

Sapega, Ellen W. *Consensus and Debate in Salazar's Portugal: Visual and Literary Negotiations of the National Text, 1933-1948*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008.

At once tightly focused and wide-ranging, Ellen Sapega's study offers a fascinating perspective on the politics of cultural production during the arguably most consequential decade and a half of the Portuguese Estado Novo regime. It was during this period that the regime's signature laws and policies took formal shape and a number of its defining cultural initiatives were undertaken, most notably the 1940 Exposition of the Portuguese World. As Sapega proposes, the period may also be viewed as the forum on which the process of public "consensus and debate" around collective Portuguese and Lusophone identity took place. These negotiations, in Estado Novo's early years still to some degree open-ended and imbued with contradiction and ambiguity, would effectively come to a halt later on, as both the regime and the anti-Salazarist opposition solidified their respective ideological postures. By contrast, in the 1930s and 1940s, "Artists and writers closely associated with the regime, those in the opposition, and many others who initially worked neither for nor against the government headed by António de Oliveira Salazar all participated in a public conversation about the stories and images that best served as symbolic markers of the Portuguese national character" (145).

One of the considerable merits of this book is its in-depth exploration of diverse forms of cultural production, visual as well as verbal, from ephemeral public spectacle, through architecture and public art, to literary fiction and autobiography. Meticulously contextualized and amply cross-referenced, Sapega's readings of specific cultural artifacts are illuminating in and of themselves, but together add up to form a comprehensive and nuanced picture of an era. The author's choice of particular artists and objects allows her to develop all of the major themes that dominated the dictatorship's political and ideological agenda during the

nearly half a century of its existence: its totalitarian approach to shaping the nation's memory and identity; its "accommodation and neutralization of the internationalist modernist aesthetics" (4); its exaltation of the patriarchal family as the crucial agent of social health and cohesion, with the concomitant suppression of women's feminist aspirations, which had been vibrantly in evidence under the First Republic; finally, its attentive and historically evolving relationship to the "colonial question."

The book's first chapter considers two prominent episodes in the regime's cultural campaign to articulate and impose on the Portuguese society a hegemonic discourse of national identity and form: the contest to discover "the most Portuguese village in Portugal," aimed at promoting "the centrality of village life as a repository of national virtue" (14), and the monumental celebration of Portuguese history and the empire staged in the context of the Exposition of the Portuguese World. Among the many valuable insights in this chapter is Sapega's observation that the Exposition's organization of physical representations of the "Mundo Português" pointed to an equivalence between Estado Novo's "actual investment in the material and cultural development of the colonies" and its similarly marginalizing attitude toward "national popular culture and the rural values that were celebrated in the *metrópole*" (40).

The second chapter widens the book's initial focus on Salazarist cultural propaganda to consider a number of public art projects of the 1930s and 1940s, namely those that resulted from a collaboration between the architect Porfirio Pardal Monteiro and the artist and writer José de Almada Negreiros. The critical spotlight falls here on the intense debates and negotiations that resulted from the increasingly incompatible claims of, on the one hand, the aesthetics of internationalist modernism (represented by the artists) and, on the other, the conservative nationalist views of the government officials who commissioned and oversaw the projects (which included a church and several maritime stations). Sapega's abundantly illustrated discussion of Almada's stained-glass windows and murals is inestimable

for its attentive focus on artistic products that are rarely if ever considered in a comparative critical framework, notwithstanding their indisputable place among the “most intriguing and successful cultural artifacts created in the public sphere in Portugal during the 1940s” (84).

With Chapter Three Sapega’s focus turns to literature, as she considers two works by Irene Lisboa: the semifictional autobiography *Começa uma vida* (1940) and the volume of sketches of Lisbon life *Esta cidade!* (1942). As critics have also observed with regard to Lisboa’s poetry, in these texts the author “expresses a suspicion of ‘grand narratives’ and a refusal to follow the ‘rules’ of fiction,” while “call[ing] attention to the power and limitations inherent in the practice of literary representation” (113). By portraying candidly the unorthodox arrangements of her own family life (in *Começa uma vida*) and a variety of social ills such as spousal abuse and neglect of children (in *Esta cidade!*), Lisboa also challenged, forcefully if implicitly, the most cherished tenet of Salazarist state: the symbiotic harmony of the patriarchal triad of “God, Fatherland, and Family.”

Last but not least, the fourth chapter offers a very rewarding reading of “imperial dreams and colonial nightmares” of Estado Novo through a discussion of the Cape Verdean writer Baltasar Lopes’s foundational novel *Chiquinho* (published in 1947, but written in the 1930s) against the backdrop of twentieth-century Portuguese colonialist ideology, with particular emphasis on its “Lusotropicalist” evolution and the contradictions generated by confronting Gilberto Freyre’s doctrine with the Creole culture of Cape Verde. Sapega also picks up here on the theme of visual representations of empire developed in her book’s first chapter, as she discusses the replica of Lisbon’s Torre de Belém erected in the port city of Mindelo, on the island of São Vicente. This discussion is an eloquent reminder of how much there is to be gained in the enterprise of cultural analysis from cultivating a well-informed critical perspective that is capable of traversing both disciplinary and spatial boundaries and of relating and cross-referencing the scholar’s findings with insightful flair and discernment.

Consensus and Debate in Salazar's Portugal carries out this challenging task brilliantly.

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Frier, David. *The Novels of José Saramago: Echoes from the Past, Pathways into the Future.* Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007.

Given the media attention surrounding both the literary production and the intellectual persona of the late José Saramago—a notoriety garnered as much by the author's provocative statements on socio-political and religious issues as by the numerous literary prizes he was awarded throughout the years—we must welcome critical analyses of his work that pierce through the obfuscating limelight and address in a rigorous way the literary and philosophical presuppositions undergirding his oeuvre. The pigeonholing of Saramago as an enemy of religion, an intolerant communist and a betrayer of his country after moving to the Canary Islands; or as an anti-globalization hero, a paladin of human rights, and one of the last true upholders of the values of the 1974 Revolution—depending on the political colors of the critic in question—polarizes his potential readership and ultimately leads to a neutralization of both the literary innovations and the real social challenges highlighted in his texts, as these get buried under layers of media scandal. A case in point was the controversy surrounding the publication of the author's last novel *Caim* (2009), which triggered a misguided public debate about the text's attacks on religion, Saramago's supposed anti-Semitism, and other such platitudes, while all but evading a serious consideration of the literary merits (and faults) of the narrative. The author's recent death again sparked a fierce debate about his literary and intellectual legacy and, even as many paid homage, in Portugal and abroad, to the writer's contributions to Portuguese and world literature, this tribute was marred