

HISTORY

"De onde? Para onde?" The Continuity Question and the Debate over Brazil's "Civil"-Military Dictatorship

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This article deals with the disputed terminology used to refer to the Brazilian military regime (1964–1985). On one side is the traditional "military dictatorship" nomenclature, which places the armed forces at the center of the political system during the period in question. Conversely, the more recent "civil-military dictatorship" terminology notes that the regime depended on civilian allies in business and government, as well as popular support, throughout its existence. My entry point is a heated 2012 debate between journalist Pedro Pomar and the radical art collective Coletivo Zagaia. I explore how new social actors that emerged after redemocratization have become central to the struggle over human rights in Brazil and, more specifically, how the dictatorship is remembered in the present. This debate among scholars, activists, bloggers, and journalists is fundamentally about memory, accountability, and, I argue, the quality of Brazilian democracy today.

Este artigo se trata da terminologia disputada usada para se referir ao regime militar brasileiro (1964–1985). De um lado está a nomenclatura tradicional—"ditadura militar"—que coloca os militares no centro do sistema político da época. Do outro lado, a mais recente terminologia—"ditadura civil-militar"—observa que o regime dependia de aliados civis no governo e empresariado, como também apoio popular, durante sua existência. Meu ponto de partida nesta discussão é um debate que ocorreu em 2012 entre o jornalista Pedro Pomar e o coletivo de arte radical Coletivo Zagaia. Analiso como novos atores sociais que surgiram após a redemocratização em 1985 tornaram-se fundamentais na luta por direitos humanos no Brasil e também como a ditadura é lembrada no presente. Esta disputa entre acadêmicos, ativistas, bloggers e jornalistas é fundamentalmente sobre memória e responsabilidade histórica. Historiadores estão, e devem continuar, se posicionando sobre o assunto.

Brazilian democracy has been unsettled in the wake of Dilma Rousseff's reelection as president in 2014. Clamorous yet substantively thin calls for her ouster began soon after the fourth consecutive victory for her center-left Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, or PT), focusing on a widespread corruption scandal in the state-owned oil conglomerate Petrobras; bleak economic indicators; and—the formal basis for her impeachment—crafty but hardly unprecedented budgetary measures. Together, these conditions irreparably damaged Rousseff's ability to pursue a proactive agenda in her second term. She was consumed by erstwhile allies in Congress and a contentious reading of the legal parameters necessary to depose a sitting president. The disquiet within the body politic may indicate a shaken commitment to democratic procedure, but an exact repeat of the 1964 military coup that installed twenty-one years of dictatorship has remained unthinkable even as a small but vocal minority urged the armed forces to enter the political arena. For better or for worse, the political system of Latin America's largest nation is resilient, able to shield its interests from the storm raging outside.

One periodical summed up the circumstances around Rousseff's impeachment this way: "At stake now are democracy, rule of law and the Republic, nothing less" (Mello 2016). These precious artifacts indeed lay in the balance, but they have been openly disputed since the end of the military regime some thirty

years ago. The very definition of Brazilian democracy has been contested for even longer.¹ This article seeks to elucidate the ways in which Brazil's most recent dictatorship continues to shape debates over the essential quality of Brazilian democracy today. Scholars who have followed developments in Brazil over the past three decades, sometimes building on seminal analyses of different national contexts, note that political transitions are rarely total and that tracing continuities between regimes is crucial to making sense of the present. In that regard, the Brazilian dictatorship is an especially intriguing case. As Vladimir Safatle and Edson Teles (2010, 9–10) have written, the dictatorship's lingering effects make it seem as though, in crucial ways, that regime never ended, yet revisionists insist for different reasons that it was shorter than is commonly held. Historian Daniel Aarão Reis (2012), for example, asserts the dictatorship lasted only from the coup in 1964 to the revocation of the repressive Institutional Act 5 in 1979, when the rule of law was supposedly restored. Marco Antonio Villa (2014) argues for an even shorter periodization, arguing that the dictatorship in fact can be said to have lasted only as long as Institutional Act 5 itself (1968–1979). These are some of the more polemical—and problematic—revisions to the chronology of the dictatorship. On the whole, the scholarly literature encourages a more nuanced appraisal of postdictatorial Brazilian politics than such interpretations allow, as well as a more multifaceted reading of the legacies of military rule.²

A particular point of contention among scholars and civil society more broadly is whether the regime that installed itself in 1964 is more accurately described as civil-military in nature or, in more traditional terms, simply military. The former, which emphasizes the role of civilians in creating and sustaining the dictatorship, has seemingly become the dominant scholarly nomenclature in Brazil in recent years, whereas the latter, stressing the political primacy of military men between 1964 and 1985, is still pervasive among nonspecialists. The discrepancy over terminology has been driven by myriad considerations, including, as I argue, the quality of Brazilian democracy today. As an entry point into this broader debate, I examine the publications and public acts of a number of collectives and co-ops, particularly an alternative São Paulo-based art group called Coletivo Zagaia, who jointly maintain not only that the period from 1964 to 1985 constituted a civil-military dictatorship but also that the same civil-military dictatorship complex remains largely intact today. A widely circulated essay published online in 2012 entitled “Um modismo equivocado” (“A wrong-headed fad”) by activist and journalist Pedro Estevam da Rocha Pomar strongly criticized the usage of the civil-military terminology by Zagaia and others in demonstrations that year. In this article, I trace the revealing back-and-forth that ensued between Pomar and Coletivo Zagaia in which Zagaia responded sharply to Pomar's criticism of their choice of terms, contributing to what became a rancorous and intensely personal exchange that exemplifies how disputed historiographical nomenclature can be.

My main argument is that while seeming to address the same quandary—the nature of the Brazilian dictatorship—these two sets of actors were actually talking past each other. Those arguing for the “civil” denomination in this case were in fact articulating a forceful critique of modern-day Brazilian politics, suggesting, among other things, that too much of the arbitrary repressive power of the state lives on from the days of military rule.³ In arguing against the new terminology, Pomar focused on the historical record of the regime itself, that is, the twenty-one-year period that began in 1964. A central concern for Zagaia was the extent to which former nonmilitary supporters of the dictatorship escaped juridical and popular scrutiny during the democratic transition. They point out that many of these individuals continue to enjoy positions of power and privilege today. For Pomar, however, the key to the debate over terminology revolves around who was responsible for the most consequential decisions affecting the social and political life of the nation between 1964 and 1985. These are separate though related issues that in this instance were conflated in the heated contest over historical memory.

Before turning to the argument between Pomar and Zagaia, I present the stakes of this debate by briefly reviewing the dispute over terms as it has played out within the scholarly literature in recent years. This will provide the context necessary to make sense of the exchange at the heart of this article and, ultimately, to judge the claims made by either side. I conclude by placing this debate in the context

¹ See Emilia Viotti da Costa's (2000) classic essay, “Liberalism: Theory and Practice.”

² A small sampling of this body of work includes Stepan (1989); Power and Kingstone (1999); McCann (2014); and Pinheiro (2014). See also O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead (1986).

³ As political scientist Jorge Zaverucha (2010) has pointed out, the 1988 Constitution promulgated after the end of military rule did not significantly rework provisions from the constitution issued by the regime in 1967 related to the armed forces, public safety, and the police. Article 142 of the 1988 charter, for instance, preserved the military's role as defender of “the fatherland, the guarantee of constitutional powers and, at the initiative of any of these, law and order.”

of other consequential events that occurred in 2012, most importantly the start of investigations by the National Truth Commission (Comissão Nacional da Verdade, or CNV) in May and the São Paulo state truth commission in March, both entities dedicated to producing official (and thus definitive) accounts of the regime's abuses.

Terms of Engagement

As with any debate of a historical nature, the terminology one uses to refer to the Brazilian dictatorship reflects how one engages with a host of related issues.⁴ Part of the dispute over terms involves the question of popular support for the coup and for the authoritarian regime that followed. It is still true that remarkably few public actors in Brazil today are inclined to discuss the dictatorship in favorable terms, as Daniel Aarão Reis (2000, 7) observed nearly two decades ago. Yet there was considerable popular support for the move to depose President João Goulart on March 31, 1964. As Jorge Ferreira and Angela de Castro Gomes (2014, 380) put it, the 1964 coup "was not an event that happened outside society and without its participation, even if its direction was in the hands of Brazilian military and civilian elites." Along those lines, a politician who had opposed Goulart later recalled that the coup was a "revolution made by every class, in a general consensus" (Ferreira 2006, 14).⁵ Indeed, for Ferreira and Gomes (2014, 14), the prominence of civilian leaders in media coverage of the coup further undermines the post hoc view of the dictatorship as a purely military invention. Historian Carlos Fico (2004) agrees that preparations for the coup constituted a civil-military affair, but he argues that the act itself was a military operation that foreshadowed the centrality of generals in Brazilian political life for the following two decades. Although scholarly consensus is lacking on the significance of civilians to the dictatorship, there is broad agreement that the efforts of nonmilitary actors were decisive for the success of the coup itself.

Civilian support for the coup, however, did not necessarily mean support for dictatorship. The military had influenced the political process before but never as directly or for as long as it would until 1985.⁶ Thus, editorials in newspapers that had openly supported overthrowing Goulart did not mention the formation of a dictatorship in the early days of April 1964, reflecting little sense that an authoritarian military regime would take shape (Ferreira and Gomes 2014, 380). Conservative politicians who had vocally supported Goulart's removal assumed they would benefit from the changed political landscape. They dreamed of political power being bestowed upon them by military men. The conspiratorial generals of 1964, however, had ambitious plans and refused to relinquish control of their "revolution" to politicians, even those who had opposed Goulart and his reformist platform. Most prominently, journalist and politician Carlos Lacerda incorrectly assumed he would have the chance to run for president in 1965. He later assembled an ill-fated broad front of civilian opposition to the regime.⁷ Civilian politicians and average citizens who supported the democratic break in 1964, in other words, could not have known that the military would remain in power for twenty-one years. It is thus difficult to assert that most of those who supported a military intervention in the political process necessarily also favored an authoritarian regime, although some clearly did. Significantly, proponents of both found themselves on the same side of the political divide in 1964.

The notion that the dictatorship enjoyed broad-based support after it had consolidated itself is also shaky. Historian Demian Bezerra de Melo (2012) has convincingly and succinctly punctured several of the arguments undergirding this position. First, he acknowledges that conservative street demonstrations calling for and then celebrating Goulart's ouster were sizable and significant despite the president's overconfident allies dismissing such displays as not representative of the majority of the population.⁸ "But what would one expect," he asks, "that after the coup and the installation of the dictatorship the Lefts would promote public acts of repudiation, or continue rallying for structural reforms?" (46). He also

⁴ In this article I focus on the dominant nomenclature, but in fact there are myriad terms scholars have used to identify the nature of the 1964 coup and the dictatorship that followed. Juremir Machado da Silva (2015), for example, has called it a media-civil-military coup, while others prefer to call it a business-military coup (*golpe empresarial-militar*) (see Mattos 2012, 128).

⁵ João Cleofas de Oliveira was a member of the conservative National Democratic Union (União Democrática Nacional, or UDN), the main opposition party to Goulart's administration.

⁶ On the military's historical role in politics, see Schulz (1994) and Stepan (1971).

⁷ On Lacerda's political career, see Dulles (1991–1996); Mendonça (2002).

⁸ "That is not the people [Isso não é povo]," Goulart's allies said of the marches organized by Catholic and anticommunist forces (cited in Ferreira 2011, 438). Public opinion polls taken at the time did show that a majority of the country approved of Goulart's administration in the run-up to the coup. For example, one poll of three cities in the state of São Paulo found that 15 percent of respondents considered Goulart's administration great; 30 percent, good; and 24 percent, average. Meanwhile, 16 percent considered the government bad or terrible. Paulo Reda, "Jango tinha apoio popular ao ser deposto em 64, diz Ibope," *Folha de São Paulo*, March 9, 2003, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/folha/brasil/ult96u46767.shtml>.

dismisses the idea that favorable electoral results for the regime's de facto political party reflected support for military rule. After all, he points out, the only legal opposition party itself frequently encouraged its supporters to cast blank ballots to protest a stilted political system.⁹ Finally, Melo expresses skepticism of polls showing tremendous support for General-President Emílio Garrastazu Médici (1969–1974), who presided over what are considered the harshest years of military rule, since, in a climate of suspicion, repression, and torture, how likely is it that an opponent of the regime would openly criticize the president's performance to a pollster (Melo 2012, 46)?

Melo goes on to argue that the term *civil-military* is not inherently more precise, as its proponents suggest, since it discursively lumps nonmilitary actors into a single category. "In addition to decoupling the political process from the dynamics of capitalism," he writes, "historians [who embrace the civil-military denomination] raise dangerous notions, such as that 'Brazilian society' was complicit during those terrible years."¹⁰ Recent works by Adjovanes Thadeu Silva de Almeida (2013) and Janaina Martins Cordeiro (2015) further problematize the notion of popular support for the regime. Almeida (2013, 322), for example, argues that there existed a "gray zone" in which various social actors—artists and workers, among others—sought a middle ground between "steadfast support and obstinate rejection" of the regime. The idea that civilians supported the dictatorship is thus a complicated notion, insufficient by itself to warrant a revision of terms.

Another common argument for the civil-military denomination focuses on the institutional support the dictatorship received from key segments of civil society, the press, and the business community. The classic work documenting the involvement of business interests and civil society in the coup remains René Armand Dreifuss's (1981) highly influential *1964: A conquista do Estado*. Indeed, Demian Bezerra de Melo (2012, 53) refers back to Dreifuss in his own discussion of the proper nomenclature to suggest that business interests and, more broadly, class were key factors in the coup's elaboration. More recently, the 2009 documentary *Cidadão Boilesen* has become perhaps the best-known investigation of the private sector's role in supporting and financing torture during the dictatorship. Director Chaim Litewski uses the case of Henning Albert Boilesen, a Danish businessman who became a naturalized Brazilian citizen, to explore the relationship between companies—Boilesen was the president of Ultragas, a gas distribution conglomerate—and the repressive apparatus in the state of São Paulo, including Operação Bandeirante (OBAN), created in July 1969, which later morphed into the fearsome Destacamento de Operação e Informações—Centro de Operações de Defesa Interna (DOI/CODI), on September 27, 1969. Boilesen was assassinated by members of an underground guerrilla organization who correctly proclaimed that "Boilesen was only one of those responsible for the terror and oppression" before promising to target other civilian collaborators like him (Godoy 2014, 41). According to Cláudio Guerra (2012, 143), a former agent of the repressive apparatus, "the resources that made it possible to pay the team responsible for clandestine operations came from businessmen who, in exchange, were benefitted by the military regime. There was never a lack of funds." Guerra's testimonial, along with Marcelo Godoy's book *A casa da vovó*, offer perhaps the definitive accounts of the torture machine civilian collaborators like Boilesen helped to create. Advocates of the civil-military verbiage point to the business community's support of torture to underscore the complicity of nonmilitary actors in the dictatorship's worst abuses.

Focusing on institutions and governmental trends, two edited volumes published in recent years offer panoramic looks at the ways in which Brazilian society has and has not changed since the end of the dictatorship (Pinheiro 2014; Safatle and Teles 2010). The aim of such works is not, as two of the editors put it, "to commit the basic mistake of confusing our semidemocracy with a dictatorship, but to recall the origins of what keeps our democratic experience from advancing" (Safatle and Teles 2010, 11). Palmério Dória and Mylton Severiano are more strident in their analysis of the dictatorship's legacy, explicitly arguing that the legacy of the 1964 coup threatens Brazilian democracy today. They assert that Brazil is trapped by a "permanent coup [*golpe permanente*]," sustained by a conservative press, judiciary, and congress, all of whom are intent on "placing the course of history in reverse" (Dória and Severiano 2015, 20). Notwithstanding their tonal differences, these works agree that the transition from dictatorship to democracy in Brazil is incomplete in some crucial way. They reject what Adriano Codato (2006) has called the "teleological temptation" to see democracy as the ultimate aim of the dictatorship's liberalization, which ostensibly began in 1974 under

⁹ Brazil had only two legally sanctioned political parties from 1965 to 1979. The National Renovating Alliance (Aliança Renovadora Nacional, or ARENA) was the de facto party of the regime while the Brazilian Democratic Movement (Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, or MDB) represented the moderate opposition.

¹⁰ If forced to revise terms, Melo (2012, 53) advocates calling the regime a business-military dictatorship (*ditadura empresarial-militar*) since it defines the civilian element more narrowly.

the fourth general-president, Ernesto Geisel (1974–1979). Such an assumption is flawed “because it frees itself from the need to evaluate remaining authoritarianism in the new regime” (Codato 2006, 11). Many of those who embrace the newer civil-military terminology thus do so, as Coletivo Zagaia and their allies did in 2012, to draw attention to civilian individuals and institutions who benefited from or collaborated with military rule and who continue to enjoy prominent positions today. From this perspective, the end of the dictatorship was less a process of transition than a process of transaction, as José Paulo Netto (2014, 262) has put it. That fact, combined with Thomas Bruneau’s (1992) observation that civil-military relations in Brazil have historically been defined by an exclusionary “antidemocratic consensus,” renders the lack of accountability for bad actors perfectly understandable. Indeed, it fits into a clearly defined theory of Brazilian history in which powerful elite actors are largely impervious to social and legal challenges to their antidemocratic behavior.

Lingering antidemocratic tendencies in Brazilian society have shaped a quandary I refer to as the continuity question; that is, to what extent does Brazilian democracy today reflect the pernicious influence of authoritarian regimes in the past? An often-overlooked part of the debate over terms, and the nature of Brazil’s dictatorship more broadly, has to do with whether continuities can be traced directly from today’s political culture to the period of military rule. Coletivo Zagaia and its allies argue vehemently that they can. “The question the Cordão [da Mentira] has always raised,” affirmed Caio Castor, one of the participants in a 2014 demonstration marking the fiftieth anniversary of the coup, which gathered around one thousand people in São Paulo, “is when will the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil end? In May 2006, five hundred were killed in fifteen days. That’s how many were killed, according to official data, during twenty-one years of dictatorship.” He concluded: “Not only is there an entire apparatus left over from the dictatorship, but it has intensified,” referring to police brutality in slums and peripheries and attacks on indigenous people (Gombata 2014). Something fundamental about the essence of the regime installed in 1964, according to this logic, can be deduced by a closer investigation of powerful civilian elements active today. Recasting the dictatorship as a civil-military phenomenon might encourage popular reflection over the extent to which those who benefited from military rule still possess inordinate influence over Brazilian politics and society. Such reflection could then foster a debate over how to improve the quality of Brazilian democracy. This was the main thrust behind the Cordão da Mentira and Coletivo Zagaia’s statements in 2012. That year, a cadre of young activists found new ways to engage with the discursive and material struggle over the dictatorship and its legacies. Their actions reflect a deep frustration with the entrenched conservatism of Brazilian political culture historically but also, primarily, in the present.

Coletivo Zagaia versus Pedro Pomar

The Cordão da Mentira, an activist cooperative composed of more than thirty groups from São Paulo, including politically minded collectives, activists, theater groups, and samba performers, has emerged in recent years as one of the most visible grassroots organizations devoted to highlighting perceived continuities from dictatorial rule on issues ranging from police brutality to impunity for the regime’s civilian collaborators.¹¹ Cordão’s actions, essays, and statements merit consideration by historians and others within the academy given that the group has, perhaps unwittingly, inserted itself into a broader historiographical debate regarding the nature of the military regime. Their impact on the discussion around the continuity question has been more than merely discursive.

The Cordão da Mentira’s first public demonstration was a satirical parade on April 1, 2012, to mark the forty-eighth anniversary of the coup. The group’s name played off the ironic jubilation of the gathering and the fact that the samba march was to be held on April Fools’ Day, known in Brazil as Dia da Mentira, or Day of the Lie.¹² Their idea was distinctive: with a variety of songs and *samba-enredos*—samba parades inspired by a specific theme or narrative—protesting the regime, the stated goal of Cordão was to encourage participants to “*carnevalizar* against the torturers and murderers of the military dictatorship and its

¹¹ *Cordões* emerged in São Paulo in 1914 as an innovation in carnival celebrations. Created by Dionísio Barbosa, cordões possessed a number of distinctive features including the presence of the *baliza*, a figure who juggled a baton and cleared the way for the group to pass between carnival revelers. The *baliza* was also charged with guiding the group’s banner, itself another peculiarity of the cordão. “The rhythm of the cordão,” writes Francisco de Assis Santana Mestrinel, “was the so-called *marcha-samba* which combined elements of rural São Paulo sambas and marches.” Mestrinel (2010) situates the cordão firmly within the camp of “pequeno carnaval,” that is, carnival celebrations “based on Portuguese, black and indigenous recreational and religious traditions” as opposed to the more elitist erudition of “grande carnaval.”

¹² The coup began in the early hours of March 31, 1964, when insurrectionist troops began marching toward Rio de Janeiro. The events of April 1, however, sealed Goulart’s fate.

disciples." The demonstration made use of samba music and lively street theater to parody and denounce the military regime while identifying individuals and institutions who benefited and continue to benefit from a political regime insulated from popular pressure. The event was a deliberate effort to link past and present. The chosen theme for the demonstration was "Quando vai acabar a ditadura civil-militar?" ("When will the civil-military dictatorship end?"). With that name, Cordão made a provocative two-pronged statement: first, the underlying dynamics of Brazilian politics have not changed significantly since the end of military rule, and second, civilian collaborators were at least as important as military figures in defining the dictatorship's essential character.¹³

According to *Estado de São Paulo*, about two hundred participants gathered at noon for a soiree at the Consolação cemetery, where the march was to begin (Inhesta 2012). The parade then proceeded to a number of sites of symbolic importance for the history of the dictatorship, like Rua Maria Antônia, where violent clashes in 1968 between students at the University of São Paulo and Mackenzie left many wounded and one dead; Avenida Higienópolis to the headquarters of Tradição, Família, e Propriedade, the conservative Catholic organization that in 1964 had called on the armed forces to take a stand against the "disorder, subversion, anarchy, and communism" attributed directly to João Goulart; the offices of *Folha de São Paulo*, where demonstrators read aloud an editorial from that newspaper in support of the 1979 amnesty law, which the various assembled groups vehemently denounced for the legal protections it extended to agents of state violence.¹⁴ The group's route ended in the Luz neighborhood at the Memorial da Resistência, the former headquarters of the political police (Departamento Estadual de Ordem Política e Social do Estado de São Paulo, or DEOPS/SP), where prisoners were taken and tortured during the height of the dictatorship's repression.

Two months after Cordão da Mentira marked the anniversary of the coup, Coletivo Zagaia, one of the main groups behind the event, published the essay "De onde? Para onde?" (From where? Where to?), musing on how the Cordão as a tactic might evolve and on what it meant exactly to *carnavalizar* against the dictatorship. After an esoteric discussion of the aesthetic novelty of the Cordão as political theater, the essay ended with a rebuke of Brazilian political discourse as a whole and the old-guard left in particular: "The Cordão prepares a symbolic struggle against the lie that reproduces itself not just in the civil-military dictatorship's past, but in the narrative of a country unaware of its genocidal present. A class struggle which operates in the imagination, about which the left must also chase away the old ghosts haunting its perceptions and attitudes" (Coletivo Zagaia 2012a). Coletivo Zagaia and its partners criticized the historical perspective of those who confine arbitrary state violence to the dictatorial period while failing to actively mobilize against it in the present. They implied that insisting the regime was a purely military construction makes it easier to relegate its damage to a bygone era when generals controlled the government. In contrast, the civil-military moniker, as they use it, draws attention to conservative civilian actors who supported military rule and who are still influential today. Civilian collaborators in the government, media, and business community allow these activists to argue that the nation's political economy has not changed significantly since the dictatorship. Ongoing violence committed by the state only adds to that conclusion. The Cordão da Mentira's second demonstration, entitled "Quando vai acabar o genocídio popular?" ("When will the popular genocide end?"), underscored this point by explicitly referring to ongoing state violence against poor communities of color as genocide. Scheduled for September 29, 2012, the march was intended to "point to a continuity of the structures of the civil-military dictatorship and its civilian accomplices in the present," according to Coletivo Zagaia (2012b).

Less than a month before this second demonstration was to be held, Pedro Estevam da Rocha Pomar, a journalist, author, and longtime activist born in 1957, published a widely circulated and republished essay entitled "Um modismo equivocado" ("A wrong-headed fad"), directly responding to the argument advanced by Coletivo Zagaia, whose leadership and membership remained mostly anonymous, and others that the Brazilian dictatorship was civil-military in nature. Pomar criticized "human-rights activists, former political prisoners, university students, and even renowned academics" for adopting a term that defied, if nothing else, the settled terminology of dictatorship historiography. "Those who defend the usage of the term 'civil-military dictatorship,'" he wrote, "see it as necessary to adequately explain the context of the regime

¹³ The Cordão da Mentira again identified the dictatorship as civil-military for its fiftieth anniversary celebration entitled "Há 50 anos, o golpe civil-militar ... o aniversário é deles, mas a rua é nossa!," <https://cordoadamentira.milharal.org/2014/03/18/ha-50-anos-o-golpe-civil-militar-o-aviversario-pode-ser-deles-mas-a-rua-e-nossa/>.

¹⁴ "Protesto contra o golpe militar reúne 300 pessoas em SP," *Folha de São Paulo*, April 2, 2012, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2012/04/1070408-proteto-contra-o-golpe-militar-reune-300-pessoas-em-sp.shtml>.

Brazil lived under from 1964 until 1985, the result of a collusion between the military and civilian sectors of the business community It happens that, however noble the aims of renaming the period may be, it represents a profound mistake" (Pomar 2012a).

Pomar did not deny the civilian role in the regime; his central point was merely that ultimate political control invariably rested with the generals who headed the federal government. Adding the "civil" element presumably defanged the "military" nature of the regime, thus minimizing the culpability of torturers and human rights abusers within the military. Pomar's implication was that as the CNV was beginning its operations the focus ought to be on the dictatorship's "praetorian guard, those who committed violent crimes in favor of the regime," although he also asserted the need for civilian collaborators to eventually be brought to justice as well. Finally, Pomar also argued that switching terms would confuse the Brazilian people, accustomed to the "military dictatorship" as an institution, a concept, and as the object of public opprobrium.

This concern with nomenclature is a vivid example of how contested the terminology used to describe historical phenomena can be. Pomar's assertion that a change in terms would substantially alter popular understanding of the twenty-one year period beginning in 1964 demonstrates a concern for the preservation of a particular historical narrative, one presumably undermined by the newer civil-military verbiage. Pomar denounced the impulse to revise the terminology by suggesting that the move could backfire and actually muddle the record of military culpability. Thus, Pomar's criticism of the *Cordão da Mentira* was also a defense of the once-overwhelming historiographical consensus that the military in fact reigned supreme from 1964 to 1985. That consensus has evidently softened. Case in point, the armed forces in 2014 agreed to issue a general apology for torture and other abuses committed during the dictatorship but would only accept their "share of the responsibility" for what current historiography supposedly maintains was a civil-military arrangement. The military in this case is actively engaging in the broader debate over the nature of the regime in order to reframe its role as an institution that controlled the government for twenty-one years. It is making use of the newer nomenclature to deflect public criticism, precisely as Pomar and others warned they would (Costa and Serodio 2014).

Three months later the anonymous members of *Coletivo Zagaia* wrote an essay entitled "A construção da verdade ou da obrigação de combater a tradição, família e impropriedades" ("The construction of truth or the need to combat tradition, family, and impropriety"), in which the group responded directly to Pomar's criticisms (Coletivo Zagaia 2012c). Zagaia began by attacking Pomar's excessive attachment to established historiographical orthodoxy. "According to his old-fashioned rhetoric," they wrote of Pomar, "power resides solely with the sovereign identified as the one in charge, the one who signs the orders. And, in that sense, there was nothing comparable in the civilian camp. In the halls of the Executive, military uniforms were the fashion, not the gray suits of [civilian] collaborators." Zagaia suggested that by separating civilian from military poles of influence Pomar presented a flawed understanding of political power. They argued instead for a broader conceptualization of power while also pointing to a coalition of identifiable actors: "After all," they pointed out, "who was it that controlled (and still controls) the means of communication, who made real the symbolic apparatus in praise of the regime, who controlled the means of production, who made the torture devices and who financed the torturers?" Zagaia's key point was that only recently has the full extent of civil society's collusion with the repressive apparatus come to light. That collaboration ran deeper than previously understood. "More than mere complicity, civilian elements of various orders—as capital is more diverse than the military apparatus—consolidated a pact around a society based on progressive industry and regressive torture. They benefit directly from authoritarianism." A failure to update terms to match new information gleaned from increased access to archives represents, according to Zagaia's response, a commitment to "half truths."

Zagaia also included several references to the generational divide in the selection of terminology used to talk about the dictatorship. The *Cordão da Mentira*, they asserted, was a:

Thought-out act that, among many other demonstrations [*esculachos*] also employing the 'civil-military' nomenclature promoted mostly by young people who are not a part of Pomar's generation, reflected a fundamental historical reflection on why the traces of the civil-military dictatorship has profound effects until today. We want to know why it is so difficult for a country to establish a commission to investigate the dark past of its history. We want to understand the links between the present structures with the past, be it in our media, our financial and industrial apparatus, be it the logic of extermination which continues to govern everyday life in the peripheries.

The generational dimension of this dispute, as Zagaia itself demonstrates, is complicated. On one hand, the Cordão da Mentira and Coletivo Zagaia certainly fit within a more theatrical strain of activism that in 2012 also included the first of the so-called *escrachos* or *esculachos*. Inspired by young activists in Chile and Argentina, *escrachos* are acts of vandalism at the homes of former torturers that are intended to publicly shame agents of the regime. Led by two collectives in particular, the Frente de Esculacho Popular and the Levante Popular da Juventude, such acts sought to “oxygenize and bring up to date the struggle of older militants” (Frente de Esculacho Popular 2013). These movements cite their relative youth as markers of authenticity and legitimacy, presenting the *escracho* as a contribution of this generation to the democratic struggles of the dictatorship period.

While seeking to set themselves apart from the traditional strictures of political discourse, Zagaia also sought to make clear that they were not necessarily disagreeing with older, more seasoned activists who identify the dictatorship as purely military in nature. “That is a legitimate way to codify their anguish,” they noted, “but, in our view, it is insufficient if we are to understand the contemporary predicament.” It bears mentioning that Daniel Aarão Reis, a historian and former guerrilla, has been at the vanguard of scholars calling for a modification in dictatorship terminology. It would therefore be a mistake to view this debate as purely generational. And yet innovative forms of social protest like the Cordão da Mentira and *escrachos* have been spearheaded by individuals at least one generation removed from the height of the dictatorship’s repression. The relative youth of those denouncing the dictatorship in this context correlates more to the tactical choices behind their demonstrations than to their substance. In other words, the main contribution of this new generation of activists has been to introduce new forms of theatrical social protest intended to draw attention to the dictatorship’s pernicious legacies in the present. Their adoption of the civil-military verbiage is not incidental, but it is also not their defining characteristic.

The essay ended by strongly criticizing Pomar’s adherence to old-line quasi-authoritarian dogmatism, stating that Pomar “would rather attack the new generation than rethink his position. He prefers to attack the young people clamoring for truth and justice rather than the allies of the dictatorship, who continue to enjoy the spoils of power.” Zagaia suggested that Pomar, the grandson of one of the founders of the Communist Party of Brazil (Partido Comunista do Brasil, PCdoB), clung presumptuously to a traditional discourse, “denounc[ing] those who do not share his ideas affixed in the authority of bygone times, assuming the authority of one who holds the truth for himself and does not dialogue with anyone.” On this point Zagaia seemed to be articulating a common critique of the traditional left in Brazil: that it was domineering, rigid, often intolerant, and undemocratic.¹⁵ As a longtime member of the PT, in their view Pomar was essentially conservative, a co-opted leader, or *pelego*, of the left, enforcing ideological and historiographical purity to the detriment of fresh interpretations arising from the activism of newer social movements. Pomar refused to indulge a change in historical terminology presumably because he benefitted from the political status quo.

Pomar did not delay in responding to such a vehement riposte. This time, in an essay entitled “Resposta aos meus detratores” published online on December 4, 2012, he began by establishing his progressive bonafides to contextualize his rebuttal: “I am fifty-five years old and have been active in the Left for over thirty years. I have seldom seen such an unseemly text, so loaded with anger, so full of hatred, so disgraceful as this letter from Coletivo Zagaia, in which the goal is not to debate but to demolish the opponent” (Pomar 2012b). Pomar’s text dealt mainly with Zagaia’s combative tone, the author opting not to rehash arguments made previously. “Yes, I am ‘archaic,’” he continued, “but I feel younger than certain youths who, eager to demonstrate their wisdom, do not hesitate to resort to the most perverse and ancient methods of manipulation, deception, and misrepresentation. I am shocked to see a supposedly revolutionary group produce such literary garbage.” Noting that he was not a historian, Pomar stressed that his work had nonetheless been cited by like-minded academics. He defied Zagaia to produce similarly referenced intellectual contributions and appealed to the judgment of history and historiography: “We shall see, in the coming years, what history will say of such recklessness and lack of principles.” Pomar also criticized the authors of the essay for hiding behind the anonymity of the collective. He wrote: “I do not know who the real authors are. I signed my essay ‘Um modismo equivocado.’ The authors of the letter hide behind the facade of an unknown group, Zagaia, which it says is part of a larger group, the Cordão da Mentira. Do they not have the courage to show their face?” “I believe,” he continued, implicitly underscoring once again his own career as an activist, “that taking a clear position on controversial issues

¹⁵ For an example of this critique, see Green (1999, 275).

is the duty of every intellectual and any and all militants of the left." Pomar concluded by inviting his detractors to publicly reveal their identity to the readers.

The final response in this exchange was also the most substantive. On December 15, 2012, Coletivo Zagaia (2012d) published an open letter to Pomar entitled "Muito além do 'modismo': quem confunde as palavras, confunde as coisas" ("More than a fad: those who confuse words confuse matters") in its online magazine on December 15, 2012. The authors began by responding to Pomar's charge that they were hiding behind the anonymity of the collective, giving the names of the group's leaders and pointing out that such information had been available, if unclearly, on the collective's website all along. They asserted that instead of responding to their arguments Pomar had simply accused them of attacking his person and refused to engage with the substance of their critiques. They proceeded to restate those critiques: "The problem with your conception of power," they wrote of Pomar, "is the notion that the person in charge is solely the one formally empowered Recent discoveries in Latin American historiography reveal that there was a [mutual] scheme between civilian and military components beyond the supremacy of either pole." The authors cited a few more examples of recent archival materials showing the central role of civilians before, during, and after the 1964 coup to underscore the notion that terms must periodically be updated to reflect inconstant understandings of the past.

Coletivo Zagaia also questioned Pomar's priorities vis-à-vis accountability for those responsible for dictatorial repression, touching on what had been a sticking point among sectors of the left before the truth commission began its operations. Criticizing the notion that military actors—what Pomar had called the regime's "praetorian guard"—must be the first brought to justice, Zagaia argued that doing so would imply that "financing torture and murder was a lesser offense" given the fortune or political influence of those involved, "as if we were unaware of how the justice system works with its predilection for scapegoats." The letter continued: "And if, perhaps, civilians were at one point cast aside by the military . . . nothing prevented them from returning to full strength by the backdoor amnesty (or even before it, since the amnesty is no legal miracle, but the result of an agreement between the military and civilian forces in power). The [conception of a] purely 'military' dictatorship hides all this and leaves the cloudy present and civilian crime [unexamined]. Here, in our view, is the disservice of your strategy."

In this final piece of the exchange the generational angle of the dispute again reared its head. Whereas Pomar had attempted to establish his credentials as a longtime activist and militant, Zagaia rejected outright the discursive recourse to age or experience to justify traditional thinking. "Using this rhetorical instrument," they asserted, "reaffirms what we criticize: the appeal to orthodoxy as an authoritarian means to cement misunderstandings about the past." The authors reiterated the argument that an insistence on overly traditionalist readings of the past discounted the perspectives gleaned from the present-day activism of vibrant new organizations. Here again was the argument that those insisting on the "military" moniker stubbornly refused to reevaluate their position in accordance with changing times that called for a revision of terms. The point of taking to the streets in a carnival-like *cordão* or defacing the homes of known torturers or establishing truth commissions, the authors pointed out, was precisely "to unveil what has been covered up by time, to redefine what has always been thought in traditional terms." The theatricality these groups employed in their public acts reflected a diffuse generational frustration, anxiety, and impatience with the stilted state of Brazilian democracy. They ended the letter with a mission statement of sorts: "Changing the term 'military dictatorship' to 'civil-military dictatorship' is not, then, some whimsical thing and, yes, it does respond to the aspirations of history: to revisit the past in order to better understand it and identify its structures in the present, to build a free future, where the truth can be known by all. This is the real meaning of our current struggle for democracy."

Zagaia thus situated the revision of terms within a modern current of activism that implicitly possesses a vitality and vigor no longer identifiable in Pomar's writings or in the political actions of his seasoned cohort more broadly. Embracing the new terminology, indeed vocally insisting on it, was a means by which Zagaia and its partners in other groups sought to reinvigorate public debate about the dictatorship and its legacies in the present. The thrust of their argument therefore rests on present concerns and not simply with the historical record of the regime itself, that is, the period from 1964 to 1985.

On its face, this dispute might be dismissed as one among so many trivial internet feuds characterized by petty grievances untethered from real stakes. It might also be seen as yet another episode in the internecine battle over ideological purity that has long bedeviled the left in Brazil and elsewhere.¹⁶ But more than just

¹⁶ A tiny sampling of books dealing with divisions within the Brazilian left during the dictatorship include Langland (2013), Ridenti (1993), and Keck (1992).

a particularly acrimonious squabble, this exchange merits attention because it reflects in part different understandings of the dictatorship's essence and its impact on Brazil today. By repeatedly attempting to link Pomar to the traditional old-line left—in this case, the PCdoB and PT—Zagaia implicitly depicted themselves and their cohort as the vanguard of a new critical movement questioning settled interpretations of the military period. They suggested, in words and deeds, that the legacies of the dictatorship are more than distant echoes; they endure as intractable obstacles to a more democratic Brazil. Confronting various facets of this troublesome inheritance is presented as the *raison d'être* for not only Coletivo Zagaia but also a slew of like-minded social movements, including Cordão da Mentira (established in 2012), Mães de Maio (established in 2006), and Rede 2 de Outubro (established in 2011), to name a few of the most prominent groups that have emerged. Many of these groups focus on continuous police violence against poor and marginalized communities as representative of the failures of civilian politicians to bolster a humane and equal political culture in Brazil. The democratic system over which these civilian leaders preside is, as these groups maintain, not inherently different from the military governments of the past. Coletivo Zagaia insisted that Pomar respect their reasons for identifying the regime as a civil-military dictatorship. In doing so, they sought to shore up not only the performative aspect of their demonstrations but their intellectual legitimacy as well.

This episode also illustrates the interplay between academy and civil society through which historiographical revisions of terms and concepts get digested, appropriated, and often reconfigured by actors outside the scholarly community. I do not maintain that Coletivo Zagaia and its partners can be said to represent all those who argue for the civil-military moniker. After all, there are myriad arguments used to support that nomenclature, as indicated earlier in this article. Instead, I suggest that an examination of their writings can provide insight into the reasoning of some particularly vocal, youthful, and insistent advocates for the revision of terms. This case, in which both sides claimed validation from the academy and social legitimacy through political activism, illustrates Michel-Rolph Trouillot's (1995, xix) assertion that "the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production." Different assessments of the dictatorship's legacy and Brazilian democracy in the present in this instance drove a wedge between actors who mostly agree in their negative assessment of the military period and its enduring impact. The difference was fundamentally one of historical interpretation and emphasis.

Conclusion: Truth and Memory

The way in which events, individuals, or regimes are remembered matters in large part because it shapes actions taken in the present. In that sense, historian Steve Stern's (2004, xx) observation about postdictatorial Chile holds true in some measure for Brazil: "In the struggle for hearts and minds ... the memory question became strategic—politically, morally, existentially—both during and after the dictatorship" as a means of establishing "political and cultural legitimacy." The struggle over memory in the present, in Brazil as well as in Chile, he says, "casts fresh light on the entire era of dictatorship and constrained democracy from the 1970s through the 1990s" and beyond. Disputes over memory and historical narratives often, at their core, deal with the loci of hegemony in the present and with the frictions involved in mediating that power, whether in the media, government, or industry. The polemic between Pedro Pomar and Coletivo Zagaia in 2012 can thus be understood as a disagreement over the nature of political power and the impact of the past on the present.

The year 2012 in Brazil was marked in other ways by an intensive debate regarding the legacy of the dictatorship. This was due in no small part to the fact that the CNV inaugurated by President Dilma Rousseff on May 16 promised a more holistic adjudication of the dictatorship's crimes than had ever been officially undertaken. The focus, scope, and authority of the CNV were all sources of controversy for supporters and opponents alike; the latter expressed concern that the state would produce a one-sided account of the dictatorship and pursue a policy of revanchism against former agents of the regime while the former fretted that investigations would be obstructed by sectors of the military and produce few tangible results. Demonstrations similar to the one that precipitated Pedro Pomar's open letter to Cordão da Mentira attacked the legacy of dictatorial rule in various parts of the country. In fact, the Cordão's action was the third theatrical protest against the dictatorship in less than a week's time, and one of several to receive explicit support from elected officials like Adriano Diogo, a PT state senator and the president of the Rubens Paiva state truth commission of São Paulo (Comissão da Verdade do Estado de São Paulo 2012, 307). On March 27 there were coordinated *escrachos* at the homes of alleged torturers in seven major cities, and two days later protestors in Rio de Janeiro projected photographs and videos of individuals killed or disappeared

by the dictatorship onto the building of the *Círculo Militar*, a former army installation now used for cultural and sporting events, where retired officers were commemorating the forty-eighth anniversary of the 1964 coup. Events in 2012 made clear the extent to which various social actors are still debating the significance of the dictatorship and its impact on Brazilian democracy today.

The CNV ultimately cast a wide investigative net, seemingly satisfying Pomar's call to look deeply into the actions of the armed forces as well as Coletivo Zagaia's insistence that civilians be taken seriously as criminal conspirators. Chapter 8 in the second volume of the CNV's final report, for example, focuses on civilians who collaborated with the dictatorship, including names of companies and individuals (such as the aforementioned Boilesen) who actively supported the 1964 coup and the authoritarian regime that followed. The report offers a fairly comprehensive account of the civilians who supported the regime's repressive apparatus even if it was not empowered to hold such figures legally accountable for their actions. There were other shortcomings: some argued, for example, that the CNV's report mishandled the issue of torture. Cecilia Coimbra, a former member of the Brazilian Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Brasileiro*, or PCB) arrested during the dictatorship who later founded the *Grupo Tortura Nunca Mais*, took issue with the report's use of the phrase "violations of human rights" as opposed to torture. She argued that this was a euphemistic concession to conservative political actors and the military. "It is important to hold individuals accountable," Coimbra stated, "but it is even more important to know: where did [torture] happen and how? These questions were not answered. We also do not know what happened to the disappeared. This story is being told according to the interests of the forces in power."¹⁷ Coimbra implied that a deeper look into the crimes of the regime was obstructed by powerful actors concerned with the social impact of such an investigation today.

Pedro Pomar himself did not diverge much from this conclusion, noting that the CNV's report represented progress not for the revelations it contained but for its recommendations, most notably that the 1979 amnesty law be revised so that alleged torturers could be made accountable to justice. Political scientist Anthony Pereira (2015) expresses a similar opinion when he suggests that the most important metric of the CNV's success should be whether it provides the momentum necessary for improvements in police practices and a reduction in the human rights violations that remain pervasive today. He points out that the CNV's final report called for the creation of an independent committee to monitor progress toward acting on the Commission's various recommendations, demonstrating a clear commitment to do away with harmful practices leftover from years of authoritarian rule and a much longer history of violence against the poor and dispossessed in Brazil.

For their part, Kathryn Sikkink and Bridget Marchesi (2015) have argued in *Foreign Affairs* that the real test of the CNV's impact will be whether it leads to trials for those who committed abuses during the dictatorship. "Brazil's public prosecutor's office, in particular," they note, "has been attempting to open criminal and civil prosecutions over many years, but judges, invoking the amnesty law, have repeatedly frustrated their efforts Yet virtually every other country in the region has either overturned or circumvented its amnesty laws in order for prosecutions to proceed—making it hard to believe that Brazil won't ultimately follow suit." Mauricio Santoro, a human rights adviser at Amnesty International Brazil, agreed, arguing that "the Brazilian exception has made us out to be the odd ones on the international stage." He continued: "It's one thing to defend this type of impunity in the 1980s, when no one had taken their dictators to trial. But in 2015, every other country has been able to make it happen except for us" (Charner 2015). Those advocating for a review of the 1979 amnesty law saw the CNV as perhaps the last best hope that the perpetrators of human rights abuses could be held legally accountable, an exercise that would represent both a reckoning with the past and a message in the present about the inadmissibility of such actions today.

The unclear extent to which Brazilian political culture today remains fundamentally the same as it was under military rule—what I have called here the continuity question—as well as the ability of Brazilian society to overcome its antidemocratic past thus figured into the debate over how scholars should receive the CNV's report. Pereira, like Zagaia, expresses an interest in seeing the truth commission serve as a tool to shape, through recommendations and nonbinding reforms, Brazilian society today. The commission's final report, in other words, is a prime opportunity for the government and civil society to directly confront the continuity question. Sikkink and Marchesi, however, suggest that the CNV's main function should be to bring perpetrators of human rights abuses to justice. Like Pomar, they suggest that

¹⁷ Fabio Brisolla, "Fundadora do Tortura Nunca Mais considera frustrante relatório da CNV." *Folha de São Paulo*, December 10, 2014, <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2014/12/1560330-fundadora-do-tortura-nunca-mais-considera-frustrante-relatorio-da-cnv.shtml>.

efforts by both the state and society more broadly to reconcile with the dictatorial past must include criminal proceedings against those who carried out the most violent crimes on behalf of the government. Although neither Sikkink and Marchesi nor Pereira frame their arguments according to the civil-military or military frameworks at stake in the argument discussed earlier in this article, it seems clear that similar considerations are in play.

The debate over the quality of Brazilian democracy has not been so pressing since the end of the dictatorship in 1985. Dilma Rousseff, the former guerrilla reelected president of Brazil in 2014 and impeached two years later, said in 2008, “Any comparison between the military dictatorship and Brazil’s democracy can only arise from those who do not value Brazilian democracy.”¹⁸ Public discourse no doubt allows for more nuance than that, yet it is not difficult to understand why a generation that resisted and survived the military dictatorship, like Rousseff and Pedro Pomar, might strongly reject the notion that very little has changed since the return of democracy. After all, Brazil today is objectively a democracy, however faulty its mechanisms for social inclusion or diversity of opinion may be. To overly stress purported continuities inherited from military rule would belittle both the progress made since the end of the dictatorship as well as the violence confronted by those who challenged it. Faced with a pervasive discourse of letting bygones be bygones, many former militants who resisted the dictatorship seem compelled to keep the memory of their struggle alive in a different political environment even if parts of their narratives have changed with time (Martins Filho 2009, 89–90).

In contrast, younger activists removed by a generation or more from the height of repression—along with, it must be noted, older activists—correctly highlight the many shortcomings of the new regime established in 1985. Scholars and activists who point to continuities from the dictatorial period have tended to focus on the violent repressive practices that persist despite the formal trappings of democratic procedure inherent in the discourse of the postdictatorial New Republic and, more specifically, the 1988 constitution. The current political arrangement is seen by these actors as a largely unsatisfactory composite, a middle ground between authoritarian and democratic modes of governance. While this critical perspective has been useful in identifying the often surprising extent to which fundamentally undemocratic behaviors endure, it does not sufficiently explain how conflicting impulses came to be integrated through historical processes into a political framework that is more than a simple sum of its parts. Put another way, the degree to which the shallowness of Brazilian democracy today can be directly attributed to the dictatorship that lasted from 1964 to 1985 remains unclear. Surely the particularities of that regime reverberate today, but a move to demystify its enduring effects might lead us back to the conclusion that the dictatorship was but one especially traumatizing episode in a long national history of antidemocracy.

The debate over whether to call the regime that governed Brazil for twenty-one years a civil-military or purely military dictatorship is not particularly new, but it has received considerable attention in recent years.¹⁹ My focus has been on the competing narratives that allow different social actors to arrive at seemingly irreconcilable interpretations of Brazil’s authoritarian past and its significance in the present. I have attempted to show that historical narratives can shape political action in the present and that such action offers clues as to why conventional wisdom about the past is less unassailable than is often thought. Coletivo Zagaia and Pedro Pomar were effectively talking past each in this dispute, the former making historical claims with an eye to the present while the latter focused intently on the historical record of the dictatorial period. The historian may be moved by the passion of Coletivo Zagaia’s claims and admire their devotion to the idea that history matters in the present, for people living here and now. But the historian also must be wary of what continuities from military rule can actually tell us about the regime itself. Certain continuities from that authoritarian period exist, as Zagaia and others have rightly noted, but to say that conservative civilian elites continue to enjoy inordinate political and economic influence, ignore electoral outcomes they find unfavorable, or demonstrate only partial concern for the rights of nonwhite Brazilians, does not describe a historical phenomenon that can be traced specifically to the dictatorship. Oligarchic rule, though dynamic and adaptive, has been a constant throughout Brazilian history. Any analysis of the dictatorship or the Brazilian political scene today must bear that in mind.

¹⁸ “Ditadura é primeiro ponto de tensão em depoimento de Dilma,” *G1*, May 7, 2008, <http://g1.globo.com/Noticias/Politica/0,,MUL456406-5601,00-JOSE+AGRIPINO+CITA+QUE+DILMA+MENTIU+DURANTE+A+DITADURA.html>. Rousseff at the time was serving as chief of staff in the administration of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva; her remarks came as she testified to the Senate Infrastructure Commission.

¹⁹ João Roberto Martins Filho (2006, 7) rightly predicted that this would be a much-debated topic in the events and publications marking the coup’s fiftieth anniversary.

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