

...as if it were one of them: Almirante Aragão

ALMEIDA, Anderson da Silva ...as if it were one of them: Almirante Aragão. Memories, silences and resentments in times of dictatorship and democracy. Rio de Janeiro: Eduff, 2017.

Felipe Garzón Serna *

In 1996, Anderson da Silva Almeida entered the boarding school of the Naval Fusilier Corps of Brazil, where he would later compose the team of musicians in the same institution as an interpreter for Bombardino.

Parallel to his career as a sailor and musician, Anderson da Silva Almeida graduated in History with the Catholic University of Salvador, Bahia; and later he advanced his specialization, master's and doctorate in History at the Federal University Fluminense UFF where he stood out in 2012, with the Revealed Memories prize of the National Archive for his master's dissertation that would give rise to the book *"All rudder to port: sailors and civil - military dictatorship in Brazil: from the 1964 rebellion to the amnesty."*¹.

In the year 2010, Anderson da Silva would have left the marina to get a scholarship to study at the UFF doctorate, and this book is the result of this process. *"... as if it were one of them: Almirante Aragão. Memories, silences and resentments in times of dictatorship and democracy"*, magnificent historical biography where the author makes clear the motivations generated at the intersection of his careers as a sailor and as a historian.

The central theme of the research, which gave rise to this book, focuses on the life of one of the characters fallen in historical anonymity on account of the turbulent political and social dynamics experienced in Brazil in the second half of the 20th century, specifically the events that led to the military civil coup of 1964 that overthrew the democratically constituted government of João Goulart, thus consolidating a dictatorship that would extend until 1985.

In the book, the author contextualizes the reader (be it national or foreign, sociologist or historian) not only at the particular juncture of the life of the commander of the Naval

* Master's student at the Graduate Program in History at the Federal University of Alagoas (PPGH/UFAL). Concentration area: Power, Culture and Society. Research line: Political Cultures, Representations, Discourses and Narratives.

¹ ALMEIDA, Anderson da Silva. *All rudder to port: sailors and civil - military dictatorship in Brazil: from the 1964 rebellion to the amnesty*. Rio de Janeiro: National Archives, 2012.

Rifle Corps in those days of the coup, but also the territorial, historical context, social and political of Brazil and, even of the Latin American region, during much of the 20th century.

The story of admiral Cândido da Costa Aragão is the story of a man protagonist of an era marked by the bleak droughts in the Northeast hinterland and subsequent migrations of its inhabitants to the important cities of the country such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro: as well as witness of the consequences of the Cold War in the political and social scene of Latin America, the stigma and persecution of everything that was related to the increasingly indeterminate communist danger; He also experienced racism and inequalities within the hierarchical structure of traditional institutions of the Brazilian nation.

Aragão arrived at the marina in Rio de Janeiro in the 1920s in these circumstances: Northeast of Paraíba, poor, black, probably a descendant of enslaved Africans, had left the hinterland fleeing hunger with his family. He entered the navy ranks quite young as a private in the lowest position of the institutional hierarchy, and with perseverance, discipline and decades of service he was appointed Commander of the Naval Rifle Corps of Brazil, in 1963, during the government of President João Goulart. It is the only time in the history of that institution that a soldier makes a career passing through all levels from the lowest to the highest, from apprentice to admiral, commander of the entire body of naval riflemen.

He would carry forever the marks of his origin both on his skin and in his memory. On the way to commander, Aragão made friends and enemies within a situation increasingly influenced by the Cold War and, by the increasing involvement of the military in the national and international political dimension.

According to Almeida:

Aragão's sympathy for some politicians ported during the 1950s also placed him in the discourse of his adversaries, like a dangerous communist, hence the nickname "red admiral" disclosed by his opponents. (ALMEIDA, 2017, p. 105)

In that way, his name was becoming uncomfortable among the circle of senior naval officers and several times they tried to remove him from office under accusations of insubordination, misbehavior, moral incapacity and other defamations such as womanizer, non-religious and addicted for gambling.

With the missile crisis in Cuba, in the year 1961, the political positions at regional, national and international level became increasingly radicalized and likewise the consciousness of Aragão was manifesting itself more and more clearly. The gold test took

place in March 1964 when he refused to comply with the order to suppress a revolt of sailors that took place in the Metallurgists Union of Guanabara, in Rio de Janeiro, after the arbitrary detention of some members of the Association of Sailors and Naval Fusiliers, a group that sought to improve the living conditions of sailors.

Instead of suppressing the rioters as ordered, Aragão decided to listen to them. And the confidence of President Goulart in Aragão was so great that he ended up personally assuming negotiations with the Association of Sailors and Naval Fusiliers, decreeing the release of its members who had been prisoners.

By that gesture, Aragão was lifted on the shoulders by the strikers sailors in triumph, which aroused a feeling of indignation and scandal among the naval aristocracy. The act of Aragão and President Goulart was considered intolerable for those sectors of society and state institutions that became enthusiastic about the military coup on April 1, 1964.

Few know that at that time Aragão and the body of naval riflemen loyal to him and President “Jango” were ready to take up arms and resist the blow to death to protect the nation, as stipulated in the oaths that sailors and military assume. But the authoritarianism machine would not reverse. The whole world was immersed in a transcontinental war against Soviet communism and Brazil paid the price. Aragão became one of the exiles along with many other military, politicians, journalists, trade unionists and student leaders procured by the military repression machine.

At that time a long exile would begin for Aragão that lasted for 14 years, during which time he went through different countries, experiencing in each of them events marked of political importance in Uruguay, in Chile during the death of Salvador Allende, the fall of Peronism in Argentina, the carnation revolution in Portugal, the struggle of North Vietnam in war against the United States, Algeria and its efforts to shake off French colonial rule, and also passing through Switzerland, France and Venezuela.

In those places that Cândido da Costa Aragão visited during his exile, he met various experiences of socialist organization and struggle, while suffering the persecution orchestrated by the repressive machine of the military dictatorship in Brazil against the exiles and that he was leaving dead in the I walk along it.

In that process he was looking for allies where he arrived, working hand in hand with the socialist and communist parties in the countries he toured, dealing with spies and infiltrators within the exiled groups, planning the armed struggle in Brazil in the framework of a revolution socialist on a global scale, designing plans for an eventual agrarian reform in Brazil, as well as the nationalization of wealth and banks, advocating from abroad for a

general amnesty for political prisoners in their country, learning about guerrilla warfare and on subversion in North Vietnam and Algeria, and making efforts to try to unite all the left-wing military in Latin America in the same war block to fight against US imperialism.

However, none of those plans would come true. Aragão was required by the authorities in each station he was doing during his exile, and the permanent spies and surveillance caused the discontinuity of his actions and the historical conditions were not given to achieve those purposes.

Aragão would return to Brazil in 1979 without glories or receptions, without being expected even by the Brazilian political left, and in addition to this being almost immediately imprisoned having stepped on national territory, despite the amnesty that had just been granted to political prisoners and exiles.

Aragão would not enjoy full freedom until 1981, and would be dealing in the last years of his life with the frustration of the armed struggle that was not possible to do, and with the presidential order that never came to take up arms and resist the coup. Until the last consequences. Aragão would die completely invisible in 1998, forgotten by the navy, without protocol honors. His painting was removed from the historical album where all the commanders of the Naval Rifle Corps of Brazil appear, and the role he exercised during the days before and after the coup of 1964 remains silenced by the institutionality.

The present work is a sample of the struggles for memories of the past that are immersed in disputes over the power of the present. It is also breaking the preconception that tends to qualify the military as incapable of historical conscience and revealing that within the armed institutions there was also an internal struggle of soldiers, sailors and officers plunged in anonymity and that they remained faithful to President João Goulart in the juncture of the military coup of 1964 in Brazil.

Admiral Cândido da Costa Aragão has his place in history regardless of the places of official memory, in the non-places of the persecuted, of those who were forced to be forgotten by institutional memories, excluded from the album of photos, defamed as outcasts that bother historical reality.

