

« Recordações de Jornadas Portuenses »

*« Se tivesse de ouvir mais uma vez a
palavra identidade, sortirei o meu
revólver »*

Anónimo

Portugal has spent 800 years - or more if one delves into the field of physical anthropology with its debates over dolichocephalic and brachycephalic skulls - seeking an identity. Such a comparable research has never troubled the English who effortlessly assume arrogant attitudes of superiority without question - thereby frequently causing offence in all quarters of the globe including Portugal. « Who are we » and « what are the specificities of our identity » have always been perplexing questions for each rising generation of Portuguese. The most obvious answer - adopted by the ultra-patriotic propagandists of the Salazar era - is that « we are the children of Dom Henrique ». But even this answer causes some difficulty since since Henry's family demonstrated a fully globalised cosmopolitanism, since his famous ferry-ride to Ceuta was hitched on the back of a huge and very international military expedition.

Since the fall of Salazar, Prince Henry has been partially relegated to the commercial sector - he features on plate-glass automobile showrooms of the new Euro-capitalist Portugal - and Vasco da Gama has risen in his place to dominate the eight-kilometre bridge which now links Lisbon to the European mainland. But Vasco da Gama has his share of problems too when it comes to epitomising Portuguese identity. « Goa é nossa » may still be remembers by the generation which saw the walls of Lisbon plastered with posters in December 1961 but, in Goa itself, only 0.01 per cent of the population speak the tongue of Camões, and even in Brazil - discovered by sailors who followed in da Gama's wake - Portugal is now almost as neglected by scholars as any other small foreign country. So what then is the specificity of Portuguese national culture and heritage ?

The answer must surely be found not in the civil wars which pitted Portuguese Muslims against Portuguese Christians in the Middle Ages, nor in the era of trans-oceanic navigation which brought Italian admirals and bankers to the harbours of Lagos and Lisbon in their dozens, but in the early modern wars which brought about the formation of modern states across

the length and breadth of western Europe. While seventeenth-century France was resisting the rise of the Low Countries, and England was colonising the highlands and islands of Scotland and Ireland, Castile was consolidating – mostly successfully – the unification of the Iberian peninsula. But one small corner escaped that consolidation and the key question that the historical *longue durée* of Portuguese nationalism needs to ask is why, when Castile was relatively successful in repressing autonomous aspirations in Catalonia, or Andalusia, or Galicia, or Navarre, did it fail to recover the Lusitanian provinces despite twenty-eight years of warfare during – and after – the great Thirty-Years War which consolidated other modern nations in Europe-beyond-the-Pyrenees.

The explanations for the survival of the Portuguese bid for independence in the years 1640 to 1668 are many and varied, but they probably have little to do with nationalism, patriotism, identitarianism or populism however much successive generations of politicians and scholars would like Portuguese uniqueness to be the driving force of the nation. The received explanation – among Portuguese scholars as opposed to Portuguese patriots – for the revolution of December 1640 (whose anniversary on December 1 passed, incidentally, wholly unnoticed in the halls of the *Jornadas da Luso-Utopia*) is that the Braganca family was persuaded to lend its name to a Lisbon palace coup among the almost wholly Castilianised aristocracy of the Alentejo plains not to advance a national Portuguese revolution, but on the contrary to prevent a popular Portuguese uprising. Such an uprising has been attempted in 1637 when Portuguese tax-payers rebelled against the levies which the aristocratic nobility was levying to help Castile pay for repressive wars of unification in other parts of the Iberian peninsula. By 1640, some of these aristocrats feared another such challenge to their wealth, power, and status as noblemen of Castile resident in Portugal. They also recognised that Madrid was so deeply engaged in the repression of Catalonia that it would not have any troops available to crush any manifestations that might occur on the western, Lusitanian, rim of the European domains of the Habsburgs. So to prevent popular and populist revolts by the local Portuguese, the nobility broke their ties with Madrid – probably as a temporary emergency measure carried out by administrators deeply rooted in Castilian culture and practice.

Why the coup of 1 December 1640 became the candle which lit a national bonfire in Portugal over the next decades, is another question which any historian of independence and of the *longue durée* needs to study. And why did the Pope of Rome eventually concede independence to the Portuguese – though not before the church had been so emaciated that there was scarcely a single bishop left in office throughout Portugal or its surviving overseas dependencies. Why did Louis XIV, who had a powerful French faction at work in the rebel court at Lisbon, finally concede primacy of economic interest in Portugal to the King of England. What role did merchants from the rebel Portuguese provinces play in the Hispanic territories of the Americas – where they were disparagingly known as the Jews of the empire rather than as the Portuguese – and how far was the economic service-role of the overseas Portuguese affected by the political aspirations of the rebel aristocrats who has goaded the Braganças into claiming possession of a nominally restored – but effectively entirely new – Portuguese crown,

modelled on the royal practices of Spain rather than on the medieval ones of the *ancien régime* of the house of Avis. All of these questions need to be more investigated when discussing the history of « Portuguese independence ».

Equally elusive, in a workshop that was trying to come to terms with the intellectual impact of the « Revolution of the Carnations » – and the long-term consequences of the *coup-d'état* of 25 April 1974 – was any consideration of the significance of the Salazarian era for defining the nature of Portuguese self-interpretation. It is perhaps not surprising that one of the more interesting pieces of self-analysis of the so-called « fascist » era was the one written in exile by Jose Rentes de Carvalho, *Portugal : de Bloem en de Sikkel* – the flower and the sickle – and still only available in Dutch. The received and accepted ideas, published and republished *ad nauseam* in Portugal itself, are that Portugal was uniquely oppressed by its long night of dictatorship and uniquely liberated by its idealistic young generation of army captains. Neither proposition – the unchanging nature of the dictatorship and the unlimited liberalising of the revolution – will stand up to scrutiny, when addressed with adequate rigour. Far from being monolithic, unflinching and unchanging, the Salazar dictatorship was extraordinarily adept at adapting to changing circumstances, effectively changing war partners in 1943, masquerading as a democracy to win a seat at the United Nations in 1955, but above all becoming an economic client of the United States in 1963 when it invited international capital – and the American industrial-military complex – to help sustain the dictatorship during the colonial wars and enhance white supremacy in southern Africa.

The changes that flowed from the jolt administered to Portugal by the colonial wars were far-ranging. Young men who might have been conscripted into the army for two, four or even six years of alternating boredom in the barracks, and terror on the terrain, clandestinely crossed Spain on the undersides of lorries to become the guest workers of the European economic « miracle ». Soon the Portuguese treasury found their remittances such an important source of tax revenue, and rural purchasing power, that attempts to stem the flow of migrant workers were scaled down and a new generation of Europeanised, Mercedes-driving, Portuguese began to gain local influence in the provinces. At the same time the urban captains of industry continued to question the viability of the empire as a mainstay of the Portuguese economy since it supplied poor quality raw material at above average prices and failed to provide an adequate consumer market for the evolving manufacturing sector which wanted access to the European community – not the empire – for its shoes and textiles and hand-assembled electronic goods. A more positive appreciation of the changes brought by defending the empire came from a burgeoning middle class in which career officers in the army controlled the black market in foreign exchange and invested their winnings into the booming real estate of high-rise Lisbon, while the younger set found that in the colonies American music had replace the mournful fados of the motherland, fashion clothing was becoming available to a new consumer generation, and above all young women had shaken off the old traditions and were no longer required to take chaperones to the ball or to drive their beaux into the arms of courtesans.

The financial, social and sexual revolutions that began in the colonies in

the 1960s did take Lisbon by storm in the immediate aftermath of the April coup of 1974. But the question was : how radical was the change, how lasting were the effects, was continuity the hallmark of post-war Portuguese history or did fundamental structural and institutional change occur with the fall of Caetano ? In the words of the conference conveners, did 25 April 1974 « dissolve » into the main-stream current of history, or did it stand out as a phenomenon that was qualitatively quite different from all the other turning points in Portuguese history - 1385, 1668, 1834, 1926... Obviously, it's not easy to answer such a question, but it is not forbidden to think that everything had not been transformed overnight on April 25. Did women gain a new social statute after 1974, or did they simply get sucked into the exploited echelons of the labour force without really gaining any new advantages in a still largely *macho* Lusitanian culture. Did the captains of the army who played the theme music of Grandola, the land of the free, on an independent radio station the night before the *coup*, really replace the captains of industry, who had decided long before 1974 to take Portugal into Europe as the masters of the new Portugal ? Would the economy of Portugal have blossomed faster if it had not gone through the turbulent era of marches and graffiti and would the dictatorship have dissolved into democracy more quickly if there had not be a ten years period of military probation. So many questions any historian of independence and of the *longue durée* needs to study.

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