

Chapter 3

“Ousar Lutar, Ousar Vencer”: Influences of the 1959 Cuban Revolution on Armed Resistance Against Dictatorship in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The 1959 Cuban Revolution had intense and long-lasting repercussions in Brazil. To highlight this, it is worth mentioning two recent events that occurred exactly 60 years after that revolutionary triumph: first, the release of the movie Marighella, directed by Wagner Moura, based on the life of the writer and former congressman of the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro, PCB) Carlos Marighella (1911-1969); second, the speech delivered by President Jair Messias Bolsonaro at the opening of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, with abundant distribution of insults to the Cuban government.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1959 Cuban Revolution had intense and long-lasting repercussions in Brazil. To highlight this, it is worth mentioning 2 recent events that occurred exactly 60 years after that revolutionary triumph: first, the release of the movie *Marighella*, directed by Wagner Moura, based on the life of the writer and former congressman of the Brazilian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Brasileiro [PCB]) Carlos Marighella (1911-1969). Second, the speech delivered by President Jair Messias Bolsonaro at the opening of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, with abundant distribution of insults to the Cuban government.

Marighella, a party member since the 1930s and its leader in the late 1940s, led one of the main groups to take up arms against the civil-military dictatorship established in the country in 1964. In open dissent with the PCB, he participated in August 1967 in the First Conference of the Organization for Latin American Solidarity (OLAS) in Havana, Cuba, which brought together Latin American revolutionary and anti-imperialist movements (as well as assistants from Africa, Asia, and Europe)¹. As a result, he was expelled from the party, founding the following year the National Liberation Action (Ação Libertadora Nacional [ALN]), which became famous for actions such as the kidnapping of U.S. Ambassador Charles Elbrick, in support of the October 8 Revolutionary Movement (Movimento Revolucionário 8 de Outubro [MR-8])². The hardening of the regime in December 1968, by suppressing parliamentary powers and several guarantees and rights, through Institutional Act No. 5, made him a prime target for repression, culminating in a deadly ambush that killed him in November 1969³.

The movie, which is an adaptation of the book *Marighella: o guerrilheiro que incendiou o mundo* [Marighella: the guerrilla man who set the world afire], by Mário Magalhães, has been facing major difficulties to be released in Brazil. It depicts the character as a passionate revolutionary man deeply committed to a social transformation capable of overcoming the huge (economic, political, cultural) inequalities that large portions of the Brazilian population undergo. According to critics of the genre, director's intent to reach a standard audience is clear, especially young people, thanks to an accessible language, an agile camera to capture shooting scenes and police chases, and a soundtrack that resorts to Brazilian rap songs. Thanks to this, *Marighella* would tend to be regarded sympathetically, as a fearless, visionary man who challenged the existing status quo, be it political repression or social exclusion.

In turn, President Jair Bolsonaro's mentions to Cuba at the opening of the UN General Assembly were targeted primarily at the Brazilian More Doctors Program [Programa Mais Médicos], launched by former President Dilma Rousseff, in 2013, under the supervision and mediation of the Pan American Health Organization

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(PAHO), which had the Cuban government as its most decisive partner. In order to meet the needs of poor and/or remote areas in Brazil, this program aimed to keep physicians working in the public health network in the outskirts of big cities or in poorer and more remote municipalities. It reached, in its heyday, over 18,000 professionals, but it was replaced by the Doctors for Brazil Program [Programa Médicos pelo Brasil], created by the Bolsonaro administration on August 1, 2019.

Despite offering a scholarship worth R\$ 10,000.00 paid by the Brazilian Ministry of Health (Ministério da Saúde [MS]), in addition to a living allowance for housing and food provided by the municipalities on the other hand, the Brazilian More Doctors Program was slow to attract Brazilian practitioners (who, by the way, never represented half of our total number of doctors). However, this program aroused the interest of the Cuban government, which identified an opportunity to allocate thousands of practitioners and also to receive a portion of the scholarships available for them. This, particularly, among other reasons (such as the fact that Cuban doctors, usually, attend 4-year courses focused on medical clinic and family health, therefore, they are not specialists, something which is common among Brazilians), served as an excuse for harsh criticism and even hostility from medical entities and opposition politicians. According to these positions, Bolsonaro, in his UN speech, referred to the program as a promoter of ‘slave labor,’ arguing, without providing any evidence, that “Cuban agents” might have been sent to various countries “to collaborate in the implementation of dictatorships” through similar initiatives.

In any case, therefore, the 1959 Cuban Revolution had, and still has, varied and perennial repercussions in Brazil, either between left-wing activists and/or progressive activists or between leaders and institutions with a conservative profile. However, if nowadays this refers to memory-related clashes (in the case of the movie *Marighella*) or to the immediate political clashes (in the case of Bolsonaro’s speech at the UN), in the 1960s and 1970s the crux of the matter was different. It derived from the contrast between the success achieved by the Cuban Revolution and the defeat, with almost no resistance, experienced by progressive workers and forces in the 1964 coup and prolonged by the later PCB’s inaction.

The Cuban example, fostered by the representation of its own leaders, had, in the widespread dissemination of the book *Revolução dentro da revolução: luta armada e luta política na América Latina* [Revolution within the revolution; armed struggle and political struggle in Latin America] (1967), written by the French man Régis Debray after long conversations in Havana with Fidel Castro, many first-time admirers, revealing a clear symptom of things to come. The work discussed the role played by the self-entitled ‘vanguards’ and armed struggle in the social transformation processes of the then so-called Third World, and which arrangements they could and should take. In other words, people put into question whether the revolutionary party of Leninist tradition retained its leadership prerogatives in those

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social transformation processes, connecting the ‘vanguards’ and the ‘masses,’ as it was said, since such ‘vanguards’ could afford to live without the ‘masses’ at least initially, through politico-military actions, which could even serve as example and motivation for them.

Based on these references, many debates filled hours and sheets of paper, and then led to attacks, bank robberies, and armored car robberies and kidnappings by left-wing organizations, above all between 1968 and 1971. Thanks to unprecedentedness and self-sacrifice, they initially surprised the dictatorship and its allies by achieving occasional victories, but shortly thereafter, with better preparation of the regime’s repressive bodies, faced a tough harassment, punctuated by arrests, torture, and murder, which, combined to increasing isolation from any social movement, eventually led the guerrilla groups to complete defeat.

Since the democratization process that began in the 1980s, a large and well-qualified academic literature on the theme has been produced. However, we believe that the sharp polarization of Brazilian society from the mid-2010s on, the election of a far-right government in 2018, and widespread dissemination of the so-called ‘fake news,’ several of them from a revisionist perspective that seeks to slow down the civil-military dictatorship’s actions, make it timely to resume some aspects of recent Brazilian history. Particularly, we seek to think through the meaning lent to armed struggle as a tactic and strategy against the dictatorial regime, so we highlight three contexts, from different moments, which allow us, in our view, to identify variations in the reception of the Cuban experience on Brazilian soil.

DAWN

The Marxist Revolutionary Organization Worker Policy (Organização Revolucionária Marxista Política Operária [ORM-POLOP]) was officially created in Brazil in 1961, bringing militants from several states and theoretical and political backgrounds in the left-wing field. The academic history of members such as Ruy Mauro Marini, Theotônio dos Santos, Emir Sader, Eder Sader, Vânia Bambirra, Moniz Bandeira, and Michael Löwy has contributed so that the organization progressively acquired the image of an intellectualized party in search of an original interpretation to the history of Brazil and a specific strategy for unfolding the socialist revolution on national soil. Immersed in a bipolarized international atmosphere regarded as increasingly revolutionary, internally, the group experienced various phases in the building of a radical memory of the Brazilian left-wing, its violent interruption with the advent of the 1964 civil-military coup, and the successive attempts at partisan rearticulation and rearrangement until complete dissolution in last 1970s. On this route, the roots of POLOP’s main ideas in a series of other political movements and

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theses stand out, as well as the issue of adherence to immediate practice of armed struggle as an irreconcilable point of dissent and fragmentation.

The magazine created by the POLOP was entitled *Política Operária* [Worker Policy] and it first circulated in January 1962. The issue announced a new phase in the struggles of urban and rural workers, marked by political polarization, which made centrist positions unfeasible, and the need to break with the tradition of reformist predominance among the Brazilian left-wing organizations. The overt purpose of the publication was preparing for the future:

What does this workers' policy mean? What does this program consist of? We could simply answer that it is about the left-wing renewal in the country. The old left-wing that once played a major role in the struggles of the past has worn off and has been unable to keep up with the development it is talking about. Today, it can no longer galvanize the new generation destined to take the work forward. This new revolutionary generation demonstrates its existence throughout the political crisis, in universities, in factories, on the streets. It is in charge of the anti-imperialist struggle initiatives; it spreads the ideas of the Cuban Revolution and advocates the weak democratic rights when threatened by right-wing attacks. However, so far these new players have not been able to define themselves as a political factor capable of offering struggle objectives that actually represent an alternative to traditional bourgeois politics. After the wear and tear on the old players, a vacuum emerged. Contributing to fill it is our raison d'être. (Política Operária, 1962a, p. 1)

Under the temporal sign of the gap between the *no more* and the *not yet*, the organization puts itself in a privileged position of observing the events, capable of pointing out precisely the features of the generational transition period through which the left-wing would be going through in the country. On the basis of that time lapse, the main force-ideas mobilizing the new-age players are stated: the anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggle, the symbol of the Cuban Revolution, and the defense of a kind of defensive democracy. As other issues of the publication show, we do not notice an exclusive or a predominant appreciation of the Cuban experience. Rather, the POLOP seems to grasp it as a convergence that consecrates its perceptions of reality and revives its “faith in historical becoming” (Reis, 1990)⁴.

In October 1962, the issue of *Política Operária* published a lengthy interview given by Fidel Castro to a Brazilian delegation that had visited the island on July 31 that year (*Política Operária*, 1962b, pp. 21-23, without information about the conditions under which the interview was conducted). The summary contained the symptomatic title of the chat with the then Cuban Prime Minister: “no one will stop the Revolution in Latin America.” Amid the complex context of the so-called ‘missile crisis,’ the publication of this interview situates the rejection of U.S. threats to invade

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Cuba as a necessary response to ‘anti-Communist hysteria’ across the continent. As a general impression of the issue, it can be said that there is a certain euphoria about the fact that the reference horizon has shifted from Europe to Latin America, as if History moved towards a Third World thinking that had been asserting itself since the early 1950s.

Fidel Castro’s interview reaffirms, and thereby legitimates, POLOP’s claim about the unsuccessful communist strategy to establish an alliance with a supposed progressive national bourgeoisie as a necessary step in the revolutionary process. Asked about “what is the attitude of the ruling class towards the revolutionary movement in the struggle against imperialism,” Fidel answers:

In many cases, out of fear of the popular revolution, the ruling class prefers to rely on imperialism, the bourgeoisie, if it considers itself to be less safe, it is afraid of the popular movement because it knows that the latter aims at the proletarian revolution. In Latin America, the Cuban Revolution accentuates this fear. And this fear do determine the attitude of the bourgeoisie in Brazil. The Brazilian bourgeoisie, almost unanimously, consists of intelligent men: they speak of reforms because they believe this is an antidote to social revolution. The Brazilian bourgeoisie is smarter than that in Argentina, Colombia, and other countries. These men say they will solve problems through reforms. They hope to provide the masses with palliatives and believe that is enough to hinder the way for a revolution like Cuba’s. (Política Operária, 1962b, p. 22)

The publication of this dialogue largely reinforces the POLOP’s thesis that the tradition of the left-wing communist and/or reformist/labor in Brazil was marked by bourgeois ideas and was out of step with real-world time. The ‘populist’ trickery of these left-wing groups deserved whole pages of the magazine. Thus, it denounced that the key contradiction of Brazilian society – the clash between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat – had been obscured by the interpretation of a national reality in which a progressive bourgeoisie existed and, therefore, the possibility of an alliance and conciliation between social classes.

Under these circumstances, the POLOP claimed an *immediate* socialist revolution led by the independent proletariat in a ‘Workers’ Front’ that included the rural populations and also organized students. However, it is the aggravation of the 1962 international crisis that stands out in the magazine, translated as an invitation to emergency action. Quite different, it is worth saying, from what is found in the last volumes published in 1963, when the reflection and caution concerning the incorporation of the Cuban example – considered irresponsible – is at the center of dispute.

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The emphasis put on the critique of the theses of class conciliation, and shortly thereafter, on the narratives of revolutionary inspiration and inevitability based on the Cuban example, seem to have allowed people to silence on another crucial issue. Until 1964, we did not find in any issue of *Política Operária* a broad discussion about armed struggle, focus, or guerrilla warfare. POLOP’s relationship with violence as an instrument of political struggle becomes a central aspect only under dictatorship, leading to splits and new organizations.

The issue of *Política Operária* published in January-February 1963 is an inward turning point. In this issue, there is a clear growth in the accusations of political radicalization on the left and on the right, replacing the persistent criticism of reformism and Soviet indoctrination by Brazilian communists. In the case of the left-wing, it is the “adventurism” (*Política Operária*, 1963a, p. 16) related to uncritical incorporation of the Cuban example that gains prominence and starts being assigned to other organizations born between 1962 and 1963, such as the Communist Party of Brazil (Partido Comunista do Brasil [PCdoB]) and the Popular Action (Ação Popular [AP]). Gradually, the discourse on the inevitability of the revolution gives way to the inevitability of a coup. In this short time, therefore, between 1961 and 1963, the prevailing euphoria to use Cuba as a revolutionary inspiration in Brazil loses momentum and space to describe the internal political crisis.

In this regard, Ruy Mauro Marini (1932-1997), a social scientist, former POLOP militant and one of the original formulators of the Marxist Dependency Theory, stated in his memoirs that the interest immediately aroused by the Cuban Revolution in France – giving way to intense press coverage and the publication of significant books, such as Sartre’s – seemed to him much greater than that observed in Brazil. According to Marini’s recollections of an academic memorial in the 1990s, this situation only changed after the attempted U.S. invasion and the resulting Cuban position in favor of Marxism and the USSR. Thus, the author concluded, the gestation of the Brazilian and Latin American revolutionary left-wing – particularly in Argentina, Peru, Venezuela and Nicaragua – would not be, as was generally assumed, an effect of the Cuban Revolution, but a part of the same process that gave rise to it – regardless of having come under its strong influence, in the 1960s (Marini, n.d.). With this, the former militant provides a less pragmatic and fatalistic reading of the POLOP’s experience, emphasizing the insertion of Latin American revolutionary organizations in a simultaneously broader framework of political radicalization and rather local in terms of feasible explanations for coup success in Brazil.

In this context of intensifying the internal crisis, the first issue in 1963 denounced the mainstream press as ‘reactionary’ and creator of ‘psychological warfare’ through selective and fanciful news about ‘guerrillas in the countryside of Goiás’ or ‘guns wrapped in Cuban newspapers’ along the country’s highways (*Política Operária*, 1963a, p. 7). The same issue strongly criticized the ‘revolution at any

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price’ (p. 16), influenced by episodic aspects of the Cuban experience. Thus, the idea that ‘the Cuban Revolution will never be repeated in Latin America’ came to be constantly repeated in the writings of *Política Operária*, signaling the need, as a priority, to appreciate the political preparation of bases before making a military effort considered irresponsible. It is worth mentioning that reading the magazine does not allow us to detect the internal tensions related to revolutionary struggle strategies at that time, such as memorialist works, and sparse texts published by militants may show. The issues circulating in Brazil until 1967 remained advocating a Revolutionary Left-Wing Front capable to reach and mobilize the proletarian masses. *Política Operária* started from the clear principle that the leading role in the revolution would be played by workmen, defined as urban workers subject to the most developed capitalist conditions.

Between 1963 and 1964, the absence of broadly revolutionary social movements and the U.S. interventionist offensive, as well as the huge circulation of anti-communist propaganda, came to be described as a part of the domestic elements to be considered. Only around 1967-68 the POLOP’s leader Erico Sachs (1922-1986) observed that Fidel Castro’s guerrilla men were, according to his viewpoint, “landless peasants, rural wage earners, the most radical portion of the rural population, as the outcome of a capitalist society” (“Aonde Vamos,” 1967). According to him, who also wrote under the pseudonym Ernesto Martins, the Cuban Revolution was the utmost expression of the worker-peasant alliance governed by radicalization of the wage-earning proletariat in the countryside.

Given this tangle of ideas, it must be recalled that for at least three decades the Russian Revolution was the dominant, theoretical, conceptual, and practical model for the Brazilian left-wing groups and the PCB was the only communist party to dispute popular support. In a short period of time, Cuba has contributed decisively to change this scenario, by bringing the revolution’s role to the Third World, just as the revolutionary model migrated from the Soviet Union to Fidel’s island and sometimes to China (Sirinelli, 2014, p. 56). The individuals who participated in this debate experienced a quite unique tension induced by the perception of an environment not only in rapid and unstable transformation, but stimulated by a constant recollection of the revolutionary possibility put into practice by Cuba, an event whose global scale was interconnected to the Cold War panorama and the radicalization of domestic politics. Progressively, this atmosphere came to include the issue of armed struggle legitimacy in Brazil. The last issue of *Política Operária* circulating before the 1964 coup announced:

This issue of the magazine is, in a way, a special issue. It contains, among other pieces of writing, the theses and political guidelines approved at the Second Congress of the Marxist Revolutionary Organization ‘WORKERS’ POLICY.’ Thus, we seek

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to be up to the task we set ourselves with this publication: to contribute, with our economic and political analyses, to developing the revolutionary awareness in Brazil. Such consciousness unfolds, of course, closely linked to the revolutionary practice itself and to the struggle against the bourgeois ideas that seek to deform and divert it; that is why our contribution has an essentially controversial nature. (Política Operária, 1963b)

Among the guidelines considered necessary for Brazilian foreign policy there are the unconditional defense of socialist Cuba, the complaint of imperialist repression on Latin America, and the acknowledgment of China. The domestic face of this policy was translated by the socialist nature of the revolution in Brazil. It is worth highlighting the rather subjective aspect that the opening section of the issue lets us see. It is the ‘struggle against bourgeois ideas,’ beyond the *stricto sensu* [in the strict sense] political arrangement. To a large extent, the influence of Cuba revolution on the POLOP and other left-wing organizations critical to PCB has also and especially focused on a moral dimension of condemning values regarded as capitalist. In all editions, ‘moralization’ invariably appears as an accusation that lies on the supposed ideological tutelage exercised by the bourgeoisie, mainly about the working class, whose primary resources, according to the POLOP, consisted both in the cultural force of patriotism and the Church and in the developmental theories that equally mobilized petty-bourgeois nationalism.

Thus, a revolutionary morality was becoming defined as the conditions for political action became more dangerous in the country. It is in this sense that the increasingly restrictive militancy model also becomes an almost unquestionable moral commandment to renounce private life, circles of belonging, and professional careers. According to Miskulin (2003), this might have been a key feature of the impact of Che Guevara’s figure in Latin America since the Cuban Revolution: to critique not only the capitalist system, but the values linked to capitalism regarded as responsible for the alienation of individuals and their work. According to the historian, ‘gray years’ followed in the newly socialist Cuba. With this expression, the author denotes the closing nature of the cultural field, increasingly conditioned by the *parametrización* ([parameterization] – compliance with rules), similarly to the idea of socialist realism in the Soviet Union. The publication of works of art and intellectual works, for instance, was associated with appreciation of the national culture and reflection on the ‘concerns of the Cuban people’ stipulated in 1961, with the creation of the ‘cultural guidelines of Cuba.’ At the same time, themes related to personal conflicts and subjective issues, especially homosexuality, were evidently marginalized and their authors stigmatized and sometimes persecuted, regarded as subversive. The so-called “new man” should live for collective and voluntary work, dedicating himself to the revolutionary cause. In The recent history of Cuba, in part,

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the spread of this mentality has been attributed to the reduction of illiteracy rates, among other positive social indices. In Brazil, this is still today a sensitive point of revolutionary memories, little discussed by historiography

In March-April 1964, the Brazilian civil-military coup violently interrupted this entire political debate with its radical transformation agendas. The trails offered by the documents we mentioned point out the confluence between the wish for accelerating time towards revolution, the emergence of political action – taken by cadres and masses – and the ideological and strategic fragmentation. On the way, however, the search came across the coup and the dictatorship. As Reis wrote, “Brazilian revolutionary organizations were prepared, cohesive and mobilized, in a word, ready – but the revolution lacked the meeting” (1990, p. 186).

MIDDAY

On February 1, 1969, Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira published, in the monthly newspaper *Catolicismo*, a virulent article entitled “O Arcebispo vermelho abre as portas da América e do mundo para o comunismo” [The red archbishop opens the doors of America and the world to communism]. Overtly alarmist in content, the text denounces the seriousness of a series of statements that could have been made by Dom Hélder Câmara, Archbishop of Olinda and Recife – also known as red archbishop –, in New York, during the closing speech of the Sixth Annual Conference of the Catholic Program for International Cooperation. In the speech in focus, according to Corrêa de Oliveira’s nonconformist words, Dom Hélder might have literally advocated for the communist cause and demonstrated that Recife could be becoming an “ecclesiastical device [...] in the sense that, by exploiting the faith of Brazilians, it gets the latter’s support for a policy that leads to the ruin of the country and the world.”

Symbolizing the author’s fears (and the content of arguments), we highlight the article subtitles due to their relevance: “Communism, anticommunism, secondary issue;” “United States, a communist power to be neutralized;” “Advocating Mao Zedong’s cause;” “Shaking the UN in favor of communism.” Beyond the conjunction between Hélder Câmara’s words and (what could be) the ‘values of Marx’s doctrine,’ we are particularly interested in the assertions that follow the subtitle “In favor of Fidel Castro.” In the very first sentence, the author describes the Cuban regime as “one of the fiercest dictatorships in the world” that denied primary moral principles of a Christian civilization. The author goes on to name Castro’s regime as a ‘stain’ in America, bringing it closer to Moscow and Beijing (which could have the archbishop’s sympathy at the time). His dismay was mainly due to Dom Hélder’s request for bringing Cuba back into the Latin American community, regardless of political differences, insofar as, according to the prelate, Cuba’s isolation might result

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in the division of the continent. According to the opinion expressed by the writer, Dom Hélder said that the union of the continent “does not require communism to be expelled, but rather that the doors be open to it” (Oliveira, 1969). Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira claims that all of Dom Hélder’s statements converged on a policy of surrender to communism taken not only by America, but by the world. Even more serious than the issue of Cuba’s political reintegration, in Correia de Oliveira’s words, might be the ideas that provided the prelate’s position with means. According to the writer, D. Hélder confused an ‘authentic and martyred’ Cuba with Castro’s Cuba, asking not only for political reintegration, but respect for a set of ideas driven by materialism and atheism, thus contributing to consolidate Castro’s regime.

The fact that Corrêa de Oliveira devoted a few paragraphs of his diatribe to Fidel Castro’s Cuba was not random, nor did it look new. It is even worth noticing that the longest part of the article is precisely this, just after brief considerations about Russia, China, and the U.S. and UN actions in the anti-communist field. Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira’s concerns, at the time this article was published, come from a long time ago. In 1960, the author was the founder of the Brazilian Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property (Sociedade Brasileira de Defesa da Tradição, Família e Propriedade [TFP]), and he also participated in a series of Christian-inspired activities, including the foundation of the Catholic University Action [Ação Universitária Católica], at the Law School where he studied (in 1929), the creation of the Catholic Electoral League [Liga Eleitoral Católica] (in 1932), and the presidency of the Archdiocesan Board of the São Paulo State Catholic Action [da Junta Arquidiocesana da Ação Católica Paulista] (from 1940 to 1943), among others. Such actions are based on the ideas of Catholic fundamentalism, which, in a nutshell, were defined by ‘legitimate defense of the truths of the Church,’ its ‘unchanging tradition,’ and ‘spiritual supremacy’ (Zanotto, 2010, p. 89). The ideas expressed by TFP members and, particularly, by its founder, were written in the 1959 essay “Revolução e contra-revolução” [Revolution and counter-revolution], also written by Corrêa de Oliveira. In this piece of writing, the author justifies the need for a counter-revolutionary movement, which could defend Christianity against the ills caused by a series of revolutions throughout history. The 1959 essay, published in the 100th issue of *Catolicismo*, carries a justification: “*Catolicismo* is a combative newspaper. As such, it must be assessed primarily on the purpose of its struggle.” A few paragraphs later, the text announces the enemy to fight: “this terrible enemy has a name: it is called Revolution.” Following, after outlining the specifics of what he names as “the three great revolutions of Western history: the Pseudo-Reformation, the French Revolution, and Communism,” the author assigns the word *revolution* the meaning of “a movement that seeks to destroy a power or a legitimate order and put in its place a state of affairs (intentionally we do not mean order of things) or an illegitimate power” (p. 16).

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We cannot naively read the fact that this text was published in 1959. In addition to the “fateful” year, the ideas it announced help us to grasp the voracity with which, 10 years later, Corrêa de Oliveira accuses Dom Hélder Câmara of “opening the doors of the world to communism.” If the first may be taken as an icon of Catholic conservatism, with a decidedly anti-communist stance, the second is equally (or perhaps better) known for uttering immediately contrary principles. Dom Hélder’s name is – still today – quite representative of an engaged Catholicism, focused on the difficulties of poor people and contrary to the so-called *dependent capitalism*, characterized by the control of large multinational corporations, which has led to abyssal social differences, such as those observed in Latin America at the time. Dom Hélder’s public positions gave him, by his critics, the epithet of ‘red bishop’ or approximations such as that made by Corrêa de Oliveira when he claims that “Dom Hélder feels like a brother to Marxist Cuba.” On one occasion, the then governor of the State of São Paulo, Abreu Sodré, referred to the bishop as “a Fidel Castro wearing a cassock” (Löwy, 2000, p. 143).

Although the fear about the widespread ‘red danger,’ we know, predates the year 1969 or even 1959, the content of the articles cited above indicates to us the remarkable presence of the Cuban revolutionary experience in the debates about the socio-political action perpetrated by the Brazilian Catholic officials. The approach of Catholic organizations to social issues – not only in Brazil – characterizes the first half of the 20th century. The Cuban Revolution, however, resizes this approach, both with regard to the possibilities of action and the meanings assigned to these actions. Given this, it does not seem wrong to say that the influences of the Cuban Revolution transcend the date of its ephemeris. This finding invites us to think of it not exactly in terms of its conditions of possibility and immediate consequences, but to take it as a case. To think of it as an event from which new possibilities are opened, whether they are in line with what the revolution advocated or, to the same extent, contrary to it.

If the anti-communism promulgated by Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira predates the Cuban Revolution, we may say the same about the Catholic socio-political engagement, embodied here by Dom Hélder Câmara. Even so, it is worth noticing that the deposition of Fulgencio Batista and the subsequent alignment of the island with the Soviet bloc acted vehemently in the way such propensities were (and came to be) experienced since 1959. We agree with Martins and Liebel (2015) when they claim that it is in the Latin American imagination and identity sense that the Cuban Revolution finds its most prominent place. In this way, the reception of the revolutionary movement was certainly an intensifying and defining element of the above-mentioned propensities within the Catholic religious field in Brazil. The relationship of brotherhood between a Marxist Cuba and Dom Hélder Câmara’s words, highlighted by Corrêa de Oliveira, is due to a set of factors that have been

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intensified and became potentially concrete from the revolutionary movement in Cuba. It is not, therefore, merely the overvalued competency of Dom Hélder by “opening the doors of America and the world to communism,” but a progressive attitude that he embodied and this was radicalized in some sectors from the early 1960s on.

Thus, these 1960s are characterized by a clear polarization concerning the political positions, the social action and insertion of the Catholic Church in Brazil and Latin America. The Plínio Corrêa de Oliveira’s words, transcribed above, exemplify this polarization and urge us to think about the impact of the Cuban Revolution in the Brazilian Catholic religious field. This impact, we believe, can be strongly perceived in the consolidation of an ambience that, it is worth to saying, still seems to enjoy a certain survival.

The attempt to grasp this ambience compels us to recall that the Brazilian and Latin American Catholic Church experienced, in institutional terms, in the very first half of the 20th century, a certain – and quite controversial – approach to social issues. This, inspired by Christian theologians and theorists such as those by Jacques Maritain, Emmanuel Mounier, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, was driven, among other aspects, by the need to “respond and gain ground in face of the rise of the populist State and the modernization of continental dependent capitalism.” These were, according to Dussel (1989), two of the great challenges faced by the Latin American Church within the period before 1959.

In general terms, the Catholic Church, in the early 20th century, sought to strengthen itself as an institution by means of alliances with rising State administrations (such as those of a populist nature), striving to maintain a traditionalist and conservative status quo. Although Catholic officials, resorting to encyclicals such as *Quadragesimo anno* and *Divini Redemptoris*, published by Pope Pius XI, have expressed their distrust of socialist propositions and even supported authoritarian regimes in the name of a common enemy – communism –, in Latin America, we can observe a gradual – and sometimes ambiguous – advance towards social issues. According to Dussel, this progress is made explicit through some initiatives, where the Catholic Action and the Social Action stand out.

Regarding the Catholic Action, despite the fact of being organized under the papacy of Pius XI during the 1920s, in order to trigger lay commitment under the direction of the episcopal hierarchy, its specialized branch⁵ did manage to slowly expand throughout Latin America, especially from the late 1950s on. The Brazilian Catholic Action had specialized agencies focused on youth evangelization, among which we mention the Catholic Agrarian Youth (Juventude Agrária Católica [JAC]), the Catholic Independent Youth (Juventude Independente Católica [JIC]), the Catholic Workers’ Youth (Juventude Operária Católica [JOC]), the Catholic University Youth (Juventude Universitária Católica [JUC]), the Catholic Student Youth (Juventude

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