



SPECIAL SECTION: DEMOCRACY AND UNIVERSITY EDUCATION: 60 YEARS AFTER THE 1964 COUP

The resistance of the Student Movement: a political and human formation moment¹

La resistencia del Movimiento Estudiantil: un momento político y de formación humana

A resistência do Movimento Estudantil: um momento político e de formação humana

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ABSTRACT

This work is a literature review (Acadêmica; Pádua, 2022) and aims to analyze the role of resistance of the university student movement during the Military Dictatorship period in Brazil. The methodology employed involved searching and analyzing works in major national indexing databases, such as Periódicos CAPES, Scielo, and the CAPES Theses and Dissertations Database, from March to May 2024, using keywords such as resistance, Student Movement, Military Dictatorship, and University Reform. The concept of resistance and its nuances was used as an analytical framework, addressing the various social actors present during this historical moment. The literature review showed that Brazilian students were a fundamental social actor in the process of struggle and affirmation against the Military Regime, playing a crucial role in organizing protests and disseminating democratic ideals. Through this movement, students developed intellectually, morally, and politically,

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transcending university walls. The impact of their actions as a social force reverberated throughout Brazilian society, contributing to political awareness and strengthening social movements that challenged and shook the foundations of authoritarianism. The analysis demonstrated that student resistance was essential to Brazil's redemocratization, highlighting the importance of engagement in the struggle for rights and social justice.

Keywords: resistance; student movement; military dictatorship; university reform.

RESUMO

Este trabalho se configura como uma revisão de literatura (Acadêmica; Pádua, 2022) e tem como objetivo analisar o papel de resistência do movimento estudantil universitário durante o período da Ditadura Militar no Brasil. A metodologia empregada envolveu a busca e análise de obras nas principais bases de indexação nacionais, como Periódicos CAPES, Scielo, Banco de Teses e Dissertações da CAPES, além de livros de referência na área da história da educação, entre março e maio de 2024, a partir das palavras-chave: resistência, movimento estudantil, Ditadura Militar e Reforma Universitária. Utiliza-se como eixo analítico o conceito de resistência e suas nuances, abordando os diversos atores sociais que estiveram presentes nesse momento histórico. A revisão de literatura mostrou que os estudantes brasileiros foram um ator social fundamental no processo de luta e afirmação contra o Regime Militar, desempenhando um papel crucial de formação na organização de protestos e na disseminação de ideais democráticos. Nesse movimento, os estudantes se formaram intelectual, moral e politicamente, transcendendo os muros das universidades. O impacto de suas ações como força social repercutiu em toda a sociedade brasileira, contribuindo para a conscientização política e para o fortalecimento dos movimentos sociais que desafiaram e abalaram as estruturas do autoritarismo. A análise demonstrou que a resistência estudantil foi essencial para a redemocratização do Brasil, destacando a importância do engajamento na luta por direitos e justiça social.

Palavras-chave: resistência; movimento estudantil; ditadura militar; reforma universitária.

RESUMEN

Este trabajo se configura como una revisión de literatura (Acadêmica; Pádua, 2022) y tiene como objetivo analizar el papel de resistencia del movimiento estudiantil universitario durante el período de la Dictadura Militar en Brasil. La metodología empleada involucró la búsqueda y análisis de obras en las principales bases de indexación nacionales, como Periódicos CAPES, Scielo y el Banco de Tesis y Disertaciones de la CAPES, entre marzo y mayo de 2024, utilizando palabras clave como resistencia, Movimiento Estudiantil, Dictadura Militar y Reforma Universitaria. Se utilizó el concepto de resistencia y sus matices como eje analítico, abordando los diversos actores sociales presentes en este momento histórico. La revisión de la literatura mostró que los estudiantes brasileños fueron un actor social

fundamental en el proceso de lucha y afirmación contra el Régimen Militar, desempeñando un papel crucial en la organización de protestas y en la difusión de ideales democráticos. En este movimiento, los estudiantes se formaron intelectual, moral y políticamente, trascendiendo los muros de las universidades. El impacto de sus acciones como fuerza social repercutió en toda la sociedad brasileña, contribuyendo a la conciencia política y al fortalecimiento de los movimientos sociales que desafiaron y sacudieron las estructuras del autoritarismo. El análisis demostró que la resistencia estudiantil fue esencial para la redemocratización de Brasil, destacando la importancia del compromiso en la lucha por los derechos y la justicia social.

Palabras clave: resistencia; movimiento estudiantil; dictadura militar; reforma universitaria.

INTRODUCTION

From the second half of the 1960s, with the establishment of the dictatorship following the 1964 coup, Brazil faced one of the darkest periods in its history. Due to the intensification of the dictatorship through the enactment of Institutional Act⁴ (AI) No. 5 (Brasil, 1968) on December 13, 1968 - which led to the revocation of the population's civil and political rights and gave "carte blanche" for the persecution, imprisonment, summary trial and torture of opponents of the regime - Brazil entered the period known as the "Years of Lead"⁵ (Castro; Soares; D'Araujo, 1994).

In this context, various social actors emerged, opposing the military government and its political stance. The student movement - mainly university students - is one of them, and presents a position of opposition and denunciation, notably a civil-ideological resistance. It's interesting to note that the AI-5 is contemporary with the University Reform, which modernizes Brazilian higher education. This same university reformed and modernized will be the locus par excellence of political and ideological clashes and the humus for strengthening the student movement.

However, it should be noted that this is not a homogeneous and unified actor and was not always very organized. Just as some of its members and activists didn't always defend or support peaceful civil-ideological resistance, some joined other movements that defended and used armed struggle to fight the military regime. It is important, and this is the focus of this work, to emphasize that the incipient public university was indeed - contradictorily to the context in which it is affirmed - a place of intellectual and political formation of Brazilian youth and of resistance by the most important in this sad moment of our recent history (Cunha, 1988).

⁴ The Institutional Acts were decrees that expanded the government's powers, legalizing cassations, censorship and repression.

⁵ It is called this because it was the most repressive period of the military dictatorship, from 1968 to 1974, marked by censorship, torture and persecution of opponents of the regime after AI-5.

With this in mind, this work is a Literature Review⁶ (Academic; Pádua, 2022) which aims to analyze the role of resistance played by the Brazilian student movement during the military regime. To this end, the methodology employed involved searching for and selecting academic works and reference works in Brazilian historiography on the period in question (1964-1985). We used the following keywords to search for works: resistance, student movement, military dictatorship and university reform. This search was carried out between March and May 2024 in the main national indexing databases, such as Periódicos CAPES, Scielo and Banco de teses e dissertações da CAPES, as well as reference books in the field of the history of education. We then selected, by reading the abstracts, those that met the scope of our research and went on to analyze them by reading the papers in full, always taking as our “guiding thread” the social and political role of the student movement during the Military Regime, established in Brazil following the 1964 coup d'état.

In order to analyze and discuss the actions of the university student movement during the “Years of Lead”, this work is divided into three parts. In the first section, we will discuss the broader social, historical and political contexts in which the 1964 military coup took place, and how the Brazilian public university modernized during the years that followed the closure of civil society and the intensification of the dictatorship. In the second section, we will look at the concept of resistance and its nuances, since this concept will be the “magnifying glass” that will enable us to read the actions of the student movement and how it is formed. Finally, we will discuss how it was formed and acted, its strategies and tactics, as well as the uses of memory by its former members as a political instrument creation of martyrs and heroes.

A MILITARY COUP AND A REFORMED UNIVERSITY ARE ON THE HORIZON

Since the 1950s, due to the Cold War, the world has been in turmoil and marked by bipolar conflict. The success of the Cuban Revolution caused concern for the United States (US), which sought to

(...) to counteract the growing social effervescence - framed in a heterogeneous range of reformist or revolutionary currents - and the tendencies of some of its rulers towards economic nationalism, phenomena that US ruling circles linearly attributed to Soviet penetration and identified with “communist infiltration” (Rapoport; Laufer, 2000, p. 70).

Thus, coups d'état in Latin America were supported by the US, especially in the case of Brazil, since they couldn't run the risk of the most populous and economically important country in South America becoming another Cuba (Rapoport; Laufer, 2000).

⁶ “The Literature Review consists of identifying what is already known about the topic/problem that you want to investigate, or as we have previously defined, the ‘state of the art’ in a given area of knowledge, focusing on both theoretical and methodological aspects or professional practice, found in previous studies on the topic/problem in question” (Acadêmica; Pádua, 2022, p. 55).

On the national scene in the 1960s, it can be seen that João Goulart's government was not, in fact, communist⁷, but it did have some left-wing or more popular tendencies, such as the so-called Basic Reforms, which included agri-reform agendas, fiscal and educational reforms (Moreira, 2011). On March 13, 1964, Jango made his famous speech on the subject during the Central Station Rally in Rio de Janeiro, which generated a response: the March of the Family with God for Freedom. This movement first took place in São Paulo and then spread throughout Brazil, demanding that Goulart be removed from office and that the communist threat be brought under control.

Later that month, the Sailors' Revolt took place, in which the demonstrators demanded better working conditions and supported the Basic Reforms. The unfolding of these episodes intensified the "atmosphere" of discontent on the part of Brazil's conservative social class, which also resonated with a significant portion of the military officialdom, which had the political task of restoring order in the country (Nogueira, 2006).

On March 31, 1964, the "revolution"⁸ began: Olympio Mourão Filho organized his soldiers and left Minas Gerais for Rio de Janeiro, without the approval of his superiors. While João Goulart traveled to Brasília and Porto Alegre on April 1st and 2nd to seek support, the military took advantage of the situation and claimed that the president had abandoned the country and that the position was therefore vacant. At an Extraordinary Session of the National Congress, Ranieri Mazzili, until then President of the Chamber of Deputies, was declared President of the Republic, occupying the post for 15 days (Ferreira, 2014).

A military junta was formed to decide the next steps. The first was the AI-1 decree, which served as a legal instrument for institutionalizing the coup, by determining extreme measures, such as the revocation of political mandates and the suspension of constitutional rights. In addition, it was established that the new president would not be chosen by the people, but by a vote in Congress. Thus, General Castelo Branco was elected president (Bechara; Rodrigues, 2015).

In 1965, AI-2 was implemented with the aim of further consolidating the military regime and extending its power. It established that there could only be two political parties - ARENA and MDB - as well as indirect elections for president. In the previous year, the Suplicy de Lacerda Law (Brazil, 1964) was applied more effectively, limiting student autonomy, since

⁷ Goulart "was not a revolutionary" and "was far from being the prototype of a radical leftist" (Campos, 1994, p.547 *apud* Rapoport and Laufer, 2000, p. 73).

⁸ Editorials at the time used expressions such as "revolution", "glorious", 'victorious' and "savior" (Forattini, 2019). Today, it is also possible to observe this use by "new right" groups, who seek to legitimize the coup through historical denialism. Therefore, the way in which this historical period is named demonstrates a battle for memory about the military dictatorship and those responsible for it (Do Couto Neto, 2019).

[...] reformulated the functioning of student organizations, extinguishing bodies such as UNE and UPE. Thus, only bodies such as the Central and State Student Directories (DCEs and DEEs) were recognized as legitimate, and these were linked to the MEC (Silva, 2022, p. 74).

In 1966, AIs 3 and 4 were enacted, seeking to reduce the political influence of the opposition and strengthen the regime's control over all spheres of power, as well as aiming to reform the 1946 Constitution. AI-5, implemented on December 13, 1968, established the period known as the “Years of Lead”, marked by extreme repression and the suspension of political rights. Congress was closed, political mandates were revoked, censorship was institutionalized and the granting of habeas corpus to those accused of crimes against national security was banned. Therefore, the repression political and ideological - which was already happening, but intensified - was backed by it (Bechara; Rodrigues, 2015).

At the same time, analyzing the educational situation, it is necessary to look at some important moments in this area in order to understand the role of the student movement in this historical period. Firstly, it is worth noting that at the very beginning of the coup, on April 1, the headquarters of the National Union of Students (UNE) were invaded and set on fire, and many students were persecuted.

In addition, on April 9, 1964, the University of Brasilia (UnB) was occupied by the Military Police of Minas Gerais and Mato Grosso, who interdicted departments, seized books considered subversive and removed the rector and his vice rector from their positions. Teachers and students were arrested, taken in for questioning and some were even tortured (Cunha, 1988). The aim was clear: to eliminate any form of resistance to the military regime within the academic environment.

The invasion of UnB was motivated by the regime's distrust of the university, due to its innovative higher education project. UnB was also seen as a center for critical thinking and opposition to political conservatism. According to Cunha (1988, p. 52), the “(...) location of the University of Brasilia and the audacity of its project, which went against broad and strong educational, bureaucratic and ideological interests, explain the violence that befell it”.

Also in 1965, the Government's Economic Action Program (PAEG) presented a plan for education, defining it as “human capital”, based on an economic orientation. The PAEG proposed integrating higher education institutions with the productive sector, with the aim of aligning learning with market needs and saving resources through practical training. In addition, it believed that the functioning of higher education should be evaluated taking into account its costs and the significant impact it has on income differentiation. Therefore, the solution would be to implement paid education in public institutions, through a direct contribution or refundable scholarships.

The regime's aims were based on transforming the traditional higher education institutions into modern ones and included profound changes to the educational system, based on the model in force in the USA. This is evidenced in the MEC-USAID agreement⁹, which sought to reform Brazilian education according to the standards imposed by US policy (Cunha, 1988).

It is also worth mentioning other initiatives, such as the creation of the Centro de Integração Empresa-Escola and the Extensões Universitárias (the CRUTACs and the Rondon Project)¹⁰, which were based on the idea that students who were busy with work would not have time to get involved in subversive movements. Through these programs, the government sought to “also show university students how much the military government was interested in the people (...) and spread among them the ideas that serve as the basis for university extension activity” (Cunha, 1988, p. 67), as well as being a way of incorporating the populations of the interior of the country into the “national community”. Therefore, the government's “educational policy aimed to transform all universities into complements of capitalist companies, into organizations governed basically by the immediate and long-term needs of the companies” (Cunha, 1988, p. 110-111).

The 1968 University Reform¹¹, a model imported by the military dictatorship from the organizational system of US universities, was based on the development agenda that had already been planned since 1964 and exemplified by the MEC-USAID agreement. It was implemented under the justification of transforming, restructuring and modernizing higher education, changing not only the administrative organization, but also the physical structure. The main scope was to exert strong influence over universities in a more centralized way, thus reducing the autonomy of these institutions (Cunha, 1988).

Until 1968, the Brazilian university system had a structural model divided into professorships, in which a specific professor was given the title to a subject, based much more on the criteria of seniority and academic prestige than on notable knowledge and qualifications in the field. Therefore, there was a rigid and hierarchical structure in the universities, with little flexibility and renewal of the teaching staff (Cunha, 1988).

⁹ O acordo feito entre o Ministério da Educação do Brasil e a Agência dos Estados Unidos para o Desenvolvimento Internacional foi negociado secretamente e se tornou público somente em novembro de 1966.

¹⁰ The creation of the CIE-Es was an attempt to bring students' theoretical knowledge closer to practice in companies where trainees could receive grants. University Extension was manifested in the idea that the university should put its resources to work for the community, and was well characterized by two ventures: the Centro Rural Universitário de Treinamento e Ação Comunitária (CRUTAC), in which biomedical students trained in hospitals, and the Rondon Project - with the motto “integrar para não entregar” (the Amazon) – which were expeditions to develop assistance activities in the interior of the country, setting up military units to mark the state's presence in these places

¹¹ It was instituted by Decree-Law No. 464 of March 11, 1969, but its guidelines had already been discussed and implemented since 1968.

As part of the reform, departments were introduced in public higher education institutions, with the aim of promoting interdisciplinarity and better management of resources. Other significant changes were: the unification of the entrance exam; the merging of the colleges into universities to improve fundraising; the creation of the credit system, which allowed enrollment by subject and greater curricular flexibility; the appointment of rectors and directors; the development of teaching and postgraduate studies, with the aim of fostering research and qualified training; the integration of teaching, research and extension, aiming for a more complete education that was connected to the needs of society (Martins, 2009).

These measures were aimed not only at modernizing Brazilian public higher education, but also at ensuring stricter government control over universities. Martins (2009, p. 17) states that it was a system “structured along the lines of educational companies aimed at obtaining economic profit and quickly meeting the demands of the educational market”. Therefore, it is an ambiguous and contradictory reform, generating a lot of debate, since it introduced significant advances, but at the same time it is inserted in an authoritarian context.

It is in this broader scenario of repression, and in the more specific one of a reformed university, that a particular social actor will come onto the scene as one of the main subjects of resistance and criticism of the military government: the student movement (Cunha, 1988).

THE CONCEPT OF RESISTANCE AND ITS NUANCES

Brazil in the late 1960s, after the military coup and the AI-5, experienced a contradiction between a country that was becoming mostly urban, preparing to experience the so-called “Economic Miracle”, and increased repression, censorship and persecution of all those who were seen as subversive to the regime. The contradictory context of modernization in various sectors, including higher education, coexisting with a civil and political backlash, caused by the annulment of civil and political rights and the conditioning of the use of guarantee instruments, such as *habeas corpus*, brought out the dissatisfaction, revolt and protests of a portion of Brazilian society. As a result, various social actors entered the scene, taking a critical stance towards a dictatorial government that was suffocating civil society, through various forms of resistance to the military regime (Netto, 2014).

It is only possible to think of this specific form of social action called resistance in contexts of Restricted States (Gramsci, 1975), i.e. societies in which civil society is gelatinous or non-existent and political society or the coercive moment of the state prevails. Historically, in societies of advanced capitalism, the bourgeoisie has developed more subtle ways of guaranteeing its direction over society by seeking and educating consensus to its social project, a consensus that is built in an organized civil society.

However, in the pre-coup Brazilian scenario, and even more so after the outbreak of the coup in 1964, the incipient and not very participatory civil society was suffocated, the

modern arena for clashes ceased to exist and the voices opposed to one type of social direction were forcibly silenced. In the place of conquering spaces of strength in an organized civil society through what Gramsci (1975) calls the War of Position, the social actors opposed to the direction taken by the Brazilian state could only use as a strategy the War of Movement or the frontal attack on the dictatorial state (Gramsci, 1975).

This frontal attack was launched in various ways, whether through violence and attacks, or through peaceful demonstrations such as marches: it is at this juncture that the students will raise their voices. But what specifically is the concept of resistance? In this sense, to try to understand it, Napolitano (2017) states that resistance is a political action undertaken by various social actors in a context of repressive and dictatorial states, contexts characterized by the absence of an organized civil society, since its presupposition - consolidated civil and political rights - no longer exists.

Therefore, what differentiates resistance from other political actions is precisely the specificity of the context in which it takes place, since it is the latter that conditions it as a form of action. Faced with the impossibility of clashes and dialogues in the modern “arena” of political construction that is organized civil society, social movements and other actors sought ways and channels so that their protests and demands could be heard.

Resistance didn't always take shape and materialize exclusively through frontal and direct struggle, starting with civil-armed resistance, such as the Araguaia Guerrilla (1967 - 1974). They also took other forms, such as civil-ideological resistance: the Passeata dos Cem Mil and other movements involving artists, who used art as a channel for protest and took their political message to society (Napolitano, 2017).

As Motta (2016) points out, there are also several cases of “accommodation” - very present in the university environment - in which opponents sought strategies to live with the system and, at the same time, reduce the effects of repression. It was a two-way game: just as social agents exploited these “loopholes” in the regime, the state also used this instrument, attracting its opponents and controlling them more closely. “Thanks to the strategy of accommodation, repressive initiatives were sometimes softened by indirect means, subterfuges, negotiations, arrangements, bureaucratic procrastination” (Motta, 2016, p. 17).

It can therefore be summed up that the resistance, which was more on the front line, took place through two political actions: the civil-organized (joined by most organizations) and the civil-armed, such as the PCdoB, the Movement Revolutionary Eight of October (MR-8) and the National Liberation Action (ALN).

Although historiography questions whether the armed struggle can be considered a democratic resistance, its role in deconstructing the military regime is undeniable and, for this reason, should be cited in this work. However, although it was based on both actions, it

is important to point out that the resistance had different nuances, since each social actor had their own specificities and organized themselves according to their ideals. In this sense, we will present each of these “political families” (Napolitano, 2017) that were present in the context of the Military Dictatorship in Brazil and in some way undertook resistance to the regime established.

The political parties and groups characterize the first of these families, whether they are left-wing or liberal: the communists, especially the PCB and PCdoB, had various strands and differences; the liberals ranged from the democratic to the more moderate and conservative.

The second is the Catholic Church, which was extremely ambiguous, because although as an institution it did not directly support the coup, many members of the high clergy agreed with the new government, in the name of anti-communism and conservative tradition. On the other hand, many Catholics joined the resistance, mainly through social movements in the neighborhood, such as the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEB), and played a fundamental role in strengthening popular movements.

We can also mention the professional organizations that only began to take part in the mid-1970s, but which included academic intellectuals, journalists and lawyers: the Brazilian Society for the Advancement of Science (SBPC), the Brazilian Press Association (ABI) and the Brazilian Bar Association (OAB). It is worth highlighting the extremely contradictory but central role of the press: although it helped to build the government and assisted in the process of conspiracy against Jango, it was fundamental to the delegitimization of the regime, given its reach among the population.

The trade union and workers' movements were also central to the resistance, in addition to the artistic and cultural movements. Finally, there is one of the most prominent actors in the process of criticism against the military dictatorship: the Student Movement. From the first day that the new regime was installed until the country was re-democratized, amid censorship and violence, this group resisted and denounced the crimes committed by the government, in an extremely complex and heterogeneous way (Cunha, 1988). The focus of this work will be on the Student Movement and its political action of resistance in an ambiguous context of modernization of the Brazilian public university and the social and political regression in which Brazil found itself after the 1964 military coup.

THE STUDENT MOVEMENT AS A SOCIAL PROTAGONIST

Since the establishment of the military regime, there has been a search for mechanisms to neutralize the more progressive sectors, so they saw the university as a key to the development of their plans, considering it a space for communist infiltration and subversive

ideas. Thus, “Operation Cleanup”¹² began and, progressively, there were interventions in the education sector. On the other hand, the student movement was present from the outset and resisted intensely

After the occupation of the UNE headquarters, several student leaders were neutralized and the organization of the resistance was affected. With the Suplicy Law, the UNE was replaced by the National Student Directory, seeking greater control over the students and their critical ideological character. However,

[...] this physical, administrative and symbolic violence exerted by the government on university students did nothing but accentuate and accelerate the process of politicization of university youth. After the harshest and most intense phase of Operation Cleanup and after the initial shock of it, the students gradually recovered their operational capacity, the leaders of the left assumed their role as such in the main organizations, including UNE, and these resumed their academic, political and social activity (Huerta, 2018, p. 55).

The Brazilian public university was the locus par excellence of ideological clashes, political confrontations and human formation. Not just the places of student representation within the institutions or the classrooms where politicized and, as far as possible, critical discussions were held with professors, but above all, the university as a “spirit” of freedom that would go beyond its borders and spread throughout Brazilian society.

In the specific case of the UNE, despite its clandestine nature, it continued to act and held two National Congresses, in 1966 and 1967, in opposition to the 1964 Suplicy Law. It is interesting to note that the progressive discourse was increasingly linked to a social and political character and with a greater commitment to workers' and agricultural causes, which was evident in these two events. In the first three years of the military regime, there was relative freedom to protest and demonstrations were intensifying, causing other social actors to join the student struggle. However, repression was still present, as evidenced by the Praia Vermelha Massacre, which took place on September 23, 1966, in Rio de Janeiro, an event in which students demanded an end to police violence and the non payment of fees at public universities (Huerta, 2018).

Huerta (2018) divides the main motivations for student protests into two groups:

Those of the former refer to strictly educational issues, particularly the university question: the public and free character of the school, the need to provide the baccalaureate with a professional profile, the style and “fascist” orientation of the education system, the literacy of the people, the MEC-Usaid agreements, the Suplicy Law, the “Surplus” problem, the legislative initiatives directed towards the privatization of the university system and

¹² They were mechanisms to neutralize, through censorship and violence, the most progressive sectors and to all those who disagreed with the actions of the military regime (Netto, 2014).

the establishment of monthly fees for students, and the arrests of university students and teachers, as well as the persecution and torture of some student leaders. Those in the second group made reference to broader public, political and cultural spaces: human rights, the return to constitutional guarantees prior to the coup d'état, the workers' and agricultural question, the government's economic policy, the strike law, the repeal of A-I, the enactment of an amnesty law, the freedoms of association and political and trade union affiliation, direct elections, the war in Vietnam and Brazil's stance on it, and international equality and solidarity (Huerta, 2018, p. 55).

In 1967, military repression began to intensify. The Suplicy Law was repealed thanks to the mobilizations, but was replaced by the Aragão Decree (Brazil, 1967), which further tightened control over student activities. In December, the Meira Mattos Special Commission was set up, and Law No. 5540 of November 28, 1968 (Brazil, 1968), the University Reform Law, came into force, responding to the demands of the military and the liberal and moderate university sectors. Thus, in addition to the impacts on the structure of Brazilian higher education, the student movement was largely socially delegitimized and politically neutralized.

On March 28, 1968, there was a mobilization at the Calabouço Restaurant, in Rio de Janeiro, motivated by the stoppage of works at the site, in which there was a police invasion, generating the injury of students and the death of Edson Luís. This event became a milestone in Brazil's history and was put to good use by the student movement¹³

The 17-year-old high school student was not a militant engaged in the fight against the military regime, but after the tragedy, he was transformed into an icon of resistance. The repercussions were amplified by widespread press coverage, enabling massive publicity of the military repression and triggering the "Calabouço Effect": a series of protests with the support of various sectors of society were held across the country, with harsh repression, deaths and many injured. The peak of the demonstrations was on June 26, with the Passeata dos Cem Mil, in Rio de Janeiro (Huerta, 2018).

In October of that same year, UNE held its XXX National Congress in Ibiúna (SP), with the aim of defining the next steps in the student struggle. However, the event was highly disorganized: there was a lack of food and the press covered the event, which drew the attention of the authorities¹⁴. The result was the arrest of more than 900 students (Netto, 2014).

¹³ Samantha Quadrat (2023) analyzes the guided tour route in Rio de Janeiro, which narrates the tragedy of the Calabouço, arguing about the political uses of Edson Luís's death by the student movement, in search of legitimizing the resistance process.

¹⁴ According to João Júnior, one of the PUCPR leaders, there was an indiscretion on the part of the students. After realizing that there wasn't enough food, some members of the organization went to buy more and the quantity caught the attention of the shopkeepers, who called the police. In addition, according to Júnior, "some

On December 13, 1968, AI-5 was decreed and four days later, an attempt was made to continue the repressed event that had taken place in Ibiúna. Disguised as a barbecue, the rally took place in Curitiba, at a place known as Chácara do Alemão. However, the students did not know that they were being monitored by the security forces, so there was no time to react: of the 42 young people arrested, 15 were convicted (Silva, 2022).

Due to the decree of the Institutional Act, the students no longer had the right to habeas corpus and found themselves at the worst moment of the student resistance. In this sense, there were three alternatives for them: exile, engagement in the armed struggle or accommodation. Therefore, protests and demonstrations became rare and, when they did take place, repression was intense (Silva, 2022).

On March 16, 1973, Alexandre Vannucchi Leme, a geology student at the University of São Paulo (USP) and ALN militant, was arrested and murdered by the Detachment of Information Operations - Internal Defense Operations Center (DOI-Codi)¹⁵. There are various contradictions and doubts about the event, but what is known is that the authorities considered him to be a subversive and therefore there was justification for his death.

There was a quick movement by USP students, who despite their political differences, came together to denounce the military violence. The members of the Academic Centers acted strategically and launched a manifesto highlighting their colleague's qualities, saying that he was an exemplary student, dedicated and a good friend, seeking to contradict what the regime was arguing. Five years later, with the strengthening of the student movement, this image of innocence was replaced by characteristics of a militant, warrior, supportive and conscious. This reallocation of meaning also happened with the figure of Edson Luís, who came to be seen as the “defender of democracy” (Langland, 2006 apud Müller, 2011).

The students then organized a mass in honour of Alexandre, which was an excellent strategy for the struggle of this social actor, because:

[...] it was a way of expressing a reality that could be exposed through a religious sense. In the midst of the fragility of the situation, the religious field could be the place to find protection, consolation and action (Müller, 2011, p. 172).

The mass held on March 30 was a weapon of denunciation and was a way of getting past censorship, going beyond the university. The students were surrounded by support and showed their strength: the OAB, the ABI, the MDB and the Archdiocese joined the cause. It was the first major public demonstration since the beginning of the “Years of Lead”: was

student leaders had received money from some press outlets so that they could cover the event, which showed a contradiction between preserving their image and the desire for publicity” (Silva, 2022, p. 11).

¹⁵ Repression unit focused on identifying and repressing political opponents through surveillance, arrests and torture.

attended by around 5,000 people. In response, the authorities moved in with a huge military apparatus and filmed the people present. In this context, a political calendar of the student movement was created in opposition to the civic commemorations of the “revolution of 64”. Therefore, the mass and other forms used by the students are channels of subterfuge to circumvent the mechanisms of persecution and, at the same time, keep alive the message of indignation and criticism of the regime in force in Brazil (Müller, 2011).

At the same time, the same year saw the “disappearance”¹⁶ of Honestino Guimarães, a geology student at the University of Brasília (UnB) and president of UNE, during his fourth arrest. The student leader's death certificate was only given to his parents in 1996 and was incomplete, not containing the cause of death. The figure of Guimarães was also used to give strength to the movement, by instrumentalizing his figure as the “eternal president” of UNE (Müller, 2011).

Therefore, the political use of the past by the student movement, through a construction of the collective imaginary, reinforced the need for resistance against the military dictatorship and fed the hope of redemocratization. By emphasizing the martyrdom of students who were victims of repression, this social actor increased its reach, gaining the support of other groups through the feeling of compassion and empathy of individuals who were not part of the resistance (Müller, 2011).

In this reallocation of meaning, the victims come to be seen as models of militancy and personalities who gave their lives in the name of the movement, as well as becoming a cause for the struggle. It should be noted that this instrumentalization does not mean opportunism, evil manipulation or a perverse plan, but rather a way of legitimizing the resistance, causing commotion throughout society (Müller, 2011).

[...] death linked to violence and patriotic sacrifice constitutes a privileged element for its political instrumentalization, which transforms it into event loaded with a strong symbolic connotation by those who appropriate it, even transcending it through the reworking of the characteristics of the characters by those who use them (Müller, 2011, p. 169).

The politicization of the Brazilian student movement did not take place exclusively within the walls of the institutions or in their classrooms. The strategies developed and the non-conventional tactics of protest and struggle not only transcended university spaces, but were, par excellence, developed and learned in the very becoming of the Brazilian political movement in the streets, during the “Years of Lead”: the learning took place in the public space, in the underground and in the most unusual meeting places.

¹⁶ This was no ordinary disappearance, but possibly a deliberate action by the regime, as opponents were kidnapped and killed without official explanation.

As an emerging social actor, the university student movement was contemporary with the University Reform that modernized higher education in Brazil and, at the same time, would take the lead in the political action of resistance, forming itself intellectually, morally and politically between beatings, torture and persecution. But the ostensible obstacle of the military regime was always experienced dually by the student movement: as repression and as encouragement to overcome it.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The period of the military dictatorship in Brazil was marked by social, political and economic ambiguities. This contradictory context of modernization - on the one hand, economic and higher education, and on the other, civil and political regression - served as a backdrop for the emergence and intensification of resistance on the part of various segments of society. The literature review carried out revealed how these forms of resistance (as political action) were carried out by various social actors opposed to the regime. These resistances have in common the fact that they are characterized as a frontal attack or open confrontation against the Restricted State (Gramsci, 1975), in other words, a state in which society predominates politics or the coercive moment.

Based on this assumption, the concept of resistance has been explored through its nuances, without restricting itself to the armed struggle, since it manifested itself in various other ways, such as peaceful marches and the work of artists. In this way, the plurality of strategies adopted by different social actors and their forms of resistance highlights the complexity not only of the military regime, but also of the resistance process and its ability to adapt to circumstances. Among these actors, this work has emphasized the role of the student movement, especially university students, in the struggle against the *status quo* and their leading role in the search for the re-democratization of Brazilian society.

The students were essential social actors in the fight against repression, confronting state violence and mobilizing society around their demands. Despite internal disagreements, this group used effective tactics that sustained the process of re-democratization, encouraging members of other social groups to join and delegitimizing the regime. Therefore, the contribution of the political use of the past and the memory of the victims of repression is undeniable, with a view to strengthening the resistance and mobilizing popular support. Facts and episodes were reconstructed so that their political instrumentalization could fuel the students' political action against the military regime. Therefore, this paper has attempted a multifaceted analysis of the resistance to the military dictatorship in Brazil, addressing its complexity and diversity of actors and strategies, highlighting the impact of the student movement on the path towards re-democratization.

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