

The Road Not Taken: Alberto Tôrres and An Alternative History of Brazilian Developmentalism

Brazilian development has been, in many ways, an almost miraculous success story. Over the course of the twentieth century, Brazil's GDP grew at an astonishing pace, jumping from 4560 million in 1900 to 379 trillion cruzeiros by 1984.¹ While the stories told have varied with the vicissitudes of voguish economic theories— think only of Prebisch's structuralism, *dependencia* and, more recently, the Washington Consensus brand of neo-liberalism— the pattern of the narrative is familiar: during the twentieth century, for whatever reason, Brazil transformed itself from one of Latin America's smallest and least sophisticated economies, beset by the vulnerabilities of commodity cycles, to the world's ninth largest economy, characterized by industrialization and urbanization. Indeed, so naturalized has this narrative of industrialization, urbanization and growth become that it is hard now to imagine a counter-narrative of the intellectual history of Brazilian developmentalism in which these markers of economic development are not taken for granted.

One point of departure, however, from which to write such a counter-narrative is presented by the figure of Alberto Tôrres, who has been cast variously as an economic nationalist, a pioneer of anti-racial thinking, even an early environmentalist.² He was, to

¹ Raymond William Goldsmith, *Brasil 1850-1984 : desenvolvimento financeiro sob um século de inflação*, São Paulo: Editora Harper & Row do Brasil, c1986, 82 and 507. Prices based on 1984 currency values. 1900 figure given in terms of mil-reis.

² For treatments of Tôrres' racial and nationalist thought see, for example: Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1993, 118-123; E. Bradford Burns, *Nationalism in Brazil: A Historical Survey*, New York: Praeger, 1968, 78-79; W. Douglas Jr. McLain, "Alberto Tôrres, Ad Hoc Nationalist," *Luso-Brazilian Review*, Winter 1967. For an analysis of

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use that worn-out platitude, all this and more. It will be the contention of this paper that, through a close look at Tôrres' vast corpus and an examination of the ways in which his work has been transformed, distorted and forgotten in Brazil, Tôrres provides us a different vantage point from which to see the intellectual history of Brazilian development. This is primarily a negative history—a history of absence and silence, of the failure of an idea, in fact. Nevertheless, it is particularly revealing of certain assumptions underlying both the course of Brazilian development and current thinking regarding it.

To call this venture a history of silence is not to say that Tôrres has been absent from Brazilian historiography in general—far from it. From his own times onwards, Tôrres has been recognized for his contribution to Brazilian public life. Alberto Tôrres' early years were full of promise: a dynamic young man from rural Rio, he was an abolitionist, a republican who believed ardently in the new constitution of 1891 and an able and much-admired statesman. With tenures in the Supreme Court, legislative body and as the governor of Rio, Tôrres had, as Thomas Skidmore puts it, “impeccable credentials.”³ Yet what he has come to be known for is not the achievements of his optimistic youth but rather the bitter fruits of his disillusionment—the intellectual output of an older, mature and disenchanted man, who saw in his country deep disorder, a lack of unity and national consciousness and the sad waste of potential. The arc of his life is almost that of a tragic hero—after a brilliant public career, he died largely unaccepted.

Tôrres' work as an early environmentalist, see José Augusto Pádua, “Natureza e Projecto Nacional,” *Ecologia e política no Brasil*, José Augusto Padua, ed., Rio de Janeiro: Editora Espaço e Tempo: Instituto Universitário de Pesquisas do Rio de Janeiro, c1987.

³ Skidmore, 118.

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Within the decade, he came to be popularized by the best and brightest of Brazil's post-war modernist generation, a posthumous national hero.⁴ The narrative contours of Tôrres' life and work have obvious appeal and indeed, a small but substantial body of scholarship has emerged around his figure.⁵

A quick perusal reveals an interesting recurrent trope in the historiographical, and to a lesser extent, biographical, literature on Tôrres— that of his inherent anachronism. This trope is clearly visible in W. Douglas Jr. McLain's 1967 article, "Alberto Tôrres, Ad Hoc Nationalist." For example, McLain judges Tôrres' progressive racial ideas to be "ahead of his time," despite the fact that Tôrres himself acknowledged his debt to Franz Boas, among others, in developing his defense of Brazil's racially heterogeneous population.⁶ Though Tôrres' anachronism with regard to racial theories was judged favorably, his brand of agrarianism and economic nationalism was not: McLain condemns Tôrres as a tragic hero to posterity because he "was out of step with his time and the future in that he failed to realize the need for a more fully developed capitalistic system in Brazil."⁷ The point here is not so much whether or not Tôrres was a genuine visionary but rather that, in both his positive and negative aspects, he was, if his

⁴ Cândido Motta Filho, *Alberto Torres e o thema da nossa geração*, Rio de Janeiro: Schimidt, 1930s [?].

⁵ For book-length biographies, see Barbosa Lima Sobrinho, *Presença de Alberto Tôrres*, Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1968; A. Saboia Lima, *Alberto Torres e sua obra*, São Paulo: Companhia editoria nacional, 1935; Dalmo Barreto, *Alberto Tôrres, sociólogo e jornalista*, Niterói, 1970. For an indexed summation of his ideas, see Alcides Gentil, *As idéas de Alberto Torres*, São Paulo: Companhia editoria nacional, 1932. For a summary and analysis of Tôrres' theories in light of Christian and political traditions of thought in Brazil, see Alceu Amoroso Lima, *Política*, Rio de Janeiro, AGIR, 1956. Tôrres' ideas are also regularly discussed in reviews of Brazilian intellectual history: see especially Skidmore 1993; Burns 1968; João Cruz Costa, *A History of Ideas in Brazil*, trans. Suzette Macedo, Berkeley: University of California Press; Padua 1987.

⁶ Alberto Tôrres, *O problema nacional brasileiro*, São Paulo : Companhia Editora Nacional/MEC, 1978, 59-60.

⁷ McLain, 33.

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intellectual biography is to be believed, a man inherently anachronistic. This is clearly a doubtful proposition.⁸

Indeed, the myth of anachronism that has quietly and invisibly crystallized around the figure of Tôrres veils a much more complex historical phenomenon. To understand this, it is not only necessary to re-examine Tôrres in terms of the intellectual problematics of his time, but also to consider the way in which his work was popularized after his death.⁹ The *modernistas* who reclaimed Tôrres— most notably, Oliveira Vianna, who later rose to prominence in Getúlio Vargas's first administration— did so in a peculiar way, ignoring both his racial and agrarian theories and rescuing only what seemed to be proto-corporatist in his ideas. This curious cannibalistic process not only constructed Tôrres' iconic status as a nationalist thinker but also allowed this status to be parlayed into legitimacy for ideas he himself would very likely not have supported.¹⁰ Through a closer look at how those who appropriated Tôrres felt about his ideas, one may gain valuable insights into not only why Tôrres has remained a notable figure but also why his ideas were never actually applied in Brazil. Such a study may provide new insights and future avenues of research into the antecedents of Brazil's developmentalism.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. The following section provides a brief biographical sketch to give context to his literary and polemical output. The study

⁸ This trope is intimately related to the biographer's desire to cast the subject in the light of uniqueness or even greatness. E. Bradford Burns calls Tôrres "the pioneer economic nationalist," the origin of "modern economic nationalism in Brazil." Yet, elsewhere in the same work, Burns notes other thinkers who clearly antedated many of Tôrres' ideas, particularly with regard to foreign influence in the Brazilian economy, including Jose Joaquim da Cunha de Azeredo Coutinho. A historian's disciplinary obsession with origins and "firsts," and a biographer's admiration of the subject can disguise the rich connections the subject has to the past and to his own historical present. Moreover, by casting the subject as "pioneer," the biographer may be unintentionally propagating national myths without critical examination and thus disguising deeper — and messier — historical processes. See David Hackett Fischer, *Historian's Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, 134-135, for a summary, and a brutal but witty condemnation of the fallacy of anachronism.

⁹ Burns, 123.

¹⁰ McLain, 1.

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cannot and does not hope to be a comprehensive biography: other works already fulfill this function admirably.¹¹ This section concentrates therefore on those details that pertain most directly to Alberto Tôrres' intellectual formation, especially his brief tenure as Governor of Rio. To this end, a careful analysis of the three Provincial Presidential Reports he wrote during this time will be presented.¹² The paper then summarizes the thrust of his major journalistic works. The next section attempts to place his corpus of ideas in the context of the intellectual climate of Tôrres' age and the section after that outlines the relationship Oliveira Vianna, Tôrres' most (in)famous and important disciple, had to his mentor's intellectual legacy and the ways in which he appropriated and popularized Tôrres work. The final section of the paper will summarize findings and suggest avenues for further research.

Alberto de Seixas Martins Tôrres was born on 26 November 1865 on his ancestral property, an old *fazenda* in Porto das Caixas in rural Rio de Janeiro. The landscape of his childhood was one in decline: the area, a land of gentle hills, soft fertile earth riddled with small rivulets and blessed with easy access to the coast, had early attracted the Portuguese colonizers of Guanabara. It had flourished from colonial times but by the time Alberto Tôrres was born, technological change and economic decline had begun to make

¹¹ See especially Lima Sobrinho 1968, Saboia Lima 1935, Barreto 1970. It is curious that the most comprehensive works are the least willing to pass any kind of judgment on their subject.

¹² One final note regarding this study's departure from the historiographical tradition: this study will not only reconsider his journalistic work, on which his historians have almost exclusively focused, but also his official writings, produced in his capacity as Governor of Rio de Janeiro, and his literary efforts. The vast body of his work and the diversity of genres and topics that they display coalesce to form a cogent philosophy and it is important, therefore, to consider his corpus *in toto*. Moreover, his official writings and poetry illuminate certain aspects of his theories and concretize them in a way that a study of his journalistic writings alone cannot do. By returning these lesser-known aspects of his intellectual output to his corpus, we can gain a deeper understanding of Tôrres' own ideas and thus highlight the contrast between these ideas and the forms in which they were passed down by his popularizers.

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indelible marks on the land. Dalmo Barreto describes the landscape of Tôrres' childhood thus:

Coincidentally, around this time, the old fazenda [where Tôrres was born] entered a state of decay. A new sort of progress was in clear ascension; however, here, there was nothing more than a specter, old abandoned farmhouses, others in ruins, with not even the memory of a time of vitality remaining.¹³

This *fluminense* landscape of specters, abandoned farms and rural decay retained nonetheless enough charm and happiness for Tôrres that much of his adult work was devoted to its defense in the face of urbanization and increasing technological, environmental and economic pressures. As one of his earlier biographers, A. Saboia Lima, put it: "Growing up in the Brazilian countryside of the times, among pure people and good slaves, [Tôrres] carried within him, throughout his life, a great *saudade*."¹⁴

"*Saudade*," tinged with bitterness about the continued destruction of the rural Brazil of his childhood, informed not only the sensibility of his writing but formed the emotional core of his vision of Brazilian nationhood and his particular brand of agrarianism. In other words, the rural landscape of his boyhood continued to exercise a powerful hold over his imagination, both moral and political.

The exigencies of higher education cut short Tôrres' rural and private childhood, pushing him towards Brazil's cities, the stage for his later public life. Although Tôrres qualified at an exceptionally young age for medical training, he eventually abandoned this path, choosing instead a career in law.¹⁵ His legal training, however, remained secondary to his development as compared to his journalistic and political activities and the relationships he formed during his student days in São Paulo. By twenty, he was

¹³ Barreto, 17.

¹⁴ Saboia Lima, 13.

¹⁵ Ibid.

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visible and politically active enough to be considered a youth leader, one inspired by the heady days of the last breath of the empire and jubilantly welcoming of the waves of change to come in the momentous acts of abolition and the birth of the republic.¹⁶ He co-founded the Centro Abolicionista de São Paulo; with Figueiredo Coimbra, he founded *A Tarde*, a republican newspaper.¹⁷ Additionally, he founded *Ça Ira*, a pro-republican and pro-abolitionist publication and collaborated on other publications, notably *O Constitucional*.¹⁸ Among his group, he counted another illustrious *fluminense* writer, Raul Pompéia, the naturalist author of *O Ateneu*.¹⁹

Upon completion of his training, Tôrres returned to Rio de Janeiro to open his practice. Nevertheless, his journalistic and political work took precedence over his professional activities: he founded in 1889 the Club Republicano of Niterói and focused his efforts at disseminating republican propaganda into the interior, arranging conferences and organizing Republicans in the rural parts of the province.²⁰ Even this early in his career, Tôrres kept one eye trained upon the rural interior as a target for political education. Here possibly, one may find the roots of his later efforts, as Governor of Rio, at creating a rural citizenry that was not merely peripheral to the political life of the nation.

Tôrres undoubtedly began his political career with the flush of victory; as a member of the movement that ushered in the institution of the republic as well as the abolition of slavery, he was able to embark upon a political career, the success of which can only be described as meteoric. This success, however, proved to be increasingly

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Ibid., 15.

¹⁸ Barreto, 20.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Saboia Lima, 15.

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empty: maturity brought disillusionment and eventually, after ill health forced him to retire from public life at the age of 44, a sense of personal defeat. In his varied career—he served as a state and federal legislator (1889-1896), as a cabinet minister (1896-1898), as the Governor of Rio (1898-1900) and as a Supreme Court justice (1901-1909)—Tôrres was able to view at close quarters various aspects of the political machinery of the republic. His experiences, especially the frustrating term as Governor of the beloved province of his birth, convinced him both of Brazil's lack of a unified national consciousness as well as the general unsuitability of the federal structure to Brazil's political life. Still, his political career established for him a reputation of unimpeachable integrity and devotion to public life, qualities that were undoubtedly attractive to the following generation who would rediscover him and claim him as mentor.

To the extent that his actions as a public figure— however constrained by the machinations of other politicians and the structure of political life— may be read as praxis, his tenure as Governor of Rio is informative. The three Presidential reports Tôrres penned during his tenure show not only his particular concerns in government but also the arc of his disillusionment with Brazilian political life.

The first report is notable for its optimistic, idealistic tone— Tôrres devoted considerable space to rather earnest musings on the responsibilities of democratic government and the environmental degradation of the state of Rio.²¹ He does so in impassioned passages and using rhetorical flourishes that seem more suited to his polemical tracts rather than to an official missive. The report is also striking for the emphasis placed on agriculture. Almost every aspect of economic, social and political

²¹ Alberto Tôrres, *Mensagem enviada á Assembléa Legislativa em 15 de Setembro de 1898 pelo Presidente do Estado*, Alberto Seixas Martins Torres, Rio de Janeiro, 15 September 1898.

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policy is oriented to support agricultural enterprise. Tôrres begins by pointing out that agriculture in the state, which has been limited almost exclusively to the production of coffee, sugar and *aguardente*, has become increasingly less productive. For example, despite increasing monoculture, coffee production in the state had declined steadily since 1881, dropping from 131,572,011 kilograms to 75,366,276 kilograms in 1895.²² Tôrres explains this dramatic loss of productivity thus:

The truth is that the productivity of the soil of Rio de Janeiro has been compromised by the radical alteration of the physical environment of the State—the handiwork of the improvident and fierce exploration of its first owners, who knocked down age-old forests, substituting them for plantations and then abandoning them as soon as the humus left by the forests was depleted.²³

In response, Tôrres offered a multi-pronged approach to revitalize agriculture in the state, including environmental restoration, measures to build physical and financial infrastructure for the sector and improvement of agricultural practices through education and research. To stem the environmental degradation, he suggested several measures. For example, his Secretary of Public Works, after consulting with experts, had acquired seeds for plants that would flourish in and replenish the *fluminense* soil.²⁴ Tôrres also recommended higher export taxes on wood to reduce felling.²⁵

Of these various measures, the educational pillar seemed to be closest to Tôrres' heart, as he believed that “the lack of economic and agronomic instruction” was the principle cause of the decadence of the agricultural sector.²⁶ Accordingly, much of the report was devoted to the question of education, particularly in rural areas. The report

²² Ibid., 22.

²³ Ibid., 23.

²⁴ Ibid., 20.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 23.

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showed that a new *Gymnasio Fluminense* was to be built.²⁷ The *Conselho Geral de Agricultura* was set up, the principles functions of which was to collect and display agricultural products in newly created expositions for farmers as well as to foster a spirit of association among farmers.²⁸ The *Centro Agricola da Vargem Alegre* was to aid in research through two newly installed departments— agronomics and the model *fazenda*.²⁹ Perhaps the most important and far-reaching changes were the introduction of classes in rural economy and agronomy in public schools and the creation of new vocational schools for agriculture in rural areas.³⁰ In general, Tôrres succeeded in expanding the network of rural schools in the state during his brief tenure.

To support the agricultural sector, Tôrres laid the basis for a number of institutes that would provide cheap and easy access to credit for farmers.³¹ He was also committed to expanding and improving road and railroads in the state and was seeking reductions in freight charges for agricultural products.³² He insisted that the government must take responsibility for and enforce the improvement of transportation. Given the heavy foreign penetration in the railroad sector, it may be surmised that Tôrres was subtly advocating bringing the foreign-held railroads firmly into the ambit of the national government. It seems that he was not opposed to foreign capital per se; rather, he supported better national control of foreign capital and hoped to orient this capital to national development goals.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³² *Ibid.*, 25.

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This attitude can be seen later in Tôrres response to a congressional inquiry into concessions of lands and railways to foreign companies carried out in 1913. Tôrres stressed that:

The sudden expansion of foreign influence in the country combined with the notorious political, financial and administrative disorganization, represents a state of extreme political debility...[D]irect measures dealing with isolated facts connected with the establishment of foreign influence in Brazil will be unproductive, unless accompanied by a vigorous movement in the direction of political reorganization.³³

Tôrres is careful not to reject foreign capital outright; rather, he stresses the deleterious effect of the *combination* of poor internal political organization, and control and excessive external influence. Thus, for Tôrres, knee-jerk protectionism is not a sufficient or desirable solution.

This attitude towards foreign capital is consistent with Tôrres' views on international trade. One of the measures that he urged the federal government to take in order to resuscitate agriculture was the reduction of the "exorbitant" taxes on imports and on exports. He argued that industrial protectionism is an obstacle in the economic evolution of a nation, besides being an unpardonable drain on the national coffers.³⁴ This was a view of the international economy based on the classical Ricardian model and his insistence on agriculture, in which Brazil had a comparative advantage, is a direct corollary of his support of the theory of the international division of labor.

Although Tôrres demonstrated a limited acceptance of foreign capital, this tolerance did not extend to the presence of foreign labor in Brazil. In a striking passage, he strongly condemned the official policy of encouraging immigrants and colonization,

³³ Reported in *The South American Journal and Brazil and River Plate Mail*, London, January 25, 1913.

³⁴ Tôrres 1898, 24.

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primarily from European countries, as a means of populating the rural interior. He charged that “official immigration could not offer any guarantees, neither of selection, nor of stability,” as one could control neither for the quality of immigrant labor nor could one ensure that they would not leave the expensive colonial centers for the already overburdened cities.³⁵ Instead, Tôrres advocated the “parcelling out of land and the mobilization of land proprietorship.”³⁶ That is, Tôrres believed that by providing landholdings, rural labor could be tied to the land, thus stanching the bleeding of labor through urbanization and resuscitating agriculture. He believed that land redistribution was not only inevitable in economic evolution but was also desirable and thus exhorted the federal legislature to begin the process.³⁷

If the first report showed us a glimpse of an optimistic, even naïve man, full of plans and ideas for the betterment of his state, the second report is a photographic record of a man beleaguered by political machinations, tripped up by his own idealism and besieged on all sides by mean-spirited criticism. The second Presidential report begins by describing a crisis in the state, which started with two separate parties claiming victory in the elections of Campos, a town with disputed municipal boundaries.³⁸ The conflict, which constitutionally should have been decided by the judiciary, was instead taken up by the legislative assembly, which sought a political resolution. Tôrres rightly rejected their solution, challenging the assembly's right to mediate the controversy and denying

³⁵ Tôrres 1898, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

³⁸ Alberto Tôrres, *Mensagem enviada á Assembléa Legislativa em 15 de Setembro de 1899 pelo Presidente do Estado*, Alberto Seixas Martins Torres, Rio de Janeiro, 15 September 1899.

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his own authority in resolving the issue.³⁹ The situation became critical as the suspension of municipal activities created a public health and sanitation crisis in the area.⁴⁰

Amidst this political predicament, Tôrres' most cherished plans began to falter: for example, the newly instituted *Gymnasio Fluminense*, which Tôrres had envisioned as a way to improve education in the state and to resuscitate the city of Petropolis, was met with a tenacious campaign of criticism.⁴¹ Though Tôrres continued to advocate his most cherished causes— specifically, those relating to immigration and to agriculture— the dominant note of the second report is one of growing helplessness in the face of disorder. As he wrote in the conclusion of the report, “obstacles of the greatest gravity deterred me, obliging me to divide my attention between political concerns for the prestige of authority and the constitutional and material order of the State.”⁴² Tôrres' increasing obsession with the disorder of the Brazilian polity and economy was certainly fuelled in part by the experience of his second year in power as the Governor of Rio.

While the second report showed some disaffection, it nevertheless resembled the first one in that Tôrres went to great lengths to elaborate on and defend his ideas. Further, both reports possessed an impassioned tone similar to the one that permeates his major works. Tôrres' final report as Governor, however, was a terse summary of activities completely unlike the other two missives.⁴³ It was a year in which the Campos debacle had nearly led to his impeachment.⁴⁴ His own allies in the Republican Party turned against him, as Tôrres was increasingly seen as an unwelcome threat to the power of the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴³ Alberto Tôrres, *Mensagem enviada á Assembléa Legislativa em 15 de Setembro de 1900 pelo Presidente do Estado*, Alberto Seixas Martins Torres, Rio de Janeiro, 15 September 1900.

⁴⁴ Lima Sobrinho, 165.

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local chief, José Tomás da Porciúncula, who had been instrumental in securing Tôrres' governorship in the first place. The issue of Campos had shown that the strictures of constitutional propriety were clearly antagonistic to the preferred mode of politics of traditional powerbrokers. Tôrres, in supporting the Constitution, had not merely alienated his erstwhile allies, but had broken faith with the very political machinery that had conferred his post upon him. In the wake of the impeachment effort, Tôrres' ambitious plans, as laid out in the first Presidential report, were mooted. The curve of Tôrres' disillusionment and sense of defeat was complete.

The Provincial Presidential reports concretize many of Tôrres' vague pronouncements on the national economy and flesh out the vision of agrarianism that one finds in *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*. The lessons he gleaned from the Campos episode— in which he saw the full effect of partisanship and decentralization of power within the federal structure— inform his prescriptions for restructuring the Brazilian polity in *A Organização Nacional*. The reports are thus an important element of his body of work.

Nevertheless, the reports are incomplete, if not misleading. Certainly, the reports are silent on such vital issues as Tôrres' opinions on the thorny issue of race, and his views on the federal structure are veiled, if not absent. Moreover, the demands of official writing and politics impose a strictly utilitarian logic on Tôrres' thinking, often based on classical economic reasoning. By contrast, his journalistic writings display a form of reasoning that transform many of the issues discussed in the reports— agriculture, immigration, education— from analytical to moral categories. That is, although the measures he recommends in the reports are consistent with those he advocated in his

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main works, his non-official writings are distinctly ideological or moral in tone and in their mode of reasoning. This is not a trivial difference: his journalistic works reveal the depths of his nationalistic sentiments and also show that agrarianism and opposition to foreign immigration, for example, are not merely utilitarian prescriptions but moral imperatives.

The works Tôrres wrote after his retirement from public life are the basis of Tôrres' problematic legacy. The five main texts that he left to posterity were composed from essays written for various important publications of the day. Although two of his five major works addressed international questions, for the purposes of this paper we will limit ourselves to his writings focusing on Brazil.⁴⁵ These works are: *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, compiled from essays written in 1912 for *Jornal do Comercio*; *A Organização Nacional*, based on articles written in *Gazeta de Notícias* in 1910-1911; and *A Fontes da Vida*, his last published work before his death in 1917, which largely recapitulated the ideas of the two earlier works.

These writings, together, seem extremely wide-ranging, discussing conditions for international peace, agricultural reform, scientific racism, the need for a new constitution, the dangers of colonization through foreign economic control and foreign immigrant

⁴⁵ Tôrres' two tracts on the international political system, *Vers La Paix* and *Le Probleme Mondial*, are fascinating in themselves. These anti-war essays are surprisingly resonant and prescient in some respects— notably, his call and plan for an international judiciary system, including a international criminal tribunal, to mediate conflict and thus avoid war. In other ways, the works, which pronounced confidently that the world was on the brink of a sustainable global peace, are outdated, optimistic relics of an innocent time before the World Wars which marred the twentieth century so indelibly. The works also show the lack of parochialism in Tôrres' outlook— he was in many respects the epitome of a nineteenth century cosmopolitan intellectual and consequently viewed Brazil very much as a nation among nations. It was natural that he would speak admiringly of Kant's notion of cosmopolitanism, founded upon universal hospitality. See Alberto Tôrres, *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, Rio de Janeiro: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1978, 49.

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labor, economic history and the emptiness of political life in the First Republic. In short, Tôrres leaves little out of the purview of his commentary and at first glance, these topics seem disparate and it is difficult to see how they form a cogent philosophy. Indeed, McLain signals this apparently arbitrary quality in Tôrres' work by labeling him as “*ad hoc* nationalist.” Nonetheless, there is a unifying thread to his work, which is expressed in his constant refrain of “*o problema nacional*”: the need to identify a *national* problematic and a call for a new sociology specifically suited to the needs and study of Brazil.

In *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, Tôrres attempts to create a foundation for just such a project, taking as his disciplinary focus political economy. Rejecting the easy diagnostics of social critics habituated to the pathological language of social hygiene and medicine, Tôrres countered the charge that Brazil's underdevelopment was a function of its racial profile with the observation that European theories of scientific racism are deeply imbricated in the politics of imperialism.⁴⁶ Instead, evaluating a wide range of ethnographic and biological studies, from Franz Boas to Kropotkin, Tôrres rejected scientific racism, claiming that Brazil's diverse population was well-suited to its vast and diverse territory, and that any sign of physical degeneration in the Brazilian was a function of three inter-related factors: a lack of understanding of and hence adaption to the environment; lack of adequate nutrition; and economic, social and pedagogical factors relating to prosperity and the education of the people.⁴⁷ Thus, the focus on “whitening” the population in social policy was not only ill-advised; it distracted from the more

⁴⁶ Alberto Tôrres, *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, 3rd ed. São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional/MEC. 1978, 62.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

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pressing problem of the economic disorder of the nation, riven by the vicissitudes of speculative capital.

To refound the notion of a national economy, Tôrres begins by observing that, in the current global climate, “wealth is the arbiter of destiny,” guaranteeing peace to the country wealthy enough to command the expensive resources of war.⁴⁸ Wealth is ultimately derived from the Earth, which contains the natural patrimony of the people.⁴⁹ The history of Brazilian wealth has been characterized by three types of industries: the colonial exploitation of the riches of the soil, a form of rapacious industry that is characterized by extensive not intensive cultivation of the land and is always oriented outwards to the demands of the export (metropolitan) market; the development of trade; and the recent drive towards industrialism, entirely created and animated by protectionist tariffs.⁵⁰ Yet, these seemingly diverse spheres of activity are essentially the one and the same;

But if the work, crude and wasteful, of the owner of vast lands, has been a brutal draw on our wealth, the trade he has provoked, installed and encouraged, has been and will be the most effective attendant of the drainage, the export, the exodus of its fruits... From colonial times until today, the direction and organization of our economic life have obeyed the sole aim of channeling products of the interior into the hands of trade, facilitating and strengthening trade, and opening new ways of the expansion and influence of trade in the interior...[The] business development we have... really represents the work of conquest, the suction and the drainage of our wealth... for our economic metropolises.⁵¹

Thus, for Tôrres, commerce is merely a continuation of the colonial exploitation of the Earth and industry clearly an endeavor unnatural to Brazil, given that its existence

⁴⁸ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 91.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 93.

⁵¹ Ibid., 94.

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depends entirely on outrageous levels of protectionism. If colonial exploitation also entails a real and dangerous compromise on sovereignty, placing Brazil at the mercy of the vicissitudes of speculative markets, Brazil's path becomes completely transparent: Brazil's destiny is that of an agricultural country.⁵²

In embracing this destiny, Brazil would have to construct two new but interconnected areas of policy: an environmental policy, designed to replenish its natural patrimony after centuries of colonial exploitation and to curtail the exploitation of virgin lands⁵³; and an enlightened economic policy, placing agriculture at its heart. The rural economy, as it stood, was hampered at the level of policy by the unconsidered adoption of the same solutions found in other countries.⁵⁴ In terms of its organization, a history of slavery and a policy of encouraging immigrant labor to agricultural colonies had not provided an adequate solution to the problem of providing free labor.⁵⁵ Rural credit was scarce, except for those cash-crops associated with a colonial form of exploitative agriculture, and often only available at frankly usurious rates.⁵⁶ Fiscal policy was fundamentally anti-production, an ironic state of affairs considering that this was the ultimate base of taxation, with an expensive policy of protectionism, an irrational and self-contradictory system of contradictory federal, state and municipal fiscal policies and

⁵² Ibid., 101.

⁵³ This aspect of Tôres' thought is innovatively examined by José Augusto Padua. For a pre-history of this moment in Brazilian environmental thought, see his monograph, *Um sopro de destruição: pensamento político e crítica ambiental no Brasil escravista, 1786-1888*, Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editora, 2002. Padua notes that Tôres represents a departure from his environmentalist antecedents in Brazil in his belief that technological advancement, modernization and development would not save the natural world.

⁵⁴ Tôres, 90.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

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the graft of intermediaries and speculators offsetting any benefits from actual agricultural production.⁵⁷

The development of new economic policy, however, could not take place in the current political climate, vitiated by the incessant and counter-productive politicking of *coronels*, which solved neither the political problem of democratic representation nor the practical problem of government. For this too, Tôrres had a solution that depended on the cultivation of a national sociology and of the development of national solutions to national problems. In *A Organização Nacional*, Tôrres argued that the adoption of foreign political structures for a new country like Brazil inhibited the organic evolution of the nation's polity and was incongruent with the national character.⁵⁸ The constitution to him was a dead document, a beautiful fiction unsupported by measures to enforce its edicts and born not out of the actions and will of the people but from the unconsidered adoption of foreign philosophies. Specifically, the constitution made no provisions against what Tôrres termed the tyranny of individualism, either in the economic or the political realm. In the political realm, the democratic structure and partisan politics allowed individuals to pursue their interests while manipulating public opinion in support of essentially private goals. Without a unifying national spirit to overcome the petty divisiveness of partisan politics, Tôrres viewed democracy as a poor solution.

His solution to the problem of an appropriate structure of government was a mechanism wherein indirect and direct elections would be combined. The house of representatives would consist of directly elected members while the senate would include

⁵⁷ Ibid, 130. In criticizing interstate taxes as an irrational impediment to internal market development and a symptom of rampant, destructive and uncritical federalism, Tôrres was supporting the views of other critics, including Serzedello Corrêa who tried in vain to introduce legislation to do away with interstate taxation in 1911 Gentil, xxix.. These taxes were not definitively banned till 1930.

⁵⁸ Tôrres, *A Organização Nacional*.

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appointed members and *ex officio* leaders from various religious, political, class, intellectual, social and professional groups. Most notable among this group were the members of the Institute for the Study of National Problems, a technocratic organization that would help found all governmental actions and dictate educational policy on a rigorous national sociology. The directors of this Institute would also be afforded a place on the National Council, the central executive body of the nation.

This corporatist political system would allow broad-based representation and some popular sovereignty while limiting direct popular participation. Furthermore, to stem the debilitating influence of partisan politics, he advocated a strongly centralized state structure that limited drastically the autonomy of the individual states. While he viewed federalism as essentially divisive and a factor in fomenting partisanship, he recognized that the geographical and historical realities of Brazil made its complete elimination impossible. The strongly centralized state would thus serve as a bulwark against the divisive influence of the federation. In his eyes, the democratic principle of the American maxim, “*o governo do povo pelo povo*” (government of the people *by* the people), is a fiction. He advocated instead a new formula, “*o governo do povo para o povo*” (government of the people *for* the people). This prescription with its authoritarian tone would later ensure his popularity among the right-wing thinkers of the following generation and tie his name to the dubious tradition of Brazilian authoritarianism.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ In his chapter on Tôrres, Vianna explicitly refers to this section of Tôrres' thought. Vianna goes even further in dismissing the American democratic slogan, referring to it as “the old demagogic refrain.” Oliveira Vianna, *Problemas de política objetiva*, São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1930, 15.

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Nevertheless, in his writings, Tôrres explicitly rejected authoritarian or collective modes of government.⁶⁰

Based upon this governmental structure, which would limit the enervating effects of politics, an agrarian economy, along the lines sketched out above, could flourish. While the level of abstraction in these two works make it difficult to determine exactly what Tôrres envisioned, the utopian ideal of this agrarian society seems to have been an economy of small farmers, where scientific agriculture would not only exploit fully Brazil's comparative advantage but would also prevent the insalubrious effects of rapid urbanization and environmental degradation.⁶¹ The stock of farmers was to be not white immigrants, as in the *colonos*, but the Brazilian people themselves. Presumably, from his Provincial reports, Tôrres' idea was to provide landholdings that would tie workers to the rural economy, thus solving the problem of a low labor-to-land ratio and obviating the need for foreign immigration and colonization.

Tôrres' agrarianism, the heart of *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, has been consistently troubling for his biographers and historians. Thomas Skidmore, for example, claims that, while Torres had an astounding grasp of the most advanced historical and anthropological trends of his time, agrarianism in Torres's intellectual production was "a

⁶⁰ In this, Tôrres is explicitly separate from the mainstream Brazilian positivists, spearheaded by Miguel Lemos, who outright rejected democracy, were quite influential in designing the constitution of the First Republic and who actually desired a benevolent form of dictatorship in the material realm, to ensure freedom in the spiritual realm (Costa, 370). It was no accident that Farias Brito, the philosopher and critic of Brazilian positivism, hailed Tôrres as the founder of Brazilian political philosophy (Gentil, XVI). Furthermore, it is testament to the confused ways in which Tôrres was appropriated that the Integralists, with their authoritarian bent and explicitly European fascistic influences, would cite both him and Farias Brito as explicit influences (Costa, 246).

⁶¹ Although Tôrres makes no explicit acknowledgement of American agrarian thought upon his thinking, the resonance with the Jeffersonian society of yeomen and, later, with Theodore Roosevelt's agrarianism, is strong. Given Tôrres familiarity with the thought of American politicians (he cites Woodrow Wilson, William Jennings Bryan and Elihu Root just in the preface of *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*), the interpolation of influences does not seem too far-fetched.

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curiously old-fashioned economic formula.”⁶² This is partly because Tôrres’ economic nationalism has been read at odds with his agrarianism. Skidmore considers Tôrres’ economic nationalism incongruent with his support for the liberal economic theory of the international division of labor, in which Brazil’s natural role would be in the agricultural sector, calling the combination of beliefs “ironic.”⁶³

This assumption is anachronistic: it turns on the idea that economic nationalism must necessarily mean support for indigenous industry, with industrial protectionism being one strategy in this program. This brand of pro-industrial, anti-foreign capital developmentalism emerged in Brazil only in the 1930s; the fullest articulation of this idea dates back to the 1950s, when the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis posited that dependence on primary industries was to blame for the impoverishment of developing nations and when import-substitution policies first began to be widely adopted in Latin America.

By labeling Tôrres as an economic nationalist, his biographers miss an important historical development: the intellectual and political process by which economic nationalism came to be narrowly construed as necessarily pro-industrialization and the way in which this definition has come to be naturalized. Before the particular conjuncture of economic, political and intellectual forces which led to the development drive of the 1930s, it was not a given that the quest for a modern economic nationhood must be circumscribed by indigenous development, industrialization and urbanization. At the turn of the century, when Tôrres was formulating his economic policies, the prevalent model was the classical one, based on the idea of comparative advantage, which would then predicate an international division of labor. Even Friedrich List’s theories of national

⁶² Skidmore, 122.

⁶³ Ibid.

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economics, dating from the mid-nineteenth century, did not advocate protectionism in general, but aimed it primarily at infant industries instead.⁶⁴ Furthermore, List specifically advocated the improvement of agriculture for developing nations through free trade with richer nations as the first step towards economic development, only turning to infant industry protection when the economy is advanced enough to manufacture for itself⁶⁵. Thus, Tôrres' economic nationalism, his rejection of industrial protectionism and his support for an agrarian Brazil are largely in line with the dominant model of Western economics of the time.⁶⁶

Where he departs from orthodoxy is in his refusal to consider trade a source of wealth and his rejection of speculative capital, which he considers a distraction from the real work of agricultural production and a conduit for the colonial exploitation of the nation.⁶⁷ In this view, he departs too from earlier Brazilian political economists who considered the question of agricultural reform, such as Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho and Luís dos Santos Vilhena, had suggested many of the same things Tôrres was to advocate several generations earlier in the early eighteenth century, with Vilhena even suggesting social reforms like ending slavery and redistributing land⁶⁸. The difference between Tôrres and these intellectual antecedents was the focus of the latter on the colonial relationship and the idea that increasing Brazilian productivity was ultimately predicated on the assumption of colonial trade. In rejecting the assumption of trade-driven demand, Tôrres' agrarianism, though consistent with Brazil's comparative advantage in the

⁶⁴ Friedrich List, *The Natural System of Political Economy (1837)*, trans. W. O. Henderson, London: F. Cass, 1983, passim.

⁶⁵ List explicitly rejects the idea that protectionism can ever actually aid agriculture, a position Tôrres echoes. *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶⁶ Tôrres speaks admiringly of the orthodox French economist of his day, Leroy Beaulieu. *Ibid.*, 105.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁶⁸ J.H Galloway, "Agricultural Reform and the Enlightenment in Late Colonial Brazil," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Oct. 1979, 763-779.

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international division of labor, is internally oriented and a departure from both international and Brazilian intellectual predecessors.

What allows Tôrres to maintain this convoluted and distorted version of orthodox economics discursively is his focus on the nation: he is not bound by the logical strictures of the abstract prescriptions of orthodox political economy. Indeed, classical economics, unheeding of the particularities of national reality, *demand* the sorts of manipulations Tôrres carries out if it is to be relevant to a national sociology of Brazil.⁶⁹

While the surprisingly detailed legal, political and economic solutions Tôrres outlined in his journalistic works seem almost technical in their erudition and abstraction, it would be a mistake to neglect the affective quality of Tôrres' corpus. The emotional core of these works and what lent his ideas cohesion and force was his intensely felt and unique, almost mystical vision of Brazilian nationalism. This ethos is exemplified by a remarkable poem entitled *Le Tablier du Forgeron* (The Blacksmith's Apron), ostensibly a retelling of an episode from Firdawsi's *Shahnama*, the Persian Book of Kings.⁷⁰ In this particular section of the epic, the thousand-year reign of the evil Arab king Zuhák is finally challenged by a rebellion instigated by the blacksmith Kávah⁷¹. Kávah raises his leather apron as the standard of his force and pledges allegiance to Faridún, the man prophesied to defeat Zuhák. In Tôrres' retelling, the protagonist is the wise sage Zirek, who, in the original epic, came forward and interpreted Zuhák's prophetic dream of his

⁶⁹ Tôrres notes that the philosophy of economic individualism (*sic*) formulated by Adam Smith and classical economics was a product of old-established societies where the national spirit had taken root, and was therefore inapplicable to new transplants like Brazil without sufficient modifications. Alberto Tôrres, *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, 95.

⁷⁰ *Gazeta de Notícias*, Rio de Janeiro, August 22, 1910. Reproduced in Barreto, 102-105.

⁷¹ Firdawsi, *The Shah-namah of Fardusi*, trans. Alexander Rogers, London: Chapman and Hall, 1907, 30-47.

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own defeat. Tôrres describes how Zuhák's corrupt nation, whose ornate flag is "the mendacious symbol of the crimes of a court" falls under the onslaught of "the rebel artisans." Zirek, who reads "the infinite in the alphabet of the stars," looks calmly beyond the tumult of the battle to a glorious future where "destiny...will be able to lead well the good crowd, beloved of Eden, towards the other Paradise." In short, it is a future where "man finds the goal of his steps: America." Tôrres describes the land in sensuous, loving detail—a vision of tropical America, of Brazil in fact, as a veritable paradise. Yet, this land is more than a mere repository of riches waiting to be plundered. As Tôrres warns, in the voice of Zirek:

A whole treasure of goods and happiness is spread out
In this temple of love and fraternity:
One must leave outside, upon entry, the sandals
Of former hatreds and old prejudices.

...The oracle of progress
Is to find peace, joy and confidence
Under the poor flag of Kaoueh the blacksmith.

America is thus a new paradise where the hatreds and prejudices, the bloody wars of the Old World can be left behind.⁷² More than that, it is a place where the oracle of progress demands that one destroys the "extinct nation," represented by Zuhák's regime. Man in America must build instead a true nation, a nation like the one that rose behind Kávah's leadership. Such a nation would be so potent that it would transform the modest apron of the blacksmith into a proud flag.⁷³ The analogy with Brazil's situation, as Tôrres saw it, is clear: though Brazil possessed the trappings of a legitimate nation, like the ornate flag

⁷² These lines echo almost exactly Dante's lines describing the entry to Paradise. I owe this observation to Mauricio Tenorio.

⁷³ In Persian iconography, Kávah's apron or the *derafsh-e-kaviani*, is also known as the glorious banner of Iran. The nationalistic sentiment is clearly present in Firdawsi's epic, which is careful to emphasize the Arabic (i.e. foreign) origin of the evil king Zuhák.

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of Zuhák, these symbols of nationhood could not replace a true, organic nationalism. To become a true nation and fulfill the promise symbolized by Kávah's flag, Brazil had to tear itself free from its colonial past and European ancestry and embrace its American heritage, to see and know itself for what it was. Again, we hear the echo of a call for a national sociology, this time expressed in the idiom of emotion and patriotism, not in the dry diagnostic language of a social critic.

Just as Tôrres' thought reflected in large part the prevalent economic thinking of the era, reading his work within the social and intellectual context *within* Brazil reveals the extent to which he echoed the preoccupations of his compatriots. Consider the urban landscape of Brazil in Torres's day: we imagine promenades in a European style, with men and women dressed in the fashions of England and France ambling along; cafes where young men and women of letters discuss their works, almost invariably imitations or emulations of the writings of Europeans, quite often written in French.⁷⁴ After the expensive urban renewal of Rio de Janeiro, where parts of the old colonial city were demolished to make room for a wide, geometric sweeping central avenue, the capital itself became a South American Paris.⁷⁵ This is, in short, "a civilization of ostentatious cities and of clothing," as Torres dismissively described it.⁷⁶

Away from these fashionable areas, the cities teem with a steadily increasing flow of immigrants: the Port of Rio alone saw 31,156 immigrants landing in 1907, a flow that

⁷⁴ See Skidmore's descriptions of the Europeanization of Brazilian life, particularly among intellectual circles.

⁷⁵ Jeffrey Needell, *A tropical belle époque: elite culture and society in turn-of-the-century Rio de Janeiro*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

⁷⁶ Tôrres 1978, 15.

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increased to 72,970 new immigrants arriving in 1911.⁷⁷ The drain on public coffers is naturally correspondingly large. Indeed, of the total of 133,616 immigrants that Brazil welcomed in 1911, the government provided aid to 55,595 people, apart from the ongoing costs of maintaining 38 colonial centers.⁷⁸

The marks of the new immigrants are everywhere, in street signs written in every language, in flourishing restaurants serving non-Brazilian food. It is not the immigrants who adapt, but the Brazilians themselves who yield their customs, willingly, to the newcomers. In Rio, the journalist Paulo Barreto, writing as João do Rio, applies the following litmus test:

The stomach and the tongue are always the surest bases of observation...Among one hundred foreigners living in Rio, one will find perhaps ten that would tolerate a certain preparation called "dried meat," our national dish. Among one hundred Brazilians, one will find not one that does not enjoy Hispanic, Italian, Portuguese or German dishes. There are foreigners who can pass their entire existence here without speaking Portuguese. The Brazilian is truly in awe of speaking foreign tongues. I met...blacks speaking English and English, it seems to me, is a minor colony of Rio...But everybody speaks French.⁷⁹

The city, with its obviously foreign mien, is the symbol of a more ominous, less visible and deeper penetration of foreign influence. The credit-houses, banks, railways lie largely in foreign hands. Brazil has become the battleground of various foreign companies, playing out imperial rivalries while the people can only watch.⁸⁰ Paranoid

⁷⁷ *The South American Journal and Brazil and River Plate Mail*. March 1, 1913. The figures were obtained from the "the official organization, which is called the "Direction-General of Population," which was instituted in 1907, and is entrusted with the regulations and location of immigrants desirous of settling in Brazil..."

⁷⁸ "Brazilian Industrial Development." *The South American Journal and Brazil and River Plate Mail*. February 8, 1913.

⁷⁹ Paulo Barreto (João do Rio), *Vida Vertiginosa*, Rio de Janeiro: H. Garnier, Livreiro-Editor, 1911, 22.

⁸⁰ The British reaction to the meteoric success of the Farquhar Syndicate, a Canadian-American enterprise, was couched in terms of national defeat. See Simon Hanson, "The Farquhar Syndicate in South America," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, August 1937.

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rumors of foreign companies taking over entire industries circulate.⁸¹ Even the constitution represents, as Tôrres described it in *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, a combination of French thought, the English parliamentary system and the US federal structure.

The pace of change in the cities is also dizzying. Barreto documents his Rio existence in the aptly titled *Vida Vertiginosa*. In the opening chapter, entitled “*A era do Automovel*,” he describes the distance between the technological city, obsessed with grandeur, and the modest countryside:

Thanks to the automobile, the countryside dies— the countryside, the trees, the cascades, the pretty stretches of nature. We pass as a ray, with our spectacles smoky from the dust...We do not have anymore *la naturaleza*...Nature recoils, humiliated. In compensation, we have palaces, lofty palaces born of the smoke of gasoline of our first vehicles and the fever of the great consumes us.⁸²

Barreto then goes on to condemn Rio, still imbricated in its colonial origins and driven by monetary profit, as a city without the capacity for firm beliefs. As he puts it, “Rio is a city without opinions, without political, social or artistic convictions, ridiculing without reason, enthusiastic when there is even less cause, and systematically oppositionistic, like a destructive child.”⁸³ The city thus stands for nothing— it is promiscuous in its beliefs and holds no fixed ideologies, despite being the seat of the nation and of the new Republic. It is, in short, an ideologically empty capital for a hollowed out nation.

The excessive foreign influence or, more politely, the cosmopolitanism that was both embodied and symbolized by Brazil's cities was also intimately linked to the

⁸¹ *The South American Journal and Brazil and River Plate Mail*. February 28, 1913. In this episode, the paper reported that: “[a] statement had been made in the press that a foreign syndicate is endeavouring to purchase all the cocoa estates in the State of Bahia. The Government was urged to oppose the sale.”

⁸² Barreto (João do Rio), 8..

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 19.

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perception of its decadence. Tôrres' characterization of the city as parasite, as something that drained the nation to feed the world, thus reflected the intellectual *zeitgeist*:⁸⁴

Ports, towns, roads, rail, navigable rivers, are always instruments transit, not always instruments of exchange... [I]n the life of a vast country like Brazil, someone leaving the Rio de Janeiro in any direction will find vast areas exhausted; immense treasures sacked; and little evidence of any compensation paid, any repairs to the real productivity or the value of the soil for that huge capital extorted from the land.⁸⁵

In reaction, Brazilian intellectuals began to turn away from the city, an increasingly alien space, in search of a 'purer,' 'authentic' Brazil. This repulsion at the urban landscape translated in various ways into a growing interest in non-urban Brazil as a matrix of nationhood.

The most emblematic and profound expression of such an intellectual enterprise was Euclides da Cunha's path-breaking novel, *Os Sertões*. Published in 1902, his account of the Canudos campaign, the first moral test of the new Republic, showed rare sympathy with not only the inhabitants of Brazil's frontiers but its environment too. The work brought Brazil's hinterland squarely into the national consciousness; moreover, Cunha casts the hinterland and its people as the true matrix of Brazil. In a remarkable footnote to the third edition, in which Cunha defends his statement that it was "the very core of our nationality, the bedrock of our race, which was being attacked at Canudos," he wrote:

The bedrock...This locution suggests an eloquent simile. The truth of the matter is, our formation [is] like that of a block of a granite...Whoever climbs a granite hillock will encounter the most diverse constituents...Down beneath, however, when the surface layer has been removed, will be found a nucleus of hard solid rock. The elements, which on the surface are scattered and mixed in a highly

⁸⁴ Richard Morse notices this trend of diagnosing cities as parasites upon the body politic across Latin America during this period. See Richard Morse, "Cities as people," *Rethinking the Latin American City*, eds. Richard Morse and Jorge Hardoy, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992, 12.

⁸⁵ Tôrres, *O Problema Nacional Brasileiro*, 94.

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diversified manner—for the reason that the exposed soil retains even the foreign matter brought in by the winds—are here, down below, rendered firm and resistant, with their proportions stabilized. And so it is, the deeper he goes, the closer the observer will come to the definite matrix of the locality in question. Precisely the same thing happens with respect to race, as we leave the cities of the seaboard for the villages of the backland.⁸⁶

This opposition between the “cities of the seaboard” and the “villages of the backland” was the basis for a conceptual re-imagining of Brazilian national geography. Tôrres’ particular innovation was to extend this project of a new national geography into economic discourse. The cartography of these two *fluminense* authors, however, is essentially the same: the true Brazil, the “bedrock,” lies not in the cities but in the villages, in non-urban space. Thus, Tôrres’ agrarianism, a troubling intellectual throwback to his many biographers, is very much apropos to his time and another expression of the same intellectual project Cunha pursued.

In another sense too, Euclides da Cunha and Alberto Tôrres are very much intellectual siblings. This is in their preoccupation with the need for a national sociology, a call that would be taken up with great success by the modernist generation merely a decade later.⁸⁷ As Dain Borges put it, *Os Sertões* “is in a sense the foundation of critical and passionate inquiries into Brazilian national identity.”⁸⁸ Tôrres, with his passionate

⁸⁶ Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands* (Os Sertões), trans. Samuel Putnam, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944, 481.

⁸⁷ For a wonderful analysis of how this national sociology, in the vein of Tôrres and the *modernistas*, became the basis for a scientific sociology as embodied by the São Paulo school of sociology, see Richard Morse, “Manchester Economics and Paulista Sociology,” *Manchester and São Paulo: Problems of Rapid Urban Growth*, John D. Wirth and Robert L. Jones, eds., Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978. Indeed, Morse’s argument that the sort of bottom-up foundation of national sociology that the *modernista* poets had to provide to prepare the ground for a scientific and abstract discipline of social science in São Paulo essentially mirrors Tôrres’ own arguments for the need for a national sociology before considering the problem of political economy in Brazil.

⁸⁸ Dain Borges, “Euclides da Cunha’s View of Brazil’s Fractured Identity,” *Brazil in the Making: Facets of National Identity*, Carmen Nava and Ludwig Lauerhass Jr., eds., New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006, 29.

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exhortations to understand the nation and to refound the notion of nationalism, certainly shared in this pursuit.

The isomorphism between the thinking of da Cunha and Tôrres signaled a common epistemological framework. Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos notes that Cunha and those he influenced, including Tôrres, ushered in a new epistemological mode into Brazilian life that replaced the “methodological individualism” of the Second Empire.⁸⁹ These authors marked the transition from a mode of thought that assigned primacy to the individual actor as the principle force behind socio-historical developments towards an abstract method of theorization about collective phenomena.⁹⁰ Indeed, one way to interpret Tôrres’ hatred for the “tyranny of individualism” is in this light— as a marker of this shift in historical thinking where the “great man” was no longer the object of either unquestioned admiration or the only vessel via which historical progress could be achieved, but something to be treated with caution, if not downright hostility. Tôrres placed his trust instead in abstract institutions, designed specifically to contain the ambitions of any single individual and end personalistic politics.

This new approach to historical and sociological thinking had certain consequences. As Santos goes on to note:

In conformity with the new approach, politics in Brazil was the material of the decision between two potentialities of the country: one, industrialized, economically autonomous and politically independent and sovereign; the other, monocultural, economically dependent and politically colonized.⁹¹

It was not merely a clear choice between an industrialized, modern, autonomous Brazil and its opposite. Industrialization in that moment was still dependent upon foreign capital,

⁸⁹ Wanderley Guilherme dos Santos, *Ordem burguesa e liberalismo politico*, São Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1978, 44.

⁹⁰ Nísia Trindade Lima, *Um sertão chamado Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro: IUPERJ, c1999, 28.

⁹¹ Santos, 44..

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and was associated with denationalization and neo-colonialism. Modernization carried with it strong connotations of foreignness, thus posing a risk to the survival of an “essential” *brasilidade*. On the other hand, modernization as Europeanization of Brazilian society also signified whiteness and racial whitening— an attractive proposition for many Brazilians of the time.

The two poles of the dichotomy between “the two potentialities of the country” were considerably more complicated, and far less clearly delineated, than Santos seems to imply. Nevertheless, Santos’ schematic does point to the true relationship between Cunha and Tôrres. The oppositional form of thinking that characterized both Tôrres’ and Cunha’s work reflected an underlying preoccupation with the perception of the two potentialities of Brazil. Indeed, this is the fundamental source of similitude between the thinking of the two authors— the anxious, even pessimistic, sense that their country stood at the brink of a historical precipice, the proverbial point of no return.

Though the burden of a pregnant future lay heavy on both their shoulders, Cunha’s work is suffused with a sense of fatalism, even defeat. He is prescient, but ambivalently so: “We are condemned to civilization. Either we shall progress or we shall perish. So much is certain, and our choice is clear.”⁹² Destroying Canudos, a symbol of un-modern, non-European, non-urban Brazil, was inevitable, part of “the natural order of things.”⁹³ Cunha’s belief in social Darwinist theories of the evolution of civilization and in scientific racism made any other outcome impossible. Yet, he was still left with the niggling conviction that, inevitable though the path towards modernization was, in taking

⁹² Cunha, 54. Borges comments on this sense of imminent change in Cunha’s work, noting the frequent use of the words “transformation” and its synonyms, “metamorphosis,” “transmutation” and “transfiguration” in *Os Sertões*. Borges, 39.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 161.

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it, Brazil was sacrificing what made it fundamentally unique— the basis of its nationhood, in fact. Ultimately, however, the subordination of the nation to the city, and all it stood for, was unstoppable.

Tôrres, unencumbered by the deterministic theories of social Darwinism and scientific racism, faced no such dilemma. He was confident that not only was the rural, agrarian landscape the bedrock of the Brazilian nation but that it could still form the basis for a viable future. Unlike Cunha's *sertão*, an extreme, wild, unchangeable environment, the rural world of Tôrres' imagination was capable of a form of limited modernization through scientific agriculture and the education of the rural citizenry— the very measures he attempted to undertake as Governor.

Despite this difference in their attitude towards the future, both Cunha and Tôrres saw themselves as witnesses to a world in peril, a world that was in danger of disappearing but was nonetheless manifestly *there* in their present. Euclides da Cunha goes so far as to call this world the apparition of an already dead society,⁹⁴ but he cannot deny the continuing practice of a culture and the vitality and political relevance of many of the features of a life far removed from the civilization of Brazil's cities. In this context, Tôrres' voluminous writings on Brazilian agrarianism are hardly anachronistic. They are rather a response— and hardly entirely unique at that, considering the *zeitgeist*— to a rapidly changing environment. The question then arises: why has Tôrres come to be seen as such an anachronistic thinker?

⁹⁴ Ibid.

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To answer this question, we must turn to the beginnings of the process by which Tôrres has been remembered, or, more accurately, appropriated.⁹⁵ Here, the writings of Oliviera Vianna prove to be most revealing. While Vianna was certainly not Tôrres' only famous disciple—the Jacobinist writer Antonio Tôrres also counted himself among Tôrres' followers—Vianna's prominent position in the Vargas administration and his undeniable influence on later conservative thought in Brazil ensured that Tôrres remained intellectually and politically relevant long after his death. Furthermore, the tensions between Vianna's theories and Tôrres' beliefs reflected in many ways the ambivalent value assigned then and now to Tôrres' ideas in Brazilian society. The current controversies swirling around Vianna, who is seen as the intellectual father of Brazilian authoritarianism, have also affected the ways in which Tôrres is remembered. Vianna is therefore Tôrres' most challenging and interesting popularizer.

Francisco José de Oliveira Vianna's influence—as an historian, public intellectual and statesman—in the 1920s and 1930s in Brazil is hard to overstate. His published volumes ran into several editions. He served as a legal consultant to the Ministry of Labor in the Vargas regime after the revolution of 1930 and rose to head the Ministry of Accounts in the *Estado Novo*. As Jeffrey Needell puts it, “Vianna was therefore a key source of the thinking and legislation that triumphed after the Revolution

⁹⁵ Tôrres seems to have been misappropriated quite radically and unfortunately. For example, the *Sociedade de Amigos de Alberto Tôrres* was soon to be known as a virulently xenophobic and anti-semitic group, opposing all forms of immigration, particularly those of Jews, on very different grounds than those on which Tôrres originally criticized the policy of promoting immigrant labor at the cost of employment for native, often non-white, Brazilians. See Jeffrey Lesser, “Immigration and Shifting Concepts of National Identity in Brazil during the Vargas Era,” *Luso-Brazilian Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2, Winter 1994, 23-44. As has already been noted above, the Integralists also attempted to ally themselves with him, with little appreciation for his ideas beyond a naïve, willfully fascist, “blood-and-soil” interpretation of his nationalism (Costa, 246). In this light, Vianna also seems to represent the most sympathetic of his popularizers, if only because he had both the advantage of personal contact and an actual respect for Tôrres' corpus.

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of 1930, which ended Brazil's first Republican era."⁹⁶ As such, his discussion of Tôrres carried great weight and presumably reached a wider audience than the popularizing work of his less famous peers.⁹⁷

Vianna's relationship to Tôrres was more complicated than a simple one of disciple to mentor. Certainly, he greatly admired the elder statesman and even believed in the project Tôrres had delineated in general terms. In a private letter written to Tôrres in 1915, Vianna affirmed his commitment thus:

Your Excellency asks me to help in "the work of legitimizing this people, foreign in spirit and alienated in character, giving it an ideal for direction and organization." On this score, to the extent possible, your Excellency may believe, I will act with decided enthusiasm and sincerity. All depends on the opportunities that are opened to me to discuss the nationalist program of which your Excellency is the greatest founder here.⁹⁸

Writing years later in a preface for Alcides Gentil's hagiographic tribute to Tôrres, an indexed book summarizing all of Tôrres' ideas, Vianna displayed a certain unwillingness to consider himself an orthodox *torrista*. Speaking of the group that had formed around Tôrres before his death— consisting of Gentil, Saboia Lima, Porfirio Netto, Antonio Tôrres, Carlos Pontes, Mendonça Pinto and Vianna himself— he noted that barring Gentil, who remained the orthodox member of the group, all the others, including himself,

⁹⁶ Jeffrey Needell, "History, Race and the State in the thought of Oliveira Viana," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, February 1995, 2.

⁹⁷ Please note that the object of this paper is not to discuss Vianna's body of work- his basic positions are delineated above for clarity. Only those ideas from Vianna's vast corpus that bear direct relevance to the analysis of Tôrres are explicated at length. Needell 1995, cited above, provides a recent English-language review. A collection of essays written for a conference on his work provides an excellent range of interpretations: See João Quartim de Moraes, Elide Rugai Bastos, eds., *O Pensamento de Oliveira Vianna*, Campinas : Editora da Unicamp, 1993.) See especially Jose Murilho Carvalho's essay for the collection. Vianna's work is also touched on in such reviews of Brazilian intellectual history as João Cruz Costa's *History of Ideas in Brazil*. For an especially vitriolic but closely argued condemnation of Vianna, see Rodrigues's works on Brazilian historians and historiography: Jose Honorio Rodrigues, *História da história do Brasil*, vol. 2 pt. 2, *A metafísica do Latinfúndio: o ultra-reacionário Oliveira Viana*, São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional, 1979-1988.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Needell 1995, 10.

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deviated from Tôrres' teaching.⁹⁹ He goes on to describe the group's weekly meetings thus: "On Mondays, it was Tôrres, as a rule, who spoke; we listened, limiting ourselves, once in a while, to taking advantage of the opportunity, albeit rare, of intervening with an aside."¹⁰⁰ In the gentle reproach in his tone, it seems that Vianna had wished to interrupt and perhaps to contradict Tôrres more often than he did.

Nevertheless, Vianna considered Tôrres' work relevant to the challenge facing the *modernista* generation, which found itself disillusioned and dissatisfied with the Republic. That is, Vianna's appropriation of Tôrres' work was not merely a transparent attempt at building legitimacy for his own ideas by capitalizing upon his mentor's reputation for unimpeachable integrity and sense of public service. Vianna obviously harbored a sense of genuine affiliation, even kinship, with Tôrres' oeuvre. Thus, for example, the opening chapter of Vianna's 1930 work, *Problemas de Política Objectiva*, uses Tôrres' thought in an attempt to shed fresh light on the problem of constitutional revision. The essay, published around the time Vianna served as a consultant on a commission under the Vargas regime to revise the constitution, appears to be almost an early blueprint for the architecture of the *Estado Novo*. Vianna accords Tôrres remarkable foresight in raising the problems which had come to define his generation: specifically, the sense that the Republican constitution was a document that was at odds with the reality of Brazilian social and political life, where the partisan politics of the day had produced a situation of near anarchy.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Oliveira Vianna, "Á Guiza de Prefacio" in Alcides Gentil, *As Ideias de Alberto Torres*, São Paulo: Companhia editora nacional, 1932, vi.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Oliveira Vianna, 1947, 25. Even as early 1924, in *A Margem Da Historia Da Republica*, the seminal book that marked the coming of age of the *modernista* generation, Vianna had begun to elaborate these ideas. See his article on the idealism of the constitution in *À margem da história da República*, ed. Vicente Licínio Cardoso, vol. 2, Brasília-Distrito Federal: Universidade de Brasília, c1981.

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Here and elsewhere in his writings, however, Vianna distorts Tôrres' work.¹⁰² Tôrres' scheme for the reorganization of the Brazilian polity depended on an organic nationhood that would subordinate individual interests. A centralized state, that combined corporatist representation with limited avenues for electoral politics, was largely intended to combat the divisive influences of a federal structure that Tôrres considered historically unavoidable, and of unbridled democratic partisan politics. The state also had an important role in nurturing this organic nationhood and, in its ideal form, it was thus a reflection and an instrument of the nation, but not the repository of nationhood. Vianna, rather than emphasizing the development of the organic nationhood that was so critical to Tôrres' original work, focuses instead on the proto-corporatist flavor in Tôrres' theories. In Vianna's scheme, a strong, authoritarian statehood replaces the organic nationhood Tôrres advocated. One could argue that this was merely the pragmatic translation of what, in Tôrres' work, is a vague, somewhat optimistic, even mystical notion of nationhood. Nevertheless, the shift in focus imputes a far more authoritarian bent of government to Tôrres than he himself— given his explicit repudiation of authoritarianism— might have been comfortable with. This subtle difference in Tôrres' original work and Vianna's appropriation of his ideas has been obscured, allowing Jose Murilho Carvalho, among others, to draw a genealogical line from Tôrres to Vianna. Given Vianna's stigmatized place in post-dictatorship Brazilian history, one can see how this may hinder a critical engagement with Tôrres' ideas.¹⁰³

¹⁰² See Rodrigues 1988, 231, for specific instances of Vianna's misrepresentations.

¹⁰³ Vianna, often characterized as the father of Brazilian authoritarianism and undoubtedly a racist thinker, was for a long time shrouded by the silence of liberal historians. A recent revival in interest, fuelled by the desire to understand the roots of Brazil's twentieth century experience with dictatorships, has often been rather shame-faced. Carvalho, for example, after a long essay excavating Vianna and his utopian vision, wryly consigns him to the fiery depths of hell again (1993).

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If Vianna was willing to resurrect Tôrres to obtain his blessing for his schema of a revamped Brazilian state, he is silent on the two other most important elements of Tôrres' thought. These are Tôrres' views on race, and his agrarianism. The former were in direct contravention to Vianna's own racist sociology— it is only natural that he does not acknowledge the contradictory theories of his erstwhile mentor. The latter, however, is a more interesting and revealing omission, given that Vianna's early works dealt explicitly and at great length with the question of ruralism.

His first work *Populações Meridionaes* (1921) represented the first part of a series of historical enquiries into Brazilian society, the conclusions of which formed the platform upon which Vianna built his prescriptions for a new Brazilian state. In the preface, Vianna writes:

I intentionally limited the field of my investigations to the rural population...All my concern is, for now, to establish and define the characterization of the interior. Matrices of nationality, it is of them, of their spirit, their diligence, their human affluence that the cities of the hinterland or of the coast live and grow and develop. Its influence— silent, obscure, subterrenean today— is, in the past, principally in our first three centuries, powerful, incontestable and decisive.¹⁰⁴

Vianna, like Tôrres before him, shares the conviction that the rural world is the matrix of Brazilian nationhood. However, its position vis-à-vis chronological time has changed: the rural world lives on now only as a “quiet, obscure, subterranean influence,” expressed through the instincts, predispositions and character of the urban population. Its interest in the present lies only as a reflection of history, an object lesson in the past, by which to understand the present national situation as the result of a process of historical evolution.

This point becomes especially clear when we consider that Vianna emphasized the historical nature of his analysis and project:

¹⁰⁴ Oliveira Vianna, *Populações Meridionaes*, São Paulo: Companhia editoria nacional, 1938, xxv.

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I undertook then a work, arid at times, at times full of ineffable enchantment: to investigate in the dust of our past the seeds of our current ideas, the first dawn of our national psyche. The past lives within us, latent, obscure, in the cells of our subconscious. It is that which drives us still today, with its invisible, yet inevitable and fatal, influence.¹⁰⁵

His project is thus conceived as a kind of exorcism of the past through its revelation by historical analysis, an effort to dilute the fatal, invisible and subconscious nature of its influence. In identifying this past as the rural world, Vianna is not merely denying the possibility of a Brazilian future articulated, as Tôrres would have wished, in a rural, agrarian world; he is, to some extent, questioning even the normative value of such a project.

Vianna was certainly sympathetic of the rural world of the past: in the patriarchal relations of the pre-Abolition *fazenda* and the associated rural aristocracy, Vianna saw a model of social order and a reflection of his firmly-held belief in racial hierarchies. It was also, however, the site of Brazil's long history of racial miscegenation, the original sin, in his view, that condemned Brazil to insufficient progress. The archetypal rural *matuto*, the subject of *Populações Meridionaes*, is fatally flawed, a deficient, even degenerate type. Whatever its normative value, rural Brazil was the site of nostalgia, not activism: Tôrres' ideas of revitalization of the rural world through land distribution, scientific agriculture, free and not slave labor and rural education were unthinkable, not least because they contradicted Vianna's racist assumptions. Mostly, however, Vianna was writing *after* the moment that Tôrres and Cunha had been a part of, the moment of two potential Brazils. In *Pequenos Estudos do Psychologia Social* (1921), Vianna even signals this shift. It is represented for him by a change in the norm for the ambitions of the nation's elite, from

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., xvi.

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being *fazendeiros* to being bureaucrats, a migration away from the rural world. As Vianna put it, "It seems like nothing; it is, however, a revolution."¹⁰⁶

It was, indeed, a revolution. In the generational transition from Tôrres to Vianna, there had emerged a consensus among Brazil's intellectuals that the rural world, as a vision of the future of Brazil, was dead. It existed only as the past, as the pre-modern. In this context, Tôrres' agrarian program is indeed anachronistic— but for Vianna's time, not his own, a distinction historians have missed. In doing so, they have also missed this process by which the rural world was dislocated in chronological time from the realm of the present and the future, to the realm of the past. Whether it was the inexorable and centripetal pressures of capitalism that consolidated this consensus, or some other force, remains an open and important question. In noting this shift in intellectual currents, intriguing counter-factual questions for the study of Brazilian developmentalism also spring to mind.¹⁰⁷ What would the course of Brazilian development have been if the rural world had continued to hold sway as an imaginable future among the elite? Would the pattern of Brazilian development have been so urban-centric? Would urbanization have occurred at the same breathtaking pace in the twentieth century? Whatever the answers may be, in examining Alberto Tôrres, an important transitional moment in Brazilian intellectual history is uncovered.

Tôrres' influence in Brazilian political life is evident, although often unacknowledged. In mounting an immanent critique of his social context through a self-

¹⁰⁶ Oliveira Vianna, *Pequenos estudos de psicologia social*, São Paulo: Companhia editora nacional, 1942, 26.

¹⁰⁷ For a provocative view on the use and importance of counter-factual questions in history, see John H. Coatsworth, "Counterfactual Mexicos," *History Compass*, 2006, 176–180.

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consciously nationalistic sociology, in taking on the mantle of nationalistic thinking, Tôrres was part of a global milieu of thinkers in colonial and post-colonial countries who profoundly impacted the course of their nations' histories.¹⁰⁸ Today, as McLain notes, Brazilians learn Portuguese in the classroom, their nation is called Brazil instead of the "United States of Brazil"— all suggestions Tôrres himself made. However, Tôrres' legacy is perhaps most revealing and important in the negative, in its absence in Brazil's history. The silence surrounding Tôrres' agrarianism, achieved by dismissing him as anachronistic, is a silencing of an alternative path of developmentalism. Tôrres' work is testament to a moment in Brazil's history when, at least in the realm of imagination, another road may have been taken.

¹⁰⁸ Many of these thinkers, from Theodore Roosevelt in the USA to Romesh Chunder Dutt in India, were also agrarianists. It is provocative to think of Tôrres' place in this global matrix of nostalgia for the impending loss of an agrarian way of life and the urgency of nationalist thought.

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