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Lusotopy as Ecumene

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To be edited in Stockholm in Festschrift to Ulf Hannerz.

In a now famous essay, Ulf Hannerz suggested that we should look at our contemporary world as an *ecumene*; that is, as an undivided space of human intercommunication, a network of networks (1991). A few years later, Sidney Mintz argued that, within this larger space, one can identify areas where intercommunication is more intense due to historical reasons – he famously suggested that the Caribbean too must be seen as an *ecumene* (1996). A similar notion of areas of density of intercommunication that define humanity as historically constructed can also be found in Tolkien’s fiction writing, where the notion of *ecumene* played a centrally creative role – he called it ‘the middle-earth’.

In this paper, I argue that the sharing of a historical past functions as a catalyst for *amity* and, thus, within our globalised world Lusotopy (the space/time originating in the historical expansion of the Portuguese) shares the features of a ‘middle-earth’, an *ecumene*. This is due not only to the sharing of a language, to the sharing of cultural codes, or of political and civic institutions; rather, the very choice of the concept of *amity* to characterise what makes Lusotopy emerge is meant to highlight the fact that, over and above these more perceptible features, we can find less immediately visible

features such as kinship networks, family histories, friendships, relations of homonymy, etc – all of those things that mark primordially our social personhood.¹

A catalyst for amity

When I meet someone new, I invariably carry out a process of comparison of their condition to mine. The first thing that happens is that I access what I share with this new person. This involves an exercise in memory – do we speak the same languages, do we hold similar types of knowledge, do we have similar tastes, have we lived in the same cities, do we know people in common? Although the process usually takes place subconsciously, I have found out that it makes for a peculiar intensity in the situation. The proof is that, if on a certain occasion one meets new people, one is prone to getting tired quicker. Greater effort is involved in encountering new people than people we already knew.

The context of the meeting, however, matters immensely. As a young man, I discovered that, in Johannesburg, South Africa, a person who had heard about my parents counted as a friend in the ethnically hostile environment of the Transvaal, where being Portuguese was, on the whole, a stigmatised condition. Then, I went on to discover that, if I came across that very same person in a street in Lourenço Marques (present-day Maputo), where my parents lived, she would not greet me in the same effusive way. Similarly, in England, a few years later, simply speaking Portuguese was a sufficient passport for being received as a friend in someone's home.

The point I want to establish here is that we approach people on the basis of who we are by relation to who they are – but context matters. Thus, sharing a past somehow brings people closer and, depending on context, might even have the effect of allaying

¹ For this particular use of the concept of 'primordially', cf. Pina Cabral, 2002b.

solitude in the way that Epictetus famously described when he said that finding oneself in the middle of a group of thieves while travelling abroad hardly reduces one's solitude: 'it is not the sight of a man as such that relieves us from being forlorn, but the sight of one who is faithful and self-respecting and serviceable.' (2004 [1916], II: 24) Thus, I chose to speak of *amity* – a notion that Meyer Fortes placed at the root of kinship relations and Julian Pitt-Rivers extended to apply to close relations of neighbourhood and friendship (Fortes 1970; Pitt-Rivers 1973). By using it, I mean to stress that what is at stake in these encounters is a process of interaction that is also a process of constant human co-construction, which is akin and associated with the processes of emotional constitution that characterise kinship and friendship.

In his classical essay on the issue, Pitt-Rivers defines amity in the following terms: 'All these "amiable" relations imply a moral obligation to feel – or at least to feign – sentiments which commit the individual to actions of altruism, to generosity. The moral obligation is to forego self-interest in favor of another, to sacrifice oneself *for the sake* of someone else.' (1973: 90) For us, however, today, this definition of the concept is problematic, as it bears the marks of the modernist conceptions which characterized the period of writing. Today, we find ourselves obliged to re-work the concept of amity in order to avoid the implication that the self's interests are in any way monadic and that, therefore, all 'generosity' sits on some sort of reciprocity between individuals (even if conceived in terms of Sahlins' generalized reciprocity – 1972).

Amity, thus, must be taken to remit to an extended notion of 'fraternity', of co-responsibility, such as that which Emmanuel Levinas has proposed. The philosopher warned us against the dangers of polarizing alterity. He called our attention to the fact that the culturally elaborated categories of social belonging on which anthropologists have traditionally focused co-exist with another, far more constitutive, form of alterity: an interpersonal, face-to-face interaction that implies a deep and unavoidable sense of

ethic co-responsibility. He warns us that ‘alterity [cannot] be justified uniquely as the logical distinction of *parts belonging to a divided whole*, which rigorous reciprocal relations unite into a whole.’ (1996: 165) Modernist anthropologists focused on the latter type of alterity, thus forgetting about the former: the face-to-face confrontation, the basic fraternity that is constitutive of our own selves as humans.

This basic fraternity is a precondition of all human sociality because it is constitutive of human beings, but it is constantly subject to the strains of political belonging: that is, to culturally elaborated forms of alterity. Amity, in my view, must be taken to refer to the way in which humans construct themselves out of an essential drive for recognizing the humanity of others. This process involves the channeling of one’s feelings of fraternity. This is amity as constituted in kinship relations, friendship relations, ethnic belonging, etc.

But let us return to the analysis of the unspoken claims hidden in the examples of Lusophone encounter that I started with. I will provide two contrasting cases just to make my point. W.V. Quine, the prominent Anglo-American philosopher, was a fluent speaker of Portuguese – indeed one of his very first books was published in Portuguese, in Brazil (1944). Does this make him an instance of the Portuguese-speaking cultural contribution to contemporary philosophy? Most people would think not. Yet it might well have opened up the door of someone’s home for him in some distant context. In fact, the eminent sociologist Hermínio Martins reports that, when the two met at a party in Oxford, they spoke amicably together at length in Portuguese.

Now, the philosopher Spinoza was the son of Portuguese-speaking Jews residing in Amsterdam. In his correspondence with Blyenbergh (2006 [1664]) he complains about not being able to debate philosophy in the language that he most feels as his own – which was, of course, Portuguese. In fact, he was forced as an adult to learn Latin in order to be able to write his philosophical oeuvre. Spinoza decidedly is part of the

Portuguese-speaking world and of the Portuguese cultural heritage in a way that Quine will never be. But then why? Don't the Dutch have a better claim to him? Don't the Jews have a better one still, as he was Jewish – even although he had been ostracized? Or, since he made his living as a grinder of lenses, do the opticians have a greater right to claim his intellectual heritage?

How did I come to pass so easily from the recognition of the sharing of a language to the ownership of a claim over a heritage? Surely that was an abusive passage! In fact, the examples I chose were meant to suggest just that. Unfortunately, the issue is not so easily settled. It is beyond doubt that, in a globalized world, the sharing of all that goes with a common language brings people together; makes them feel they share their fate; fosters mutual interest. António Damásio, the famous neurophysiologist, has written a book about Spinoza where it becomes abundantly clear that the fact that the two of them share some association with Portugueseness is not irrelevant (2003). And yet, I would not want to put into Prof. Damásio's mind some sort of pathetic claim to national ownership of Spinoza's oeuvre. As a matter of fact, the sense that one gets from reading Damásio's book is that what really mattered was not only that they shared a language or a culture (as the 'national' and the 'religious' issues are clearly beside the point in their case); rather, it was a combination of the language with a diasporic condition.

Our perplexities can hardly be resolved by reference to linguistic norm. What counts or does not count as Portuguese, strictly speaking, from some sort of normative linguistic standpoint is clearly not what is at stake here. In other words, Spinoza's relevance for our discussion is not affected by any debate concerning the precise nature of the dialectical variety of Portuguese that Amsterdam Portuguese Jews spoke in the late seventeenth century. The proprietorial distortion that leads to the silly debate concerning who 'owns' Spinoza's heritage is produced by a tendency to identify

automatically language with culture, culture with nation, nation with groupness – and we are lucky if our interlocutor does not go on to identify *a* people with *a* religion, for then we succumb to incurable confusion. Part of the problem is the proclivity that we inherited from our modernist ancestors in the early twentieth century to discuss human interaction in terms that reify politically self-defined groupness – in anthropology, we call this kind of proclivity by the name that Émile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss gave to it when they advocated it, *sociocentrism* (1963).

These kinds of doubts are especially poignant when diasporic situations are the order of the day. And this is why I started this paper by giving examples of my own African experience. These were situations where the fact that I was perceived as sharing something with these people made it more likely for us to create social trust in the midst of an essentially hostile environment, increasing the intensity of the intersubjectivity that arose during our encounters. This thing we shared was a catalyst for amity, in the Fortesian sense (cf. Pitt-Rivers 1973). But it was also the putty that brought Damásio to Spinoza in the throes of their mutual diasporas, or that produces in me such a feeling of intimacy when I read the book of Duarte Barbosa – the Nayar-speaking clerk of the Cannanore factory (now called Kannur in Kerala, India), one of the greatest proto-anthropologists of the sixteenth century.²

Error and irritation

What is this thing, then? Let us try it out a little. Is it to do with sharing a common language? I reckon it is not, since I have met people who do not speak Portuguese and yet whose relations to me give evidence of the presence of that catalyst for amity. My experience with the Eurasians of Macao and Hong Kong and my contacts with the

² Barbosa 1984; Reis 1948; Pina-Cabral 2007.

Timorese have left me with no doubt that one can feel distinctly the presence of this catalyst even among people who do not speak more than a few shreds of Portuguese (cf. Pina-Cabral 2002a).

Is it then a ‘culture’? Well, frankly, if Spinoza and Damásio are said to share the same culture only because they share this thing, then really the concept of culture has to be stretched to such a point that it means very little. Damásio clearly shares much more concerning his definitions of the world with any contemporary Dutch person than with Spinoza. Culture, then, also won’t suffice.

I will go no further, as it has become clearly obvious by now that ‘nation’, ‘group belonging’, ‘genetics’, ‘knowledge of historical facts’, etc., are all categories that will fare no better as exclusive terms for defining this catalyst for amity – even if they all, in fact, belong to the chain of associations that are normally presumed in the sociocentric tendency to conjoin language with culture, culture with nation, nation with group.

There is, of course, the possibility of simply denying that it exists at all; claiming that I made a mistaken assessment concerning the sense of amity that I shared with those people; in short, that I am confabulating. But I am hardly the first one to have noticed it (e.g. Sousa Santos 2001, Fry 2005). So, for the moment, I will just take it for a fact that there is indeed some ‘thing’ out there the nature of which we have not yet quite determined. It has often been noted that one of the best ways of starting an analysis is to test the notion through error. Error is a wonderful tool for interpreting other people’s actions and their assumptions concerning the world more generally. Through it, we can start working at identifying the boundaries of operation of what we want to analyse.

Now, in my own experience as a bearer of this Lusotopic catalyst, I have learnt to recognize a potential for misunderstanding in our exchanges leading to intense

mutual discomfort; a source of error in communication that is not always easy to pinpoint. For example, in Mozambique, I have learnt that my accent conjoined with my skin colour, function as irritants. Somehow they have the potential to bring down my local interlocutors on first approach even although, in time, the old process of constitution of amity eventually prevails. Then again, in Brazil, I have often been the butt of ethnicist jokes concerning the supposed stupidity of ‘the Portuguese’. My interlocutors’ irrepressible compulsion to perform these jokes in front of me – patently not the illiterate migrant who impersonates the jokes – is a clear expression of their discomfort before me. But there again, when faced with third parties, who somehow do not share this catalyst with us, the same Brazilians always give clear signs of its presence. Again, in Portugal, when speaking about such matters, it is I who often feel irritated as I notice that my interlocutors are prone to presuming proprietorial claims to ‘language’ and ‘culture’ that imply the subalternization of all the people around the world who share this catalyst of amity with us but who do not categorize themselves as ‘Portuguese’.

Over the years, I have learnt that these ‘errors’ have to do with that sense of ‘claim’ that we identified above concerning Spinoza’s heritage. It is a claim to privileged representation, to ownership rights – in it, cultural phenomena (custom, language, food, etc.) and political domination somehow conjoin. One does not actually need to openly stake the claim before one’s interlocutors feel its effects; the isomorphism between language/culture/nation is so deeply ingrained into our presuppositions concerning the world that it is automatically presumed. Its political corollary is that those who rule in the place where the language historically originated have greater claim to represent that language and, by implication, the groups which that language brings together. Yet, in our post-colonial era, no one in their right mind would be willing to condone such a position, due to its imperialist and racialist implications.

In his theorization on these issues, Boaventura Sousa Santos rightly identifies these problems (2001). Unfortunately, I feel that the ‘Calibanization of Lusophony’ that he proposes dehistoricizes the process, leading to the constitution of a kind of Lusophonic destiny that is inevitably utopian, even if, in taking recourse to the image of Shakespeare’s ugly Caliban, it presents itself initially as dystopian (cf. Pina-Cabral 2004).

It is, therefore, a fact of surprise to me that there is at the moment no way of referring conjointly to the space/time that is demarcated by the sharing of this catalyst for amity. Lusophony as a term to describe those who hail from countries where Portuguese is the state language leaves out many people and places around the world where the catalyst’s presence is nevertheless very strongly felt: both (a) people who often do not speak Portuguese in Goa, Africa, Macao or Timor, and (b) people who, though they might speak Portuguese at home, live in worlds where other languages are dominant – Canada, the United States, Venezuela, South Africa, Australia, France, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Germany. In fact, in Macao, Mozambique and Timor, I personally found out that affinity to a Portuguese football club is probably a far better marker of this shared sense of destiny than the actual capacity to use the Portuguese language (cf. Pina-Cabral 2002/3). As I stated above, strictly speaking, sharing a language, sharing a culture or sharing a national identity will not suffice. In fact, what to think of the sense of amity that a student of mine encountered when he went to Manchester to study Hindus whose ancestors originated in Diu, once a Portuguese colony, but who resided for various generations in Mozambique and then came to Europe, first settling in Portugal and then moving on to England?³

³ I thank Nuno Dias for our long and interesting talks concerning his fieldwork experience.

Much as we might observe that the putty that brings together these experiences is not strictly speaking a linguistic one, there is a yet stronger reason why I prefer not to start with Lusophony as an adjective. And that is, once we start to define a social space by a language, it becomes almost impossible to avoid the sociocentric convergence between language, culture and nation. Lusophony surely is an important (I would say even central) aspect of the space that is delineated by the sharing of this catalyst for amity. But if I refer to the space by the language, I inevitably fall into the type of proprietorial claim against which we were warned above.

Therefore, I propose to characterize it as a space/time and not as a language. I propose to adopt the word *Lusotopy* that the political historians from *Sciences Po*' in Bordeaux invented and that they use as the name for their interesting journal. In short, to be part of Lusotopy is to possess the modes of identification/differentiation that are the key for entering into the network of relations that it constitutes. Each one of us that possesses these modes of identification (that carries them in his or her past and signals them in a reified manner by his or her presence) creates a space/time by being part of it. So Lusotopy as a space/time affirms itself in its enactment. This enactment occurs in the moment of recognition – that is, simply put, when two people that possess those modes of identification realize it by experiencing and assuming reflexively the operation of the catalyst for amity.

Note, experiencing the identification does not necessarily mean to acknowledge the identification. For example, I have encountered people who, for one reason or another, refuse to acknowledge openly the experience of identification. It might be the case that they actually do not feel it – in which case Lusotopy has simply not occurred. But it has happened to me to have come out of such an encounter with the founded conviction that the people in question were in denial, to use the Freudian expression. It has even occurred that, retrospectively, the person in question has later on

acknowledged the equivocation. The situations of error which I exemplified above are typical instances where one's presumed proximity functions initially in an almost perverse way as a factor for irritation. One's interlocutor's irritation or his or her need to perform some sort of ritual of exclusion (of the kind exemplified by Portuguese jokes in Brazil) is already a sign that the catalyst is in operation.

Ecumene

Lusotopy, therefore, is not a contiguous space, nor can it be defined in any regional manner. In short, so as to avoid the risk of confusing you any further, I propose that, in attempting to define Lusotopy, instead of relying on culture, language and nation and their presumed isomorphism, we should look to an earlier use of the concept of culture as expressed in the work of the American diffusionist anthropologist Alfred Kroeber.⁴ He proposed that we should see these phenomena of cultural diffusion and the way in which they create a human world of intercommunication by using the Greek concept of *oikoumenê* (1963 [1923, 1948]: 231). Today, the concept has become vulgarized by reference to the notion of 'global ecumene' which has been used more recently to describe the fact that the whole world today constitutes a kind of 'network of networks', to use Ulf Hannerz's expression (1992: 34-58). Much as this is a very important notion, I prefer to follow Sidney Mintz in believing that the concept can acquire greater weight if we take recourse to the earlier implications of the Greek word *oikoumenê*.

The original word derives from the feminine present middle participle of a verb meaning 'to inhabit'. It was used literally to describe the part of the earth inhabited by humans. The radical *oikos* refers to household (and specially the large room in ancient Greek homes where the women lived) and it points to the element of human fostering.

⁴ I am grateful to Hermínio Martins and Wilson Trajano Filho for their insightful comments about these issues.

The usage of *ecumene* to mean the part of the world known to a civilization, which Kroeber espoused, further captures the Christian sense that the word has acquired since then, when used to describe the whole and most widely defined community of the Christians (as in the adjective ‘ecumenical’).

My favourite, however, is the use that Tolkien gives to the concept by defining it as ‘the abiding place of men’, ‘the physical world in which man lives out his life and destiny, as opposed to the unseen worlds, like Heaven or Hell’.⁵ The synonym he ultimately adopts in his fiction writing is ‘middle-earth’, a translation of the Old English expression *middangeard* of which he declares that it ‘is not my own invention. It is a modernization or alteration ... of an old word for the inhabited world of Men, the *oikoumenê*’.⁶

The concept is useful to us, because it points to the existence of levels of convergence that exist within a much more broadly conceived sociocultural universe. Thus, we can speak of areas of global integration and areas of local specificity. The middle-earth or *ecumene* is that area where struggle, construction and destruction occur which allows for human co-construction. It is the area of human action. In that sense, it is an area of relative freedom; it allows both for a certain freedom from local constraints and a certain freedom from global hegemonic imperatives. To that extent the *ecumene* is a space of escape – it is the ‘discoveries’.

It should be noted that I specifically want to avoid any similarity with the opposition in Canonical Law, which Mary Douglas made famous as a principle of social organization (2001), between *modality* (the local organization of the Church in terms of parishes and dioceses) and *sodality* (task-oriented non-local religious organizations) –

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oikoumene>.

⁶ Tolkien (1995 [1981]): Letter 211.

that is the difference between local allegiances and transversal non-local allegiances. This will not serve our purposes. Whilst Lusotopy functions as a sodality in as much as it links people across nations and continents; at local level, it is often the very historicity of the reified Lusotopy that gives rise to a localised sense of community. I believe Timor Leste is probably the best example of how a distant historical Lusotopic ferment can function as the basis for a future-oriented project of national community (cf. Feijó 2008). Many other examples would be found throughout Asia, from the Catholic communities of Larantuka in Solor Islands, to Catholic communities in India, to the burghers of Sri Lanka, to the *Kristang* of Malacca, to the Eurasian middle-class of Macau and Hong Kong that I studied in the 1990's (cf. Pina-Cabral 2002a).

Our tendency to focus on colonial history from the Eurocentric perspective of power and rule means that we have not developed sufficiently our analytical language for dealing with the way in which, in the long term, colonial encounters write themselves into people's worldviews in ways which open the way for new negotiations of self-respect and self-determination. Elizabeth Traube, in her superb ethnography of the Mambai of Timor Leste, carries out a study of the way in which colonial rule wrote itself into Timorese myth, giving rise to complex processes of identification/differentiation (e.g. 1986: 55). As she puts it, 'Strictly speaking, Mambai have no tradition of foreign invaders from the outside, nor do they have any real conception of a larger outside world which might encompass their own society. By Mambai theories of origin, the Malaia [a category which includes all non-Timorese] are autochthonous, their relationship to the Timorese is based on kinship, and their arrival on Timor signifies the return of the legitimate defenders of order.' (1986: 53). Decolonization was formulated to the ethnographer as 'this matter of our younger bothers going away.' (1986: 54).

Now, a process such as this one is local and unique and cannot be observed in any other Lusotopic space/time.⁷ Still, each of these local charters of identification/differentiation, when looked at from a distance, comes to constitute a foundation (local, diversified and irrepeatable) for an ecumene that, in contrast, is a function of globalization. Paradoxically, this is the case even when, as it happens with the Mambai, there is no local category to formulate the larger outside world.

In reaching this formulation, I was influenced by the use given to the concept of ecumene by Sidney Mintz. What unites the Caribbean, he argues, cannot really be pinned down to language, custom or nation (including, of course, ethnicity) – for these were all very varied in the region. And yet, in spite of all that, the Caribbean has a distinct ‘coherence not so much cultural as sociological.’ (1996: 289) Thus, he sustains

‘The basis for constructing a Caribbean *oikoumenê*, then, lies with the social frameworks created for culturally diverse migrant people who were subjected to century-long processes of mostly forced cultural change by European rulers; and with the long-term effects of those processes upon Caribbean life. It has nothing to do with language or food or dress or like cultural indices *as such*, but with a transmuted vision of the world itself, engrafted upon countless strangers, who came or were brought to the region over the centuries, replacing those who had died or who had been killed off by disease, war and European imperial enterprise.’ (1996: 297)

⁷ Even though, as the American historian K. David Jackson has noted, something like this loop effect could be found in the obsessive search for Christian roots in exotic places that characterized the Portuguese expansion in the sixteenth century (Prester John, the tomb of St. Thomas, the Nestorians in Mendes Pinto, etc.). ‘In abstract terms, to identify oneself with the lost origins means to assimilate being with its own absence. One might say that the Portuguese navigated in order to reach their own “lost” bodies, thus completing themselves.’ (1997: 17)

Now, obviously, I am not claiming that Lusotopy as ecumene has the same history, the same process of construction, or the same regional type of reach as Sidney Mintz's Caribbean. It shares a similar condition, however, in that it operates as a kind of 'middle-earth'. Lusotopy is something that most of us that belong to it can identify when it arises. Being spread out throughout the world, it is not a region but a space/time. I favour the spatial metaphor for the sole reason that it marks better Lusotopy's proneness to call onto itself by encompassment those who come close to it.

My point is simple: as an ecumene, Lusotopy is a network of contacts; but, when it fires up, it creates effects upon the world; thus, it leaves reified marks (cities, statues, modes of cuisine, musical styles, manners and etiquettes, narratives and texts, language games, etc.); so, the world feeds back the ecumene onto those who produce it. Thus, the ecumene is triggered off, as it were, by the reified products of its former occurrences, even when one is alone. When this happens, the dispositions of identification within the single person involved are deepened and reinforced, predisposing this person to greater ulterior recognition.

For example, I go to a foreign land, Sarajevo, at a time in which a violent civil war is brewing up and everyone around me is, as it were, fevered up by a sense of foreboding (1988). In a museum, I start reading a liturgical text written in Serbo-Croatian alphabetical style in a beautiful silver mounting. As I pronounce it out loud, I discover that it is a Serbo-Croatian rendering of Portuguese Jewish prayers – although it looks like Serbo-Croat, in fact it reads out as an archaic sounding Portuguese. The experience grabs my breath with a poignant identification that brings me close to tears. I will never forget it again for it disposed me to look at Sephardic history in a new Lusotopic manner. Thus, unwittingly, at that moment, I became an agent of the Lusotopification of Sephardic history. Much the same sort of movement that results from Damásio's approximation of Spinoza's hideouts in Rijnsburg near The Hague.

Let me give you another example. You will pardon that these are personal examples but they are useful precisely because of that – as I can report on the internal emotional dynamics that they produced which, in other people, would have remained relatively obscure to me. The process is not unlike that of Freud’s reliance on the analysis of his own dreams or of his own reaction to Austrian jokes concerning Jews.

Long ago, the economic historian Rui Graça Feijó and I were invited to go to a conference at the University of California, Berkeley. In the weekend that followed it, we decided to rent a car and visit Yosemite Park. It was spring and the tops of the mountains were still covered in snow. So we drove as far up as we could and, when we reached the snowline, we parked facing the abyss, looking at that tremendously beautiful spectacle of the Park’s central valley. Rui commented that, at that moment, he was as far from home as he had ever been. After a moment’s silence, I switched on the radio and we nearly jumped off our skins. The radio blurted out an advert in Portuguese for a healer, a certain Irmã Ana, who was specialised in making love potions, in allaying envy and in curing all sorts of ailments of the body and the soul. Anyone who knows California is familiar with the existence of large communities of Portuguese residents in the nearby San José Valley, but for us at the time this worked almost as a Lusotopic epiphany, making us acutely conscious of the inescapability of our condition. Irmã Ana promoted love as much as she safeguarded against envy. She did this in Portuguese; thus firing up Lusotopic associations within a kind of middle-earth: an area both of love potions (and, therefore, inmarriage) and of envy (and, therefore, fraternal strife). Tolkien’s middle-earth as a metaphor is useful here, therefore, for it stresses the issue of human habitation, a sense that this is an area of action and of struggle; of friendship and of hate.

Lusotopy’s strange inescapability is largely produced by the way in which one’s subject condition is dependent on one’s insertion into chains of historical events,

making one prone to recognize the people whose past went past those same events. In this sense, Lusotopy is a *continued identity* – it is a proneness to recognize in others a certain kind of proximity caused by a common past (cf. Pina Cabral 2003). Note, the strangeness of the feeling is created by the imposition of a number of veils. Descendants of former enemies find themselves mutually comforting against their own expectations; national foes find themselves sharing an unstated common ground when faced with third persons; people whose trajectories are ethnically divergent find ground for silent common recognition. As Oswald de Andrade said for Brazil ‘only anthropophagy unites us’ – the struggles of the past bring people together in the present (cf. Pina-Cabral 1999).

Particularly strange is the feeling of pride that people experience in the face of past events that, officially, are often held to be disreputable: empire, slavery, war, migration, hunger, religious fanaticism, dictatorship, etc. Ever since the eighteenth century, the Lusotopic subject has lived a strangely dual condition: whilst being part of imperial nations, he or she is also subaltern in geopolitical and economic terms. Brazil inherited from Portugal this same sense of being both modern, Western and imperial and, at the same time, backward, impoverished and dominated. Faced with the Anglo-American hegemonic alliance that has ruled the world since then, the subjects of Portugal, Brazil and their ex-colonies were ever placed before a dilemmatic identity which made up for a type of hurt pride. Lusotopy, thus, when faced with Anglo-American might (cultural, economic, political or military) is often experienced as a stigma.

In these past post-colonial fifty years, the children of the Portuguese and the children of the former subjects of the Portuguese empire have found themselves in a global atmosphere where their continued identity is not seen as a source of prestige but mostly of a lack of prestige. This gives rise to both anger and shame, both rejection and

repression, both fascination and enforced oblivion. I know of successful intellectuals, third-generation descendants of non-European upper-class Portuguese-speaking families, whose whole privileged globalized lives have been spent struggling with the phantoms caused by the sense of Lusotopic identity that they do not manage to shed.

Now, if we learn Erving Goffman's lesson, we can detect the logic of stigma in operation – the process that often makes the stigmatised their own worse enemies; fraternity breeding love as well as hatred (1974). As a young man in Transvaal, I witnessed the arrival of the refugees from the African colonies in 1976. These were hordes of disoriented people who had been unprepared for their eviction by a totally backward and irresponsible colonial regime. The prosperity of the late colonial period had turned these people, nearly all of whom had left Portugal in relative penury, into a rising middle-class. Overnight, however, they were disowned and exiled. To witness the scenes of abuse, pillage and maltreatment that were impersonated against them by many of the already settled Portuguese migrants that lived in South Africa, was an experience that I found deeply troubling and that probably goes into explaining why, over thirty years later, I am concerned with this topic to the point of writing this essay.

Again, in southern France, one evening, my parents and I were being served at a restaurant by a young lady who, after the meal was ended and there was no one else left in the restaurant, declared that she was Portuguese. The language that we had been speaking among us beckoned to her; it was deeply written into her as an emotional bind much as she could no longer express herself adequately in it. Worse still, much like the children of Japanese migrants to Brazil who face a stigmatised condition when they visit Japan (Tsuda 2003), what she spoke was a garbled style of Portuguese that she had learnt from her illiterate parents; a parlance that she felt demeaned her. The moment we acknowledged her as familiar and spoke to her in Portuguese, she found her own process of ethnic passing into Frenchhood challenged. As she tried to explain to us in

her faulty Portuguese what she felt, she broke into tears and sobbed uncontrollably. She was challenged not by us but, as it were, from within.

Lusotopy and Diaspora

At this point, you might well point out that whilst I often manage to identify the vague historical links that go into making Lusotopy, the bearers of those links themselves are often ignorant of their presence and nature. Immersed as they are in universes of everyday life that feel locally integrated, they cannot tell which aspects demonstrate a Lusotopic ascent and which do not. What, then, makes Lusotopy a middle-earth, a world of human habitation?

The question is legitimate in as much as each of these bearers of Lusotopy are also the bearers of many other types of links; some of a local nature, but others of a global nature. For example, members of my generation born in China, Africa, Brazil, America or Portugal, independent of whether or not they are bearers of Lusotopy, are capable of singing out to you the starting words of ‘Yesterday’, the Beatles’ song. So what is special about Lusotopy by contrast to Beattlemania? Well, the answer is that the difference is not one of essence but one of relevance. As opposed to Beattlemania, Lusotopy is far more constitutive of people’s everyday universes. In short, when two bearers meet, they find echoes in each other that make them mutually recognizable and, in that way, that allow for greater and easier contact. This does not necessarily mean that these people will immediately, due to it, become ‘friends’. The notion of *amity* with which I have been operating does carry that ultimate meaning of mutual docility, but it hardly implies constant and absolute agreement. Fraternal fights, as we have known since Cain, are the most homicidal (cf. Pina Cabral 2005 and Finkelkraut 1997). That ultimate sense of docility to which I refer is hardly an emotional disposition of each bearer individually. It has to do with the fact that we are all socially constructed –

all humans were created by humans in a process of gradual evolution that is lost in the infinitesimal nature of the intervening steps.

In order for us to become people, we had to link up into a series of meanings that were created long before each one of us came into existence. That process of linkage is a process of acceptance, of docility in the face of the meanings of others. That original docility, however, need not be interpreted to mean that we are all easy going, nice sort of fellows. To the contrary, all it means is that the very process of becoming human has involved us in negotiated meanings. Pastness, therefore, is written into our condition as humans in such a way that we are all historical. Thus, when a little baby in Brazil babbles her first words, those words produce echoes that reverberate throughout the world and that give rise to harmonies wherever there is Lusotopy. These harmonies, we have seen, might not even be all that conscious to those who experience them and, in turn, reproduce them. Never mind, because the whole process, whilst being human, is one that goes on in the world outside (or better still beside) humans. It is in this sense that Lusotopy is an ecumene – a world of human habitation with characteristics of its own when compared with others. Not always the same characteristics everywhere; not always with the same intensity; not always as tightly bound to each other. But then, as I never claimed that Lusotopy is a sharply delineated territory, but rather that it is a loosely defined space/time that comes into existence whenever it occurs, we need not be troubled by the impossibility of drawing it out precisely on a world map. But, of course, there is no problem in attempting to draw out on a map the areas of its strongest occurrence. In short, it is a statistical, not a mechanic event.

As an ecumene, therefore, Lusotopy is the network constituted by a continued identity that originated in the Portuguese expansion of the sixteenth century but that acquired immediately a complexity and dynamic of its own. One can follow the process

along the sea routes. It is possible to trace the musical style that accompanied the Portuguese expansion all the way along the south Atlantic and into the Indian Ocean and, beyond that, to Malacca and into what is today Indonesia and beyond to Macau (cf. Jackson 1990). The mutual and multilayered process that created these musical affinities and prolonged them over the next five centuries no longer has a single direction. The local musicians that carry this musical line of descent are generally unaware of the web of links that their interiorized musical practice transports. When the Singalese modernizing youth of the 1970's rocked and danced away at the sound of what they thought to be the latest thing in modern chic (*baila*), they hardly could know that they were building on musical resources that this web of Lusotopic music had provided for them.

In short, their music is written onto the world with implications that far outreach them. But once inscribed in the world, their music produces echoes and triggers off recognitions (nostalgias, memories, traumas) that the musicians had not planned for. In this way, a musical gesture produced with one set of localised personal aims, gets to echo somewhere else. In some places, it gives rise to sheer disharmony. Many have been the people who have twisted their noses at Singalese Lusotopic rock or at the Macanese *tuna*'s music or at the folkdancing of the Malacca *Kristang* – for those people Lusotopy did not occur. But, unbeknownst to those who produce those musical gestures, there will be a lot of other people around the world for whom the very same echoes produce Lusotopic chords, so to speak.

You will excuse me for using musical metaphors to speak about music, but I hope the point has been taken that the way Lusotopy is inscribed in the world operates largely independently of the actors. Through human action, Lusotopy is reified; and, once that occurs, it becomes a mould for human action. It does not constrain, it entices

– and that is why I do not speak of cultural domination, of acculturation or anything of the kind, but of echoes that give rise to harmonies.

As with musical styles, much the same applies to the present day descendants of the naval creole that installed itself round the world in the sixteenth century or, for that matter, of the basic cooking methods that, adapting themselves to different foodstuffs and condiments, can still be seen in operation from Portugal to Brazil, from there to Africa and on to Asia, all the way to Macau's Macanese food and Japanese *tempura* or *castilla* cake.

More puzzling still, and for that reason yet more mysterious, is the way in which certain traditions of religious entertainment based on the Charlemagne crusading tradition, mediated by Jesuit theatrics, survived throughout the centuries to our present day – from São Tomé's *txiloli* studied by Paulo Valverde (2000) to the *cavaladas sertanejas* that Isaura Pereira de Queiroz identified. They ring out their Lusotopic chords in contemporary major works of literature and film such as Ariano Suassuna's *A Pedra do Reino*. Another fascinating example are the *Congadas* – a performance which celebrated the crowning of the King of Congo (the last case of African royalty that the Portuguese of the sixteenth century still treated as aristocratic equals before imperial attitudes set in). This had a long history as an annual celebration of self-value among slaves throughout the Portuguese seventeenth and eighteenth century empire. In Brazil and São Tomé, today, they re-emerge as an art form in a process of constitution of black pride strongly influenced by contemporary media culture and by Anglo-American modes of racial validation.

There are too many examples like these for it to be worthwhile to continue. The ones to do with music and dance or with language and literature are probably the most visible and striking, but I would not like to leave you with the sense that it is all to do with 'culture', 'language' and 'literature'. There are many ecumenical phenomena in

other areas: food and drink; legal practice; business dispositions; etc. Where such things go deeper, however, is precisely where they are less easy to formulate. Peter Fry has shown the way that the dynamics of racial differentiation are structured by long term Lusotopic trends (2005). I myself have argued that the Lusotopic traditions of anthroponymy transport dispositions concerning the construction of the human person (2008).

Lusotopy in Portugal

Considering the drift the argument has taken, you might well ask yourselves whether Lusotopy is something strictly to do with exile and diaspora. In short, is it something that necessarily occurs outside of Portugal?

No; Portugal is as much part of it as anywhere else. I have two seemingly contradictory replies to this question. The first is that exile and diaspora are in Portugal too. Today, the large cities in Portugal are terrains of Lusotopic colonization. The second is that the Portuguese in Portugal have always been the bearers of two interconnected but distinct kinds of sociocultural strains: one, linking them to Iberia, southern Europe and the Catholic world as heirs to the Roman Empire; the other, linking them to the Atlantic world they were forced onto through economic need and political pressure (cf. Pina Cabral 2002/3).

This issue links up with the question of misplaced proprietorial claims. This is, in fact, a problem inherent in the initial use of the notion of ecumene. At the beginning of last century, Kroeber writes, for example, that the concept has ‘a modern utility as a convenient designation of the total area reached by traceable diffusion influences from the main higher centres of Eurasia at which most new culture had up to then been produced.’ (1963 [1923]: 231) This directionality of ecumene deserves our attention.

One of the reasons why I favour Mintz's treatment of the concept is that he actually avoids this colonizing implication.

To put the issue plainly, is it not true, after all, that it was the Portuguese 'discoveries', as it were, that opened up Lusotopy? Can we, thus, speak of Lusotopy without presuming the directionality (the one way movement) that this historical process implies? Linear time produces directionality in sociocultural influence. The thing with linear time, however, is that it is never the only temporal mode; other modes of temporality always interplay with it. In short, Lusotopy was not instituted in Brazil the moment that Pedro Álvares Cabral arrived there, but rather the moment that the famous letter writing by his pilot, Pedro Vaz de Caminha, reached the king back in Lisbon. Empire is created in an expansion outwards, but the historical implications of what it sets up are always dependent on a dialectics of return, as is apparent from the work of all the major sixteenth century Portuguese traveller scholars.

The only problem for us today is that Portugal gives the feeling of being unchanged. This is a mirage caused by cultural hegemonies that far outreach the influence of the Portuguese elite itself. Portugal's role as the point of origin does not imply by any means that it stands outside of its creation; as an unchanged elementary core. No such thing happens in history and that has never actually been the case. For example, the registers of the Inquisition studied by Laura Mello e Souza bear patent evidence to the fact that, ever since the sixteenth century, the religious and moral life of the Portuguese was being marked by the cargo of the return trip, the counter waves of Empire (2005 [1986]). One of the ways in which this mirage of a pristine unchanged condition is fostered is by associating Portugal and things Portuguese with the other axis of sociocultural foundation of Portugal – the European axis, which we are prone to call Western these days.

For instance, we are ready to see how people like Matteo Ricci or Tomás Ribeiro went from Portugal and Italy to China, there to implant notions of neo-Aristotelian philosophy and European music making. At the same time, we fail to see what came in the Jesuits' baggage in the return trip. Leibnitz, for example, invented binary mathematics after having read a description of the Chinese notion of Dao by a Portuguese Jesuit (1994). Binary mathematics, that which made the computer revolution possible is strongly considered a Western thing! Here is the hegemonic mirage at work hiding the return trip. We cannot write directionality out of the ecumene, but we can write the counterdirectionality back onto it.

When we do that, suddenly, we start seeing things that were invisible earlier on. For example, over the past ten years or so the best fiction writing in Portuguese has not come out of Brazil or Portugal but out of Africa. We might, thus, be tempted to claim that the two seats of Lusophony have lost their nerve, have exhausted their genius and that the newer communities are showing their vigour. This, however, would be to miss the point that, in our present post-colonial world, Lusotopic literature is written in a kind of delocalized space that reflects the globalization of the lives of the inhabitants of our modern metropolises. The point is not one of directionality, but one of increasing transnationality.

I will conclude again with a personal note, the same way I started this paper. Between Sintra, where I live, and Lisbon, where I work, lie the most populous areas of contemporary Portugal, where the average age of the population is lowest. As the train descends from the old town to the plain, it fills up with young people giving the outward signs of a multiplicity of origins – Guineans, Ghanaians, Angolans, Mozambicans, Brazilians, Moldavians and Ukrainians, even the odd ethnic Portuguese. Chinese and Indians do not use this train, as they have settled in better residential niches on the

Eastern side of town. I normally go in their midst during pick hour traffic and have little occasion to break through the routine of our daily trips.

The other day, however, I made the journey back home on a Saturday afternoon. To my surprise the train was full. At that time, only those whose families do not own a car are to be found there, so there was not a single ethnic Portuguese to be seen apart from me. People were returning home from their Saturday shopping sprees, the train smelled of perfume and the dress code was one step up from usual. Some of the people around me were replying to their cell phones in Russian or in Capeverdean creole. The majority of them, however, had brought Portuguese with them from wherever they came initially. They are busy writing into this land their own brands of spoken Portuguese as well as their music, their graphic styles, their skin colour. The sense of Lusotopy struck me deeply. For someone like me, who started life in the diaspora, the experience caused a feeling of warmth and well being, a certain aura of freedom; for others, who still hold desperately onto the proprietorial mirage, the sense of amity that they cannot fail to experience, produces a feeling of fraternal anger, a fear of loss of one's mother's love. Racism, ethnocentrism and class exclusivism exist in Portugal, of course, as they exist anywhere else where there are human beings. In Mozambique, in Brazil and in Macao such things can also be observed. Lusotopy, therefore, is as much a terrain of encounter as of mutual fear and distrust. As an ecumene, one thing Lusotopy is not: a utopia.

In fact, my fervent hope is that we succeed in abandoning the modernist propensity for thinking the future by means of utopias. Utopian thought, by attempting to escape history, encourages a kind of blindness to the unfathomable richness of history. When history inevitably touches the plans of action drawn along utopian modes, it does so in ways no one could have predicted. People are not prepared for the complexity and depth of the encounter and react in fear, producing monstrosities. In

this sense, much as we have to allow ourselves to be inspired by the great visionaries of Lusotopy – António Vieira, Fernando Pessoa, Agostinho da Silva – we have to avoid their utopianism if we are to produce in the twenty first century a more humane world than that which we produced in the last century with its poisonous dreams of perfection.

Conclusion

Before closing off the argument, I would like to refer back to another implication of Tolkien's notion of middle-earth. He says that, in his fiction, the *oikoumenê* is in the middle 'because [it is] thought of vaguely as set amidst the encircling Seas and (...) between the ice of the North and the fire of the South.' I want to argue that Lusotopy shares much the same fate. In our globalized world, it is neither Western nor non-Western – it places its subjects in a middle-earth between today's rich North and today's highly diversified South. I believe that this condition will become increasingly important in the coming years when the unifocal world we lived in since the Fall of the Berlin Wall will again polarize politically and culturally. If in the past this condition has often proved to be a disadvantage for Lusotopic subjects; today, Agostinho da Silva's suggestion that we should own up that condition as a middle-earth might well turn out to be useful.

This paper was an effort at inserting old concepts into new frameworks. The sociocentric framework which presumes the unitariness of identity and sees all alterity as essentially dyadic is no longer satisfactory to most of us; but anthropological theory has not taken the sufficient steps to salvage some of its central concepts (concepts of immense theoretical might, such as amity or ecumene) from the sociocentric interpretations that were written into them by the modernists. It is Kroeber's and Tolkien's humanist preoccupations that allow for their concept of ecumene to rise above diffusionism or medievalist nostalgia, respectively, making it decidedly useful to

understand our contemporary world, where the unitariness of cultures, societies or individuals is no longer self-evident.

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