

Presentation

The 1964 coup inaugurated a new period in Brazilian History by beginning an authoritarian regime that left profound marks on our society. The dictatorship meant a break with the previous period, but in some respects it also represented the continuity of some deep-rooted traditions. The military and their civilian allies implemented a political regime marked by other paradoxes, besides the combination between breaks and continuities. The dictatorship constructed a State that was at the same time conservative and modernizing, in which acute repressive actions – with torture, deaths and disappearances – were combined with strategies of accommodation involving segments of the social and intellectual elites. At the same time as the dictatorship constructed a remarkable repressive machine and legal instruments aiming at ensuring authoritarian power, which brought hard times to part of society and fed the wish to resist, it launched a large project for economic and technological modernization which contributed to attracting the support of other social segments.

The study of this recent process, whose complexity involves many challenges to researchers, puts into play the relations between History and Memory, and their different regimes of truth and approaching/distancing from the past. Besides the challenges imposed by the strong presence of memory, in this terrain historians face the production of other fields of knowledge, especially the Social Sciences (Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science), and journalism, not to mention the increasing participation of law professionals. Despite the healthy character of these multiple looks and perspectives which can only provide a contribution to a broader and more profound knowledge on the topic, the action of historians in the slippery, hazardous field of this recent history must be highlighted and encouraged. The History professionals have a major contribution to offer in constructing representations on the recent authoritarian past: using the appropriate theoretical and methodological apparatus, and armed at the same time with critical distance and civic responsibility, historians are important agents in the search for the possible truth. Therefore they must take a prominent place in the debates in which journalists, social scientists, law professionals and politicians have marked their presence.

Despite the reticence of those who still consider that History should only study societies that are more distant in time, a growing number of young researchers have become interested in the recent past. Among the factors that stimulate performing new investigations it

is worthwhile mentioning the activities of organizations established to investigate the violation of human rights during the dictatorship and to find out the truth about those processes. On the other hand, there is an aspect characteristic of Brazil that favors increasing the number of researchers dedicated to the dictatorship: the great volume of collections of documents involving that period, although some records are still unavailable, above all those of military agencies. These huge collections will irrigate a great number of research studies for a long time, which reminds us that the historians will continue for many years still to study these issues, even after the current political urgency to investigate the crimes practiced by the dictatorship and its agents is gone.

Beginning with such assumptions, namely valuing the historiographic production and the concern with stimulating further investigations on the topic, especially arousing the interest of the young, we organized this dossier: *The Brazilian dictatorship: history and historiography*. The purpose was to bring together contributions by historians and social scientists who are in the “front lines” of academic production on the dictatorship, and we were successful. We managed to attract the interest of a select group of researchers, with original papers on important aspects of the history of the dictatorship. The texts gathered in the dossier offer different approaches about the topic and give the readers a broad and current panel about the paths that have been followed by the historiography dedicated to the military regime.

The article *A short spring before the long winter: a historical cartography of Brazilian culture before the 1964 coup d'état*, by Marcos Napolitano, which opens the dossier, critically explores the cultural scene of the 1950s and 1960s, situating the main questions raised by the analysis and study of the cultural and artistic production of the period, with special attention to the Fifties, which have not yet been much studied. Inspired theoretically by Raymond Williams, the author reflects on the different Brazilian cultural formations which acted in that context, as well as their potential for interaction, without losing sight of their contradictions and ambiguities. It exposes the analytic limits of the categories established by political history to think about the projects and aesthetic renewal of the period, which implies rethinking the articulation between culture and politics on new bases. It should be pointed out that, by taking up the discussion about the great cultural projects and dealing with the tendencies and

problems involving the process of crossing the different traditions of the Brazilian cultural scene of the period, the author indicates, inspiringly and generously, aspects that require research and further analysis and reflection.

The article by Maud Chirio and Mariana Joffily under the title *Honoring repression: the award of the Peacemaker's Medal to state agents involved in security (1964–1985)* reveals how agents involved in and responsible for the functioning of the repressive apparatus of the military governments were distinguished by the Brazilian Army. The authors discuss, in an analytical and reflexive manner, the criteria and meanings involved in awarding this medal. After all, the Peacemaker's Medal was given to several individuals who participated directly in the political violence that characterized the Brazilian military dictatorship. A meticulous research study, broadly cross-checking information, supplies the bases for the authors' conclusions, even allowing the establishment of the numerical expression and relevance of this decoration among the direct agents of repression, as well as the profile of the military people involved.

Janaina de Almeida Teles, in the article *Secrets and myths about the Araguaia Guerrilla War (1972–1974)*, places us in a new universe to think about the impact of the guerrilla's action amid the rural populations of southeast Pará and in the confrontation with the soldiers of the combat forces. The author focuses on the symbolic representations that were mobilized to explain and given meaning to the presence and sojourn of the guerrillas in the region. In interviews with guerrillas and peasants of the Araguaia region, she managed to reconstitute the myths involving the guerrillas. She highlights two of them in this article and carefully examines and compares them in their articulation with the Amazon myths. The symbolic universe sketched by the interviews and explored in the light of the Amazon mythology gives us a perception of the feelings that permeated the relations between the local population and the guerrillas. As a counterpoint, Teles discusses the representations inaugurated by the programs and soap operas produced by TV networks, exploring the views that the media key constructed and disseminated about the guerrillas.

The article *Intellectuals, literature and the press in the post-coup period*, by Rodrigo Czajka, presents thoughts about the editorial spaces that existed in the framework of the dictatorship and that were involved in the field of resistance and political engagement. It discusses the dissemination of the vocabulary and ideas of the left in the context of the constitution of a market for the consumption of culture at a significant moment of reflection and gestation of debates on the national reality. It discusses aspects and issues present in the formation of this public debate on the directions taken by national life, and also the role and insertion of intellectuals and their cultural

production into the new repressive context. It points out especially the discussions conveyed on the pages of the *Revista Civilização Brasileira*, thematizing and exploring, among other issues, the clash between Paulo Francis and Ferreira Gullar and its meaning for understanding the intellectual conflicts among the left-wing cultural formations.

The Brazilian military reserve officers and the defense of the institutional memory of March 31, 1964 is the title of the article written by Fernando da Silva Rodrigues and Claudio Beserra de Vasconcelos as a contribution to this dossier. The authors problematize an important issue when they deal with the construction and preservation of the official memory regarding the military coup and the installation of the dictatorship, focusing especially on the agents and the initiatives which, even in the context of redemocratization, still strive to (re)construct this memory, both of the events that they consider to be involved in the 1964 coup and of the entire period of the dictatorship, until 1985. A detailed analysis of the bulletins of the Center of Social Communication of the Army is presented and provides information for the analysis of the battle of memories implemented since 1964. The authors discuss the role of the Military Clubs in maintaining this institutional memory, and also its dissemination and reception in the modern media. They also focus on the present significance and the scope of this political debate, whose outreach and relevance can be sized by the institutionalization and functioning of the National Truth Commission.

Finally, the article *Conservative intellectuals, sociability and practices of immortality: the Brazilian Academy of Letters during the military dictatorship (1964–1979)*, by Diogo Cunha, discusses the role of the Brazilian Academy of Letters based on the analysis of three characteristic practices of the way this institution functions, which are the swearing in ceremonies, the visits that the “immortals” received and the homages, which allowed discussing the way in which an official memory was constructed within the institution. Special attention is given to the candidacies and disputes involved in a few of the elections, as well as the swearing in ritual for two new members. Two swearing in ceremonies were chosen for detailed analysis, since they reveal the ties and approaches to the military governments. The interests and actions of the presidents are also examined and merited the author's attention. The visits that are highlighted also allow understanding the dynamics of the relationships and the sociability in day to day life at the Academy, which continued to be a place of intellectual acclaim and political sociability among the conservative elites.

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