

It is already trivial to say that identity and alterity, self and other, are mutually constituted. To say that processes of othering are inherently processes of power is also widely accepted in the social sciences and humanities. Furthermore, processes of collective memory building, especially by the states, have been intensively studied. The same cannot be said of our attention to forgetting, especially selective forgetting as part of all of the above processes; not that which is censored or left aside, on purpose, but that which remains in the shadow, unseen by eyes not prepared to see. Those areas of shadow may very well hide what we could call our “otherselves” – the identities we could have had/been. In a purposefully speculative tone, I would like to explore this by drawing from my research materials regarding gender and sexuality, post-colonial identities, and the diaspora/zionism articulation among Brazilian Jews in Israel.

Miguel Vale de Almeida (Lisbon, 1960) is Professor of Anthropology at ISCTE-Lisbon University Institute and Researcher at CRIA – Center for Research in Anthropology. With research in Portugal, Brazil, Spain, and Israel/Palestine, his work has focused on gender and sexuality, as well as on ‘race’ and ethnicity, and postcolonialism. He published several books, two of which in English: ‘The Hegemonic Male’, on masculinity, and ‘An Earth-Colored Sea’, on Portuguese colonialism and postcolonialism in Portuguese-speaking countries. He has also published an edited volume on the body, “Corpo Presente”, co-edited one on colonialism and post-colonialism, “Trânsitos Coloniais”, and published a collection of his essays on anthropology and citizenship, “Outros Destinos”, as well as a collection of newspaper op-eds, “Os Tempos que Correm”, a book of short stories, “Quebrar em Caso de Emergência”, and an award-winning science-fiction and dystopia novel, “Euronovela”. His latest book, in Portuguese, is ‘A Chave do Armário’, on issues of same-sex marriage and family. As an LGBT rights’ activist, he was a member of Portuguese Parliament, instrumental in the passing of the same-sex marriage and gender identity laws. He is currently starting new research on Brazilian Jews’ and Palestinians’ narratives of migration to Israel/Palestine. Site: miguelvaledalmeida.net. E-mail: miguelva@gmail.com

## Otherselves

Miguel VALE DE ALMEIDA

ISCTE-IUL and CRIA

Chance dictated that I am writing this piece in Bahia<sup>1</sup>. Since 1995 I have been coming to Brazil at least twice a year, and in 1997-98 I lived in the Southern part of the state, where I conducted fieldwork with a network of people involved with what they called the Afro-cultural movement. But this is my very first trip as a tourist, escaping from a long winter, setting camp in a *pousada* on the beach of Itapuã, known from the internationalization of Bossa Nova music and Vinicius de Moraes’s poetry. It is weird. Neither the intellectual – or social – stimulation of what has come to be known as ‘academic tourism’, nor the anthropological ‘beat’ of fieldwork, walking up a steep slope to a favela and the Candomblé terreiro where my research collaborators hung out while strategizing for the recognition of their dignity as Afro-Brazilians. This is something altogether different – but incredibly insightful. Take this: the maid is picking up all the trash (bottles, corks, paper plates, napkins) that litters the lawn around my poolside table. I mention how rude those people were the previous evening. ‘The trash can is right here but they wouldn’t bother’, she says. I sympathize. Then she adds: ‘The worst part is that it was the *pousada* owner’s private party’. She gestures impatience, a hint of rebellion too. Oh, did I mention that she is black? That is,

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<sup>1</sup> Keynote address, “Trancultural Amnesia: Mapping Displaced Memories”, International

that 'black' is the word that locals, including herself, and Portuguese foreigners such as myself, would use to define a certain convergence and incidence of phenotypical traits in her body, also found in all the workers at the *pousada*? And that, conversely, the *pousada*'s owner, as myself and literally all the guests here, bear the dogtag (how appropriate... can't we say humantag?) 'white'?

Now, I guess you all know the *story*, the *counter-story*, and the *history* around this. The story goes: Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese, who brought African slaves and created a mixed Indian, African, and European society where, in spite of early violence and inequality, a culture of friendly hybridity was created, a sort of positive Other for the U.S. racial formation. This was the narrative that started to consolidate when Brazil became an independent state ruled by the European elite and that was further elaborated until sociologist Gilberto Freyre legitimized it as 'science' and both the state apparatus and popular culture established the notion of both 'racial democracy' and 'cordial' social relations. This is actually the product that Brazil sells to the rest of the world, that which motivates so many of the tourists around me.

A counter-story has been elaborated since the 1970s, however, following national and international academic and social movements that would ultimately lead to post-colonialism. It focused on denouncing the ideological nature of the received story or narrative and on highlighting what was being hidden from memory: the catastrophe and violence of slavery, the near-extinction of Indians, the complex relationship between 'race' and class and how both end up unmentioned, hidden, and irretrievable for political action. Much of the counter-story has been told by Black activists engaged in Black identity politics, as well as by anthropologists engaged in Indian rights.

But what about History? That is: what if we could, at the same time, acknowledge a different – albeit not exceptional – process of racial and class formation in Brazil, when compared with, say, the U. S., *and* critically analyze the structures and habitus of inequality based on difference? That, I think, is what a critically engaged social science should do. When I was writing my book on my research in Brazil there came a point when I stopped and took a new road. That happened when I realized that so much of what I had seen in the race and class formation and in the narratives of national identity pointed to Portugal in a

strangely hidden way. Portugal was mentioned either in the beginning of the narratives, as a country that was itself miscigenated, that blend in the Brazilian reality and thus disappeared early on in the narrative, replaced by Brazil itself; or, it was mentioned as the colonialist evil power like, for instance, Britain would be mentioned in another context. History helped me realize how both the story and the counter-story were not quite right. It all started with Lusotropicalism, the theory that none other than Gilberto Freyre himself concocted for the Portuguese dictatorial colonial regime in the 1950s. The idea of Portuguese exceptionalism, that Portugal was not a colonial power like the others but rather a hybridizing civilizational project, became the main ideology of Portuguese late colonialism and, unfortunately, it managed to become a popular representation, very much alive still today. And it coincides tremendously with a similar Brazilian narrative. Both Portugal and Brazil live under conditions of cultural and historical amnesia, on the one hand, and in conditions of cultural and historical hyper-memory, on the other. This specific conjunction of amnesia and memory could be called *anesthesia* – and its outcome is the refusal to acknowledge racism. But ideologies do not survive if they are complete lies. There was something in the peripheral nature – economic, demographic, military, etc – of Portugal and its colonialism that allowed for those narratives to seem to have a foot on reality. It was not that a “new humanistic, Christian, civilization in the tropics”, as Freyrians would put it, was build in Brazil, or that Portugal managed to invent a new kind of soft and smooth colonialism (an oxymoron, if there is one). It was, rather, that the difficulty in imposing a true process of othering (which can only be done when power relations are very distant and unequal) was tantamount to a difficulty in creating the conditions for empathy, the recognition or imagination of an Otherself.

My concern became the imagination of Portugal today – in the democratic, European Union, post-colonial period. To understand how a narrative of centuries is squeezed together in the collective imagination in order to produce the notion of a humanistic, universalist culture and state that created a miscigenated, hybridized world, where clear racial and class distinctions are not detectable, as opposed to what are seen as cruder colonialisms, racial and class formations. It's an identity without politics, that is, where politics are not

supposed to take place – a huge hidden, repressed reality by the national super-ego.

What many of us – social scientists from many disciplines – have been doing has been focused on deconstructing representations of late colonialism, confronting them with facts. Namely, analysing the policies of nationality and citizenship, the situation of immigrant populations (namely from the ex-colonies), the rhetoric of national identity as promoted by the state apparatus and in popular culture, and so on. I won't go into that now. I want to take a different, new road. To go further back than late colonialism and even before early colonialism or colonization (Brazil) or even the (commercial) expansion and 'discoveries'. I want to bring you the two most repressed memories in the national imagination and the state apparatus' narratives: Berbers /Arabs /Muslims, and Jews.

Curiously, Freyre's master work starts with them. He explains Portuguese ability to mix by means of the mixed origins of the Portuguese, namely with Arabs and Jews. This is, of course, an empty assumption, since all peoples come from the mixture of previous peoples and all peoples do not exist until they are politically pronounced to exist. The two expulsions – of Arabs/Muslims (in fact, Berbers), and of Jews – took place in two distinct periods. The former as part of the Reconquest (the 're-' prefix would deserve a full essay by itself...) and the foundation of the Portuguese polity as such – that is, as quintessentially non-Arab, non-Muslim, non-North African. The latter took place much later and 'purified' – religiously and ethnically – the state at the very moment that the discoveries and the commercial expansion were taking place, setting the stage for the definition of Portugal as a 'colonial' polity and cultural formation. So, the historical and cultural experience that set the stage for what later Lusotropicalism would define as inherently Portuguese, was also the experience of extirpation of Judaism from Portugal. Still, our contemporary pundits of Lusophony (a term created in post-colonial Portugal) wouldn't hesitate in paying lip service to the contribution of Jews of Portuguese origin in the places they had to flee to, such as the Netherlands, the Mediterranean world, the US, the Caribbean, and Brazil – and this has recently led to the intensification of the touristic niche of the search for Sephardic roots, and the symbolic historical

reparation through granting access to citizenship to descendents of expelled Jews.

Back to Brazil. The maid has finished picking up the litter. She utters some cuss words, she knows I'm sympathetic, she pictures herself reprimanding her boss, she won't, it's a small act of contained resistance. She can't trust me fully, either. I am a guest. I am a tourist. I am white. I am a man. Being Portuguese is, today, irrelevant, I fall into the generic category of Gringo. She probably imagines that she is, for me, Black, a woman, a maid. We are each other's Other. But we are asymmetrically positioned. Identity and Otherness are misleading concepts, they imply a non-existing symmetry. Different positionings in a conflicting cultural History, and unequal political economies amount not only to Otherness but to Inequality, and that is what I would call the Otherselves – *a rational, critically engaged and ethically/politically willful process of recognition of the Other that, while acknowledging the impossibility of being the Other, still allows for its imagination*. Something that wakes you up from anesthesia, by means of turning amnesia into memory.

If I were in São Paulo or Rio, there would be a possibility that the white people she is serving could be Jewish. They could be some of my research collaborators and friends in Israel, with whom I have been conducting fieldwork for the past two years. They are the descendants of Ashkenazi Jews who fled Europe in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, before the war and the Holocaust. Their grandparents became mostly members of the white middle class in Brazil, albeit with the Difference of ethnicity and religion. They are not the descendants of the Jews expelled from Portugal and Spain, their forefathers' and foremothers' experience of anti-Semitism was a different one. They are fully Brazilian, of course, and true Lusophones, they talk and think and reason and cuss and feel and dream in Portuguese. Differently from other migrant populations – Italians, Japanese and so forth - that made Brazil well beyond the narrative of the 3 original races, they do not have a 'place of origin' that they would like to return to, to visit, to search for roots in, etc. The old country of Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, is simply imagined as Hell. Anti-Semitic hell. But they were, of course, exposed to Zionism, that paramount change – and a controversial, ambivalent one - in the course of the identities of the Jewish

Diaspora. Zionism, too, has a story, a counter-story, and a History. And its amnesias, selective memories, and, consequently, its Otherselves.

The story that Zionism tells about itself is that European Jews came to a point, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, where they could no longer bear the burden of anti-Semitism and pogroms and when attempts at integration through secularization proved to be unwelcomed by the nation-states where they lived. Jews were to be defined as a people, a nation and, like other nations they needed a territorial state – and that state was Palestine, wherefrom Jews started their Diaspora and exile. Marked by a strong secular strain and influenced by the contemporary socialist ideologies, pioneerism in Palestine was to be the opportunity to build a new Jew, engaged in hard physical labor and living in egalitarian social institutions. The local Arabs were to be left alone and they were expected to benefit from the civilizational development that European Jews would bring. This is clearly a Western narrative, with elements of Orientalism and, some would say, elements of *mission civilisatrice* and colonialism.

The counter-story has been developed by Palestinians and many critics of the implementation of the state of Israel or of its development, including many Jews, left-wing Zionists and post-zionists. It highlights the orientalist and colonialist attitude of Zionism, indeed its racist nature (in some versions), and the violent expulsion of Palestinians after the declaration of the state of Israel - seeing there the beginning of a pattern that was to be accentuated with the occupation of the West Bank, the isolation of Gaza, the apartheid-like inequality of Israeli Arabs regarding citizenship, and the general catastrophe that befell the Palestinian people.

History follows – or should follow – a path of suspicion about Memories and an attention to Amnesias, as well as a concern with processes of othering that turn difference into inequality. Similarly to the case of Portuguese colonialism, contradictory trends can coexist and produce new realities. For instance, Palestinian nationalism and national identity were very much the product of the creation of the state of Israel and of occupation; many of the discursive patterns of Palestinian identity and resistance, and of its conflicting relation with other Arab communities and polities, have a striking similarity to the creation of Zionism in specific sectors of the Jewish Diaspora; and the

contradictions within Israeli society – ideological, religious, identitary – show that there is no consensus regarding the course of History and the course to be taken in solving the conflict and making justice to Palestinian grievances.

But, again, there is no symmetry here. Today, Israel is clearly the power-that-be in the region, and the local stratification is one of West versus East, European versus Arab, Ashkenazi Jewish versus Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewish (Oriental, of Arab cultural background) and Islam. Class and ethnic divisions are so blatant that one of my Brazilian collaborators, when asked if she knew any Israeli Palestinians or West Bank or Gaza Arabs, said “well, what are the chances that I am friends or intimate with Blacks back in Brazil? Very few. Same here with Arabs”. This is how History turns, and roots and routes, and discourses (and realities) of oppression take strange turns: the descendants of persecuted Jews who have fled to Brazil, where they could be free as members of a white middle class that kept Blacks aside, are now in a place of imagined origin (through Zionist discourse) where the freedom and normalcy of being able to be part of a Jewish majority implies the exclusion and oppression of Arabs, not imported to the territory like slaves were in Brazil, but as native people of the land. The Arabs, specifically the Palestinians, were made into the Israeli Jewish Other – not the *goyim* of the European Diasporic experience. But they are hardly the Otherselves. That would imply seeing them as the contemporary version of the European Jews of the past.

Hours have passed. The maid smiles at me. There was a thin, fragile bond made of recognition, better, of acknowledgement. A gesture towards empathy, the truly imagined Otherself, but not empathy. Looking for the Otherself is *a rational, critically engaged and ethically/politically willful process of recognition of the Other that, while acknowledging the impossibility of being the Other, still allows for its imagination*. I can't help but feeling like the liberal, progressive white colleague in a Brazilian university who works in solidarity with the Black movement; or like some of my research collaborators in Israel who consider themselves left-wing Zionist or even anti-Zionists and who engage in political and cultural movements of solidarity with Palestinians; or with myself in Portugal, when I write or lecture critically about post-Lusotropicalism, i.e., the continuation and *aggiornamento*, in post-colonial situation, of the lusotropicalist

discourse that goes hand in hand with truly economic, cultural and political apartheid – Blacks are kept in hidden suburban neighborhoods, their experience is not reflected in school books other than as passive recipients of Portuguese “contributions” to the world (a Maussian negative reciprocity, a gift without a counter-gift), and their access to citizenship (and, therefore, work) is hindered by increasing ‘blood’ (i.e., racialized) laws of citizenship and nationality). As for Arabs, they are gone, gone, gone, fetichistically preserved in a list of words and name places of Arabic origin. As for Jews, they are gone too, and only recently has a monument in Lisbon recalled the stench of burning bodies in the big pogrom of 1506, six short years after the “discovery” of Brazil.

I will now enjoy the package of romanticized exoticism that is at the core of tropical tourism, much more so in ‘African’ Bahia, and dive into the warm Atlantic, listening to Bossa Nova, to my own language with a creolized twist, before I travel to Lisbon and then to rainy, Catholic, traditional Braga.

Where I am right here and now... To say this: we all know that collective memory is selective and that it is only possible thanks to a process of selective amnesia. We also know that subaltern identities strive to turn amnesia into memory. When the two meet – in the political-economic and cultural processes of the politics of identity – we have a chance to wake up from anesthesia and to imagine Otherselves and thus make amends not only to historical wrongdoings but also to contemporary inequalities. At the same time, a constant struggle of *otherselfing* helps escape the temptation to tell a story of bad guys and good guys. Everyone is in a position of *othering* that is not *otherselfing*, as – unfortunately - the Israeli case regarding the Arabs demonstrates. Even I and my fellow countrymen and countrywomen here have recently become simply Others, Others that are not Otherselves (and the Other is he or she who can not be conceived as an Otherself): I am talking about how we became PIGS in the course of the new cultural narrative that accompanied the current financial and political crisis in Europe.

There is one thing I did right, at least. A gesture, a move, an action. I took the litter that I accumulated on my table while writing this piece and put it in the trashcan. I disposed of my trash. The maid smiles at me. I smile back at her. That’s about as far as we can go.