

# 'Interculturality' and Portuguese Legacies in Contemporary World

Dr. Poulami Aich Mukherjee

Assistant Professor, PG Dept. of History & Research Centre, Assumption College Autonomous, Changanacherry, Kerala (India)

## ARTICLE DETAILS

### Article History

Published Online: 16 Nov 2019

### Keywords

Interculturality, Identity, Hegemony, Heritage, Legacy.

### \*Corresponding Author

Email: mepoulami[at]gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

A meaningful encounter between cultures takes place only in an 'intercultural' space which resides in the self-reflexive dimension of all cultural encounters. North of the south and south of the north, an empire with a 'colonial economy', a country that was both the 'source of migrations' and the 'destiny of immigrations', Portugal and Portuguese identity has always been very difficult to define. Being the origin of an empire whose evaluation is still polemic, the Portuguese have been seen in very different ways by their European contemporaries and as well as their colonial 'subjects'. The present study is an attempt to understand Portugal and its encounters with the 20th century India, Brazil and Macao as represented through various tools of Visual Culture as sources of historical understanding. The work elaborates four different aspects of Portuguese legacy and 'interculturality' as case studies of the problem.

## 1. Introduction

A meaningful encounter between cultures takes place only in an 'intercultural' space which resides in the self-reflexive dimension of all cultural encounters. The intercultural occurs in the space between two or more distinct cultures that encounter each other, an area where meaning is translated and difference is negotiated. The intercultural is ultimately a *relation of difference*. It occurs in the space where people with distinct ways of interpreting the world reciprocally negotiate their *otherness*. It engages a wide spectrum of groups with discrete sub-cultures, identities, social positions and rules of operation from associations and professions to communities, ethnicities and nations with varying levels of involvement and uneven degrees of internal coherence. The intercultural does not need a meeting in the same physical space; people may come into contact with ideas, and things that originate in a culture that is not in direct proximity to them. It can be argued that *interculturality* may take place when people come into contact with cultural *otherness*.<sup>i</sup> The responses to this realization may be defensive, adaptive or co-existential but whatever form they assume, intercultural relationships are one of the most dynamic forces driving historical change.

In recent years, the concept of *liminality* could regularly be found in geographical literature and anthropology which may be applicable to the present work more appropriately. This concept was introduced in 1909 by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in his work *Les rites de Passage*, where it referred to a state of 'in between-ness' during such rites.<sup>ii</sup> More precisely, it denoted a category in between 'normal' social categories, which brought about connotations of sacredness, empowerment and comradeship but also of death and darkness. Obviously because of the imaginative power of this, the concept was introduced in other disciplines, one of which was human geography. However, as a result, and even more as a result of the concept surviving the paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism – a shift that implicated that categories lost their meaning and should be approached more critically – the original meaning of the concept has come to

shift and weave. A systematic understanding of this highly complex process calls for interdisciplinary approaches but scholars are often constrained by conventionalized conceptual languages of their discipline and by the incommensurability of frameworks of knowledge.

Most post-colonial and post-modernist formulation of nations-states, certainly those that emerged with the collapse and shrinking of western colonial empires in Asia and Africa, mid twentieth century onwards, necessarily retrospect on imperialism in an attempt to draw out the asymmetrical relationship of interdependence, past and present, between the materially advanced colonizing powers and themselves especially in the former's hegemonic ascendancy. These articulations, discursive and at times engagingly political, contextualize the multidimensional and ever growing complexities within colonial societies in their engagement with the construction of a cohesive political community.

North of the south and south of the north, an empire with a 'colonial economy', a country that was both the 'source of migrations' and the 'destiny of immigrations'<sup>iii</sup>, Portugal and Portuguese identity has always been very difficult to define. Being the origin of an empire whose evaluation is still polemic, the Portuguese have been seen in very different ways by their European contemporaries and as well as their colonial counterparts. The present study is an attempt to understand Portugal and its reflections of interconnectivity during late 20<sup>th</sup> century India, Brazil and Macao as represented through various tools of Visual Culture as sources of historical understanding. The following section of the work deals with four different aspects of Portuguese legacy and 'interculturality' as case studies.

## 2. Case Study 1-Liberation of Goa 1961

Here an attempt has been made to analyse Political Cartoons of 1961-62 on Liberation of Goa when India had to take 'violent measures' to liberate and integrate the Portuguese occupied territories. Nehru was a champion of

pacifism and a strong supporter of the United Nations and led newly independent India (1947-1964). He pioneered the policy of Non-Alignment and co-founded the Non-Alignment Movement of nations professing neutrality between the rival blocs of nations led by the US and the USSR. His aim was to act as an intermediary to bridge the gulf and tensions between the communist states and the Western bloc. Nehru's foreign policy suffered through increasing Chinese assertiveness over border disputes.

Nehru authorized the Indian Army to invade Portuguese controlled Goa in 1961, and then he formally annexed it to India. It increased his popularity in India, but he was criticized by the communist opposition in India for the use of military force. The use of military force against Portugal earned him goodwill amongst the right-wing and far-right groups. The invasion of Goa was closely linked with the 1961 elections to the Lok Sabha. V.K. Krishna Menon, the then Defense Minister aggressively addressed the issue of Indian sovereignty over the Portuguese 'colony' of Goa. On 17 December 1961, Menon and the Indian Army overran Goa, leading to widespread Western condemnation. The invasion also spawned a complex mass of legal issues relating to differences between eastern and western interpretations of United Nations law and jurisdiction.

The political transition of Goa from fascist colonial regime to a liberal democratic political order and for a considerable period the co-existence of essentially contravening ideological and potentially conflictive systems instead of being viewed as dysfunctional aspect or break down of state organization provides a point of departure for comprehending how states come to be constructed and represented in postcolonial societies. Underlying this perspective is the liberal assumption that political institutional encounters are events of mutual incorporation of the other's systemic excellences which favour the sharpening of the essence or potency of one's own political systems and structures. This is at variance with the more cliché representation of Goa as the Rome of the East or a dominantly *Lusotopic* remnant of a society or according the Marxist formulation it is a form created by imperialism to perpetuate its existence in a postcolonial form.

### 3. Case Study 2-Carnation Revolution 1974

The second part of the work is an effort to understand the Carnation Revolution of 1974 in Portugal through the contemporary Political Posters. The Portuguese was the most enduring European empire and the last one to fall. After the end of World War II, Self-Determination Movements spread all over Asia and Africa. Attempting to stop the tide, the dictatorial regime of António de Oliveira Salazar-the New State (1926–74)-renewed its efforts to ensure the continuity of Portugal's African empire. The idea of empire was firmly implanted in national consciousness and served as a main source of national pride. Meanwhile, in Portuguese Africa, resistance against colonial rule intensified from the late 1950s on, culminating in an armed liberation struggle (1961–74), which started in Angola and spread to Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique, leading to the collapse of colonial rule and, in a related process, to the end of dictatorship in Portugal.

The Revolution of 25 April, 1974 brought about deep changes in both internal and external Portuguese politics. Measures considered to be priorities were symbolically conveyed by the "3Ds" slogan "Decolonization, Democracy, Development." The end of the Colonial War became an imperative and more and more frequently crowds cried out on the streets "no more soldiers to the colonies". Negotiations started at once for recognition of the autonomy of the various territories, and the independence of all African former colonies was recognized between by 1975.

For centuries Portuguese culture has basked in the contemplation of its glorious past as pioneer in opening up the frontiers of the Western world. Eduardo Lourenço, one of the most respected analysts of contemporary Portuguese thought argued, 'It was Camoes's sixteenth-century epic poem *Os Lusíadas* that first erected the Portuguese maritime and imperial venture into the founding myth of the nation's identity'.<sup>iv</sup> According to Lourenço, even after the loss of its African colonies in the mid-1970s, Portugal did not suffer a crisis of national identity. Rather, the problem with the nation's self image, as construed in and by its literature, is one of hyper-identity which Vítor Viçoso<sup>v</sup> has paraphrased as 'an obsessive and almost delirious search for differences'. Thus in Lourenço's view, Portugal's sense of being different from other European countries supposedly nourishes and strengthens an almost indestructible national identity. In a similar vein, Onésimo Teotónio Almeida begins an extensive survey of the question of national identity in contemporary Portuguese writing with the following statement: "Portugal's reduction to its European dimension after decolonization did not give rise to the trauma that might have been expected in the country."

It is in the work of historians and sociologists, rather than in the writings of cultural essayists and literary critics, that we find the first refutations of the notion of Portugal's unwavering sense of national identity. In his sound study of Portuguese identity from a political, historical and sociological point of view, the historian José Mattoso affirms: "Widespread until the end of the sixties, the conviction that Portugal possessed a cultural unity and coherence which presumably did not exist in other countries can be demonstrated to be false as to culture in general, especially if one considers not only the literate culture, but also popular culture."<sup>vi</sup>

### 4. Case Study 3: Telenovelas in 20th century Brazil

This section deals with the '*Telenovelas*' which became a central mass ceremony in which compelling images of the nation have been negotiated in Brazil. These images in turn have been deeply shaped by a middle class perspective and by hegemonic forces of Brazilian society. As a result television fiction has contributed to build a new social consensus that in spite of being always challenged was able to sustain social, economic, political and cultural hierarchies in a deeply unequal society. *Telenovelas* contributed to renew and reinforce *hegemonic* values by re-signifying emerging representations in terms of the perspectives of dominant groups. As Martin Barbero notes in a study about Colombian *Telenovelas*, television melodramas frequently incorporate demands from the audience but they also re-signify them in terms of a hegemonic social discourse. In the Brazilian case, television fiction has played a key mediating role, allowing

accommodations in the class alliance of which TV Globo has been an essential part.<sup>vii</sup>

It would be a simplification, never the less, to interpret the role of *Telenovelas* solely in terms of the maintenance of a hegemonic image of the national that reflected the basic interests of the dominant power bloc. In response to the deepening of social and political democratization, *Telenovela* authors and producers incorporated emergent meanings in the fictional plots. As a result, *Telenovelas* have frequently allowed viewers to encounter contradictory and compelling representations that offered new opportunities for the expression and mobilization of oppositional ways of imagining the nation. In interesting ways, television fiction reflected but also gave new meaning to Brazil's recent process of democratization.

Raymond Williams, in particular, offers important analytical tools to overcome traditional functionalist approaches that define culture or media representations as mechanic reflections of society. Williams proposes to replace the concept of 'reflection' by the concept of 'mediation', which designates a more active process in which distinctive realms of social life (i.e. culture, society, media, etc.) are connected but not over-determined. Mediation also designates a dynamic relationship that frequently affects the original meanings exchanged in cultural and communication practices.<sup>viii</sup>

Williams can also help us overcome one of the limitations of Anderson's approach, namely the tendency to conceive of nationhood as a relatively homogenous cultural configuration. Williams insists on the need to recognize the complexity of any culture and the dynamic nature of the inter relations between its parts. This is accomplished by the identification of "dominant," "residual," and "emergent" cultural elements. According to the author, the residual refers to elements of a culture's past that are still active in the present, while the emergent designates new meanings and values that are continually being created.

The works of Jesús Martín-Barbero, in particular, offer valuable analytical tools that will be applied in the analysis that follows. In a path breaking book about communication and cultural practices in Latin America, including popular culture and *Telenovelas*, Martín-Barbero further develops the concepts of hegemony and mediation. By moving the analytical focus from the media to the cultural mediations of everyday life, Martín-Barbero sheds new light on the place of television in Latin American societies.<sup>ix</sup>

In this respect we need to apply these conceptual tools: hegemony, mediation and dominant, residual, emergent to discuss the role of television in the construction of an imagined and compelling sentiment of national identity in Brazil. Based on these assumptions, it is possible to consider television as the most dynamic 'private apparatus of hegemony' in the building of representations about the nation in Brazil. This perspective allows us to consider the television institution no longer as an apparatus that manages one dimensionally the social and ideological reproduction of the existing social order but as a contradictory space where meaning is negotiated and

cultural hegemony created and re-created in the play of mediations.

#### 5. Case Study 4: Cultural Heritage of Macao

This section intends to understand Macao and its cultural heritage. Macao was leased out to Portugal in the 1550s by the Ming Dynasty of China as an entrepôt for foreign trade. Scholars have observed that, during most of its rule, the colonial government was remote from the Chinese population in Macao. In fact, a secret pre-agreement was signed in 1979, in which Portugal and China agreed that Macao was 'Chinese territory under Portuguese administration'. Portugal was basically waiting to return Macao to China before 1999. In 1987 China and Portugal signed an agreement on the handover of Macao. In 1999, following Hong Kong, Macao was reverted back to China as a SAR ruled under the principle of *one country, two systems*.

An attempt has been made to trace the unique process of reconstructing the identity of the Macao, a Special Administrative Region (SAR) and its people after the political resumption to China in 1999, and the political and economic significance of the reconstruction. As in other postcolonial contexts across the globe, identity is an arena of political contest where various discourses that embody re-appropriation of political traditions and legacies criss-cross. The success in reconstructing a postcolonial identity in Macao, in stark contrast to Hong Kong, another Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, has fabricated its relatively smooth reintegration with China and enhanced the legitimacy of the new Macao government.

What makes the case of Macao particularly interesting is that a sense of national identification was not the prime task in the reconstruction of a new Macao identity. Rather, there was a process of incorporating the identities of "the other" through which multiple identity components that push the hybridity, coloniality and historicity of Macao to the forefront are deliberately promoted. In consequence, the growth of nationalism, or more specifically, economic nationalism, was boosted. The advancement of national assimilation in Macao has met little resistance. However, what is intriguing is that the new Macao government consciously strengthens the coloniality inherent in the original identity, and encourages people to take pride in their colonial past.

The case of Macao is unique in showing that the making of a national identity may not be the prime goal of a new regime, and that the regime may not be antagonistic to the features of 'the other'— colonial attributes and local identities — that it has inherited. Rather, the new government has cultivated a hybrid identity, including local, national and international identities, believing that these can advance not only nation building but also the economic goals beneficial to governance. Contrary to common wisdom, the process of identity making is not a clear process of differentiating 'the other' from 'the self' and repressing 'the other' but is instead a process of incorporating the identities of 'the other'.

If identity is a social construction, then it is revealing that in Macau the predominant emphasis in the process of identity construction is on economic and constitutive strategies. Political narratives foster trust in the worth of an identity by promising the people enhancement of their political power through institutions and policies as well as protection from all external enemies. Economic stories promote accounts of interests, arguing that a particular identity advances each member's economic well-being. Constitutive stories endow members of the community with shared identities, as defined by their common religion, race, ethnicity, language, culture, history and so on.

With regard to the role of constitutive stories, scholars such as Cathryn Clayton<sup>x</sup>, Benedict Anderson<sup>xi</sup>, Anthony D. Smith<sup>xii</sup> and Arthur G. Neal<sup>xiii</sup> similarly argue that in the process of identity construction, the past is selectively remembered or forgotten and the hopes and fears of the people are inherited by the newly reconstructed identity. In Macau, the constitutive stories put forward a re-reading of the city's past as peaceful and devoid of conflicts, its place as an international city, and the people's cultural identity as a hybrid of eastern and western cultures. During the process, we see significant reconstruction of Macau's collective memory and the past.

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up we may comment here that to study the intercultural is to study the differences and the difference is not a product of the present. Assumptions and beliefs that have achieved the status of 'taken-for-grantedness' are the outcome of history. They have been instituted by past experiences of peoples or groups. One of the most important arguments for the study of *interculturality* is that it carries substantial intellectual rewards. Perhaps the greatest of them is that it generates new knowledge. It does so because an encounter between different cultures as well as an encounter between the scholar and the object of study located in a distinct culture sets off a phenomenon akin to an act of magic that transforms the stage for all actors. Until the wand of otherness is waved and the familiar fixedness of everyone's culture is thereby dented, people view much of the reality around them-social structure, authority, moral values, notions of taste and beauty, propriety of behaviour as ordinary natural and largely unquestioned 'the way things ought to be'. They see these 'things' as meaningful in themselves. The magic wand exposes these received understandings to be historical, constructed, imagined and conventional prompting creative reflections and innovative inquiries.

## Reference Notes

<sup>i</sup>Rozbicki Michal Jan, *Perspectives on Interculturality*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015, 11-12

<sup>ii</sup>Gennep A. Van, *The Rites of Passage* (trans. M.B. Vizedom & G.L. Caffee), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1960.

<sup>iii</sup>Maria I.B. Baganha, Pedro Go'is, and Pedro T. Pereira, *International Migration from and to Portugal: What do we know and where are we going?* <http://www3.uma.pt/ppereira/Eumi-121.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup>Lourenco, Eduardo, *Chaos and Splendor and Other Essays*, Edited by Carlos Veloso. Dartmouth, MA: Centre for Portuguese Studies and Culture, UMass-Dartmouth, 2002.

<sup>v</sup>Vitor Viçoso, *A máscara e o sonho: Vozes, imagens e símbolosnaficção de Raul Brandão*, Porto: Edições Cosmos, 1999.

<sup>vi</sup>José Mattoso, *A Primeira Tarde Portuguesa*, Lisbon: Revista de Guimarães, 1978.

<sup>vii</sup>Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony*, London: Sage Publishing, 1992, pp.59-61.

<sup>viii</sup>Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1963, p.76.

<sup>ix</sup>Jesús Martín-Barbero, *Communication, Culture and Hegemony*, London: Sage Publishing, 1992, p.64.

<sup>x</sup>Cathryn H. Clayton, *Sovereignty at the Edge: Macau and the Question of Chineseness*, Harvard: East Asian Monographs, 2010.

<sup>xi</sup>Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination*, New York: Verso Books, 2007.

<sup>xii</sup>Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, UK: Polity Press, UK, 2010

<sup>xiii</sup>Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory*, New York: Routledge, 2005.