

Searching for Memory: Aluizio Palmar and the Shadow of Dictatorship in Brazil

Jacob Blanc

The University of North Carolina Press (Apr 29, 2025)

Softcover \$34.95 (304pp)

978-1-4696-8102-3

A sensitive exploration of Brazilian history and the boundaries of biographical writing, Jacob Blanc's collaborative book reconstructs the life of human rights activist and former militant Aluizio Palmar.

Born in rural Brazil, Palmar was a student during Brazil's fateful 1964 military coup. He later became a communist activist, student organizer, and member of the militant group MR-8. After years of imprisonment and torture by the Brazilian authorities, Palmar lived as an exile in Chile and Argentina. Both countries fell to military regimes. Upon returning to Brazil, he became a journalist and activist fighting against the excesses of Jair Bolsonaro and the unresolved wounds of Brazil's authoritarian past.

Conceived when Palmar was sued for defamation in 2019 by his former torturer, *Searching for Memory* reconstructs Palmar's life with an eye cast toward the way memory coheres into particular forms of self-narration. The book draws on years of interviews and conversations with its subject as well as Palmar's public statements to put forward the novel idea of a "memory script," a concept that examines the significance behind the way events are remembered, recounted, repeated, and shared in public discourse. As a result, there are fluid shifts between expansive narratives that capture the sweep of history, anthropological reflections on Palmar's stories (how they speak to larger historical realities), and self-reflections on the process of writing a biography. Palmar's commentary on the biography itself is also woven into the text. Discrepancies in his stories are pointed out, and the process of discussing these infelicities with Palmar becomes a narrative in itself, studding the book with intimate analyses of the process of telling one's own story.

The expansive biography of a Brazilian political activist, *Searching for Memory* delves into why and how memories become stories, exploring the power those stories possess.

WILLEM MARX (March / April 2025)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.