

EDITORIAL

The 1964 coup, the dictatorship and historiography

O golpe de 1964, a ditadura e a historiografia

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In these times, marked by so many controversial issues related to the recent past, it is impossible to discuss the historiography dedicated to the 1964 coup and the dictatorship without noting that the topic has become more present and up-to-date, as well as more controversial and dangerous, making it essential for public debate, whether in the traditional public sphere or on the brand-new social networks.

For some decades now, the theory of history has been questioning the traditional views (which come from modern historiography) on time and the phenomena of temporality, founded on a linear perspective on past-present-future relationships, as if they formed a perfect, unidirectional sequence. Quoting Chris Lorenz, whose work is based on the work of Reinhart Koselleck¹, the dividing lines between temporalities are not always crystal clear. In the words of the philosopher and historian Lorenz, they are often opaque, or blurred², so that what has passed can remain present in different ways, in contrast to the modern

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¹ Koselleck, R. *Futuro passado. Contribuição à semântica dos tempos históricos*. Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto: Ed. PUC-Rio, 2006.

² Lorenz, Chris. Blurred Lines - History, Memory and the Experience of Time. *International Journal for History Culture and Modernity*. July, 2014.

view that the past is a very distant reality in relation to the present and also to the predictable (or desirable, according to the modern progressive perspective) future.

Therefore, and using a thought-provoking metaphor proposed by the same author, the past is not necessarily cold and dead, as it can still be very hot in our present. The theme of the persistent presence of the past appears in very common formulas today, such as pasts that do not pass, or present pasts, which express the idea that the past continues to shape our lives, our perceptions of time and, above all, continues to have an impact on current political disputes.

These theoretical reflections, which have more complex implications than it would be possible to discuss now (for example, the perception that the marked presence of the past is related to “presentism” and the crisis of progressive visions of the future³), clearly apply to recent history or the history of the present time, and particularly to the history of the 1964 coup and the military dictatorship. To use Lorenz's metaphor again in a hyperbolic way, in our case the heat of this past is so intense that it seems to burn us up.

Certainly, this memory and legacy of recent dictatorships is visible not only in Brazil, but throughout the Southern Cone, and even in other parts of Latin America and the world. However, even if it is not one-of-a-kind, or a phenomenon restricted to Brazil, the presence of the dictatorship is uniquely acute here, especially due to two factors. The first involves the accommodation arrangement that characterized the transition to democracy in Brazil. Agreements between the military and civilians have been reached in other countries, but it is difficult to find a case like Brazil's, in which the old and new ruling elites came together in such harmony, forging a new political regime that sought to distance itself from the dictatorship with no ruptures, which included an attempt to erase the memory of the authoritarian period. This deliberate policy of oblivion promoted by the so-called New Republic made it difficult to educate the population about the virtues of democracy and the evils of authoritarianism. It also allowed the military to remain untouched, united around a positive memory of the dictatorship, and thus

³ Hartog, François. *Regimes de historicidade: presentismo e experiências do tempo*. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica, 2013.

more likely to embark on new authoritarian projects.

The second essential factor to understand the remarkable presence of the dictatorship was the turn to the right in the last decade, which generated and was generated by the Bolsonaro phenomenon. There would be a lot to say here, but I will only comment on what is essential for the purposes of this text: the scenario that led to the rise of the authoritarian right also implied the return of the military to the public scene and the revalorization of the memory of the dictatorship, which was possible because of the character of the transition already mentioned.

The picture would be incomplete if I did not mention two more essential aspects: the political crisis generated by Lava Jato, which has disfigured the Brazilian political system by dismantling all its components, with particular impact on moderate right-wing forces; and the transnational context, also marked by the rise of right-wing radicalisms in various quadrants of the globe.

The sum of the factors mentioned favored the growth of Bolsonaro and its arrival in power, which in turn aggravated the movement to revalorize the memory of the military regime. Significantly, the captain-president himself used his networks (and those of the Presidency of the Republic) to spread a positive memory of 1964. For example, a few months into his administration, on March 31, 2019, he ordered the military institutions to commemorate the event, which at the time he denied was a coup that led to a dictatorship. In the following years, the president and his military commanders repeatedly returned to the theme, always seeking to affirm a positive legacy for 1964, which involved denying that there had been a coup and a dictatorship; on the contrary, these events were presented as democratic actions to save the country from communism and disorder.

The followers of Bolsonaro made a similar move on social networks and digital media, getting these messages to circulate on a large scale. The public impact of this form of dictatorship nostalgia in Brazil is revealed in different aspects, but I would like to highlight one relevant detail. In which other country is it necessary to explain that the forcible overthrow of a democratically elected president effectively amounted to a coup d'état? And, even more so, that the

political regime built up from this episode, kept under strict control by the military and sustained by coercion (even if it had the support of part of the population), was in fact a dictatorship?

One of the consequences of this right-wing politicization of recent history has been to put historians in the middle of the storm, making us targets of right-wing extremists. It's important to note that this process has had more serious consequences in the school system, as many teachers have lost their jobs due to ideological persecution. Historians in the university system, on the other hand, have rarely lost their jobs, at least in the public sector. Nevertheless, they have been the target of criticism ("leave the historians alone," said the former president), threats on social media, and even attempts at censorship, such as when a list of "inconvenient" historians (scholars of the dictatorship or LGBTQI movements) was sent to the CNPq at the end of 2019. This was clearly an attempt to pressure them not to receive public funding for their research.

In recent years, the risks for researchers of the dictatorship have increased, as has our academic and civic responsibility. Mobilizing against authoritarian threats, whose existence reveals the persistent presence of the legacy of the military dictatorship, has become a civic imperative, in defense of democracy, but also in favor of free professional practice and academic historiography. Hence the intensification of public action by historians who, in addition to their usual work in basic and higher education, have expanded their activism in traditional media, digital media and social networks, trying to counter the avalanche of disinformation, fake news, denialism and other forms of distortion of knowledge. It is difficult to assess the results of this mobilization of parts of the academic community, to measure whether its goals have been achieved and how effectively. I would venture to say that no time has been wasted, and that public outreach efforts must continue to reach beyond school walls.

It is essential, however, that the effort to act in public spaces be accompanied by the appropriate investment in the production of original knowledge (not necessarily by the same person, since it is an arduous task to research and make the results public). In the same way, the fight against the nostalgics of the dictatorship, the deniers and other falsifiers, which, to repeat, is

essential and involves a certain politicization in defense of democratic values and institutions, should not compromise the results of the work of university researchers in order to preserve their credibility. Finally, what distinguishes academic history from other ways of representing the past is the care taken with methodological procedures, respect for sources, a critical attitude to evidence, and a grounding in theoretical reflection aimed at obtaining more reliable results.

It may be objected that the manipulators of history sometimes mobilize academic rhetoric in search of credibility. However, abandoning academic procedures or publicly questioning them will not provide adequate answers to the current challenges. On the contrary, it is up to us to show that the discourses of deniers and other falsifiers are deceptive and unworthy of public recognition. And this necessarily involves defending the scientific procedures that are essential for producing stories of quality and credibility, as well as a starting point for the battle of dissemination and for confronting public clashes.

With these considerations in mind, I would like to welcome the organizers of the dossier “60 years of the 1964 coup: religion, politics and society”, which has been published in good time by *Horizonte* journal. This is an important contribution to a field that is markedly transdisciplinary, since studies on the dictatorship bring together different fields of knowledge linked to the major areas of the humanities and social sciences. Furthermore, this dossier deserves to be highlighted not only because it is dedicated to a transdisciplinary approach, but also because it addresses an essential theme in view of the context and actions of the military dictatorship.

In fact, the 1960-70s are a fertile field for the study of the religious field in Brazil. During this period, important changes took place both within the field and in the relationship between the state and religious institutions and practices. One could go further and say that the period was marked by significant transformations in the Brazilian religious field. On the one hand, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the dictatorship relied on religious discourses to legitimize itself, to the extent that its leaders and supporters emphatically affirmed their commitment to the fight against atheistic communism and in favor of the traditional Christian family and so-called good customs. Such discourses

were repeatedly used to destabilize the government of João Goulart and to mobilize sectors of the population in favor of the coup that overthrew that president (for example, in the famous "Marches with God for Family and Freedom"), but also to justify the repressive actions against left-wing activists and social movements during the dictatorship. It is also important to remember that these actions and speeches of the dictatorship were supported and blessed by some religious leaders, despite the fact that other Christian leaders denounced state violence, countering it with humanism and solidarity.

On the other hand, it is important to remember that during the dictatorship there was an expansion of activism by Catholic segments of popular descent, eventually counting on the support of some Protestant militants, who sought to bring religion closer to distributist and/or egalitarian social demands, attracting against them the forces of repression of the dictatorship who saw in such movements the "hidden hand" of communist infiltration. In addition, from the end of the 1960s onwards there was a significant change in the relationship between the state and the Catholic hierarchy, which from a traditional position of harmonious coexistence with the established power began to clash with the dictatorship's leaders, in defense of politically persecuted groups and socially excluded sectors, a process that went hand in hand with the increased impact of "progressive" tendencies in Catholic circles, without this meaning generalizing this situation for all Catholic institutions.

Another important process that is noteworthy in those years involves the expansion of Protestant religions, both traditional and neo-Pentecostal, which in many respects were more conservative than Catholic institutions and leaders, and for this reason, this trend towards the growth of non-Catholic Christianity was appreciated (if not encouraged) by the dictatorial state. Focusing on another significant religious dimension, during the years of the dictatorship the repressive state had an ambiguous relationship with Afro-Brazilian religions, which, in many cases, continued to be repressed, as had been the case for decades and even centuries in Brazil, while, on the other hand, certain state and military leaders cultivated good relations with certain groups, especially in areas of the Southeast.

Finally, the topics covered and analyzed in the dossier are essential for

understanding religious themes connected to the 1964 coup and the years of the military dictatorship, but which still raise some very current dilemmas and challenges. It is therefore worth continuing to investigate these issues, so that in the coming years we will see this area of study expand and consolidate, preferably at the same time as the authoritarian forces at work in our region and other parts of the globe are contained, and democracy is strengthened and improved, based on respect for diversity and pluralism, which includes religious tolerance, and achieving social density beyond simple liberal-democratic institutionality.