

# A periferia como obra modernidades excêntricas a re-arranjos Luso-tropicalistas

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## *Resumo*

A acumulação teórica das últimas décadas sobre as “periferias” atualizou o conceito clássico, que hoje é chave para repensar as morfologias complexas do moderno. Com tal conceito, esboça-se, aqui, o perfil do colonialismo português, baseado historicamente numa paradoxal “força débil” que alimenta uma mitologia de excepcionalismo. Assim, um discurso moderno periférico pode se articular no plano internacional a narrativas falsas. Tal dispositivo ideológico, presente na ideologia do Luso-tropicalismo – constituído no Brasil por Gilberto Freyre, e reciclado pela metrópole – mostra um aspecto encoberto nas teorias pós-coloniais. Ao não se cuidar de uma particular ética do discurso, formulações acrílicas pós-coloniais podem se converter em álibi colonial alimentando a imaginação de uma colonização necessária. Portanto, a teoria pós-colonial deve manter um elo estreito com a dimensão meta-crítica do discurso.

## *Palavras chave*

Periferias modernas, colonialismo português, excepcionalismo e Luso-tropicalismo, ética do discurso pós-colonial, pós-colonialismo situado.

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# Periphery as a Work Eccentric Modernities and Lusophone- -Tropical Rearrangements

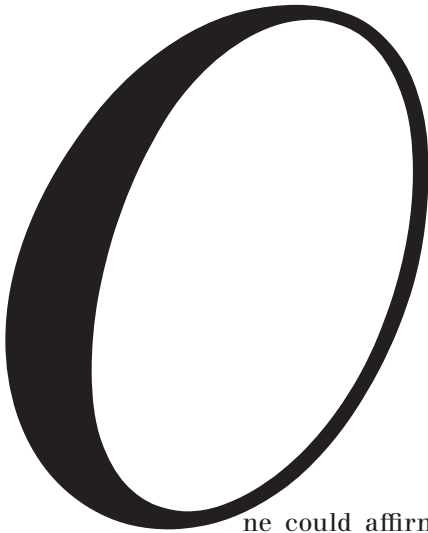
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## *Abstract*

The last decade theoretical accumulation on peripheries has turned this concept into a fundamental tool to approach contemporaneity. It has become an effective key to rethink the complex morphology of modernities, in particular when the modernization processes don't seem completely to entail the diversities of the generated modern forms. After a synoptic genealogy of peripheral thoughts, inscribed in the synthetic categorial circle of Periferic, the concept key is adopted to draft the very particular profile of Portuguese colonialism, historically grounded on a paradoxical "weak force" that fed a mythology of exceptionalism of the Portuguese Overseas case. In this sense, a modern peripheral discourse may become an international work of articulation of fake forms and narratives. Such a rethorical and ideological device, defined by the ideology of Luso-Tropicalism - set up in Brazil, that is in an ex-colony with the decisive contribution of Gilberto Freyre, but after recycled by the contemporary metropolis, Portugal and the Salazarian regime, in order to justify the maintenance of the African colonies - shows a crucial but hidden aspect and risk of the postcolonial theories. If it isn't assumed with a particular ethics of discourse care, uncritical postcolonial arguments may be turned as a exceptional colonial alibi to feed the imagination of a necessary colonial relation. Therefore, postcolonial theory has to keep a very strict link to the metacritical dimension of the discourse.

## *Keywords*

Modern peripheries, Portuguese Colonialism, Exceptionalism and Luso-Tropicalism, Postcolonial, Ethics of the discourse, Lusophone Postcolonialism.



“The future was today”<sup>2</sup>  
Beatriz Sarlo

one could affirm that there is always a sort of ontological problem when we talk about modern periphery<sup>3</sup>. But what is actually the object we refer to? Linguistically, it is a composed name, a hendiadys, an oxymoron, or should we think of it rather as a conceptual set, doomed to an inexorable dispersion of sense?

Difficulties arise when we deal with complex concepts and we make efforts to inscribe them in a conceptual history (in the modes of the *Begriffsgeschichte*): in these cases, we always encounter phantoms or shadows conditioning (distorting or adjusting) the possibility of interpretation, making an indirect reference to certain thoughts formulated by Slavoj Žižek on the working of political signifiers<sup>4</sup>.

So we may begin our discussion trying to grasp, as much as we can, some phantom rags that, even outside a regime of presence, we “feel” as if they were pressing behind the forms of peripheral modernities.

Among the many fragments - my phantoms, actually - I take into account some authors, following Beatriz Sarlo’s suggestion included in a work we all certainly take into consideration when dealing with peripheral modernity. Sarlo says that “any book comes out as a desire of another book, as an impulse to copy, to robbery, to contradiction, as envy and immeasurable trust”. There are a couple of books I really appreciate on the subject of our discussion: the first is the one I have already quoted

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2 SARLO, Beatriz. *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1988, p. 29.

3 The present article was originated by the inaugural lecture that I delivered at the II Lisbon Summer School for the Study of Culture entitled *Peripheral Modernities*, in July 2012. I am grateful to Isabel Capeloa Gil for the friendly invitation to the event and for all the stimulus on the issue deriving from her generous discussion.

4 ŽIŽEK, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London-New York: Verso, 1989.

in the epigraph by Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica Buenos Aires 1920-1930*, and the other one is the book defined as essential in the sense above mentioned in Sarlo's essay, that is *All That's Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity* by Marshall Berman, in particular the chapter on "St. Petersburg: the Modernism of the Underdevelopment"<sup>5</sup>, one of the most read and discussed book in Latina America and especially in Brazil, during the period of redemocratization.

So which are the shadows covering my view of modern peripherals? First, I'd like to highlight the heterogeneity of the concept, that partly justifies the lexical restriction of its multiple interpretation (a multiplicity that maybe can turn itself into the vitality of the concept). What is relevant for me about modern peripheries is that they always entail a constellation of other objects, such as modernization or, if we prefer, Modernism.

There is always an image of a world system, a world economy or transnational capitalism supporting the existence of hybrid peripheries. Even if the triad is structured by some implied relationships, the object keeps a substantial autonomy. For this reason, it seems important to me to try to catch the modernizing process implied by peripheral modernity and how modernist techniques ideologize modernity and its entailed processes (naturalizing them as processes, as Althusser points out<sup>6</sup>). The link established between periphery and modernity sketches out what I would call the "Periferic", a common entity that composes just a part or even the entire peripheral or semiperipheral dimension. Of course, there are strong and irreducible differences between the two concepts, but, at the same time, the heterogeneous nature of their form provides common edges that, in my opinion, turn to be helpful to rethink them in a combined mode.

The double bibliographic spectre fluttering over this vision is today an unpopular (though maintaining in my view its great importance) concept, particularly developed by Leon Trotsky: the idea of an "uneven and combined development". Using this tool, Trotsky approaches the analysis of Russian Revolution providing a model for the interpretation of universal history and, particularly, the functioning of Imperialism and the imperial relation, redefining the forces between the dominator and the dominated:

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5 BERMAN, Marshall. *L'esperienza della modernità*. Italian translation. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985, chapter IV.

6 ALTHUSSER, Louis. *Sull'ideologia*. Italian translation. Bari: Dedalo Libri, 1976, p. 37.

The backward country [...] not infrequently debases the achievements borrowed from outside in the process of adapting them to its own more primitive culture. In this the very process of assimilation acquires a self-contradictory character. Thus the introduction of certain elements of Western technique and training, above all military and industrial, under Peter I, led to a strengthening of serfdom as the fundamental form of labour organisation. European armament and European loans – both indubitable products of a higher culture – led to a strengthening of czarism, which delayed in its turn the development of the country.<sup>7</sup>

Such a “privilege of historic backwardness”, as it is defined with the usual duality, leads us to another critical stage, represented by Ernst Bloch. In another quite famous article written in 1932, and published as part of *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* (1935), “Non-synchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics”, Bloch, in a rather famous *incipit*, observes: “Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others”.<sup>8</sup> Even if Bloch marginally refers to peripheries (“We called the nonsynchronous differentness warped, and its rebellion, as a much older substance, peripheral”<sup>9</sup>) Franco Moretti, in *Modern Epic. The World System from Goethe to Garcia Márquez* (in Italian: *Opere mondo*), assumes Bloch’s notion of the “contemporaneity-of-non contemporaneous” (translated sometimes as non-synchronism), in order to define the specific nature of the space he calls semi-peripheries. In this sense, non-contemporaneity would be connected, as Moretti asserts, with a specific position inside the World system, unknown to the relatively more homogeneous nations of the centre; this is typical of semi-peripheries, where, on the contrary, development is combined<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, we realize, even if through other perspectives, that there is more than a single analogy between such a vision and Wallerstein’s interpretation of the World system. That would be the feature of the *opere*

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7 TROTSKY, Leon. *The History of the Russian Revolution*, English translation. London: Pluto Press, 1977, p. 26 and 27.

8 BLOCH, Ernst. Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics. *New German Critique*, n. 11, 1977, p. 22.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

10 MORETTI, Franco. *Opere mondo*. Saggio sulla forma epica dal Faust a Cent’anni di solitudine. Torino: Einaudi, 1994, p. 47.

*mondo* (world works), where the geographic reference is not the nation-state but a larger space, a continent or the whole world system.

This theoretical background shows the complex temporalities that configure modern peripheral. Much more than the heterogeneous well-known structure of the modern time (since peripheries are an outcome of modernity), “Periferic” may be conceived as a multiple space in which non-contemporaneities are merged in an indissoluble way. We can analyse this form if we want to have at least an impression – or an image – of the modernizing processes producing it.

We could ask ourselves whether such a morphology of modern peripheries, with their hybrid temporal and material composition, is something peculiar of a certain kind of space or if it constitutes a universal trace of the peripheral condition. In this sense, the proposal to amalgamate, through modern peripheral concepts, the dimension of “Periferic” with different kinds of such a space, would lead us to incline for the second element of the disjunctive sentence.

Thanks to the contributions by Sarlo and Berman, it becomes more evident that what characterizes modern peripheral condition is the cultural dimension of this composed conceptual phenomenon (just to use one more double definition).

There is, as we know, an open discussion on the limits and the potentials from a cultural point of view, in the adoption of a world system view. Some people contest the strictness of the cultural reflection in Wallerstein’s interpretation. Wallerstein himself considers that the confusion existing about the multiple meanings of the term culture is a consequence of the world system itself, of its logic of working as an ideological battlefield<sup>11</sup>.

It may be useful here, as we will talk about Portugal and its “colonial empire” or “*ultramar*”, to outline a brief summary of the conceptual imaginations of its peripheral or semiperipheral condition. I am referring to some elements of the best, contemporary “Portuguese thought”, where we can find some conceptual arrangements showing the complexity of modern peripheral figures, in relation, not only to materiality or economy, but also to the cultural dimension. Eduardo Lourenço’s canonical concept related to Portugal, the “hyperidentity”<sup>12</sup>, about the asymmetry between being and representation of the Atlantic

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11 WALLERSTEIN, Immanuel. La cultura come campo di battaglia ideologico del sistema-mondo moderno. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Alla scoperta del sistema mondo*. Roma: manifestolibri, 2003, p. 294 and 302.

12 LOURENÇO, Eduardo. Portugal - Identidade e imagem. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Nós e a Europa ou as duas razões*. Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1990, p. 22.

Portuguese “complex”, connected with the imperial experience, is surely a crucial issue. At the same time, Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ idea of a Portuguese “State-as-the imagination-of-the-centre”<sup>13</sup>, during the ten-year process of the Portuguese admission in the European Community, has been recently converted by Margarida Calafate Ribeiro in another important interpretative tool to decipher, in a postcolonial framework, the Portuguese expansion over the seas, as the “Empire as the imagination-of-the-centre”<sup>14</sup>. Critical devices, beyond their singular interpretative potentials, highlight that the form, if rethought through its huge cultural entailment, as in the case of modern periphery, is as important as the relation that implies. This is another emerging shadow, not in a game of presences or absences, but dealing with the heterogeneous nature of the “Periferic”. The great crucial fact arising from the game played by the relation in peripheral dimension is in my opinion the essential contribution of Antonio Gramsci, who concentrated in the idea of the South (of Italy, the Italian *Meridione*) a great part of its sharp intuition on peripheries.

Actually, Gramsci contrasts the geometric logic with the logic inscribed in the history of spatial concepts (Gramsci’s “metaphorology” directly communicates with the space, based on a lexicon such as “ground”, “territory”, “blocks”, “regions”). In this way, he promotes a reconfiguration of the idea of the South, in particular with other “South(s)”, in a plural, conceptual sense, not in a metaphoric unitarian hypostasis, such as the Italian *Meridione*. Since 1929, Gramsci wrote about the so-called *Mistero di Napoli* (the “Mystery of Naples”), moving from a previous Goethe’s impression, and wondering why such an industrious and active city like Naples was not productive, but only preoccupied for satisfying the needs of the productive classes. The intimate device that the Italian philosopher perceives in Naples, allows us to interpret the Mystery through the relations of force and power, in particular in what he defined the *Quistione meridionale* (“the Southern Question”).

What is impressive in the conceptual reflection about the South (or periphery, in the sense we are mentioning) is its operating analogy with another key category of Gramsci’s thought, that is the subaltern. First of all because Subalternity, like the South, is inter-subjective (starting from the proper Latin etymology), besides arising from a relationship,

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13 SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa. O Estado, as Relações Salariais e o Bem-estar Social na Semiperiferia: o Caso Português”. In: \_\_\_\_\_. (ed.). *Portugal um Retrato Singular*. Porto: Afrontamento, 1993, p. 20.

14 RIBEIRO, Margarida Calafate. *Uma História de Regressos: Império, Guerra colonial e Pós-Colonialismo*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2004, p. 15.

and, therefore, South and Subaltern, not only in Gramsci's thought, are defined in the context of an organic reflection on power and its spatial projections. In this sense, the case of the Italian *Mezzogiorno* may become, as the Subaltern Studies still maintain, a minimum field to deconstruct more complex and global apparatuses such as Empire or colonialism.

The text of the *Quaderno n.1* (1929) about the "Mystery of Naples"<sup>15</sup> captures the importance of the connection always implied by the South, as the most of its interpretative power should be a consequence of an apparently invisible fold that, on the contrary, reveals itself to be substantial. Significantly, the note is referred to "Americanism", which reflects a radical view, with lights and shadows, of the USA modernizing process, in particular the importance of the deep cultural effects determined by the industrial growth in Northern America and the peculiarity of its forms. Much of the content of the "Mystery of Naples", which the philosopher rewrites in the *Quaderno n.22* (1934) was already present in a more ambitious project (later interrupted and left incomplete, because of the prison) *Alcuni temi della questione meridionale*, written in 1926.

Endorsing Gramsci's reflection on the South, Edward Said (in *Culture and Imperialism*) defines the relationship between Naples and Turin, north and south, as what he calls the "Gobetti's factor"<sup>16</sup>, that is the possibility of establishing an axis between the Northern proletariat and the Southern peasants. As a matter of fact, Said assumes Gramsci's sharp analysis on the South as one of the most relevant points of a geographic and territorial reflection on culture. In fact, in *Culture and Imperialism*, the famous musical metaphor of the counterpoint for the cultural archive, something that comes out from the combination of the metropolitan archive with colonial archives and creates alternative and polyphonic narrations<sup>17</sup> derives from the Gramscian reflection. This is another confirmation of the relational feature of the modern peripheral condition, which, in a certain way, helps to go beyond the simple morphological aspect.

Referring to peripheral conditions, it is important - but at the same time problematic, as I will try to show - to configure the peripheral or semiperipheral conditions of Portugal and its imperial experience.

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15 GRAMSCI, Antonio. Quaderno I (XVI) 1929-1939. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *Quaderni del Carcere*, Gerratana V. (ed.), Torino: Einaudi, 1975, v. I, p. 70.

16 SAID, Edward. *Cultura e imperialismo*. Letteratura e consenso nel progetto coloniale dell'Occidente. Italian translation. Roma: Gamberetti, 1998, p. 75.

17 Ibid., p. 76.



This has to do with a very well-known topic (we can just remember Boaventura de Sousa Santos' analysis of the semiperipheral, intermediate condition of the Atlantic country, following Wallerstein's lesson on the specificity of Portuguese colonialism and postcolonialism), but, in a certain way, the wider circle we define as "Periferic" can clarify some points of the discussion.

What complicates the issue is that we are dealing with a mixture of historic facts, cultural and imagined narratives, central or peripheral fantasies and mythological phantoms - imaginary realms of a past never fully possessed; all this creates an extremely complex and uncatchable configuration of Portuguese modern peripheral.

We might say that the recourse to psychoanalytical theory is not only a functional metaphor as it was in the seventies, during the problematic crisis that definitely converted Portugal from an Atlantic country to a European one (see e.g. Eduardo Lourenço); it is rather useful in the sense Francesco Orlando reads *Il Gattopardo* ("The Leopard") in *L'intimità e la storia*, using a post-Freudian equipment (e.g. Matte Blanco). Thus, it is possible to see a specific periphery like Sicily as an antonomasia of the universal peripheral condition *tout court*, as if Sicily and Portugal had in common a "Periferic" basis, keeping analogical links that allow the combination between the particular and the universal<sup>18</sup>.

So, we are approaching what we could name, recalling Gramsci, the "mystery" of Portugal as a peripheral location, a chain of the South (in a plural sense) leading to complications, if we assume a conventional colonial relation. The issue could be summarized in the baroque figure of metropolis, which, for particular conditions, may be interpreted in certain historical periods as "*a colony of its colony*", quoting Almeida Garrett's famous observation on the paradoxical correlation of forces between Portugal and Brazil at the time of the Lusophone Brazilian Empire, at the early 19th century<sup>19</sup>.

Modern peripheral features, not only residual, characterize Portuguese ontology since its beginnings (that national mythologies transformed into "origins"): it is significant to observe that the consciousness of the South is somehow associated to a radical revision of the Portuguese ontology, in its complex dialectics between Atlantic and Europe, where Europe emerges as a predominating force on the sea

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18 ORLANDO, Francesco, *L'intimità e la storia*. Lettura del Gattopardo. Torino: Einaudi, 1998, p. 121 and 122.

19 GARRETT, João Baptista da Silva Leitão Almeida. *Portugal na balança da Europa*. Do que tem sido e do que ora lhe convém ser na nova ordem de coisas do mundo civilizado. Lisboa: Horizonte, 2005, p. 65.

and Portugal regains its marginal, extreme status of a European country turned out to be a weak and vulnerable Atlantic dispersion. An example of this is the dualism depicted by Eduardo Lourenço when he refers to the conflict, in the case of Portugal, between an ontological strength and an ontic weakness characterizing Portugal history as a whole<sup>20</sup>.

So, if the Southern consciousness comes out more of a relationship or an articulation with the north than a spatial location, speaking of the geographic and historical case of Portugal, the Southern consciousness is configured not in a theoretical, but in a practical and historical way, as a clash of power intensities, a complex dialectics or, it would be better to say, tensions between different poles (north and south, centre and periphery, etc.). Therefore, it's an intellectual process that "produces" the South, as a declension of a hybrid, modern and simultaneously late condition.

Such a feature can be explained by the complexity of the location of Portugal, within, at least, a double geography. The awareness that a reterritorialization of Portugal was not something to be postponed occurs, beyond the emergence of Europe, in the transit between the 19th and the 20th centuries. The turning point of such a process may be located still in the 20th century, when the discussion on modernities places the country and the national culture in what can be defined sociologically as a semi-periphery.

In the folds of a "particular" modernity – and someone might say, with some risks, "specific" – representations of Portugal are fed by a fantasy of the centre which is anyway inadequate to hide all the evidences of an immanent peripheral co-presence. Modern European colonial topographies are based on more tortuous, eccentric figures in the Portuguese case.

For these reasons, the triad modernization, modernities and modernism has a proper function in 20<sup>th</sup> century Portugal, at least until the fracture of the full European inscription and the end of any imperial temptation (after the Carnations Revolution in 1974 and the decolonization in 1975).

In this context, we assist to an apparent resistance to Modernity, used as a flag to claim an historic exceptionalism, at the same time accumulated and comparative, in what could be seen as the centre (only partial, actually), but promoting a parallel, doubled modernity. This is made by controlling modernizing processes through the adoption

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20 LOURENÇO, Eduardo, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

of modernist techniques outside, in the so – called colonial space, highlighting more and more the mixed form of modern peripheries.

So, we can ask what remains of a spatially localized periphery when the dominant agency of the regime alters the relations of force in the above mentioned triad. An identitarian self-portrait work is at stake in a context like that. Modernist and vanguard signs are recycled for the production of a peripheral self-represented location<sup>21</sup>.

Beyond the configuration of modern periphery as a form and relation, it is important to add how a periphery may be the result – that is, the work of a production, or a process, particularly when the tensions between material and cultural conditions are deeply sharp and are involved in a permanent redefinition of the peripheral and the Southern inscription, as well as in an intensity of powers.

I would like to use a couple of images as circumstantial evidences, not really full analytical objects, but useful as turning points for the following reflection.

The first image is Kinaxixi municipal market in Luanda, a “modernist” work erected in the fifties and planned by the Angolan Portuguese architect Vasco Vieira da Costa, pulled down in 2008 in order to construct a new six-floor mall. The demolition, which was considered in Portugal a tragedy for the modern Portuguese architectonic history, provoked a debate on cultural heritage, architectural memory, and colonial relations. To whom belonged Kinaxixi Market, as a cultural heritage, to the former colonizer or the former colonized? Why an example of Portuguese modern architecture is destroyed in the name of economic market values or as a consequence of an old and overcome postcolonial resentment?

The second case is quoted in a classical and fundamental essay *Raízes do Brasil* (1936), by Sérgio Buarque de Holanda, on national formation (and previously, as an embryo, in an article, “*Corpo e alma do Brasil*” (“Body and Soul of Brazil”, 1935)). The text mentions a strong image of what can be assumed as an interpretative figure of Portuguese colonial experience, in this case localized in South America: referring to the singular modernity of Brazil, after a deep and still active influence of the Portuguese colonization, he observes that today we are still “a periphery without a centre”.<sup>22</sup>

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21 In such a perspective cfr APPADURAI, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 179 and 180.

22 HOLANDA, Sérgio Buarque de. *Raízes do Brasil*. 18. ed. Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1984, p. 131.

The double image (Kinaxixi and an absolute periphery) helps us to understand a little better what is at stake with Portugal and a diaspora overseas going on for ages, that is the configuration of a peculiar modern peripheral setting: the dislocation in the periphery of a Modernity otherwise fought in the metropolis (a metropolis marked by another peripheral situation) and the production of a quite absolute periphery (to which any central reference is taken away, as well as any constitutive inter-subjective relation). It is a sort of huge fetish of the “Periferic” that perfectly interprets one of the most famous Salazarist propaganda slogans “*orgulhosamente só*” (“proudly alone”).

After the World War II, when the international community started to claim the dissolution of the European Empires, a peripheral mythopoeia has been articulated with a very functional symbolic economy. The long duration strategy of Portugal drastically changed directions. Starting from the constitutional revision in 1951, all the imperial possessions were converted, using an ingenious rhetorical device and a revisionist and integrational discourse, considering the exceptionalism of the civilizing Portuguese expansion over the seas. As it is well-known, Empire became *Ultramar* (“Overseas”), Colonies turned to be Overseas Provinces, Colonialism is translated as *Integracionism* and so on. In this way, the Portuguese empire, which had developed in the previous decades, between 1930 and 1945, as a mystic achievement of the providential “destiny” of the Atlantic country to dominate other worlds, to be naturally and ontologically colonizer, claims its peripheral condition outside the modern European imperialisms, configuring itself as a large periphery without a centre, where peripheries reached a more advanced stage of development in comparison with their metropolis.

This comes along with a coincident production of a self-image as a peripheral margin of Modernity. Such a new rearrangement is based apparently on a singular genealogy, mixing peripheral modernities with proper and modern techniques of assemblage. The Brazilian reflection on national formation, around the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concentrated, in particular, on the anthropologist Gilberto Freyre’s thought, enhancing for the first time the importance of the black slaves in the construction of the hybrid, mixed race, Brazilian identity. At first, such a vision was rejected and considered as dangerous by the Salazarist regime, because of the importance given to race mixing (*miscigenação*). In the fifties, the same regime assumed this external (peripheral) thought to highlight that Portuguese history in this perspective must be reformulated not as a colonial narration but, on the contrary, as an early civilizing project founded on a precocious modern “humanitarian” universalism,

assuming the features at this stage of what is renamed, as a specificity, “Luso-tropicalism”.

Similarly, a dose of unrealism can be noted in the resurgence of this Luso-Tropicalist, nostalgic view regarding the Imperial experience of Portugal outside Europe. According to this revisionist theory of the colonial experience, from the point of view of colonial violence, Portugal practised a much more friendly (“cordially”) type of colonialism within the borders of its empire. This conviction contributed to the formation of a rather widespread stereotype regarding the existence of a colonial model specific to the Portuguese empire, in which the conditions were created for a progressive alliance between the colonizer and the colonized (Brazil is the alleged example of this).

This model is very different in nature compared with the one that went on in other colonial contexts, for example within the context of British “regulatory” colonialism. Even this re-interpretation suffers, as it happens when the Imperial narration is at stake, from a substantial manipulation of the relationship between *factum* and *factum*, between history and myth. This is absolutely indecipherable in the Portuguese case, because it overlooks a substantial detail which the most attentive postcolonial studies have readily pointed out: the “subordinate” colonialism practised by countries such as Portugal is not at all weaker, as it may be claimed; on the contrary, it is more intense and complex because the colonialism practised by a semiperipheral country reproduces both the direct colonialism of the metropolis on the colony, as well as parts of the indirect colonialism which the metropolis is subjected to by other centres<sup>25</sup>.

The lusophone-tropicalist rearrangements, taken as a revision of Portuguese colonial narrative, are a quite intriguing object of study. First of all, for the modality through which a modern periphery is carried out as an artificial but historically active locality, typical of any act of colonization, transforming space and times in places and histories. It is also an effective work whose construction provides metacritical elements to discuss how a theoretical postcolonial framework can operate in critical discourses. This is a problematic ideological device which influences most of the representations taking into account Portuguese colonial past.

The labyrinth in which the work is executed is quite eccentric; however, it’s not a casual and planned eccentricity, but rather a modern discourse rooted in the old colony (Brazil) for national aims, in particular to fulfill the process of national formation. This is done a couple of decades

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25 SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa, op. cit., p. 247.

after by the old colonizer (Portugal) to justify its colonial past as another kind of project in comparison to the other European colonialisms.

The appropriation of Freyre's reflection (with Freyre's availability) is really functional for supporting the isolation of the claim for a specific peripheral condition. It is important to notice that this reassumption happens with a modern symbolic work of rearrangement and articulation of another location. It deals with articulated techniques of assemblage, quotation, rewriting, reusing, that turn the work into a modernist act, even if not aesthetically finalized, at least from a formal point of view. As Berman shows, "the Modernism of the underdevelopment is destined to found itself on fantasies and dreams of modernity, feeding itself with a contemporary familiarity and struggling with mirages and phantoms".<sup>24</sup>

The most interesting element comes out when we consider the temporalities and the ideological content, entailed by the production of such a work. A postcolonial material, belonging to a remote colonial past, is recycled to set on and confirm the ongoing strong vitality of colonialism, which is, in its turn, redefined not as colonial but as civilizational, shifting from a historical plane to a cultural one. In this sense, periphery works in symmetry with the material of the colonial project, with the force of this ideological rearticulation, disguised as scientific tendency as in Gilberto Freyre's contribution. The critic was invited to carry out a wide trip "*em terras de Portugal*" ("in Portuguese lands"<sup>25</sup>) to see a colonial system originated by the historical weakness of the Portuguese colonial project.

The praise for the Portuguese plastic tendency to hybridism and race mixing, distancing itself from the critical position and the censorship of other colonial empires in condemning the practice of mixed race marriages, incorporates a visible fact within Portuguese colonial experience and its pseudo-specificity.

What draws our attention is the consistence between the work and the act of this artificial interpretative product. It is like an assemblage of the main line of force combining a modernization movement, a reshaping of the past by fixing a proper paradigm of colonialism and criticizing alternative modernities. The equipment, through which such a reformulation turns to be possible, derives from the modernist arsenal, and everything is put together with a wide consciousness of

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24 BERMAN, Marshall, op. cit., p. 285.

25 Cf. FREYRE, Gilberto. *Um brasileiro em terras portuguesas*. Introdução a uma possível lusotropicalologia, acompanhada de conferências e discursos proferidos em Portugal e em terras lusitanas e ex-lusitanas da Ásia, da África e do Atlântico. Recife-São Paulo: Fundação Gilberto Freyre - É Realizações Editora, 2010.

the functioning of this new revisionist narration. Past postcolonial and nationalist Brazil is the main ingredient of contemporary colonial Portugal.

How does peripheral modernity at stake facilitate the new amalgam corresponding to an alternative semantic strategy? Heterogeneous composition, and in particular the possibility to handle some parts of the peripheral form, disconnecting the peripheral from any other relational centre, is what provides the main tools for the cultural operation on fragile memories and not yet historicized colonial past. But the consciousness of the work of periphery is quite sharp and visible.

The complex cultural act based on a careful use of the symbolic economy carried out by the regime, in the presence of a skeptical international community, is not at all extemporary, but founded in a longstanding effort to invest symbolically in the construction of an imaginary empire. The work is based on a double reterritorializing exercise of power, ex-scribing (it should be said, using partially the term defined by Jean Luc Nancy and in the sense of a cultural sovereignty) from a Brazilian postcolonial history, a reviewed colonial past and in-scribing it in Africa as a new Portuguese Brazil (since the times of “*Setembrismo*” and Sá da Bandeira). This actively interposes an investment in the verbal aspect, that is, showing the long duration of a present tense (a historical present tense).

In this sense, it is perfectly consistent the affirmation of the 1961 Minister of Colonies, Adriano Moreira: “We want to emphasize in front of the national community the national decision to go on with the politics of multiracial integration, without which there will not be peace and civilization in black Africa [...] a politics whose benefits are documented by the major country of the future, that is Brazil”.<sup>26</sup>

There are many elements in Moreira’s sentence that need to be examined. The first is very evident and is the rhetoric device that makes Brazil an antonomasia of the periphery founded by Portugal. In a certain way, it is a common exercise in literary criticism, in particular in the Freudian outline (as Francesco Orlando shows with *Il Gattopardo*); at the same time, the antonomasia is used not towards a generalization, as we could expect, but in search of a specificity to be established and thus working in a complex mode, shifting the general for the particular and naturalizing the artificial effect.

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26 (incomplete) apud RIBEIRO, Margarida Calafate. op. cit., p. 160. Quoted in RIBEIRO, Margarida Calafate. op. cit., p. 160.



As a matter of fact, we have many slight shifting movements that shape Luso-tropicalism, through a form that has semantic effects. The other macroscopic case is, as it emerges from Moreira's quotation, the Luso-tropicalism appearing as a fake epistemology and an effective ideology (not a reality, but "a desire or a destiny"<sup>27</sup>). This turns exceptions (in the sense of characterizing features of a certain fact) into examples (whose functioning is, according to Agamben, quite symmetric, even if uneven<sup>28</sup>) and produces an apparently original (in all the sense) colonial paradigm as a work. And the work is executed through a sophisticated rhetoric and a symbolic technology and is based on a reuse of the heterogeneity of forms rooted in peripheries.

What I'd like to underline in this reflection is that it is risky to build up a discourse on peripheries only starting from its morphology, from its mixed form, because even unintentionally we might generate an aura of the peripheral condition, celebrating an extraordinary regime of uniqueness. In the Portuguese case, a contagious uniqueness produces other ("lusophone") forms of "uniquenesses" (in the plural), if the paradoxical (that is modern) definition can be admitted.

Which are the main semantic consequences deriving from the production of a peripheral discourse on the luso-tropical artificial "specificity"?

Among the main ones, I'd say that the first is a warning on an ethics of discourse concerning postcolonial studies. The luso-tropicalism produced through an apparently scientific theory of the tropics adopted by Salazarist regime, is a colonial device of a postcolonial discourse, but it keeps working as a postcolonial possibility of interpretation about Portugal and the "seas". This is the reason why it is so easy to fall in its traps, even involuntarily. There is a sort of automatic distortion in the intention of saying when we deal with Portuguese Empire and colonial experience. It seems that describing any context of Portuguese colonialism, because of the project's weakness and the exiguity of the historical force, we are always compelled to identify some differences that form a specificity. Uncritical praise of peripheries or modern peripheral or the peripheric may breed such effect, even indirectly or unintentionally. It is the case of the big names among postcolonial

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27 CASTELO, Cláudia. O modo português de estar no mundo. In: \_\_\_\_\_. *O luso-tropicalismo e a ideologia colonial portuguesa (1935-1961)*. Porto: Afrontamento, 1998.

28 AGAMBEN, Giorgio. *Homo sacer. Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita*. Torino: Einaudi, 1995, p. 27. And on this topic see VECCHI, Roberto. *Exceção atlântica*. Pensar a literatura da guerra colonial. Porto: Afrontamento, 2010, p.184.



Portuguese critiques, which occupy important positions, but are not completely immune from Luso-tropicalist traces.

This potential threat that can affect any “situated” discourse (which, in the act of situating, implies the risk of diverging or being exposed to an ideological drift) provokes the necessity to rethink peripheries from other points of view, not only morphologically.

In fact, if a production of peripheries as a work through a proper cunning articulation is feasible, as we can see it is very important to watch this process because of the reification, that is the shifting from a use value to another consumption value, related to an ideological reconfiguration of the work, hiding the way it is produced. In a certain perspective, anyway, the transfer of terms of the problem from the historical horizon to a material, morphological or linguistic one, determines several conditions of study and reflection on it. Otherwise, it would keep alive a phantasmatic essence.

In this way, we can consider that modern peripheral elements impose a wider angle of critical agency in case we want to avoid negative semantic effects exemplified by Luso-tropicalism. We have to assume peripheries with all their dense background, with the quality of a form but also with their supplementary relational and processual entailments.

Mosaicism, composition, articulation - all the modern techniques we can use when we handle hybrid and accumulated fragments of the peripheral dimension - can convert peripheral materials in a rigid hegemonic discourse without any user’s assent.

In conclusion, we can draw some clear advice from the connection between modern peripheries and luso-tropicalist rearrangements.

Such a perspective provides a materialistic mode (dealing with linguistic and rhetorical planes) to approach ideological issues, in particular, as in the imperial Salazarist case, the attempt is to naturalize an ideological reformulation of past colonial experience.

Another consequence of this option is the relevance we can ascribe to the task of the ethical subjectivity in the construction of a scientific discourse, in particular handling fragments of divergent modernities in accordance to which the definition of the rules of the assembly is essential to produce one or another postcolonial narratives, as it occurs in many other cases of problematic contemporary representations such as testimony or translation. The risks of revisionist narration, as luso-tropicalism shows, are many and it is important for the interpreter to activate strategies where his ethical engagement is exposed and visible and not concealed or distorted.

Finally, the vision that comes out, from this reconstruction of periphery as a modern, symbolical and rhetorical, problematic work, is that the common – which is not the eccentric – of colonial and postcolonial rearrangements may be found in the violent nature of the colonial relation (the opposite of luso-tropical cordiality); something that narratives can hide or euphemize for specific ideological aims and approaches.

The deconstruction of artificial specificity, derived from peripheral modernities and related to the modern expansion of dominating centres, may not only unmask the social and ideological production of eccentric peripheral auras, but may clearly show what could be seen as “unique”, on the contrary is the same, deep and hidden heart of an old but modern violence, reusing and misusing remnants of other times and probably forever lost voices and histories.

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