

PROJECTOR OR PROJECTION SCREEN?  
THE PORTUGUESE ESTADO NOVO  
AND 'RENEWAL' IN THE NETHERLANDS (1933-1946)<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract*

In the 1930s and during the first year after the Nazi invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940, the basic principles of Salazar's authoritarian Estado Novo were widely discussed and cheered in the Netherlands. Influential Dutch newspapers featured articles about the 'lessons' for Dutch politics and society that could be drawn from Portuguese corporatism. This chapter focuses on the idea that the enthusiasm in the Netherlands for Salazar's system was largely based on the encounter between perceptions of Salazar, images of Portugal and self-images of the Netherlands.

*Introduction*

During the economic crisis of the 1930s, the ability to provide citizens with welfare provisions was one of the main arguments in the contestation for power of communism, fascism and nazism (Aly 2005, 49; Vincent and Carter 2008, 164). The apparent socio-economic successes of the Soviet experiment, Italian fascism and Hitler's 'New Order' put pressure on policy-makers in liberal democracies like Britain to design 'a New Order of their own' (Mazower 1998, 186; Overy 2009, 265-313). In the Netherlands, many advocates of a new socio-economic order that strengthened national unity (the so-called 'renewers') saw the corporatist Portuguese *Estado Novo* as an acceptable alternative to liberal 'parliament-

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arism', communism and fascist socio-economic policy. However, corporatism was not a Portuguese invention (Ribeiro de Meneses 2009, 88). It was an idea that travelled across Europe and beyond. What was the importance of exchange networks for the dissemination of this idea? To what extent was the Dutch analysis of Portuguese corporatism founded on personal contacts, personal experience and thorough knowledge of the system in operation? This chapter deals with the practices of exchange and adaptation of an idea. In this article, I shall stress the importance of images of Portugal in the Netherlands and Dutch national self-images rather than transnational exchange across borders as a condition for the popularity of Portuguese corporatist ideology in the Netherlands.

*Striving for a national 'renewal'*

In the interwar years the Netherlands were a religiously segmented ('pillarised') and socially divided society. Dutch politics were dominated by the Catholic Party, two Protestant parties, and to a lesser degree by the two liberal parties, who collectively excluded the Social Democrats from governmental power until 1939. The segmentation of Dutch politics was considered an obstacle for an effective governmental crisis policy. Therefore, pillarised politics was rejected by the small Dutch National Socialist Movement and some of its democratic (mostly Social Democrat) opponents, who in 1935 formed the movement 'Unity Through Democracy'. However, in left-wing Catholic, liberal and liberal-Protestant politics, there were also advocates of national unification. All these renewers propagated social and socio-economic solidarity among the Dutch people ('Volkseenheid'), the emancipation of the rural areas and the regulation and rationalisation of economic production ('ordering'). What these movements eventually wanted was nothing less than a renewal in Dutch politics, Dutch economy and Dutch culture.

The shaping of ideas for this renewal was inspired from across national borders. Many renewers were influenced by the 'Personalist' movement of Denis de Rougemont (the Swiss founding father of European Federalism) and French philosophers like Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier (Linthorst Homan 1946, 145) who turned against both capitalist individualism and totalitarian collectivism (Amzalak 2011, 136-139). Ideas of corporatism, in which both employers and employees of different groups of professions form government-licensed bodies (corporations) and represent different sectors of the economy in a cor-

porative chamber that deliberates on governmental policy, were presented as a means to eliminate class conflict and industrial disputes. Although experiments in the Netherlands with corporative bodies had in fact failed (Luykx 1996, 234), corporatism was presented as a 'third way' between liberal capitalism and Marxism and as the only right path to social justice. A distinction was made between 'narrow' corporatism, in which corporations had an advisory role, and 'broad' corporatism, in which corporatism replaced parliamentary democracy (Hartmans 2012, 209-210).

In the Netherlands, as in other West European countries, Salazar's authoritarian *Estado Novo* was cheered, especially though not exclusively by progressive Catholics (Kaiser 2004, 268). They did not seem to be aware of the fact that employers gained much more from Salazarism than the workers whose wages were kept low (Ribeiro de Meneses 2009, 89). Some advocates of the *Estado Novo* in the Netherlands were democrats, while others were seduced by the idea of (temporary) authoritarianism as a condition for social justice and national solidarity (De Jonge 1968, 326). For instance, according to Pieter Jan Bouman, a former social democrat historian and sociologist, socialism had proved powerless in Western Europe. He flirted with fascism, national socialism and the Portuguese Salazar system, which he claimed were alternatives to the disruptions of capitalism and class struggle. Bouman regarded them as members of the 'solidarist' family, just like social Christianity. Thereby, like many of his contemporaries, he seemed to consider the aggressiveness of fascism and national socialism as a temporary side-effect (De Jonge 1968, 328; Van Berkel 1996, 183, 185).

But overall, totalitarian fascism and national socialism were not very popular in the 1930s. In accordance with Mounier's Catholic-social views, Catholic politicians in the Netherlands criticised Italian fascism for its totalitarian, statist character (McMillan 1996, 48). Protestant politicians were even more averse to fascism (Janse 1940, 1-17; De Jonge 1968, 333) and strongly rejected Hitler's statist and racist national socialism. Subsequently, a strong division was made between totalitarian state corporatism and an organic corporatist society (De Jonge 1968, 313; Brongersma [1940]b, 21, 22; Bouman 1941, 84). According to the influential liberal newspaper *Het Vaderland* of 7 October 1940, some renewers regarded Portuguese corporatism as 'le corporatisme sans larmes': a corporatism without any drawbacks.

*The reactions to Salazar's Estado Novo*

How was the Portuguese 'Salazar system' received and interpreted in the Netherlands and what was its attraction? In general, the few reactions to António de Oliveira Salazar's *Estado Novo* in the 1930s in the Netherlands had been quite sympathetic. For instance, the well respected liberal journalist Marcus van Blankenstein claimed that the Portuguese dictatorship basically did not seek to be dictatorial and that it was reluctant to use violence. According to Van Blankenstein, this regime finally managed to get Portuguese government expenditure under control (this had been a problem for decades). In 1937 Van Blankenstein characterised Salazar as a 'peaceful dictator' (Van Blankenstein as cited in Krop 1939, 13). In 1939, Frederik Johan Krop, an anti-communist vicar in the Dutch Reformed Church who had been the initiator of protests against the nazi 'persecution' of Jews in 1933 (Van Roon 1973, 87, 88, 203), published a pamphlet on Portugal, entitled *Portugal under Salazar, or: the recovery of a small but brave nation*. Krop described the humble origins of Salazar, his thriftiness, his work ethic and his religious devotion. He emphasised that Salazar's experiences as a member of parliament with 'the excesses of Portuguese parliamentarism' had turned him into a dictator, but a dictator with a strong dislike of totalitarianism and statism, which distinguished him from other European dictators (Krop 1939, 17-18). In nearly all the publications in the Netherlands on the Portuguese *Estado Novo*, these characteristics of its leader play a dominant role. They were fully in accordance with the official portrait of Salazar as depicted by the State's National Propaganda Secretariat (Ribeiro de Meneses 2009, 177). Although Krop had made a comparison between the German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels and the Portuguese propaganda leader António Ferro in his pamphlet, to the advantage of the latter, nobody really seemed to be aware of this (Krop 1939, 31).

The Portuguese *Estado Novo* found its most influential advocate in the Netherlands in Edward Brongersma, a Catholic convert (Luykx 2007, 211) and a typical exponent of the 'Catholic renewal'. In 1933, as a student, Brongersma formed the Catholic Corporatist Movement that he wanted to organise independently of the Catholic Party. His attempt failed, as it was strongly rejected by the Dutch bishops, who wanted to preserve unity in Catholic politics. Brongersma had access to the higher inner circles of Catholic politics, but, as can be found in his personal archives at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam

(IISH), after a sexual offence in 1934 of which he was convicted, Brongersma withdrew from public life and worked on a PhD dissertation in Law on the Portuguese corporatist constitution of 19 March 1933.

During the 1930s Brongersma began to hold lectures on the Portuguese corporatist state, in which he emphasised its Catholic character, which in his view was constituted according to the principles of the Vatican encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* of 15 May 1931. In the next few years, Brongersma was invited again and again by Catholic organisations to share his views on Portugal, Salazar and corporatism. He graduated on 24 September 1940, a few months after the German invasion of the Netherlands, from the Catholic University of Nijmegen. Brongersma's PhD dissertation was first published in 1940 and was reprinted twice before the end of 1942 with a recommendation from the Portuguese Consul in the Netherlands. It was widely discussed and cheered in the Dutch press. An anthology of Salazar's speeches in Dutch with an introduction by Brongersma sold over 2000 copies in the first year of the German occupation and was reprinted several times before 1943 as part of a series of 'guides for a new age'. According to Brongersma, with God's help Salazar would guide the way to a new Europe (Brongersma [1940]b, 26). Brongersma's personal archives at the IISH show that this series attracted the suspicions of the German authorities. Publications were blocked several times.

*Brongersma's propaganda for the Salazar system*

Brongersma's PhD dissertation, which consisted of almost 600 pages, was meant as a juridical analysis of the Portuguese corporatist constitution, but it also provided information on the historical and sociological background of this constitution and the character of the Portuguese leader Salazar. Features attributed to Portugal in the book were the continuing discord in Portuguese history, the lack of 'perseverance' of the Portuguese population (what was meant was lack of work ethic), the clientelist, non-ideological politics and the irresponsible expenditures of the different national governments in Portuguese history. All these elements were in accordance with stereotypes of Spain and Portugal in the Netherlands. All this had caused a continuing decay in Portugal from the eighteenth century onwards, Brongersma argued. In his view, Salazar was not against democracy as such but he claimed that a liberal democracy in

Portugal would initially lead to chaos and finally to communism. Therefore, a temporary enlightened Catholic dictatorship would be the best political solution to Portugal's problems (Brongersma 1940a, 35). These views corresponded with those of some Catholic political leaders in the Netherlands, who at this stage did not reject autocracy principally; they rejected autocracy because no autocrat had ever been able to cope with excessive power (Bosmans 1991, 379).

An important feature of Brongersma's view on Portuguese corporatism was its lack of statism. Salazar was depicted as a modest, even shy technocratic scientist of simple descent, who was averse to politics and to power, but had managed to stabilise state finances within a few years. Brongersma emphasised strongly that Salazar had accepted his dictatorial powers *à contre-cœur* (Brongersma 1940a, 36). This corresponded with the regime's apparent lack of universal pretensions: the Portuguese *Estado Novo* claimed to be very successful, but nevertheless Salazar stressed that the Portuguese system had offered the right solutions to Portuguese problems but could not easily be adapted to other European countries.

Dutch catholic and liberal newspapers discussed and reviewed Brongersma's books extensively. Critical remarks were made about the lack of influence of the Portuguese *Câmara Corporativa* (corporative chamber), for instance by the Catholic Party's monthly of 30 September 1940. But it was above all the 'character' of Salazar, the 'modest dictator', that drew attention; his shyness as a quiet intellectual, and the fact that he apparently aimed to make himself superfluous as a dictator. This was regarded as a quality few great leaders had, especially in 'Latin' countries as the liberal newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* wrote on 9 October 1940. According to the periodical of the Catholic league for family life *Het Gezin* of 16 December 1940 democracy was often idealised, but 'the great Salazar' managed to restore the state budget balance, neutralised the class struggle and was a guardian of religion. The ambition to transform class society into a society of corporate groups also drew a lot of attention.

In agreement with the views on Salazar's *Estado Novo* in the 1930s and early 1940s, many of the current experts on fascism agree that the *Estado Novo* was a limited, non-totalitarian state, where social power remained in the hands of the Church, the army and the big landowners. They characterise the *Estado Novo* as *Ersatz* fascism or para-fascism and emphasise the suppression of authentic Portuguese fascism (the National Syndicalists) by the *Estado Novo* (Griffin 1996, 19; Paxton 2004, 150, 217).

*Contact and impact*

The image of the *Estado Novo* and the self-images of the Netherlands were important conditions for the enthusiasm in the Netherlands for Salazar and his corporatism. Personal encounters played a less important role in the Dutch adaptation of corporatist ideas. Brongersma's personal archives at the IISH show no indication that he, the authority in the Netherlands on the Portuguese *Estado Novo*, had regular personal contact with Portuguese people (with the exception of the Portuguese National Propaganda Secretariat). His PhD dissertation was mainly based on the international literature on the *Estado Novo*. He also gained information about Portugal from the Vatican.

Portugal, as a small, internally divided nation with a large colonial empire just like the Netherlands, served as a film screen for the projection of Dutch domestic political desires, such as those for a strong, but modest leader and neutralisation of the class struggle. The notion of a functioning Catholic political system no doubt appealed strongly to many Dutch Catholics, just as it did to social Catholics in (Vichy) France (McMillan 1996, 55). In the Netherlands, Catholic politics was associated with particularist and clientelist politics, due to lack of ideological foundations.

The enthusiasm Brongersma generated was essentially based on the propaganda of the *Estado Novo*. In his recently published biography of Salazar, Ribeiro de Meneses stresses that the Portuguese leader was the subject of an intensive propaganda campaign and that the same applies to Portuguese corporatism as a whole. This corporatism was in fact theoretical tin-kettling, as the corporative bodies did not have any substantial influence (Ribeiro de Meneses 2009, 87-89, 115). Another explanation for the sudden outburst of enthusiasm in the Netherlands is the window of opportunity that many renewers saw after the German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940 for the creation of a corporatist society in the Netherlands (Luykx 1996, 233). In the first months of the war, it was expected that Germany would be a dominant power on the European continent for years to come. Not all the Dutch were fully aware of the criminal and rapacious character of the nazi regime. Some renewers expected a quick deradicalisation of nazi Germany and saw an opportunity for the creation of a European economic *Großraum* under German leadership. They thought that this would be an important condition for a general economic rationalisation and a rise in general welfare

(Linthorst Homan 1974, 148; De Bruin 2010a, 70). Some of their French sources of inspiration cherished similar illusions about the New Order (Bruneteau 2003, 30, 31, 313).

After the German invasion, the Dutch government had moved to London, while the Dutch civil servants were supposed to cooperate with the German *Reichskommissariat* led by Arthur Seyss-Inquart, in the interests of the Dutch population. The nazi New Order in the Netherlands had a strong hold on the democratic political parties and trade unions, before they were ultimately banned legally or effectively. The initial hopes in the Netherlands for a restoration of self-governance were dashed in 1941, when the nazi's relatively mild occupation policy was transformed into a brutal regime. In the first phase of the occupation, many Dutch renewers (especially Catholics and Social Democrats) joined the national political mass movement The Netherlands' Union, which had over 600,000 members (at that time the Dutch population consisted of 8.8 million people) (Ten Have 1999, 321), to counterbalance the occupying regime. In the first brochure of the Netherlands' Union, *Volks-eenheid* ('Unity among the people'), the Catholic renewer Geert Ruygers called nazi Germany, fascist Italy and the Portuguese *Estado Novo* the forerunners of a new communitarian age in Europe, suggesting that they were some sort of model states (Ruygers [1940], 6; Van Oudheusden 1990, 242). Bouman, also a member of the Union, advocated pushing back the 'parliamentarism' and political discord in Dutch politics through the introduction of a corporative chamber, in agreement with the arguments put forward by Salazar (Bouman 1941, 83-88). He wanted to use the circumstances of nazi rule for a national social reconstruction that, according to him, should be based on a foundation of authentic Dutch corporatism; he understood perfectly well that such a national reconstruction would have been impossible before the German invasion (Bouman 1941, 35-36 and 46; Van Berkel 1996, 187). In the course of the German occupation, both renewers acknowledged their errors. After the liberation from German occupation, Ruygers became a Member of Parliament for the Labour Party and was one of the staunchest supporters of European integration in Dutch Parliament.

The three leaders of the Union, Jan de Quay, Louis Einthoven and Hans Linthorst Homan, aimed at the adaptation of 'the European revolution' to the Netherlands 'in a Dutch way' (De Jong 1972, 830 s.e./772 p.e.). In the second half of 1940, Linthorst Homan (the Provincial Governor of Groningen) even expressed his hopes that the war between

Britain and Nazi Germany would end in a 2-3 victory for Germany, as if it were a football match. Linthorst Homan feared that Western Europe would fall prey to Soviet domination after a war of attrition between Britain and Germany. He was immediately strongly criticised for his statement, also from within the Union (De Bruin 2010a, 70).

The Union was supported by different groups and factions; it was for instance strongly supported by the liberal newspaper *Algemeen Handelsblad* (Stollenga 2012, 28-37). Within the vague, 'personalist' ideology of the Union that was called 'Dutch socialism', no fundamental choice was made between democracy and corporatism (De Jong 1972, 831 s.e./773 p.e.). Corporatism was propagated as the middle ground between 'planning' and 'freedom'. The class society had to be transformed into a society of corporate groups (Linthorst Homan 1974, 102). When on 12 November 1940 the Secretary-General for Economic Affairs, Hans Max Hirschfeld, announced the plan for a corporatist industrial organisation, he had the immediate support of the Netherlands' Union (Ten Have 1999, 334). In the following years, a design for this organisation was drawn by the prominent Dutch banker Herman Louis Woltersom. During the occupation an organisation was established in which the rights of workers and trade unions were restricted. It would have the force of law until 1950.

Some of the Union rank-and-file regarded these corporatist ideas as a smoke-screen to please the Nazi authorities (Ten Have 1999, 333, 334). This applied neither to the Union leaders like Linthorst Homan and Jan de Quay nor to one of Linthorst Homan's main sources of inspiration, Edward Brongersma (Linthorst Homan, 1974, 35-37). Although his personal archives at the IISH show that for personal reasons he was not a formal member of the Netherlands' Union, Brongersma strongly sympathised with the political aims of the movement. At a congress of Catholic academics in 1941, he advocated reforming the Netherlands into a corporatist state 'now that the opportunity arises' (Rogier 1980, 276). However, soon the New Order would take away his vehicle for political influence by banning the Netherlands' Union. Carl Romme, another Catholic advocate of a corporatist society, who would become the post-war leader of the Catholic Party, designed a blueprint for a new, rather authoritarian 'organic, corporative democracy' to be implemented after the liberation from German occupation. But he and the other Catholic leaders realised that the idea of corporatism was more and more considered to be fascist socio-economics (Bosmans 1991, 371, 382).

Although the Netherlands' Union was compliant with the nazi authorities, it refused to support the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. For that reason, the Union was banned in December 1941. By then, all political parties except the Dutch National Socialist Movement had been banned. The leaders of the Union were imprisoned for varying periods of time. By now, a relatively large number of renewers had joined the organised resistance to nazi rule (Verkade [1968], 6). Some of them became (Labour and Catholic) politicians after the liberation from German occupation.

*The image of the Salazar system after the Second World War*

After the German defeat in May 1945 until 1958 the Catholic Party dominated Dutch politics together with the Social Democrats. Initially, pre-war pillarised party politics was restored, but there was a change in political culture. In the course of the German occupation, the attention of many Dutch renewers had been redirected from corporatism to democratic European federalism (Verkade [1968], 6). In order to create national welfare, domestic political compromise became the motto of Dutch Catholic and Labour politics, which in the eyes of the Dutch Labour Party served as an example for a future 'truly democratic' Europe. Setting the example of ideological restraint on behalf of Europeanisation was their self-imposed task (De Bruin 2010b, 210).

In the first decades after the Second World War, ideological bigotry was increasingly discredited, partly because of the ideologically-driven horrors of the Second World War, and partly because of growing individual welfare – growing only slowly in the Netherlands until the late 1950s, due to the governmental policy of low wages for the purpose of the post-war economic reconstruction. For instance, post-war Catholic politics in the Netherlands abandoned political corporatism as an alternative to capitalist democracy, although ideas about 'neocorporatism' certainly have had a lasting effect on socio-economic relations in the Netherlands. 'Neocorporatist' consultation became a crucial and valued factor in post-war governmental socio-economic planning, but the heritage of 1940 and 1941 was rejected. As an example of a statist corporatist organisation directed from above, the Woltersom industrial organisation was rejected and replaced by a more democratic industrial organization in 1950.

The leaders of the Netherlands' Union were strongly criticised after the war, for instance in the Dutch Senate on 6 February 1947 (by the Orthodox Protestant Senator Hendrik Algra) but nevertheless they obtained high functions. After a disgraceful purge, Linthorst Homan eventually became a high official. He was the main Dutch representative in the negotiations on the Treaty of Rome and later became a member of the High Authority of the European Coal and Steel Community (De Bruin 2010a, 74-76). De Quay would even become the Dutch prime minister for the Catholic Party in 1959. Bouman became a well-known and well-respected historian. Brongersma joined the Labour Party, like many former members of the Netherlands' Union, and became a Labour senator. As such, he continued his propaganda for the Salazar system – still believing that democracy was inappropriate for Portugal – and was made *Comendador da Ordem Militar de Cristo* in 1948. He converted to Humanism in the late 1960s (Luykx 2007, 215). From the 1980s until his death in the late 1990s Brongersma was highly controversial, not only for his former admiration for Salazar, but also because of the liberal views he expressed on paedophilia and euthanasia.

Within Catholic politics in the Netherlands, Portugal lost its reputation as a prototypical ideal Catholic state. The Portuguese constitution served as a foreign example of the bad, statist implementation of a good idea. With regard to the Salazar regime, Catholic politics in the Netherlands slowly started to identify itself with the Christian democratic resistance to this regime, as was shown in 1968 by a report of the Catholic Party about Portugal. From the early 1960s onwards, there were many protests in the Netherlands against the NATO membership of 'fascist' Portugal.

### *Conclusions*

After the German invasion in 1940, Dutch newspapers like the *Nieuwe Tilburgsche Courant* of 21 October 1940 spoke of 'lessons' from Portuguese corporatism. However, images and self-images foremost determined its reception and were more important conditions for the enthusiasm in the Netherlands for Salazar and his *Estado Novo* than personal encounters and experiences. The enthusiasm for corporatism was essentially based on the propaganda projected by the *Estado Novo*. Moreover, Portugal served as a film screen for the projection of Dutch domestic political desires, like the neutralisation of religious and socio-economic

segmentation of society. As a result of this encounter, some Dutch re-newers saw a window of opportunity for the creation of a corporatist society in the Netherlands after the German invasion of the Netherlands. In the course of the German occupation corporatism was brought into disrepute. European federalism breathed a new life into their notion of a 'third way'.

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