

Postcolonial Portugal, Postcolonial Goa

A Note on Portuguese Identity and its resonance in Goa and India

From an Indian and more particularly a goan viewpoint it is useful to look at what the articulation of Portuguese identity and nationalism means for contemporary India, Goa and Goans in particular. It might be appropriate to understand postcolonial Goa by first looking at postcolonial India.

Edward Said¹ has shown that Colonialism was premised on Orientalism, i.e. the construction of an Orient which emphasised the Orient as an « other » which is distinct, different and inferior. To emphasise, the inferiority of the Orient was established through the device of essentialising difference – primarily in race and in terms of the universal evolutionary principles between the Occident and the Orient. Said argues that it is precisely such a construction that rationalised and made possible the hegemony of the coloniser on the colonised. Even while Said's work has been criticised, it has been fruitfully used to understanding Indian colonial experience. One such work is that of the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha. Bhabha says that the British effort of educating Indians through the British education system was ostensibly meant to create a class of Indians taking on English opinions, morals and intellect. However Bhabha points out that this led to what he termed as the ambivalent « mimic man », i.e. « one who learns to act English but does not look English nor is accepted as such ». In Bhabha's words « for an Indian to be Anglicised is emphatically not to be English »².

In contrast to the British, the Portuguese had, it seems to me, a different relation to the cultures it conquered. In Goa, the Portuguese emphasised what at some time was termed as the doctrine of the *assimilados* (assimilated). Rather than see difference, the emphasis was on actual and potential absorption of Goa and Goans into Portuguese culture and identity. In a recent article, the Portuguese anthropologist Rosa Maria Perez³ says : « Instead of underlining the cultural difference [Portugal] on the contrary engendered a narcissist lusocentrism, a true nostalgia of a lost paradise – not

1. E. SAID, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1978.

2. See J. MCLEOD, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, Manchester University Press, 2000 : 54.

3. R.M. PEREZ, « Portuguese Orientalism : Some problems on sociological classification », in K.S. METHREW, T.R. DE SOUZA & P. MALENKANDATHIL (eds), *The Portuguese and Socio-Cultural Changes in India : 1500-1800*, Kerala, Meshar, 2001.

so much in the East as in the West - here is its singularity ». Those from Goa who were and experienced assimilation (and they were always only a few) believed and do believe that they were and are Portuguese. In other words for a Goan « to be Lusitanised is to be Portuguese ». At least officially, it was emphatically so. To give you a sense of the contrast from the diasporic Indian community : Goans who settle in the US, Canada, UK, etc., believe they are US or UK citizens of Indian origin, living in a multi-cultural society. It appears to me that people of Goan origin settled in Portugal, see themselves as Portuguese whose origin is incidentally Goan. I am not suggesting that differences such as race or colour were or are absent in Portugal but rather that the myth of the absence of racial discrimination was critical to the project of assimilation and lusitanisation and myths do shape reality to a degree⁴. The results therefore are different from what Fanon has described in *Black Man White Masks*⁵.

Ziauddin Sardar reminds us that « in formulating a response to Islam and the discoveries, the West learned more and developed more of its own self-image than it did of the specific orient it constructed... »⁶. The discovery and the colonies it would seem were and are a critical part of Portugal's self identity. I place a suggestion for consideration : When Portugal wanted to establish a modern image through Expo 98, it chose the Oceans as the central theme, Vasco de Gama as the name of the new bridge and Orient the new station not because Portugal was harking back to the past but rather because Portuguese identity is intimately linked with the discovery and the territories. I am told that in Sarmango's novel *A Jangada de Pedra*, the Iberian peninsula is severed from Europe and floats in the Atlantic towards the New World once colonies of Portugal and Spain. Is this an indication of how the author perceives the distance of Portugal and Spain from Europe and its nearness to its former colonies ? In the domain of Portuguese identity, the doctrine of assimilation and its postcolonial predicament implies a certain type of attachment (or is possessiveness) of the territory it once conquered.

Does what I have termed as an intimate relationship between identity and territory pose difficulty for Portugal to accept and recognise difference ? Sometimes, in the postcolonial context I think it does. The Portuguese Government proposed to commemorate the discoveries through re-creating a voyage that would also dock in Goa and other South India ports. While the Government of India found little difficulty, the suggestion invited strong criticism in Goa and other parts of South India and was eventually called off. The problem lies I think in the fact that only a small minority of Goans experienced assimilation into Portuguese culture, while others experienced difference and at times suppression. The perception in the latter case is that difference was denied and it is not acceptable to come to terms with commemorating an event that is the origin of ones denial. You will pardon me and I would like to share with you a speculation in an entirely different domain at a different level : I wonder if some similar problems of navigating across cultures mark the relationship between Portugal and Brazil.

Allow me to illustrate with a personal experience. When I first visited Portugal in 1999, I understood and still understand little of Portuguese

4. For a discussion critical of lusotropicalism and its role in contemporary Portugal see C. CASTELO, *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo (1933-1961)*, Porto, Edições Afrontamento, 1999.

5. F. FANON, *Black Skins White Masks*, London, Pluto, 1986 (1st 1952).

6. Z. SARDAR, *Orientalism*, Buckingham, Open University Press, 1999 : 54.

culture and language, which as you may know is the lot of the majority of postcolonial Goans. I found it surprising that the year 1961 in Goa's history should be referred to as Goa's invasion rather than Goa's liberation as it is commonly known in the Goa State. Further, using the term Goa's liberation came across as a bit awkward or even offensive to some of my Portuguese friends. During arguments, I felt like saying out loud that Portugal could rather celebrate the fact that Goa was liberated from Dictatorship before the Carnation Revolution. Instead, I chose to listen to legal definitions of liberation as opposed to invasion. A friend of mine from Goa, who had spent the previous two years in Portugal, suggested to me that I would be more sensitive if I eschew both, the terms of « invasion » and « liberation » and use the word *mudança* (i.e. change) to refer to Goa's transition from Portugal into India. This goes to show that assimilation does also engender its own ambivalence – though not of mimic man perhaps. I found the discomfort I experienced with the word invasion quite in contrast to the warm, open and enthusiastic acceptance I received as a Goan. For me it was paradoxical. Over time I have come to think that the disagreement is over cross-cultural differences on the Portuguese relationship between identity and territory.

The roots of the different colonial experiences between Goa and the rest of India may perhaps lie in the different periods during which they were colonised. The British colonised India after the establishment of the theories of race and evolution and the positivistic subject-object dichotomy. The Portuguese came to India during the period of early modernity when evolution and racial doctrines were absent and hence worked with a different cosmology and notion of culture – they attempted to occidentalise (also lusitanise) rather than orientalise the Indian⁷. This pre-enlightenment disposition found a new affirmation after the second world war due to the particularly difficult international situation that the Salazar regime found itself in terms of justifying its colonies⁸.

It is important to look at the postcolonial significance of the different colonialisms. A review of colonialism in Goa would allow us to arrive at an understanding of its fractured postcolonial predicament. This in turn makes possible a critique of Goa colonialism as different from that of the rest of India. More importantly the critique would be based on the inclusion of the experience of early modernity, i.e. that which precedes the enlightenment theories of race and evolution. We have therefore much to learn through an anthropological examination of the relationship that Portugal had and has with its colonies.

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Alito SIQUEIRA

Goa University, Department of Sociology

7. For a discussion on Occidentalism see W.D. MIGNOLO, *Local Histories/Global Designs – Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2000. A more detailed version of the argument for the different colonial experiences of Goa and India may be seen A. SIQUEIRA, *Goa : Between Occidentalism, Orientalism and Beyond*, paper submitted to « Cultural Studies Workshop » of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Birbhum, West Bengal, January 2002, mimeo.

8. See C. CASTELO, *O Modo Português de Estar no Mundo...*, *op. cit.*
