

ACADEMIA | Letters

*“Portugality”: a nothingness that is nothing**

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Eduardo Lourenço underlined a Portuguese hyper-identity due to a deficit of real identity, which tends to compensate on the imaginary level. But that is not why the essayist invoked “Portugality” to justify it, quite the contrary, as he made clear in an interview with RTP (Portuguese public channel), in which he stated that there was no “the” Portuguese, much less “Portugalities”.[2]

The expression “Portugality” seems to have become naturalized. The current President of the Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, for example, regularly uses this expression. It is worth remembering that this was forged in the middle of the Estado Novo (50s-60s of the 20th century) - the Portuguese dictatorship -, when Lusotropicalism developed Gilberto Freyre’s theory (at least in what was appropriated by the regime at the time). The intention was to validate the slogan “Portugal from Minho to Timor”, looking at the idea then in vogue that “Portugal is not a small country”, which wanted the then overseas provinces to be seen by the UN - to which Portugal was trying to adhere - not as autonomous territories, but as an integral part of Portuguese territory (Sousa, 2017; 2021).

This logic was corroborated by the parliamentary speech of the National Assembly, of 1951 (date of the repeal of the Colonial Act), by the introduction of this term in the speeches of the deputies. The idea was to fight the independence movements that were emerging in the former provinces, defending the belonging of these territories to Portugal through their “historical destiny” (Sousa, 2017). In addition to having served as a support to legitimize colonialism, Luso-tropicalism, today embodies the myth of racial tolerance of the Portuguese and even an integrative, ecumenical and universalist nationalism, as noted by historian Cláudia Castelo (2011).

In 2017, in the commemorations of the April 25th Revolution anniversary, the President of the Republic referred to Portugal as the holder of a “patriotic nationalism with a universal

vocation”, an idea that should provoke a strange feeling in Political Science, uniting patriotism with nationalism. On other occasions he added ecumenism. Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (Sousa, 2021), by the way, seems to use the words of António Quadros (*The art of continuing Portuguese*, 1978), who sees “Portugality” in a teleological way. What is dear to a messianic vision, often based on the Fifth Empire and associated with esoteric visions of “Portugality” - an essence that Communication Sciences have the mission to deconstruct. It is not possible to apply the Aristotelian essence/accident pair to “Portugality”, as José Fernandes Fafe did in 1985, in an article in the *Expresso*, although in a sense that, not being that of Aristotle, would have its origins in his metaphysics; “Portugality” would be the essence of Portugal) and the events of Portuguese history (the accident). It is also not possible to attribute the “invention” of “Portugality” to António Sardinha (the greatest reference of Lusitanian Integralism), because Hispanicity, at the time, was hegemonic, and it is also not possible to start from “Azorianity”. of Vitorino Nemésio (1932), to arrive at “Portugality”, as some defend.

“Portugality” as a Lusotropical product is embodied in António Ferronha’s book entitled “Um ideário de Portugalidade as awareness of luso/tropicalidade” (Ferronha, 1969). In the case of Angolans, he called himself “native” trainer of trainers, transmitting through this “catechism” the basic notions of “Portugality”. “Portugality” echoed until the fall of the Estado Novo regime, on April 25, 1974. Then, there was a hiatus in which the word seems to have disappeared from the Portuguese lexicon in formal speeches. It is understood: the break with the previous regime concomitantly represented the break with its ideology, which pontificated the idea of “Portugality” (Sousa, 2017).

Although the term was first printed in 1947, in a brochure by Alfredo Pimenta (*In defense of Portugality*), a friend of Salazar, anti-parliamentary, anti-communist and linked to Lusitanian Integralism, it only entered the dictionary in 1994, by Costa & Melo, Porto Editora, (with a confusing and not very objective explanatory range). Moreover, the term began to “gain shape” with Lusitanian Integralism, particularly in the first series of “Nação Portuguesa”, a magazine published between 1914 and 1938 and directed, among others, by Alberto Monsaraz, António Sardinha and Manuel Murias. The so-called reference dictionaries - New Contemporary Portuguese Language Dictionary, from the Lisbon Academy of Sciences (Casteleiro, 2001) and Houaiss Portuguese Language Dictionary (Houaiss & Vilar, 2002)-, do not have any entry with the word “portugality”. And although Ludwig Wittgenstein has been adept at the idea that meaning is its use, I argue that contextualization is necessary so that there are no misunderstandings.

It is in this context that, in the deaths of former Presidents of the Republic Mário Soares or Jorge Sampaio, the present President of the Republic himself associates them with “Portugality”, despite both having fought against the ideology of the Estado Novo (now understood

as an inverted interculturality, in which we looked at the “other” to reflect ourselves) (Sousa, 2021). The same doesn’t happen when an April captain dies (25th April Revolution is also known as Captain’s Movement), making sense and having coherence, given that the Captains’ Movement ended the dictatorial regime and, consequently, “Portugality”.

Strategic communication, of brands and political communication, has also been responsible for the naturalization of “Portugality”. After all, phrases like “Portugal from Minho to Timor” and “Portugal is not a small country” are circulating, without criticism, in Portuguese society. “Portugality” suggests a nothingness that is really... nothing, to quote Fernando Pessoa’s phrase in relation to myth [”The myth is the nothingness that is everything”].

Historian Miguel Cardina considers it necessary to “de-Portugalize Portugal”, noting that perhaps the country is about to reinvent. So that, he argues it is necessary “that it does not get stuck in a self-colonizing vision that constrains the movement and excludes difference” (2012, p. 207). “Portugality” is, therefore, “a weak song”, as shown by sociologist Moisés Martins (2019).

References

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[2] “Grande Entrevista”/“Great Interview” (RTP), June, 10th 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.rtp.pt/play/p1718/e197923/grande-entrevista> [47’00-47’55]

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