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THE BRAZILIAN MIRACLE HAS DEEPENED SOCIAL INEQUALITIES

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Abstract: This text provides a critical analysis of the “Brazilian Miracle,” the period between 1968 and 1973 when Brazil’s economy grew significantly. This historic era was known as the military government period. The idea is to show that, behind the military government’s propaganda, growth was not good for everyone. The article investigated books, research, news from the time, and government data to understand who really benefited. What was discovered is that, while the country was getting richer, the poorest people had their wages controlled and the gap between rich and poor only increased. The conclusion is that the “miracle” was not a period of prosperity for everyone, as was claimed. It helped the elite and left the majority of the population behind. Thus, the text shows the difference between the “great Brazil” of propaganda and the difficult reality experienced by a large part of society.

Keywords: Official propaganda, military dictatorship, increase in social inequalities.

Introduction

This research will address the period between 1968 and 1973 in Brazil, when the country experienced a period of rapid economic growth that became known as the Brazilian miracle.

During this period, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at rates above 10% per year. This was widely used by the military regime as a tool for political legitimization and institutional propaganda. However, a scenario of profound social inequality was consolidated.

This study aims to analyze how the economic miracle, despite its macroeconomic advances, contributed to the deepening of social inequalities in the country.

To verify whether there is economic evidence demonstrating that there was a concentration of income among a wealthy minority to the detriment of the majority of the population. To identify whether there were social groups that benefited from the economic policies of the time.

To examine the impacts of wage squeezes and social exclusion during the military regime.

We will research authors such as Maria da Conceição Tavares and Celso Furtado, who wrote critiques of the development model adopted.

This work is justified by the need to revisit this historical episode from a perspective that goes beyond macroeconomic indicators, valuing the social and structural impacts that continue to this day.

A critical analysis of this period is essential to understanding the historical roots of social inequality in Brazil and the limits of growth models that neglect social justice. “Brazilian economic policy, by privileging accelerated growth, ended up deepening income concentration and marginalizing a large part of the population.” (FURTADO, 1980).

The methodology used will be qualitative. To prove this thesis, this study uses an exploratory research methodology, which, according to researcher Maria Cecília de Souza Minayo (2000), seeks to delve deeper into the motives and meanings of social phenomena, without concern for numerical representativeness.

The analysis includes official propaganda and newspaper reports aligned with the regime, which celebrated the “miracle,” and compares them with the analyses of economists and historians who expose the increase in social disparity, in addition to seeking sources that portray the daily life of the popular classes.

The proposal is to demystify the official narrative of prosperity, demonstrating that the economic trajectory of the Miracle was marked by a paradox: while the “cake” grew, the slice destined for the majority of the population shrank.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of the theoretical framework is to present and discuss the main concepts, historical contexts, and academic contributions that underpin the analysis of the Brazilian Economic Miracle, which occurred between 1968 and 1973. This step is essential to situate the phenomenon studied within a consistent theoretical framework, allowing for an understanding of the divergent interpretations of the economic growth observed during the period and its social impacts.

The literature on the Economic Miracle is marked by an intense debate between authors who highlight the macroeconomic advances promoted by the military regime and those who emphasize the social costs associated with this development model. While some scholars point to the period as a phase of accelerated modernization, industrialization, and infrastructure expansion, others emphasize that these achievements were accompanied by a profound worsening of social inequalities, income concentration, and wage squeezes.

Thus, this theoretical framework dialogues with classic and contemporary authors on Brazilian economics and history, such as Maria da Conceição Tavares, Celso Furtado, Albert Fishlow, Carlos Geraldo Langoni, Fernando de Holanda Barbosa, among others, who analyzed the period from different perspectives. The articulation of these approaches allows for a broader and more critical understanding of the Economic Miracle, going beyond readings restricted to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth indicators and incorporating the social and structural effects of the model adopted.

By contextualizing the historical period, presenting the main critical arguments, and also the interpretations favorable to the military regime's economic model, the theoretical framework establishes the analytical bases that guide the research and support the discussion of the results presented in the following sections.

The Historical Context

The military government began on March 31, 1964, with the deposition of democratically elected President João Goulart. Many believe that it was a political coup, and that this coup marked the beginning of a civil-military dictatorship that would last until 1985.

Brazil was facing a political and economic crisis, with high inflation, political instability, and ideological polarization. Goulart's proposals, such as the Basic Reforms (agrarian, university, and tax reforms), displeased conservative sectors.

At that time, there was the Cold War (a global commercial and political dispute to gain more supporting countries) between the Soviet Union (communist) and the Uni-

ted States (capitalist). Sectors of the Armed Forces, businessmen, large landowners, and part of the Catholic Church saw Goulart as aligned with the left and feared that Brazil would become communist.

During this period, Congress was weakened, parties were abolished, and civil rights were severely restricted.

The regime sustained itself through Institutional Acts, especially AI-5, which gave absolute powers to the Executive Branch and intensified censorship and repression.

History tells us that on March 31, 1964, General Olympio Mourão Filho and his troops left Juiz de Fora for Rio de Janeiro.

On April 1, João Goulart left Brasília and went to the south of the country, later going into exile in Uruguay.

Congress declared the presidency vacant, and the military officially took power.

Without a president for Brazil, Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castello Branco was appointed in April 1964 and thus assumed the presidency of Brazil.

The military regime lasted until 1985, and the country was ruled by five military presidents, all indirectly chosen by the National Congress. They were: Humberto de Alencar Castello Branco, from 1964 to 1967; Artur da Costa e Silva, from 1967 to 1969; Emílio Garrastazu Médici, from 1969 to 1974; Ernesto Geisel, from 1974 to 1979; and João Baptista Figueiredo, from 1979 to 1985.

It was during the period of Brazilian military rule (1964-1985) that the country experienced one of the most unique moments in its economic history, the so-called "Brazilian Miracle."

It is well remembered because of the high growth rates of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which rose above 10% per year. However, this growth was accompanied by a series of social and economic distortions that deepened inequality in the country.

This regime, which began with the inauguration of Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco in 1964 and ended with General João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo in 1985, experienced GDP growth rates exceeding 10% per year between 1968 and 1973, according to Brasil Escola (2025). This performance was widely used by government propaganda to legitimize the regime. (MEMORIAS DA DITADURA, 2025).

However, behind the image of prosperity and development, there is a crucial historical debate: was economic success shared by all social strata?

The answer to this question is clear to researchers. Economist Maria da Conceição Tavares (1974, p. 28) is emphatic in stating that the economic growth of the period “was achieved at a high social cost, reflected in wage squeezes and income concentration.”

In other words, this statement shows that economic growth did not reach everyone equally, leaving the majority of the population out of the benefits.

This scenario of inequality is corroborated by several studies, which point out that the economic policy of the time favored groups with greater financial and political power to the detriment of the poorer classes (FURTADO, 1980).

The ongoing debate about this period echoes the view of historian Carlos Fico, who states that “the military dictatorship, in

a way, continues to haunt us, so many are the ‘unburied corpses’.” (FICO, 2004).

Authors Critical of the Military Model

The theoretical framework of this work is based on authors who address Brazilian economic growth during the military regime and its social impacts, focusing on income concentration and the exclusion of the lower classes.

According to author Maria da Conceição Tavares (1974), who is one of the leading critics of the model adopted during this period. In her work *From Import Substitution to Financial Capitalism*, the author states that growth was achieved “at a high social cost, reflected in wage squeezes and income concentration.” Tavares criticizes the exclusionary development model, which prioritized capital accumulation and industrial modernization without promoting social inclusion. Highlighting the exclusionary nature of the economic miracle.

Author Celso Furtado (1980), in his work *The Myth of Economic Development*, reinforces this perspective by arguing that Brazilian economic policy favored rapid growth at the expense of social equity, deepening inequalities and marginalizing a large part of the population.

For Furtado, the economic miracle consolidated a pattern of dependent and concentrated development that perpetuated the country’s historical inequalities.

Albert Fishlow (1972) contributes a structural analysis of the period, highlighting the pro-capital bias of economic policies and the absence of income redistribution mechanisms. His approach shows how

growth disproportionately benefited the wealthiest strata of society.

He says that economic growth was the result of reforms such as the PAEG (Government Economic Action Program), but that these measures also contributed to increasing the concentration of income among the richest and the further impoverishment of the poorest, thereby increasing social inequalities.

Although taking a more liberal perspective, Carlos Geraldo Langoni (1973) recognizes that educational inequality was one of the factors that perpetuated income concentration, pointing to limitations in access to education as a barrier to social mobility.

In addition to these authors, contemporary studies such as that by Ana Clara Lopes Maciel (2022), from the Federal University of Ouro Preto, analyze the impacts of the economic miracle from the perspective of social inequality. In her monograph for the Federal University of Ouro Preto, she revisits the economic miracle from the perspective of social inequality.

The author points out that, despite advances in infrastructure and industrialization, the benefits of growth were concentrated in privileged groups, while the majority of the population remained on the margins of the development process, reinforcing that the model adopted consolidated an exclusionary development pattern.

Authors Favorable to the Model Implemented by the Military Government

Some authors are more favorable to the government's view at the time. Carlos Geraldo Langoni (1973), while acknowledging inequalities, argues that economic growth

could generate long-term social mobility, especially with investments in education.

Simonsen (1974), a defender of the regime's economic policy, was Minister of Finance and believed in the effectiveness of measures to control inflation and stimulate growth.

Velloso, Minister of Planning during the Médici administration, promoted policies to encourage industry and infrastructure. His speeches and articles defend the role of the state as a driver of growth.

Barbosa analyzes the period based on econometric models, highlighting the role of institutional reforms and monetary policy as positive factors.

Giambiagi, Villela, and Fernando Velloso (1973) published an article as a technical study that recognized the role of PAEG reforms and economic policy as fundamental to growth.

Methodological Procedures

The research is qualitative in nature, with a historical-descriptive approach, seeking to understand the social impacts of the accelerated economic growth that occurred between 1968 and 1973, known as the Brazilian Economic Miracle.

Data collection was carried out through a bibliographic and documentary survey, focusing on publications between the 1960s and 1980s.

Priority was given to sources that directly address the social effects of the Economic Miracle, especially those dealing with income distribution, public policies, and the living conditions of the population.

Presentation and Discussion of Results

The results of this research show that the Brazilian Economic Miracle, although characterized by high rates of growth in Gross Domestic Product and significant advances in infrastructure and industrialization, had profoundly unequal effects on Brazilian society. Analysis of the works and studies reviewed demonstrates that the benefits of economic growth were concentrated mainly in the upper strata of the population, while a large part of society remained excluded from the gains of this process.

The data and interpretations of the authors analyzed indicate that wage restraint, repression of labor movements, and the absence of redistributive policies contributed to increased income concentration during the period. Authors such as Tavares (1974) and Furtado (1980) emphasize that growth was achieved at a high social cost, deepening historical inequalities and consolidating an exclusionary development model.

In discussing the results, it is observed that the conclusions of this study are in line with the prevailing critical literature, which questions the official narrative of prosperity disseminated by the military regime. At the same time, it is recognized that certain authors point to relevant macroeconomic advances, which reinforces the complexity of the period and the need for analyses that consider multiple dimensions of development.

The limitations of the study, mainly related to its dependence on historical sources and academic interpretations, indicate the need for future research that deepens regional, sectoral, or comparative analyses, contributing to a broader understand-

ing of the effects of economic growth models dissociated from social justice.

Positive Points Pointed Out by Some Authors During the Military Period

Although the Brazilian Economic Miracle is widely criticized for its exclusionary social effects, part of the academic literature recognizes that the period saw significant advances in certain economic and structural aspects. Some authors, especially those linked to the formulation or technical analysis of the military regime's economic policies, highlight positive results related to accelerated growth, modernization of the economy, and expansion of national infrastructure.

These interpretations emphasize that the state played a central role as a driver of development through economic planning, public investment, and the creation of an environment conducive to industrialization and attracting foreign capital. From this perspective, the Economic Miracle contributed to transforming Brazil's productive structure and making the country more competitive on the international stage.

The following are the main positive points highlighted by these authors, with the aim of offering a balanced view of the academic debate, recognizing the economic advances of the period without disregarding its limitations and social contradictions.

Sustained Economic Growth

Fernando de Holanda Barbosa argues that the miracle was the result of institutional reforms initiated by the PAEG (Government Economic Action Program), which created a solid foundation for growth. Brazil grew at rates above 10% per year, with con-

trolled inflation and increased productivity. He points out that the country underwent “accelerated modernization,” with strong expansion in the industrial sector.

Infrastructure Expansion

Velloso, Minister of Planning, argued that the military government was responsible for major infrastructure projects: the Trans-Amazonian Highway, the Itaipu and Tucuruí power plants, the Steel Railway, and the Suape Industrial Complex.

These projects are seen as fundamental to integrating the national territory and stimulating regional development.

Industrialization and Modernization

Langoni acknowledges that, despite inequality, there was significant progress in the country’s productive structure.

According to him, Brazilian industry diversified, with growth in the automotive, chemical, steel, and capital goods sectors.

In addition, the import substitution policy has been consolidated, reducing dependence on foreign products.

Opening up to Foreign Capital

Fishlow points out that the military government created a favorable environment for foreign investment, with political stability and tax incentives.

He points out that many multinationals set up operations in Brazil, bringing technology and expanding production capacity.

This contributed to an increase in exports and Brazil’s entry into the international market.

Centralized Economic Planning

Simonsen defended the role of the state as a driver of growth. The government used instruments such as subsidized credit, exchange controls, and active fiscal policy to stimulate strategic sectors.

According to him, technocratic and centralized action is seen as efficient for achieving ambitious economic goals.

Methodology

The methodology of a scientific article outlines the procedures used to conduct the research, including the type of study, the methods of data collection and analysis, as well as the limitations inherent in the investigative process. Its detailed and transparent description is essential to ensure the reliability of the results, enabling the study to be replicated and providing consistent support for the interpretation of the findings.

In this study, a qualitative, exploratory, and historical-descriptive approach was adopted to critically analyze the social impacts of the Brazilian Economic Miracle from 1968 to 1973. This approach was chosen due to the nature of the research problem, which seeks to understand social, economic, and historical phenomena beyond purely quantitative measurements.

Data collection was carried out through a bibliographic and documentary survey, covering classic books on Brazilian political economy, scientific articles, dissertations, course completion papers, institutional do-

cuments, as well as historical memory content and news reports from the period. Priority was given to sources published between the 1960s and 1980s, as well as contemporary studies that revisit the period in light of new theoretical interpretations.

The data analysis followed the assumptions of qualitative research, as proposed by Minayo (2000), seeking to identify patterns, convergences, and divergences among the authors analyzed. The contents were interpreted critically, considering the historical, political, and economic context of the military regime, as well as the social interests involved in the construction of the official narrative of the so-called “miracle.”

A limitation of the study is its dependence on secondary sources and the impossibility of direct access to certain complete official data from the period, due to the authoritarian context and the scarcity or control of information at the time. Nevertheless, the set of sources analyzed allows for a consistent and well-founded interpretation of the social effects of the economic growth observed.

Final Considerations

Analysis of the data collected reveals that, although the Brazilian Economic Miracle (1968–1973) promoted significant GDP growth and strengthened strategic industrial sectors, the benefits of this progress were not distributed equitably among the population.

It is true that GDP grew at rates above 10% per year, driven by state investments and international loans, which is good, but it did not help the entire population.

Inequality occurred because the real wages of the working class remained stagnant or were eroded by inflation, while the business and financial elite accumulated record profits.

Rapid urbanization led to the disorderly growth of urban peripheries, without basic infrastructure or strategic planning.

Education, health, and housing remained difficult for a large part of the population, especially in the North and Northeast regions.

The political repression of the military regime prevented the organization of social movements that could demand better living conditions.

As can be seen, despite the official narrative of progress, the facts show that the model adopted during the military government prioritized economic growth and neglected to promote social justice.

And so, due to the absence of income distribution policies, the concern with effectively combating inflation, and maintaining the purchasing power of workers’ wages, there was a considerable increase in social inequalities.

While the government was concerned with investments in large urban centers, regional and social inequalities deepened in places that were not seen as important to the growth and political visibility of that era.

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