

BOOK REVIEW

The Coup within the Coup: An Analysis of Competing Discourses in 1961-1964

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(MENDONÇA, Daniel de. *1961-1964: The Brazilian Dictatorship in Two Coups*. Curitiba: Ed. Appris, 2017)

Written by one of Brazil's leading proponents of Ernesto Laclau's theory of discourse, '1961-1964: The Brazilian Dictatorship in Two Coups' presents an innovative conception of the events that led up to a dictatorship that lasted 21 years. A Laclauian perspective permeates the entire work. One can appreciate the discourse of the main actors involved - political groups, unions, social and military movements - through solid documentary analysis in which special attention is paid to antagonistic debates that reveal the construction of opponents. In this polished and incisive book, second place-winner of the Brazilian Association of Political Science's 2018 Victor Nunes Leal Prize, Daniel de Mendonça revisits his doctoral thesis on the interpretation of the discursive battle that took place between political groups in the pre-coup period.

His central argument is that the '64-'85 dictatorship was not, contrary to popular belief, the result of 'only' one coup. He also argues that the military regime was not the result merely of events in March and April 1964, and

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that military personnel were not the only actors in them. Mendonça (2017) argues that the Brazilian military dictatorship was the product of two coups orchestrated at different times (the period prior to 1964 being of fundamental importance) that involved not only military personnel but also civilian politicians. He also shows us that these coups were not carried out by unanimous actors.

Mendonça's (2017) understanding goes against the current official literature, which describes the events of March 1964 as 'the military coup' of that year. President João Goulart delivered a speech at the Rio de Janeiro Automobile Club on March 30, 1964. It was directed at the military and was not well received by them. The textbook version of events has it that the president was deposed on April 01 as part of a military action organized on March 31 in response to events in the preceding month. It seems at the very least inappropriate to describe the events of early April 1964 as the product solely of developments in March.

Recent literature (GALLO, 2018; NAPOLITANO, 2014) has come out strongly in favor of the concept of a civil-military coup in 1964, rather than a merely military one. The idea is that military and non-military actors colluded in the removal of the president. Mendonça (2017) examines the roles, positions and decisions taken by the various actors so as to understand the jostling for power between them and the eventual hegemony that resulted and led to the '64-'85 dictatorship. He thus presents a distinct and detailed view of the events and actors involved in prioritizing order over democracy.

Although he doesn't provide details of his methodology, Mendonça (2017) develops an original analytical apparatus underpinned by the theories of Laclau and Mouffe. He employs a material conception of discourse to analyze the public statements of key powerbrokers in the period, as well as the language used in pamphlets, demonstrations and political strategizing. From this material, he seeks to understand the process of creating meaning that divided the pro- and anti-coup camps, by revealing their common motivations and how the discourse of the military finally predominated. He then examined the public statements of key actors, looking for construction of meaning, disputed meanings and the relationships between them. Mendonça (2017) presents excerpts from the documents he studied, which provide a solid basis for understanding the 1961 and 1964 scenarios. These excerpts help us to understand the author's analysis.

The book, consisting of 320 pages, divided into eight chapters and organized in two parts, ends with a list of the documents referred to in the research. Mendonça (2017) starts out by presenting the ideas that guided him, followed by a chapter in which he presents his four main theses on the crisis of the Goulart government and the subsequent coup. In the first part of the work, entitled 'September 1961: the first blow against democracy', he analyzes the interregnum between the resignation of Jânio Quadros and the inauguration of João Goulart. In the second part, 'March 1964: the final blow against democracy', he analyzes the events that culminated in the end of the Goulart government. The work thus shows a linear construction, informed by a critical understanding of authors considered to be leading authorities on the coup: Alfred Stepan (1975), René Dreifuss (1981), Argelina Figueiredo (1993) and Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos (2003).

The first part of the book is divided into three chapters. These chapters analyze the discourse of the main political groups involved in the national political crisis and their articulation of discursive meanings that led to a so-called 'parliamentary' solution in 1961. He analyses several documents produced by actors active prior to Goulart's inauguration (military officers, legal experts and federal deputies): the 'Military Ministers' Manifesto', other documents issued by the military before and after the Manifesto, documents produced by Goulart supporters (Marshal Lott, the 3rd Army, Leonel Brizola), and public statements made by federal deputies. The second part of the book deals with events between February and April 1964 and seeks to clarify how discourse was articulated by the defenders of the reforms proposed by Goulart, by pro- and anti-government members of Congress, and by the military leadership, who defended a rupture with democracy. He also analyses documents dealing with trade union and student movements (such as pamphlets and letters), popular movements at all levels of the military, such as Captain Anselmo's manifesto (Anselmo was leader of the Sergeants' Revolt), speeches made by President Goulart at the a rally at the Central do Brasil train station and the Automobile Club of Brazil, the 'Loyalty to the Army' (LEEX) document, and public statements made by federal deputies.

Both parts come together to support Mendonça objective (2017), which is to present and defend an original and creative view of the breakdown of democratic government and its replacement by an authoritarian regime. Contradicting the

dominant historical view that explains civil-military coup with reference solely to the events of March 1964, he argues that the coup began when the 'parliamentary' system of government was adopted on September 07, 1961. This process went on to culminate in the 'coup within a coup' of March 1964.

In Chapters 02-08, Mendonça (2017) presents his discourse analysis categories. These depict opposing ideas of order and disorder and set out the solutions for the crisis proposed by key groups and actors in 1961 and 1964. As a result, the categories are employed in all chapters to facilitate analysis of the discourse of antagonistic groups harvested from a range of data sources.

The chapter that opens the first part of the book focuses on the military ministers in the Quadros government. The discursive corpus is divided into documents prior to the Military Manifesto, the Manifesto itself, and post-Manifesto documents. Starting from the hegemonic interpretation of the 'compromise solution' found for João Goulart to be able to assume the presidency, Mendonça (2017) presents arguments to support his thesis that "in September 1961, [Goulart] took office in the middle of a civil-military coup" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 55). Discursive clashes between military figures are cited, and these reveal opposing poles: one military grouping that supported following the law and opposed any 'military solution', and another that argued that the military has a constitutional responsibility to maintain order and could therefore not allow an agitator and possible communist to take over the government. Discourse clashed over legality: would it be legal to violate the Constitution to maintain order in the country? The Military Ministers' Manifesto makes their position clear: they suggested a 'diagnosis of disorder' if Goulart was inaugurated as president. An 'order solution' would prevent this. Post-Manifesto document analysis reveals that military figures continued to make antagonistic speeches. Mendonça (2017) provides elements that help us understand Goulart's attempts to leverage the Manifesto to protect himself against support for a military solution.

The following chapter sets out the positions of 'legality' advocates. The discursive corpus concerns the manifestos of Marshal Lott and the Governor of Rio Grande do Sul, Leonel Brizola, as well as documents from the 3rd Army. The 'Chain of Legality' started with Brizola and soon gained support from some military figures (General Machado Lopes of the 3rd Army and Marshal Lott), as well as much of

Congress and civil society. Marshal Lott, the first military man to defend legality, made his position clear in his manifesto, and stated that he regarded Odílio Denys' attempt to arrest Goulart as illegal. The documents of Machado Lopes and the 5th Military Region Command indicate support among southern military detachments to the Chain of Legality. The Brizola Manifesto shows clear resistance to the idea of a military solution and the firm intention of maintaining the Constitution. This 'legalist' view diagnoses any "military veto of Goulart being inaugurated" as "disorder" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 95) and favors the solution of "constitutional inauguration of João Goulart as president of the republic" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 95).

The last chapter of the first part deals with the 'parliamentary' solution to the crisis. It presents the steps that the Chamber of Deputies went through until it reached the solution that resolved the clash of discourses through a series of excerpts from speeches. Initially, Deputies adhered to a discourse of legality. The excerpts show, however, that Goulart's position in favor of the Military Ministers' Manifesto put them in fear of a military coup. They then became more flexible regarding their conditions. Mendonça (2017) thus identifies the diagnosis of disorder understood by the Chamber of Deputies as "the position of the military ministers Odílio Denys, Silvio Heck and Grum Moss to prevent the inauguration of President João Goulart" (MENDONÇA, 2017, pp. 108-109). He shows that the solution to the impasse was managed by Congress itself and not by the military: the first talks on adopting 'parliamentarism' concerned the future Goulart government. Gradually, the parliamentary idea gained ground. A Special Commission set up to examine a constitutional amendment attempted to separate the concept of parliamentarism from the crisis so as to appear impartial and secure Goulart's inauguration. Speeches cited by Mendonça (2017) reveal a divided Congress. At this point he refers to a 'continuity solution' (not the 'compromise solution' of the literature), because "there was no undertaking between any of the parties to come to a compromise. What actually happened was an alliance of convenience between the military ministers and the conservative majority in Congress" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 129). The 'continuity solution' was about securing Goulart's inauguration, removing most of his presidential prerogatives and neutralizing the left. The first civil-military coup was underway

The second part of the book comprises four chapters, whose main intention is to analyze the antagonisms that arose during João Goulart's rule and which eventually resulted in the democratic rupture of April 01, 1964. Chapters five to eight set out all the events characterizing the instability of the political context: the call for a general strike, ministerial replacements, military revolts, paralysis in Congress, runaway inflation, economic decline and the inability of parties to work together. Masterfully, Mendonça (2017) demonstrates how the idea of democracy was drained of meaning, laying the ground for the emergence of a rupture.

Chapter five analyzes discursive meanings articulated around demands for basic reforms from social movements on the left. The narrative is constructed through analysis of documents produced between March 13 and 31, 1964 (the Central do Brasil Rally Pamphlet, Captain Anselmo's speech during the Navy Revolt, the letter of the Workers' General Command, the letter of the Students' Union and the call for a General Strike of March 31, 1964). These documents indicate a 'diagnosis of disorder' and an imminent right-wing coup against the president in order to prevent the important social reforms that he defended. With his analysis of the meanings in the documents, Mendonça (2017) demonstrates that the movements sought to identify legitimacy with the people so as to demand reforms in a broad sense and bring about a democratic expression of the desires of the oppressed working class. All these demands were channeled into the call for a general strike on March 31, 1964. However, it was unsuccessful in achieving its intended goals, since "the left did not seem in that context to possess a political hegemony capable of attracting the "people", this abstract entity that seemed so real to these movements and so effectively represented by them" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 173). The proposed 'order solution' was of an eminently reactive character, as it aimed at keeping the president in power. With low popular adherence and opposed by powerful political and military groups, the position of the trade union left was "to fragile sustain the coming struggle" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 174). Backed by low-ranking military men with little political power, underrepresented in Congress, and devoid of popular legitimacy, their longings amounted to little more than sighs easily silenced by the political events that followed.

The sixth chapter deals with the public speeches made by Goulart in March 1964 at the March 13 Rally and the Automobile Club of Brazil. According to Mendonça (2017), Goulart assumed an ambiguous position, drawing closer to the discourse of the left on basic (land, tax, electoral, economic and constitutional) reforms, while at the same time making legalistic arguments in an attempt to seek a compromise with the discourse of the right. Goulart's discourse thus retained independence from either of the antagonistic poles: "The right saw him as a leftist. [...] On the other hand, for the more radical sectors of the left, Goulart's legalistic position was seen as a barrier" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 223). Mendonça (2017) defines Goulart's 'diagnoses of disorder' as having two main axes, the first of which being the argument that social barriers were the main impediment to Brazil's growth. In this sense, he believed that reforms such as land reform were imperative. He also advocated protecting the dignity of the poor by reducing the costs of the 'basic food basket', rents and medicines. His second diagnosis is linked to the first but should not be confused with it: Goulart argued that reforms should take place within the scope of legality. Given the inadequacy of the 1946 Constitution for such purposes, he believed that the time had come to appoint a new Constituent Assembly. The 'solutions of order', in this context, revolve around the defense of a constitutional reform followed by policies of income distribution and social inclusion whose ultimate purpose is to promote national development.

Goulart's legalistic discourse was questioned by conservative military and deputies. This perspective is well demonstrated in the Chapter seven, in which Mendonça (2017) analyzes the public speeches of Marshal Odílio Denys, the documents that preceded the military coup (and which received the generic name of LEEEX), and also the Admiral's manifesto on the naval mutinies. This is an interesting point in the book because it is here, drawing on speeches made by high-level military figures, that Mendonça (2017) breaks with the conventional interpretations in the historiography of the pre-coup period. For Mendonça (2017), the diagnosis of military disorder demonstrates the fear that Goulart, who was a sympathizer of communism, would remain in the presidency, especially after the 1963 plebiscite that called for the return of presidentialism. The military top brass believed that the president, with his subversive discourse, threatened the hierarchy

and promoted the breaking of discipline within barracks, in view of the Sergeants' (1963) and Sailors' Revolts (1964). The 'order solution' in this context is the need to intervene in favor of democracy through the removal of the president. Such an understanding, well supported by documentary evidence, is a misleading reading of the military organization and the conflicts of interest within it, which are commonly portrayed as homogeneous.

The last chapter of the book aims to reflect on the discursive battle in the congressional arena between March 13 and April 01, 1964. Mendonça (2017) divides the deputies into two antagonistic groups - supporters and critics of Goulart - whose positions are explicit in relation to three important historical moments: the March 13 rally, the March of the Family with God for Freedom and the Sailors' Revolt. Among the self-identified right-wing opponents of the government, 'diagnoses of disorder' are linked to the need to contain communism: they believed that the basic reforms promoted by the federal government represented communism in Brazil and should be repudiated. For them, the 'order solution' starts out from a conception of democracy as a formal procedure (market freedoms must be protected against the possible increase of state influence over the modes of production). On the other hand, government advocates - self-identified as leftist - diagnosed disorder in the poor income distribution and social and economic underdevelopment of a significant portion of the Brazilian population. For them, the 'order solution' was to approve the basic reforms proposed by the President. Mendonça (2017) acknowledges that the presidential discourse on respect for legality was not well received by such groups, because their democratic ideal was not procedural, but lay in improving the living conditions of the population. The draining of meaning from the democratic ideal in a period of extreme polarization led to an expansion of the window of acceptable solutions, bringing about the conclusion of the coup that had begun in 1961.

Mendonça (2017) achieves the goals proposed at the beginning of the book by elegantly developing his arguments. His book has historiographic value by virtue of his incisive documentary analysis and his ability to demonstrate the composition of alliances between national political leaders and the ruptures in segments hitherto considered homogeneous, such the military. Despite the importance and value of his documentary treatment, we believe that the book's

unquestionable historiographical significance lies in its innovative reading of the events of 1961 and 1964. In contradicting important historians - notably Stepan (1975), Dreifuss (1981), Figueiredo (1993) and Santos (2003) - Mendonça (2017) demonstrates his own understanding of what he claims to be the first break with the democratic order in 1961, with the reduction of the power of Goulart to carry out basic reforms by means of the adoption of parliamentarism. With the return of presidentialism, the power to carry out basic reforms was again under in the president's hands. In order to prevent these reforms from being implemented, there was a rupture with the democratic order and an ensuing concentration of power in the hands of the military - and this Mendonça (2017) considers to be the second coup.

Thus, the work presents a different view within the contemporary debate about the episodes that marked the beginning of the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil. Fundamentally, the author defends an unprecedented conception of the institution of parliamentarism in 1961 and does not accept the conventional interpretation that it was a compromise solution. The book analyzes a wide range of documents with reference to the powerful and polyvalent discourse theories of Laclau and Mouffe. This use of discourse theory makes the book stand out among other works on the subject. Moreover, by giving space to the discourse of different actors involved in the episodes, the work achieves "an in-depth study of these central moments of crisis, since previous political analyzes have been devoted to studying the period in a panoramic way, missing important details that can only be grasped from closer analysis" (MENDONÇA, 2017, p. 21). In this sense, the dispute between political actors for hegemony over meanings such as democracy and coup (differently understood by each political group) is presented in a clear, direct and didactic way. One criticism that the work may receive, which does not disqualify it or detracts from its relevance, concerns the limitation found in the review of the updated literature about the coup: the author could have considered contributions from Angela de Castro Gomes and Jorge Ferreira (2014), Daniel Reis (2014) and Carlos Fico (2004), as well as other relevant researchers in the current context.

Mendonça (2017) is happy in his attempt to make room for the varied shades of groups that were involved in the 1961 and 1964 episodes. In this way, the

curious reader can access these key moments in recent Brazilian history from various angles. We believe that the work is of interest to students and researchers in the areas of History and Political Science as well as in also in related areas, especially those interested in furthering their studies on the period of the Brazilian civil-military dictatorship. With its accessible language, we believe the book may also interest readers with an interest in history, making a fine contribution to understanding the mischances our fragile democracy has been through.

Translated by Fraser Robinson

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