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**“The Evolution of Resistance and Opposition Movements against the Military  
Dictatorship in Brazil, 1964 -1985”**

**ABSTRACT**

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## **I. OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE THESIS**

In Latin America, military dictatorships emerged with the aim of curbing national reformism, suppressing aspirations for democracy, subordinating national economies to American business interests, and containing the extensive social mobilisation that threatened to overturn entrenched models of overexploitation. Civilian elites and the military converged in their determination to preserve established structures of domination through the direct use of force and the systematic violation of democratic governance. Persecution, arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings became instruments of rule.

At various stages in Latin American history, left-wing movements have played a significant role in the continent's socio-political processes. Social movements, trade unions, guerrilla organisations, and political parties steadily expanded their relationships with social groups that had not benefited from the capitalist system and oligarchic power structures. The presence of these movements constituted an important factor in the broader trajectory of democratic evolution across the region. The principal objectives of the Latin American Left - particularly the struggle against poverty and inequality - gradually converged and began to attract wider sectors of society critical of the dominant socio-economic model.

It is precisely the development of these movements, and their dependence on shifting political conditions - most notably under the military dictatorship in Brazil - that constitutes the focus of the present thesis. The political climate of this period created an environment in which civil rights and liberties were severely constrained, while repression against the opposition assumed a systemic character. Within this context, diverse social movements emerged and evolved, seeking to challenge the authoritarian regime and promote democratic values. The thesis examines the factors that inspired the formation of these movements, their objectives and strategies, their evolution under conditions of repression, and their role within a changing political landscape. It further analyses the impact of the military dictatorship on the development of these movements and the ways in which they responded to the regime's authoritarian practices.

### **1. RELEVANCE AND SCHOLARLY SIGNIFICANCE**

Over recent decades, the military dictatorship has emerged as one of the most extensively debated topics within Brazilian historiography. This development can be attributed, on the one hand, to the expanding availability of research sources following the publication of previously classified documents in the mid-1990s, and, on the other, to the delayed establishment of mechanisms of justice addressing human rights violations in the country. The adoption of the Access to Information Law in

2011 and the creation of the National Truth Commission in 2012 represent two of the principal factors that elevated scholarly research on this period to a new level.

At the beginning of the New Republic in 1985, the report of the Justice and Peace Commission was published in Brazil in the form of the book *Brazil: Never Again*, which exerted a profound influence on public opinion. For the first time, the mechanisms of repression in Brazil and the forms of torture practised against prisoners were revealed in a systematic, detailed, and thoroughly documented manner. The documentation used in the preparation of the volume had been clandestinely removed from the archives of the Superior Military Court. These records corroborated testimonies given by torture victims before appellate courts and, in many cases, were taken into consideration by judges in mitigating sentences.

In 2007, the Commission published the volume *Right to Memory and Truth*, issued on behalf of the state during the presidency of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva (2003-2010). The publication is frequently regarded as a form of “draft official history,” insofar as it reflects an interpretation closely aligned with the state’s position regarding the events of the dictatorship. The Commission included a representative of the military establishment, whose members often expressed reservations about the ways in which the actions and consequences of the regime were assessed. During Lula’s presidency, groups affected by repression achieved significant institutional advances in the consolidation of memory policies, albeit with uneven intensity across different spheres of government. It was within this climate - one in which memory politics coexisted with debates concerning the responsibilities of the Left for the events of 1964 and 1968 - that the National Truth Commission was established in 2012. Its mandate was to clarify the fate of the disappeared and to determine responsibility for human rights violations committed between 1946 and 1988. The broad chronological scope defined by law was intended to reduce resistance from the armed forces to the Commission’s creation; nevertheless, its work focused primarily on the period of military rule.

## **2. CENTRAL ARGUMENT OF THE THESIS**

The doctoral thesis advances the argument that the resistance to the Brazilian military dictatorship constituted a protracted and complex process of societal awakening. Despite its initial fragmentation and ideological divisions, the opposition gradually consolidated, transforming diverse forms of protest - political, social, and cultural - into a broader movement for democratization. It was precisely this progressive convergence of heterogeneous social forces that undermined the regime’s legitimacy and laid the groundwork for the restoration of democracy in Brazil.

### **3. SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

The object of the present study is the resistance and opposition to the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964-1985), examined as a complex historical and cultural process in which political action, social movements, and intellectual practices intersect. The specific focus of the thesis is the dynamics, evolution, and transformations of this resistance - from the initial legal and civic forms of dissent, through armed leftist organisations and cultural opposition, to the broad democratic movements of the late 1970s that ultimately contributed to the regime's collapse.

The study approaches resistance not merely as a reaction to authoritarian rule, but as an active force of historical change that generated alternative political and moral visions for Brazil. Central to the analysis is the diverse range of actors - intellectuals, artists, workers, students, clergy, and guerrilla fighters - and the strategies they employed to contest the regime under conditions of repression and censorship. In this way, the thesis traces how opposition to the dictatorship evolved into a process of democratic renewal, in which cultural production and civic mobilisation converged in a shared struggle for freedom, memory, and justice.

### **4. RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The primary aim of this thesis is to examine the diverse forms of resistance to the military dictatorship in Brazil, as well as the dynamics of the social and political conflicts through which the mechanisms of interaction between society and authoritarian power are revealed. The analysis seeks to demonstrate how resistance - armed, civic, social, cultural, and intellectual - evolved in response to domestic political conditions and economic transformations, gradually emerging as a decisive factor in the erosion and eventual collapse of the regime.

To achieve this aim, the thesis pursues the following principal objectives:

1. To outline the historical context and the socio-political conditions that facilitated the establishment of the military regime.
2. To define the nature of the dictatorship and the specific manner in which it became institutionalised following the coup of 1964.
3. To analyse the political and societal responses to the institutional and social changes imposed by military rule.
4. To examine the composition, ideology, and activities of the principal opposition and resistance movements, both legal and clandestine.
5. To identify the factors that led to their suppression and destruction during the so-called "Years of Lead" (1968-1977).

6. To trace manifestations of internal dissent within the regime itself - including divisions among the military, the opposition of certain political and institutional figures to the radicalisation of power, and the actions of those who sought from within to mitigate repression or encourage political liberalisation.
7. To consider the causes of the dictatorship's decline and protracted demise within the broader context of economic and international transformations.
8. To follow the process of the opposition's resurgence, political liberalisation, and the restoration of democracy in Brazil as the outcome of sustained social and cultural struggle.

Framed in these terms, the study represents an attempt at a comprehensive reconstruction of anti-dictatorial resistance - from its incipient forms to its culmination in the process of democratic transition.

## **5. METHODOLOGY AND CHRONOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK**

The methodology of the study is grounded in an interdisciplinary approach that integrates historical, political science, sociological, and cultural analytical methods in order to provide a comprehensive account of the emergence, development, and transformation of resistance to the military dictatorship in Brazil. A guiding principle of the research is the critical cross-examination of sources - official documents, memoirs, interviews, archival materials, and scholarly works - with the aim of reconstructing events and analysing the diverse perspectives through which they have been interpreted.

The chronological framework of the thesis spans the period between the final democratic elections of 1960 and the end of the military dictatorship in 1985. The introduction traces Brazil's political development from the Great Depression to the early 1960s in order to clarify the conditions that facilitated the establishment of military rule.

Chapter One analyses the process through which the dictatorship consolidated power between 1964 and 1968, the institutional and economic transformations implemented by the military, and the earliest manifestations of resistance. Particular attention is devoted to Institutional Act No. 5, which concentrated power in the hands of the armed forces and inaugurated the most repressive phase of the regime.

Chapter Two is dedicated to the "Years of Lead" (1968-1977) - a period characterised by intense repression and the near-total destruction of organised opposition. It also examines the regime's economic policy, known as the "Brazilian economic miracle," whose social consequences generated new forms of discontent and laid the groundwork for subsequent resistance.

Chapter Three covers the period of gradual political liberalisation initiated during the presidency of General Ernesto Geisel (1974-1979) and reaching its culmination in the early 1980s with the resurgence of opposition movements, social activism, and mass civic campaigns that ultimately brought about the end of military rule and the beginning of democratic transition.

## 6. SOURCES AND SCHOLARSHIP

The source base of the thesis is extensive, diverse, and multilayered, providing a robust foundation for an in-depth analysis of resistance to the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985). It encompasses not only official documents and archival materials but also diplomatic correspondence, memoirs, interviews, and periodical press, thereby enabling a comprehensive examination of the interactions between state power, opposition forces, and society.

The principal archival sources derive from the National Archives of the Federal Government, the Historical Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the National Library. Of particular significance is the declassification of documents during the first decade of the twenty-first century, which made substantial bodies of primary material available - police reports, arrest records, decrees, and institutional acts reflecting the legal and repressive mechanisms of the regime.

All Institutional Acts, constituting the legal framework of the dictatorship, have been examined, alongside diplomatic records from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that illuminate Brazil's relations with the United States and the broader international context of the Cold War. Equally important are the materials produced by the National Truth Commission, established to investigate human rights violations and crimes committed under military rule.

An important component of the source base is provided by the digital archives of leading Brazilian publications - *Folha de São Paulo*, *Correio da Manhã*, *O Globo*, *Veja*, as well as the cultural journal *Civilização Brasileira*. These sources facilitate a comparison between official propaganda and the oppositional press, thereby clarifying the mechanisms of censorship and social control. Significant contributions also derive from the documentary collections of the João Goulart Foundation and the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, which contain personal correspondence, governmental records, and contemporaneous testimonies.

The thesis also draws upon memoirs authored by Ernesto Geisel, João Vicente Goulart, Golbery do Couto e Silva, and other figures within the structures of power, as well as interviews conducted in 2022 with José Cavalcanti, José Carlos Dias, Caetano Veloso, Luiz de Melo, Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, Rosa Cardoso, and Yara Xavier. These oral testimonies introduce a personal and affective dimension, complementing institutional and documentary evidence while lending the study both human and ethical depth.

Within contemporary Brazilian historiography devoted to the dictatorship, several principal interpretative currents have emerged. Among the most influential studies is the work of Jorge Ferreira<sup>1</sup>, who analyses the causes of the 1964 coup and underscores the role of the social elite and external intervention. Of particular significance is the five-volume monograph by Elio Gaspari<sup>2</sup>, which traces all phases of the regime and the transition to democracy while offering a revisionist interpretation of the role of the Left and its responsibility for the crisis.

The studies of Luiz Alberto Moniz Bandeira<sup>3</sup> and Daniel Aarão Reis<sup>4</sup>, interpret the coup as the outcome of coordinated actions undertaken by domestic elites and the United States, while also situating it within the broader social and cultural environment that enabled the consolidation of the dictatorship. In parallel, Carlos Fico<sup>5</sup>, Marcelo Mattos<sup>6</sup> and René Armand Dreifuss<sup>7</sup> conceptualise the coup as an expression of class struggle and counterrevolution, aimed at preserving the capitalist order and sustaining dependence on international capital.

Within the historiographical debate concerning the causes of the 1964 military coup and the consolidation of the dictatorship, three principal theoretical approaches can be identified. The first is the thesis of the collapse of populism, formulated by Octavio Ianni<sup>8</sup>, according to which the reformist agenda of President João Goulart became exhausted, leading to the deepening of the political crisis and the disintegration of the populist consensus. The second approach is the thesis of the “great conspiracy,” advanced by René Armand Dreifuss, which emphasises the organised intervention of right-wing forces and the United States in the preparation of the coup. The third is the thesis of institutional collapse, articulated by Alfred Stepan<sup>9</sup> and Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos<sup>10</sup>, according to which military intervention resulted from the inability of political institutions and elites to achieve consensus amid intensifying social and ideological polarisation.

More recent scholarship by Maria José de Rezende<sup>11</sup>, Marcelo Ridenti<sup>12</sup> and Marcos Napolitano<sup>13</sup> places particular emphasis on the ideological mechanisms underpinning the regime’s legitimacy, cultural resistance, and collective memory.

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<sup>1</sup> Ferreira, J., *O Governo do João Goulart: As lutas sociais no Brasil*, São Paulo, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Gaspari, E., *A Ditadura Acabada*, São Paulo, 2002, Gaspari, E., *A Ditadura Derrotada*, São Paulo, 2001, Gaspari, E., *A Ditadura Encurralada*, São Paulo, 2001, Gaspari, E., *A Ditadura Envergonhada*, São Paulo, 2000, Gaspari, E., *A Ditadura Escancarada*, São Paulo, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Bandeira, L. A. V. M., *O Governo João Goulart: As Lutas Sociais no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Reis, D. A., *Ditadura, Esquerda e Sociedade*, São Paulo, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Fico, C., *Além do Golpe: visões e controvérsias sobre 1964 e a Ditadura Militar*, Rio de Janeiro, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Mattos, M. B., *O Sindicalismo brasileiro após 1930*, São Paulo, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Dreifuss, R. A., *1964: A conquista do Estado*, Petrópolis, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Ianni, O., *O Colapso do Populismo no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro, 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Stepan, A., *Os militares na política: mudanças de padrões na vida brasileira*, São Paulo, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Santos, W. G., *O cálculo do conflito: estabilidade e crise na política brasileira*, São Paulo, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Rezende, M. J., *A Ditadura Militar No Brasil. Repressão E Pretensão De Legitimidade*, São Paulo, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Ridenti, M., *O fantasma da Revolução Brasileira*, São Paulo, 2005.

<sup>13</sup> Napolitano, M., *1964 História do regime militar Brasileiro*, São Paulo, 2002.

Within Bulgarian historiography, the present thesis constitutes the first systematic study of the Brazilian military dictatorship and the resistance to it, addressing a significant scholarly gap through the use of original Brazilian sources and contemporary literature. The historiographical overview demonstrates that the study of the dictatorship has gradually evolved from political chronicle toward an interdisciplinary analysis of society under authoritarian rule. The thesis aligns with this trajectory by approaching resistance as a process of democratic and moral renewal within the nation.

## **II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE THESIS**

### **INTRODUCTION: POLITICAL CONTEXT AND THE EMERGENCE OF MILITARY DICTATORSHIP**

#### **LATIN AMERICA FROM THE GREAT DEPRESSION TO THE EARLY 1960s**

From the beginning of the twentieth century through the 1930s, Latin American countries experienced alternating phases of consolidation and decline within oligarchic political structures. Wherever capital became highly concentrated, pronounced social inequalities emerged, in turn provoking resistance to oligarchic dominance. Across the continent, tensions increasingly manifested in uprisings among rural labourers, who, despite constituting an indispensable component of national economies, consistently occupied subordinate positions. The influence of the Russian Revolution on leftist movements in Latin America must also be taken into account.

Debates concerning the necessity of agrarian reform remained a persistent feature of the Latin American political landscape. The concentration of land in the hands of a small elite and the expansion of large landed estates meant that land failed to fulfil its social function, thereby reinforcing structural inequality. Rural workers consequently mobilised in pursuit of a more equitable distribution of land. Guided by the notion that land constituted a collective good, they advocated its full productive utilisation in order to secure sufficient food and resources for the broader population. Within this context, the 1930s witnessed the emergence of populism in Latin America. Populist movements sought to integrate diverse social classes into an overarching national project, a factor that largely accounted for their political success.

From the 1950s onward, however, populist regimes increasingly proved incapable of responding to mounting social demands and gradually lost influence as a result of their failure to overcome deepening social contradictions and the growing mistrust of one of their most traditional pillars of support—the military. This crisis coincided with the onset of the Cold War, which became a decisive factor in shaping the continent's political trajectory. Revolution, socialism, social movements, and agrarian reform emerged as central concepts within South American political

discourse. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 further intensified fears of communism owing to its profoundly social character.

Amid the crisis of populism in South America and the reverberations of the Cuban Revolution, the United States government adopted measures aimed at containing the perceived communist threat, motivated by fears of the radicalisation of social movements that might precipitate further revolutionary upheavals across the continent. In this climate, democratic regimes began to collapse one after another, replaced by military governments supported by the United States. Parallel to the establishment of these dictatorships, opposition forces organised and a range of leftist movements took shape.

#### BRAZIL, 1930-1964

The rise of Getúlio Vargas to the presidency in 1930 marked the end of the Old Republic and inaugurated the Vargas Era. For Brazil, this period was characterised by modernisation, industrialisation, and economic expansion, but also by increasingly authoritarian governance. One of the defining features of Vargas's rule was his labour policy, which formed an integral component of the national economic and political project of the *Estado Novo*. Central to this project was the construction of a major steel-producing complex intended to serve as a pillar of Brazil's industrial transformation. In pursuit of financing and technical support, Vargas adopted a pragmatic and at times ambivalent foreign policy. In 1940, Brazil concluded an agreement under which the United States provided financial and technological assistance for the construction of the Volta Redonda steelworks in the state of Rio de Janeiro. In return, Brazil entered the Second World War on the side of the Allies.

The period between 1946 and 1964 is commonly described by Brazilian historians as the Populist Republic. Vargas's populism rested upon a close linkage between labour legislation and a broader industrialisation strategy. Labour law promised state protection of workers' rights in labour-capital relations, while industrialisation was presented as a shared national interest uniting the bourgeoisie and the working classes. Vargas thus placed considerable faith in the advantages of class collaboration for both employers and workers.

During the 1950s, Brazil confronted a severe problem of land concentration in the hands of a limited elite, further exacerbating social inequality and constraining economic development. By the early 1960s, the issue of agrarian reform had moved beyond parliamentary debate and assumed increasingly confrontational forms among those most directly affected - rural populations. Traditional pressures on the peasantry were intensified by a new phase of capitalist development marked by heightened labour demands, growing instability, mass dismissals, and social marginalisation.

João Goulart assumed the presidency amid mounting political turbulence. The country faced serious challenges in both education and agriculture, while protests led by rural and student movements intensified. Brazil struggled with a substantial external debt and persistently rising inflation. The Profit Remittance Law, which prohibited multinational corporations from transferring more than ten per cent of their profits abroad, alienated groups aligned with foreign capital. Goulart's presidency was fundamentally shaped by debates surrounding the government's proposal for the Basic Reforms - an ambitious programme of structural transformation designed to address the country's systemic problems, combat inequality, and facilitate broader national development. These reforms encompassed agrarian, educational, electoral, fiscal, banking, and urban sectors. Among them, agrarian reform proved both the most fully elaborated and the most contentious, as it envisaged the expropriation of large tracts of underutilised land.

Despite the considerable obstacles confronting his administration, Goulart succeeded in advancing numerous initiatives and laying the groundwork for projects that would bear fruit even after the military coup of 1964. His government strictly limited foreign financing for the importation of machinery and equipment that could be produced domestically, thereby seeking to revive Vargas's developmental vision. By redirecting industrialisation toward core sectors and the production of capital goods, Goulart aimed to foster a more balanced and autonomous trajectory for Brazilian capitalism. These nationalist policies conflicted with the interests of multinational corporations - particularly American capital - progressively diminishing the prospects for rapprochement with Washington. Within the context of Cold War geopolitics, the removal of Goulart increasingly came to be regarded as essential to containing Brazil's perceived strategic and economic assertiveness.

The military coup that overthrew President Goulart in 1964 had deeper origins. It emerged from a complex process which, although shaped by international dynamics, was fundamentally rooted in Brazilian political developments. While it is difficult to identify a precise point of origin, military intervention in Brazil's political life began to take clearer form with Vargas's presidential candidacy in 1950, viewed by segments of the armed forces as a threat to democratic order. His electoral victory triggered a military crisis, escalating tensions that ultimately culminated in the president's suicide. Subsequently, Juscelino Kubitschek was elected president, with João Goulart as vice president. Because Goulart was widely perceived as Vargas's political heir, efforts were undertaken to prevent the presidential ticket from assuming office. Nevertheless, they completed their mandate, and Goulart was re-elected vice president in the following electoral cycle. In 1962, President Jânio Quadros abruptly resigned, calculating that the resulting crisis would enable him to dissolve Congress and govern with military backing. The strategy failed: Congress accepted his resignation and declared Goulart president. This outcome proved unacceptable to conservative sectors and the armed forces,

which sought to block his inauguration. Military pressure on Congress produced the first - and only - experiment with parliamentary republicanism in Brazilian history. These developments revealed the growing influence of the military within political life, reinforced by cumulative political and ideological tensions that had been intensifying across the country for years.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE DICTATORSHIP AND THE FIRST MANIFESTATIONS OF RESISTANCE, 1964-1968**

#### 1. THE COUP, 1963-1964

From October 1963 onward, Brazil's political crisis intensified tensions and encouraged the implementation of a conspiracy that had long been in preparation, thereby transforming the crisis into an institutional deadlock. Only a single step separated this impasse from a military coup. Defeats in the parliamentary struggles of 1963 over the reforms negotiated in Congress, combined with the economic crisis, appeared to leave João Goulart's government increasingly disoriented. Pressured from both the left and the right, the president saw his room for manoeuvre steadily narrowing. In September, just before the final agrarian reform proposal was rejected by Congress, the politico-military crisis began that would exhaust the government in the months that followed.

Historians frequently argue that Goulart's government proved incapable of managing mounting conflicts and that radical sectors of the left helped prepare the ground for the coup. Even if this interpretation contains a measure of truth, the coup represented far more than the mere product of a moment of political crisis. The events of 1964 constituted not simply a coup against a government, but against an emerging regime, a nascent elite, and a developing - albeit politically ill-defined - societal project. Many of those who supported Goulart's removal were likely not fully aware of this broader historical significance. The same, however, cannot be said of the core groups directing the coup within the armed forces, the Superior War College, and the Institute for Social Research and Studies (IPES). For some time, these actors had been outlining the contours of a new state. It is evident that both conspirators and government supporters initially believed this to be another military intervention in the Brazilian tradition - swift and short-lived, soon to return power to civilian authorities within a "cleansed" political environment. Such had been the case in 1945 and, in a different manner, in 1954. In neither instance did the fall of Vargas, precipitated by a political crisis encouraged by coup leaders, pave the way for a right-wing military dictatorship. In 1964, however, the signs were different. Although the government of Castelo Branco promised a provisional mandate, it did not conceal its strategic objectives - namely, a policy oriented toward capital accumulation that required long-term authoritarian measures. This outcome diverged from the

expectations of many coup leaders, who had envisaged a “corrective intervention” followed by a prompt restoration of elections. The civil-military coup rapidly evolved into a military regime.

The military coup and the inglorious defeat of the so-called progressive forces left a profound mark on the Brazilian left. Even those political groups that had previously warned of the possibility of a right-wing coup and the need for organised resistance failed to undertake concrete measures to defend Goulart’s government. The Brazilian Communist Party and other reformist organisations passively witnessed the disintegration of their ideals and of the social project they had championed. In an international context, this defeat generated a broader debate regarding the crisis of the left - its organisational inertia, lack of strategic unity, and inability to respond effectively to the contradictions and dynamics of modern class societies. Within this climate of national and international contestation, the failure of the Brazilian left in 1964 produced irreversible transformations within the existing clandestine movements, particularly the Brazilian Communist Party.

Despite the difficulties of coordination among the conspirators, the military coup succeeded by capitalising on the country’s economic and social instability. Social tensions, inequality, corruption, and regional discontent contributed to the destabilisation of society, thereby rendering the coup possible. Business sectors, political elites, the media, the middle classes, and segments of the intelligentsia turned against the government in search of a more stable and economically favourable alternative. Support from the United States played a significant role in both the execution and consolidation of the coup. Under the pretext of a communist threat, the United States became involved in the organisation and implementation of the conspiracy in order to safeguard its own economic and political interests.

## 2. INSTITUTIONAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS

The government of General Castelo Branco may be regarded as the institutional architect of the dictatorship. During his administration, four Institutional Acts were issued, the Press Law was adopted, and a new Constitution was promulgated, enshrining the principle of national security. Aware that the regime could not be sustained indefinitely through coercion alone, the Brazilian military sought to justify its actions of “national cleansing” and the expulsion of the “red threat” by attributing legal legitimacy to the coup. In their effort to legitimise the seizure of power through juridical instruments, the armed forces constructed an unrestricted political authority in which democratic principles were effectively disregarded. Thus, the “power base” deliberately created by and for the military during the regime’s early years took shape through a wide array of specific legal measures, including seventeen Institutional Acts, 104 Complementary Acts, an Electoral Code,

numerous decrees, and the Constitution of 1967 - all carefully designed to weaken resistance and expand the regime's repressive capacity against sectors deemed dangerous to the nation.

In the sphere of foreign policy, the government of General Castelo Branco was strongly aligned with the interests of the United States, not only in recognition of its role in the organisation of the coup but also as a natural consequence of the geopolitical vision shared by the conspirators. Throughout the dictatorship, military leaders with nationalist leanings were not absent - albeit without fundamentally disrupting relations with the United States, particularly within the broader context of the Cold War. Castelo Branco's policy, however, bore little resemblance to either economic or ideological nationalism; rather, it operated in full synchrony with that of the United States, as the ruling authorities considered the recovery of Brazilian capitalism to be dependent upon investment and support from Washington. Roberto Campos and Otávio Bulhões, prominent advocates of economic liberalism and extensive openness to international capital, became the principal architects of the government's external and economic policy.

In the economic sphere, governmental measures were swift and dynamic, suggesting prospects for short-term growth, albeit with uncertain outcomes. Finance Minister Delfim Neto reduced interest rates, thereby restraining inflation and consumption, while Labour Minister Jarbas Passarinho promised to review the stringent wage policy implemented under Castelo Branco. In foreign affairs, the minister responsible, Magalhães Pinto, adopted a more nationalist orientation, signalling a degree of distance from Washington. These policy adjustments clearly aimed to prioritise nationalism, permit a limited degree of criticism, and revive economic growth in order to regain the support of the middle classes, which had eroded during Castelo Branco's administration.

During the initial phase of the dictatorship in Brazil, significant economic transformations occurred, associated with efforts to stabilise the economy and implement reforms under military rule. The government actively promoted industrialisation and economic modernisation, with sectors such as steel production, automobile manufacturing, and electric power receiving substantial support and investment. A range of economic plans and reforms was introduced to stimulate growth and enhance economic resilience. Yet, while these changes contributed to improvements in economic stability and expansion, they simultaneously created conditions that curtailed civil liberties and political rights.

### 3. POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL RESISTANCE

The leadership of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) proved uncertain in responding to its defeat and was equally incapable of undertaking a process of self-criticism regarding its actions prior to the coup. This gave rise to the most significant internal struggle in the party's history, at the conclusion of which General Secretary Luís Carlos Prestes and the majority of the leadership

succeeded in preserving the party's traditional line, albeit at the cost of diminished prestige and political influence. This was compounded by persistent divisions at every organisational level - from the grassroots to the highest governing bodies - triggering a fragmentation from which the party would never fully recover.

The PCB remained largely passive during the coup and throughout the initial years of the military dictatorship in Brazil. The Brazilian left relied on its favourable relations with various social sectors and with the Church, failing to grasp fully the magnitude of unfolding events. This produced dissatisfaction, internal divisions, and a search for new paths of struggle against the military regime. A substantial proportion of party members severed their ties with the PCB and established guerrilla groups and alternative organisations more inclined toward radical methods of resistance. The resulting fragmentation and estrangement among the party's factions weakened its organisational strength and public influence, thereby undermining its legitimacy in the eyes of both society and other groups advocating democratic change.

Rural guerrilla movements emerged from the ideas of activists closely connected to agrarian life and committed to improving working conditions for Brazil's vast rural population, which endured persistent persecution from large landowners fearful of agrarian reform. Organisations such as the Peasants' League were established with the aim of enhancing the living conditions of rural communities. Given prevailing social conditions, these groups faced considerable difficulty in confronting powerful landowners due to their limited resources. This contentious mobilisation, intended to improve the lives of peasants often treated in conditions akin to servitude, produced repercussions in the country's interior through a range of direct actions.

Between 1965 and 1968, university-based groups across the country broke with the Party and founded what became known as student dissident movements. In Rio de Janeiro, DI-RJ and DI-GB emerged, later evolving into the Revolutionary Movement of 8 October (MR-8). Additional dissident organisations appeared in Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo, the latter subsequently integrating into the National Liberation Action, among others. The principal factions that split from the PCB included those led by Carlos Marighella, founder of the National Liberation Action, and Mário Alves, who established the Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party. Both attracted supporters from within the Party nationwide and organised themselves on a national scale, although the National Liberation Action operated primarily in São Paulo, while the Brazilian Revolutionary Communist Party was centred in Guanabara. Between 1964 and 1968, the PCB lost more than half of its members to advocates of armed struggle. The Party withdrew from the political arena for nearly a decade, thereby managing to shield itself from repression. New organisations emerged, including the Revolutionary Communist Party in the country's northeast and the Red Wing of the Communist Party of Brazil in

the central and southeastern regions. The latter itself experienced internal divisions that led to the creation of the Tiradentes Revolutionary Movement and the Revolutionary Marxist Movement. Popular movements likewise underwent significant transformation during the 1960s, culminating in the establishment of the Workers' Revolutionary Party in 1968-1969.

Left-wing nationalist movements, composed primarily of lower-ranking former military officers dismissed in 1964, created the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, which in 1967 organised the Caparaó guerrilla initiative. It operated in the region between the states of Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo and was formed by approximately thirty former military personnel along with several civilians, with the support of Leonel Brizola, who at the time was in Uruguay. Their objective was to confront the military regime, yet their efforts were thwarted before they could fully materialise. Initially, the movement received backing from Fidel Castro and financial assistance from Cuba, and its members were sent there for military training. The group established its camp in Caparaó National Park, a remote area offering difficult access and numerous hiding places. Owing to poorly timed actions and the loss of Cuban financial support, the guerrillas were left to fend for themselves. Forced to steal from local inhabitants in order to survive, they failed to secure popular backing and were ultimately exposed when one of the guerrillas descended to a nearby village for supplies. They were captured and imprisoned in Linhares.

At the end of 1967, the Broad Front launched a protest campaign that coincided with the radicalisation of student movements. The convergence of these two protest fronts represented the government's greatest fear, as it had the potential to constitute a genuine political threat to the regime. Early the following year, the government banned the activities of the Broad Front. Student movements moved beyond military control and succeeded in attracting the attention and sympathy of segments of the liberal press. For the authorities, the Brazilian student movement became a focal point of revolutionary activity, nourished in part by the archaic structure of higher education. Student militancy was thus framed as a reaction against outdated institutional arrangements. Their efforts to reform and modernise the educational system were grounded in criticism of obsolete and ineffective methods of university admission and governance.

Although the labour movement was heavily repressed and controlled from the outset of the dictatorship, it gradually reorganised, articulated its demands, and re-emerged as a social and political actor. In April 1968, fifteen thousand metalworkers went on strike demanding higher wages. A 25 per cent wage reduction and its inevitable social consequences, rising living costs, and declining job security were increasingly felt by workers. In July, a group of metalworkers occupied a factory in Osasco, in the state of São Paulo. Trade unions intervened, and the army employed repressive force to retake the facility. Both strikes were organised and led by revolutionary leftist groups that had

infiltrated industrial workplaces and dominated metalworkers' unions. It appeared that the government's gravest fears were being realised - the radicalisation of student and labour movements, reinforced by growing opposition among the middle classes, intellectuals, and artists.

After 1964, Brazil's intellectual sphere became a prominent arena of opposition to the military dictatorship. An almost automatic association emerged between being an intellectual and being an opponent of the regime. Many intellectuals drew upon leftist values and traditions, shaping the character of the opposition. Yet despite this apparent ideological homogeneity, the intellectual world encompassed a broad spectrum of ideas, doctrines, and political positions. Each field of activity experienced distinct trajectories in the formation of this intellectual identity, which came to define the oppositional camp and consistently posed a challenge to the military's efforts to consolidate symbolic and political legitimacy before society.

Democratic sectors quickly joined in condemning what was described as "cultural terrorism," thereby fostering, within the cultural sphere, an alliance between leftist circles and liberalism in search of a common front against the regime. The historical role of the arts proved particularly significant—not only in shaping the emotional consciousness of a generation committed to democracy, but also in idealising resistance as a symbolic act of conscience in the face of repression. The culture and arts of resistance were far more than mere reflections or instruments of oppositional politics; they were symptomatic of the profound dilemmas confronting the opposition itself.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE YEARS OF LEAD, 1968-1977**

#### **1. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE REPRESSIVE APPARATUS**

In 1968, the world experienced an intense political and social upheaval. Within a short span of time, numerous demonstrations took place across different regions of the globe, and this wave reached Brazil as well. A series of student protests at the beginning of the year provoked harsh police repression and resulted in multiple fatalities. In protest against the policies of the dictatorship, student leaders from across the country organised occupations of university buildings. Large-scale labour strikes were also mobilised, while robberies carried out by left-wing armed groups became more frequent as a means of securing financial resources. The Brazilian journalist Zuenir Ventura famously described 1968, in his book of the same title, as "the year that never ended." Embedded in this phrase is the sense of rupture with a historical moment imbued with liberal promises and the onset of a new era marked by foreboding.

The "Years of Lead" began with the promulgation of AI-5. Through this measure, the president was granted authority to dissolve the National Congress and the legislative assemblies of the

individual states - powers he promptly exercised. The Act stipulated that during the enforced closure of federal and state legislative bodies, their functions would be assumed by the president and state governors, including the authority to enact constitutional amendments. Under the pretext of national security, the government was authorised to intervene in the administration of states and municipalities, remove local officials, and appoint military authorities in their place. The president also obtained the power to dismiss immediately any public servant suspected of subversion or unwilling to cooperate with the regime, a prerogative widely used to control the composition of the Electoral College. According to the provisions of the Act, Institutional Acts - and any measures derived from them - were exempt from judicial review.

The military issued the Act in response to opposition efforts to strengthen democratic and autonomous public spaces. Rather than addressing societal concerns, the authorities opted for stricter censorship and the curtailment of fundamental rights. The Act exerted a profound influence on the country's political climate, isolating the regime both internationally and domestically while deepening social tensions. Power was effectively seized by the so-called "hard line" within the upper echelons of the armed forces, at the expense of the more moderate faction. The dictatorship thus acquired an instrument that granted extraordinary powers, much like Institutional Act No. 1; unlike its predecessor, however, AI-5 had no expiration date and opened the possibility of indefinite military rule. In Brazilian historical memory, it occupies a paradoxical place: on the one hand, it coincided with a period of robust economic growth; on the other, it marked an era of brutality and repression, transforming the state from an authoritarian system into a violent police state. If debate had previously persisted regarding the nature of the dictatorship - whether military or civil-military - thereafter the distinction became clearer. The armed forces increasingly distanced themselves from their civilian allies with more moderate or liberal orientations. Freedom of expression was curtailed, asset confiscation permitted, and human rights restricted. President Artur Costa e Silva readily accepted the proposed reforms that conferred exceptional powers upon the executive. In order to resume the purge of public administration, guarantees of tenure, irremovability, and institutional stability were suspended. The government could dismiss, remove, or forcibly retire any public servant without the need for due process or formal investigation. Within days of AI-5's promulgation, repression intensified throughout the country, with operations targeting students, trade unionists, politicians, workers, and artists. After 13 December 1968, the dictatorship became markedly more authoritarian, narrowing the scope of action available to civilian allies, who, although still present, now occupied a clearly subordinate position.

Repression against leftist guerrillas fostered the emergence of a new policing culture grounded in autonomy and impunity for state agents, manifested in flagrant violations of the law such as brutal

torture and extrajudicial killings. Torture was not a novel practice within policing traditions, yet it was refined and systematised within the context of political repression. Neither the judiciary nor society proved capable of controlling or preventing its application, whether due to negligence, powerlessness, or complicity. To this must be added the overt or latent racial prejudices embedded within Brazilian society, which tolerated violence as a mechanism of social control over the poor and marginalised. Within a context of restricted civil liberties and rapid urban demographic expansion - conditions conducive to social disintegration and criminality - such policies generated profound social and humanitarian consequences. Beyond failing to resolve the problem of crime, as remains evident today, this “ethos of elimination” tended in the long term to erode the legitimacy of the police, who came to inspire not respect or fear, but rather hostility.

## 2. THE BRAZILIAN ECONOMIC MIRACLE, 1969-1974

The military frequently boasted that in 1964 Brazil ranked sixty-fourth in the world by GDP, yet in less than a decade it had become the planet’s tenth-largest economy. This remarkable leap, however, was achieved at the cost of declining wages, the deepening of structural dependence on international capital, and an extreme concentration of income - even by capitalist standards. The difficulty lies in the fact that during the decade following the end of military rule, civilian governments not only failed to reverse this situation but further exacerbated the economic disorder, thereby generating a sense of nostalgia for the “economic miracle,” which continues to be invoked as an argument in defence of the dictatorship’s achievements. Undoubtedly, the military regime constituted a period of consolidation for large-scale capital in Brazil, reinforcing a structural process already set in motion prior to the coup through targeted economic policies and facilitated by the absence of democracy, which afforded the state considerable bureaucratic autonomy.

The economy continued to expand until the late 1970s; however, the concentration of investment, rising inflation, and declining consumption among the middle classes fuelled growing social discontent. Workers increasingly felt the effects of wage reductions and accelerating inflation, which reached 95 per cent annually by the end of the decade. In 1964, the conspirators had exploited the economic crisis to remove President Goulart from power; by the late 1970s, however, support for the military regime was eroding for precisely the same reason. The growth of social dissatisfaction and the loss of societal backing during this period underscore the importance of social factors in the formation of public legitimacy. The economic transformations associated with the “economic miracle” were accompanied by an inequitable distribution of wealth and a deterioration in social standards, developments that ultimately undermined support for the regime. Economic stability,

therefore, proved insufficient to sustain social legitimacy, and the regime's base of support progressively weakened.

### 3. OPPOSITION AND RESISTANCE DURING THE YEARS OF LEAD

As state repression intensified, organisations engaged in armed resistance underwent increasing radicalisation. Between 1968 and 1972, hundreds of guerrilla operations were recorded, including bank robberies, arms theft, kidnappings of high-ranking foreign officials, and armed attacks. The National Liberation Alliance, formed from diverse social segments, emerged as one of the most emblematic guerrilla organisations in the country. Its leader, Carlos Marighella, sought to generate resources through urban guerrilla actions in order to support rural insurgent movements. His strategy envisaged striking at large landowners, expanding the movement into the country's interior, and ultimately advancing towards national liberation. The regime designated him "enemy number one," not merely because of his intellectual capabilities but also due to his ability to unite disparate opposition groups, organise armed resistance, and become a symbol of the revolutionary struggle against the dictatorship.

Carlos Marighella played a pivotal role in resistance to the authoritarian regime. His strategy of urban guerrilla warfare represented an innovative and radical model for the overthrow of the dictatorship. Drawing upon his political experience, he articulated a coherent theory and practice of the urban guerrilla fighter. He recognised the importance of securing financial resources from urban centres to sustain rural insurgencies and intensify the struggle against the regime. His advocacy of attacks on large landowners and the expansion of operations into the country's interior reflected an aspiration towards national liberation and the creation of a more equitable social order. Marighella confronted the regime through a loosely organised, decentralised structure that mirrored his revolutionary principles. Even after his death, his ideas and strategies continued to shape the struggle for democracy and social change in Brazil.

Guerrilla warfare in Brazil emerged from the impasse and divisions within the left following the military coup. Participants in the insurgency included political activists, students, professionals, and ordinary citizens, motivated by a wide range of factors: the defence of democracy and human rights, the pursuit of social justice, and resistance to the repression and violence imposed by military rule. Guerrillas were driven by a commitment to freedom and the affirmation of civil liberties within an authoritarian context. They organised themselves into small cells or lent support to political organisations operating outside the institutional framework of the military government, seeking to transform the country's political landscape.

## CHAPTER III

### POLITICAL LIBERALISATION AND THE END OF THE DICTATORSHIP, 1977-1985

#### 1. BETWEEN LIBERALISATION AND AUTHORITARIANISM

The paragraph characterises the “opening” under President Ernesto Geisel as a managed “transition from above,” in which the regime partially relaxed its grip - through the limitation of censorship, the introduction of partial amnesty, and the rehabilitation of moderate opponents - while preserving the core mechanisms of control. The 1977 normative package (the so-called Constitutional Amendment No. 7) institutionalised the predominance of the executive by enabling indirect elections for one-third of the Senate and for state governors, distorting representation in favour of the regime, lowering the quorum required for constitutional amendments, and extending the presidential term - an array of instruments that cloaked authoritarianism in a procedural-legal façade. Whenever confronted with the prospect of autonomous parliamentary initiative, Geisel closed Congress by invoking AI-5, thereby delineating the limits of liberalisation. The rhetoric of “democracy” served both domestic and international legitimation, while figures such as Petrônio Portela simulated dialogue with the moderate opposition in order to channel change into corridors deemed safe for the regime.

At the core lay a dual pressure: internal, arising from public expectations and new forms of mobilisation; and external, shaped by the international human rights environment of the late Cold War. The regime sought to “breathe life” into its quest for legitimacy by constructing an ideological vision of a “responsible opening” and relying on the support of large-scale capital as a guarantor of stability and profitability. This logic was consistent with the doctrine of “national security” and with counterinsurgency practices through which the state legitimised surveillance and selective repression even while speaking the language of reform.

The state itself remained deeply militarised, and liberalisation was contingent upon consensus within the armed forces. Tensions between “pragmatists” and “hardliners” escalated. Far-right factions within the security services sabotaged the opening through acts of violence and terror, while the conflict between Geisel and the Minister of the Army, Sylvio Frota, culminated in the latter’s dismissal on 12 October 1977 - an event that consolidated presidential control and cleared the path for the carefully prepared succession of João Figueiredo. The ruling elite had orchestrated Figueiredo’s succession well in advance, and his election through indirect voting in 1978 ensured a “slow, gradual, and secure” transition - one that avoided “revanchism” while preserving the structural role of the military.

At the same time, society intensified its pressure. The amnesty campaign and the “*Diretas Já!*” movement transformed the memory of armed resistance into a moral resource for civic mobilisation, thereby accelerating the delegitimation of the dictatorship. In parliament, the “authentic” deputies of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB) exercised moral and institutional opposition, for which they paid the price through the revocation of mandates and political rights under AI-5 - an indication of the late regime’s simulacrum of legality. Between the façade of liberalisation “from above” and the expanding sphere of participation “from below,” a dynamic emerged that ultimately exhausted the authoritarian project and facilitated the transfer to civilian rule in 1985.

## 2. OPPOSITION AND NEW FORMS OF RESISTANCE

During the 1970s, the MDB - the only legal opposition party - became the focal point of a broad anti-dictatorial coalition. Following its electoral victory in 1974, the party acquired renewed political weight, while its “authentic” wing adopted a more radical stance, opening itself to leftist groups and former participants in the armed resistance. In this way, a political front emerged that united parliamentary, social, and intellectual opposition and called into question the very legitimacy of the regime’s top-down “opening.” At the same time, the Catholic Church underwent a profound transformation under the influence of Liberation Theology and the Second Vatican Council. From an initial ally of the 1964 coup, it evolved into a moral opponent of the dictatorship. Archbishop Hélder Câmara and other members of the clergy denounced violence and social injustice, while the Church committed itself to the poor through grassroots ecclesial communities and social movements. Thus, religious discourse became an instrument of social critique and political emancipation.

By the late 1970s, other institutional actors had likewise become increasingly active. The Brazilian Bar Association and the Journalists’ Association, initially supportive of the regime, gradually repositioned themselves as defenders of the rule of law, freedom of expression, and human rights. Their declarations and manifestos of 1977-1978, including the “Letter to the Brazilians” and the Church’s own statements, articulated a new moral and civic legitimacy that challenged the legal and ideological foundations of the dictatorship.

Meanwhile, the left reorganised itself. Armed groups disintegrated, yet their energies were redirected into trade unionism, the student movement, and neighbourhood initiatives. Communist parties abandoned the idea of revolution and embraced democracy as a value in its own right. The Catholic left, inspired by a socially grounded Christian humanism, established local structures of self-organisation in impoverished urban districts, while Trotskyist and autonomist groups revitalised university spaces.

On the urban peripheries, particularly in São Paulo, the social contradictions of the “economic miracle” generated new forms of mobilisation. Women’s “mothers’ clubs” evolved into the Movement Against the High Cost of Living and later into the Anti-Hunger Movement, bringing together impoverished women, parish communities, and social activists. These initiatives elevated economic grievances to the level of political contestation, transforming everyday life into a site of resistance. By linking domestic labour and family care to notions of citizenship and dignity, they marked a radical shift in the understanding of politics under authoritarian conditions.

Simultaneously, the industrial working class re-emerged as an autonomous political actor. The strikes of 1978-1980 in São Paulo’s industrial belt, led by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the proponents of the “new trade unionism,” fractured the state-corporatist system of labour relations. The campaign for a 34 per cent wage increase became emblematic of a broader transition from social to political demands - from the defence of labour rights to the insistence on democracy and representation. Out of these struggles arose the Unified Workers’ Central (CUT) and the Workers’ Party (PT), organisations that would play a decisive role in the country’s democratic transition.

In this period, culture likewise became a site of resistance. The return from exile of figures such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Ferreira Gullar, and Augusto Boal revitalised critical public discourse. Music, theatre, and cinema assumed the functions of publicity and collective memory, exposing the moral bankruptcy of the dictatorship. Taken together, these political, social, cultural, and moral processes contributed to the emergence of a new civil society that eroded the regime’s ideological and social foundations. Resistance ceased to be fragmented and instead evolved into a network of interconnected initiatives - from the Church and trade unions to universities, neighbourhoods, and artistic circles. By the end of the 1970s, the dictatorship had lost control over the process of “opening”: it was no longer a strategy imposed from above but the outcome of mounting social pressure and moral transformation.

The administrations of Geisel and Figueiredo thus emerge as a period marked by duality, characterised by the regime’s attempts to orchestrate democratisation “from above” and the growing activism of society “from below,” which transformed democracy into a collective moral and political project. It was precisely this multidimensional awakening - among workers, women, intellectuals, the Church, and the cultural sphere - that prepared the definitive delegitimation of military rule and the transition to democratic governance in 1985.

### 3. THE TRANSITION AND THE END OF THE DICTATORSHIP, 1979-1985

The paragraph examines the final stage of the Brazilian military dictatorship (1979-1985) - the period of the so-called “controlled political opening” initiated by President João Figueiredo. This

process constituted a contradictory and dual transition: the formal liberalisation of the regime “from above,” accompanied by continuing repression, violence, and social mobilisation “from below.”

Figueiredo’s inaugural address in 1979 symbolised this new phase - a gesture of “reconciliation” that nonetheless concealed the preservation of the repressive apparatus and the military’s hold on power. The transition was not intended to bring about democratisation but rather to adapt authority to new social and international conditions. The opening sought to channel societal pressure without undermining the authoritarian architecture. Yet the very relaxation of control unleashed powerful forces of social mobilisation that the dictatorship could no longer contain.

In the early 1980s, the economic crisis, mounting external debt, and accelerating inflation eroded the regime’s legitimacy. Workers’ strikes in São Paulo’s industrial belt, led by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, transformed labour demands into a political act of resistance. The strikes in São Bernardo legitimised the “new trade unionism” and gave rise to the Workers’ Party, which provided political expression for demands for social justice and participation. At the same time, a new civil society took shape, gradually reclaiming public space from the state.

The regime responded with repression and renewed attempts at control, including through the 1979 Amnesty Law, which formally released political prisoners while guaranteeing impunity for perpetrators. Simultaneously, the military sought to confine democratisation within institutional frameworks devoid of substantive social content. The Party Reform Law of 1979 was intended to fragment the opposition but instead facilitated the emergence of new political parties such as the Democratic Labour Party, the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement, and, most notably, the Workers’ Party.

After 1980, the dictatorship lost control both over society and over its own internal structures. The escalation of right-wing violence, bomb attacks, and para-state terror exposed the regime’s disintegration and the absence of centralised authority. Political and economic crises deepened, while social energy shifted from strikes to the streets and to mass protest. It was within this context that the “*Diretas Já!*” movement emerged - the largest civic mobilisation in Brazilian history. Uniting millions across diverse social strata, it demanded the restoration of direct presidential elections. Although the Dante de Oliveira constitutional amendment was rejected in 1984, the movement definitively delegitimised the dictatorship and paved the way for the opposition’s victory.

Political unity between the moderate opposition and dissidents from the ruling party led to the formation of the Democratic Alliance, which advanced the candidacy of Tancredo Neves. His election by the Electoral College in January 1985 marked the symbolic end of military rule. Following Neves’s death, his vice-president, José Sarney, assumed the presidency, inaugurating the New Republic - the first civilian government after twenty-one years of dictatorship.

Brazil's transition was not an abrupt rupture but a prolonged process of social and moral renewal. Democracy was not merely an institutional restoration but the outcome of accumulated collective energy, resistance, and cultural mobilisation. The military's controlled "opening" gradually gave way to democratisation imposed by society itself. It was civil movements - trade unions, the Church, intellectuals, and the new political parties - that ultimately secured the political space within which modern Brazilian democracy was born.

## CONCLUSION

By the late 1960s, following the introduction of AI-5, repression had reached its apex, while armed groups such as those led by Carlos Marigella and Carlos Lamarca became symbols of resolute yet ultimately doomed resistance. Their defeat marked the end of the guerrilla phase but consolidated the moral mythos of the struggle against dictatorship. During the 1970s, the centre of opposition shifted towards the cultural and social spheres: music, theatre, cinema, and literature were transformed into weapons against censorship and instruments for sustaining critical consciousness. At the same time, the Catholic Church and Liberation Theology provided both moral and organisational support for civic resistance.

From the late 1970s onward, economic crisis and deepening social inequalities generated a broader movement - the "new trade unionism," embodied in the metalworkers' strikes in São Paulo and in the leadership of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva. Workers' protests transferred the struggle for democracy from cultural circles to the industrial cities, transforming it into a mass social force. Within this context, the dictatorship initiated a process of "controlled opening," which gradually escaped its control.

In the early 1980s, the "*Diretas Já!*" movement symbolised the culmination of a long-standing process of social and political mobilisation. It united diverse social groups and definitively delegitimised the military regime. Although the constitutional amendment introducing direct elections was not adopted, pressure from the streets rendered democratisation irreversible. The transition of 1985, culminating in the election of Tancredo Neves and the accession of José Sarney, was not a revolution but the outcome of accumulated social tension, moral pressure, and institutional compromise. Despite its contradictions, this process demonstrates that Brazilian democracy was won through the convergence of multiple forms of resistance - political, cultural, social, and moral - and stands as an example of how a society can transform defeat into a pathway toward democratic renewal.

Resistance to the Brazilian military dictatorship constitutes one of the most compelling examples of a prolonged and multilayered process of democratisation, through which society

gradually reclaimed the political and moral space appropriated by authoritarian rule. From the initial manifestations of political opposition and armed struggle to the cultural, trade union, and civic mobilisation of the 1970s and 1980s, this resistance assumed diverse forms, strategies, and ideological expressions while preserving its fundamental objective - the restoration of democracy and human dignity. The resilience of this process lay precisely in its flexibility and capacity for transformation: when one arena of struggle was suppressed, its energy flowed into another - from arms to words, from culture to the streets, from isolated acts of defiance to mass mobilisation. Ultimately, the fall of the dictatorship in 1985 was not the result of a sudden political collapse but of the gradual exhaustion of authoritarian hegemony under the pressure of a society that learned to organise itself, to think collectively, and to act in concert. In this sense, democracy in Brazil was not merely an institution restored but a historical achievement - secured through the interplay of political courage, cultural creativity, and social solidarity. It was the product not of “reconciliation from above,” but of a profound process of societal maturation in which the struggle against fear evolved into a struggle for participation, memory, and justice.

### **III. ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP**

The present doctoral thesis constitutes the first comprehensive and systematic study of resistance to the Brazilian military dictatorship within Bulgarian historiography. It approaches resistance as a complex political, social, and cultural phenomenon, tracing its evolution from armed and intellectual forms of opposition to the mass civic and trade union movements that emerged in the final phase of the regime. The principal scholarly contributions of the study lie in its critical engagement with leading Brazilian historiographical interpretations, its elucidation of the internal dynamics and transformation of the opposition, its emphasis on cultural resistance as a distinctive mode of political action, and its introduction of previously unexamined sources and materials into academic circulation. In doing so, the thesis fills a significant lacuna in Bulgarian historical scholarship by offering a fresh perspective on the process of democratisation in Latin America and by affirming the importance of Brazil as a key subject for comparative research on resistance to authoritarian regimes.

### **IV. PUBLICATIONS ARISING FROM THE RESEARCH**

- *Тропикализъмът - културна експлозия по време на диктатура* – In: Сборник от Научна конференция "Кризите като катарзис - политически социални, стопански и културни измерения на екстремните ситуации в историята", Pleven, 2022, pp. 334-342.

- *Карлос Маригела - между поезията и партизанството* - АНАМНЕЗА, Volume. XVI, 2021, No. 7, pp. 103-113, ISSN 1312-9295.
- *Социални, политически и културни движения по време на военната диктатура в Бразилия* - АНАМНЕЗА, Volume XV, 2020, No. 4, ISSN 1312-9295.
- *Бразилия във Втората световна война – причини и последици* – In: сборник от Научна конференция „Войната за историята. 75 години след Втората световна война”, pp. 243-251.
- *Как превратът от 1964 г. в Бразилия се превърна в революция* – In: Сборник от Научна конференция в памет на проф. д-р Тодор Попнеделев, Sofia, Университетско издателство, 2023, pp. 305-314.
- *Каetano Велозо - Тропическа истина* – forthcoming
- *Тропикализъм - култура и политика* – forthcoming