

**THE LEGACY OF ODORICO PARAGUAÇU IN BRAZILIAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BUREAUCRACY AND INEFFICIENCY OF THE INSS****O LEGADO DE ODORICO PARAGUAÇU NA ADMINISTRAÇÃO PÚBLICA BRASILEIRA:
UMA ANÁLISE CRÍTICA DA BUROCRACIA E INEFICIÊNCIA DO INSS****EL LEGADO DE ODORICO PARAGUAÇU EN LA ADMINISTRACIÓN PÚBLICA
BRASILEÑA: UN ANÁLISIS CRÍTICO DE LA BUROCRACIA Y LA INEFICIENCIA DEL
INSS** <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2025.021-063>**Romero de Albuquerque Maranhão¹****ABSTRACT**

This article proposes an analysis of the persistence of the dysfunctions of the Brazilian public administration, satirized in the figure of Odorico Paraguaçu in "O Bem-Amado" by Dias Gomes, through the observation of the contemporary challenges faced by the National Institute of Social Security (INSS). We argue that the demagogic, inefficiency and excessive bureaucracy, hallmarks of "Odoriquian" management, find worrying parallels in the problems that affect millions of insured individuals seeking access to their social security rights. Using a qualitative and exploratory approach, we compare the characteristics of Sucupira's administration with those of the INSS, highlighting the social implications of a public service that, at times, distances itself from its fundamental purpose, and the discursive strategies used by Odorico to subject bodies and maintain power.

Keywords: Odorico Paraguaçu. Public Administration. INSS. Bureaucracy. Inefficiency. Social Criticism.

RESUMO

Este artigo propõe uma análise da persistência das disfunções da administração pública brasileira, satirizadas na figura de Odorico Paraguaçu em "O Bem-Amado" de Dias Gomes, através da observação dos desafios contemporâneos enfrentados pelo Instituto Nacional do Seguro Social (INSS). Argumentamos que a demagogia, a ineficiência e a burocracia excessiva, marcas da gestão "odoriquiana", encontram paralelos preocupantes nos problemas que afetam milhões de segurados que buscam acesso a seus direitos previdenciários. Utilizando uma abordagem qualitativa e exploratória, comparamos as características da administração de Sucupira com as do INSS, evidenciando as implicações sociais de um serviço público que, por vezes, se distancia de seu propósito fundamental, e as estratégias discursivas utilizadas por Odorico para a sujeição dos corpos e a manutenção do poder.

Palavras-chave: Odorico Paraguaçu. Administração Pública. INSS. Burocracia. Ineficiência. Crítica Social.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo propone un análisis de la persistencia de disfunciones en la administración pública brasileña, satirizada en la figura de Odorico Paraguaçu en "O Bem-Amado" de Dias Gomes, a través de la observación de los desafíos contemporáneos que enfrenta el Instituto Nacional de Previsión Social (INSS). Argumentamos que la demagogia, la ineficiencia y la burocracia excesiva, características de la gestión odoriquiana, encuentran preocupantes paralelos en los problemas que afectan a millones de asegurados que buscan acceder a sus derechos de seguridad social. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo y exploratorio, comparamos las características de la administración de Sucupira con las del INSS, destacando las implicaciones sociales de un servicio público que, en ocasiones, se distancia de su propósito fundamental, y las estrategias discursivas empleadas por Odorico para someter a los organismos y mantener el poder.

Palabras clave: Odorico Paraguaçu. Administración Pública. INSS. Burocracia. Ineficiencia. Crítica Social.

INTRODUCTION

The work "O Bem-Amado",ⁱ by Dias Gomesⁱⁱ, immortalized the character Odorico Paraguaçuⁱⁱⁱ, mayor of the fictional city of Sucupira. More than a political satire, Odorico has become an archetype of the Brazilian public manager: demagogue, prone to populism and corruption, and obsessively focused on façade projects that aim more at personal glory than collective well-being. Its main goal was the inauguration of a cemetery, an objective that was ironically impossible to achieve due to the lack of deaths in the city (ALMEIDA, 2003).

This representation, created in the 1960s, transcends fictional time and space, remaining as a critical mirror of the pathologies of public administration in Brazil. The persistence of vices such as clientelism, the use of the public machine for private purposes, bureaucratic inefficiency and disconnection with the real needs of the population are still daily challenges. Fiction itself often serves as an enlarged mirror of the reality observed by the authors (ALMEIDA, 2003).

Maranhão (2024) legitimizes the use of literature as an "investigative resource" in administration, highlighting that works such as "Os Sertões" by Euclides da Cunha contribute to an interpretation of the beginnings and foundations of the formulation of Public Policies in Brazil. This perspective broadens the scope of our analysis, allowing us to contextualize the dysfunctions of public administration to deeper historical roots in the country.

Bender and Silva (2024) propose an analysis of the "subjection of bodies" based on the political discourses of Odorico Paraguaçu and former President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, highlighting the context of the typhus epidemic in fiction and the COVID-19 pandemic in the Brazilian reality. Both characters act under a denialist condition, cultivating the rhetoric of the "differentiation" of the "other" and promoting the rejection of "self", which evidences a process of normalization and regulation of bodies through the repetition of narratives.

Figueira (2024) also addresses the control over the body as a technique of political domination in the work of Dias Gomes, evidencing Odorico's trajectory from the opportunistic discourse in front of Mestre Leonel's body to his downfall when he tried to politically appropriate the body of one of the Cajazeiras sisters.

It is in this context that this article proposes to analyze to what extent the dysfunctions of public administration satirized in "The Well-Beloved", through the figure of Odorico Paraguaçu, can be observed in the contemporary reality of Brazilian public institutions, with a specific focus on the National Institute of Social Security (INSS).^{iv}

Our objective is to identify points of convergence between the management of Sucupira and the challenges faced by the insured and by the management of the INSS itself, discussing the social implications of inefficiency and bureaucracy in access to social security rights. The relevance lies in the topicality of Dias Gomes' criticism and the urgency of debating the quality of essential public services, which impact the lives of millions of Brazilians.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The work of Dias Gomes is part of a rich Brazilian tradition of social and political criticism in literature and teledramaturgy. From the colonial period, with authors such as Gregório de Matos, to modernism and the contemporary, politics and its ills have been the object of analysis and satire. "The Beloved" stands out for its ability to synthesize, in a charismatic and comic character, deep-rooted vices. Fernandes (2015) points out that Dias Gomes resorted to political imaginaries to idealize Odorico, alluding to politicians and political situations of the time.

Conceptually, Odorico's public administration can be understood in the light of Weber's bureaucracy and its dysfunctions. Max Weber (1999) conceived bureaucracy as a rational model of organization, based on rules, hierarchy and impersonality, aiming at efficiency. However, in contexts such as the Brazilian one, this rationality is often subverted, generating excessive formalism, slowness, depersonalization, and a distancing from the citizen.

Authors such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda (2000), with the "cordial man" and patrimonialism, and Raymundo Faoro (2001), with the "bureaucratic class", help to explain how personal relationships and private interests overlap with impersonality and legality in the Brazilian public sphere, elements that Odorico Paraguaçu embodies with mastery (FERNANDES, 2015).

Figueira (2024) highlights the relevance of Michel Foucault's (2009; 2020) contributions on biopower, biopolitics, and discipline to understand the exercise of power over the body of others, their life, and their death. Foucault (2020) proposes that biopower operates on two fronts: the anatomical-political of the body, which aims at individual training to make it productive, and the biopolitics of the population, which manages the life of the collective through statistics, public health, among others.

Traditional sovereign power, focused on "making die and letting live", is replaced by biopower, which "makes live and lets die". However, as Figueira (2024) himself points out, Foucault's propositions are criticized for their Eurocentric view, which requires a broader

look at the realities of the Americas, Africa, and Asia, where death can be an "economic and legal normality" (FIGUEIRA, 2024).

Bender and Silva (2024) deepen the discussion on the subjectivation of bodies using Judith Butler (2020), who argues that the process of "subjection" (*assujettissement*) imprisons subjects through discourse, imposing on them an ideal model of obedience and normalization. This subjection implies a radical dependence, where the body is "trained, shaped, cultivated and invested", not only subordinated, but also maintained (BUTLER, 2020). Denial, in this context, can be an active process of non-recognition of the "other" and of oneself, cultivating a "rhetoric of differentiation".

Maranhão (2024) adds that Euclides da Cunha's "Os Sertões" reveals the "political vices" that prevented the development of democracy in Brazil, with a "lack of unity of feeling of belonging to a homeland" and an "absolute lack of knowledge between the parties". This Euclidean analysis of a Brazil of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resonates with the timelessness of Odorico's dysfunctions, showing that the problems of public administration have deep historical roots and are not isolated or recent phenomena.

Political corruption, in this sense, is a phenomenon of changing perception, which uses public resources for private purposes, has the State as a central figure and aims to create or expand status, wealth and power, articulating in secret with inspection deficits (MONTE, 2012)

The INSS, in turn, is the main institution responsible for guaranteeing social security rights in Brazil, a pillar of the social security system. Its mission is to ensure support for citizens in situations of need, such as retirement, illness, disability or death. The efficiency and accessibility of its services are, therefore, crucial for the dignity and survival of millions of Brazilians (BRASIL, 1988).

METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative approach, exploratory and descriptive in nature. Content analysis is used to establish parallels between the fiction of "The Well-Beloved" and the reality of the INSS. The corpus of analysis comprises the characterization of the administration of Odorico Paraguaçu (based on the work of Dias Gomes and its television adaptation) and information on the challenges faced by the INSS, such as long waiting lines, problems in medical expertise and difficulties in accessing digital services.

The empirical material consists of reports and articles from national press outlets published between 2023 and 2025, which address problems such as fraud, waiting lists, delays in granting benefits, and issues related to medical expertise and digitalization at the

INSS, as well as YouTube videos that report on the experiences of policyholders and expert analysis of INSS problems. The procedures involved the identification of the characteristics of the "odoriquian" management, the mapping of the problems of the INSS evidenced by the news and YouTube videos, and the critical interpretation of these parallels.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS: THE INSS AS A "SOCIAL SECURITY SUCUPIRA"

The management of Odorico Paraguaçu in Sucupira and the reality of the INSS, although at different scales and contexts, present worrying convergences that point to structural challenges of the Brazilian public administration.

THE INSS "CEMETERY QUEUE": THE PARADOX OF INEFFICIENCY

Odorico's obsession with the cemetery, a finished work, but useless due to the absence of deaths, finds a dark parallel in the long waiting lines of the INSS. Millions of insured people wait for months, and sometimes years, for the granting of retirements, sickness benefits or pensions.

In April 2025, the waiting list for benefits at the INSS reached 2.678 million applications, almost doubling in one year and raising the average time for granting to 52 days, exceeding the legal limit of 45 days (PODER360, 2025a; R7, 2025). This delay is so critical that palliative measures such as the creation of financial incentives for civil servants to reduce the queue (SENADO NOTÍCIAS, 2025) and the approval of new deadlines with the figure of the "provisional benefit" (CÂMARA DOS DEPUTADOS, 2024) are implemented.

Just as in Sucupira, where the cemetery does not fulfill its function satisfactorily, in the INSS, the structure exists, the servers work, but the efficiency in granting rights often fails, leaving the citizen in a limbo of helplessness. The right, which should be guaranteed, becomes a "work" that has been started, but chronically postponed.

Nunes and Dillmann (2021) point out that the construction of the cemetery in Sucupira satirizes inefficient projects with little social priority, making an analogy to the contestations of the construction of Brasília.

DEMAGOGUERY AND EMPTY RHETORIC: BUREAUCRATIC LANGUAGE AND THE DEHUMANIZATION OF THE SERVICE

Odorico was a master of empty rhetoric and neologisms to mask inefficiency. At the INSS, the complexity of bureaucratic language, excessive documentary requirements, and

justifications for slowness can act as a veil, creating a feeling that the system is "talking" a lot, but "solving" little. Communication, often impersonal and standardized, contributes to the dehumanization of the service, distancing the institution from citizens who seek support in moments of vulnerability. The disconnection between the official discourse of modernization and the reality of precarious care echoes Sucupira's demagogery (WEBER, 1999).

FAÇADE PROJECTS VS. ESSENTIAL PRIORITIES: MEDICAL EXPERTISE AND NEGLECT OF LIFE

The prioritization of "solutions" that do not address the core of the problem, such as digitization without adequate support or the focus on indicators that do not reflect the quality of the service provided, can be compared to Odorico's obsession with useless work.

The crisis of medical expertise in the INSS is a clear symptom of disinvestment and mistaken prioritization. Reports of constant rescheduling (FORTES ADVOCACIA, 2025), the complexity of preparing for the process (LEMOS DE MIRANDA ADVOCACIA, 2025) and, in extreme cases, failures in the system that can lead to the loss of the benefit, such as the impossibility of requesting an extension (INSS EM FOCO, 2025), demonstrate how the focus on processes and saving resources can lead to negligence with the health and livelihood of the insured.

The guidance for the insured with expertise under analysis for a long time is to contact the INSS directly, as the delay may indicate pending issues not communicated online or by telephone (PREVIDENCIÁRIO NA PRÁTICA, 2023). In addition, the difficulty in obtaining the benefit often stems from superficial analyses and the lack of knowledge of experts in relation to rare or chronic diseases (YOUTUBE, 2025b), reinforcing the perception that the system operates against the citizen.

The tips of an experienced expert (DOCTOR VON MÜHLEN, 2021) on how to behave in the expert opinion, although useful, reveal the complexity and the need to "play the game" to have the right recognized. These changes sometimes make it "much more difficult to grant benefits" (YOUTUBE, 2025b), referring to Odorico's disregard for the basic needs of Sucupira, privileging his "great work" (the cemetery) to the detriment of life.

In the context of Odorico, he even manipulated the distribution of vaccines to combat a typhus epidemic in the city, with the aim of generating deaths to inaugurate the cemetery, refusing science (DIAS GOMES, 1973; BENDER; SILVA, 2024).

THE "DIGITAL SUCUPIRA": REINVENTED BUREAUCRACY AND EXCLUSION

Despite modernization efforts, digitalization, without proper planning and digital inclusion, can generate new layers of bureaucracy and, paradoxically, promote social exclusion. Elderly people and people with less digital literacy face immense difficulties in accessing online services, and face-to-face service is increasingly scarce.

The 1,466 hours of unavailability of INSS systems between August 2023 and December 2024, due to a Dataprev failure, for example, demonstrate vulnerability and how the "Digital Sucupira" can transform facilitation tools into new obstacles (PODER360, 2025b), perpetuating inefficiency for those who do not master the technology or do not have constant access.

In addition, errors in the National Registry of Social Information (CNIS) can prevent retirement, demonstrating that digitalization, by itself, does not guarantee efficiency (SAGAZPREV, 2024). If it were contemporary, Odorico could "inaugurate" complex and difficult-to-navigate digital platforms, which seem modern, but perpetuate inefficiency and exclusion for those who do not master the technology or do not have constant access.

FRAUD AND EMBEZZLEMENT: RECURRENT PATRIMONIALISM

The dimension of corruption in the "odoriquiana" administration, which used the public machine for personal and clientelist purposes, finds an alarming echo in the recent news about fraud and embezzlement of money in the INSS. Scandals involving billions of reais in "undue discounts" of membership fees between 2019 and 2024 (PODER360, 2025b), in addition to numerous operations by the Federal Police and blocking of assets of suspected fraudsters (VEJA, 2025b; 2025c), show a serious problem of patrimonialism and misuse of purpose (FAORO, 2001).

The difficulty in knowing the exact destination of the stolen billions (VEJA, 2025a) and the political disputes over responsibility, with the opposition demanding explanations (VEJA, 2025d) and accusations that the top leadership of the government "knew about the problem" (INFOMONEY, 2025), reinforce the image of an administration where transparency and accountability are often obscured, as are Odorico's maneuvers to maintain power. The president's own statement that he "does not want to punish entities in a 'hasty way' for fraud in the INSS" (VEJA, 2025e) adds a layer of ambiguity that refers to leniency with corruption.

Maranhão (2024) points out that, in the early days of Brazilian public administration, the use of public agents for personal purposes was already a problem, as in the case of the judge who, under the pretext of public order, sought personal revenge against Antônio Conselheiro, denying him agreed materials and mobilizing troops. This episode illustrates

the persistence of the use of the public machine for vested interests from the foundations of the Republic.

Monte (2012) deepens this discussion, distinguishing political corruption from the manipulation of institutions and rules of procedure, aiming to sustain status, wealth or power. The "valerioduto" and the "mensalão" are concrete examples of corruption schemes that expose the weaknesses of public administration, political parties and electoral legislation. Such mechanisms, which involve overbilling of contracts, money laundering and illegal transfers, demonstrate a complex network of private and partisan interests that, instead of being restricted to a deviation from norms, alter the very logic of politics.

Corruption, in this sense, undermines democracy by distorting electoral processes, masking illicit negotiations, and hindering oversight, transforming public affairs into an object of private interest. Impunity, with cases that "end up in pizza", is a major engine that undermines the credibility of the political regime and accentuates social inequalities (MONTE, 2012)

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The figure of Odorico Paraguaçu, with his demagoguery, inefficiency, and focus on questionable goals rather than the real needs of the population, serves as a potent and timeless metaphor for the chronic challenges faced by the Brazilian public administration. In the case of the INSS, this analogy, widely corroborated by recent journalistic articles and reports by experts and policyholders on YouTube, reveals a "Social Security Sucupira" where millions of insured people find themselves trapped in a bureaucratic labyrinth, fighting for rights that should be accessible and guaranteed.

According to Bender and Silva (2024), the repetition of the narratives of authoritarian figures imprints a pattern of social, political, and cultural behaviors and conducts to be followed, coercively, bringing them closer to an ideal model of obedience. However, the inconsistencies of demagogue discourses, such as Odorico's, can be destabilized and delegitimized by people's "ignorance" of the disciplinary apparatus, that is, by the non-recognition of the imposed discourse (BUTLER, 2020). Odorico's own death in fiction, which ironically inaugurates the cemetery, serves as an outcome that destabilizes his power and the lies that sustained it (FERNANDES, 2015).

Maranhão (2024) reinforces the timelessness of these issues by discussing how Euclides da Cunha's "Os Sertões" already denounced the absence of unity and ignorance between different layers of society and the State, in addition to recording the use of public power for personal purposes and the inefficiency that date back to the early days of the

Brazilian Republic. This historical perspective deepens the understanding that the challenges of the INSS are not merely conjunctural, but reflections of structural problems rooted in the very formation of the Brazilian public administration.

Monte (2012) complements by detailing how political corruption, exemplified by the Mensalão, is not a one-off deviation, but a system that affects decision-making, distorts the use of public funds and erodes the pillars of democracy, such as political equality and transparency, being aggravated by impunity.

The work of Dias Gomes, therefore, continues to be an essential tool for critical reflection and civic awareness. It reminds us of the urgency of a public administration that is, in fact, efficient, transparent, humane and truly citizen-oriented. Overcoming the challenges at the INSS and other public institutions requires not only investments in technology, but also a thorough review of processes, appreciation of human capital and, above all, an unwavering commitment to the fundamental purpose of serving the population. May the laughter provoked by Odorico Paraguaçu motivate us to action and to demand a public service that does not leave anyone waiting in the "cemetery queue".

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i - "O Bem-Amado" was originally a telenovela aired by TV Globo in 1973. Its central story is based on the play *Odorico, the Well-Beloved*, written in the 1960s by Dias Gomes, also author of the plot.

ii - Alfredo de Freitas Dias Gomes, better known by the surname Dias Gomes (Salvador, October 19, 1922 – São Paulo, May 18, 1999), was a novelist, playwright, author of soap operas and member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters.

iii - Mayor Odorico Paraguaçu is a demagogue and corrupt politician who, with his inflammatory and verbose speeches, deceives the simple-minded people of small Sucupira, on the coast of Bahia. The priority goal of his administration is the inauguration of the local cemetery, criticized by the opposition to his government, led by the Medrado family, which commands the local police, dentist Lulu Gouveia and journalist Neco Pedreira, editor-in-chief of the newspaper A Trombeta. Odorico's direct arm in the city hall is his secretary Dirceu Borboleta, a shy, stuttering and clumsy type who hunts lepidoptera. The mayor's greatest coreligionists are the Cajazeiras sisters: Dorotéia, Dulcineá and Judicéia. Spinsters and false carolas, each one maintains a secret affair with Odorico, without one knowing about the other, until Dulcinea becomes pregnant and the mayor arranges for the baby's paternity to fall on the disconnected Dirceu. Machiavellian, Odorico plans the death of someone in the city so that his cemetery can be inaugurated. However, he always ends up unsuccessful.

iv- It is an autarchy of the Government of Brazil linked to the Ministry of Social Security that receives contributions for the maintenance of the General Social Security Regime and performs duties belonging to the nucleus of Exclusive State Activities.