

BOOK REVIEW OF *A INVENÇÃO DO ASSIMILADO. PARADOXOS DO COLONIALISMO EM MOÇAMBIQUE*

RECENSÃO DO LIVRO *A INVENÇÃO DO ASSIMILADO. PARADOXOS DO COLONIALISMO EM MOÇAMBIQUE*

Vítor de Sousa

Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Portugal

Macagno, L. (2019). *A invenção do assimilado. Paradoxos do colonialismo em Moçambique*. Lisboa: Edições Colibri.

The theme of colonialism and its associated paradoxes still influence the dynamics of several former Portuguese colonies, almost 50 years since their independence. The same phenomenon can also be found in the former colonial powers. This is inevitable, suggests Roberto Vecchi (2018), affirming that the colonial past can always be problematic and should never be considered to have lost its contemporary relevance. The power of the associated ideologies and their reuse can profoundly change, or even invert, the ways in which they are evoked. In the case of Mozambique, which declared independence on June 25, 1975, Lorenzo Macagno states that “the colonial paradox continues to challenge us, under the most varied guises and grammars”, in the beginning of his book *A invenção do assimilado. Paradoxos do Colonialismo em Moçambique* (The invention of assimilated. Paradoxes of Colonialism in Mozambique). He tries to answer the question: “in what real or imagined battleground, does its persistent contemporary relevance and resilience reside?” (p. 14).

The author “starts from the assumption that colonialism works as a system of practices and representations and, as such, can be analyzed as a culture” and, perhaps because he is a trained anthropologist, the author studied the phenomenon “investigating what the ‘natives’ think and do that give meaning to this culture”, regardless of their role during the colonial process (n.p.).

To fulfil his research objectives, the author has combined political anthropology with Social History, in pursuit of the research matrix that he has developed over several years, in a dialogue that Michel Cahen¹ says has been “fruitful and successful”, since, “by abandoning the classic thesis that opposes the official policy of assimilation to the concrete policy of discrimination, it demonstrates that there could not be one without the other” (n. p.).

¹ Referenced in the book’s back cover.

The book therefore provides a critical analysis of the history of assimilationism in Portuguese Africanist politics from the late 19th century to the second half of the 20th century, as written in the preface João de Pina Cabral, who guided the author's master's thesis, defended already in 1996, and that gave rise to this book. One of its most innovative aspects "is the attention dedicated to the way in which anthropology has become related to the process of ideological evolution of Portuguese Africanist colonialism" (Cabral, 2019, p. 17).

This is a very welcome addition to the literature, since it reflects a gaze that extends beyond the usual Western research logic. Macagno is an Associate Professor of Anthropology at the Federal University of Paraná (Brazil) and a researcher at Brazil's National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). He has developed research aimed at proposing alternatives to "canonical" views, but which reflects in-depth research, showing that "post-colonial time does not cancel colonial time, although it may recycle it" (Sousa, 2019, p. 263). The book effectively rewrites History, while simultaneously demonstrating that this is a non-linear discipline, retroactively analysing the facts that lie at the heart of dialectical reflection, in the sense of so-called absolute knowledge. This approach is based on Hegel's idea that truth is not static, but instead results from awareness of contradictory moments which are overcome through a dialectical movement towards "absolute" knowledge (Hegel, 2008). To this effect, this book will have obvious utility for students of African History and Colonial History, and also for those interested in the History of Portugal (Cabral, 2019).

According to Macagno, the paradoxes of assimilationism assume various different forms. However, its most evident discursive version can be expressed in a self-contradictory message, as reflected in the statement: "civilise yourselves, assimilate yourselves, but never detribalise yourselves, always remain in your place" (p. 201). The same principle can be found in the slogan "learn to speak and write in Portuguese, incorporate Portuguese habits and customs, but don't aim to become distinguished members of society" (p. 201). This is analogous to messages that produce double-bind situations, as described by the anthropologist Gregory Bateson when classifying certain interpersonal relationships in which, based on certain communication pathologies, one of the participating members is trapped in the twofold coercion that is expressed in the message.

António Ferronha has already drawn attention to this issue in his book, *Ideário de portugalidade. Consciência da luso/tropicalidade* (Ideas of Portugality. Awareness of Luso-tropicality) in which he stressed that in the context of Portugality the future became an evident certainty, since the white person was no longer viewed "as white", nor the black person "as black", since both were "Portugalised in Portuguese-Tropicalism" (Ferronha, 1969, p. 249). Both white and black are "Mestizos of ideas, feelings and action" (Ferronha, 1969, p. 249). But alongside them, "the physiological Mestizo toils and entertains, a tabernacle of the ideas of Portugality, and is more naturally predisposed to serve as a balance between white and black extremism, because he is the offspring of both, without organically pertaining to either" (Ferronha, 1969, p. 249). Ferronha nonetheless recalls that "some prodigal Mestizos preferred to play the game of foreign racism"

(Ferronha, 1969, p. 249). He argued that Mestizos “should flaunt the awareness of their mixed raced identity”, in contrast to the “blackness” propagated by Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor, and should be “a source of positive values of healthy ethnic and cultural balance, rather than hysterical negativism” (Ferronha, 1969, p. 249).

According to Lorenzo Macagno, it was mainly from the 1950s onwards that the concern of Portuguese assimilationism contrasted with the obsession about the supposed dangers of contamination due to miscegenation, as revealed by the racial segregation of apartheid. In late colonial narratives, culture sometimes seems to operate as a kind of “spiritual” fluid, that is capable of transiting through different peoples (Macagno, 2019). In a speech delivered in 1952, in the Centro Associativo dos Negros de Moçambique, Gilberto Freyre condensed this ambiguity as follows: “being Portuguese does not mean being white. Being Portuguese means being Portuguese in one’s heart, spirit and culture. And a Portuguese person may be yellow, red, white, black and always remain a good Portuguese citizen” (Freyre, 1953, pp. 245-246). According to Macagno (2019, p. 202), this means that culture lies in the “heart”, spirit and soul, wherein the body and blood are not decisive instances, in the definition of “Lusitanity” (a subtle way of referring to “Portugality”), although they remain latent, alert, always about to emerge as exclusivist markers. Freyre’s position received widespread praise but was also the target of violent criticism. He stated that the world imagined by the Portuguese could be “the paradise of ‘racial harmony’ that many wanted to find in Brazil, and also the hell of exploitation, segregation and violence that others noted in Portuguese Africa” (Macagno, 2002, p. 102). What was based on the slogan “Portugal from Minho to Timor”, underlined between the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, a period during which the word “portugality” was coined, and the respective rhetoric spread with intensity.

Although Freyre was concerned, in a certain stage of his career, with the issue of miscegenation, this concern was never part, at least at an official level, of the agenda of the assimilationist policy. Although, at some point, miscegenation may have appeared to be a component of a rhetorical strategy, it was never an organically formulated objective, nor was acquisition of assimilated status an indispensable requirement. The cultural question of assimilation broadly displaced the biological question of miscegenation (Macagno, 2019).

Moreover, the Estado Novo’s slogan of “Portugality” gained strength in 1951, as a result of the repeal of the Colonial Act, in which the Portuguese Government began to defend the idea that Portugal would be a single and indivisible entity, from Minho to Timor, where all the colonies would become provinces, identical to the provinces that existed in Portugal itself. The approval of the UN Charter in 1945, that included a declaration on the principles of administration of Non-Self-Governing Territories, may have contributed to the Estado Novo’s change in policy (Sousa, 2017). The Estado Novo was looking for a special status for the “overseas colonies”, that supported the idea that they were part of a single, multiracial nation, even spanning several continents. However, according to Reis Torgal (2009), the legislative changes were purely cosmetic. The expression “colonies” was replaced by “overseas provinces” and the Ministério das Colónias

(Ministry of Colonies) was renamed the Ministério do Ultramar (Ministry of Overseas Territories). In terms of constitutional changes, the Organic Charter of the Portuguese Colonial Empire was substituted by the Organic Law of the Portuguese Overseas Territories (1953), “which ended up affirming the idea of greater solidarity between the overseas provinces and Portugal” (Torgal, 2009, p. 488), based on broader decentralisation, while also extending the powers of the Ministry of Overseas Territories. Construction of the myth of homogeneity occurred at different times, and its justifications were adapted to the moment in question. During the early years of the Estado Novo, the idea was based on the existence of a Portuguese colonial empire, “in which vast territories needed to be illuminated by values and knowledge from the mother country” (Stoer & Cortesão, 1999, p. 58). Following the propagation of liberation movements throughout the world, the Portuguese Government began to defend the idea that Portugal would be a single and indivisible nation, from Minho to Timor, as mentioned above (Sousa, 2017). Due to international pressure and the first threats, in 1961, to the Portuguese presence, the then minister of Overseas Territories, Adriano Moreira, introduced a decree-law that extinguished the “Estatuto do Indígena Português” (Portuguese Indigenous Statute), which determined that those who were previously designated as “second-class Portuguese citizens” (white Portuguese people born in Africa), and even those who were hitherto labelled as ‘indigenous’ persons were all to be considered Portuguese citizens” (Stoer & Cortesão, 1999, p. 59). According to Reis Torgal (2009, p. 489), this was an ingenious solution that was designed to prove that “progress was being made towards ‘assimilation’”, and aimed to counter the criticisms made in relation to the indigenous statute. The wording of the new statute “had the sole purpose, within the “Portuguese tradition”, to respect the ‘private right of populations’ and not exactly to deny ‘citizenship’ to the indigenous peoples”, which should not be confused with “the ability to enjoy and exercise political rights related to the new forms of the organs of sovereignty” (Torgal, 2009, p. 489).

In view of the tensions between “assimilation” and “segregation” as a participant in a gestalt relationship, Lorenzo Macagno has taken a stand. He states that he has adopted a vision based on an overall view, that is sensitive to the paradoxes that underpinned the colonial practices and discourse and highlights an image of a pamphlet reproduced at the end of the final chapter of the book (p. 188), which on one side depicts a Portuguese soldier carrying a shotgun, and a child on the other, and comments that it is “a powerful multiplying metaphor for the colonial oxymoron” (p. 203).

He thus preferred to draw attention to the reciprocally structuring role of the dimensions of “tolerance of the residual space of masking superstructures” and the “violence of the space of revealing structures”, which he justifies with the fact that such a system does not act passively (p. 203). “Therefore, from the place of *praxis*, it would be legitimate to ask: how can we escape from cordial violence or, if we prefer, from violent cordiality? How can we escape from the ‘double bind’?” (203-204). In view of these questions, the place of the analyst is dissipated, since, as he states, it was the Mozambicans themselves who provided the response, throughout the tortuous process of political independence.

Macagno cites Luís de Camões' *Os lusíadas* (The lusiads) as an epigraph in the conclusion of his book, and states that Portuguese colonialism revealed, without any doubt, its "yoke", "iron", "anger" and "hard and strong arm", towards the inhabitants of the east coast of the Indian Ocean. Moving beyond the mythical logic that punctuates Camões' epic tale, Macagno emphasises that History sometimes vanquishes the myth, since the "gentiles" mentioned by the nymph in Canto X (verse 10) of *Os lusíadas*, refused to accept the fate decreed in the poem. In this case, the double bind is to die or surrender. Macagno says that this is a historic rather than a mythical struggle, which pertains to another long and painful chapter in the History of Mozambique.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Vítor de Sousa holds a doctorate degree in Communication Sciences (Intercultural Communication), from the University of Minho, with the thesis *Da 'portugalidade' à lusofonia*. He holds a Master's degree (with specialization in Media Education and graduated in the same field of expertise (specialization in Communications/Information and Journalism). His areas of research include issues around identity, Cultural Studies, Media Education and theories of journalism. He is a researcher at CECS (Communication and Society Research Centre), where he is part of a Cultural Studies group. He is a member of the project "Cultures Past & Present – Memories, cultures and identities: how the past weighs on the present-day intercultural relations in Mozambique and Portugal?" (FCT/ Aga Khan) and of the Museu Virtual da Lusofonia (Virtual Museum of Lusophony); he is also a member of Sopcom (Portuguese Association of Communication Sciences) and ECREA (European Communication Research and Education Association). He has won the Mário Quartim Graça Scientific Award in 2016, which distinguished the best thesis concluded in the previous three years in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities in Portugal and Latin America. He was a journalist (1986-1997) and a press secretary (1997-2005).

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6051-0980>

Email: vitorde Sousa@ics.uminho.pt

Address: Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Universidade do Minho, Campus de Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga

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