

REVIEW

of the doctoral dissertation submitted by **Kremena Diash**,
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entitled:

“The Evolution of Resistance and Opposition Movements against the Military Dictatorship in Brazil (1964–1985)”

submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Doctor (PhD)**
in Academic Field 2.2. History and Archaeology

Kremena Diash’s doctoral dissertation addresses one of the most complex and contested subjects in the contemporary history of Latin America. While the Brazilian military dictatorship has been examined through a variety of analytical lenses, sustained and systematic analysis of the evolution of resistance movements against the regime remains comparatively limited. The candidate’s choice of topic therefore reflects considerable scholarly ambition. The subject demands engagement with extensive archival sources, a thorough command of Brazilian historiography, and methodological sensitivity to the intricate interplay between state power, social actors, and cultural dynamics.

The dissertation is of notable contemporary relevance. In an era marked by renewed political polarization and ongoing debates concerning the legacy of authoritarian regimes, the study of resistance mechanisms, the role of intellectuals, student activism, and civil society assumes particular importance. Within Bulgarian historiography, a comprehensive and dedicated study of the Brazilian military dictatorship has thus far been lacking. The present work therefore constitutes a meaningful and original scholarly contribution.

The dissertation comprises 402 pages and includes an abstract, an introduction featuring a historiographical review, three substantive chapters, a conclusion, appendices, and an extensive bibliography. Its structure is coherent and logically organized, following a clear chronological periodization (1964–1968; 1968–1977; 1977–1985), which corresponds effectively to the internal phases and transformations of the regime.

The methodology is interdisciplinary, incorporating historical-analytical methods, comparative analysis, discourse analysis, and cultural-historical approaches. A particular strength of the dissertation lies in its source base. It makes use of archival materials from Brazilian institutions, documents of the National Truth Commission, and periodical press publications. Among the most impressive elements of the research are the interviews conducted with participants in the events under study. Oral history consistently introduces a personal and emotional dimension to scholarly inquiry, which is essential for a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the historical processes examined.

The study opens with a substantial and carefully constructed introduction. At 36 pages, it may appear extensive in relation to the conventional length of a doctoral dissertation; however, in this case, it is

entirely proportionate. In my view, this introductory section is exceptionally valuable and does not disrupt the overall structure of the work. The introduction is divided into two parts. The first outlines the general situation in Latin America from the Great Depression to the early 1960s, while the second focuses specifically on Brazilian history during the same period. This section undoubtedly provides the necessary analytical framework for a full understanding of the political and social processes unfolding in Brazil during the core period under examination.

Particularly significant is the assessment of external influence on the development of the leftist movement, discussed on page 17. Special attention is devoted to populism as a distinctive Latin American phenomenon. The analysis of *Varguismo* in Brazil and comparable regimes highlights their dual character—social mobilization and the integration of marginalized groups combined with centralized and authoritarian governance. The crisis of populism in the 1950s, coupled with economic decline and increasing social polarization, laid the groundwork for military intervention.

A substantial emphasis is placed on the Cold War and the Doctrine of National Security as the ideological and institutional foundations of subsequent military regimes. The author convincingly demonstrates how the concept of the “internal enemy” transformed the state into an instrument of systematic repression and legitimized the suspension of democratic mechanisms. American influence is not presented in a one-sided manner, but rather as part of a more complex network of domestic elite interests and broader geopolitical strategies.

The first chapter, spanning an impressive 116 pages, covers the period from the political crisis of 1963–1964 to the promulgation of Institutional Act No. 5 in December 1968 and constitutes the conceptual foundation of the dissertation. The author analyzes the coup not as an isolated military act, but as the outcome of a profound institutional crisis, social polarization, and geopolitical pressure. Particular emphasis is placed on anti-communist mobilization, the fear of radical reforms, and the role of external factors within the broader Cold War context.

The opening section of the chapter is devoted to the growing internal tensions within Brazilian society. The significance of the “Sergeants’ Revolt” (p. 54) and the radicalization of the working class are clearly presented. The media analysis is particularly valuable, as it effectively demonstrates the depth of societal polarization. The evolution of the American position is also well articulated, drawing upon documents from the classic collection *Foreign Relations of the United States*.

A notable strength of the chapter lies in its analysis of institutional transformation after 1964. The regime is presented as a deliberate project aimed at restructuring society, eliminating the reformist elite, and neutralizing potential social alternatives.

The section addressing institutional and economic changes demonstrates that the dictatorship was not confined to a purely repressive function, but also implemented structural reforms oriented toward technocratic modernization and the consolidation of capital concentration. Especially insightful is the analysis of educational reorganization and the restriction of university autonomy, measures designed to depoliticize the intelligentsia and cultivate a loyal technocratic elite.

A third major emphasis concerns the early forms of resistance. The author traces the development of student movements, workers’ strikes, and cultural opposition as interconnected manifestations of social

discontent. The year 1968 is presented as the apex of public mobilization—a moment of synchronization between intellectual, social, and armed resistance. At the same time, it is interpreted as a turning point: the promulgation of Institutional Act No. 5 marked the transition to systematic repression and the beginning of the so-called “Years of Lead.”

The analytical strength of the chapter lies in its balanced integration of political, social, and cultural perspectives. The dictatorship is examined as a project of authoritarian modernization. Repression is analyzed not merely as suppression, but also as a factor that accelerated the consolidation of oppositional identity.

In conclusion, pages 50–166 construct a compelling interpretation of the regime’s early period. They present both the institutional consolidation of power and the formation of organized resistance. The chapter successfully demonstrates that, in the very first years following the coup, the foundations were laid both for the regime’s long-term authoritarian stability and for the moral and political grounds upon which it would later be challenged.

The second chapter examines the most severe and repressive phase of the Brazilian military dictatorship, beginning with the promulgation of Institutional Act No. 5 in December 1968. This period is characterized as one of institutionalized terror, systematic censorship, and the near-total destruction of legal opposition. The author traces the construction of the repressive apparatus as a deliberate state strategy, legitimized through the rhetoric of “national security” and the struggle against the “internal enemy.”

The first section analyzes the consolidation of the security apparatus and the transformation of emergency measures into a permanent mechanism of governance. Repression against students, intellectuals, trade unionists, and armed groups is presented not as sporadic action, but as a structural component of the regime. In this context, 1968 is interpreted as a turning point after which public opposition was forced into illegality. A particularly important element here is the clearly demonstrated connection to broader global processes at that moment (p. 166). The section devoted to direct repression and the comparative analysis with mechanisms employed in other countries of the region (pp. 179–182) is especially valuable.

The second part of the chapter addresses the so-called “Brazilian economic miracle” (1969–1974). The author examines economic growth as a dual phenomenon: on the one hand, it produced impressive macroeconomic indicators and accelerated industrialization; on the other, it deepened social inequality, froze real wages, and concentrated income in favor of large capital (p. 186). It is convincingly shown that the economic upturn was heavily dependent on external financing and favorable international conditions, while the oil crisis of 1973 exposed the structural vulnerability of the model. Thus, economic achievements ultimately proved politically insufficient to secure the regime’s long-term legitimacy.

The third section analyzes the evolution of resistance. Intensified repression led to the radicalization of segments of the opposition and the expansion of the urban guerrilla movement, including the activities of the National Liberation Alliance. Despite severe blows dealt to armed organizations, the author emphasizes that repression did not entirely extinguish oppositional energy. Particularly noteworthy is

the transformation observed in the second half of the 1970s, marked by the resurgence of civic and university movements, which laid the groundwork for subsequent political liberalization.

Analytically, the chapter is impressive in its ability to integrate repressive policy and economic modernization into a unified model of authoritarian development. A key strength lies in highlighting the regime's internal contradiction: economic growth achieved through the restriction of social rights. This process gradually eroded its own legitimacy. The author convincingly demonstrates that the "Years of Lead" were not merely a period of fear and paralysis, but also a phase in which resistance shifted from open confrontation to deeper social and cultural forms of pressure. Particularly original and valuable is the section devoted to culture, the *Tropicália* movement, and specifically music and cinema (pp. 248–256).

In conclusion, the second chapter offers a thorough analysis of the dictatorship at its apex, persuasively demonstrating that it was precisely under conditions of the most intense authoritarian control that the preconditions for the regime's eventual weakening were formed.

The third chapter examines the final stage of the military regime and the period of gradual liberalization, internal contradictions, and the eventual collapse of the dictatorship. The author approaches this process not as a sudden political reversal, but as the outcome of a long-term erosion of legitimacy, driven by economic crisis, social discontent, and mounting international pressure.

The first section analyzes the administration of General Ernesto Geisel and the concept of "controlled political opening." It is emphasized that liberalization did not stem from an abrupt democratic transformation within the regime, but rather from a strategic recognition of its structural limitations. The military elite sought to manage the transition process in a manner that would minimize risks to its own position and prevent a revolutionary scenario. The tension between authoritarian inertia and the necessity of institutional reform is clearly delineated.

The second major focus concerns the deepening economic crisis. Following the end of the "economic miracle," Brazil faced high inflation, rising external debt, and declining real incomes. These economic difficulties undermined the regime's social base and reproduced a paradoxical historical situation. The developments closely resembled the crisis of the early 1960s, which had been used to justify the coup. However, by the late 1970s, economic instability had become a factor in delegitimizing the dictatorship itself. The author convincingly demonstrates that economic performance could no longer compensate for the absence of political representation and social justice.

Particular attention is devoted to the resurgence of opposition. Workers' strikes, university movements, new civic organizations, and cultural initiatives formed a broad coalition in defense of democracy. Resistance gradually became institutionalized, shifting from fragmented actions to a mass social movement that no longer relied on armed struggle, but instead exerted pressure through legal and semi-legal channels.

The final stage of the regime is presented as a process of "controlled retreat," in which the military retained influence but lost the capacity to dictate the direction of societal development. The fall of the dictatorship in 1985 is interpreted not as the triumph of a sudden revolution, but as the culmination of sustained social mobilization combined with internal institutional transformation.

Analytically, the chapter is distinguished by its balanced approach: it avoids both an apologetic interpretation of the so-called “liberal generals” and reductionist explanations based on a single causal factor. A particular strength lies in tracing the relationship between economic dynamics and political legitimacy. It is persuasively demonstrated that the democratic transition resulted from the interaction between societal pressure and internal changes within the regime itself.

In conclusion, the third chapter successfully substantiates the thesis that the end of the dictatorship represented a complex and contradictory process of transformation, in which resistance evolved from a marginal force into the carrier of a new political consensus. It logically completes the overall conceptual framework of the dissertation, demonstrating how the long-standing struggle against authoritarianism ultimately became institutionalized in democratic transition.

The chapter thus presents political liberalization and the gradual delegitimization of the regime as the product of prolonged social evolution and interaction among diverse societal actors.


Following the numerous strengths of the dissertation, it is also necessary to note several issues that merit attention. First, one may observe a certain diffusion of focus from the central subject, namely the opposition movements. As I am familiar with the evolution of the manuscript, I believe that this issue has been substantially addressed in its final version. Nevertheless, there remains a perceptible tendency toward a broader overview of the entire period of the dictatorship, with a slight dilution of the primary focus.

At the same time, the approach adopted by the doctoral candidate Diash succeeds in constructing a comprehensive and nuanced picture of the formation of resistance and opposition, which is clearly situated within the broader historical framework. In certain sections of the first chapter, minor inconsistencies in the formatting of the scholarly apparatus can be observed; however, these are minimal and do not detract from the overall excellent impression created by the work’s engagement with the literature.

Among the principal contributions of the dissertation, several aspects stand out. First and foremost, it represents the first comprehensive study of this topic within Bulgarian historiography. A substantial body of Brazilian archival material has been introduced into scholarly circulation. Particularly noteworthy is the analysis of cultural resistance as a key factor in the democratic transition. The internal evolution of the opposition is traced with precision and clarity.

In conclusion, I consider the dissertation to be a thorough, methodologically sound, and substantively original scholarly work. For the reasons outlined above, I propose that Kremena Diash be awarded the educational and academic degree of **Doctor (PhD)** in Academic Field 2.2. History and Archaeology.

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Prof. Dr. Alexander Sivilov