being of Minors (Fucabem), whose office had recently been opened in the city. A photograph of the boy superimposed on the prison window, with his arms resting on the windowsill, depicting him waiting, and the text appealing to the coordinator of Fucabem, Maria Lucia Sander, accompanied the end of the report. The newspaper editors stated:

How long has it been...

We ask you, willing to help, Ms. Maria Lúcia Sander, Regional Coordinator of the Santa Catarina Foundation for the Well-being of Minors (FUCABEM): please find, if possible, a better place for little José Machado, who has been in the Chapecó public jail for more than six years, or rather, since he was six years old... (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 8-9, our translation).

The press's narrative, drawing attention to the case and focusing on Fucabem, characterizes the discourse that mobilized the 1960s and 1970s regarding juvenile delinquency. Arend & Daminelli (2014) state that, during the Brazilian dictatorship, a set of strategies were proposed by the Federal Senate to "curb" the number of children and adolescents entering and leaving police stations. According to the authors, the most significant example was Law N^o 5,258, of April 10, 1967, which established the age of criminal responsibility at 16 years and restored the criterion of discernment, already in disuse since 1920. "This movement made it clear that the motivation of the legislation was to remove adolescents in conflict with the law from circulation through incarceration, the most popular penal model in Brazil at that time" (Arend & Daminelli, 2014, p. 195, our translation).



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Even though the law was not approved due to protests, mainly in the legal field, because it was considered a step backward, the discourse regarding the problem of minors in conflict with the law remained focused on the idea of eliminating those who disturbed social order and did not fit into the established precepts of normality.

In the context of Santa Catarina, the policy was consolidated in 1972 with the opening of the Centro Educacional São Lucas [São Lucas Education Center], located in the neighborhood of Barreiros, in the municipality of São José. Soon after, other institutions were founded in the region of Florianópolis, exclusive centers for those considered highly dangerous offenders. In other cities in the state, such as Chapecó, Educational Centers administered by Fucabem were also established.

The journalistic narrative emphasizes the “sad and moving story of a child taken to prison” and states that the case would only change if organizations such as “Fucabem, LBA, INPS, ASDI” took the initiative to “[...] save a poor creature from the most terrible of fates: complete social marginalization and its gradual biological destruction.” Inviting its readers to reflect on whether “are we truly a Christian society?”, the editors reaffirm their purpose in problematizing the “obscured” issues of the city of progress, appealing for the “[...] sad and long story not to serve only for publication in that periodical” (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 8, 1977, p. 2, our translation).

After the news repercussion, in issue 11, of October 22, 1977, José Machado appeared again on the front page of the *Correio do Sul* newspaper. In a photograph on the lower part of the page, with the following headline: “The boy who was in jail, is now taken to Florianópolis” (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 22, 1977, p. 1, our translation), announcing the development of the “sad history” narrated. With a much less expressive space in the newspaper than that of the previous report, on page 14 the journalists inform: “Mazaropi”, who was freed after having spent seven years in jail, was transferred to the capital of the State, where “[...] he will continue receiving treatment through the *Centro de Recepção e Triagem* (CRT) [Reception and Screening Center], an agency of the Fundação Catarinense do Bem Estar do Menor (Fucabem) [Santa Catarina Foundation for the Well-being of Minors]” (*Correio do Sul*, Oct. 22, 1977, p. 14, our translation).

From the history told based on the facts presented by the *Correio do Sul* newspaper, the boy, José Machado, had been made prisoner at the municipal prison of Chapecó in the



early 1970s, for having committed a “violent” act that caused the death of his younger sister. According to the newspaper article and the statement of the judge who oversaw and delegated the case, the boy was sent to prison because there was no “suitable institution” in the municipality. It is important to point out that, until the mid-1980s, the municipality of Chapecó did not have any type of institution for the detention of juvenile offenders. In the western region of Santa Catarina, at that time there were only two orphanages, one in the municipality of Xanxerê and the other in Mondaí, intended solely for the sheltering of abandoned or orphaned children.⁴

Prison in Brazilian childhood history

The story, as told by the press, of the case of the boy imprisoned since the age of six, highlighted the practices carried out in violation of the law experienced by thousands of Brazilian children and young people who, for some reason, came into conflict with the law during that period.

Rizzini (2009) highlighted that, up to 1830, children and youngsters were severely punished without much distinction when compared to adult offenders, and only after the first criminal law of the Empire – the Criminal Code of 1830, legislation that closely resembles the Philippine Ordinances – that changes in the treatment of minors began to appear. According to this law, minors under 14 years of age would not be considered criminals (Art. 10, §1º). If it were proven that minors under 14 years of age committed crimes and “[...] acted with discernment, they should be placed in correctional facilities for the time that the Judge deems appropriate, provided that the detention does not exceed the age of seventeen years” (Art. 14, our translation)⁵.

Therefore, a concern is identified regarding the confinement of minors in special establishments aimed at their correction; that is, even though the discussion about the prevalence of education over punishment, which would only happen decades later, was not yet in vogue. However, this does not mean that punitive practices did not continue to be carried out, as the intention to repress delinquency was simply not seen as a threat that exceeded police and judicial controls (Rizzini, 2009).

⁴ Xanxerê is 44 km far from Chapecó and Mondaí is 97.4 km far from that city.

⁵ Criminal Code of 1830. Available at: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/leis/lim/lim-16-12-1830.htm. Accessed on: May 20, 2020.



The transition from Empire to Republic, amidst significant changes in the country's social context, particularly the movement surrounding the abolition of slavery, somehow propelled transformations in Brazilian legislation. Regarding childhood, a differentiated concern emerged, primarily based on a legal-welfare perspective, marking a new cycle in the trajectory of legislation on children. Social transformations, coupled with changes in the political regime and the reform of the penal system, influenced by international movements, intensified discussions surrounding the promulgation of a new Penal Code in 1890, which sought to regulate the problem of abandoned and delinquent children (Rizzini, 2009).

The results of such changes and, mainly the association between justice and social assistance were legitimated by the creation of a special law for children – The Code for Minors. It seems relevant to emphasize that those changes were associated with the transformations occurring in the law field, influenced by international debates in the field of modern law. Of particular note is the shift in the conceptualization of justice from the 20th century onwards, which aimed at a "humanization of justice and the prison system." Following this movement, the specific case of children was naturally considered, with the idea gaining traction that it was necessary to "understand alleged juvenile delinquency," promoting their removal from the penal sphere (Rizzini, 2009, p. 111, our translation).

The Criminal Code of 1890, still resembling the Empire Code, characterized those changes. Considering that "[...] those under 9 years of age shall not be considered criminal, and those over 9 but under 14 years old who act without discernment" (art. 27, §1st, §2nd, our translation), the said document provides for an alteration in relation to the Empire Code and includes the provision that those between nine and fourteen years old who "acted with discernment" should be sent to "correction facilities", thus signaling changes in relation to punishment practices, which from that moment onwards started to be viewed negatively in the legal field. The correction practice, at the time, was associated with disciplining of children's bodies in industrial institutions that revealed the pedagogy of coercive labor as the main resource for the regeneration of those who did not fit into the prevailing productive regime (Santos, 2009, p. 216). Therefore, the "infantile delinquency" issue, seen as a threat to the current public order, gained other dimensions.

The 'childhood issue' began to acquire a political dimension, embodied in what many at the time called the "republican ideal." It was not merely a matter of highlighting the importance, but rather the urgency of intervening, educating or correcting "the minors" so that they could become useful and productive individuals



for the country, ensuring the moral order of society (Rizzini, 2009, p. 109, our translation).

The transformations occurring in Brazilian society in the early 20th century, such as the intense migratory flow and the accelerated urbanization and industrialization processes, influenced the concerns of legal experts regarding abandoned and delinquent children. According to Boeira (2018), those concerns were linked to new social configurations and the significant increase in crime, mainly committed by minors who used the streets as an extension of their homes, since many lived in tenement houses and boarding houses.

In the early 20th century, juvenile delinquency was a problem on the agenda not only of jurists but also of general public opinion. Reports of minors being sent to prisons as adult inmates fueled discussions surrounding impoverished childhood, which were reinforced by laws that, on the one hand, focused on disadvantaged children and, on the other, on delinquents, establishing a dichotomy between these two categories (Rizzini, 2009). The category "minor" was used in legal discourse to designate children and/or young people in situations of social risk, offenders, and workers. Loaded with political interests, this category summarizes a multiplicity of discourses on impoverished Brazilian childhood, defining practices with this population for approximately a century.⁶

Such movement placed childhood in the center of legal discussions and resulted in the reformulation of the Penal Code, bringing new directions for the detention of those considered criminals. In this context, laws, ordinances, and regulations were promulgated, giving rise to a set of welfare institutions. Places like the *Instituto de Proteção e Assistência à Infância* (IPAI) [Institute for the Protection and Assistance of Children], in 1899, and the Juvenile Court, in 1924, were decisive for the promulgation of the first Code for Minors in 1927. Under the aegis of projects and laws, the Brazilian legal system gradually instituted projects that provided for the full-time detention of boys and girls who were in situations of abandonment. The Code for Minors instituted in 1927 characterizes the slow process that profoundly altered the social life of countless Brazilian children.

⁶ The word "minor," originating from the legal field, began to be identified from the late 19th and early 20th centuries to refer to children in situations of abandonment and marginalization, "[...] in addition to defining their civil and legal status and the rights that correspond to them." According to Londoño (1996), until the 19th century, the word "minor" was used as a synonym for child, adolescent, or young person, indicating age limits that prevented people from having the right to paternal emancipation or assuming civil or canonical responsibilities. It was only at the turn of the 20th century, with a marked change in the legal field, that Brazilian jurists began to use the category "minor" to refer to poor children and young people (Londoño, 1996, p. 129, our translation).



The first half of the 20th century was permeated by the construction of legal and welfare strategies and the implementation of social policies directed to the poor childhood aiming to “save” it from the dangers presented by the streets. However, what also appeared in that period were mechanisms aiming to control poor children by educating them in institutions such as correctional facilities and agricultural institutions characterized by prison and internment practices. An example of such institutions were the agricultural patronages, which spread throughout different parts of the country. Regarding them, it is important to highlight the dissertation by Daniel Boeira (2012), which points out the different practices used, mainly by police authorities, to “capture” those considered “dangerous” and send them to boarding schools, with the aim of training agricultural labor.

Those institutions that marked childhood history throughout the 20th century, and we could say even today, sought to correct children's behavior. According to Passeti (2009, p. 355), prisons and boarding schools were represented simultaneously as a disciplinary image, where those considered “maladjusted” should be contained, and, on the other hand, as a threatening space. This duality justifies the inability of those institutions to find solutions for the return of criminals without stigmatizing them or sparing their families from the economics of crime, since sooner or later they end up participating in the illegality that takes hold from within the prisons.

It seems relevant to emphasize that, during the civil-military regime, there was a setback in relation to legislation concerning minors. The first occurred during the Costa e Silva Government (1967-1969), with the repeal of two previous achievements. One of them refers to article 33 of the Penal Code, which establishes the non-imputability of minors under 18 years of age. According to the article, “[...] a minor under 18 years of age is non-imputable, unless, having already completed 16 years of age, he or she reveals sufficient psychic development to understand the lawful nature of the act and to determine himself or herself in accordance with that understanding” (our translation). With the advent of the 1969 Constitution, in article 165, item X (10), the second setback occurred regarding the permission for work by minors under 12 years of age. Previously, the entry of adolescents into the labor market was only possible at 14 years of age. On the other hand, the Code for Minors, instituted by Law n^o 6,697 allowed minors to be held in police custody for five days for investigation of their participation as co-perpetrators or perpetrators of criminal offenses.



Therefore, the previous provision that had set this period at 24 hours was revoked (Rodrigues, 2001, p. 46).

Frontana (1999) explained that during the civil-military regime, the State promoted different government actions aiming at economic appropriation and the exercise of political domination. The child or young individual in conflict with the law, who were under the State's guardianship would be unable to escape situations of extreme violence and helplessness, leaving them with no option but to follow a life path that would inexorably imprison them in the social role of juvenile delinquent (Frontana, 1999, p. 161).

Returning to the news regarding the boy arrested in Chapecó, those discourses permeated the various social mechanisms that decisively impacted the lives of Brazilian children and young people in the 1970s. The story of José Machado is yet another example of how the State protected those considered abandoned and delinquent. Particularly regarding delinquents, those in power did not hesitate to label them as dangerous and threatening to social harmony, relying on various social mechanisms for support.

Coimbra (2001), in a relevant work on the discourses produced by media, discussed from the news how mass communication media become important social equipment helping to produce dominant schemes of signification and interpretation of the world, producing subjectivities. By means of spectacle and sensationalism, identities are produced that demarcate what is acceptable or not by society. Regarding impoverished childhood, discourses are constructed that point to the possible future formation of dangerous classes. Thus, different mechanisms are needed to shape the image of impoverished childhood according to socially acceptable standards.

For Coimbra (2001, p. 131, our translation): “Escaping these model territories means joining the enormous legion of the ‘dangerous,’ those who should be viewed with suspicion and, at the very least, kept away and avoided.” That author's statements are important for considering how journalistic discourse constructs narratives about childhood. Particularly in the story about the boy arrested, the press used spectacle and sensationalism to reproduce what is acceptable in a society that idealizes an orderly and happy childhood.

The boy José Machado, as reported in the press, would possibly be sent to the *Centro Educacional São Lucas* [São Lucas Educational Center] in the capital, Florianópolis. According to Daminelli (2013, p. 148), people who committed homicides and robberies were



Aline Fátima Lazarotto

“The Little Prisoner”: Journalistic discourses about the “juvenile offender”
in the 1970s in Chapecó - Santa Catarina

sent to a special cell in the Florianópolis State Penitentiary, where they would await the decision of the juvenile judge who would send them to the São Lucas Educational Center, as they were considered “highly dangerous”.

Regarding those institutions maintained by Fucabem in Florianópolis:

[...] the *Centro Educacional São Lucas*, and also the *Centro Educacional São Mateus*, both located in the municipality of São José, in Florianópolis, were known as true juvenile prisons since they housed young people whom FUCABEM had no hope of rehabilitating (Daminelli, 2013, p. 197, our translation, our emphasis).

The fact that the boy continued his journey far from his hometown, confined in institutions that were veritable juvenile prisons, reaffirms that “escaping normality” means forever assuming the status of a criminal – a social danger. Furthermore, it is evident that the deprivation of his liberty reinforced the measures that the Brazilian State, under the civil-military regime, used to tame the bodies of children belonging to classes considered dangerous.

It is worth highlighting that this is one of the purposes that underpin penal incarceration practices since the 19th century, as Michel Foucault aptly presented, inferring that these disciplinary institutions “[...]covered both the deprivation of liberty and the technical transformation of individuals” (Foucault, 2014, p. 252). The techniques used by prison institutions produce delinquents, framing children and young people within discourses that aim to manufacture bodies that are both docile and capable. Considering that,

The modelling of the body produces a knowledge of the individual, the apprenticeship of the techniques induces modes of behaviour and the acquisition of skills is inextricably linked with the establishment of power relations; strong, skilled agricultural workers are produced; in this very work, provided it is technically supervised, submissive subjects are produced and a dependable body of knowledge built up about them. This disciplinary technique exercised upon the body had a double effect: a 'soul' to be known and a subjection to be maintained. (Foucault, 2014, p. 294).

The life story of José Machado, who spent his childhood incarcerated in prison, bears witness to the history of thousands of Brazilian children and young people for whom the Judiciary applied practices of social control, constructing, through techniques of power, a discourse that stripped them of their identities and presented them as criminals, distancing them from the orderly representations of childhood. Even adopting a discursive tone intended to reveal a social problem, the newspaper *Correio do Sul* does not demystify the figure of criminal assigned by the State to José Machado. The images that frame the child within the



cell only reaffirm his status as a criminal, whose destiny was to live without freedom, since the boy had committed something that went against the precepts of society.

As highlighted by Foucault (2015, p. 31), since the 18th century, the concept of crime is not only linked to guilt, that category of guilt that causes damage to the other, but rather that crime is something that harms society, that is, it is a gesture by which an individual breaks the social pact that binds him to others and wages war against his own society.

Some considerations

Characterizing the slow process of restructuring laws concerning abandoned or delinquent minors in Brazil, particularly in the 20th century, is important to understand the case of the six-year-old boy imprisoned in the municipality of Chapecó in the early 1970s, a period when the 1927 Penal Code was in effect. The punishment authorized by the judge, and which appears to have been freely consented to by society at the time, reveals the contradictions between the letter of the law and the authoritarian practices carried out by legal professionals. The article published by the *Correio do Sul* newspaper echoes punitive practices against Brazilian children that persisted for centuries. Those social practices characterize a clear imbalance in the judicial system and highlight the forms the State adopted throughout the 20th century to try to suppress delinquent behavior seen as a threat to the established order.

During the dictatorial period, particularly in the early years of its implementation, as we have seen previously, a social policy was introduced targeting children and adolescents considered abandoned or in conflict with the law, based on the National Security System. Thus, in addition to "capturing" minors considered dangerous to society, actions aimed at the readjustment of this population were also carried out. Upon assuming control, the State applied, in its own way, the necessary corrective measures to suppress the behavior of abandoned boys and girls or those in conflict with the law, who, in official discourse, became potential threats to national security.

Journalistic narratives weave a tapestry of social discourse that allows us to highlight the ways in which children gain space in the media, sometimes more as objects than as subjects of their own history. Objects in the direction of policies, but, in a contradictory manner, subjects who occupy public spaces, revealing how deprived they are of their rights.



Aline Fátima Lazarotto

“The Little Prisoner”: Journalistic discourses about the “juvenile offender”
in the 1970s in Chapecó - Santa Catarina

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Aline Fátima Lazarotto

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Submitted on: February 11, 2026

Evaluated on: March 08, 2026

Accepted on: April 12, 2026