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*Consensus and Debate in Salazar's Portugal: Visual and
Literary Negotiations of the National Text, 1933-1948*
(review)

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SAPEGA, ELLEN. *Consensus and Debate in Salazar's Portugal: Visual and Literary Negotiations of the National Text, 1933–1948*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2008. 184 pp.

The Portuguese Estado Novo (1933–1974), an authoritarian regime headed from its inception to 1968 by the charismatic prime minister António de Oliveira Salazar, strove to create a homogeneous conception of nationality grounded on economic corporatism, colonial domination, conservative social values, and close ties between the government and the Catholic Church. In order to shape the Portuguese nation into a community of supporters, the state developed a well-oiled propaganda machine, which appropriated images and heroes from the country's long history to justify the present and to "convert the disbelievers," in the apt expression of Luís Reis Torgal. Salazarist propaganda forged collective memories of a glorious national past that necessarily culminated in the Estado Novo. This teleological narrative, according to which the figure of Salazar often acquired messianic undertones, was conveyed through a variety of state-sponsored means, including theater performances, films, exhibitions, political celebrations, popular festivities, architecture, and sculpture. Ellen Sapega's well-researched book *Consensus and Debate in Salazar's Portugal* analyzes some of the ways in which the artists and intellectuals working for the regime deployed tradition and collective memory so as to generate a consensual adherence to the government's policies. Yet, as she points out, the discerning eye can often glimpse alternative discourses to the official ideology in the fissures of propaganda. These contending views on the national project are all the more explicit in nonpropagandistic artworks. In spite of widespread censorship, several authors and artists deviated from the official narrative of national grandeur and presented other, often bleaker interpretations of the country's present. Sapega skillfully illustrates the nuances that characterized the Portuguese artistic and literary panorama in the first fifteen years of the Estado Novo, and her study is indispensable reading for all students and scholars working on this topic.

One of the strengths of Sapega's book is the fact that she touches upon a variety of literary and artistic practices. While there have been numerous works that focus on one or another aspect of artistic production under the Estado Novo, it is less common to find scholarly analyses that attempt to encompass different perspectives under a unifying guiding thread. Undergirding Sapega's work is the assumption that, in the first years of the existence of the Estado Novo, there was a sometimes explicit but often subterranean debate among the various sectors of the country's intellectual milieu about the definition of *portugalidade* (Portuguese-ness). The author begins by delineating the government's version of what it means to be Portuguese through the description of some of the projects undertaken by the Secretariat of Propaganda, later rebaptized the National Secretariat for Infor-

mation, Popular Culture, and Tourism. One of these was a competition that took place in 1938 to identify the most Portuguese village in Portugal. The winner would be the village that most closely approximated an idealized notion of historical purity in terms of its architecture, traditions, arts, festivities, dress, and so on. The goal of the government was to reactivate the country's connection to its historical origins, while, at the same time, emphasizing that age-old rural traditions and hierarchichal social structures could be emulated by present-day society. Rich landowners and poor peasants supposedly lived in harmony in rural Portugal, and the patriarchal rules that bound them should serve as a model for structuring the relations between the Portuguese and their leaders.

Another event organized by the Secretariat of Propaganda as a means to create a cohesive, nationalistic interpretation of the country's past was the Exhibition of the Portuguese World that took place in 1940 as a part of the celebrations to mark both Portugal's eight hundredth birthday as an independent nation and the commemoration of the country's independence from Castillian rule in 1640. Sapega provides a comprehensive interpretation of the different sections of the exhibition, which included pavillions dedicated to various moments in Portuguese history, a pavillion on the Portuguese diaspora, and a colonial section that represented the country's overseas territories. The book includes a number of black-and-white photographs that illustrate the grandiosity of the exhibition's architecture. Most buildings interwove modern aesthetics with architectural elements characteristic of older styles in an effort to convey their propagandistic message of continuity between the country's glorious past and the *Estado Novo*. This deployment of modernist techniques allied to a traditionalist, nationalistic content is an example of the "reactionary modernism" that characterized authoritarian regimes in Europe during the interwar period.

The *Estado Novo*'s propagandistic attempts at creating a consensual narrative of Portugal's past were contested by several artists and writers working under the regime. Sapega's study focuses on three of these: painter and author José de Almada Negreiros, writer Irene Lisboa, and Cape Verdean novelist Baltasar Lopes. Almada who, together with poet Fernando Pessoa, had been part of the modernist group that coalesced before the rise of Salazar's government, participated in a number of public art projects, where he tried to reconcile modernist aesthetics, popular culture, and the regime's ideology with varying degrees of success. Almada was responsible for creating the stained glass decorations in the Church of Our Lady of Fátima, a project completed in 1938. In this work, the artist adhered to the state's hegemonic discourses on the centrality of the Catholic Church for the Portuguese, while preserving some of the techniques that characterized his individual modernist style. He thus distanced himself from the more overtly propagandistic artworks that had adorned the Exhibition of the Portuguese World. Sapega

argues that Almada's stylistic idiosyncracies are even more apparent in the murals he created for the maritime stations of Rocha do Conde de Óbidos and Alcântara, opened to the public in 1945 and 1948, respectively. Through a detailed analysis of the murals, reproductions of which are included in the book, Sapega successfully demonstrates how Almada walked a thin line between official cultural discourses and a more critical representation of the experience of the people under Salazarism.

Whereas Almada subverted the dictates of official cultural discourses from within, Lisboa's literary works were created from the position of an outsider. In her texts, the author distanced herself from the masculinist grand narratives of the state and wove a subtle critique of Portuguese society during the Estado Novo. According to Sapega, one of Lisboa's strategies for resisting the dominant male literary discourse endorsed by the regime was her rejection of traditional genres such as the novel and the short story. Instead, she crafted reflections, sketches, and semifictional autobiographical notes where she focused on topics such as the patriarchal abuse of authority, urban poverty, and the discrimination of women. She therefore undid the propagandistic image of a bucolic Portugal free from social tensions and exposed the social and political injustices that the regime struggled to conceal.

In the final section of her study, Sapega turns to a voice emanating from the Portuguese colonial empire. She analyzes Cape Verdean author Baltasar Lopes's semiautobiographical novel *Chiquinho*, published in 1947. Sapega shows how Lopes resisted the discourse of Portuguese superiority to the colonial subjects by putting forth a theory of Cape Verde's racial and cultural hybridity as a positive development in the history of the archipelago. Lopes was influenced by the ideas of sociologist Gilberto Freyre, whose favorable views on miscegenation in the Brazilian context were later to become very influential among Estado Novo ideologues as a means to justify Portugal's colonial project. If racial purity was defended in the first years of Salazarism, this progressively changed after 1945, as the regime came under increasing pressure to grant independence to its colonies. Freyre's concept of Portuguese colonialism as conducive to a peaceful fusion of cultures thus became a useful tool for the state to justify domination over its overseas provinces. Sapega argues that one of Lopes's innovations was the use of Freyre's theories before these were appropriated by the Estado Novo. Yet, Lopes is not able to avoid the pitfalls of the sociologist's views on colonialism as nonviolent miscegenation and continues to emphasize the Portuguese element of Cape Verdean culture to the detriment of the African one. Even though he opposes the metropolis as a model for his region's culture, he remains trapped in the colonial logic that saw Europe as the center from which culture emanates.

Sapega's reflections on art and literature under Salazar touch upon a wide range

of artistic positions. Her analysis follows a continuum that extends from overtly propagandistic artworks, such as those created for the Exhibition of the Portuguese World, to more nuanced approaches to the Portuguese situation, where authors and artists such as Almada negotiate an uneasy compromise between their style and official ideology, or completely dissociate themselves from the regime and implicitly criticize its politics, as in the case of Lisboa. Underlying Sapega's study on the diverging approaches to collective memory and official ideology during the Estado Novo is the question of how present-day Portugal should deal with its authoritarian political past. In portraying Salazar's regime as a multifaceted period, where the dominant state-sponsored view on the country's past, social arrangements, gender roles, religion, or colonialism coexisted with alternative interpretations of Portuguese society, Sapega's book is a significant contribution to the ongoing debate about the breaks and continuities between the Estado Novo and Portugal's present democracy.

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