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Brazilian Fascism: The Extreme Right and the Forever-Present Past¹

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On January 1st, 2023, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva took office as president of Brazil, a significant milestone for Brazilian democracy after being weakened over four years under Jair Bolsonaro's rule and constantly threatened during the electoral campaign. However, Lula's election in

2022 did not represent a complete collapse of Bolsonarism, much less of the Brazilian extreme right - they both continued to grow amidst a global radicalization process. The book *Fascism in Brazil: From Integralism to Bolsonarism*, written by Professors Leandro Pereira Gonçalves and Odilon Caldeira Neto, demonstrates this advance based on historical evidence from the 1930s onwards, when the most significant expression of fascism outside Europe was established in Brazil: the Brazilian Integralist Action (*Ação Integralista Brasileira*, AIB).

Gonçalves is a Professor of Contemporary American History at the Department of History and the Post-Graduate Program in History of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (UFJF). He is also a CNPq Productivity Research Scholarship holder as well as a researcher at FAPEMIG. He holds a Ph.D. from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), where he researched the life of Plínio Salgado, the leader of Brazilian integralism, which resulted in the book *Plínio Salgado: um católico integralista entre Portugal e o Brasil (1895-1975)* (Plínio Salgado: an Integralist Catholic Between Portugal and Brazil (1895-1975)). With a

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vast, renowned academic production on Brazilian integralism, he is the coordinator and associate researcher of Brazilian and European networks and research groups focused on studying Ibero-American fascism.

Caldeira Neto is a Professor of Contemporary History at the Department of History and the Post-Graduate Program in History of UFJF. He holds a Ph.D. from the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), where he presented his thesis *"Nosso nome é Enéas!": Partido de Reedificação da Ordem Nacional (1980-2006)* ("Our name is Enéas!": the National Order Reconstruction Party). He studies contemporary history and the history of the present, focusing on right-wing extremism, fascism, neo-fascism, the radical right, and the transnational dynamics of the extreme right. In addition to renowned works on these topics, he coordinates and participates in Brazilian and international networks and research groups.

Fascism in Brazil: From Integralism to Bolsonaroism is the result of years of collaboration and research by these two historians. The book is geared towards non-specialized audiences and presents the history of Brazilian integralism, which became the main fascist movement outside the European continent. This work derived from the book *O fascismo em camisas verdes: do integralismo ao neointegralismo* (Green-Shirt Fascism: from Integralism to Neo-Integralism), published by FGV Editora, in Brazil, in 2020². It was well-received by audiences and critics alike³, standing out both for its quality and for addressing a highly relevant topic to the current times. Bolsonaro was elected Brazilian president in 2018 by employing a radical *ethos*, which was an incentive for extremist groups to come to the forefront of public spaces. For example, in 2019, an attack claimed by neo-integralists involved the explosion of Molotov cocktails in the headquarters of production company Porta dos Fundos, in Rio de Janeiro, after the airing of the Netflix Christmas special, *The First Temptation of Christ*.

² The Brazilian edition had a preface by Octávio Guedes, journalist and commentator at GloboNews. The English edition includes a preface by Federico Finchelstein, Professor and Researcher linked to the New School for Social Research and Eugene Lang College.

³ In the Brazilian version, the work was nominated as one of the best political books of 2020 by the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper and the *Veja* magazine.

Due to the relevancy of the topic for the current times, there was another release in the Brazilian publishing market in 2020: the book *Fascismo à brasileira* (Brazilian Fascism), by journalist Pedro Doria, an analysis of the history of Brazilian integralism and its relationship with Bolsonarism. Due to its broad circulation thanks to being released under a commercial publisher, this work was important to help bring awareness to the topic. It adopted a journalistic approach rather than a historiographical one to address the trajectory of fascism in Brazil, intertwining it with the rise of Bolsonaro and the development of Bolsonarism. Despite being a relevant undertaking with the potential to instigate a critical analysis of the Brazilian political context, the book is controversial. Its narrative tone puts it in a gray area between literature and journalism, bringing the book closer to a novel. It meddles the lines between fact and fiction: it prioritizes describing environments and emotions rather than an in-depth study of the sources. Thus, it is a superficial analysis of a sensitive, current topic. Furthermore, the publication is used to promote a liberal agenda, which is a testament to the bias that underpins the book.

In view of this, the work of Gonçalves and Caldeira Neto stands out, above all because it is the result of the authors' academic investigations, encompassing nearly 20 years of study. It is an approachable book in the Brazilian context that employs a language that simultaneously contemplates a wide range of audiences without compromising the quality of the serious historiographical research behind it, supported by reliable sources, a solid bibliography, and critical analyses.

By addressing a topic that demands relentless reflection due to the widespread activity of extreme right groups in the present time, the book was updated for the Routledge release of *Fascism in Brazil: From Integralism to Bolsonarism*, in 2022. This release is an essential milestone in historiography; it spreads knowledge about Brazilian fascism to the international public (academic or not) and presents the history of the extreme right in Brazil, marked by a tradition of ideas and practices that influenced the new Brazilian rights.

The publication covers the history of integralism in four chapters, each focusing on a specific period of the movement's trajectory from the 1930s to the present day: "The Formation of the Sigma: The Brazilian Integralist Action",

"Integralism Between Democracy and Dictatorship", "The Death of Plínio Salgado and the Origins of Neointegralism", and "Neointegralism in the 21st Century: From Social Media to Political Violence". In these chapters, the authors present the development of the AIB (1932-1937), its dissolution and the movements resulting from the establishment of the Estado Novo by Getúlio Vargas (1937-1945), the restructuring of Brazilian fascism during the democratic period with the People Representation Party (*Partido de Representação Popular*, PRP) (1945-1965), the participation of Integralists in the coup that began the civil-military dictatorship of 1964 and their entrance into the party that supported the regime, the National Renewal Alliance (*Aliança Renovadora Nacional*, ARENA), and finally the rise of neo-integralist groups today and their relationships with Bolsonaroism and the Covid-19 pandemic. Alongside these themes, the authors present a vast array of images concerning the integralists' actions in Brazil, showcasing the broad mobilization of the movement and the importance that fascist symbolism held for its members.

In conclusion, even though the book is aimed primarily at a wider audience rather than solely academics, it is also possible to view it as a resource for general consultation for scholars on the subject, both because it is the most current historiographical publication on Brazilian integralism and for the quality of its content, which is the result of a solid research endeavor by two renowned historians over decades. Despite not presenting theoretical discussions, explanatory notes, or references, which might cause some hesitance for an academic audience, *Fascism in Brazil: From Integralism to Bolsonaroism* is an essential text for understanding the dangers that fascism and the advance of the extreme right present to democracies.

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