

# The universities and the military regime

## As universidades no regime militar

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**MOTTA, Rodrigo Patto Sá.**

*As universidades e o regime militar – cultura política brasileira e modernização autoritária.*

Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 2014, 448 p.

### ABSTRACT

The review approaches the book *The universities and the military regime (As Universidades e o regime militar) – Brazilian political culture and authoritarian modernization*, by Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (Zahar, 2014), that analyzes the relations between the Dictatorship (Ditadura) and the Brazilian universities, using sources recently opened to the researchers. This book develops an analytical perspective beyond the dichotomy *repression-resistance*, replaced by *resistance, adhesion and accommodation*, with a panoramic approach of the several State actions and their consequences to the university, having University of Brasilia (UnB), Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG), and, in another registry, the University of São Paulo (USP), as the focus of analysis.

**Keywords:** Brazilian university, dictatorship in Brazil, book censure

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### RESUMO

A resenha aborda o livro *As universidades e o regime militar – cultura política brasileira e modernização autoritária*, de Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta (Zahar, 2014), que analisa as relações entre a Ditadura (1964-1985) e as universidades brasileiras, utilizando fontes recentemente abertas aos pesquisadores. O trabalho elabora uma perspectiva de análise para além da dicotomia *repressão-resistência*, substituída por *resistência, adesão e acomodação*, a partir de uma abordagem panorâmica das diversas ações do Estado e suas consequências para a universidade, tendo como principais focos de análise a Universidade de Brasília (UnB), a Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) e, em outro registro, a Universidade de São Paulo (USP).

**Palavras-chave:** Universidade brasileira, ditadura no Brasil, censura a livros

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v9i1p273-278>

V. 9 - Nº 1 jan./jun. 2015 São Paulo - Brasil JOÃO ELIAS NERY p. 273-278

MATRIZES

THE YEAR OF 2014 marked the 50th anniversary of the dictatorship's beginning in April 1st 1964, the day "that lasted 21 years". Many were the events surrounding the analysis of the heritage and legacy of the dictatorship implanted by military forces with support of big social groups. On the work mat made by the *Comissão Nacional da Verdade* (National Truth's Commission), different groups of society organized discussions involving depositions of people involved in the battles against the dictatorship, as well as researches were published in academic magazines and books, making the public debate about the coup of 1964 gain room and mobilize big groups of society.

The editorial market participated actively of this process by publishing or republishing works that have dictatorship as theme, especially publishers like *Boitempo* and *Zahar*. By the last one were published books that are part of a group of works that surround the rubric *1964 – 50 anos depois* (50 years later), of which is part *A ditadura que mudou o Brasil – 50 anos do golpe de 1964* (The dictatorship that changed Brazil – 50 years of the coup of 1964), organized by Daniel Aarão Reis, Marcelo Ridenti and Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta; *Ditadura e democracia no Brasil – do golpe de 1964 à Constituição de 1988* (Dictatorship and democracy in Brazil – from the coup of 1964 to the Constitution of 1988), by Daniel Aarão Reis, e *As Universidades e o regime militar – cultura política brasileira e modernização autoritária* (The Universities and the military polity – Brazilian political culture and authoritarian modernization), by Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta.

This review has as object of study the last work, that, as we will see, shows innovative interpretations about the relations between educational institutions and its agents and the dictatorship. Is worth observing that the firsts two works have in its titles the reference to a "dictatorship", while the one we comment uses "military polity", relevant aspect in that there's a dispute for the memory and definition of the kind of State deployed in 1964.

The dispute for the memory involves different denominations used to characterize the movement that led to João Goulart's demission, since "revolution", term used by the armed forces and groups that supported the coup, even dictatorship, passing by authoritarian regime, military regime, authoritarian state, military dictatorship, civil-military dictatorship, and even *ditabranda* (combination of the Portuguese words "*ditadura*" [dictatorship] and "*branda*" [light])!

Professor of Federal University of Minas Gerais' history department, Rodrigo Patto choose to use military regime in the title, however in many parts of the text he uses dictatorship or military dictatorship, and other denominations. Apparently the author doesn't have as goal to participate in the debate

that involves the analysts of the model implanted in 1964 as the nomenclature used to characterize it, what sets him apart, for example, from Daniel Aarão Reis, committed in compromising the civilians with the new regime by referring to a “civil-military” dictatorship.

The book *As universidades e o regime militar* (The universities and the military regime) (Zahar, 2014) approaches the relations between educational institutions, its managers, teachers and students and State agencies, as well as analyze the participation of EUA’s development agencies, public and private and of EUA’s government groups in the questions of Brazilian college education during the dictatorship. The reading reveals that the author defined an object that, due to it includes a long period of time (1964-1988) and includes different themes in its delimitations, it leads to a panoramic approach, as the author himself clears up in page 19, when he affirms that “certain themes related to the universities’ history here are approached superficially, without bigger deepening”.

The text composition consumed, as the author informs in page 19, “6 years of intense work [and] were consulted many archives and memory institutions” in Brazil and EUA, of which a significant part of the collected material still hadn’t been used by other researchers, which is informed by the author in different parts to affirm the relevance of the research sources, which includes, still, about 50 interviews and collecting news published in the Brazilian’s and EUA’s press, in addition to an extensive bibliography.

The ideas that guide the making of the text are in the book’s subtitle: “*cultura política brasileira e modernização autoritária*” (Brazilian political culture and authoritarian modernization). To the author “The authoritarian State implemented in 1964 (...) was influenced by deeply rooted traditions and elements that can be considered part of the Brazilian political culture”, namely those linked to the tendency to conciliation and accommodation. To Rodrigo Patto (p. 13), “The hypothesis’ central point is that the influence of such characteristics of the Brazilian political culture helps to explain the State’s modernizer-authoritarian feature during the military regime”. To him the State was modernizer in economics and administrative areas and authoritarian-conservative in politics and culture. According to this line of argumentation (p. 160), it’s possible to understand that the military governments, following the Brazilian political culture, established ambiguous politics, conciliatory, with paradoxes that bordered contradiction. To understand the relations between the dictatorship and the universities the author proposes (p. 18) a typology in which the opposites *repression-resistance* are replaced by *resistance, adhesion and accommodation*.

The triad *resistance, adhesion and accommodation* is part of the analysis model chosen by the author, that justifies its use depending on the State's characteristics after 1964 and those that participated in the political life and the disputes surrounding the projects and ideologies. According to the author (p. 300), the theme resistance to the authoritarianism is fundamental when discussing the representations of the dictatorship that began in 1964. To him the resistance to the dictatorship is

Important question of the historiographical point of view, but that also involves the memory battles that have been fought since then, with the political repercussions that followed. In the post-authoritarian period, (...) became more attractive profiling among the "resistant", while the ones that "helped" with the military regime began to be seen with suspicion and in more intellectual groups as ex-ecration objects.

The use of the terms *military regime* and *authoritarian* is relevant in this characterization. The relation that establishes is between a dictatorship that is always authoritarian, whether in its modernization actions, either in what it's conservative. To the State's occupants in the 1964-1985 period their action purposes justified the use of strength and violence and the institutions of college education were, as the author shows, strategic areas to the State's project that act in both aspects – modernizing and conservative – according to its values and goals.

The *accommodation*, treated with relevance in the book, in the author's opinion, characterize a significant part of the relations between the Dictatorship's representatives and groups that opposed to it, is a two way street, so, practiced by both parts. Such practices tend to be more effective when the people involved are part of academic elites, able of mobilizing their family capital and social relations to avoid confrontations with the system, generating accommodation strategies. Yet the author says (p. 311) "... these type of situation wasn't always viable because certain agents didn't show to be inclined to commitments or because, obviously, the regime wasn't willing to tolerate some transgressions and some enemies".

In Bosi's formulation (1992) this selective practice had been analyzed in analytical perspective that allows to understand the dictatorship's action as not a form of accommodation that would lead to a *ditabranda* (light dictatorship), but for the selectivity of its repressive actions that searched to destroy the society model based on a non-aligned culture to the EUA's values. The Brazilian dictatorship used violence needed to obtain the expected results, among them was defeating the previous period political culture, identified as

communist and that led to the anti-communist speech exacerbation, able to unify the “front” led by military since before the 1964’s coup. According to the author (p. 354), “In this history marked by so many paradoxes, the right-wing won the battle in 1964, defeating its left-wing enemies and ensuring the official predominance of its values”.

Despite this statement, Rodrigo Patto shows that there was growth of the Marxist culture influence in universities, however what he doesn’t says is that it was limited to academic means, with no repercussions to society, another relevant aspect of the change introduced by the military, the disjunction between life in universities and reality. As the author showed (p. 16), to the dictatorship the university’s role is to train professionals and develop technologies. To maintain the academic community focused on those goals and keep it far from the other social groups and from the proselytism and discussions about the values and projects for the country, the democratic contents and practices were removed or controlled, whether by substitution of graduation disciplines, either by restriction to political activity.

The control to ideas circulation in books is approached in many parts of the text, even without deserving an specific chapter. The author shows (p. 27) that the editorial circuit suffered with books apprehension in bookstores and publishers, persecution to editors and booksellers and the fear dissemination among the readers that began to hide and even burn books that could be used as evidence in lawsuits filed by the State against possible opponents. The censorship of books, as Reimão (2011) showed, passed by different stages throughout the regime. The press control generated the alternative press, books publishing control favored the opposition publishers’ appearance (Maués, 2013), including Zahar, who published the book we reviewed.

The dispute for the military regime memory has in communication and, particularly, in the publishing field an extensive approach and 50 years after that regime began the editorial market resumes approached questions throughout the regime and after it with different strategies that combined political issues, marketing and cultural, with positioning that sought to present the print culture products to society in a process that involves resistance to repression, as occurred in other parts of cultural industry.

Analyzing the results for institutions of college education and for the college education system the author says that “the calm times were intense, but ephemeral” (p. 287), following the dictatorship’s economic trajectory with its ephemeral “economic miracle” and the long year of decline that followed it that ended destroying, also in the field of college education, the gain obtained in the “calm times”: the funds for research dwindled, the inflation eroded the

teacher's and technical and administrative staff's salaries. As the author says (p. 66), "... in college education the military regime appropriated projects under discussion in the years before 1964 and implemented them in their own way", read: using violence and authoritarian ways, such as practices that constituted the dictatorship's *ethos* that composes, according to Florestan Fernandes, the "autocratic-bourgeois model of capitalist transformation" (Fernandes, 1976: 292).

As part of final considerations, the author says

Certainly would have been better for the country if the democratic forces had succeeded in avoiding the 1964 coup, but things took the known course and the military and their civilian allies took the job of refurbishing the college system, what implied in an authoritarian and repressive modernization. (p. 352)

It's a book that worth reading, disagreeing or agreeing with the author thesis because of the wide documentary survey about the theme and analysis coverage. **M**

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This text was received at 27 February and accepted at 21 March, 2015.