# The "mild manners" of the Portuguese

## The persistence of luso-tropicalism through the lens of social representations theory

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A widespread idea in portuguese society is the belief that the Portuguese are non-prejudiced, friendly, open to the Other, and easily able to promote harmonious intercultural relations. These representations are not independent from the colonial ideology disseminated in portuguese society after the Second World War when luso-tropicalist assumptions were appropriated by the Salazar dictatorship. Luso-tropicalism was proposed from the 1930s onwards by the Brazilian sociologist Freyre (1933), stressing, among other features, the special ability of the Portuguese to maintain a benevolent and non-prejudiced enterprise in colonisation, including miscegenation with people from the tropics.

Historians (Alexandre, 1999a, 1999b, 2017; Castelo, 1998) have elucidated the main course of these ideas in portuguese society. Briefly, and schematically for the purpose of this chapter, we can say that after the 1950s there was an appropriation and vulgarization of the theory by the Salazar dictatorship in order to sustain its colonial politics and cope with international anti-colonialist pressure on Portugal. Dissemination of these ideas in that period also includes propagation in the scientific field, namely in anthropology, geography, political science and even in the (at that time) incipient field of social psychology in Portugal with Álvaro Miranda Santos (Santos, 1966; Valentim, 2011).

The "end of the empire" was not the end of luso-tropicalism in the representations of portuguese society. They survived the democratic revolution in 1974, decolonization processes (1974-1975) and the process of Portuguese integration into Europe from the 1980s onward. Even though it has been discredited in the scientific field a long time ago and is useless for the ideological justification of a colonial system under pressure,

according to anthropologists and historians, it still survives nowadays as a "myth" (Alexandre, 1993, p. 65), a "social fact" (Almeida, 2000, p. 182; *cf.* also Bastos, 1998) or a "diffuse ideology" (Alexandre, 1999a, p. 394). One of the reasons for the permanence of this myth across time and across such different socio-historical frameworks is its embedment in the "fusion of [Portuguese] nationalism and colonialism" (Pinto, 1999, p. 591; *cf.* also Alexandre, 1999b).

## 1 Luso-tropicalism as a social representation

The importance of this "diffuse ideology" for the comprehension of prejudice, intergroup relations, multicultural issues and racism in current portuguese society can hardly be overestimated. The idea of a tolerant, non-prejudiced society where luso-tropicalist virtues would work as a kind of vaccination against prejudice and xenophobia is pervasive. To say the least, it would be naïve to take the myth as reality (*cf.* for ex. Alexandre, 2017; Bethencourt, 2013/2015; Boxer, 1963/1977; Lourenço, 2014; Vala, Brito & Lopes, 1999). But as a "social fact", or a "diffuse ideology," it has real political, social and psychosocial value, thus capable of strong effects. It is not a simple issue of historical knowledge, attitudes or even norms. Luso-tropicalism is a modern "myth" with historical roots where common sense is grounded_.__ So, my point here is that social representations theory is a useful tool for psychosocial studies on these issues, providing useful contributions to understanding the current functioning of portuguese society in the field of intergroup and intercultural relations.

A psychosocial approach to the issue will miss the point if conceived solely through the lens of stereotypes, attitudes or knowledge – it means an error or deficit of knowledge, since historical data clearly points to the absence of support for it in reality (Alexandre, 2017; Bethencourt, 2013/2015; Boxer, 1963/1977). Studies on social representations include it, but they go beyond regarding the processes of social reality construction since they supply "explanatory narratives" (Liu & Hilton, 2005, p. 551) rooted in history and with political and psychosocial consequences.

Studying a social object as a social representation means, according to Moscovici's classical work (1976, pp. 246-247), seeking to clarify and understand common sense without "feeding prejudices about the 'illogical'or 'irrational'character of current reasoning". This does not mean endorsing the relativistic assumptions regarding knowledge of post-modernist theories, as in constructionist approaches (*cf.* for example, Gergen, 1994). What is at stake here is to understand the specificities of common lay knowledge where ordinary people participate in their social frameworks (*cf.* Lo Monaco, Delouvée, & Rateau, 2016); Markova, 2015; Sammut, Andreouli, Gaskell, & Valsiner, 2015). In this approach, social psychology is conceived as an anthropology of modern societies (Moscovici, 1981), developing (plural) theories and methods allowing an understanding of the particularities and features of lay knowledge in current societies, trying to look for its inner logic or rationality. The truth or the error is not the point in social representations, but the utility and functions which they accomplish for a group. One of the basic ideas of social representations theory is that a meta-system of normative regulations intervenes in cognitive functioning (Doise, 1990, 1993). So reasoning is not only regulated by formal rules (e.g. non-contradiction rule), as in

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scientific knowledge, but social regulations can have also a role in cognitive work on lay knowledge.

Actually, social representations theory does not only deal with the "inner" architecture of the cognition. Social representations are not just simple ideas or cognitive structures, preceding individual actions as an individual independent variable – like in the classical case of attitudes, although they can have that role. But social representations are also constitutive of and organize daily social practices, making up the political and social field (Elcheroth, Doise & Reicher, 2011; Howarth, 2006). At different levels of psychosocial analysis (Doise & Valentim, 2015), they intervene in the fabrication of phenomena and engagements where social life occurs.

Considered under the lens of social representations theory, luso-tropicalism provides a working case study for this kind of socio-psychological research (Valentim, 2011). Actually, due to the work of historians we are dealing here with a specific case of a social object where we know the main pathways of dissemination of these ideas, from the beginning of its original formulation in the scientific field, through official and ideological speeches to its later broader impregnation in common sense.

The notion of charter, in the sense of Liu & Hilton (2005), based on the work of Malinowski (1926), could also be useful for this kind of studies. In their words: "A central part of a group's representation of its history is [...] its *charter*, an account of its origin and historical mission, which will have been amended and renegotiated over time to reflect changing circumstances, and frame its responses to new challenges" (Liu & Hilton, 2005, p. 538).

Studies in social psychology about luso-tropicalism are still scarce. But they consistently point towards the fact that portuguese people born after the democratic revolution and with European citizenship still endorse – or at least do not reject – the main ideas of luso-tropicalism; and that the endorsement of luso-tropicalism is associated with prejudice. Let us review this data very briefly and in a concise way.

Looking for the organizing principles at stake, the works of Valentim (2003) and Pereira *et al.* (2015) using factor analysis techniques on data collected from questionnaires in Portugal identified two dimensions: past colonial and contemporary society. The presence of a contemporaneous dimension of luso-tropicalism is a first empirical index of its presence in social representations about current intergroup relations. It means that it is not only an issue focused on the colonial past. More recently, Valentim and Heleno (2018), in an attempt to specify these different organizing principles, presented a solution with four dimensions: harmonious relations with other groups (including less racism in Portugal than in other European countries); good colonial past; ability to adapt to other cultures; and an easy cultural integration of other groups into Portuguese society.

When we look for the anchoring of these organizing principles in other social and psychosocial variables, the first striking aspect of the data is that luso-tropicalism is endorsed by the Portuguese and rejected by Africans living in Portugal (Valentim, 2003). Furthermore, African participants showed a more positive attitude towards Europeans in general than to the Portuguese in particular. The results of African par-

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ticipants can be considered a kind of criteria for the corroboration of luso-tropicalism. If luso-tropicalism were more than a myth, then Africans would endorse it. Clearly, this is not the case: in the data obtained there are no traces of any portuguese luso-tropicalist specificity. What we found is the reverse: Africans disagree with those ideas and present more negative attitudes towards the Portuguese than towards the Europeans in general (Valentim, 2003, 2011).

The remaining data with Portuguese participants (Pereira *et al.*, 2015; Valentim & Heleno, 2018; *cf.* also Vala, Lopes & Lima, 2008) are also indicative of the role of luso-tropicalism in expressions of prejudice as well as when explaining inequalities between groups, specifically immigrants in Portuguese society. They consistently fail to point to any effect of luso-tropicalist representation in preventing prejudice and in increasing openness to other cultures (Pereira *et al.*, 2015; Valentim & Heleno, 2018). On the contrary, the endorsement of luso-tropicalism is associated with nationalism and prejudice among the Portuguese participants towards other groups in portuguese society, namely towards other lusophone groups, like Africans who live in Portugal. Moreover, luso-tropicalism is also linked with a valorisation of Portuguese colonizers in the past but not with the valorisation of the colonized people in the past. And it is also associated with a kind of "blaming the victim" explanation of the worse social and economical situation in which immigrants are living (Valentim & Heleno, 2018).

Adhesion to some of the main ideas of luso-tropicalism, notably harmonious relations, good colonial past, and ability to adapt, is actually related to endorsing the idea that if immigrants are in a poor situation, this is their fault. They are considered responsible for their situation, due to their lack of effort, their absence of entrepreneurship, or even because they are from a less gifted race. The anchoring of luso-tropicalism current representations in "racialized explanations" deserves attention in further research, not only because Freyre's theoretical writings on luso-tropicalism were based on a cultural approach, but also because it appears in the contemporary normative context where we could expect "modern" cultural explanations to be much more widely accepted than old-fashioned racial ideas.

## 2 A function in the field of current intergroup relations

Paradoxically, this pattern of positions towards other cultures and minority groups is achieved through a nice, sympathetic representation – luso-tropicalism. Actually for purposes of social legitimation and psychological comfort, it is better to state that we are not prejudiced rather than admitting that we are blatantly prejudiced. We must take into account that the rise of nationalism, xenophobia, and fascism across Europe (Chryssochoou *et al.*, 2015), has made it easier today for majority (white) groups in European, and more generally in Western societies, to express prejudice than some decades or even years ago (*cf.* Pérez & Molpeceres, 2018). But even in this case, luso-tropicalist ideas can still serve a good function: "the rise of extremism is all across Europe, but not with the Portuguese." Our "mild manners" would be the reason why xenophobic and extremist political parties have not yet flourished in Portugal as has happened in other European countries. And – in line with this interpretation – this would be also the reason for the difference, in comparison with Greece for example,

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in participation in collective actions against austerity during the recent economic and social crisis (Chryssochoou, Papastamou & Prodromitis, 2013; Poeschl, Valentim & Silva, 2015; Poeschl *et al.* 2017; Valentim, Poeschl & Forte, 2018).

The social representation of the Portuguese as non-prejudiced, as embodying the luso-tropicalist virtues regarding the Other, and their mild-mannered way of dealing with interpersonal, social and political life introduces a non-questionable "way of being" in the political field that becomes neutral and aseptic, avoiding critical thinking about intercultural issues (and problems) in portuguese society. So, paradoxically, this social representation allows an easier expression of prejudice, because "due to our way of being we are not prejudiced". By doing so, it becomes a facilitator of expressions of prejudice as the research results consistently point out. It does not provide immunity or protection against negative intergroup attitudes as the ideology claims.

This social representation is important in the constitution and organization of social reality and practices. It can accomplish an important political and psychosocial function, legitimizing "our (good) Portuguese way of being". Since "we are like that" – non-prejudiced, benevolent and friendly towards Others – surely, if there are problems with those Others in Portugal it is because "they" are the source of the problems. Besides the anchoring of luso-tropicalism in blaming the underprivileged (see above), according to the results obtained in Valentim (2003), only those Portuguese who rejected luso-tropicalism did not present negative attitudes towards Africans living in Portugal.

## 3 Dissemination through textbooks and change over time

When pondering the pervasive presence of this representation of portuguese colonialism, it makes sense to ask how it is dealt with in textbooks over time. They are certainly not the only media through which social representations are transmitted and disseminated, but they have a capital role in it, particularly as concerns this kind of historical and identitarian social objects, like luso-tropicalist ideas.

Even if school is not the exclusive engine in the manufacturing of social representations, in schooling societies it has a preponderant place in the production of common sense, in the learning of basic schemes and categories of thought. As Bourdieu wrote (1967, pp. 369-371), "school […] constitutes the fundamental factor of cultural consensus as participation in common sense, which is the condition for communication (….) the schemes that organize the thought of an epoch cannot be completely understood without reference to the school system."

Due to the concurrence of other tools and media with a strong(er) influence on young generations, school definitely no longer has its ancient, almost exclusive role in these processes. However, its important and unique role in common sense production and in the dissemination of collective memories, with strong implications for intergroup relations, is nowhere near disappearing.

In these processes, textbooks are an important device. They have the particular feature of coming from the side of reified knowledge (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Obradovic, 2016; *cf.* also Carretero, 2011), but are not like scientific knowledge. They are in

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the middle between scientific knowledge and social representations. Their function is transmission: providing lay knowledge with scientific information. So they have a particular role in the fabrication and transformation of social representations, which studies in the field would hardly overestimate. Moreover, textbooks are physical objects, contrary to knowledge (namely the curricular knowledge that they carry out), and can be considered documental historical memories (Sá, 2015, p. 335). They are cultural artifacts that last over time. They can be revisited by new generations for many different reasons, whether out of curiosity, to transmit familiar contexts from generation to generation, or even as food for nostalgia. Whatever the reason, they feed social representations. Thus, they are also a privileged tool for analizing change and transformations in social representations, allowing the introduction of the dimension of time in social representations studies.

One of their more particular features is that they are a device for spreading the influence of a state among their future citizens, being a paradigmatic case of a political tool – for social influence – if not a mindset tool. They tell us a lot about what a state in a certain moment wanted to spread among its citizens. Even if there is a lot of room for different pedagogical work with the same textbook, still they are "state technologies" (Sakki, 2014, p. 36; *cf.* also Obradovic, 2016) inasmuch as in many states (like Portugal) they must be in accordance with a national curriculum. This is particularly relevant to learning in the broad field of humanities and social sciences, and more specifically as concerns the contents of history, where the construction of a shared collective "us", for building citizens with an identity rooted in the past, in collective memories, including their own "charters", is particularly at stake. So textbooks easily feed political as well as pedagogical debates and power relations and struggles, in this case about how to present colonialism – both for former colonizing countries as well as for former colonized countries.

In looking for the features of how luso-tropicalism gets disseminated in portuguese textbooks since its appropriation and vulgarization carried out by the regime (since the 1950s, as stated before), let us take into account a recent exploratory study carried out with Isabel Miguel (Valentim & Miguel, 2018) where we aimed to understand how colonialism is presented in portuguese history textbooks across different time periods. Textbooks for the last upper secondary school year were analyzed in four main periods: 1) before the democratic revolution in 1974 (1950s and 1960s textbooks), i.e., during the vulgarization of luso-tropicalism under the Salazar dictatorship and including part of the period of the colonial wars in Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique; 2) a few years after the democratic revolution (1974) and the independence of Portuguese African colonies; 3) almost one decade after the formal portuguese integration into the Economic European Community in 1986; 4) more recent textbooks in the 2000s. Seven textbooks (13 volumes) from 1957 to 2015 were analyzed. All contents related to colonialism since the 19$^{th}$ century were subject to a qualitative content analysis by two judges. Data analysis was based on the percentage of word counts in each category for each period, complemented by an in-depth interpretative analysis of all the documents.

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Results show blatant nationalism and a hegemonic representation objectified in development, or on Africa as a virgin land, in textbooks during the dictatorship (and so also during the colonial period in Portugal). As in the research of Mendes and Valentim (2012) carried out on the textbooks of history and Portuguese for primary school (3rd and 4th grades) of the late 1960s and early 1970s, here too we found homogenization of an out-group (Africans) together with individualization of the in-group (the Portuguese). The Portuguese are presented as individual agents with their names and sometimes their personal characteristics, whereas Africans are simply presented by a group categorization (e.g. "African tribes").

In recent textbooks a more heterogeneous representation linked with international order and decolonization is present. In these textbooks, colonialism in the 20th century is mainly anchored in the portuguese dictatorship and objectified in colonial war and decolonization. It is striking that in this framework, colonialism per se is almost absent. In general, there are only references to its "end" (e.g. liberation struggles and decolonization).

Interestingly, luso-tropicalism does not appear explicitly in the textbooks of the dictatorship period and it appears only briefly in the more recent period (already in a critical manner in the 2009 textbook). However, across all textbooks there is no factual information which would put that myth into question. Processes of exploitation and discrimination are almost absent, as well as wrongdoings perpetrated by the Portuguese, namely during the colonial war. The only exception appears in Matos *et al.*'s (1995) textbook in a form of a short presentation of the Wyriamu massacre perpetrated in 1972 in Mozambique. It is presented as carried out by particular agents. It means, perpetrated by "a company of commandos and some elements of PIDE/DGS [the political police], denounced in the UN" (Matos *et al.*, p. 220) not by the Portuguese, nor even the by the Portuguese army. We are faced here with the idea that "our" wrongdoings are a particular case, resulting from actions done by some bad elements of "our" group, not the result of "our" group as a whole. But the atrocities perpetrated by out-groups (liberation movements and other colonial powers) are presented as the results of a general group category ("the *baconga* and *mbundda* ethnic groups" "under the direction of the UPA/FNLA" [an Angolan independence movement]; the French navy; French troops; the Vietminh). Actually, this kind of description is in line with the "black sheep" effect (*cf.* Marques & Paéz, 2002). When wrongdoing is perpetrated by "others" it is the result of a group entity; when it is perpetrated by "us" it is a circumstantial particularity of some bad elements of our group (see also Abadia & Collins, 2018; Leone & Mastrovito, 2010), allowing protection of a positive identity, a good image of "us".

Overall, all these data are in accordance with the study carried out by Araújo & Maeso (2015) covering history textbooks for the 7th to the 9th grades, using another theoretical framework and method, as well as with the study of Soares and Jesuíno (2003; *cf.* also Cardim, 2003) on "the discovery of the Brazil" in history textbooks for the 5th, 8th and 10th grade.

Across all the textbooks analyzed (Valentim & Miguel, 2018), the changes and permanence found, especially as pertains to the omissions and the subtle intergroup asym-

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metries discerned, can ostensibly contribute to the maintenance of representations about the friendly nature of Portuguese colonialism, not least also to avoid critical thinking about intercultural relations and prejudice in current portuguese society.

## 4 Conclusion

Social psychological research corroborates anthropology (Almeida, 2000; Bastos, 1998), and historical research (Alexandre, 1999a, 1999b; Castelo, 1998) studies about the persistence of luso-tropicalist representations in portuguese society. It showed their permanence even among the young Portuguese generation, born after the "end of the empire." Besides adherence to the idea of the "mild manners" of the Portuguese in relations with the Other (in the colonial past as well as in the present), such luso-tropicalist representations are not associated with positive attitudes towards minority groups in portuguese society. On the contrary, they relate to prejudice as well as nationalism, and an inclination to justify the lack of success among immigrants as resulting from their own responsibility or fault (including attributions to their "race").

Among the many different media for transmission of such social representations, textbooks are an important and specific tool for building common sense and categories of thought and spreading shared ideas among citizens in a society. Actually, textbooks are a case of social influence processes, aligned with state intentions, and last for an enduring period. So, an analysis of the presence of these ideas about the Portuguese in the colonial period in textbooks across different periods helps us understand their pervasive influence in current portuguese society.

According to the exploratory diachronic study (Valentim & Miguel, 2018) reviewed in this chapter, the silence about structural inequalities and their blatant manifestations, like the generalized system of forced work (see Alexandre, 2017) and the outrageous "indigenous status", is striking across the whole period analyzed (since the 1950s). Its silence feeds common sense about benevolent Portuguese colonialism as well as about the friendly nature of the Portuguese and their special ability for non-prejudiced and harmonious relations with the Other. No factual data contradicting luso-tropicalism assumptions are presented in the textbooks analyzed. And even when it could happen – like the one (and brief) reference to a wrongdoing – it is disguised through the "black sheep" effect, not bringing general Portuguese virtues into question. Of course, textbooks are not the only channel for the dissemination of these ideas. But even nowadays they have a role in the persistence of this myth.

Studied under the scope of social representations theory, luso-tropicalism encompasses the insurance of a "historical certitude" working here as a charter. "It is through providing such charters that are informally accepted by public opinion as true that social representations of history legitimize a society's current social and political arrangements (….) they establish rules, norms, moral codes, laws, 'do's' and 'don'ts' " (Liu & Hilton, 2005, p. 539).

Based on a reservoir of folk knowledge, it explains what happens in the present. Luso-tropicalism as a social representation provides the stuff for certitude on history and identity – a useful toolbox which is taken for granted for essentialist as well as so-

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cial and political explanations in the field of current multicultural issues. According to the data summarized in this chapter, luso-tropicalism functions as a meta-system – in the sense of social representations theory – when the Portuguese people think about "the Portuguese", even if they express attitudes and positions related to contemporary social issues in the intercultural domain in contradiction with this myth, namely regarding prejudice. So, it provides immunity not against prejudice, but from acknowledging the resulting problems in the current portuguese social reality. The representations of the exceptionality of the Portuguese "national character" or "identity" blocks the problematization of intercultural subjects in portuguese society, allowing a legitimation of current problems as having its source in the Other, minorities or "cultural groups".

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