

Legacies and repercussions of the military dictatorship in the Brazil of today.

Introduction

Legados e repercussões da ditadura militar no Brasil de hoje. Introdução

MARIANNE L. WIESEBRON

Leiden University, Netherlands

m.l.wiesebron@hum.leidenuniv.nl

Since Dilma Rousseff was re-elected President of Brazil in 2014, the country has been extremely polarised as the opposition continues to find it difficult to accept its defeat. But already in 2013 and 2014 there were waves of protests against a range of issues: against the increase of the price of bus tickets (rescinded), against all the money spent for the organisation of the world football championship in 2014, against a homophobic proposal by the human rights committee in Congress (withdrawn), etc. Since 2015, the protests are mostly against the president and her political party, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT). As these lines are written (November 2015), a part of the opposition wishes to see President Dilma disappear as president, through impeachment, although there seems to be no legal basis for this procedure, renunciation, or otherwise. Since the protests began, there has been a small group which has been advocating the return of the military regime, as according to these protesters only the military are capable of governing the country well, work for the greater good of Brazil, while all civilian governments are corrupt, only guided by party politics at best, their own interests at worst. One of the most recent groups favouring this idea stood in front of the Porto Alegre military headquarters, asking for their return (Ely 2015). The majority of the population does not agree with this position. The military themselves have no intention of fulfilling this wish and taking political power again.

In Brazilian history, and Latin American more generally, the military have intervened briefly when they considered that civilians were making a mess and order had

to be restored. This also happened when the military thought that a president should resign, as was the case when Getúlio Vargas was asked to resign in 1945, to give just one example. After a short period, another civilian government would take over again from the military (Dabène 1997; Skidmore 1986: 48-54; Joana 2006). However, on the 31st of March 1964, in Brazil, a military regime was established which remained in power until 1985. This was a whole different situation, as the military regime lasted for over 20 years, although after the coup, the initial idea of the military was to remain in power briefly. However, due to internal pressure, from a part of the citizens and institutions like the Catholic Church, amongst others, afraid of an alleged communist threat, and external pressure by the US, the military only returned to their barracks after 21 years. The military should re-establish (political) order, but foremost get the economy going again (Fico 2004: 29-56).

Brazil was the first country to start with a military regime but was followed by many others in other South and Central American countries: Argentina (1976-1983), Bolivia (1971-1982), Chile (1973-1989), Uruguay (1973-1985), etc. (Dabène 1997: 134-139, 157-166). But the military regime in Brazil had some original features: there were regular changes of presidents, albeit by indirect elections. These presidents had their own programmes, mostly quite different from that of their predecessors, even though they all wanted to further Brazil's national development, through investments in industry, infrastructure and energy, and adapted their foreign policy to be able to implement their economic projects (Visentini 1998). Congress was closed for less than a year (1968-1969) and two weeks in 1977. There were also regular elections, with regular victories from the opposition, after which the government tried to change the rules to favour their candidates, not always with success. Politicians who were considered dangerous could get their political rights or mandates revoked. That happened to former presidents, and from national to municipal politicians. From 1979 onwards, the two party system, established by the military, became once more a multiparty system.

One of the areas with marked differences between the different presidents was the level of repression, which became heaviest in 1968 till 1973, due to national and international factors. Amongst the national factors were the protests during the whole period of the military regime, by students, trade unionists, and many others. The intensity, numbers of protests and participants varied over the whole period. The period 1968 to 1973 was also the period of the 'economic miracle', when yearly growth was well into two digits. After the death of the journalist Vladimir Herzog in prison in 1975, which got quite some repercussion and protests at home and abroad, protests became louder and the press bolder. The death of the metallurgical worker, trade union member, Manoel Fiel Filho in 1976 in a Department of Information Operations led to the dismissal of the general responsible for that unit (Fico 2004: 29-56). From 1977, repression, torture, and disappearances decreased, although censorship was strict until the end of the seventies. In 1979, by the end of Geisel's mandate, the president and his successor, the last military president, Figueiredo, were preparing for the return to democracy through the *abertura* (Castro 1995). The state of exception, established

in 1964, ended in 1979, and was followed by the phase of transition to democracy. Exiled politicians were asked to return to Brazil, which a number started doing. Artists and academics, gone into exile to escape persecution, were also slowly coming back. Censorship had made life very difficult for artists, although with creativity, quite some interesting works have been produced in very different areas, such as film, music, theatre (Reis *et al.* 2014: 11-47, 172-185, 203-215).

Although the number of victims who died of torture or disappeared was much lower than in neighbouring countries such as Argentina and Chile, Brazil addressed the topic of investigating the past much later than these countries. Only when Dilma became president, herself a victim of the military having been tortured by them, did she establish a *Comissão Nacional da Verdade*, in 2012. This National Truth Committee has an ample mandate, interviewing victims and authors of torture, opening archives about this period, and trying to find out if archives had disappeared, etc. The final report was ready in 2014 (*Comissão Nacional da Verdade* 2014). According to a number of Brazilians, the transition to democracy got a great boost with the advent of this Committee, and thanks to her work, democracy can be considered consolidated (Oliveira 2013). Other Brazilians, national and international academics and politicians, regard the 1992 Collor de Mello impeachment procedure already as evidence of Brazil's maturity as a democracy.

In that same year, 1992, there were many protests, inspired by those under the military regime. There was also a direct link between the protest movements of 2013 and 2014 and those during the military regime. Because of the lasting impact of the military regime in Brazil, a workshop was organised in Leiden University, precisely 50 years after the coup, on the 31st of March 2014, looking at how Brazil was shaped during the military regime and how it has emerged from it, following the return of democracy. The participants in the workshop also looked at the legacies of the regime in a democratic Brazil, and, in how far, this period still has an impact on the Brazil of today, and, at the same time, what kind of changes took place since the consolidation of democracy, in quite a number of areas such as national and international politics, social and cultural movements, and also at the role of the military then and now. Some results of this workshop are found in this dossier.¹

As Timothy Power points out, the military regime had a *relative* legitimacy when compared to other dictatorships in the Southern Cone. Power examines several variables which impact on the way politics has played out between 1985 and 2014: a high level of continuity of personnel inherited from the military period, an accentuated commitment to civil liberties, as in the Constitution of 1988, a more robust level of

¹ For the organisation of the workshop, thanks must be given to the Leiden Chair of Brazilian Studies Rui Barbosa, and to the Leiden History Institute. Due to constraints of space, not all contributions could be included here. João Roberto Martins Filho showed the complexity of the military regime in Brazil. Esther Limonad focused primarily on mass mobilization, in particular on the grassroots movements from 2013, and made an analysis of the changes of the Brazilian state, of what has not changed and the (re)actions against it. Tânia Pelligrini painted a more general picture of the specific actions of the military regime leading to the effective consolidation of the Brazilian cultural industry.

political competition compared to the pre-coup years, and a delayed but increasingly meaningful consideration of transitional justice issues. He also stresses the importance during the mass mobilization (the street), which engendered the collapse of the military regime, and has been used a number of times since.

Marianne Wiesebron analyses Brazil's foreign policies, during the military regime, in the middle of the Cold War, well into the 21st century. One important concept is Independent Foreign Policy, presented in 1961, but only really developed under President Geisel when the Brazilian government started its cooperation with the People's Republic of China, amongst others, in the framework of Brazil's national economic development. The Brazilian military followed an independent path in an adverse conjuncture, becoming less aligned to Washington, as no reciprocity came from the US in return for Brazil's loyalty. The pendulum movement of governments more or less aligned to the US does also happen in times of democratic regimes. President Cardoso was much more aligned to Washington, especially during his first mandate, while President Lula really put Brazil on the world map.

Roberto Vecchi focused on the problem of trying to give back a memory of those who disappeared during the military regime. The worst case is that of the Araguaia guerrilla, which disappeared without leaving any traces. Although limited in numbers, state violence started earlier than in other neighbouring countries. His analysis, based on the novel *K.* by Bernardo Kucinski, from 2011, shows how to weave a public memory from the disappeared and, more generally, from the repressive traumas of the authoritarian years.

Maria Lucia de Barros Camargo presents a much more specific analysis, concentrating on the *Revista Civilização Brasileira*, published between 1965 and 1968, which can be considered the first magazine to be launched with the explicit objective of resistance to the 1964 military coup. Furthermore, the theme song of Chico Buarque, *Tem Mais Samba*, introduced in 1964, is the start of a reflection on the discussions about the state of culture, especially with regard to literature and its relationship to popular music. She studies the survival in and of the Brazilian popular music (MPB), 50 years after the coup.

Finally, Vinicius de Carvalho, aims his attention at a musical show *Opinião*, whose premiere was on the 11th of December 1964, at the Teatro Arena in Rio de Janeiro, under the direction of Augusto Boal. The show was considered a *manifesto*, a clear protest against the socio-economic conditions in Brazil. It became a reference to what became known as protest music against the regime established in March of that same year in Brazil. This show substantiated the various social and political demands of Brazil at that time and became an aesthetic and political paradigm. At the same time, the 1964 production is compared to the reinterpretation of the show in 2014. The goal is to seek to understand how, 50 years after the coup and the show *Opinião*, Brazilian music and art reflect not only that historical moment, but also its role in the contemporary socio-political context.

The articles of this dossier show clearly how in some ways there is an enduring impact of the military regime, while at the same time democracy became consolidated.

They also highlight the political, social, cultural complexities of the various periods, and, above all, how many protests there have been, in many different forms, which also, in some ways, persist over 50 years later.

REFERENCES

- Castro, Celso/D'Araujo, Soares, Maria Celina/Dillon, Gláucio Ary (1995): *A Volta aos quartéis: a memória militar sobre a abertura*. Rio de Janeiro: Relume-Dumará.
- Comissão Nacional da Verdade (2014): *Relatório da Comissão Nacional da Verdade*, <<http://www.cnv.gov.br>> (10.11.2015).
- Dabène, Olivier (1997): *L'Amérique latine au XX^e siècle*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Ely, Débora (2015): "Em frente ao QG do Exército em Porto Alegre, grupo pede intervenção militar." In: *Zero Hora*, 16.08.2015, <<http://zh.clicrbs.com.br/rs/porto-alegre/noticia/2015/08/em-frente-ao-qg-do-exercito-em-porto-alegre-grupo-pede-intervencao-militar-4826112.html>> (10.11.2015).
- Fico, Carlos (2004): "Versões e controvérsias sobre 1964 e a ditadura militar." In: *Revista Brasileira de História*, 24, 47, pp. 29-60.
- Joana, Jean (2006): "Le pouvoir des militaires, entre pluralisme limité et démocratie." In: <<http://www.afsp.msh-paris.fr/activite/2006/colllinz06/txtlinz/joana1.pdf>> (11.10.2015).
- Maia, Marta Regina/Lelo, Thales Vilela (2014): "A morte de Vladimir Herzog: narrativas do trauma na memória coletiva." In: *Estudos em Jornalismo e Mídia*, 11, 1, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5007/1984-6924.2014v11n1p21>> (10.11.2015).
- Oliveira, Gabriela Goergen de (2013): *Comissão Nacional da Verdade: a busca pela concretização da justiça de transição no Brasil*. In: <http://www3.pucrs.br/pucrs/files/uni/poa/direito/graduacao/tcc/tcc2/trabalhos2012_2/gabriela_oliveira.pdf> (10.11.2015).
- Reis, Daniel Aarão/ Ridenti, Marcelo/Motta, Rodrigo Patto Sá (eds.) (2014): *A ditadura que mudou o Brasil, 50 anos do golpe de 1964*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.
- Skidmore, Thomas E. (1986): *Politics in Brazil 1930-1964: An Experiment in Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Visentini, Paulo G. Fagundes (1998): *A política externa do Regime Militar brasileiro: multilateralização, desenvolvimento e a construção de uma potência média (1964-1985)*. Porto Alegre: Ed. Da Universidade/UFRGS.
- Weichert, Marlon Alberto (2013): "A Comissão Nacional da Verdade." In: <<http://nucleomemoria.org.br/imagens/banco/files/Comissao%20Nacional%20da%20Verdade.pdf>> (10.11.2015).

I Marianne L. Wiesebron is Associate Professor of History at the Department of Latin American Studies at Leiden University. She specialises in Brazilian foreign relations and society. She also works on current economic and political developments in Latin America, in particular on problems of regional integration in South America. Amongst her recent works: "Social Policies during the Lula Administration: The Conditional Cash Transfer Program Bolsa Família" (2014), *Brazil under the Worker's Party: Continuity and Change from Lula to Dilma* (Co-Ed. 2014); "Democracia participativa e cidadania no Brasil" (2013).