



# ON THE PRODUCTION OF A PUBLIC ANTAGONISM IN BRAZIL

**M**ichel Foucault traveled to Brazil five times from 1965 to 1976. He visited the country in October 1965, May and June 1973, October and November 1974, October and November 1975, and October and November 1976. Foucault went to Brazil to fulfill highly demanding, if not grueling, academic itineraries. Over the course of his five visits to the country, Foucault delivered dozens of lectures and informal talks on topics as diverse as the human sciences, juridical forms, madness, contemporary philosophy and literature, social medicine, sexuality, and the prison. A thematic consistency nevertheless underpinned the bulk of his lectures and talks in Brazil. They revolved around the theme of power, because the majority of Foucault's visits to the country coincided with a period from the early to mid-1970s in which he meticulously elaborated his approach to power. However, it would be a mistake to assume that Foucault was simply recycling materials in Brazil from his already presented research in France. He broke new ground in Brazil by introducing his audiences to concepts that had not been publicly introduced elsewhere, such as his now famous concept of biopolitics. Brazil was therefore what Salma Tannus Muchail and Márcio Alves da Fonseca aptly describe as

a “laboratory” for Foucault.<sup>1</sup> It was a space where he could speak about new directions in his research and receive feedback from friends, interlocutors, audience members, and readers.

Yet Foucault’s efforts to spur dialogues with Brazilians by sharing his research contributions with them came up against a manifestly constraining political reality. All of Foucault’s visits to Brazil took place in the context of a military dictatorship that arose from a coup d’état against a civilian government on March 31, 1964, and lasted until the reinstatement of civilian government on March 15, 1985. The dictatorship rationalized its foundation and decades-long existence by promising to save Brazilian democracy from the threat of communism. The coup plotters in the military overthrew the left-leaning government of João Goulart with the support of his civilian opponents and the United States. These plotters and their supporters viewed Goulart’s social reforms as well as the popular mobilizations around them as conducive to a communist takeover of Brazil. What emerged from the coup d’état was an emergency state that relied heavily on executive decrees to confront challenges stemming from surges in popular opposition as well as internal divisions.<sup>2</sup> Evoking an expression that would be employed verbatim by Foucault in 1978 to describe the autonomy of the police from justice in seventeenth and eighteenth-century doctrines of reason of state, João Quartim went so far as to identify a “permanent coup d’état” as the functional substratum of the Brazilian state under the dictatorship.<sup>3</sup> This expression, from a former member of a guerrilla organization, nicely put the accent on the continuity of the military dictatorship through emergency government. Contrary to what even many civilian supporters of the dictatorship expected, the military did not swiftly return the reins of state power to civilian hands. It remained in control of the state for nearly twenty-one years.

The use of executive decrees under the dictatorship translated into the widespread and systematic use of torture in Brazil. The most notorious decree was Institutional Act No. 5 (AI-5). Issued in December 1968 in response to a wave of strikes and student demonstrations, AI-5 suspended habeas corpus, closed the Congress for an indefinite period of time, and enacted other harsh measures that opened the floodgates of political repression. Emboldened by the decree, security forces practiced torture on an unprecedented scale in the history of the dictatorship. Complaints of torture from political prisoners in military courts offer a partial measure of the sudden increase in the occurrence of the practice immediately after the introduction of AI-5. Those complaints spiked from a total of 308 between 1964 and 1968 to 1,027 in 1969 and 1,206 in 1970.<sup>4</sup> The dictatorship publicly denied that it practiced torture and

held political prisoners. However, reports of torture in Brazil had circulated widely enough in the international press by the beginning of the 1970s to tarnish the country's image.<sup>5</sup>

It was during the five-year period of heightened political repression after AI-5, known as the "years of lead," that Foucault initiated his four-year-long sequence of annual visits to Brazil. What happened when his endeavor to speak prolifically in the country came right up against the brutal reality of the dictatorship? How did the dictatorship react to Foucault's presence in Brazil? How did he respond to the dictatorship? How did opposition movements, international publicity, and diplomatic relations figure in their interactions? This book sets out to answer these questions through a detailed examination of the relationship between Foucault and the dictatorship in Brazil. The dictatorship merits elaborate consideration in the exploration of the topic of Foucault in Brazil, because it was a major force in structuring his intellectual and political engagements in the country. Yet to pursue a book-length study of the relationship between Foucault and the dictatorship in Brazil over the course of his five visits to the country and beyond them is to trek a new path. There is a relatively recent and still burgeoning literature from Brazilian scholars on the broad topic of Foucault in Brazil.<sup>6</sup> This literature brings to light a lot of important details about the relationship between Foucault and the dictatorship in Brazil, but there is no contribution to it that treats this relationship as the center of gravity for an analysis of his five visits to the country.<sup>7</sup> One reason for this circumstance is that the literature on the topic of Foucault in Brazil holds, by and large, the view that his relationship to the dictatorship was simply antagonistic.<sup>8</sup> This literature therefore demonstrates a strong tendency to tacitly conclude that there is nothing to say about the relationship between Foucault and the dictatorship beyond giving flesh to the antagonism at its core through the elaboration of historical detail. The problem with this approach is that it tends to be, paradoxically, de-historicizing. It elides a glaring peculiarity in Foucault's relationship to the Brazilian dictatorship out of a deference to his stature as a militant intellectual.<sup>9</sup> The more complicated truth is that Foucault did not make any public declarations against the dictatorship on Brazilian soil until midway through his fourth visit to Brazil. We can tell a much more interesting and instructive story about Foucault's political experiences in Brazil if we resist the easy slippage toward historical confirmation that flows from the premise of his antagonistic relationship to the dictatorship and ask instead *how his public antagonism to the dictatorship was produced*. What forces compelled Foucault to manifest a public antagonism toward the Brazilian dictatorship at one moment rather than another? To ask this more

precise historical question is to simultaneously ask why Foucault remained publicly silent about the dictatorship in Brazil for such a long period of time over the course of his visits to the country.

My method for answering the questions above walks a fine line between two approaches. Heliana de Barros Conde Rodrigues offers one approach in her groundbreaking book *Ensaio sobre Michel Foucault no Brasil: Presença, efeitos, ressonâncias* (Essays on Michel Foucault in Brazil: Presence, effects, resonances). She explores the ways in which Foucault upended the expectations about him in Brazil through his physical, theoretical, and political circulation in the country. Any researcher seriously addressing the topic of Foucault in Brazil owes Rodrigues an enormous debt of gratitude for single-handedly invigorating a conversation about the topic.<sup>10</sup> But her book focuses so heavily on the rich reconstruction of the context of Foucault's visits to Brazil that the actual content of his lectures from these visits tends to take a backseat. To consider only a stark example of this tendency, Rodrigues dwells on the press coverage of Foucault during his visit to Salvador in the state of Bahia in late October 1976, but she does not offer any commentary on the content of his lectures in the city.<sup>11</sup> Her book therefore has its limits in helping us to understand the more intricate ways that Foucault's lectures in Brazil spoke politically to Brazilians.

Stuart Elden's *Foucault: The Birth of Power* offers a diametrically opposed approach, even though his book is not about the topic of Foucault in Brazil. As indicated by its subtitle, Elden's book constructs an "intellectual history" of the emergence of the theme of power in Foucault's work from 1969 to 1974.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Elden provides incredibly detailed analyses of Foucault's lectures in Rio de Janeiro on juridical forms in May 1973 and on social medicine in October and November 1974.<sup>13</sup> He implicitly but forcefully rejects the view that Foucault was simply retreading old, familiar terrain in these lectures. For Elden, Foucault's lectures from Rio de Janeiro were clearly connected in different ways to his research at the Collège de France but they were not simply a repetition of his previous work. Foucault's lecture series in Rio de Janeiro in 1973 and 1974 were important steps in the emergence of his distinct approach to power because they heralded major innovations, such as his first public use of the term *panopticism* as well as his first public mention of the concept of biopolitics.<sup>14</sup> Elden's book stands out in the Anglophone literature for giving two of Foucault's lecture series in Brazil the meticulous attention they deserve. Yet his book does not touch on the Brazilian historical context in which Foucault delivered his lectures. It therefore cannot help us understand the ways in which that context spoke to Foucault.

I want to reconstruct the broad context that framed Foucault's visits to Brazil. To keep the focus on that context, I will refer to his analyses presented or published outside Brazil only when they help accentuate or illuminate a problem posed by his experiences in the country. I also want (where possible) to plumb the depths of Foucault's lectures in Brazil in order to tease out the rich, productive conversation between context and theory. Maneuvering through the relationship between Foucault and the Brazilian dictatorship in this manner illuminates otherwise glossed over subtleties in his contributions to a range of areas, such as modern torture.

### **Echoes of an Authoritarian Past in the Present**

Why is the relationship between Foucault and the military dictatorship in Brazil topical today? What provocations in our present render it an object of urgent consideration and study? An examination of the relationship between Foucault and the military dictatorship in Brazil is timelier than it would have been in even the recent past because of a dizzying transformation that Brazilian political life has undergone. That transformation was encapsulated in the victory of the far-right politician and former army captain Jair Bolsonaro in the presidential election of 2018. In an interval of less than three years, Brazil went from a country that had been governed by successive administrations of the center-left Workers' Party, first under the immensely popular Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and then under Dilma Rousseff, to a country with a government headed by Bolsonaro.<sup>15</sup> The tortuous path to his government involved the impeachment of Rousseff in 2016 over a budgetary technicality and the imprisonment of Lula shortly before the general election in 2018 on corruption charges. Brazil's dictatorial past came back to haunt the country with a vengeance under the Bolsonaro government. He indulged in violently anticommunist rhetoric, exuded an open nostalgia for the dictatorship, and praised one of its most notorious torturers, Coronel Carlos Alberto Brilhante Ustra.

The British historian Perry Anderson reminds us that Bolsonaro also acted on his admiration for the dictatorship by returning the military to a prominent role in political life. "There are now," Anderson remarked in 2019, "more military ministers than there were under the rule of the generals."<sup>16</sup> And the military did not simply benefit from the Bolsonaro government. It also cleared the path for his victory by sending a barely veiled warning to the Supreme Court against granting habeas corpus to Lula in April 2018. The commander of the Brazilian Army, General Eduardo Villas Bôas, sent the following tweet the day before the Supreme Court voted on whether to grant Lula habeas corpus: "I assure the nation that the Brazilian Army shares the desire of all good citi-

zens to repudiate impunity and respect the Constitution, social peace, and democracy while remaining attentive to its institutional mission.”<sup>17</sup> The Supreme Court’s actions suggested it understood the implicit threat in this tweet loud and clear. It suddenly reversed its decision, from two weeks earlier, to grant Lula habeas corpus, effectively barring the highly popular former president from running in the 2018 presidential election.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, Anderson treats Villas Bôas’s declaration as an interference that hearkened back to the coup d’état that established the dictatorship in 1964 despite noteworthy differences in form, historical context, and effects.<sup>19</sup> The Bolsonaro government that arose in part from such maneuvers was what can only be described as a strange and combustible concatenation of ostensibly paradoxical attributes: an effect of military interference wrapped in the garb of a legitimate election, a cabinet with more generals as ministers than any of the governments under the military dictatorship, and an elected leader who waxed effusive about the years of the dictatorship.

Bolsonaro and Lula have now experienced a slow-motion but dramatic reversal of fortunes. Lula was released from prison in November 2019 after the Supreme Court ruled that defendants have a right to exhaust their appeals before being imprisoned.<sup>20</sup> In April 2021, the Supreme Court also voted by a wide majority to affirm the decision of one of its justices to annul Lula’s convictions on grounds that he had been tried in a lower court that lacked proper jurisdiction over his case.<sup>21</sup> The annulment of Lula’s convictions allowed him to launch his campaign for the presidency. He clinched victory in the presidential contest by defeating Bolsonaro in the decisive second round of voting at the end of October 2022. Bolsonaro suffered a loss of support due in large part to his disastrous trivialization of the coronavirus pandemic. Lula is now back in the presidential palace, and Bolsonaro faces criminal probes without the immunity from legal prosecution afforded a sitting president.<sup>22</sup>

Yet the right-wing movement that supports the authoritarian values that Bolsonaro embodies is simply too entrenched and expansive to go away anytime soon. Nearly half of the valid votes cast in the 2022 presidential election were for Bolsonaro. He received 49.1 percent of these votes against Lula’s 50.9 percent.<sup>23</sup> Bolsonaro’s allies and members of his government also obtained major victories in congressional and gubernatorial races.<sup>24</sup> Bolsonaro reacted to his loss in the presidential contest with unproven claims of voter fraud and a refusal to concede defeat to Lula. These claims prompted his more energized supporters to block roads to protest the presidential election result and to set up encampments at the gates of military barracks to demand (and pray for) a military coup. Exactly a week after Lula’s inauguration on January 1, 2023,

and only five days ago at the time of writing, these supporters staged an attack on the headquarters of the Congress and the Supreme Court as well as on the Presidential Palace in Brasília. Early reporting indicates that they were able to pull off their attack with the complicity of at least some elements in the security forces.<sup>25</sup>

In all of Foucault's visits to Brazil, he was obliged to contend with a dictatorship that Bolsonaro and his more fervent supporters uphold as a model for the solution to the problems that afflict the country. Foucault's political experiences in Brazil speak to us more forcefully in this context because they serve as a resource for the stimulation of critical reflections on how to intellectually and politically navigate a situation marked by the slippage toward a more open embrace of authoritarian values. The exploration of Foucault's experiences in Brazil puts the spotlight on the complications, entanglements, possibilities, and outright perils that constrain and incite theory and practice in more openly authoritarian situations.

### **Conditions for the Production of a Public Antagonism**

Various elements combined to put Foucault on a potential collision course with the dictatorship in public on Brazilian soil when he returned to Brazil in the early 1970s: his history of political activities, the content of his presentations, the institutional spaces where he spoke, his proximity to Brazilians who had been subjected to political repression, the political orientation of his audiences, and the press coverage of his contributions in left-leaning outlets. By the time Foucault returned to Brazil in May 1973, he had established a reputation as a militant intellectual through a rich history of political engagements. As we shall see in detail toward the end of this chapter, Foucault had engaged in acts of solidarity with Marxist students in Tunisia who were revolting against the authoritarian regime of Habib Bourguiba in the late 1960s. He had also founded the Prisons Information Group (GIP) with others in France in February 1971. The GIP sought to generate a public resistance to the prison system by disseminating the voices of prisoners about intolerable conditions in the prison at a time when the prison was physically inaccessible to members of the general public in France. In the pursuit of this goal, Foucault plunged headlong into the investigations and other activities of the GIP until its self-dissolution in December 1972.<sup>26</sup> Foucault even engaged in one comparatively minor intervention concerning Brazil during the period of his activities on behalf of the GIP. He added his name to a petition published in *Le Monde* in July 1971 against the imprisonment of members of the international theater troupe the Living Theatre in Brazil.<sup>27</sup> Foucault was therefore already on public

record in France for his opposition to a police action in Brazil. More generally, his acts of solidarity with Marxist students outside France could have aroused deep suspicions among authorities in the Brazilian dictatorship, because these authorities considered Marxists of any sort internal enemies and reacted violently to support for them among foreigners. Foucault's support for a group in France that sought to generate public intolerance of the prison system through information from prisoners was also susceptible to these suspicions. The dictatorship not only relied on the prison system for punishment but also sought to thwart the circulation of information about the location and condition of political prisoners, especially after AI-5.

The contents of Foucault's lectures in Brazil were also a potential source of trouble for the dictatorship, because they contained powerful allusions to its practices and institutions of political repression. His first lecture series in Brazil in the 1970s, "Truth and Juridical Forms," dealt at length with the inquiry, torture, surveillance, the police, and imprisonment in Europe. Merely bringing up these practices and institutions even with reference to another continent was a provocative move in Brazil, precisely because they were also obvious features of political repression under the dictatorship. Any talk of torture, above all, from a foreigner was prone to arouse the sensitivities of Brazilian authorities, who publicly and emphatically denied the existence of the practice in their country. As we shall see in the next chapter, a prominent Brazilian interlocutor immediately seized on one of Foucault's allusions from "Truth and Juridical Forms." The psychoanalyst Hélio Pellegrino perceived Foucault's discussion of the inquiry through the lens of the notorious practice of military police inquiries (IPMs) under the dictatorship. Foucault's presentations in Brazil were also provocative in a more general (and therefore perhaps less obvious) way. His meticulous expositions of power offered Brazilians theoretical resources to reflect on and challenge the exercise of power in the context of a dictatorship. Foucault's emphasis on power relations beyond the ambit of the state in particular underscored the limitations of narrowly state-centric approaches on the radical Left in challenging the dictatorship.

He also had the potential to arouse the suspicions of the security forces because he articulated his insights about power relations from institutions in Brazil that had been spaces of violent conflict with the dictatorship and were subjected to ongoing political repression. The dictatorship wasted no time targeting universities for political repression, because it viewed them as hotbeds of subversion stemming from communist infiltration.<sup>28</sup> On April 9, 1964, the junta issued Institutional Act No. 1.<sup>29</sup> Article 8 of the decree established special inquiries into individuals and groups alleged to have committed offenses



against the dictatorship.<sup>30</sup> Institutional Act No. 1 was followed by an executive decree later in the same month that formalized these inquiries as the aforementioned IPMs.<sup>31</sup> The dictatorship relied heavily on IPMs to persecute thousands of government employees, including professors.<sup>32</sup> Special commissions carried out the task of conducting IPMs at universities. The historian Victoria Langland sums up the function and effect of the commissions: “Headed by military-appointed panels from within the university and informed by confidential army reports, these commissions investigated allegedly subversive professors and compiled lists of those to be dismissed, creating a climate of distrust and acrimony among colleagues.”<sup>33</sup>

A special commission carried out IPMs against professors at the University of São Paulo (USP) in the months following the coup d'état. This detail is noteworthy for our purposes, because Foucault would lecture at USP in October 1965 and October 1975. The USP rector, Luís Antônio da Gama e Silva, was a fervent supporter of hardliners within the dictatorship. He secretly created a special commission with other USP professors to investigate the allegedly subversive activities of their colleagues for the security forces.<sup>34</sup> The commission produced a report accusing fifty-two USP professors, students, and administrators of Marxist infiltration with the goal of subversion.<sup>35</sup> The report resulted in IPMs for many of the professors.<sup>36</sup> The ensuing trials cleared the professors of the charges of subversion but not before they had already been dismissed or forcibly retired,<sup>37</sup> and not before some of them had been arrested and imprisoned.<sup>38</sup> Foucault was therefore lecturing in a community of academics that had been tormented by political persecution through IPMs. Shortly after the coup d'état, the military attacked and plundered the building of what was known at the time as the School of Philosophy, Sciences, and Literature (FFCL) at USP, where Foucault would lecture in 1965.<sup>39</sup> Rodrigues stresses that canine units were used in the “hunt for communists” in the attack.<sup>40</sup> Less than a week after the issuance of AI-5 in December 1968, the military engaged in a brazen attack on USP dormitories that resulted in the arrest of hundreds of students.<sup>41</sup> USP would not be the only Brazilian university that had experienced a military attack and that would later host Foucault. The military invaded what is today the Federal University of Minas Gerais and appointed a chancellor to the institution shortly after the coup d'état.<sup>42</sup> Foucault gave a talk there in May 1973.

The political repression unleashed by the dictatorship had also reached the entourage of Brazilians who circulated with Foucault. As we shall see in the next chapter, two of Foucault's interlocutors during his visit to Brazil in 1973, the philosopher José de Anchieta Corrêa and the aforementioned psychoanalyst Pellegrino, had been subjected to IPMs in 1964 and 1969, respectively.

The army briefly detained Foucault's principal Brazilian interlocutor and friend, Roberto Machado, for attempting to organize a political response to the coup d'état in its immediate aftermath.<sup>43</sup> One of Foucault's main interlocutors during his 1974 visit to Brazil, the psychoanalyst Jurandir Freire Costa, was detained for several days in 1969.<sup>44</sup> Foucault's professional and personal connections to Brazilians who had been targeted for political repression could have raised suspicions about him within the security forces.

The security forces could have generated these suspicions for another reason. Foucault drew audiences with a Marxist orientation and circulated among institutional personnel with connections to the Brazilian Communist Party. One of Foucault's Brazilian translators, Eduardo Jardim, reminds us that the audiences for Foucault's presentations in Brazil were made up of "leftist intellectuals who had little else besides Marxist literature at their disposal as a basis to challenge the military dictatorship."<sup>45</sup> Machado notes that the staff at Rio de Janeiro's Institute of Social Medicine, where Foucault lectured in 1974, was "composed, in large part, of members or persons proximate to the Communist Party."<sup>46</sup>

Finally, the press coverage of Foucault in Brazil could have fomented suspicions about him within the security forces, because he was covered in part by left-leaning periodicals, such as the nationalist weekly *Politika* and the intellectual weekly *Opinião*. As we shall see in the next chapter, *Politika* published a seemingly censored translation of an interview with Foucault about his political views and activities as early as 1972. *Opinião* ran articles on Foucault's speaking engagements in Brazil in 1973 and 1974. The periodical was subject to harsh censorship. Indeed, the financial burdens that *Opinião* incurred through the process of censorship were so great that they forced the weekly to shut down in 1977.<sup>47</sup>

There were therefore various conditions in place for the production of a public antagonism between Foucault and the dictatorship during his visits to Brazil in the early 1970s. Yet that antagonism did not burst into the open until his 1975 visit to the country. He remained conspicuously silent about the dictatorship during his speaking engagements and interviews in Brazil in 1973 and 1974, as well as throughout roughly half of his stay in the country in 1975. Foucault's silence stands out (and stood out) because he had been publicly vocal about a wide range of political matters in France and elsewhere during the two and a half years before his arrival in Brazil in May 1973. Of course, Brazil was not the only country where Foucault had to grapple with the dilemmas posed by an authoritarian state, but the timing of his political activities there does pose a peculiar problem. Why was there a *décalage* before

the antagonism between Foucault and the dictatorship burst into the open in Brazil? How are we to make sense of the paradox of a militant intellectual who remained conspicuously silent about the dictatorship during his speaking engagements in the country? And why did Foucault finally break his silence about the dictatorship in Brazil?

### **The Argument**

Foucault crafted an antagonistic yet cautious relationship to the Brazilian dictatorship that rested on the premise of collective action. He revealed this premise through his own actions. It was crucial to him because to act outside the scope of action in concert with others ran the risk of endangering his Brazilian friends, interlocutors, and audience members. The need for collective action compelled him to remain publicly silent about the dictatorship during his initial visits to Brazil in the 1970s. His silence left his stance unclear to Brazilians who were not proximate to him or knowledgeable about his broader political orientation; it thus constrained the scales of solidarity that Foucault sought to nurture with Brazilians opposed to the dictatorship. However, his avoidance of comments about the dictatorship during his speaking engagements in Brazil did not preclude other kinds of political dialogues with Brazilians. Foucault worked around his own public silence by spurring these dialogues through his lectures and interviews in Brazil.

Foucault's commitment to collective action also meant that he only broke his silence when the opportunity to act in concert with others presented itself. Larger political dynamics in Brazil created this opportunity. As Foucault stepped foot in Brazil in October 1975, security forces unleashed an extermination campaign against members of the Brazilian Communist Party in a bid to securitize the gruelingly slow transition to democracy against possible threats from the Left. The campaign resulted in the arrests and torture of students and professors from USP, where Foucault began lecturing on sexuality. As the political repression intensified, students from the student movement turned to him for help. He obliged them by delivering what became known as a manifesto at a protest held at a student assembly at USP on October 23, 1975. Foucault's manifesto expressed his solidarity with the students and professors who had been subjected to political repression over the preceding weeks. The intelligence community under the dictatorship not only reported Foucault's manifesto but also scrambled to make sense of its origins and effects as well as his political orientation. Foucault thus inaugurated the period of his own open antagonism with the Brazilian dictatorship. His subsequent participation in a famous memorial service for the journalist Vladimir Herzog, who had been

tortured to death by the security forces, only intensified that antagonism. The dictatorship sought to expel Foucault from Brazil for his political activities. The antagonism between Foucault and the Brazilian authorities was so great that it mobilized French diplomats to enact measures for his safety in Brazil and even garnered the attention of American diplomats. It also led to Foucault's decision to return to the country in 1976. He wanted to antagonize the dictatorship one more time on Brazilian soil.

Why should we care that the antagonism between Foucault and the Brazilian dictatorship burst into the open? Why should we care that he shifted his stance toward this dictatorship from public silence to public protest? One answer to this question is that this shift challenges a commonplace and still very powerful equation in the world of political practices—namely, the equation of silence with a complicity with intolerable acts. The historian James N. Green observes that this equation “had become the privileged metaphor in appeals to action” over torture in Brazil by 1970.<sup>48</sup> Foucault's movement from a position of public silence to one of public protest over the Brazilian dictatorship suggests that silence is not reducible to complicity in the world of political practices. It can serve to safeguard oneself and others for a more propitious moment of political action. Silence can thus serve as a form of the care of the self and others, to use Foucault's later vocabulary. For this reason, political militancy can (as paradoxical as it may seem) arise from silence. This point is worth stressing because many Brazilians living under the dictatorship had no choice but to be publicly silent in their militancy. Maintaining silence in public was a means of protecting oneself and others in a dictatorship bent on detecting, monitoring, and punishing the slightest signs of subversion. Public silence was also a manner of engaging in solidarity with silenced others, including those who had divergent political and theoretical orientations. One of the features of the memorial service for Herzog that Foucault attended was a silence among its thousands of participants.

We should care about Foucault's movement from public silence to public protest about the dictatorship in Brazil for another reason. It resulted in statements that nicely complement and extend his theorizations of torture. Without actually invoking the expression *biopower* in his various comments on torture in Brazil, Foucault showed that techniques for extending life invested the practice of torture in the country. He observed that doctors, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts participated in torture sessions to extend torture to the furthest bearable mental and physical limits of its victims. Foucault's reflections on torture under the dictatorship in Brazil reinforced his provocative claim from *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* that torture is in at

least in one way *more* “unrestrained” in the modern era precisely because its victims do not have the possibility of ending their torments by holding out and refusing to confess to a magistrate, as was the case in pre-Enlightenment Europe.<sup>49</sup>

Finally, Foucault’s movement from public silence to public protest about the dictatorship in Brazil is important because it attunes us to underappreciated subtleties in his relationship to Marxism and communism. Of course, Foucault had been a longstanding and fierce critic of the French Communist Party by the time of his visits to Brazil in the 1970s. One prominent view is that he had also become highly critical, if not outright dismissive, of Marxism by the mid-1970s. There are grounds to think that Foucault was moving in this direction. He had articulated various critiques of Marxism at the Collège de France and even appears to have been fed up with talk of Karl Marx in particular by 1975. However, the story of Foucault’s political experiences in Brazil complicates this way of understanding his relationship to Marxism and communism. Foucault broke his silence about the dictatorship in Brazil in response to a wave of political repression that sought to eliminate Brazilian communists. He did not let his antipathy toward the French Communist Party get in the way of political actions effectively in support of Brazilian communists. In his lectures in Salvador and Recife, Foucault also proceeded to turn to Marx’s magnum opus *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* as a source for an analysis of the productivity of power relations.

### **Foucault in Brazil in 1965**

Foucault’s 1965 visit to Brazil merits our consideration, because it shows that the dictatorship had an indirect but palpable effect on his intellectual engagements in the country long before he voiced any public opposition to the regime or even transformed into a militant intellectual. However, Foucault’s first visit to Brazil is a section of this chapter, rather than the subject of a freestanding chapter, because it is the least documented of his visits to the country. In marked contrast to their coverage of Foucault’s subsequent visits to Brazil, the national and local presses do not appear to have produced even one article or notice about his activities in the country. The reason for this contrast is no mystery. When Foucault arrived in Brazil in 1965, he had not acquired the intellectual stardom that would mark the remainder of his career. That stardom would only begin to be conferred on him through the surprising fanfare that greeted the publication of *The Order of Things* the next year.<sup>50</sup> The philosopher Paulo Eduardo Arantes puts this point candidly in his

own informal recollection. He notes that Foucault in Brazil in 1965 was a mere “nobody,” not the illustrious “Michel Foucault.”<sup>51</sup>

Foucault delivered still-unpublished lectures on what would become his forthcoming book, *The Order of Things*, at FFCL-USP in October 1965. An institutional arrangement combined with a personal and professional connection to facilitate his visit. Perry Anderson explains that when “the liberal oligarchs” of São Paulo founded USP in 1934 they turned to professors of philosophy and the social sciences contracted through the French state, because they believed that these professors, rather than their German or Italian counterparts, would be best equipped to defend democratic traditions.<sup>52</sup> Foucault arrived in Brazil a little over three decades later through this arrangement. A philosopher, friend, and former student of Foucault who taught at FFCL-USP, Gérard Lebrun, invited him to lecture at the school.<sup>53</sup> In accepting the invitation, Foucault joined the ranks of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Fernand Braudel, and other French thinkers who had passed through FFCL-USP before acquiring global renown.<sup>54</sup> According to Arantes and the philosopher José Arthur Giannotti, Foucault brought the proofs of *The Order of Things* with him to Brazil and corrected them during his visit.<sup>55</sup>

For biographer David Macey, Foucault’s relatively “unknown” status in Brazil meant that his lectures at FFCL-USP were unsuccessful and poorly attended.<sup>56</sup> That may have been the case, but there were also political conditions in Brazil that undermined the mere delivery of the lectures. Rodrigues touches on these conditions: she notes that gubernatorial elections as well as the issuance of the decree Institutional Act No. 2 (AI-2) took place in October 1965.<sup>57</sup> However, the precise timing of these events and the relationship between them merit greater consideration if we want to better understand the dynamics of the turbulent context in which Foucault delivered his lectures at FFCL-USP. Gubernatorial elections for eleven states were held on October 3, and President Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco enacted AI-2 on October 27.<sup>58</sup> The elections and the decree thus bookended the month in which Foucault delivered his lectures, and these events were intimately related to one another.

The gubernatorial elections reflected the commitment of the dictatorship to the trappings of democracy for the purposes of legitimacy, but that commitment backfired, according to the political scientist Maria Helena Moreira Alves. The 1965 elections took the form of a plebiscite on the regime, because it had stifled other forms of dissent through outright political repression.<sup>59</sup> Alves notes, “Students, intellectuals, labor leaders, and others who had felt the effects of repression most directly seized on these elections as an oppor-

tunity to protest.<sup>60</sup> The elections also transpired at a time when the policies of the government of Castelo Branco had declined in popularity due to its introduction of an economic stabilization program intended to combat inflation. The program succeeded in reducing inflation, but it also triggered a recession through the regulation of public- and private-sector wages.<sup>61</sup> Opposition candidates benefited from this situation even after the government had manipulated the electoral rules of the game (through new state residency requirements and an ineligibility law for members of the previous government) to suit its preferences.<sup>62</sup> Two opposition candidates emerged victorious from the 1965 gubernatorial elections, Francisco Negrão de Lima in the state of Guanabara, which is today the state of Rio de Janeiro, and Israel Pinheiro in the state of Minas Gerais. For hardliners in the military, the election of these candidates to governorships was unacceptable, because they were close to a popular former president who had been targeted for political persecution, Juscelino Kubitschek.<sup>63</sup> Foucault commenced his lectures right around the time that these dynamics were unfolding.

The government of Castelo Branco reacted to the victories of Negrão de Lima and Pinheiro by issuing AI-2. The decree sought to preempt electoral victories of the opposition through a range of measures, including the establishment of indirect elections for the president, vice president, and governors, the reaffirmation of the right of the president to cancel the mandates of legislators and suspend the political rights of citizens for ten years, and the dissolution of all political parties.<sup>64</sup> A supplementary act to AI-2 from early November 1965 spelled out the conditions for the creation of new parties. The parties that emerged from this process were the pro-government National Renewal Alliance and the Brazilian Democratic Movement as the official opposition.<sup>65</sup> The two-party system created by AI-2 would remain in place for fourteen years.<sup>66</sup> The broader significance of AI-2 is that it slammed the door on any prospect of a swift return to civilian rule.

What was the impact of the decree on Foucault? Without mentioning AI-2 by name, Daniel Defert suggests that political turmoil leading to the decree induced the premature cancellation of Foucault's lectures at FFCL-USP. Defert captures this moment with the following observation: "The round of scheduled lectures is stopped by power grabs that, from week to week, consolidate the establishment of the marshals, who will before long hunt or exile his friends."<sup>67</sup> Quartim reminds us that there were indeed weekly efforts by hardliners in the military to consolidate their power after the October 3 election. On October 7, Castelo Branco succumbed to hardliners by putting together legislation for the federal government to intervene in the affairs of states and



further curtail the rights of the opposition. On October 15, a group of hardline captains called on colonels to use their units to overthrow Castelo Branco. The captains were arrested, but the Supreme Court president's plea in an article on October 20 for the military to return to the barracks elicited a swift rebuke from the Minister of War, Artur da Costa e Silva.<sup>68</sup> The Supreme Court's reelection of its president on October 25, together with congressional rejection of an amendment that would have undermined the powers of Congress and the Supreme Court, were the final straws before the enactment of AI-2 two days later.<sup>69</sup> Defert's observation above does not clarify whether Foucault or the administration at FFCL-USP made the choice to cancel his lectures, but it nicely captures the speed with which political turmoil overtook his academic itinerary and foreclosed the possibility of his lecturing. The cancellation of Foucault's course shows that the dictatorship had a palpable effect on the mere delivery of his lectures during his first visit to Brazil. The dictatorship thus structured Foucault's intellectual engagements in the country years before he had transformed into a militant intellectual and a whole decade before he had publicly voiced his opposition to the regime on Brazilian soil.

Foucault's lectures at FFCL-USP would nevertheless serve as the basis of a book, *The Order of Things*, that elicited the first publications about him in Brazil.<sup>70</sup> The philosopher Benedito Nunes reviewed the book in a four-part essay published in the literary supplement of the conservative newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo* between October and November 1968.<sup>71</sup> Nunes's review may have been the first of any book by Foucault in Brazil.<sup>72</sup> The title of the review, "Archaeology of archaeology," announced its purpose. In the space constraints of a newspaper review, Nunes embarked on an ambitious archaeology of Foucault's archaeology of the human sciences. He latched onto the concept of positivity as the interpretive key to Foucault's archaeology. Nunes argued that "if the term *positivity* evokes the autonomous grounding of scientific propositions relative to experience and reason," Foucault adopted a different and "disconcerting" usage of the term.<sup>73</sup> For Nunes, Foucault showed that positivity "no longer belongs to the sciences themselves" because it is constituted by epistemes that not only vary from one period to another but that also structure types of knowledge that do not even obtain a scientific status.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, scientific and non-scientific forms of knowledge "participate in the same positivity, which is to say, the same *truth*, the same original *understanding*, which rose with the discontinuous pulse of historic time, from the subsoil of language to the soil of explicit knowledge."<sup>75</sup> Nunes then used this claim about the scope of positivity to segue right into the contention that Martin Heidegger's ontology was the "generating matrix" for Foucault's archae-



ology of the human sciences. His contention revolved around three points: first, Foucault used Heideggerian concepts of episteme, understanding, truth, opening, and ground or soil in his archaeology of the human sciences; second, Foucault returned to an analytic of the finitude of man that Heidegger had drawn out of Immanuel Kant's theory of the relationship between sensibility and understanding; third, the finitude of man in Heidegger as well as in Foucault "favors the advent of the non-human and non-thought."<sup>76</sup>

Sérgio Paulo Rouanet edited the first Brazilian book about Foucault, *O homem e o discurso (A arqueologia de Michel Foucault)* (Man and discourse [The archaeology of Michel Foucault]), which Tempo Brasileiro published in 1971.<sup>77</sup> The introduction to the book conveyed the originality of the collection of essays in the book. It acknowledged that Foucault was not unknown in Brazil due to his visiting professorship at USP and the publication of a translation of one of his books, *Mental Illness and Psychology*. However, the introduction went on to stress that there had not been a "systematic" collection of essays on Foucault published in Brazil that "describes his work and seeks to situate it in the great currents of modern thought."<sup>78</sup> *O homem e o discurso* sought to fill this lacuna to facilitate a "critical evaluation" of Foucault for readers.<sup>79</sup> It fulfilled this task by offering an interview with Foucault as well as essays about his work by Dominique Lecourt, Carlos Henrique de Escobar, and Rouanet.

The interview merits special consideration because it was the first interview with Foucault conducted by Brazilians and published in Brazil. Rouanet and José Guilherme Merquior conducted it "weeks" before Foucault delivered his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France on December 2, 1970.<sup>80</sup> The interview was not restricted to a discussion of *The Order of Things*. It addressed Foucault's articulation of the relations between discursive, extra-discursive, and pre-discursive formations in his other books. *The Order of Things* nonetheless figured centrally in the interview because Foucault credited it with two methodological developments: the establishment of similar and simultaneous transformations in distinct sciences through comparative analysis (without any specification of the root of these transformations) and the identification of an archaeological form of analysis concerned with the constitution of discursive formations (without any reference to pre-discursive practices).<sup>81</sup> Foucault also responded to criticisms of his treatment of Marx as a "fish in the water" of nineteenth-century thought in *The Order of Things*.<sup>82</sup> He insisted that what he meant by this expression was that Marx had manipulated political economy through the appropriation of David Ricardo's concept of surplus value "to propose a historical analysis of capitalist societies that can still have its validity, and to found a revolutionary movement that is still the liveliest."<sup>83</sup>

Foucault clarified that what he criticized in *The Order of Things* was a “Marxist humanism” that did “not constitute the core of Marxism understood as an analysis of capitalist society and a design for revolutionary action in this society.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, Foucault was at pains to emphasize that he did not consider his reading of Marx in *The Order of Things* to be a sweeping denial of the novelty of Marx’s contributions or an indictment of Marxism tout court. His statements reflected a conversation about Marxism in the presence of Brazilian interlocutors that would continue for years.

Foucault’s visit to Brazil in 1965 also set up other patterns for his subsequent experiences in the country. He brought the proofs of his forthcoming book with him to Brazil that year. Foucault would bring the proofs of *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction* with him on his visit to Brazil in 1976. He visited Brazil in the heat of an electoral contest in 1965. Foucault would visit the country during electoral contests in 1974 and 1976. His visit to the country in 1965 transpired during a moment of heightened political tension. Foucault would come face to face with this kind of tension (outside electoral periods) in 1975. Political turmoil stemming from efforts to consolidate the dictatorship in the face of the electoral victories of the opposition led to the cancellation of his course at USP in 1965. Foucault would cancel his course at USP exactly a decade later, in response to a wave political repression unleashed by the dictatorship. Finally, to the best of my knowledge, there is nothing to suggest that Foucault adopted a position of public opposition to the dictatorship during his time in Brazil in 1965. This detail should not come as a surprise. Foucault had not yet become a militant intellectual. He would maintain a public silence about the dictatorship during his visits to Brazil in 1973 and 1974.

In spite of the cancellation of Foucault’s course at FFCL-USP in 1965, there was a demonstrable interest in bringing him back to the university. Ricardo Parro and Anderson Lima da Silva recently discovered and reproduced letters that convey this interest. One letter dated May 4, 1966, is from the chair of the Philosophy Department at FFCL-USP, Livio Teixeira, to Foucault. It informs Foucault that he had been formally named by the administration as a substitute for another French professor, Michel Debrun, to teach a course on ethics at FFCL-USP.<sup>85</sup> Another letter dated for May 11, 1967, is from the consulate general of France in São Paulo to a subsequent chair of the Philosophy Department at FFCL-USP, Giannotti. It informs Giannotti that the French government would be able to cover the costs of Foucault’s voyage to São Paulo.<sup>86</sup> It is not clear if Foucault responded to Teixeira or why he chose not to take up the offer to teach the course on ethics at FFCL-USP. However, by the time

the consulate general of France in São Paulo composed its letter to Giannotti, Foucault had already moved to Tunisia and was teaching at the University of Tunis. His commitments there help explain why he did not return to Brazil in the late 1960s.

### **Foucault in Tunisia**

At first glance, it may seem odd to include a section on Foucault in Tunisia in a book on Foucault in Brazil. But it is difficult to appreciate the scope of Foucault's political experiences in Brazil without acknowledging the profound political transformation he underwent in Tunisia. Foucault looked back on his time in Tunisia between 1966 and 1968 as a deeply transformative moment. In his words, "That's what Tunisia was for me: it compelled me to join the political debate. It wasn't May '68 in France but March '68, in a country of the third world."<sup>87</sup> Foucault credited the revolts of Marxist students in Tunisia with his transformation. As he recalled, "I was deeply impressed by those young women and men who exposed themselves to fearful risks by drafting a leaflet, distributing it, or calling for a strike. It was a real political experience for me."<sup>88</sup> The students whose courage Foucault found so inspiring were revolting against the authoritarianism of Habib Bourguiba's regime as well as American imperialism and Israeli colonialism.<sup>89</sup> The revolts started in December 1966 with the beating by security forces of a student who did not pay his bus fare.<sup>90</sup> They then escalated with pro-Palestinian protests that resulted in attacks on the British and US embassies after the Six-Day War in June 1967. These protests were followed by protests against the Vietnam War in January 1968 provoked by the visit of US vice president Hubert Humphrey to Tunisia. The student revolts then culminated in protests and strikes in March 1968 demanding the release of all imprisoned students from the previous waves of protests.<sup>91</sup> The Tunisian security forces responded by subjecting students to arrest, torture, and imprisonment.<sup>92</sup> Foucault allowed the students to use his home in Sidi Bou Saïd as a space of refuge from police searches as well as a space for the production of publicity in the form of posters, newsletters, and leaflets about imprisoned students. A printing press hidden in his garden allowed for the latter activities. Foucault also drove students around so that they could distribute their printed materials.<sup>93</sup> His actions in support of the students may well have provoked the Tunisian authorities to send an unambiguous message to him. Hannah Chapelle Wojciehowski captures what transpired to Foucault in the months after the revolts. "Foucault," she writes, "believed that his phone was being tapped and that he was being followed. Police would stop his car menacingly, then let him off with a warning."<sup>94</sup> In one

instance, men who may have been police officers subjected Foucault to a harsh beating that Wojciehowski follows Defert in describing as outright “torture.”<sup>95</sup>

Foucault’s political experience in Tunisia is noteworthy for the present book for various reasons. First, it meant that he returned to Brazil in the early 1970s with a much more political orientation. This orientation would have palpable consequences for the fulfillment of his academic itinerary in Brazil in 1975. Second, Foucault’s experiences in Tunisia established a precedent for his subsequent experiences in Brazil; indeed, the parallels between these experiences are nothing short of striking. In Tunisia as in Brazil, Foucault was in what he described as a “third world” country surrounded by radical students who were undergoing severe political repression, including subjection to torture, for their protests against an authoritarian regime.<sup>96</sup> In Tunisia as in Brazil, he adopted a stance of solidarity with these students that provoked state authorities to take actions against him. Foucault even suspected that he was under surveillance in both countries. Third, the severity of the political repression of students in Tunisia left a profound impression on Foucault that may well have compelled him to be far more cautious about his political actions among students and professors in Brazil.<sup>97</sup> Finally, Wojciehowski cautiously contends that the traumatic effects of Foucault’s personal experience of torture in Tunisia were arguably great enough to account for the prevalence of the theme of torture in his analyses from the mid-1970s.<sup>98</sup> Foucault’s reflections on torture in Brazil enriched this theme. The shadow of Tunisia loomed over his experiences in Brazil.

### **Overview of the Chapters**

The core chapters in this book are organized around the chronological order of Foucault’s four annual visits to Brazil between May 1973 and November 1976. The occurrence of these visits in this compact period provides a tidiness to my narrative that allows us to closely examine the changes in the relationship between Foucault and the dictatorship. Grasping these changes allows us in turn to track the subtleties in the movement through which he broke his public silence about the dictatorship. Chapter 2 focuses on Foucault’s visit to Brazil between late May and early June 1973. It emphasizes that Foucault engaged in a political dialogue with Brazilians through his lecture series “Truth and Juridical Forms” in Rio de Janeiro and through his speaking engagements in Belo Horizonte, in spite of his public silence about dictatorship. In Rio de Janeiro, this dialogue pivoted around Foucault’s allusions to practices of political repression under the dictatorship, his critical but appropriative engagement with Marxism, and his invitation to rethink political practices beyond

state-centric models. In Belo Horizonte, it touched on an array of highly sensitive topics, such as freedom of information, growing inequality, political repression, and new social movements. Chapter 3 turns to Foucault's visit to Brazil in October and November 1974. It shows that in spite of his public silence about the dictatorship Foucault succeeded in fostering political dialogues with Brazilians through his lectures on the history of social medicine at the Institute of Social Medicine (IMS) in Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian researchers inspired by Foucault's history of social medicine in these lectures took up his questions about the desirability and applicability of the Western model of medicine. They also spoke to the Marxist reception in Brazil of Foucault's history of social medicine and pushed the limits of some of the marxisant elements in this history. Chapter 4 addresses the momentous occasion in 1975 in which Foucault broke his public silence about the dictatorship for the first time in Brazil. In marked contrast to the previous two chapters, the focus of chapter 4 is almost exclusively on the political dynamics that drew him into forms of collective action against the dictatorship. The chapter argues that new waves of political repression, combined with the rebirth of the student movement, compelled Foucault to take a public stance against the dictatorship on Brazilian soil. Chapter 5 explores Foucault's final visit to Brazil in October and November 1976. It underscores the political underpinnings of his turn to Marx's *Capital* in his lectures in Salvador. Chapter 6 is less a conclusion in the conventional sense of a moment of closure than an incitement to leap forward by stretching the topic of Foucault in Brazil beyond a consideration of his physical presence in the country. It examines why Foucault never returned to Brazil, how he nevertheless continued to engage political life in Brazil, and how his theoretical contributions from one of his lecture series in Brazil may be used to illuminate the Bolsonaro phenomenon. This book thus ends by taking readers back to the provocation for its production—namely, a moment of transformation in Brazil's recent political history that eerily recalls the years of Foucault's visits to the country.