

Leandro Pereira Gonçalves. *Plínio Salgado: Um Católico Integralista entre Portugal e o Brasil (1895-1975)*. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2017. ISBN: 978-972-671-398-2.

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In recent years, there has been a visible increase of interest in transnational studies centered on the comparative analysis of the twentieth century authoritarian experiences of Portugal and Brazil—in particular the corporatist “New States” of António de Oliveira Salazar and Getúlio Vargas—among historians and social scientists on both sides of the Atlantic.² Leandro Pereira Gonçalves’s book, based on a doctoral thesis presented at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo and incorporating research carried out in Portugal during a junior visiting fellowship at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, is itself an indication of the closer ties being built between the Brazilian and Portuguese academic communities in the area of contemporary history and of their positive effects.

With this work, Gonçalves provides the first comprehensive intellectual biography of Plínio Salgado, founder of the *Ação Integralista Brasileira* (AIB), commonly seen as the “most successful of all the Latin American fascist movements.”³ The originality of Gonçalves’s approach results from two factors. The first is his laudable ambition to study Salgado’s doctrinal development throughout the entirety of his lengthy political career. In a break from the common narrow focus on Salgado’s role as leader of the AIB in the 1930s, Gonçalves meticulously analyzes his period of political exile in Portugal as well as his role in Brazilian politics following his return from exile in 1946. A comprehensive approach of this type, by emphasizing the elements of continuity and rupture in his intellectual trajectory, allows for a renewed understanding of his various political engagements. The second is the fact that, whilst ensuring that the “multiple discursive matrixes” in the formation and

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² To cite only the collective works bringing together the main researchers in the subject area, see Costa Pinto, António and Martinho, Francisco Palomanes (eds.), *O Corporativismo em Português: Estado, Política e Sociedade no Salazarismo e no Vargasismo*. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2008; Costa Pinto, António, and Martinho, Francisco Palomanes (eds.), *A Vaga Corporativa: Corporativismo e Ditaduras na Europa e na América Latina*. Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 2016; Costa Pinto, António, and Finchelstein, Federico (eds.), *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Europe and Latin America: Crossing Borders*. London: Routledge, 2018.

³ Costa Pinto, António, *The Blue Shirts: Portuguese Fascists and the New State*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 235.

development of Brazilian Integralism are duly covered, the author places special emphasis on Salgado's "transnational links with conservative Portuguese politics" (31). This analytical focus on the hitherto largely overlooked international circulation of conservative political theories between Portugal and Brazil is particularly innovative, making Gonçalves's work a timely addition to the already vast bibliography on Brazilian Integralism.

Gonçalves logically opts for a chronological approach to his subject. Each of the five chapters addresses a specific phase in Salgado's intellectual and political development. The first covers the period of intellectual maturation, from Salgado's youth in São Bento do Sapucaí (in a rural area of the state of São Paulo) to the launch of the AIB on 7 October 1932. This phase is essentially understood in terms of the gradual crystallization of the Integralist doctrine through Salgado's personal experience. The author develops his analysis on two levels. The first is the complex interplay of ideological influences on Salgado's doctrinal outlook. In Salgado's intellectual production as a journalist, novelist, and doctrinarian during the 1920s and early 1930s, Gonçalves identifies four main influences: the social doctrine of the Catholic Church (synthesized in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*); the reactionary nationalism of the *Action Française* (AF) and of its Portuguese counterpart *Integralismo Lusitano* (IL); and Italian Fascism, in which Salgado found "an inspirational source for the practicability of the Brazilian Integralist movement" (86). In this respect, the pivotal role played by Italian Fascism during the interwar period in Europe as "an example of a new political model that was applicable, with some adaptations, in other countries"⁴ applied also to the Brazilian case. The second level of analysis looks at the strategy of affirmation used by Salgado in order to conquer a space on the political stage. On this level as well, Europe—and Portugal more specifically—provided him with a blueprint for political engagement, namely via the "well-known practice among radical conservative circles" of "transitioning from literary and cultural activities to political activism" (65). Examples had been provided by the members of AF, such as Charles Maurras himself, and of IL, such as Hipólito Raposo. Similarly, Salgado built his respectability and visibility by integrating the nationalist cultural circles in São Paulo as a journalist and novelist, culminating in 1922 with his participation in the *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern Art Week). His association with the Modernist movement, whose proposals for a national conception of artistic creation contained overtones of ideological contestation against the incumbent structures of oligarchic republicanism (62), effectively

⁴ Giulia Albanese, *Dittature Mediterranee. Sovversioni Fasciste i Colpi di Stato in Italia, Spagna e Portogallo*. Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2016, p. XXI.

launched Salgado on the path of political activism, leading eventually to the creation of the AIB as a means of actuating the desired “awakening of the nation” (71). While Gonçalves unravels the various ideological influences in Salgado’s intellectual maturation with clarity and precision, it would have been useful at this point in his study to define in greater detail how they amalgamated into the fascist AIB and what it was that effectively made Plínio Salgado a fascist. This would allow for a more precise definition of the fascist phenomenon in the specific circumstances of 1930s Brazil. Indeed, since further on in the book the author argues that Salgado, in spite of his reinvention as a Christian thinker during his exile in Portugal, “always remained a Fascist” (172, 267), the concept is in need of some theoretical clarification and empirical demonstration.

The second, third, and fourth chapters focus on Salgado’s years in exile in Portugal (1939-1946). They form the core of the book, filling a large gap in the historiography. Following the institutionalization of Vargas’ *Estado Novo* in November 1937, the AIB was forced to disband—a process reminiscent of the end of the National Syndicalist (NS) movement in Portugal under Salazar in 1934. Two years later, following several failed attempts to bring down the dictator, many of its leaders were sent into exile, among them Plínio Salgado, in Portugal. During his time in exile, Salgado underwent a profound ideological transformation, reinventing himself as a Salazarist devotee and apostle of Christian democracy. Gonçalves interprets this transformation primarily as a strategic device used by Salgado to ensure his political survival in Portugal and beyond. In Portugal, the ex-leader of the AIB faced several constraining factors to which he had to adjust, namely: the fragility of his position as a foreign exile, which initially at least called for a cautious attitude in his doctrinal engagements; the political, social and cultural values upheld by the Salazar dictatorship, opposed to any form of potentially disturbing political activism (including from the radical right); the uncertain international context generated by the Second World War and, increasingly after 1942, having to adapt to a post-war world in which the forces of fascism had been defeated and discredited. Through this complex prism of conditioning factors, Gonçalves meticulously uncovers the networks of support activated by Salgado. In a break from the established historiography, the author highlights Salgado’s intense socio-cultural activism during the first phase of his exile (1939-1942), traditionally presented as a period of inertia (132). Unsurprisingly, in this initial phase, Salgado received the support of his “old solidarities” among the leading figures of IL—such as Luís de Almeida Braga, Hipólito Raposo and Alberto Monsaraz (129). However, in a bid to keep all of his political options open, he also cultivated relations among the

multitude of anti-liberal nationalists gravitating in the orbit of Salazarism, such as Manuel Múrias and João Cabral—former militants of IL who had rallied to the Salazar regime after transiting through NS (136-137)—and, on a confidential level, with Germanophiles such as Rolão Preto (152). His secret contacts extended even to Nazi officials in the Portuguese capital to whom he attempted to present himself as an alternative to Vargas (160). The turning point in Salgado's position, Gonçalves argues, came when the existence of pro-Axis spying networks in Portugal was publicly denounced in 1942. Sensing the danger involved in being associated with such initiatives, Salgado opted for a change of strategy. In order to ensure his political survival as an exile and make the most of the context offered by Salazar's Portugal, he cautiously re-directed his socio-cultural activism towards "the creation of an image suffused in Christianity" (161). Gonçalves carries out a comprehensive study of Salgado's activities as a "Luso-Brazilian writer and conference speaker" (213-268), starting with the 1942 publication of his *Vida de Jesus* (Life of Jesus) and culminating in the conference given on 8 December 1944 at the headquarters of the *Centro Académico de Democracia Cristã* (CADC) on the "Christian concept of democracy" (262-268). Salgado's idea of Christian democracy was influenced by the interpretation given to it among authorized Catholic circles in Portugal, that is, as a social program rather than a political one, rooted in the principles of organic democracy to be realized in the corporatist organization of society (206)—of which Salgado considered the Salazarist New State to be the most perfect embodiment. Salgado's crude nationalism also gave way to the exaltation of "Luso-Brazilianism" as a civilizational entity capable of opposing its spiritual principles to the rise of atheistic socialism, a growing preoccupation owing to the presence of the USSR among the victorious Allies. Gonçalves also identifies Salgado's principal sources of support within the catholic movement in Portugal after 1942, namely Monsignor Moreira das Neves (editor of *Novidades*, the unofficial mouthpiece of the episcopate) and Cardinal Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira (head of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in Portugal). Through their influence, which translated into numerous invitations to speak at conferences for the Catholic Action groups and an enthusiastic coverage in both the catholic and mainstream press, Salgado was able to project onto a nationwide basis (and beyond) his renewed image as a respected Christian thinker (183-184). Throughout his analysis, the author correctly points out that the warm official reception given to Salgado by catholic officialdom should not be confused with the reception of society as a whole. Beneath the monolithic surface of religious propaganda favored by the Salazar regime, anticlericalism and laic tendencies

indeed persisted among the elite and large segments of the population.⁵ Ultimately however, Salgado's largely successful transformation from "fifth columnist" to "fifth evangelist" during his exile in Portugal (166) testifies to the depth of the social projection and cultural influence afforded to the Catholic Church by the Salazar regime.

The final chapter covers the period between Salgado's return to Brazil on 16 August 1946 and his retirement from political life in 1974. Its originality derives from Gonçalves's argument that the influence of the politico-religious vision elaborated by Salgado during his Portuguese exile can provide an interpretative key to understand the nature of his renewed engagement in Brazilian politics (269). The author singles out two phases in his political action corresponding to Salgado's mandates as a federal deputy for the *Partido de Representação Popular* (PRP), between 1959 and 1967, and the *Aliança Renovadora Nacional* (ARENA), from 1967 to 1974. In the PRP, the national Christian party created by him upon his return to Brazil, Salgado engaged in the active defense of Salazarist colonialism, which was under increasing attack from the UN after 1961. Whilst the Portuguese presence in Asia and Africa was valued essentially as a bulwark against Communism, Salgado, in line with the principles of Gilberto Freyre's "Luso-tropicalism," also afforded Brazil an active role in the realization of Portugal's mission, namely by "demonstrating the example of racial democracy, which would constitute the proof of Portugal's success and of the specificity of Portuguese colonization realized in Africa" (315). In this light, Salgado emerges as an example of a "transmigrant" maintaining multiple relations between countries and creating a "transnational social space" (315). His action was also directed towards attempting to fashion the national political entity according to the principles of conservative organic Christian democracy assimilated in Portugal, in particular by putting forward a proposal for the creation of an "economic chamber" directly inspired by Salazar's corporative chamber (325). As a deputy for ARENA, the dominant party in the civil-military dictatorship resulting from the 31 March 1964 coup, Salgado initially entertained hopes that the new regime would finally provide the opportunity for "a genuine nationalist and corporativist politico-cultural organization" (344). Though these hopes did not materialize, he resumed his attempts for the adoption of a Portuguese-inspired corporative chamber (348). In 1969, his activism in the parliamentary commission on education led to the creation of an obligatory course in Moral and Civic Education at all levels of schooling, the pedagogical basis of which was his *Compêndio de Instrução Moral e Cívica*, steeped in notions of religiosity and the cult of national heroes (350). The fact that Salgado was forced to concentrate on

⁵ See Simpson, Duncan, *A Igreja Católica e o Estado Novo Salazarista*. Lisbon: Edições 70, 2014.

long-term meta-political strategies such as the reform of mentalities, however, was ultimately a sign of the “failure of his Brazilian Salazarist project” (356). Among the factors that contributed to this failure, Gonçalves emphasizes two: Salgado’s fascist past had not been forgotten in Brazil, which complicated the reaffirmation of his position on domestic politics—especially in the post-war years of democratic construction (289-290); the Portuguese model of Church-State institutional alliance built around Salazar’s *Estado Novo* in the 1930s did not readily lend itself for import by Salgado in the altogether different circumstances of post-war Brazil (283-284). As a constant element in Salgado’s long political career, including this final phase, Gonçalves repeatedly emphasizes the propensity to adapt his doctrinal discourse according to circumstances, Salgado’s ultimate objective being the advancement of his political career and the quest for power (162, 170-171, 196). As a consequence, the overall impression left on the reader is that Salgado’s intellectual trajectory can ultimately be brought down to a mere sense of opportunism. In particular, the nature of his engagement on matters of religion is presented as a superficial, almost cynical ploy designed to mask his more radical political objectives. While there is certainly some truth in this, such an interpretation seems too reductive. As Gonçalves himself points out, by emphasizing his Catholic credentials after 1942, Salgado was to a large degree merely “returning to the themes” of his “Christian formation” in São Bento do Sapucaí (163), which in effect represented an important, if subjacent, cultural matrix in his overall doctrinal outlook. This would suggest that, in addition to an undeniable sense of opportunism, Salgado found in the affirmation of religiosity, both during his Portuguese exile and after it, the genuine expression of a central aspect of his ideological and political vision. In this respect, it is significant to remark that the AIB leadership was always more influenced by religion than had been their more secularized Portuguese counterparts of NS. While this greater permeability of Brazilian fascism to religiosity in comparison to its Portuguese counterpart would deserve to be explained, it is one of the merits of Leandro Pereira Gonçalves’s challenging book that, in addition to providing a comprehensive intellectual and political biography of Plínio Salgado and a rich account of the transnational ideological ties between the Portuguese and Brazilian authoritarian cultures throughout the twentieth century, it is also an invitation for further reflections on the theme and for the investigation of potentially fruitful new areas of research.