Portugal's Colonial Complex:

From Colonial Lusotropicalism to Postcolonial Lusophony

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Lusotropicalism in Brazil

Lusotropicalism was the invention of a Brazilian author, Gilberto Freyre. Although he is widely known as the author of *Casa Grande e Senzala* (*The Masters and the Slaves*, in the English translation), he did not explicitly use the concept in that major work of his, written in the 1930s. The underlying notions – that the Portuguese, due to historical and cultural reasons had an inclination towards adaptation and miscegenation – were there, but the term was not branded until the 1950s in books that he wrote on the aftermath of his journeys throughout the Portuguese colonial empire. It is therefore significant to note that we are dealing with a theory that has a complex colonial and postcolonial history: a Brazilian author, involved in the intellectual struggles about the representations of the national identity of his country (independent since the 19th century) proposes an historical interpretation of Brazil's formation in which the Portuguese play a major role; he is then invited to visit the Portuguese colonies in Africa and India and, by means of comparison and analogy between Brazil and Africa, he develops the notion of Lusotropicalism as a special kind of inclination or capacity for miscegenation that the Portuguese were supposed to have; this interpretation is then used by the Portuguese colonial regime to legitimize its claims in Africa against

growing anticolonial pressure as of the late 1950s and until the demise of the colonial and dictatorial regime in the early 1970s.

Freyre's *The Masters and the Slaves* is at the origin of this complex story. His book was part of an on-going dialogue and discussion among Brazilian intellectuals about the origins, the constitution, and the outcome of the Brazilian social formation as a complex society issued from colonialism and slavery. Their views were quite different, following distinct positions. One of the dividing lines was ideological, between left and right and, in the 1930s, also between fascism and communism. Another dividing line was regional, in the sense that authors form the South of Brazil and São Paulo tended to uphold more modernist positions, whereas those from the Northeast – especially in Freyre's home state of Pernambuco, where plantation society had been established in the 16th century – tended to defend more traditionalist positions.

These oppositions – of ideology, region, and social formation – were obvious in the discussions about the consequences of the past colonial formation on contemporary Brazil and its future. Race was one of the focal points of the debates. Some authors claimed that the colonial formation, based at the onset on slavery and plantation economy in the Northeast, was at the root of Brazil's underdevelopment and sharp class/race inequalities. The problem had supposedly been Portugal's feeble economy and demography, its lack of a sophisticated culture and state institutions. Brazil was simply the outcome of a poor and inefficient colonial power. These authors saw Brazil from the point of view of a fast developing, urban, industrial or agro-industrial South, where demography was changing rapidly with immigration, mainly of German, Italian, or Japanese origins, among others, pushing Brazil farther away from its Portuguese "roots". Their views were influenced by the modernist and modernizing rhetoric; they envisaged an *American* Brazil (not a neo-European nation) that would be able to overcome the degrading colonial structures of minority white landowning elite side by side with a majority of poor African and slave descendants.

Now, both camps were trying to overcome the racialist debates of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Neither camp subscribed to the racialist doctrines of Nina Rodrigues and others – or to the view that the existence of a Black majority was the cause of Brazil's underdevelopment. They were actually going beyond the discussions about the viability of Brazil as an independent nation, a viability that had been questioned because of the weight and proportion of poor blacks. They were rather fighting for an interpretation of history and for ways to outline the future, in an environment of economic development, strengthening of the state institutions, and demographic changes with settlement immigration. Freyre's novelty was to propose a positive interpretation of the negative aspects of Portuguese colonization, rescuing those dynamic and contradictory aspects that could account for what was now seen as Brazil's specificity as a miscegenated nation, with a particular composition of cultural contributions from the native indigenous populations, the black slaves, and the Portuguese. I could probably summarize his vision in the vignette of the sexual and patriarchal relation between the white landowner and his black female slave, a relationship of both power and intimacy between the Casa (the Master's House) and the Senzala (the slaves' quarters).

When Freyre wrote *The Masters and the Slaves* Brazil was in the Estado Novo period, an authoritarian regime that promoted a national identity discourse based on the notion that Brazil was a racial democracy, a country where different racial and cultural contributions had met and generated a specific ethos and culture, one of harmony, cordial social relations, joy, music, and hedonism. Freyre said that the type of social and psychological relations that were at play in the plantation society created the contradictory but dynamic system of social intimacy and violence, of negotiation and authority, of sexuality and reproduction between white masters and black slaves and that that system had carried on to become the true dynamic of Brazilian society and its character. One of the reasons for this (and the instances of comparison were, of course, the Hispanic experience in the Americas, one the one hand, and the Anglo-Saxon one in the US, on the other) supposedly was the fact that the Portuguese were already, before arriving in Brazil, the product of a similar process of cultural and racial

miscegenation, particularly with the Arabs, the Jews, and so on. That and Portugal's structural and demographic weakness supposedly contributed to a type of social intimacy with Indians and slaves in Brazil.

Brazilian discussions around Freyre's work followed their own course. Still today Freyre is a symbol that is used differently by different camps. Some will chastise his influence in the ideology of racial democracy that is now seriously challenged by the Black movement and affirmative action policies. Some still look at his contribution as a definer of a Brazilian specificity, in a culturalist sense at least. None, however, truly care about the Lusotropicalist reconstruction of the Portuguese colonial experience in the 20th century. It is important to keep in mind that the Portuguese colonization of Brazil took place in a "different world" than that of the Portuguese colonization of Africa. The former was part of the European expansion to the Americas, the creation of a community that did not yet follow the blueprint of the nation-state. Brazilian independence was achieved by the same people who previously had considered themselves Portuguese or Luso-Brazilian or, more accurately, subjects of the Portuguese Crown and who then built a neo-European nation in the Americas – a white construct that had the "burdensome legacy" of a huge black and slave population. Not surprisingly, Brazil became independent as a monarchy, and its first king was the son of the Portuguese king who had taken refuge in Rio de Janeiro, the new capital of the realm during Napoleon's invasion of Portugal.

Lusotropicalism in Portugal

In Portugal, at the time of the publication of *The Masters and the Slaves* in the 1930s the country was living under Salazar's dictatorship. He had come to power following a military coup in 1926 against the First Republic. The Republic was a progressive, anticlerical regime that in 1910 had overthrown the 800 years old Portuguese monarchy. One of the major reasons for the loss of prestige of the monarchy had been its inability to respond to the British Ultimatum of 1890. In the late 19th century European nations were engaged in the scramble for Africa. Portugal had no economic,

military or demographic power – after the demise of the first and second empires, respectively in India and the East in the 16th and 17th centuries, and in Brazil in the 17th and 18th centuries – to effectively occupy its historical territories in Africa. It was not until Salazar's regime that an actual colonial enterprise in Africa was set up (that is, a colonial *regime*, with proper institutions and knowledge systems). Portugal lived under a dictatorship from 1926 to 1974 and throughout this period the African colonies were to occupy a major and central role not only in the economy but also in the official representations of national identity. How was this done?

The dictatorial regime was able to insert the narrative of modern Colonialism in Africa into a wider narrative about the Discoveries and Portugal's role in European expansion as of the 15th century. All became part of the same: Camões' epic *The Lusiads*, Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea route to India, the colonization of Brazil as the major civilizing success of Portugal, and the 20th century occupation of Angola, Mozambique and so on. They were all part of a national narrative in which discovery, expansion, and colonization played an absolutely central role. This of course became hegemonic and part of people's representations too, not just imposed propaganda.

In the 1920s and 1930s discussions about the colonies were still revolving around racist and racialist discussions. Several studies have confirmed that most anthropologists, historians and intellectuals of the time were obsessed with establishing essentialist distinctions between the Africans and the Portuguese, as well as in establishing internationally that the Portuguese were white, not a mixed or, as it went, "Mediterranean" race. Freyre's ideas would not have been welcomed at all, and indeed they were fought by some important official anthropologists of the time. But this discourse was slowly replaced by one that was fed by an also already existing discourse about the feat of discoveries and expansion as a feat of humanist "globalization" (as we would say today), of evangelization, of expansion of the Catholic Ecumene. Discourses on the inferiority of blacks could be proffered at the same time as discourses on the different way in which the Portuguese had encountered and colonized other peoples – with supposedly less violence, with more miscegenation,

with more dialogue, and in opposition to cruder and more distant ways by other colonial powers. Brazil was already a symbol and a projection of this fantasy.

That is probably why the effective occupation of the African colonies, which took place as of the 1940s and 1950s was done on the basis of different "Constitutions" – i.e., sets of rules for politically administering the populations, based on specific representations of difference and sameness. One the one hand, some territories were classified as not quite colonies. Cape Verde and India were seen as products of an on-going miscegenation, for different reasons. Cape Verde was the outcome of a mix between Portuguese colonials and slaves from the African mainland imported to a deserted archipelago. And India was seen as a civilization in its own right, a civilization that had met another, that of European Christianity. Cape Verdean culture was classified as regional, not as colonial, and its population – its elites – had special rights, one of which was their recruitment as colonial middlemen in the African mainland. Other colonies, like Angola and Mozambique, were clearly seen as African and there a different "constitution" was established. With an economy based on forced labor, people were divided into three legal categories: citizens, i.e. the Portuguese; indigenous or native; and "assimilated". The assimilated were indigenous people who had to undergo a probation period and exams in order to prove that they were Christian, that they dressed in European fashion, that they were monogamous, and that they spoke Portuguese (bear this in mind). They never amounted to more than 1% of the colonial population.

As you may have noticed, the African colonies became "real", important factors for the economy and self-representation of the country precisely at the moment when anticolonial protest started. In Angola, for instance, Portuguese immigration (diverted in part from the illegal fluxes of poor Portuguese to industrialized countries like France and Germany) became significant just when the local African elites were organizing resistance and pro-independence movements, and when other colonial powers were proceeding with decolonization. Internationally, the Portuguese regime underwent huge pressure, from the UN and especially from the Bandung Conference of non-

aligned countries in 1955. The war started in Guinea-Bissau, Angola, and Mozambique in the early 1960s and lasted until the Portuguese dictatorial regime was overthrown in 1974 by young drafted military officers who did not want to go on fighting the colonial wars.

It was at that juncture that, in the 1950s, Freyre was invited by the Minister of the Overseas to visit and write on the colonies. His ideas were already being received and discussed in the stifling intellectual circles of Lisbon. They fitted nicely with the vague humanistic perspectives of the traditional Left, but they fit even more nicely with the regime's growing strategy toward presenting the Portuguese empire as a multiracial and multi-continental nation. Freyre's books on the Portuguese empire [i] were also commentaries on international politics. He considered that the Portuguese could do in Africa what they had done in Brazil and that Lusotropical culture was a form of resistance against both the "barbaric" Soviet communist influence, and the also "barbarian" process of Americanization and capitalist expansion.

The result was that in the early 1960s Freyre's Lusotropicalism – his wider theory about Portuguese-based cultures as cultures of ecumenical expansion and miscegenation – was official in Portugal, in a way that it never was in Brazil. It was taught in the School of Colonial Administration and at the social and political science institutes, and fed into the popular perceptions of the exceptional character of Portuguese colonialism and the absence of racism in such media as film, exhibitions, graphic representations, school books, theme parks and so on. The colonial forced-labour laws were abolished as well as the special statute that excluded indigenous populations from citizenship. All were now legally considered Portuguese, and the colonies were renamed as Provinces. Too late, though.

Lusophony

Post-democracy Portugal had to reconfigure its self-representation and its representation in the international sphere. Three major events took place since 1974 that are important for assessing this change – or lack thereof. The first one was the

dislocation from a country that saw itself as based in the discoveries, the expansion and colonization, to a country reduced to its ex-metropolitan territory and part of the supranational European Union; the second was the flux of migrants from the ex-colonies; and the third was the emergence of a new rhetoric (and reality), namely that of Lusophony and the Portuguese-speaking community, including the new notion of the Portuguese Diaspora.

Contrary to what could have been expected, the Portuguese State did not reconfigure itself as a small European territory, as an Austria or a Denmark, so to speak. Rather, it constructed for itself and the population the image of a bridge or platform of connection between Europe, on the one hand, and Brazil and Africa on the other. It offered both sides a specific type of cultural and historical capital, that of the colonial experience, decontextualized in time and space (that is, with no differentiation between the early colonization of Brazil or the harsh and brutal colonial wars in Africa), and that of a common language. Language became the main symbol, resource and fetish in this reconstruction of identity, and the Portuguese state invested in the creation of a type of Commonwealth, the CPLP, and branded the term Lusophony to define a transnational community of Portuguese speakers. In school books, the expansionist and chauvinistic discourse was replaced by a humanist, universalist, version, but one that has always left untouched the role of Portugal as a center, a point of diffusion. That can be seen, for instance, whenever there is a discussion about Portuguese spelling rules with other Portuguese-speaking countries or in the popular ways of defining the canon of the Portuguese language as that of Portugal and branding other types as subsidiary, as in the word "Brazilian" – especially after the influence of Brazilian pop culture in Portugal, of Brazilian immigration, and of Brazil's demographic and political weight in the CPLP. Simultaneously, the Portuguese state invested in the creation of the notion of a Portuguese Diaspora, making it easier for descendants of Portuguese ancestors to obtain citizenship, while making it more difficult for immigrants. There was actually a move from citizenship laws based on the right of soil to those based on the right of blood.

PostLusotropicalism

Both the Portuguese state and the population had their representations challenged by the flux of migrants that started in the late 1980s and is still going on. These were initially (and still are) from ex-colonies in Africa and then from Brazil and Eastern European countries. The immigration of Africans faced the Portuguese with their own representations of colonial miscegenation, tolerance and exceptionalism. This resulted in a cognitive tension that social scientists have identified in studies on blatant and covert racism: statements on the non-racist character of Portuguese society are hegemonic and are usually justified with the example of Portuguese expansion and colonialism as exceptionally tolerant, in what could be labeled as a form of popular lusotropicalism (and an evidence of how hegemonic that discourse became); but they are confronted with the social exclusion of immigrants, their geographical ascription to the worse neighborhoods, the exploitation of their labor and the difficulties they face when applying for citizenship or to access rights of all sorts.

Cultural competence, especially linguistic, is the idiom through which grievances against immigration are expressed and in which racial remarks are hidden. The importance of cultural and linguistic competence and the covert nature of racism became more explicit in the treatment of Brazilian immigrants, who happen to be mostly white and from the southern states; or in the positive remarks made about the linguistic skills of Eastern European migrants. Discussions in Portugal, whether by state institutions or "the man on the street" revolve around the keyword "integration". When and how (and should they?) will immigrants become "integrated". Speaking Portuguese and accepting local cultural values are the main issues. I cannot avoid but think about how similar "integration" is to colonial "assimilation". The absence of a postcolonial "constitution" allows for the use of the old, colonial one.

The Portuguese State and Portuguese society are now faced for the first time with empire striking back. Most post-democracy narratives are about the Portuguese presence in the world. They are common in TV shows, publications, tourism, and so on.

There are hardly any counter-narratives, representations of the African influence or experience in Portugal. It is as if the Lusotropicalist narrative were about spreading Portuguese cultural products around the world but never about the return journey, about the African and other cultural products *in* Portugal.

This I call postlusotropicalism, playing with the similarity with the notion of post colonialism, as the study of colonial continuations in the present. That is also why one cannot just denounce the colonial in the postcolonial. One should also acknowledge that, for better or worse, the colonial experience did create a common world of reference for many people. What we should do is work on this basic statement and set out to identify the intricate relations between power and emancipation, violence and pleasure in which such a forced commonality became a lived commonality. It is as if we were all still caught in Freyre's erotically charged vignette (because terrifying and pleasurable) describing sexual relations between a Portuguese male slave owner and his female black slave in 16th century Northeastern Brazil. This image still haunts us today, with its contradictions of power and intimacy, connecting the ambiguities of Lusotropicalism with those of Lusophony. That is why I have used the expression "Complex" in the title: both in the sense of "intricate" or "complicated", and in the psychoanalytical sense.

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[i] "O mundo que o português criou" is from a previous period, 1940; "Um Brasileiro em Terras Portuguesas" (1953); "Aventura e Rotina" (n.d.); Some were published in Portugal, such as "Integração Portuguesa nos Trópicos" (1958), translated into several languages; "O Luso e o Trópico" (1961); and expanded reprints of "O Mundo..."