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Anniversaries of the 1964 coup: historiographical debates, political implications[1]

Abstract

'Exact' anniversary dates of the 1964 coup—those marking the passage of each decade—have served as moments of spirited public and academic debate about the military dictatorship. This article discusses some of these controversies, particularly concerning the following themes: the nature of the coup, the nature of the regime, the relationship between civil society and the dictatorship, the role of the armed struggle, and the periodization of the dictatorship. The purpose is to historically situate the emergence and development of each of these debates, in addition to discussing their political repercussions. The article analyzes the longevity and endurance of some of these debates, as well as the growth of academic and public interest in the military dictatorship and its legacies.

Keywords: Dictatorship. 1964 Coup. Historiography. History of the Present Time. Commemorative Dates.

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Aniversários do golpe de 1964: debates historiográficos, implicações políticas

Resumo
As datas de aniversários "redondos" do golpe de 1964 foram momentos de efervescência de controvérsias públicas e acadêmicas acerca da ditadura militar. Este artigo discute algumas delas, em torno dos seguintes temas: o caráter do golpe, a natureza do regime, a relação da sociedade civil com a ditadura, o papel da luta armada e a periodização da ditadura. O propósito é situar historicamente o surgimento e desdobramento de cada um desses debates, além de problematizar suas repercussões políticas. Constata-se a longevidade e renovação de algumas das discussões, bem como o crescimento significativo do interesse acadêmico e público sobre a ditadura militar e seus legados.

Palavras-chave: Ditadura. Golpe de 1964. Historiografia. História do Tempo Presente. Datas Comemorativas.

'Exact' anniversary dates of significant political events, such as the fifty-year mark of the 1964 civil-military coup d'État in Brazil, are moments that activate public memory and elicit debates, 'de-commemorations,' and historiographical reviews. This renewed attention often manifests itself through exhibits, film and documentary releases, round tables, special magazine issues and newspaper inserts; in short, a multitude of events that re-situate the past within the public consciousness. Elizabeth Jelín (2002, author's translation) rightly notes that:

> These are dates when the past makes itself present in public rituals, when feelings are aroused and interpretations are interrogated, when memories of the past are constructed and reconstructed. They are moments that different actors in each country use to express or confront, at the national level, the meanings they ascribe to the institutional breaks that some imposed and other suffered from.

Public attention to the Brazilian dictatorship, reflected in scholarly works, has grown exponentially in recent decades. In 1994, there were relatively few efforts to observe the thirtieth anniversary of the coup. Less than a decade had passed since the end of the military dictatorship, and the recent history of authoritarianism remained an issue to be overcome rather than called into question. In 2004, there was much greater interest from civil society—academia, social movements, and the media—and an active debate among historians with varying analytical perspectives on the dictatorial period. In a special insert about March 1964 in the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*, a journalist noted the "stark difference" between the number of books published in 2004 compared to what had been released ten years earlier (PIZA, 2004). However, on the fiftieth anniversary of the coup, in 2014, there was a veritable explosion of multiple and conflicting understandings of the authoritarian past. There were a few reasons for this outpouring of analyses, including the 2012 Access to Information Act (Lei de Acesso à Informação – LAI), which allowed researchers to obtain previously classified documentation on the period; the work of the Brazilian National Truth Commission (Comissão Nacional da Verdade – CNV), amplified by state, municipal, and institutional commissions; as well as the presidency of Dilma Rousseff, a former guerrilla fighter. All of these factors produced a spike in popular interest that will be very difficult to replicate.

These commemorative dates represent culminations of debates started earlier. With that in mind, this article establishes a broad framework of historiographical interpretations of the military dictatorship, considering their evolution and political implications in the public sphere.[2] I seek to historicize the emergence of certain debates, to situate them in the national context, and, above all, to consider how historiographic debates have spilled over into public discourse. In Brazil, studies in the field of History of

[2] Among the historiographical surveys of the dictatorship and relevant debates, I emphasize Fico (2004a, 2004b, 2017); Badaró (2008); Napolitano (2011, 2016); D. B. Melo (2014); e D'Araújo (2015).

the Present Time have primarily produced works related to memory.[3] My intention is, rather, to explore another common line of inquiry in this field of study: the political impacts of academic discussions in the public sphere.

Because popular interest in the dictatorship has spiked relatively recently, scholarly debates reaching beyond academia is a somewhat new phenomenon. As Napolitano (2015) rightly notes, while those defeated by the regime prevailed in the battle for memory regarding the dictatorship, this did not translate into the construction of a deeply democratic society receptive to the idea of human rights. The coexistence of a memory that rejects dictatorship and the authoritarianism it produced on one hand with vast disparities in income distribution, exponential growth of the prison population, and the daily practice of murdering young black and mixed-race people in peripheral areas on the other helps to explain weak popular adherence to a concept in many ways restricted to intellectualized middle-class sectors.

It is nevertheless interesting to observe that the pillars of the main historiographical debates were established relatively early. Although I focus on commemorative periods, I historicize some of these debates, addressing controversies around five specific issues: the nature of the 1964 coup, the nature of the regime that followed, the relationship between civil society and the dictatorship, the role of the armed struggle, and the periodization of the dictatorship.

1980s: early debates

Journalists and political scientists have been interpreting the coup and the regime it produced as early as the dictatorship itself, as events unfolded.[4] Three works produced in the early 1980s stand out, released amidst the battle of memories waged through the publication of personal accounts by former political prisoners and narratives of military personnel involved in the dictatorship (MARTINS FILHO, 2003). These books, which greatly influenced the subsequent historiography, are notable because they were written

[3] To cite just a few works in this field: Martins Filho (2003); Rollemberg (2006); Motta (2013); Napolitano (2015).
[4] For some examples, see Fico (2004a, p. 23); Napolitano (2016, p. 1).

as the dictatorship was coming to an end, thus allowing broader analytical efforts and were supported by extensive documentation. First, *1964, a conquista do Estado*, by René Armand Dreifuss (1981); second, *Estado e oposição no Brasil*, by Maria Helena Moreira Alves (1984); and third, *Brasil: nunca mais*, by the Archdiocese of São Paulo (1985). These works embraced the perspective formed in the 1970s by left-wing sectors, and theorized by authors like Florestan Fernandes and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, according to which the coup and dictatorship derived, in economic terms, from an exhaustion of the import substitution industrialization model and the desire of the domestic business and financial elite to associate with foreign capital and, in political and social terms, from a crisis of the populist pact produced by the aspirations of popular sectors for reforms that would enable greater social inclusion. The new development phase of capitalism would, according to this argument, require a deeper association between national elites and transnational capital, which in turn required transformations in accumulation mechanisms incompatible with growing popular calls for structural reforms.

After the publication of *1964, a conquista do Estado*, a debate emerged around the nature of the coup and dictatorship that took different shapes over time, demonstrating a surprising longevity. In this work, the political scientist Armand Dreifuss engages authors like Alfred Stepan (1971), who regarded the seizure of power by military men as the most remarkable aspect of 1964. Unlike previous interventions by the armed forces when they had exerted a kind of 'moderating' power, after the 1964 coup the generals decided to retain political control of the country because they saw themselves as the best prepared to handle such authority.[5] Dreifuss argues that the coup was a result of deliberate actions by the ruling class, composed of the national bourgeoisie serving the interests of the multinational and associated bloc. It was the culmination of a campaign—described in detail with abundant documentation—triggered by most of the dominant classes to seize power, blocking the path of nationalist reformism and firmly "anchoring the Brazilian State to the global strategy of multinational corporations" (DREIFUSS, 1981, p. 38).

[5] Carlos Fico (2017) recently noted the similarities – including the title – between Stepan's work and a paper presented at the National War College by Robert W. Dean, a member of the foreign service who had been stationed at the U.S. embassy in Brasilia, probably building off of an interpretation by U.S. ambassador Lincoln Gordon.

Dreifuss classifies the coup as "civil-military" in nature since it had been designed by dominant sectors outside the armed forces but related to key figures in the military, all of whom were part of a conspiratorial complex institutionalized in the Brazilian Institute of Research and Social Studies (IPES) and the Brazilian Institute of Democratic Action (IBAD). In Dreifuss' work, military men appear as minor partners in a pluralistic effort involving U.S. players, politicians belonging to traditional Brazilian parties, and governors from strategically important states. The author even minimizes the importance of military action in the coup itself, which "was nothing more than a war game simulated on a national scale. [...] In many respects, state militias were much better equipped for direct intervention than the military personnel themselves" (DREIFUSS, 1981, p. 362).

As for the regime installed after 1964, Dreifuss points out the importance of the civilian presence in ministries and administrative bodies, led more so by businessmen than technocrats. According to the author, the main strategic decision-making positions were occupied by members of the IPES/IBAD complex or industrialists and bankers aligned with their agenda. Even more importantly, he points out the "congruence between the post-1964 economic and political administrative reforms and the reform proposals made by the IPES Study and Doctrine groups, which provided the guidelines and procedures for structural reforms and organizational changes in the administration," serving the interests of industrialists and bankers (DREIFUSS, 1981, p. 417). Although he sees the modernization of the State's social and economic structure imposed by IPES as having been carried out by the business class for its own benefit, Dreifuss discreetly acknowledges that this group lost its influence after Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5), issued on December 13, 1968, only regaining its standing in government during the administration of General Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) (DREIFUSS, 1981, p. 454-455). While Dreifuss focuses primarily on the years leading up to the coup, he offers a clear thesis about the nature of the dictatorship's national project.

In a review of Dreifuss' work, Maria Victória Benevides (2003, p. 257) observes that the "post-64 military and statist paths" frustrated businessmen and that Dreifuss had underestimated the role of military men in government: "the authoritarian idea of the

need for a strong State has always been present in the formulations of military personnel, sensitive to matters of sovereignty, development, and national security." She also notes that the author himself suggested a more pronounced role for the military, mentioning that "industrialists and techno-entrepreneurs linked to the multinational structure transmitted and received training in public administration and business at the ESG [Brazilian Superior War College]." However, he did not delve deeply into this important element in his analysis.[6]

Another major interpretive current of the dictatorship in the early 1980s emphasized Brazilian National Security Doctrine (DSN). According to this perspective, proposed by political scientist Maria Helena Moreira Alves (1984), the dictatorship aligned with the implementation of DSN, which involved a theory of internal security, a particular economic development model, and longstanding national goals. Its application, however, faced setbacks resulting from the actions of organized opposition sectors. The dialectic between the application of the national security project and reactions from dissident groups was, according to Alves, responsible for the dynamics of this period, oscillating between moments of institutionalization and repression and relative liberalization: "specific forms of control had to be created as a response to challenges posed by civil society, since opposition unfolded in social groups in the Judiciary, the Legislative branch, and even in the midst of the military 'internal audience' itself" (ALVES, 1984, p. 375).

The author combines the arguments of Dreifuss and Alfred Stepan into a complementary thesis, rather than competing ones:

> The seizure of State power was preceded by a well-orchestrated policy of destabilization involving multinational corporations, Brazilian associate-dependent capital, the U.S. government, and the Brazilian military personnel – especially a group of officers from the Brazilian Superior War College (ESG) (ALVES, 1984, p. 27).

[6] Review published in 1981 and republished in 2003 by the journal *Lua Nova* and mentioned by D. B. Melo (2014).

She recalls that the military establishment, which also included in its ranks civilians belonging to the national elite, was responsible for devising the doctrine that granted ideological and programmatic support to the military dictatorship (ALVES, 1984, p. 28)[7].

A third influential view was that produced by the work *Brasil: nunca mais*, carried out by a multidisciplinary team of political activists (ARQUIDIOCESE DE SÃO PAULO, 1985). This essentially political and non-academic work, based on extensive documentation produced by military courts, proposed an interpretation of the past that was after widely disseminated in the academy and beyond. The impasse that led to the coup is described as the result of profound societal transformations: "economic development and social changes that would generate the need for deep changes in the Brazilian social structures" (ARQUIDIOCESE DE SÃO PAULO, 1985, p. 56). The rupture of 1964, however, was also part of the military's tradition of intervening in politics, either through coups or by suppressing dissident movements. The effervescence of social movements in the early 1960s is contrasted with high inflation, virulent anti-communism on the right and among the middle classes, congressional opposition for reforms proposed by the João Goulart administration, and collaboration between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the State Department, the IPES/IBAD complex, and the armed forces. As in previous works, the 1964 coup is seen as the result of a civil-military coalition, which had already carried out the prior work of political persuasion:

> Virtually the entire middle class and major sectors of rural and urban workers were won over by anti-communist propaganda. Its main vehicles were U.S.-funded organizations, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSD), the Brazilian National Democratic Union (UDN), and the Catholic Church, especially its hierarchy, which joined the agitation supported by the mainstream press against the government, causing the famous "marches of the family with God, for freedom" (ARQUIDIOCESE DE SÃO PAULO, 1985, p. 59).

[7] In a review published by *Revista de História*, also in 1984, Rosa Maria Godoy Silveira emphasized that the work effectively refuted the theoretical-methodological postulates according to which one could not conduct a historical analysis of the recent past, let alone if the author had been clearly involved in the events in question: "it seems to us that the author's broad political militancy in grassroots communities, trade unions, and human rights groups, far from deforming the work through bias, provided it, on the contrary, with the necessary familiarity with the object of study and the key instruments to carry out the research" (SILVEIRA, 1984, p. 1887).

However, throughout the book, based on documents from the Brazilian Superior Military Court (STM), military personnel play a leading role, as expected in a piece aimed at denouncing how the repressive apparatus created in the period worked. While Maria Helena Moreira Alves' book focused intently on the authoritarian system of laws and information and repressive agencies created by the dictatorship, *Brasil: nunca mais* took a decisive step—both in academic and political spheres—toward demonstrating the systematic and structural nature of torture and violence in the functioning of the repressive apparatus.

These various interpretive currents converged on two points: in denouncing the role of elites in imposing and institutionalizing an authoritarian and exclusionary model and in the top-down view of dictatorship as a well-defined project of social transformation. During the transition from military to civilian government, the authors' warnings stood out amid the process of conservative modernization that sought to effectively restructure Brazilian society.

In the early 1980s, at the political level the transition to democracy was negotiated under the tutelage of the military, whose discourse was based on the argument that they had saved the country from communism. On the other hand, there emerged a contradiction acutely identified by Marcos Napolitano (2015): a social memory built by economic liberals who had contributed to bring about the coup and dictatorship, but who gradually moved away from the regime's center of power, and incorporated some of the arguments of unarmed left-wing opposition groups. Thus, several factors interacted in this complex process, including: 1. a critical memory of the dictatorship, spread by the mainstream press through the discourse of the main center and left-wing political parties, but also on the part of social movements, which tended to place most of the blame for abuses on the military, somewhat downplaying the role of civilian elites; 2. a top-down democratic transition, despite popular mobilization, with the participation of politicians who had supported the dictatorship; and 3. the authoritarian legacies of the military dictatorship.

The Brazilian transition away from dictatorship was marked by the massive campaign known as "Diretas Já" (1984), the defeat of which was to some extent overshadowed by the hopes aroused by the Constituent Assembly (1987). The drafting of the new Federal Constitution mobilized various agendas of the left, reflecting the renewal of progressive sectors with the emergence of new groups with different demands (feminists, blacks, homosexuals, environmentalists) and grassroots sectors that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (new unionism, mothers' clubs (*clubes de mães*), slum movements). In this context of expanding social agendas, a major historiographical issue arose regarding the actions of armed left-wing groups and their relations with the social groups they had intended to represent and lead. It is worth noting that, unlike the Argentine version, the Brazilian edition of *Brasil: nunca mais* didn't silence the the activism of those who had been killed and disappeared, which meant that the victims' political activities did not become a taboo[8].

From a historiographical standpoint, one of the prevailing views of the actions of clandestine groups that choose to take up arms was that proposed both by Alves and *Brasil: nunca mais*: the choice of radicalization as a strategy had been discussed since 1967, but it was only implemented after all channels of legal political action were shuttered with the promulgation of Institutional Act number 5 (AI-5) on December 13, 1968. Echoing the line of left-wing militants, Alves holds that while armed rebellion resulted from the hardening of the regime, it also produced an unprecedented buildup of political repression, involuntarily contributing to its own annihilation: "the armed struggle, in turn, strengthened the sectors within the National Security State dedicated to internal security. They effectively took advantage of the space available to implement a formidable repressive apparatus and institutionalize the strategy of control using terror" (ALVES, 1984, p. 166).

In the late 1980s, a more systematic effort to think through the various strains of the left emerged, producing interpretations anchored in the personal experiences of the authors and based on documentary research and interviews. Adopting a line with clear

[8] The 1987 work, *Perfil dos atingidos*, offers a characterization of the various left-wing organizations targeted by the repressive apparatus.

Marxist influences, but differing significantly from Dreifuss, Jacob Gorender argued that in the period before the coup, the unprecedented mobilization of workers and social movements posed a real threat to the Brazilian ruling class and the forces of imperialism. The author wrote of the "peak of class struggle," which he argues threatened "the institutional stability of the bourgeois order under the aspects of property rights and coercive State force." Given conditions that had supposedly established a "pre-revolutionary situation," the coup should be considered as having been "preventatively counterrevolutionary" (GORENDER, 1998, p. 73) in nature[9].

However, according to the author, forces on the left were not up to the historic challenge, proving unable to seize the moment, prevent the coup, and initiate the structural reforms called for at the time. The armed struggle, according to this argument, was a "delayed" reaction, articulated only after the coup and triggered in 1968, when power was already organized under new guidelines and the armed forces prepared for domestic struggle: "in unfavorable conditions, increasingly detached from the working class, peasantry, and urban middle strata, the radical left-wing could not fail to adopt the concept of unconditional violence to justify immediate armed struggle" (GORENDER, 1998, p. 286).

Gorender outlines the whirlwind armed guerrilla groups confronted: dedicated and coordinated repression; clandestinity that led to armed actions meant to secure financial support; imprisonment of members requiring rapid replacement. The author also noted the social isolation of groups that put themselves forward as the vanguard of popular sectors they sought to lead, provoked by the violence of armed actions, fear of political repression, and the effects of economic growth, which provided considerable popular support to the regime.

Gorender differs from Dreifuss by insisting on the progressive militarization of the state as the most "peculiar" political element of the period, as well as on the indeterminacy and uncertainties, even within the dominant nuclei, of post-coup political developments:

[9] The original edition was published in 1987.

> As I have already said, the right-wing conspiracy pre-64 came from a number of nuclei and never had a fully unified command. If, at first, there was general agreement of the ruling class factions in transferring power to the Armed Forces, the idea of a long-lasting military regime was not in the plans of important conspirators, in particular the candidates for the presidency of the Republic. Nor did Ambassador Gordon, as his diplomatic correspondence reveals, think that this was the best solution (GORENDER, 1998, p. 78).

A very different explanation was formulated by another former guerrilla within the academy, holding that the defeat of leftist forces resulted not from misunderstandings or weaknesses, but from what they got right. According to Daniel Aarão Reis (1990), armed organizations of the left were suitably prepared for a revolutionary situation, but "the revolution missed the appointment," that is, the dynamics of social movements did not lead to a radical break with the established order. The isolation of organizations from wider society and popular sectors, pointed out by Gorender, was, according to Aarão Reis, a product of the vanguard nature of the armed left-wing and its mechanisms for maintaining internal cohesion (defined by an attachment to principles rather than adapting to society dynamics), since the role of the vanguard is to move ahead, not "*pari passu*." An attachment to principles, the self-image of enlightened leadership, and hierarchization produced a detachment from society and a lack of understanding on the part of militant groups as to concrete social dynamics. Reis' controversial thesis was in dialogue with the intense debates about the revolutionary struggle that occurred inside the left in the 1970s, either in the context of political repression or in exile.

The 1990 publication of Reis' *A revolução faltou ao encontro* essentially coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). That event crystallized a seminal change in the expectations of the left around the world, marking the end of an era in which the socialist revolutionary experience represented an alternative that was not only viable, but considered inevitable, given the state of the social contradictions in the heart of capitalism, above all in the so-called third world countries.

Another interpretive framework, no longer directly connected with the militancy of the 1960s and 1970s, emerged precisely in an attempt to "understand the meaning and social roots of the left-wing groups' struggle, especially the armed groups, between 1964

and 1974" (RIDENTI, 1993, p. 15). In fact, the ideological universe of leftist guerrilla groups seemed, at the end of the 1980s, completely illogical: after the so-called "lost decade," the final victory of capitalism was proclaimed and the revolutionary rhetoric of Marx-Lenin-Guevara became mere historical relics. Marcelo Ridenti problematizes the thesis, advanced by other authors, that the choice to take up arms was a response to the regime shuttering institutional channels of political participation, promoted by the 1964 coup and by the hardening of the regime after AI-5 in 1968. He argues that this explanation denies class struggle as a foundation of capitalist society and sees revolution as a result of the dysfunction of social institutions:

> Class struggle, of which left-wing organizations were one expression, cannot be explained by the repressive actions of the civil-military regime, nor by the failures of the regime's institutions, or those before the 1964 coup, otherwise we would be left with the underlying idea that if there were no failures in the institutions, there would be no class struggle (RIDENTI, 1993, p. 62).

The author, like Daniel Aarão Reis before him, recalls that the projects of the left—whether armed or not—not only existed prior to the 1964 coup, many influenced by the Cuban Revolution, but went far beyond resistance to the authoritarian regime, proposing a deep transformation of society (RIDENTI, 1993, p. 63). However, he is careful to differentiate between the project these groups defended and what they actually did in practice. He argues that "the fact is that a military regime was installed in Brazil, and at that conjuncture the action of armed groups took the form of resistance against the dictatorship, even if the guerrilla project came before and was not intended to only be resistance [...]," while recognizing that it was "an armed resistance that did not necessarily seek redemocratization, but, above all, revolution" (RIDENTI, 1993, p. 64).

Ridenti is in dialogue with a bibliography and memory—of former guerrilla members[10]—that, in line with the democratic transition and reflections derived from the experience of exile experience in Europe and the United States of America (USA),

[10] One must take care not to homogenize the memory of former militants regarding this period. Ridenti's conclusion is based on accounts of former guerrillas summarizing the revolutionary project of organizations belonging to the underground armed left.

abandoned the armed struggle as a legitimate course of political action. He also addresses a critique of the guerrilla option formulated at the time, within the left, particularly by the Brazilian Communist Party, which believed that armed actions "fed into the regime's repressive violence, and isolated the guerrilla members from civil society" (NAPOLITANO, 2015, p. 24).

Thus, in order to conceptualize a History of the Present Time in Latin America, perhaps the most remarkable historical experience concerning a radical rupture with the past—in terms of imagining what is possible—has been not the advent of dictatorships, but the period immediately after. Following the defeat of the armed struggle, between the 1960s and the 1980s, when revolutionary options were buried, democracy was recovered as the only desirable horizon of change, even by the left. The rhetoric of revolution was replaced by that of human rights.

It is noteworthy that in assessing the broader agenda of armed left-wing groups, Ridenti took the academic and political care of qualifying their responsibility for the repression perpetrated by the State:

> Therefore, it is hard to assign the full weight of the defeat of "progressive forces" to the urban armed left alone. They were only the most extreme part of the opposition and social movements at the time, all of them neutralized by the established civil-military regime, which, whenever it was deemed necessary, resorted to intense repression (RIDENTI, 1993, p. 67).

He thus avoided corroborating the central argument in the military's memory as the legitimating foundation of State violence, that the repressive apparatus had been set up and had acted to safeguard democracy. In addition, Ridenti affirmed the actions of the armed left as the legacy of a generation that, although detached from the social bases it wanted to emancipate, and ultimately defeated, offered some kind of resistance to an authoritarian regime.

1994: Thirtieth Anniversary of the Coup

In the 1990s, which began under the aegis of the 1988 Constitution, there was a rearrangement of political forces, with figures who had supported the dictatorship coexisting in the formal political sphere with famous dissidents who reentered political life after the Amnesty Act (1979) and representatives of new social movements that emerged in the final years of the dictatorship. The decade was marked from the beginning by a corruption scandal involving the president, Fernando Collor de Mello, and his subsequent impeachment, which resulted from the demands of massive street demonstrations led by student groups, trade unions, the mainstream press, and a large part of the political parties. More broadly, the anniversary of the coup in 1994 coincided with the neoliberal wave sweeping the continent and with a shift among the national and international left toward appreciating democracy as a "value in itself" (TOLEDO, 2014, p. 27). The overthrow of so-called real socialism and the new political perspective of the left created a kind of vacuum concerning the experiences of clandestine armed groups, which denounced the narrow limits of liberal democracy and maintained a revolution as key to their political agenda. In this tumultuous political context, the thirtieth anniversary of the coup had some resonance, both in the academy and in the publishing market, but nothing compared to what would come in the following decades. The retrospective analyses of the 1990s were predominantly put forward by political scientists and the press, the latter concerned with enumerating the "good" and "bad" aspects of the dictatorship (CARVALHO; CATELA, 2002, p. 217). The topic of dictatorship, regarded as too recent by some, received little attention from historians. The French Institute of History of the Present Time, late a major reference in the field, had been inaugurated in 1980, and the present was still considered, even in countries that established this disciplinary field early on, off limits for historians.

Two works published around the thirtieth anniversary of the coup, however, make clear the historiographic debates of the time, dominated by considerations of the reasons and nature of the coup. The first, in 1994, was edited by political scientists Gláucio Ary Dillon Soares and Maria Celina D'Araújo (1994). The book *21 anos de regime militar. Balanços e perspectivas* set out to consider the legacy of the authoritarian period with the

detachment possible after three decades and almost ten years after the return of civilians to power. On the book jacket, historian José Murilo de Carvalho addresses the complexity of addressing the period due to the "emotional charge derived from the intense conflicts experienced by all," especially intellectuals, "the main victims of the restricted freedom of expression policy that marked the regime" (SOARES; D'ARAÚJO, 1994).

In the introduction, the editors emphasize the aim of establishing a dispassionate analysis of the period, with analytical rather than political criteria. Regarding the nature of the regime, the specificity of this period is distinguished by the obvious command of military personnel: "the country was faced with a government unequivocally controlled by military personnel" (SOARES; D'ARAÚJO, 1994, p. 2). However, they highlight the "strong and consistent civil base" that supported the regime, sustained by the business and political sectors that saw an alliance with the military as a way of avoiding the perceived threat of communism (SOARES; D'ARAÚJO, 1994, p. 3). This collection of essays privileged the analysis of dictatorship through institutions: political parties, trade unions, armed forces, business community, leaving out the actions both of the armed left and the repressive apparatus.

Emblematic of a current that might have overemphasized the role of military men, to the detriment of civilian actors, Glácio Ary Dillon Soares's article on the 1964 coup was probably the one that most reverberated in subsequent historiographical debates.[11] Basing his argument on military narratives of the coup and dictatorship, Soares aimed to recover not only political variables—underestimated, he argued, by more economistic explanations—but the leading role of military personnel as political players. He claims that the coup, regardless of the support of elite civilian sectors, was military in nature, as was the regime that followed it (SOARES, 1994, p. 27). In this way, his analysis highlights phenomena directly linked to the barracks, such as the breakdown of hierarchy and discipline, promotion issues, and "communist infiltration of the armed forces," which,

[11] The author, along with Maria Celina D'Araújo and Celso Castro, developed an ambitious project at the Center for Research on Documentation of Contemporary History of Brazil (CPDOC) at the Getulio Vargas Foundation (FGV), collecting a series of testimonies from military officers who played a major role in shaping the politics of the dictatorial period, above all regarding the repressive apparatus. The project resulted in the publication of three volumes: *Visões do Golpe*, *Os anos de chumbo*, and *A volta aos quartéis* (D'ARAÚJO; SOARES; CASTRO, 1994a, 1994b, 1995).

despite its importance, had been overlooked in much of the scholarship (SOARES, 1994, p. 31). Criticizing authors who inferred the armed forces' behavior from an expected institutional or classist behavior, attentive to the "high degree of military personnel's specificity," derived from their social isolation, their own system of values, the monopoly of coercive means, relative institutional autonomy and weak civilian oversight. In his eagerness to provide a more complex assessment of the military factor, then little explored in the concrete terms of characters involved in the coup and structuring the new regime, Soares ended up overemphasizing the military side without accurately contextualizing the complex plots behind the coup and without properly criticizing the sources of military discourse.[12]

The second influential publication on the thirtieth anniversary of the coup was a collection of articles presented at a conference at the University of Campinas (UNICAMP), on the anniversary of the coup, but only published in 1997 (TOLEDO, 2014[13]). One of the axes of the authors' disagreement is the issue of the coup and the "coup process." The philosopher Caio Navarro de Toledo, the book's editor, wrote of a "battered populist democracy," the title of his article. He emphasized the growing isolation of João Goulart, resulting from his ambiguous gestures while in office, sometimes aimed at pleasing leftist forces and sometimes to mollify conservative sectors, as well as the intensification of deeper societal tensions: "in the following months [after the government's attempt to approve a state of exception], a question came to dominate the political scene: *who will lead the coup d'État?*" (TOLEDO, 2014, p. 47, emphasis by the author).[14] Toledo explains that the right-wing believed Goulart would be the one to lead his own coup, supported by nationalist, popular, and left-wing sectors. In turn, progressives, while distrustful of Goulart, feared the conservative reaction. The function of the coup, according to Toledo, which was manifestly perpetrated by the elites, was to prevent the deepening of democracy and, consequently, the establishment of a "military regime" that could

[12] Subsequent works strengthened the idea that understanding the patterns of national politics during the dictatorship required close analyses of military men themselves and the internal political dynamics of the armed forces (MARTINS FILHO, 1995; FICO, 2001; CHIRIO, 2012).

[13] The original edition was published in 1997.

[14] In a 1982 piece on the Goulart administration, published in a collection entitled *Tudo é História*, Toledo described a "political-military" coup, claiming that "the João Goulart administration was born, lived with, and died under the shadow of the coup d'état" (TOLEDO, 1991, p. 7).

promote a conservative, exclusionary, modernization and an increasingly militarized "political-institutional order" (TOLEDO, 2014, p. 56).

Gorender, in the same work, approached the issue of the coup's unfolding in a somewhat different way: stating that it was present on the right-wing and left-wing, he presents the statement made by Luís Carlos Prestes in January 1964 regarding the need to reform the Constitution to allow for Goulart's reelection as an "open invitation to the coup" (GORENDER, 2014, p. 135). This was a curious interpretation of the coup as an attempt at constitutional reform...[15] In terms of the contours taken by the regime, Gorender highlights the "great divergences between conspirators," who supposedly did intend to install a "military dictatorship."

In the same work, Argelina Cheibub Figueiredo, the author of the book entitled *Democracia ou reformas?* (1993), articulated a third position that would generate much controversy in the following decade. In conversation with scholarship that sought to explain the coup through economic-structural factors and according to the various players and conflicting political projects, the author argues that "in the 1960s [...] democracy and reforms were perceived as conflicting political objectives" (FIGUEIREDO, 2014, p. 60). The left-wing effort, according to Figueiredo, was not aimed at expanding the boundaries of a liberal democracy controlled by the elites as that group had as little commitment to democracy as the right-wing, which was "always ready to break with democracy" in order to maintain its privileges (FIGUEIREDO, 2014, p. 67). Thus, structural reforms, which according to Toledo and Gorender signaled a *deepening* of democracy, would, according to Figueiredo, due to their radical nature, come *at the expense* of democracy.

The author attributes the coup to the radicalization of the positions of the various political players, which made an agreement, a "negotiated solution," impossible. Figueiredo, however, does not assign the proper weight to the choices made by sectors who opted to effectively break with democracy. Describing the reforms demanded by the left as incompatible with democracy carried a controversial implication: that groups and

[15] The concept of a "coup" carries such negative connotations that the right-wing bloc that took power in 1964 called their intervention a "revolution" due to the social legitimacy that the term carried at the time.

individuals should accept the narrow limits of representative liberal democracy in order to prevent elites from establishing authoritarian regimes. It is worth noting that, at the beginning of the book's introduction in which she elaborates her argument in greater depth, the author recalls that: "a classic and still unresolved issue of democratic theory and liberal societies is the tension between political democracy and economic and social inequality" (FIGUEIREDO, 1993, p. 21). It follows from the author's proposition that there is no alternative to settling for small and gradual changes, lest an opening emerge for an authoritarian regime. In a Brazilian version of the two-demon theory, the left-wing and the conservative bloc are positioned at the same level, as if their strategies were equivalent and as if the institutional spaces of political decision making and power were equally distributed among representatives of the popular sectors and the elites. This reading, in line with the expansion of neoliberalism in Latin America in the 1990s, under the guise of a dispassionate and rational interpretation, effectively downplayed the strong conflictive dose of politics in the present, under the auspices of the new world order imposed in the post-Cold War era.

While the argument that both the left and right were equally eager to seize power first appeared in the 1990s, it began gaining adherents in the 2000s. At the time, in Brazil and Latin America, the left adopted a conciliatory approach, turning their attention to elections as a way to reach power. This trend had its costs in terms of the ability of progressive parties to remain attached to their bases of support among traditionally marginalized social movements, such as landless people, various indigenous groups, the movements of those affected by dams and other large infrastructure projects, and homeless people. On the other hand, these governments implemented a series of reparation and memory policies related to the dictatorship, a process that coincided with the growth, in the academic sphere, of critical assessments of the left in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the choice to engage in the armed struggle.

2004: Fortieth Anniversary of the Coup

The fortieth anniversary of the coup mobilized Brazilian society in several ways. Universities promoted debates, round tables, and conferences during which scholars and

researchers shared audiences with former political militants. Trade unions and cultural organizations held events to mark the date. News outlets published reports, special inserts, and interviews with players of the time. Book publishers released academic works and memoirs.

Aside from specialists and former left-wing militants, retired members of the military also engaged in the public debate through pressure groups formed in the 1990s to equate the process of transitional justice with as "revanchism" and to express their outrage at the prominent role of former political prisoners in national politics (SANTOS; ALVES, 2014). The Military Club, for instance, entered the "battle of memories" in 1996, when General Hélio Ibiapina became its president. Websites and blogs were created in this decade as a response to the beginning of the work done by the Brazilian Special Committee on Dead and Missing People (CEMDP), such as the "Grupo Inconfidência" and the "Ternuma" (RODRIGUES; VASCONCELOS, 2014).

Multiple factors contributed to the growth of public interest in the dictatorship. In the academy, the temporal distance, the opening and availability of archives – such as those of the Political and Social Order Offices (DOPS), associated with the Brazilian Military Court documents compiled by the project "Brasil: Nunca Mais," or the Ana Lagoa archive – and the gradual development of the field of History of the Present Time favored the expansion of this area of study. Novels, movies, documentaries, theater plays, publication of testimonies in the cultural area, and public policies aimed at delivering reparations for victims also contributed to stoking curiosity about this recent past. Finally, the 2002 election of the trade unionist, leader of the ABC strikes in the 1980s, and head of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT), Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, played a role as well.

If in 1998 Jacob Gorender, in a reviewed and expanded version of *O combate nas trevas*, noticed a shift in how members of the armed left-wings were remembered from "terrorists" or "bandits" to the honorable designation "guerrillas," Caio Navarro de Toledo, in 2004, commented that the mainstream Brazilian press – which had supported the coup and been complacent with the dictatorship – replaced the expression used by

the armed forces and those who had supported the military intervention, "revolution"[16] with "coup d'État." He also noticed the absence of military celebrations of the anniversary of the coup, as well as public manifestations by the Army commander. The author also cited the article written by the then-Defense Minister and published in the newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo* to glorify democracy and referring to the past as a "turned page," whose wounds should no longer bleed (TOLEDO, 2004, p. 30-31).[17] The editorial of this newspaper, published in São Paulo, followed the same tone:

> If there is something to celebrate on the 40th anniversary of the March 31, 1964 coup, it is precisely the fact that we may claim that the military cycle is now buried in a historical past. While its repercussions are still felt and there are facets that require clarification, there is no doubt that the specter of military dictatorship no longer haunts national life (40 ANOS, 2004).

Although that was the army's official and institutional position, General Carlos de Meira Mattos, in the same edition of the newspaper, sought to convey the "true meaning" of the "March 31 Movement," which he presented as "an inescapable necessity for Brazilian society," accosted by a "minority in power, which openly advocated suppressing the constitutional regime and implementing a closed, oppressive government system" (MATTOS, 2004). Interviewed by the same newspaper, former Army Minister Leônidas Pires Gonçalves stated: "the revolution saved Brazil from becoming a big Cuba, but such things have a price." The general complained that "they keep speaking of this history of torture and death," arguing that this occurred on both sides: "it was a war" (CARLOS DE MEIRA MATTOS quoted by M. F. MELO, 2004).

This was, however, a minority view. The honeymoon period with a democracy that had seemed to bury dictatorship in the past and expanded the possibilities of building a more equal society, underscored by the election of a progressive president drawn from

[16] It is worth noting that the *Dicionário histórico biográfico brasileiro*, first edited in 1984 by the Center for Research and Documentation of Contemporary History of Brazil of the Getulio Vargas Foundation (CPDOC/FGV), kept the title "Revolução de 1964" in the entry written by Maurício Dias even in later updates. When discussing the use of the two expressions, "revolution" or "coup," the piece settles on the inadequacy of both, characterizing the process as a "conservative reaction."

[17] Nevertheless, the author warns that "it would be a hasty, reckless, and excessive conclusion to believe that the entire armed forces regret the '1964 Revolution' today" (TOLEDO, 2004b, p. 30).

the working class, sustained a tendency initiated in the 1990s that saw democracy as the stage for political transformation. Latin America was experiencing the years of the so-called "pink wave," a cycle of left-wing presidents, which began with the election of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela in 1998.[18] On the other hand, electoral victory implied a certain moderation of the left-wing agenda and cooperation with other political forces: assuming office was a much different thing than seizing power through revolutionary means.

In this context, a key point of historiographical debate concerned the left's relationship with democracy, either during the years leading to the 1964 coup or in the actions of the armed left-wing groups. In *O golpe e a ditadura militar: 40 anos depois* (REIS; RIDENTI; MOTTA, 2004), which compiled talks from academic seminars held in São Paulo, Belo Horizonte, and Rio de Janeiro[19], Daniel Aarão Reis denounced the "trickeries of memory" that, "treacherous by nature," erased the radicalization of leftist groups, depicted after the fact as "well-intentioned victims, struck and persecuted by the coup" (REIS, 2004, p. 29). He argued that it was not only a matter of recalling the revolutionary nature of the left's agenda as other authors had done (GORENDER, 1998; RIDENTI, 1993), but of denouncing their "lack of commitment" to democracy. While Aarão Reis also criticizes the memory distortions produced by the right-wing in his texts, he seems to show greater concern with the stigmatization of military men involved in the coup, who at the time were derisively referred to as "gorillas" (REIS, 2004, p. 40).

The article echoed, in a rather controversial tone, ideas presented in an essay published in 2000, which discussed, among other topics, civilian support for the dictatorship. The essay includes another element of the debate over how the armed left-wing struggle is remembered. During the democratic transition, according to Daniel Aarão Reis, the segments of the left that had opted for direct confrontation with the regime carried out a "displacement of meaning" (REIS, 2000, p. 70), turning the fight for

[18] "Three-quarters of South America's 350 million people are now ruled by left-leaning presidents, all of whom have been elected in the last six years" (BBC, 2005).

[19] The event in Rio de Janeiro was "40 Years of the Coup: 1964/2004," organized by CPDOC/FGV, in partnership with the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) and Federal Fluminense University (UFF), from March 22 to 26, 2004. In São Paulo, "1954-1964-2004: the coup, memory, and present time," organized by the Universidade de São Paulo (USP) in partnership with UNICAMP, was held from 9 to 12 November 2004.

revolutionary ideals during the dictatorship into "democratic resistance" to authoritarianism – that is, transforming what had been an offensive project into a defensive practice. Denise Rollemberg, in a piece published in a collection on republican Brazil, supports the idea that the memory of the 1960s and 1970s was built in relation to the values that guided political militants in the 1980s, banishing the theme of revolution: "so, there remains the question: why is it so difficult to recognize the armed struggle as a choice by the left?" (ROLLEMBERG, 2003, p. 49). The suggested answer rests in the isolation this political option engendered since society did not follow the political vanguards seeking a radical break with the capitalist order. The author relates the reluctance to admit this isolation and its meanings – a theme that appears in a series of testimonies reproduced in the book by Marcelo Ridenti (1993), published in the 1990s – to the interpretation according to which the armed struggle emerged as a response to mounting political repression. While she fundamentally agrees with Aarão Reis[20], it is worth noting that Rollemberg's narrative suggests that "democratic values did not structure Brazilian society," that Brazil had experienced various coup attempts by conservative sectors and that the revolutionary left saw democracy as "bourgeois, liberal, part of a system that people wanted to overthrow" (ROLLEMBERG, 2003, p. 48).

Taking up the discussion of the "coup" that marked the thirtieth anniversary, Jorge Ferreira, in a work on republican Brazil, embraced Argelina Figueiredo's argument, articulating a Brazilian version of the two-demon theory: "between left-wing and right-wing radicalization, a large part of the population simply watched in silence as conflicts mounted" (FERREIRA, 2003, p. 400)[21]. Marco Antônio Villa (2004, p. 240), in the biography *Jango: um perfil (1945-1964)*, struck the same note:

> The 1961 crisis ended up strengthening democracy as a fundamental value of the Republic. [...] Three years later, democracy was regarded, by most actors, as the constraint of an old order, in a curious metamorphosis: instead of a universal value, it came to be regarded as an obstacle to the proper exercise of government.

[20] In this 2003 essay, Denise Rollemberg already used the term "civil-military dictatorship" (p. 49), whereas in 2004 Daniel Aarão still referred to the regime as a "military dictatorship," although he called the coup a "civil-military movement." In a work edited by Daniel Aarão Reis and Jorge Ferreira (2007), the term "civil-military" appears in the subtitle, but is not theoretically claimed or explained.

[21] In the following decade, Ferreira would change his interpretation: "it is imperative to note that there was no initiative on the part of the president or the left that could be defined as a 'coup'" (FERREIRA, 2015).

In an article discussing the controversies around the fortieth anniversary of the coup, Caio Navarro de Toledo reflected on how the authors following this line of interpretation, which he calls "revisionist,"[22] "carried water' for the ideologues who still justify the 1964 political-military movement" (TOLEDO, 2004, p. 34). He cites statements published in the military press by Jarbas Passarinho and Meira Matos and by the journalist Ruy Mesquita, a member of the family who owns the newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*, who speak of a "preventive counter-coup." Although he recognizes "parcels of [left-wing] responsibility in the aggravation and radicalization of the political process that culminated in the coup d'état" (TOLEDO, 2004, p. 43), he rightly argues that those advocating the "two-coup" theory do not properly distinguish the motivations, concrete actions, capacity for action, and material means of the various groups involved in the pre-1964 period, thus attributing equal responsibility to forces with entirely different capabilities (TOLEDO, 2004, p. 34 e 43). Furthermore, those who effectively triggered the coup were sectors of the elite.

Newspapers with large readerships became the stage for historiographical disputes, a tendency that became even more pronounced on the coup's fiftieth anniversary. It is worth noting that historians were cited and referred to often as "experts on the topic" in order to legitimize positions that did not exactly coincide with those of the mass communication companies. *Folha de S.Paulo* (apud D'ÁVILA, 2004), for instance, advocated the thesis of "various coup plans." Carlos Fico's reminder that there is no empirical evidence that João Goulart was plotting an unconstitutional maneuver was essentially subsumed by the broader notion that, among the various interventionist plans on the table, the right-wing's "prevailed."

The press also highlighted the argument that the idea of "democratic resistance" concealed, in part, the radical nature of revolutionary struggle:

> A central dogma of those opposed to the military dictatorship that began on March 31, 1964 has been called into question. New studies conducted by specialists in the period [a reference to Daniel Aarão Reis and Denise Rollemberg] – some of them members of dissident groups against the

[22] Aarão Reis accepts the label, although he complains about the pejorative tone of the term (JOFFILY; SCHLATTER, 2011, p. 246).

> authoritarian regime – advance an explosive change, which has provoked furious responses from advocates of other currents: to call left-wing armed struggle during the regime's harshest period is wrong, historically speaking (MOTTA; OTÁVIO; LAMEGO, 2004, p. 8).

The report published by *O Globo* is particularly illustrative of the relationship between history, media, and political debates related to the History of the Present Time. Although it covers a controversy that, with less defined contours, dates back to the 1990s, the piece addresses the topic as if it were a great novelty. The headline, "Scholars of the dictatorship, including a former guerrilla, attack the idea that the armed left fought for democracy," offers abundant signifiers of authority: specialists on the topic, in the generic plural, pouncing on a long-held "belief." Although it includes dissenting voices on a disputed interpretation, the article portrays historiographical positions it does not endorse as a "mistake."

Among the historians cited in the article opposing the newspaper's line there were two strands. Renato Lemos agrees on the point regarding the revolutionary nature of left-wing struggles and he recognizes "the ethical, social, political, and historical responsibility of the left to assume its ideas and actions during the dictatorship." However, rather than assuming the denunciatory tone of Aarão Reis, he presents the armed struggle as a legitimate political choice in that particular context. This disagreement should not be understated as it reveals fundamentally divergent positions regarding armed struggle: that it was a complete mistake, according to Aarão Reis, and that it was a valid choice given conditions at the time, even if it was ultimately defeated, according to Lemos. Marcelo Ridenti and Maria Aparecida de Aquino make a somewhat different point: although they were undemocratic, armed left-wing organizations did in fact offer resistance to the military dictatorship.

While the democratic character of the revolutionary project, in line with several groups of the Latin American and European left at the time, can be debated at length, in Brazil and in exile, many former members of armed left-wing groups eventually joined the formal opposition movement that pushed for democratic transition. At the time, the goal of revolution gave way to other more immediate political concerns: pointing out the

abuses of the dictatorship and its repressive apparatus, seeking information on the whereabouts of disappeared political prisoners, punishing those responsible, and accessing the documents of the military regime. Maria Paula Araújo (2000, p. 118) clearly identified this shift:

> The defeat of the armed struggle led to the construction of a new field of contestation and opposition to the regime. This new field sought to break from the constraints of clandestinity and to make opposition to the dictatorship visible. For that reason, the new movement favored the formal political and legal struggle and participating in public and open spaces. An increasingly legal, public, visible, and even institutional opposition began to emerge in the early 1970s, just after the decimation of the armed struggle, between 1972 and 1974. By 1974, the contours of this new framework were clearly defined.

In an article marking the fortieth anniversary of the coup, Marcelo Ridente reflects on the political implications of using scholarly production to legitimize views that were not sustained by the academics in question. He observes that the aforementioned piece published in *O Globo* was immediately reproduced on the official website of the Brazilian army, which has never officially renounced the coup and the dictatorship that followed. It is also worth noticing that the journalistic narrative constructs two analyses unrelated to what the interviewees actually said: that the coup was justified by the need to combat undemocratic revolutionary actors and that society was oblivious to the struggle between two opposite extremes. Analyzing how this appropriation of historiographic debates plays out in public political discourse, Ridente writes:

> We might question whether the end result of a certain historiographical interpretation does not become incorporated to a political position contrary to the original intention: instead of interrogating the purported exemption of broad sectors of civil society from the dictatorship, this provides arguments to reinforce the idea that exempts civilian sectors from complicity with the regime, and even justifies it (RIDENTI, 2004, p. 60)[23].

[23] Ridenti refers to another controversy initiated by Daniel Aarão Reis, who argued that Brazilian society, although it constructed a memory of having rejected the dictatorship, supposedly adhered to it in several ways, providing the regime with crucial support (REIS, 2000, p. 66). This topic, which was still relatively unaddressed in 2004, was followed by a shift to characterizing the dictatorship as "civil-military" in nature, a point that would receive considerable attention in debates around the fiftieth anniversary of the coup in 2014.

This is a sensitive subject that touches on the nerve points of the History of the Present Time: an awareness of the political context in which we produce scholarly works and in which they are appropriated by other actors with or without our consent; political uses (and abuses) of the past and our possible contribution, albeit involuntary, to interpretations with which we disagree.

Amid the controversies, two perspectives were consolidated in the historiography of the 2000s: the coup was perpetrated by a wide civil-military alliance and the regime installed after 1964 was a dictatorship. Jacob Gorender, in an article for the magazine *Tendências e Debates*, offered a *mea culpa* regarding the use of the term "military coup": "what we label a military coup had unequivocal and powerful social support." He adds: "society was sharply split. Infuriated by the numerous strikes, the high cost of living, food shortages, and institutional inefficiency, the middle class moved decisively into the anti-Jango [as Goulart was popularly known] camp" (GORENDER, 2004). Early narratives of the coup had already acknowledged this fact. That civilian support, however, is not pictured as arising spontaneously from the deep moral convictions of the middle class. For Dreifuss (1981, p. 281), it stemmed from a careful campaign coordinated by the bourgeois elite with the goal of "manipulating public opinion," and using the middle class as pawns in service of an elite agenda. In *Brasil: nunca mais*, middle class support for the coup resulted from the success of anti-communist propaganda in turning public opinion against Goulart (ARQUIDIOCESE DE SÃO PAULO, 1985, p. 59).

Two works by Carlos Fico underscore how central civilian support for the coup has become in the historiography. In *Como eles agiam*, published in 2001, despite mentioning the initial support of significant urban middle-class sectors, as well as civilian politicians, Fico argues that the coup was an "undoubtedly military" movement (FICO, 2001, p. 20). In 2004, however, he revised this position: "while we can speak of a civil-military coup, what followed, however, was a military regime – in two words: a military dictatorship" (FICO, 2004b, p. 52).

The matter of civilian support in 1964, for the dictatorship that followed, and the significance of that support in defining the period's political developments was much debated during the fortieth anniversary of the coup. This issue, proposed in 2000 by

Aarão Reis, inspired by a Russian historiographical tradition concerning Stalinism, a German tradition regarding societal complicity with Nazism, and a French tradition for Vichy, sought to explain the longevity of the dictatorship, which would have been impossible without some basis of social support, and the authoritarian traces present across Brazilian society. Civilians appear in this discussion not only as the elite actors plotting the coup or as its willing foot soldiers but as players coming from the middle and popular classes who voluntarily joined the dictatorship and supported it even in the fact of its most authoritarian practices. A new line of research emerged at that time, producing a debate that would only escalate in the next decade.

The popularization of the term "dictatorship," replacing the generally used term "military regime," was not the work of a historian, but a journalist. Between 2002 and 2004, Elio Gaspari published four works, all of them having that word in the title. The term was used by sociologist Florestan Fernandes (1982), but it was used sparsely in the bibliography, which mostly preferred to use the term "military regime," considered more neutral from a political standpoint. After the works published by the well-known liberal journalist, however, the term "dictatorship" became widely used and "military regime" came to seem conceptually imprecise and politically insipid.[24]

Gaspari's work (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2016)[25] stoked broad interest in the dictatorship among a non-academic middle class, but it was harshly received. First, because he did not make his documentation, largely drawn from the private archives of Golbery do Couto e Silva and Heitor Ferreira, available to the public. Furthermore, he does not always provide rigorous criticism of the sources or maintain a proper detachment from the leading characters through which he tells the history of the dictatorship and those who sometimes provided him with their own perspective: Golbery and Ernesto Geisel. From a historiographical standpoint, the work downplays structural issues of economy and society while ascribing excessive weight to military men and, above all, constructing a history focused on the psychological profile of some players (FICO, 2004a,

[24] It is interesting that Gaspari refers to members of armed left-wing organizations as "terrorists," which he justifies through readings of texts written by Carlos Marighella, but no other author made the same choice of terminology except for those on the far right.
[25] There are five volumes (GASPARI, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2016).

2004b; RAMPINELLI, 2005; BADARÓ, 2008). Gaspari (2002a, p. 52) embraced with the two-coup theory – "the tree of the government was falling down, it was just a matter of pushing it to the right or left" – and reinforced a liberal narrative accurately described by Marcos Napolitano (2004, p. 196):

> a) the coup was a spontaneous event, without an effective project or conspiracy behind it, produced by João Goulart's political incompetence; b) civilian conspirators, useful true-believers, were either progressively removed from the new regime or broke with it once they perceived the gradual political hardening; c) there was a liberal nucleus in the army that was neutralized by the "hard line" between 1967 and 1974 and forced to accept the institutionalization of political violence; and d) the hardening of the regime was due to pressure from the barracks and was not, therefore, part of a deliberate political strategy. This analysis mitigates the responsibility of "liberal" civilians and military personnel who were the agents of the coup and regime since they supposedly lost control of the political process, giving way to the political violence of "open dictatorship" from 1968 to 1974.

Gaspari's suggested periodization[26] opened a debate that would only be concluded in the next decade, dividing the regime into a "temporary dictatorship" overseen by Castello Branco between 1964 and 1967, a constitutional system from 1967 to 1968, an open or avowed [*escancarado*] dictatorship from 1968 to 1974, and the dictatorship's retreat between 1974 to 1979. Thus, the dictatorship, according to Gaspari (2002a, p. 129), must be measured essentially according to the use of torture by State agents.[27] This periodization, like in Daniel Aarão Reis' book (2000), ends in 1979 and not the more traditional year of 1985, when the presidency passed from military to civilian hands. This foreshadowed a deeper debate regarding the chronology of the dictatorship that came to a head during the fiftieth anniversary of the coup.

2014: Fiftieth Anniversary of the Coup

The fiftieth anniversary of the coup was marked by intense debate, serving essentially as the culmination of a set of memory policies, represented most clearly by the

[26] Valdir Rampinelli (2005) in particular drew attention to this issue.
[27] A new volume was published in 2016, *A ditadura acabada*, covering the final years of military rule.

efforts of the National Truth Commission (CNV), combined with the symbolic importance and editorial appeal of the half-century mark. The anniversary was also highlighted by a greater polarization between left-wing and right-wing sectors after successive Workers' Party administrations, a greater plurality of voices and actors, and the presidential campaign. One interesting phenomenon was that former political militants were no longer just in the audience at events as in the previous decade, but actually participated as speakers on panels alongside scholars, a sign of their social legitimacy as actors and witnesses of the period. Several controversies with strong political connotations shaped the academic discussion, with a significant expansion of the research agenda and a plethora of publications on 1964. Three interconnected debates where particularly prominent: one that was not new concerned the nature of the dictatorship, particularly whether it should be considered a civil-military or military regime; the second, building off that debate, focused on the relationship between civil society and the regime; and, a more recent subject, although already presented in some earlier works, regarding periodization.

Several public policies related to the memory of the dictatorship stand out, especially those having to do with collections, such as the transfer of documents from extinct government agencies to the Brazilian National Archive in November 2005 or the 2009 creation of Center of References on Political Struggles in Brazil *(1964-1985) – Revealed Memories*, a project designed to make available to the public a vast collection of documents related to the dictatorship. The Information Access Act (No. 12.527/2011), enacted in November 2011, was a milestone in the ability to access documentation on the period. The Amnesty Caravans, mobilized in various parts of the country by the Amnesty Commission since 2008, also contributed to bring public attention to the topic of dictatorship, providing public listening spaces to people who suffered political persecution.

Attempts to hold State agents who committed torture and murder accountable helped keep the issue alive. The Brazilian Bar Association (OAB) asked the Brazilian Supreme Court (STF) for a ruling on the interpretation of the 1979 Brazilian Amnesty Act, arguing that agents of the repressive apparatus had committed common crimes rather

than political ones, since the latter technically involved actions against national security and the political and social order (STF, 2008). The Federal Prosecutor's Office (MPF) in São Paulo filed a civil lawsuit against two army officers involved in political repression. In 2012, the MPF created a working group on transitional justice, based on an understanding that enforced disappearances, abductions, and corpse concealment were not covered by the 1979 Amnesty Act (MPF, 2017). Several memorials and public monuments were also created along with initiatives to rename public places honoring individuals associated with the military dictatorship.

The election of Dilma Rousseff, a former guerrilla, in January 2011, and the passage of the law creating the CNV later that year greatly contributed to the renewal of vigorous public debate regarding the dictatorship. The CNV, along with its state, municipal, and other counterparts, provided an opportunity for many people who had been persecuted by the dictatorship to tell their stories. It also offered a space for confrontation, at times heated and emotional, with relatives of the disappeared and former political prisoners (FRANCO, 2017; BAUER, 2017).[28] Such public hearings also allowed State agents involved in political repression to tell their version of events, thus presenting a myriad of voices regarding the social memory of the period (CHIRIO; JOFFILY, 2016).

The war of memory was rekindled with great intensity. The armed forces, accompanied by former government ministers and the STM issued a statement against the efforts of the CNV and refused to apologize for human rights violations committed during their time in power (ARAÚJO; KAPA, 2014).[29] In response to attempts to hold State agents involved in political repression accountable and to the creation of the CNV, former members of the intelligence community released an edited volume in 2012 entitled *Orvil*, a rebuttal to the project *Brasil: nunca mais*, prepared in the 1980s by the intelligence sector of the Army Information Center but never released in the name of conciliation (GRAHAL, 2016)[30].

[28] On the important role played by the relatives of the disappeared during the democratic transition, see Teles (2013).
[29] "We never approved any affront to human dignity," the generals say in the manifesto (OESP, 2014).
[30] It is significant, however, that the publication has not been officially endorsed by the army.

The year 2014 was also the climax of public discussions about the dictatorship and the beginning of a political collapse that would lead to the 2016 coup. There was a highly symbolic difference between the pomp of the CNV's creation ceremony, in 2012, with the presence of all living former post-dictatorship presidents, signaling a State policy of reviewing the recent past, compared to the timorous delivery of the final report two years later. Between one moment and the other lay the turbulent year of 2013, with massive street manifestations serving as the stage for dispersed and contradictory political agendas. This was also the year of the curious self-criticism by the newspaper *O Globo*, allegedly a response to the "clamor of the streets," which accused the communication company of having supported the dictatorship. The newspaper's justification was based on elements draw from the historiography of the period: other major newspapers, as well as a significant portions of the population, also supported the coup, which occurred place in a context of deep political radicalization and "fear of a another coup, to be triggered by President João Goulart, with broad support from trade unions" (APOIO EDITORIAL, 2013).

While the CNV, made up mostly of legal scholars, did little to involve historians in its investigations, it relied on a bibliography historians have built over decades. Created to reconcile and not to judge, as Motta (2013, p. 67) points out, the CNV aimed to construct, for the first time, an official critical narrative of the dictatorship, followed by a series of commissions on other spheres. This generated a strong reaction from right-wing groups nostalgic for the period of the dictatorship. While the existence of such groups was not new, the growth of a right-wing unafraid to show itself as such was unprecedented in the political scene of post-dictatorial Brazil, particularly surprising given the support it drew from younger men and women willing to occupy the media and the streets. Thus, in the 2010s, we are experiencing a political configuration with traces of what transpired in the 1960s: in the face of growing left-wing forces, Brazilian conservatism shows its teeth. Extreme right-wing discourses, previously relegated to fringe niches, began to expand their reach, spreading the moralist motto of anti-corruption, Catholic conservatism – supplemented by the enormous growth of evangelical churches –, and the defense of the armed forces as the institution capable of righting the political system.

The policies of reparation and memory that turned criticism of the military dictatorship into "official" discourse did not address the essence of agreements at the heart of the controlled transition to democracy: the military's veto power, the existence of the military police, and amnesty for agents of the repressive apparatus. However, along with the efforts of social inclusion promoted by the Workers Party (PT) governments, they caused deep fissures within the hegemonic liberal memory of the dictatorship (NAPOLITANO, 2015). Rather than merely a matter of discourse, concrete changes – albeit superficial in many ways– were contemplated to expand the reach of Brazilian democracy.

In a February 2009 editorial addressing the policies of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, the newspaper *Folha de S. Paulo* referred to the Brazilian dictatorship as a "ditabranda" [gentle dictatorship] (LIMITES, 2009). The statement provoked several reactions, including from one of the newspaper's own editors, Fernando de Barros e Silva (2009):

> The world has changed a lot, but "ditabranda" [gentle dictatorship] is too much. The argument that, compared to others installed in Latin America, the Brazilian dictatorship showed low levels of political and institutional violence seems to serve today to mitigate the perception of the damages of that state of exception, and not to understand it better.

In fact, the movement to minimize the weight of the dictatorship received academic support from Marco Antônio Villa who, like other authors, took to the mainstream press to articulate his interpretation of the period. A major debate touched on the periodization of the dictatorship which, according to Villa, did not last twenty-one years: "it is not possible to consider a dictatorship the period between 1964-1968 (up to AI-5), with all that political-cultural effervescence. Much less the years 1979-1985, after the approval of the Brazilian Amnesty Act and the elections of state governors in 1982." The "Brazilian-style" dictatorship, the author argued, echoing the editorial published by *Folha de S. Paulo*, was supposedly milder than its counterparts in the Southern Cone, and

the memory of the "retrograde and repressive" nature of the regime had purportedly been built up by intellectuals who benefited from "generous pensions" (VILLA, 2009).[31]

On the forty-eighth anniversary of the coup in 2012, Daniel Aarão Reis, in an article published by the newspaper *O Globo*, accused those who consider the regime a "military" dictatorship of "mental laziness," and claimed 1979 as the dictatorship's end point since the state of exception ended with the expiration of AI-5 and the Brazilian Amnesty Act. He argues that between 1979 and 1985, an authoritarian State – and not a dictatorship – was in place, dedicated to managing the transition to democracy. His argument rests on the fact that the year traditionally regarded as the end of the authoritarian regime marks the transition of presidential power from a general to a civilian after indirect elections. However, the politician who assumed the presidency, José Sarney, was one of the main civilian supporters of the dictatorship. Aarão Reis once again returned to his thesis that those most interested in the hegemonic memory of the dictatorship were the civilian leaders and entities that supported the regime as well as groups advocating the idea that most of Brazilian society had opposed the dictatorship (REIS, 2012).

Renato Lemos (2012), counterattacked in a letter to *O Globo*, demonstrating the fine line that separates historiography from social memory: "why do we see the expression 'military dictatorship' as a product of memory and not, also and mainly, of knowledge constructed according to systematic theoretical-ideological premises?" He recalled that if the term "military dictatorship" benefited the civilian sectors that supported the dictatorship and who later wanted to detach themselves from the regime's image due to the socially established negative memory, the term "civil-military dictatorship" also had the political drawback of legitimizing the military's argument that they had seized power in response to demands emerging from civil society. Lemos also draws attention to which civilian sectors had been the main beneficiaries of the country's authoritarian modernization and calls into question the paradox pointed out by Aarão Reis that the "years of lead" – referring to the period of greatest political repression – were also "golden years" – an allusion to the "economic miracle." "A false paradox," according to Lemos, as "there is abundant evidence that the 'Brazilian miracle' – the

[31] Probably alluding to reparations the government offered to those persecuted for political motives.

'gold' factory in those years –cost the overwhelming majority of the working class the 'lead' of reduced wages, degraded public services, and other harmful impacts [...]" (LEMOS, 2012). Finally, he argues that, when speaking of a civil society detached from its characteristics of class and social belonging, Aarão Reis creates a mystification of history, precisely what he claimed to fight against. This position was endorsed by other Marxist authors like Demian Bezerra de Melo, who, within the framework established by Dreifuss, calls for analyzing the sectors that benefited most from the dictatorship's policies: the depoliticization of society, the disassembly of organized social movements, and huge income concentration. Thus, a more precise designation may be "business-military" dictatorship (D. B. MELO, 2014, p. 16).

As for periodization, two elements are worth noting. The first is the comparison between the aforementioned interpretations put forth by Villa and Aarão Reis, who reduce the timeline of the dictatorship, on one hand and the memory policies mentioned above premised on a considerably broader chronology. The Brazilian Missing People Act (1995) addresses the period from September 1961 to October 1988; the dossier of the Brazilian Special Commission on the Dead and Disappeared for Political Motives, published in 2007 by the Brazilian Secretary of Human Rights, starts in 1961[32] and goes until 1985; both pieces of legislation created by the Brazilian Amnesty Commission (2002) and those created by the CNV (2011) consider the period between the 1946 Constitution and the 1988 Constitution, which became a subject of criticism as this mischaracterized the dictatorial period. All of these didn't correspond to the traditional periodization of the regime as having lasted from 1964 to 1985. The second point is that Aarão Reis's argument would be considerably more convincing, for those who wish to adopt the "civil-military dictatorship" line, if his proposal were not to effectively shorten the period, but to use the year 1988 as its end point, following the promulgation of a new federal Constitution.

Those who claim that the coup was triggered by a broad civil-military coalition, but that the dictatorship was military in nature, argue that from the standpoint of regime

[32] There was a widespread view that the constitutional order had already been broken in September of that year, with the military's attempt to prevent Vice President João Goulart from taking office after Jânio Quadros' resignation (CEMDP, 2007, p. 51).

dynamics and actual political behavior, decision-making power was ultimately in the hands of military men (MARTINS FILHO, 2014; FICO, 2014; NAPOLITANO, 2014). João Roberto Martins Filho, in particular, claims that, despite undeniable civilian participation, regarding the regime's ideology, the management of political crises throughout the period, the militarization of society, and the power structure, the regime was essentially military (MARTINS FILHO, 2014). On the matter of periodization, he reminds us that the pace and nature of the transition to democracy, even after 1979, was controlled by the military. Carlos Fico follows the same line: "it is not political support that determines the nature of historical events, but the effective participation of historical actors in their configuration." In this way, he recalls, as he had in his 2001 book, that "the military soon removed many prominent civilians who had been involved with the coup precisely because these civilians put their control at risk" (FICO, 2014, p. 9)[33].

Regarding relations between civil society and the military government, Daniel Aarão Reis (2014, p. 26) continued to denounce the "shadowy zones" of memory concerning civilian support for the regime, which he argues created "resistance heroes, real and fictitious, who had little or nothing to gain with a better understanding of the period." Marcos Napolitano made a major contribution to the debate by pointing out that this hegemonic memory was not built, as Aarão Reis suggests, by the left, which Reis argues traded its revolutionary ambitions for a democratic approach that gave it room for maneuver politically during the transition away from dictatorship. According to Napolitano (2015, p. 19-20), although it had partly incorporated views coming from the left– both those who had taken up arms and those who had not –, this memory was, in fact, essentially a "liberal conservative" construction: "in praising resistance abstractly and condemning the concrete actions taken by some dissidents (like the guerrilla members), the prevailing memory managed to erase the role of liberals in the construction of an authoritarian order" (NAPOLITANO, 2015, p. 19-20).

Without disregarding particular arrangements and ambiguities, Marcelo Ridenti (2014) avoids falling into explanations that rely excessively on either the population's "complicity" in the regime or its role as an effective opposition. He claims that

[33] In a 2017 article, Fico argues that Ernesto Geisel had a project outlined for the transition to democracy and that "the military regime's exit was controlled by the armed forces" (FICO, 2017, p. 66).

"modernization, capitalist development, authoritarianism, and social struggles" coexisted in a complex and conflictive way. In this multifaceted context, he points out that the split between the Brazilian left and its clandestine actions, the detachment of middle-class sectors that supported the coup but progressively assumed a critical attitude towards the regime due to economic recession and increasing authoritarianism, the ambiguities and oscillations between collaboration and opposition from civil society, the rebirth of social movements during the democratic transition. He also reasons that, although on one hand the dictatorship relied on the cooperation and adherence of civil society, on the other hand it had to give in more than once to requirements of opposition sectors, as Maria Helena Moreira Alves (RIDENTI, 2014) had already noted.

As supporters of the thesis that the 1964 coup did not necessarily contain the seeds for the dictatorship that followed, Jorge Ferreira and Ângela de Castro Gomes (2014, p. 16) distinguish between broad civilian support for the coup and the subsequent positions of non-military sectors:

> That is to say, those who applauded and celebrated the victory of the "revolution for order" had no way of knowing what would happen in the following years. Their applause, at that very moment, should not be confused with support for an authoritarian, violent, and dictatorial regime that would last until 1979, when the Brazilian Amnesty Act was passed.

Denise Rollemberg was one of the first to bring empirical research to this debate.[34] She examined the role of the OAB and the Brazilian Press Association (ABI) in detail, based on documents of the respective institutions, and analyzed their positions over the course of the dictatorship. In the case of the ABI, she concludes that support for the regime coexisted with rejection within the same entity, demonstrating its ambivalence towards the dictatorship (ROLLEMBERG, 2010). As for the OAB, more homogeneous in its political position, there was a gradual shift in positioning, from

[34] Daniel Aarão Reis launched the debate, but in the form of an essay. He advised several works following the historiographic line that he proposed, but he did not conduct his own research with primary sources. In an interview published in 2011, he acknowledged that "sometimes I even use the term 'Brazilian society' in the controversy, but this has to be duly qualified. Brazilian society is a plural society. [...] Of course, when I started this controversy, perhaps it was not very clear, because one goes into a controversy drawing much attention to what one is against or for" (JOFFILY; SCHLATTER, 2011, p. 250).

collaboration to confrontation, passing from "one side to the other" (ROLLEMBERG, 2008).

In his analysis of civilian support for the coup and the dictatorship through opinion polls produced by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE), Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta came to a position similar to Rollemberg's: one cannot speak of unrestricted adherence or frontal opposition to the dictatorship, but of positions that varied over time (MOTTA, 2014a, p. 21). In a book about the dictatorship's policies for higher education, Motta demonstrated the complexity of relations between civil society and the military dictatorship in the university reform process, where ambiguities and "accommodation games" were rampant. The latter worked on both sides: in concessions to the authoritarian policy of the dictatorship on the part of universities, as well as in the protection these institutions afforded left-wing intellectuals due to their academic talent. Through its reforms of the university system, the dictatorship incorporated many of the demands of the social sectors defeated by the coup, although it did so in an autocratic and elitist way (MOTTA, 2014a, p. 8).

Using the concept of political culture as an interpretive key, the author argues that in the relationship between the dictatorship and society, two long-lasting tendencies operated in the Brazilian political tradition: "conciliation" and "accommodation" with a view toward avoiding conflicts. Private connections and informal arrangements prevailed over and above impersonal relations and universal rules, according to Motta (MOTTA, 2014b, p. 13). While recalling that the military dictatorship was a "political construction that significant social sectors deemed legitimate" (MOTTA, 2014b, p. 301), he circumvents the trap of generalizing about the supposed resistance or collaboration of civil society, introducing more nuanced notions of resistance, adherence, and accommodation. Thus, through the study of universities, a more general conclusion is reached: "the State constructed after the 1964 coup represented an attempt to reconcile divergent requirements, since the heterogeneous nature of the regime's support base generated pressures in opposite directions" (MOTTA, 2014b, p. 15). Two significant caveats make his analysis more precise: the conciliatory strategy was usually adopted when it came to

members of the social elite and accommodation aimed at maintaining the status quo, with the preservation of political exclusion and vast social inequality.

Historians should employ the concept of "political culture" with caution, at the risk of essentializing the supposed traits of Brazil's political tradition. There has long been a prevailing tendency in our politics of establishing political agreements on a top-down basis, combining the "modern" and "archaic," so that the solid structures that sustain brutal social inequality remain untouched (RIDENTI, 2014). However, inheritance is not destiny, so we must know and debate the past if we wish to overcome it.

Will the 2016 coup change the 1964 coup?

Public interest in the military dictatorship, which has steadily grown over the years, is reflected in a vast bibliography, also shaped by the great expansion of graduate courses in Brazil since the 1980s. The explosion of academic works on this topic will not provide new directions for the historiographical debates addressed in this essay, but will propose original ones stemming from new questions brought about by the work of the various truth commissions, the huge amount and variety of collections available, and the political changes the country is undergoing.

The parliamentary coup – driven also by the media and the judiciary – that ousted President Dilma Rousseff in April 2016 elicited a series of comparisons to the 1964 coup. Given the numerous differences between the historical periods, the episode, as well as the CNV's work, reestablished a series of connections between a political context that generates misunderstandings and confusion among many people and a past that never ceases to be refashioned in order to explain the present.

The discussion of the military or civil-military nature of the coup and dictatorship, begun in the 1980s, took on several layers of meaning since the 2000s, incorporating civilian support for the dictatorship – in terms of particular social sectors and the degree of adherence– and in the 2010s – expanded to studies focused on the definition of social groups and the degrees of collaboration, accommodation, and resistance. This debate,

the longevity of which is outstanding,[35] tends to be revisited when there is a coup against popular reformist aspirations, as in 2016, through an alliance between Congress, the media, business, and the judiciary, but lacking the participation of the armed forces. This difference may provide clues to reflect upon the weight of the military factor in the configuration of the period from 1964 to 1985.

Studies of the sectors that participated in the coup have also become more complex over the years, identifying contradictions, rivalries, and fissures within the groups that actually promoted João Goulart's fall and led national politics. This trend tended to counter early interpretations of a well-designed pre-existing project of social and economic restructuring of which the coup was but the inaugural gesture. Thus, the armed forces– and, within them, the intelligence community – the press, the judiciary, universities, professional associations, trade unions, political parties, and the Church have received close attention that enables a more sophisticated view of the power bloc and its support networks, showing fissures, contradictions, and ambiguities.

Perhaps the current situation might stimulate a reflection on the role played by the left in the 1960s in light of the government's experience in the 2000s and its subsequent consequences for Brazil and Latin America. The debate regarding the limits of liberal democracy, particularly in a country with enduring income concentration and intolerance of popular participation in decision-making, as well as on the anti-democratic tradition of Brazilian elites, deserves attention both from established scholars as well as from younger generations. The memory of the dictatorship as a period of exception, a time of authoritarianism and arbitrary power, is being reviewed toward understanding the dictatorship as another episode in the enduring social and political exclusion of the popular sectors.

There are situations in which bridges with certain historical moments are reopened, establishing an inquiry of past experiences as a means of rendering the present intelligible. The political and social urgency of certain debates puts history at the center of an extremely disputed field upon which academic, political, media, and social

[35] See, for instance, the recent debate between the alternative art collective Zagaia and the journalist Pedro Pomar (PAGLIARINI, 2017).

interests converge. Not by chance, as we have seen, during the last decades, the mainstream press became the stage of diffusion and discussion for historiographical interpretations regarding the military dictatorship, as memory policies and public debates referred to this topic.

Dialoguing with a wider audience allows historians to play a role in the public sphere, one of the characteristics inherent to History of the Present Time as a field. However, at the same time, it may lead to simplifications that allow for the construction of certain myths and that contribute to the uses and abuses of the past, contrary to the values that are most dear to our profession. Ethical considerations – always present in the historian's craft – multiply at the intersection of the social and the political, demanding a complicated negotiation between: 1) our commitment to the rigors of historical research and its complexity; 2) our contribution as historians and citizens to the construction and diffusion of knowledge governed by its own rules, in a highly conflictive space; and 3) awareness of the statute of academic and scientific legitimacy socially assigned to our craft.

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