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Consequences of Intercultural Practices in Miguel Sousa Tavares' Equator

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Introduction

This article involves the analysis of a case-study, so I have chosen *Equador* by the Portuguese author Miguel Sousa Tavares. His book recreates the story of Sao Tome and Principe's people living under strict circumstances, while belonging to the Portuguese empire as one of its overseas' province. The forthcoming lines contain an approach to interculturality by analyzing these concrete circumstances. These lines also describe and study the differences between cultures - the Portuguese, as a European culture, and the Equatorial, as a colonized people's culture. The theme is old, but always relevant: the clash of value systems and the impossibility of forcibly overlaying one society on another.

Slavery has existed as a common practice in most civilizations throughout history, based upon the superiority of a human being towards another. In socially hierarchized communities slavery was a major principle, almost a need. That way, some would benefit from exuberating privileges but many others only from hard working and giving their freedom up to be mistreated instead. In order to have a socially structured community, they were to be seriously and consciously neglected.

Even though the practice of enslaving people varied accordingly to the location in time and space, it never ceased, but spread all over the world instead. It had a big impact from the 15th century onwards, with the discovery of "new worlds" and new enslaving methods. Portugal was a pioneer in this reality, with the expeditions to Africa, sighting new routes to commercialize this wide labor force throughout Europe, thus enabling the country's economical enrichment.

The practice of racism, on the other hand, assumed people were to be classified and put apart based on their ethnic characteristics. It included behaviors, customs, traditions, beliefs, thoughts, practices and interests.

By joining these two strong types of prejudice together, it meant people were diminished not only just because they were represented as less than the white settlers, but also by their ethnic characteristics and traditions.



Resumo

Este ensaio envolve a análise de um estudo de caso, portanto escolhi o livro *Equador*, do autor Miguel Sousa Tavares. A sua prosa recria a história do povo de São Tomé e Príncipe sob circunstâncias bastante rígidas, enquanto Província Ultramarina do Império Português. Este contexto será analisado daqui em diante abordando a questão da interculturalidade. São, assim, expostas e comentadas as diferenças existentes entre duas culturas - a Portuguesa, enquanto sociedade europeia; e a Equatorial, enquanto povo colonizado. É um tema antigo, mas sempre relevante: o conflito entre sistemas de valores e a impossibilidade de sobrepor coercivamente uma sociedade perante outra.

Das temáticas a ser abordadas, destacam-se a escravatura e o racismo. A escravatura existe desde sempre como prática comum a vários povos, por forma a levar a cabo a superioridade de um povo através da força. Por sua parte, a prática do racismo, fomenta a questão étnica como fator de inferiorização.

Aliada a estes temas, ocorre a tentativa de sobreposição da cultura europeia portuguesa à cultura africana equatorial, motivada pela expansão do Império Português do século XIX e início do século XX, e pelo crescente interesse na exploração das terras colonizadas, especificamente nas suas matérias-primas.

Historical Contextualization

During the reign (October 19th 1889 - February 8th 1908) of King D. Carlos I (September 28th 1863 - February 8th 1908), Portugal struggled with several political and economic crises, a situation that has stretched overseas. These crises were motivated by the aging of the well-known system of *Rotativismo*¹ that kept complying manipulated and discredited elections, as most times there was no change regarding small parties. A Government not chosen by the population but by the King himself, with all influences attached, didn't administrate the nation properly. This uncertainty reached the colonies and eventually led, as e.g., to the dismissal of one of the colonies' - Sao Tome and Principe - previous Governor.

¹ Portuguese political system which consisted in power sharing between the two major political parties of the center-right and center-left.



Around the world, the Russian-Japanese War, which also involved China, Korea, Europe and the United States, came to an end with the Russians' defeat. Both parts signed the Treaty of Portsmouth - a treaty of peace, agreeing to settle harmony and armistice.

The war and the treaty had signaled the emergence of Japan as a world power, whilst the USA became a significant force in world diplomacy due to the mediating role of Theodore Roosevelt in peace negotiations, and led Russia to abandon its expansionist policies.

Concerning Portugal's international image, the British press had published, in bold letters: "Slavery still alive in Portuguese African colonies"².

Contextualization of the Narrative

Given Portugal's economic and social circumstances, the situation in colonies wasn't any better. And, as mentioned before, the previous Governor of Sao Tome and Principe was dismissed due to the Empire's crisis. Miguel Sousa Tavares tells us in his book that a new one had been chosen and, therefore, that he had to travel urgently to the colony.

The story here considered specifically portrays a Portuguese bohemian young man - Luís Bernardo Valença - that is invited by King Dom Carlos to take over the position of Governor of Sao Tome and Principe's island.

In this period, Sao Tome and Principe, located in Equator, like most of the empire's many colonies, struggles with slavery, racism, essentialism and other prejudices and problems. Given the situation, the world economic potencies, among which England, try, under the shield of a "hypocrite humanism", to eliminate the Portuguese cocoa producers' competition, with the alleged illegal use of slave work, and encouraging the boycott to Sao Tome's coffee. A real act of humanism would consider not someone's own interests over the rest - although claiming for the change of an unethical situation, for that unbearable and intolerable - but human welfare above all.

² TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 34.



The colony is ruled by a Portuguese governor, so he protects the nation's best interests. But instead of persuading the British that all anti-slavery agreements are being observed, he ends up trying to stand up for the black slaves' rights, to be well treated, fed and paid instead. Slavery wouldn't be considered a *problem* by them, if its abolition hadn't already been published.

Slavery was abolished by Marquês de Pombal in 1761, even though the first slaves were released from their condition by the Government only in 1854. In February 25th 1869, slavery was abolished in the entire Portuguese empire. Worldwide, its abolishment only happened in 1948, with the Human Rights Declaration, where one can read in article 4: "No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms."³

In spite of all those obstacles, the truth was that, indeed, slavery was still being practised by Portuguese colonizers in the island of Sao Tome. Thus, with the British intents of exposing the situation, the new Governor started his evaluation of Sao Tome and Principe's labor conditions. When he came to that fatidic conclusion, he actually wanted to put an end to it - not only because he should prove to the British the inexistence of slavery, but also because it was against his own principles and beliefs. Though he didn't have any support from the Empire's metropolis - Lisbon -, he went forward with the idea. While visiting plantations, he would always want to know more about the working and living conditions of workers. He once represented a slave in court, as otherwise the slave would be denied defense, provoking the anger of the plantations' owners, who were obviously not pleased with the Governor's interfering with their issues.

Theory and the Narrative

As it has been said above, there has always been prejudice and ideologies amongst and against people influencing them. These topics have become a kind of social structure frequently used between cultures. In order to become 'superior' individuals, 'others' have been intentionally created. They were intentionally created and did not

³ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a4>



just appear, by the simple fact that people always tend to make representations of what they do not know well: "Awkward and faddish as it may sound, othering expresses the insight that the Other is never simply given, never just found or encountered, but made"⁴.

That is considered to be the case, once the "inferiors" are always the ones about whom nothing or little is known; whose practices, traditions, behaviors and interests end up being underrated and thought of less relevance, because that is what the 'superiors' intend that everyone else should believe in. It must be clear that, in the analysis of this case-study, the 'inferiors' are the black enslaved and the 'superiors' are those who "own" them, the white folks. That leads us to the idea of representation: we see what we are shown, and what we are shown is not chosen by us, but by the so called 'superiors':

*(...) we give things meaning by how we represent them - the words we use about them, the stories we tell about them, the images of them we produce, the emotions we associate with them, the ways we classify and conceptualize them, the values we place on them.*⁵

Accordingly, whatever we are shown may not correspond to the truth and be a mere representation of untrue facts. Also what we understand is what we are given to know, not always what we want or choose to. That said one may not know what truth really is but only a part of it, and most of the times a misrepresented one. That is why I consider that, in the book *Equator*, the black community is presented and represented as an acculturate community by those who want to classify them for less than they truly are.

To the idea of representation is inherent the concept of identity. A represented culture or identity, although sometimes not accurate, is not steady, but uncertain and evolving. However, accordingly to Essentialism, that is not the right definition of identity. It is, then, fixed in a determined original moment with an inherent set of

⁴ FABIAN, Johannes; "Presence and Representation: The Other and Anthropological Writing", in *Othering: Representations and Realities - Critical Inquiry Journal*, Vol. 16, No. 4. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990, p. 754.

⁵ HALL, Stuart (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications/Open University, 1997, p. 3.



permanent, unalterable and authentic characteristics, belonging to a certain group, opposing another, that surpass History. Allowing this, it is possible to conclude that the representation of an identity is, therefore, permanent and changeless, and that process is an act of power, what will lead us to the subject of slavery, even if mitigated.

Some of the governors that have administrated the island of Sao Tome used to go along with the Portuguese plantation' owners enslaving policy, once it allowed them to have a higher income at lower prices. The British also had cocoa and coffee companies that were of comparatively inferior success, because their labor force was being (well) paid and that was to increase the product's final rate, thus making Portuguese products to be preferred for their lower price. Therefore, their interest in proving the occurring fraud in the Portuguese colony in Equator increased considerably.

Despite that intention, their real interest was income, and even though the British weren't exempt of enslaving their supposed employees, they were really interested in profiting from the situation, once Portuguese products always ended up being cheaper.

The book draws a parallel between the mundane and consumerist life already existent in Lisbon (the capital of the empire) and the sad reality of slave trade and exploitation in the underdeveloped atmosphere lived in the Portuguese colonies, a parallel which is about to be explained.

BACKGROUNDS OF PREJUDICE

The black slaves in Sao Tome and Principe were underpaid, overworked and for that poorly lived. As a result, they became unsatisfied, frustrated and unbelieving about the idea of a better life, with better and worthy people than the white Portuguese plantation owners, who were constantly mistreating them.

Five topics will be approached, in order to present a thorough analysis of this case-study and enlighten the previous mentioned parallel between the mundane and bohemian life in the metropolis - Lisbon - and the overlaying and dominant society



that Portuguese people created in the colonies, while enslaving black people. The backgrounds explored are: working conditions; eating habits; housing situation; performance in social events - including dress code and behavior patterns; and forms of family structure - including women's social condition.

Before I begin, I find it essential to say that the author, Miguel Sousa Tavares, begins the book with a definition of *Equador* as a *line that divides earth in north and south hemispheres, a line of demarcation and boundary between two worlds*, but also as a possible contraction of the expression «é com a dor» («é cum a dor», in ancient Portuguese), that means "with pain" or "painfully"⁶. This possible definition is allusive to the suffering, majorly silent - voluntary or not - of the enslaved natives.

Right from here we see the intent of the author to expose this reality of prejudice too. And that may be considered as one of the basis of this case study analysis.

⁶TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 3 (my translation).



1. WORKING

On what concerns working conditions, they would differ accordingly to social status, as it still works nowadays. Having money, coming from a wealthy and renowned family, or being white are aspects that used to influence a person's working role or placement. Sometimes being white was enough, and being wealthy was only a natural consequence.

Portuguese people in Equator's Sao Tome acted as land and people owners, as if they were able to do whatever they wanted. According to that idea - a deeply entrenched structure of feeling - all white Portuguese usually employed black people and not otherwise. These structures were embedded in the colonizers' minds as a real conviction, and led them to provide black people only the basics - generally, not even that - to ease their labor journey.

Native people were considered hired workers and, as the head of one of the slave quarters states, they would "have working schedules, Sundays to rest, medical assistance, lodging or housing supplied by the slave quarters"⁷. Though, when he is asked if the so called workers are free, the answer is that they don't leave just because they don't want to.

These conditions were to be taken as a payment, as a reward for working non-stop - as if they would have a choice, as we will see - for the plantation owners. Furthermore, they wouldn't be allowed to fight back, complain or even just think about it. It was mostly as if "Did you work hard today? Weren't you whipped? Good! Now you may rest for another day like this in the morning. And be thankful for that!".

But the reality is that they were given poor housing, poor and few meals a day, some "time out" and mostly hard work.

Indeed, when an employee/slave was not pleasing his owner with his work he would be instantly and constantly whipped. Even taking a breath would be considered

⁷ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 112 (my translation).



harmful to the plantation's profits. In reality, it would be impossible for black employees to work better, not only due to the heaviness of the working conditions, but also due to the poor meals they had, which weakened their health.

2. EATING

Eating habits were also a factor of distinction, once white people could afford and were allowed to have full table meals and nutritious eating habits. On the other hand, the locals would have to be satisfied with simple, kind of "ready-made" and basic meals, since they couldn't manage to pay for better or healthier food.

In the metropolis, one could have for breakfast "tea, French toasts, goat cheese, peach jelly and scrambled eggs with ham"⁸. Even on the Island the white population would be offered "a reasonable white wine along with a course of shrimp seasoned with hot sauce and puree or roasted porgy, with *matabala*⁹ and fried onions"¹⁰; for dessert, they would even have "pudding and fruit salad"¹¹.

On the other side, in the plantations, black workers would be simply served a "bowl of cooked flour and a liter of boiled water, [served] in brass mugs"; while, in the same workplace, the Governor and the plantation owner would be having "fried pork meat with beans, banana dessert, followed by coffee and brandy"¹². These clear opposite evidences, present in Miguel Sousa Tavares's book, only support and strengthen the concept of discrimination by race and social status. The simplest meals to the simplest - and, as thought back then, the lowest - of people. The black wouldn't be worthy of better, neither could they manage to pay for it.

⁸ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 20 (my translation).

⁹ Herbaceous spontaneous plant, from the family of Dioscoreaceae, with large shield-shaped leaves, which are starchy tubers alternative to potatoes, though less soft. Typical in Sao Tome and Principe.

¹⁰ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 215 (my translation).

¹¹ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 140 (my translation).

¹² TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 117 (my translation).



3. HOUSING

As we can see in the book, and concerning the locals' way of living and the conditions beneath that, it is correct to reemphasize that they did not know better. Unhealthy meals and poor housing were the main effects of their poverty.

On what concerns housing specifically, the book let us percept that whereas the natives had the most basic facilities, Portuguese people, including the Governor himself, could appreciate the comfort of big mansions. Locals had Sao Tome's typical facilities such as a "cubata" - "a simple wooden construction covered in palm tree leaves or solid mud"¹³ - and colonizers had guards on their fences, to keep them safe - as they were actually powerful important people in this colonial society.

Also, there was not a "single car" on the island, only the town center had "street lights" and "there was no factory or industry worthy of that designation"¹⁴. Sao Tome was considered a poor and underdeveloped island, which "lacks everything that is world, as we know in Europe and other civilized countries", it is in its "rough and primitive form". Another proof of that is when the King himself explains, when he summons the Governor-to be, that in the island Luís Bernardo Valença "will be accommodated with all the luxuries inherent to his post, operating in the colony, and that I suspect are not that many, only enough"¹⁵. This is a conscientious and standardized representation, more than a subconscious prejudice, as this was a common and perfectly normal practice - after all, the black slaves were to be considered inferior and live accordingly, in a likewise inferior environment.

¹³ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 105 (my translation).

¹⁴ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 74 (my translation).

¹⁵ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa, *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 31 (my translation).



4. SOCIAL LIFE

As there were no street lights, clearly there wouldn't be places to develop and cultivate the arts and formal knowledge. On one side, in order not to let the black community grow smarter, but, on the other side, because there were no actual conditions for it. There were no accommodations like in the metropolis, where the Governor was used to go to clubs, restaurants, theatres and even brothels.

The Governor even states that in Sao Tome he had to "abandon commodity and comfort, but also his social life and cultural routine" in order to "get stuck in an island, in the middle of the ocean, at the end of the world (...) where even the black slaves are forcibly shipped to"¹⁶. As he demonstrates his discontent towards the socio-economic circumstances in Sao Tome and Principe, he realizes that black people are forced to go there to work, through slave trade, and that they are mistreated as well.

▪ CULTURAL BEHAVIOURS

The author expresses the point of view of one of the black slaves, as a rebellion is being solved by the Portuguese governor:

(...) It is rare for a white man to keep a promise made to a black man. God did not create the world for white people to feel bad for the black ones or to acknowledge them any rights.¹⁷

While this statement supports what has been said so far, it also describes and validates how black people felt uncomfortable when a white person reached out to greet them, hence they were not used to their sympathy, unless with seconds intents. Their look towards white people showed contempt and distrust; they expected nothing from them but hard work and no appropriate living conditions.

In an early 20th century remote colony, mostly populated by black people - considered as 'uncultivated' by the white elite - and lacking resources for cultural

¹⁶ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa; *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 61 (my translation).

¹⁷ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa; *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 275 (my translation).



enrichment, the black community could not stand for their rights and complaint about what they thought was incorrect, in order to improve their conditions of living.

Based on these restraining circumstances, we can infer that they did not know better, not because they did not want to, but because they did not know how to. We may say, then, that they were not *taught* better, according to the philosophy of Mathew Arnold, as they were forced to leave their education in the hands of others. But these others were the white elite, who wanted the black to remain ignorant in order to protect their own interests and prevent the native forced labor from coming to an end. As 'uncultivated', the black community would accept what the 'superiors' or 'cultivated' - the white elite - would have to tell them, as it happened in white dominated education, which the slave workers were to accept gratefully and passively. It would never be their role to criticize or judge whatever the white elite had to "offer" them.

As an example, in several conversations with many slaves on their working contracts, the governor finds out that some of them had no idea of what he meant or when their contracts would end and some were even completely illiterate, although they said they had signed some document. Still, King Dom Carlos and other white men in the island considered the slaves "hired" workers.

The term *culture* can have different meanings: it may represent moral standards but also material principles. As a moral standard it may be considered a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development. On the other hand, as a material value it is said to be the works and practices of intellectual and, especially, artistic activity¹⁸.

The white elite described in the book consider its own culture, works, practices and values to be the superior ones. Their interests and ideas are to be believed in and must prevail at all cost, and their knowledge would be the one that actually mattered. Thus black people were submitted to their ideologies and would have to think as white people did. Their culture did not have any weight in the day to day life in the eyes of the elite; therefore they were simply considered as working and non-thinking masses.

¹⁸ WILLIAMS, Raymond. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of culture and society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 90.



The most suitable definition of culture to apply in this case is what Matthew Arnold describes, in his work *Culture and Anarchy*, as "*the best that is known and thought about the world*"¹⁹, once the slaves actually didn't know better and were subjugated to whatever might be imposed upon them.

The author of the book also has an opinion on this, according to what has been said, as he thinks that the European, especially the Portuguese, way of colonizing wouldn't include learning at all, but only exploitation at its highest, without civilizing the slaves.

A culture, as in a community, is also based on common beliefs, ideals, thoughts and representations of the world. In the present subject, where the approached themes are, among others, racism and slavery, the notion of representation plays an essential part. Once, in a broad sense, it is "*a system in which human beings are the property of others*"²⁰, in colonial centuries, those mentioned "others" would characterize a foreign culture based on isolated acts or beliefs, in order to suppress them. The process of reducing this different culture to nothing is a representation in itself.

▪ TRADITIONS

It is possible to deduce that this book doesn't depict much of the Equatorial traditions and customs. However, there is one that I consider very relevant, once it demonstrates the bare contrast between the Portuguese European culture and the one of Sao Tome's island. An awakening call at 4.30 am in a slave quarter is described, and the workers are humming:

It was a sad chant (...) a singing moan. A moan for a lost world, only surviving in the memory of yore happy days. (...) An Africa in the endless horizon, and not that prison of 50 for 30 kilometers, that thick and permanently wet asphyxia, those narrow paths through the jungle, with its eternal nauseous cocoa odor, that same bell every day, ringing invariably at 4:30 am, 6 pm and

¹⁹ ARNOLD, Matthew; *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1869, Introduction and Chapter 1.

²⁰ BRACE, Laura; *The politics of property: Labour, freedom and belonging*. Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 2004, pp. 161-162.



9 pm, trapping their time, always inexorably equal and predictable, as if God had set them with a schedule at birth that nothing, nor even happiness or tragedy, nor joy or pain, could ever change.

(...) Luis Bernardo realized the most amazing discovery. He had heard that chant before. In another language, but exactly the same: in «L'Opéra», in Paris, 4 years before, while listening to Nabuco, by [Giuseppe] Verdi. It was «Va, pensiero», the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves.²¹

For some, that was the chant of dawn, the awakening to a new day of work - the actual workers; for others, the white elite, it is just a song from a fancy opera that was heard in a theater, while traveling around the world. This illustrates a dichotomy between the significance of a humble chorus that became well-known almost as an ironic hymn to the slaves, though their suffering is represented in the melody.

5. FAMILY AND WOMEN

On this topic, there are also a few evidences in Miguel Sousa Tavares's prose, though the strongest one happens when the populating process is described to Governor Valença:

- Do you know how we populated this land?

- Tell me.

- With the poor minhotos and alentejanos (...) their family is the black women they buy from the village chiefs, a bag of beans for a woman, a pig for two. Priest, marriage, registered children? My ass! That is about surviving and the unfortunate are glad to have one, two or three black women to call wives (...)²²

The value of family becomes completely underestimated because the main purpose is to get profit from the land; that is why they are called misfortunate - once the poor white settlers couldn't succeed in the continent or because they were deluded to a

²¹ TAVARES, Miguel Sousa; *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 115 (my translation).

²² TAVARES, Miguel Sousa; *Equador*, Lisboa: Oficina do Livro, 2003, p. 70 (my translation).



supposed better or richer life in the colonies. Women are also underrated, once they are *traded* for food, because they are crucial only for reproduction. Besides, by being black, what meant for the white that they had no value or importance whatsoever, sometimes they were considered as being totally worthless, even for reproduction.

6. CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS

When Matthew Arnold further wrote on Culture that it:

*(...) seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light.*²³

He meant that we must seek what is best and taught in the world, because that is the only way we can reach "sweetness and light" - perfection and clarity. However, that is not possible in Miguel Sousa Tavares' *Equador*, once there is no defined culture - there are two cultures trying to coexist - , and also because the 'superiors' are constantly trying to overlay themselves and their culture - their beliefs, traditions and practices - onto the slaves, the so called 'inferiors'.

"Perfection, as culture conceives it, is not possible while the individual remains isolated"²⁴, because the exchange of ideas and a sense of unity and cohesion is necessary, in order to obtain collective perfection. Additionally, Arnold is aware that an extensive flank of individualism is that people are concerned with, and believe in, having their personal freedom - the "right to do what [one] likes". This assumption of personal freedom can, according to Arnold, lead to anarchy.

This turns to be relevant in the present subject, once cultures in Equator - Sao Tome and Principe - do not mix, do not possess the necessary sense of unity and cohesion in order to attain collective perfection, which would mean that both cultures would exist together, blend and become one by respecting and combining both. On the other hand,

²³ ARNOLD, Matthew; *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1869, Introduction and Chapter 1.

²⁴ ARNOLD, Matthew; *Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1869, Introduction and Chapter 1.



the “right to do what one likes” provides the enslavers with the possibility to act as they like and do what they think is the best for themselves.

Elements like

*[...] sounds, words, notes, gestures, expressions, clothes are part of our natural and material world, but their importance for language is not what they mean but what they do, their function. They construct meaning and transmit it. They signify. (...) They are the vehicles which carry meaning because they operate as symbols, which stand for or represent (i.e. symbolize) the meanings we wish to communicate. They function as signs.*²⁵

But

*[...] Members of the same culture must share sets of concepts, images and ideas which enable them to think and feel about the world, to interpret the world, in roughly similar ways. They must share, broadly speaking, the same cultural codes.*²⁶

This clearly does not happen, leading the European/Portuguese culture and the Equatorial/Sao Tomense culture not to blend, but to nearly coexist. Once again, there is no exchanged or shared ideas and concepts between the two. Sao Tome's people have their own traditions, like their singing at 4:30 am to set the beginning for a new day of work, while the same chant is recognized by the white elite as the aria of an opera, a symbol of art. Simultaneously, white people would have their own traditions, like parties and feasts with other rich and invariably also white people.

²⁵ HALL, Stuart (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications/Open University, 1997, pp. 4-5.

²⁶ HALL, Stuart (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage Publications/Open University, 1997, pp. 4-5.



CONCLUSION

It is safe to infer from this case-study that the presence of two different cultures in the early 20th century Equator was evident and strong. They did not blend, but did exist in the same territory, even though they had not actually mixed for many decades. Even nowadays, the black community - although not frequently - continues to not be completely merged with the European or occidental one. And vice versa. People are faithful to their own traditions and beliefs and, besides being hard to change and adapt, culture is indeed a part of their identity, of who they are towards life in society.

In this particular case, the attempt of the Governor of Sao Tome and Principe to defend the native's rights and well-being, as well as their integrity, education and equality with the white (non-supposed to exist) elite, was largely in vain. I wonder why, though. I wonder why there was no one else with his thoughts and hopeful achievements. But then I realize that was a different time, and as it has been described throughout this essay, the structures of feeling that sustained that black people were inferior because they were not white and did not have the same customs as the white ones, and that they were unworthy and destined to be mistreated and enslaved, they were deeply entrenched in society. The same society that believed they had the right to colonize another land as their own, taking those structures of feeling abroad, applying them on those they would find on their way, whom they would reduce, mistreat and enslave.



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