

BOOK REVIEW: BRAZILLIAN MACHIAVELLIANISMS

BAGNO, Sandra; MONTEIRO, Rodrigo Bentes (Org.). *Maquiavel no Brasil: dos descobrimentos ao século XXI*. Rio de Janeiro: Editora FGV, 2015, 304 pág.

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ABSTRACT

This is a review of the book *Maquiavel no Brasil: dos descobrimentos ao século XXI* ("Machiavelli in Brazil: from the Discoveries to the 21st century" (own translation)) (2015), a compilation of ten articles whose objective is to "represent one of the facets of Luso-Brazilian Machiavellianism." This book review describes these works and assesses their contribution to the study of the reception of Machiavelli's thought or sign in Brazil.

KEYWORDS: Brazil, Reception, Machiavellianism, Anti-Machiavellianism.

Although *The Prince* is one of the most (re)edited philosophical works in Brazil since the 1930s, there have been few studies on the reception of Machiavelli's thought in the country, its political uses, and interpretative lines. Until recently, the only relevant precedent in the form of a book chapter was "As leituras de *O Príncipe* no Brasil" ("Readings of The Prince in Brazil"), part of Arnaldo Cortina's book called '*O príncipe*' de Maquiavel e seus leitores: uma investigação sobre o processo de leitura ("Machiavelli's *The Prince* and its readers: an investigation of the reading process") (2000, pp. 240-255). In this work, the author briefly discusses four readings of Machiavelli conducted in Brazil between 1931 and 1980: those of Octavio de Faria (1931), Lauro Escorel (1958)¹, Afonso Arinos de Melo Franco (1978), and Marcílio Marques Moreira (1979). As part of a semiotics exercise, Cortina did not intend to exhaust the topic.

Within the framework of specialized journals, however, there has been a growing interest in the form and content of Machiavellianism dissemination in Brazil since the mid-2000s, especially in the fields of history, languages and literature, even though the number of such studies is only a fraction of the total research on Machiavelli's thought itself, which mainly comes from the faculties of philosophy and social sciences. Nevertheless, the excellent article by Rafael Salatini, "Notas sobre a maquiavelística brasileira (1931-2007)" ("Notes on Brazilian Machiavellianism 1931-2007"), published in the journal *Discurso* (2011,

¹ The work dates from 1958, but Cortina refers to the 1979 Universidade de Brasília edition.

pp. 329-359), is perhaps the most comprehensive and in-depth work conducted to date on the transformations in Brazilian Machiavellian readings.

In this context of scarce studies, the book *Maquiavel no Brasil: dos descobrimentos ao século XXI* (2015) holds great relevance. Its editors, Rodrigo Bentes Monteiro, history professor at the Universidade Federal Fluminense, and Sandra Bagno, languages and literature professor at the Università degli studi di Padova, are perhaps the authors in their respective fields who have published the most on the subject in recent years. This work compiles investigations by eight historians and two specialists in languages, literature, and translation aiming at “representing one of the facets of Luso-Brazilian Machiavellianism”, such as that of a Machiavelli that almost no one could read, since the first Brazilian editions of *The Prince* date back to 1933, but that would be “implicitly and extensively associated, in the Lusophone linguistic and cultural consciousness, with concepts such as simulation/dissimulation” (2015, p. 10). This presentation indeed sets the tone for the book, which focuses on the association of Machiavelli with the general theme of (dis)simulation (in a somewhat indiscriminating manner in some chapters).

The publication constitutes a component of the international project *Machiavellism and machiavellismi nella tradizione politica occidentale* (“Machiavellism and Machiavellisms in the Western Political Tradition” (own translation)), coordinated by Artemio Enzo Baldini, professor at the University of Turin, who signs the preface of the book. Developed between 2007 and 2013 as part of the preparations for the 500th anniversary of the compounding of *The Prince* (1513), the project involved arranging meetings, seminars, and lectures in the United States, Brazil, and Europe that prompted dozens of researchers to reflect on the fortune of Machiavelli’s work in their respective countries². In Brazil, the developments of the initiative resulted in carrying out the colloquium “Dissimulated Machiavelli. Political-cultural heterodoxies in the Luso world”, hosted at the Universidade Federal Fluminense (2011). It was coordinated by the book developers, together with Ângela Maria Barreto Xavier, professor at the Universidade de Lisboa, and Giuseppe Marcocci, professor from the Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa. Additionally, articles from participants were published in the inaugural issue of the journal *7 Mares* (n.1, v. 1, 2012) and *Tempo* (v. 20, 2014)³.

² The seminars and publications involved Brazil, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Poland, England, the Netherlands, the United States, Romania and Turkey totaled 28 “research units”. The data of this international project can be checked on the platform <http://hypermachiavellism.net> (Accessed on 12 December, 2018).

³ The initiative was linked to research projects of Professor Ronaldo Vainfas, *Linguagens da intolerância: religião, raça e política no mundo ibérico do Antigo Regime*, and that of Professor Ângela Barreto Xavier, *O governo dos*

As a reflection of this set of activities and important academic exchanges, we have the first book focused on the interface between Machiavellianism and Brazil. Beyond the presentation, preface, and introduction, the core of the work is divided into three parts (“Empires”, “Princes”, and “Writings”), introduced by comments from Professors Rodrigo Monteiro and Silvia Patuzzi, from Universidade Federal Fluminense, relating a passage from Machiavelli to an image and the content of the following chapters. In the end, the three divisions of the book do not constitute a chronological investigation or even a “national history” under a Machiavellian bias. Instead, they seek clues for readings, cultural references, and influences of Machiavelli on characters and historical events, Brazilian translations, and editions of his work (2015, “Introduction”, p. 47).

In the preface, entitled “Maquiavelismo e maquiavelismos” (“Machiavellism and Machiavellisms”), Enzo Baldini goes through some of the main episodes that marked *The Prince* and its bad reputation in Europe – from its publication and censorship to its political instrumentalizations made circumstantially. Baldini also delves into the republican readings of Pocock (1975) and Skinner (1981). In the 20th and 21st centuries, the professor points out the change in the general conditions of the circulation of *The Prince* in various countries and the astonishing proliferation of its decontextualized use in multiple areas of social life, from marketing to US military activities. The text serves as an introduction to the general lines of the homonymous project (*Machiavellismo e machiavellismi...*). Regarding Brazil particularly, Baldini describes the ambiguity of the noun “Machiavellism” in Portuguese dictionaries since the 17th century and relies on the conclusions of Sandra Bagno's works⁴.

Within “Maquiavel brasileiro” (Brazilian Machiavelli), book introduction, Rodrigo Bentes Monteiro seeks to trace a genealogy of Brazilian Machiavellian interpretations. While he builds upon the investigation done almost twenty years earlier by Arnaldo Cortina (2000), he reproduces the core of Rafael Salatini’s contributions (2011): Monteiro adopts an analytical approach to monographic studies and divides them implicitly into two phases: an essayistic monograph phase (1931 to the mid-1980s) and an academic research phase (mid-1980s to 2007). In the first phase, he includes Octávio de Faria’s, Lauro

outros: imaginários políticos no império português (1496–1961) (Portugal, FCT). Available at: <http://governodosoutros.wordpress.com>. Accessed on 10 December 2018.

⁴ Cf. specially: BAGNO, 2008, p. 129-150. The term in Portuguese is *maquiavelismo*, which refers both to Machiavelli's thought and to the caricature that was made of him. Something similar happened in English with the term “Machiavellism”, that have experienced ambiguous use. In Portuguese, this problematic term can be avoided in the use of adjectives by distinguishing what is *maquiaveliano* (related to Machiavelli) from what is *maquiavélico* (that has been imputed to Machiavelli by his critics). In English, the double meaning of “Machiavellian” remains (Cf. NEDERMAN, “Niccolò Machiavelli”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019).

Escorel's, and Joacil de Brito Pereira's works. In the second, he includes important works written by Luiz A. Hebeche (1988), Newton Bignotto (1991), José Nedel (1996), Edmundo Fernandes Dias, Arnaldo Cortina (2000), Maria Lídia Rodrigo (2002), and Patrícia Fontoura Aranovich (2007).

It is true that Monteiro complements the analysis with regard to some works and adds to the list of authors the articles by Sandra Bagno, - which are subsequent to Salatini's time frame -, in addition to mentioning the existence of the 2014 book *Machiavelo en España y Lationamérica del siglo XVI al XX* ("Machiavelli in Spain and Latin America: From the 16th to the 21st century" (own translation)), whose analysis is not developed. But it must be recognized that the author's construction overlooks a significant contribution of Salatini's article: the axis of reasoning that makes identifiable a consistent critical accumulation of Machiavellian readings in Brazil from certain theoretical problems posed and reviewed by interpreters between 1931 and 2007. Furthermore, Monteiro misses the opportunity to update this philosophical genealogy, as he does not consider works published between 2007 and 2015. Perhaps, if the book is reissued, this aspect may be reconsidered.

"Impérios" (Empires), first part of the book, comprises three articles. In "Construindo um império à sombra de Maquiavel" (Building an empire in the shadow of Machiavelli) (2015, p. 57-80), Giuseppe Marcocci argues against a certain tradition that rejected, for religious reasons, the idea of the reception of Machiavelli's thought in Portugal. He contends that "for a proper understanding of the dynamics of the construction of the Portuguese empire, especially in the first half of the 16th century, one must take into account the shadow of Machiavelli's ideas and works" (2015, p. 59). To support his argument, the author proposes a periodization of the circulation of Machiavellian ideas in Portugal based on the "Portuguese 'imperial' literature".

Whether in an effort to reconcile Machiavelli with the Christian faith, to find parallels between the Roman and the Portuguese empires (such as the desire for glory) or to attest to the Roman heritage of the Portuguese, he states that, in this first phase, the central question concerns the "link between religion and civil value in Ancient Rome" and the main work under discussion is the *Discorsi*. However, when the Portuguese kingdom itself becomes an "empire without its own crown" due to the Iberian Union in the late 16th century and throughout the 17th century, there is an explicit ban on the publication of *Discorsi* by the Castilian Inquisition. The work of censorship effectively erases references to the Romans' religion, and Tacitus is used to disguise Machiavelli in the realm of Roman history. The discussions now focus on the government practice using *The Prince* as the base text. Marcocci's chapter presents sophisticated theses on the reception of Machiavelli's thought in Portugal, supported by a rich bibliography and he succeed in demonstrating the continuity of Machiavellian ideas among Portuguese

scholars, even though the contours of this continuity change with historical circumstances, agents, and interests involved.

In “Dissimular para expandir as conquistas: o império ultramarino português em Damião de Góis” (Dissimulate to expand conquests: the Portuguese overseas empire in Damião de Góis) (2015, p. 81-104), Rui Luis Rodrigues argues that simulation and dissimulation practices are “plural behaviors embedded in the social practices of the 16th century” (2015, p. 99). In this context, Damião de Góis (1502-1574), a nobleman, friend of King João III, and secretary of the Antwerp *feitoria*, would represent an exemplary synthesis of Portuguese humanism. In his service to the crown, the author of *Fides, religio moresque Aethiopum* (“Faith, religion, and customs of the Ethiopians” (own translation)) (1540) engaged in constant dissimulation and employed elements of Erasmus’s thought without abandoning the “reasons of state”. Rodrigues contends that in Damião de Góis, some typical elements of Machiavelli’s negative reputation are not present, such as subordinating religion to political interests, although some Machiavellian traits can still be identified in him. Seen in these terms, he argues that the 16th-century context emphasized a plurality of types of action, even within acts of perfidy.

Moving on to “Um príncipe cristão e dissimulado: D. Duarte e o negócio do Brasil” (A Christian and disingenuous prince: D. Duarte and the business of Brazil) (2015, p. 105-129), Gustavo Kelly de Almeida recounts D. Duarte de Bragança (1605-1649) story and strategies, a prince imprisoned by the Habsburg kings, to participate in international debates about the “future of the Bragança dynasty and overseas possessions like Brazil” (2015, p. 125). Similar to the previous text, the central character serves as a model of a Christian policy that is not indifferent to games of appearance and power.

In the book’s second part, “Príncipes” (Princes), three other articles are included: “Maquiavel no Brasil holandês. Gaspar Barleus, João Maurício de Nassau e o príncipe colonial” (Machiavelli in Dutch Brazil. Gaspar Barleus, João Maurício de Nassau and the colonial prince) (p. 133-155) by Arthur Weststeijn; “Um vice-rei que lia Maquiavel? Uma aproximação ao governo do conde de Óbidos no Brasil” (Machiavelli in Dutch Brazil. Gaspar Barleus, João Maurício de Nassau and the colonial prince) (p. 157-178) by Vinícius Dantas; and “Catilinária mineira: o discurso da revolta de 1720 em Vila Rica” (Catilinária from Minas Gerais: the discourse of the 1720 revolt in Vila Rica) (p. 179-221) by Rodrigo Bentes Monteiro.

Weststeijn, like Marcocci for the Portuguese, proposes that “the Dutch expansion’s intellectual background is still a virtually unexplored territory”. His contribution is an analysis of Gaspar Barleus’ expressions. Barleus is a humanist poet and philosophy professor at the Athenaeum Illustre in Amsterdam, in defense of Maurício de Nassau’s colonial legacy between 1637 and 1644, a time when competition between the Portuguese and Dutch empires was prominent. According to Barleus's 1633

speech, *Dissertatio de bono principe, adversus N. Machiavelli Florentini scriptoris suasórias, quas libris suis de Principe, Republica, aliisque insparsit*, the student opposed both *The Prince* and *Discorsi*, creating an intermediate path between the divergent roads of Machiavellian prudence and classical virtue (p. 140). Although he criticized Machiavelli, Barleus still recognized that a good prince would stand out not only for his Christian virtues but also for the artifices employed in times of necessity. Commissioned by Count João Maurício de Nassau to recount his great deeds as governor-general to “justify his government and safeguard his reputation for posterity”, which became *Rerum per octennium in Brasilia* (1647)⁵, Barleus once again constructed the image of a great leader who knew how to employ *amore* and *forza* for the security and glory of the Dutch government in Brazil. Weststeijn skillfully argues that despite the previously mentioned rejection of Machiavellian supposedly immoral parameters, the poet would have transformed the Nassau Netherlands into a new Rome of modernity. Having identified as the driving force of politics the desire for profit which, left to its own devices, would have the power to destroy the civic life of the metropolis, Barleus proposed channeling it outwards, in order to harmonize and support colonialism with the project of maintaining the Dutch republic’s freedom. Thus, like the Christian humanists of his time, Barleus displayed the ambiguity of criticizing Machiavelli while adopting, with modifications, some of his main reasonings.

Vinicius Dantas, in turn, examines the figure of D. Vasco Mascarenhas, the Count of Óbidos, who was appointed camp-master in Bahia (1626), official in the recovery of the captaincy of Pernambuco (1638) and agent in Algarve and Alentejo, until he was named viceroy of the State of India (1652). In this role, he faced a rebellion by conspirators who accused him of not confirming the favors granted by his predecessors, disrespecting nobles from the Council of State, corrupting the royal treasury administration, and being “ineffective in defending the State and preparing the fleets”, which resulted in his deposition (2015, p. 160-161). Óbidos then served in the Lisbon court and later in the Council of State before finally being appointed to Brazilian government (1663).

It did not take long for the Overseas Council to bring accusations against him that mirrored the news of his rule in India: he persecuted opponents, suspended officials and religious figures income, arrested critics on false charges, and misappropriated royal funds. He returned to the kingdom in 1667 and was cleared of all charges, benefiting from the support of his judging friends. Dantas argues that the Count of Óbidos is one of the examples of the 17th-century Portuguese governors who subscribed, through their actions, to Machiavellian premises. He would be a model of Machiavelli's prince, “acting in

⁵ Another version cited is *The history of Brazil under the governorship of Count Johan Maurits of Nassau*, 1613-1644. Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2011.

accordance with his own interests”. Although there are no documentary elements proving that the governor was a reader of Machiavelli, “a brief analysis of the ideas and concepts present in Óbidos' letters allows us to reflect in some way on the 'theoretical' origins of his actions” (2015, p. 171). The elements found in these documents that would indicate a Machiavellian affiliation are political pragmatism, casuistry of values, centralization of power (made possible by the reforms of D. Afonso VI) and the fight with all weapons to maintain government. The author suggests that the connection with Machiavelli did not come from books but from his personal political experience, which led him to the same effective conclusions as the Florentine philosopher.

Rodrigo Bentes Monteiro analyzes the *Discurso histórico e político sobre a sublevação que nas Minas houve no ano de 1720* (“Historical and Political Discourse on the Rebellion that Occurred in the Mines in the Year 1720” (own translation)), attributed to Jesuits José Mascarenhas and Antonio Correia and to D. Pedro Miguel de Almeida Portugal (Count of Assumar) regarding a republican uprising. Monteiro’s objective is “to identify the political culture underlying the text as support for the count’s violent actions and power. Thus, the notes and quotations contained in this *Discurso* may or may not have originated from D. Pedro Miguel's pen or bookshelves” (2015, p. 182-183). Monteiro analyzes works, theses, and articles about the agents, scope, and meanings of both the revolt and the mentioned document. Despite the distinct social context between Machiavelli and the Count of Assumar at the time of writing each mentioned text, *The Prince* and the *Discurso histórico e político*, the author argues that there is a connection between them: D. Pedro Miguel would respond “to a more arbitrary government trend”, marked by dissimulation and supported by arguments from classical authors, such as Tacitus or Cicero.

The author recognizes, however, that the ruse would not be exclusive to the Florentine secretary and that the Count of Assumar would use eclectic sources to defend his interests, illustratively resorting to an environmental determinism anchored in Giovanni Botero (2015, p. 211). However, based on elements of the Count's behavior, Monteiro infers and considers plausible to “suppose the 'Machiavellist' use of the classical tradition conveyed in the *Discurso*, as a way to dissimulate, precisely, the writing of the Florentine Secretary”, using isolated phrases from Cicero, Tacitus, or Sallust. Like Barleus, the authors of the *Discurso histórico e político* would dismiss “Machiavellisms” pejoratively, but would propose actions with a Machiavellian hue.

In the last part of the book, “Escritos” (Writings), we find the chapter “Machado de Assis e seus inspiradores italianos” (Machado de Assis and his Italian inspirers) (2015, p. 225–252), which raises hypotheses about the mention of Machiavelli in the short story *Teoria do medalhão* (The Medalion Theory) (1881) by the great Brazilian writer. Sandra Bagno speculates that if Machado de Assis knew, when writing the story, Francesco de Sanctis's work *Storia della letteratura italiana* (“History of Italian literature” (own

translation)), “the greatest historian of Italian literature in the 19th century”, he would have been exposed to the debates in Italy that distinguished Machiavelli's thought from his caricature. In this case, the use of the expression “*The Prince* by Machiavelli” within the story could suggest, according to the author, the first nuanced interpretation of Machiavelli in Brazilian Portuguese, differentiating the lessons of the work from the profanations of tradition. In strictly historical terms, one can argue the thesis’ fragility as it is based only on speculations. However, the author herself acknowledges that Machado de Assis’s library contained only the 4th edition of De Sanctis’s *Storia* – dated 1890 – nine years after the story’s publication. The text constitutes a creative, honest, and well-founded exercise.

In “Uma versão para o futuro: Vargas, o maquiavélico” (A version for the future: Vargas, the Machiavellian) (p. 253–273), Jorge Ferreira demonstrates how the Machiavellian sign, as popularized from *The Prince*, was instrumentalized by Affonso Henriques to associate his political adversary, Getúlio Vargas, with the representation of a tyrannical and demonic ruler in Brazil. In his pamphlet *Vargas, o maquiavélico* (“Vargas, the Machiavellian”), published in 1961, Henriques describes the leader’s trajectory between 1930 and 1937, attributing to him the marks of moral deviation. The author even associates Vargas’s “physical defects as the origin of his moral deformities”, with the aim of “demolishing Vargas and his legacy” (2015, p. 281): division of the Armed Forces to better control them, self-perpetuation in power with a double game as the “father of the poor” and the “mother of the rich” (i.e., manipulating workers and entrepreneurs), and systematic staging and malice – all this made Vargas a Machiavellian ruler. Henriques adopts the position of liberals identified with the Brazilian National Democratic Union (UDN) to explain how such a nefarious politician, capable of committing any criminal act to stay in power, could be elected by popular vote in 1950, after a government imposed by the coup of 1930. It is precisely at this point that the alleged “Machiavellianism” of Vargas is applied: a man like him could only achieve electoral victory through terrible strategies, his ability to deceive to convince the population, and the division of society to better control it.

In view of this, Ferreira aptly questions whether the characterization of Vargas as a populist character, so repeated in the country's historiography, is not an echo, albeit diffuse, of the demagogic and manipulative image that Affonso Henriques tried to imprint on him based on UDN’s moralist and conservative agenda. Among the merits of the chapter is its contribution to the history of the reception of Machiavelli’s legacy in Brazil, by providing elements about the diffusion of the sign of “Machiavellianism” beyond the restricted terrain of university philosophy and for purposes of *ad hoc* political instrumentalization.

In the last article of the work, “Traduções e traições d’*O Príncipe*. Os paratextos de edições brasileiras no século XXI” (Translations and betrayals of *The Prince*. Paratexts of Brazilian editions in the

21st century) (p. 275-297), Andréia Guerini also presents significant information about the reception of Machiavelli's thought in Brazil. Although her focus is on the publications of *The Prince* in the 21st century, she also discusses the first publications and the editions that followed throughout the previous century, relying on relevant data collected from the blog of translator and researcher Denise Bottmann (updated until October 28, 2012), the UNESCO *Index Translationum* database (starting in 1979), and her own research. She concludes that between the first two printings of the work in 1933 and the beginning of 2013, around 80 translations (reprints, reissues, or new editions) were published (2015, p. 283). Guerini states that for greater accuracy in these numbers, it would still be necessary to compare them with the Library of Congress and International Standard Book Number (ISBN) databases, but they certainly already give researchers some dimension of the work's circulation reach, with an average of a new (re)edition per year since its first publication in Brazil.

The author then analyzes the paratext of six publications from 2001 to 2010, with different translators, concluding that some of them reinforce Machiavelli's negative image, which can be justified "also for marketing reasons (...) [b]ecause a conventional, 'cursed' Machiavelli sells much more than a Machiavelli who observes politics". The author's moderate and well-founded analysis presents only one flaw: Olavo de Carvalho use as an expert and reference authority in Machiavelli interpretation. The self-proclaimed Brazilian philosopher is capable of stating that the practical developments of Machiavelli's work "amount to a proliferation of cancer cells born of the prodigious mental confusion from which they sprouted" (2015, footnote 11, p. 286). Without a doubt, Guerini would be better off opting for one of the esteemed Brazilian or foreign interpreters who did not need to resort to the postulation of "cancer cells" in Machiavellian thought to try to justify, without frankly admitting, their own misunderstanding of the work. Those interpreters refrained from taking the easy path of outright disqualification of the Florentine philosopher, nor have they reinforced stigmas against people who need care.

The overall account of the book reveals that it effectively contributes to filling gaps regarding the reception of Machiavelli in Brazil and the political use of both his ideas and his image. As observed in parts I and II, the defense or use of Machiavellian strategies was frequent, even as Machiavelli himself was condemned, turning him into a consequential sign. Part III offers relevant clues about the creation of the myth of a populist Vargas, as well as one of the reasons for the perpetuation of the Machiavellian version of the Florentine philosopher until our days. Similarly, the last chapter contributes to the understanding of one of the possible reasons for the perpetuation of Machiavelli's diabolical image in common sense to this day. In fact, the analysis of traditional information dissemination mechanisms and the analysis of the quality of their content, in the age of fake news, show their current relevance and importance.

However, it is noticeable that in certain articles Brazil is nothing more than the setting in which European agents discuss from Machiavelli's historical caricature parameters. In this regard, there is more of a history of Portuguese or Dutch imperial ideas that indirectly included Brazil as an object of dispute than a history of Machiavellian ideas in Brazil. In terms of practice, some works approach the author solely through the narrow parallel between the immoral conduct of Portuguese characters and the Machiavellian playbook reproduced without deeper analysis. Although these texts claim that the history of the subjects confirms the spread of malicious acts, making Machiavelli's infamous reputation unjust (as this would be a sign of the times), they still confirm Machiavelli as a "Machiavellian" author, translating his name into the representation of perfidy. Thus, instead of problematizing it, the production of Machiavellianism and anti-Machiavellianism is naturalized.

Bearing these reservations in mind, it is important to emphasize that the diversity of sources and methods of analysis, as well as the richness of reflections, makes the book a compilation of relevant investigations that deserve to be known by those interested in modern and contemporary interpretations of Machiavelli and by a wide range of related subjects discussed.

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SALGUEIRO, Fernanda. BRAZILLIAN MACHIAVELLIANISMS. *Kalagatos*, Fortaleza, vol. 20, n.3, 2023, eK23060, p. 01-11.

Recebido: 06/2023

Aprovado: 08/2023