

# MODES OF RELATION: POWER AND PORTUGUESE IMPERIAL PAINTING

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The Portuguese have a small country as their cradle  
and the whole world as their grave.

Fr. António Vieira

Without the Empire, Portugal is not Portugal.

Carlos Selvagem

Ever since the time of the Portuguese Discoveries, justification has been sought for the link between the search for imperial greatness and the essence of the national soul but it was only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that this relationship became politically defined and widely divulged, translating into an effective relation between art and power.

If it was the persistence of an idea of a humanist and civilising mission that formed the ideological basis for the Afro-Asian-American empire, it was the dictatorship that emerged after 28 May 1926 that built the foundations for a Portuguese overseas policy, undivided and indivisible, stretching ‘from the Minho to Timor’.

In 1930, even before the *Estado Novo* was constitutionally enshrined, the Colonial Act<sup>2</sup> was drawn up and later re-published when the 1933 Constitution came into force. With this Act the group of overseas territories the Portuguese possessed became known as the Portuguese

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<sup>2</sup> Decreto n.º 18 570 de 8 de julho de 1930, published in the *Diário do Governo* n.º 156, I Série. Online at: <https://dre.pt/application/dir/pdfgratis/1930/07/15600.pdf> (accessed on 1.8.2016).

Colonial Empire. This name reflected the centralising nature of the government of Oliveira Salazar (1889-1970), reinforcing the role of Portugal's historical right to possess, colonise and civilise. In general terms, this Act ushered in a new period in Portuguese colonial administration — its imperial and nationalist phase — which would stay in effect until 1951. These years of imperial mystique, regulated by the Act and reiterated in the speeches and actions of Armindo Monteiro, Minister for the Colonies between 1931 and 1935, reflected the international policies of the various totalitarian states of Europe, subject to the tension that forced them to legitimate their colonies in the face of growing pressure from western public opinion.

This mythification of the empire in the period between the two World Wars was shared by other countries (Great Britain, France, Holland and Belgium), but in the case of Portugal there was a sacralisation of the empire capable of firmly seeding within the minds of the Portuguese people an ancestral, and therefore legitimate, idea of ownership. Given this logic, each of the political periods of the *Estado Novo* corresponded to one form of 'reading' of the work of Gilberto Freyre.<sup>3</sup> The model of economic development used in the colonies was based on the mere exploitation of natural resources and African labour through forced work and compulsory crops, all for the benefit and in the interest of the metropole and the European settlers. Besides, the imperial stance taken by Salazar's regime made a point of maintaining the rigid opposition between 'civilised' and 'primitive' peoples which rendered the idea of cultural reciprocity impossible. In fact, the only aspect of Freyre's thought and his Lusotropicalism that merited the applause of the regime's colonialists in the years between 1930 and 1940 relates to his confirmation of the Portuguese people's special aptitude for

3 Gilberto Freyre (1900-1987), the Brazilian sociologist, was the author of the theory of Lusotropicalism which in general terms claimed that the Portuguese had a special capacity to adapt to the tropics (the overseas colonies), not out of any political or economic interest but from an inborn and creative empathy. According to Freyre, this aptitude of the Portuguese to relate to tropical lands and peoples was the result of their own hybrid ethnic origin and from their long contact with both Moors and Jews in the Iberian Peninsula in the first centuries of nationhood. It was manifested primarily through miscegenation and cultural interpenetration.

colonisation. However, in the 1950s the picture changed when Lusotropicalism became incorporated and adapted into the official discourse.

The post-war period proved to be an unusual time for Portugal as it was the only European country to maintain its colonial empire intact. However, the winds of change that were being felt all over Europe after 1945 in relation to decolonisation made it increasingly difficult for Portugal to justify its position with regard to its empire. The principle of self-determination for colonised peoples was enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations (1945) and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) where it was declared to be an indisputable right. The United Nations began to insist that the colonial powers had an obligation to prepare the territories they administered for independence and self-government in the near future. It was, therefore, in this context that the anti-colonialist movement was born and consolidated and led to the start of the decolonisation process, first in Asia and then in Africa.<sup>4</sup>

Portugal tried to find arguments to legitimate maintaining the status quo in her colonies and with this in mind felt pressured into making changes to the legislation. Given this situation, in 1951, within the ambit of a revision of the Constitution, the President of the Council presented a proposal to revoke the Colonial Act, thereby ushering in a new political orientation which would be approved in 1953 as the *Lei Orgânica do Ultramar Português* [Organic Law for the Portuguese Overseas Territories].<sup>5</sup> This introduced some changes in terminology, the main one being to replace the term 'colonies' by 'overseas provinces'. The 'shift' by Salazar's government to adopt Freyre's Lusotropicalism more completely in order to defend its image as a multiracial country also dates from the time the 1953 law was approved.<sup>6</sup> So as not to introduce anything novel, one result of this

4 Indonesia in 1946, India and Ceylon in 1947, Burma in 1948, Morocco, Tunisia and Sudan in 1956, the Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1957. This made the anti-imperialist struggle universal, later proved by the numerous Pan-African, Pan-Arab and Pan-Asian congresses held.

5 Lei n.º 2.066 de 27 de junho de 1953.

6 Whether by coincidence or not, two months after national unity was declared in the 1951 Constitution, Gilberto Freyre arrived in Lisbon in August at the invitation of the Minister for the Overseas Territories, Sarmento Rodrigues (1899-1979). He said his aim was to travel around the overseas

slight alteration was that it provided a basis for the following year's reform. Thus in 1954 the *Estatuto dos Indígenas das províncias da Guiné, Angola e Moçambique* [The Status of the Indigenous Peoples of the provinces of Guinea, Angola and Mozambique]<sup>7</sup> was promulgated.

Consequently, as from the mid-1950s the Minister for Foreign Affairs tried to indoctrinate Portuguese diplomats in Lusotropicalism with the aim of furnishing them with tools that could validate Portugal's presence in Africa, India, Macau and Timor.<sup>8</sup> This 'appropriation' of Freyre's ideas by the regime can be accounted for as a way to promote its international policy and to provide grounds to support its official discourse aimed at external consumption. This could have been because Portugal's entry into the United Nations in 1955 obliged it to do so or because of the accusations voiced by anti-colonialists who began to make themselves heard within international diplomatic circles.<sup>9</sup>

In interviews given to the foreign press in the 1960s, Salazar himself argued in line with Freyre's theory of Lusotropicalism to justify Portugal's remaining on the African continent,<sup>10</sup> but the times that were to come

territories. It was during this trip that the Brazilian sociologist would use the expression 'Luso-tropical' for the first time to characterise how the Portuguese adapted to the tropics.

7 *Estatuto dos Indígenas Portugueses das Províncias da Guiné, Angola e Moçambique*, approved by Decreto-lei n.º 39666 de 20 de maio de 1954. However, discrimination in the other overseas territories would only end in 1961 with the abolition of the indigenous status. Decreto-lei n.º 43893, de 6.9.1961. Online at <https://dre.pt/application/file/180951> (accessed on 1.8.2016).

8 In 1955, Adriano Moreira introduced Lusotropicalism in the study program of his course entitled 'Política Ultramarina' [Overseas Policy] in the second year of the graduate course *Altos Estudos Ultramarinos* [Advanced Overseas Studies] at the *Instituto Superior de Estudos Ultramarinos* [Higher Institute of Overseas Studies] (later the *Instituto Superior de Ciências Sociais e Política Ultramarina* [Higher Institute of Social Sciences and Overseas Policy]). The influence of the Lusotropical idea on Adriano Moreira's initiatives would also serve as an incentive to organise two congresses of 'Portuguese Communities in the World', both held at the Lisbon Geographical Society (1964 and 1967), as well as to prompt the creation of the *Academia Internacional da Cultura Portuguesa* [International Academy of Portuguese Culture] in 1964.

9 It is in this context that the Portuguese presence at the International Exhibition of Brussels in 1958 should be understood, and in the related work (published by the event's Portuguese Committee) numerous references to the Lusotropical doctrine may be found. *Portugal: Oito séculos de história ao serviço da valorização do homem e da aproximação dos povos* [Portugal: Eight centuries of history in the service of enhancing Man's worth and bringing peoples closer together].

10 *Life Magazine*, N.º 45, and the weekly newspaper *U.S. News and World Report* of 9 June, both published in New York and dated 1962.

would be different. In 1960 the United Nations demanded that Portugal rid herself of her colonial empire<sup>11</sup> while in 1961 Salazar's regime had to face a series of political difficulties directly related to the overseas situation — the hijacking of the passenger liner *Santa Maria* by Henrique Galvão (January), the attempt to release prisoners from jails in Luanda (February), the massacres orchestrated by the Union of the Peoples of Angola (UPA - União dos Povos de Angola) in the north of Angola, the military coup by General Botelho Moniz (March), the occupation of Goa, Daman and Diu by the Indian Union (December) and the outbreak of war in Angola. All of these events led the President of the Council to invite Adriano Moreira (1922- ) to become Minister for the Overseas Provinces. He accepted and took office in April 1961. Immediately a series of reforms were proposed including abolition of the indigenous status.<sup>12</sup> This attempt at relaxing segregationist policies clearly pointed to progressive autonomy and wider administrative decentralisation for the overseas territories. However, this led to Adriano Moreira's removal in 1962, thus extinguishing any hope for progressive colonial autonomy. This signalled the end of the inspiration gleaned from Freyre's Lusotropicalism although Marcelo Caetano (1906-1980) did leave the door open in the 1971 revision of the Constitution. However, by then it was too late for any dialogue between the metropole and independence movements owing to the advanced state of the colonial war.

In the political configuration outlined above, colonial art was not forgotten although it was only acknowledged and encouraged when it became necessary to legitimate the overseas empire in the international sphere, which happened from the 1930s on. Consequently, it may be said that before the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century there were no empire painters, or artists interested in spreading knowledge of the overseas provinces. All that existed

11 See Adriano Moreira <http://ensina.rtp.pt/artigo/onu-contra-colonialismo-portugues/> (accessed on 7.10.2016)

12 Following the same directive, at the beginning of February 1962, Decreto-lei N.º 44171, de 1-2-1962, was promulgated. This established free entry and residence rights for Portuguese citizens in any part of the national territory. Until then, Portuguese people who had wanted to emigrate to the colonies were obliged to have a '*carta de chamada*', or letter of invitation, proving they had a job guaranteed or adequate means of subsistence.

were a few pictorial notes which showed a sporadic interest in the theme although these were restricted to a painted view of History that was the outcome not of any effective experience but of an image.

This being so, and as the present study deals with Portuguese imperial and colonial painting in the contemporary age, we must begin by mentioning that at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the pioneering pictorial perspective of Francisco Vieira Portuense (1765-1805) encapsulated for the first time a distinctive treatment of imperial aggrandisement. The pioneering activity of this artist is linked to the fact that he was one of the first painters to experience travelling on a European scale, wandering as he did between Lisbon, Rome, Prussia, Austria and England, thus becoming the most widely travelled Portuguese artist of his time. Sponsored by Englishmen from Porto and by British *Grand Touristes* in Italy, Vieira Portuense lived in and knew the Old Continent that had just been through and emerged from the French Revolution. This did not prevent him discovering the great works of the past and becoming acquainted with the most important artists who were his contemporaries. Acknowledging himself to be a truly European artist, he produced numerous travel notebooks and albums which show an attitude in consonance with the spirit of the age. These allow us access to his way of thinking about the historical moment which he would later encapsulate in a type of painting that enables us to perceive this. The series of small pictures he painted to illustrate the cantos of Luís de Camões' *Os Lusíadas* [The Lusiads] are revealing: *Battle of the Island of Mozambique*,<sup>13</sup> *Vasco da Gama disembarking on the Isle of Love* and *Emisaries from Gama before the King of Melinde*. Painted between 1798 and 1801, they show a form of painting that is restrained and without excess, and they possess a founding feature: the mythological fable that had prevailed among his predecessors was no longer important but instead heroic acts were. This reflects a maturity that was a result of his observation of the different pictorial universes he encountered among the private collections

13 For a detailed genealogy of the plastic arts in Luís de Camões, see B. Xavier Coutinho, *Camões e as artes plásticas. Subsídios para uma iconografia camoniana*, 2 vol., Figueirinhas, Porto, 1948.

he visited. This awareness of a shared European culture was the primary element that influenced him when he began a painting and, even if it did not yet have a colonial stamp, it at least bore a relation to other imperial narratives of the Old Continent.

The first few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought us Domingos António de Sequeira (1768-1837), considered to be the painter who, in aesthetic terms, led the transition from Neoclassicism to Romanticism in Portugal. His patriotic allegories reflect his intense experience of the political upheavals of the time — he was successively a supporter of the French invasion army, the English alliance, the Liberal revolution and the Constitutional Charter before going into exile in France following the Absolutist counter-revolution. At the Louvre Salon he exhibited *The Death of Camões*,<sup>14</sup> the first painting to usher in Portuguese Romanticism.

Francisco Metrass (1825-1861), the most widely travelled artist of his generation, also produced paintings with a significant historical theme. His *Camões in the grotto in Macau*, bought by the king, Dom Fernando (1816-1885), and believed to be a self-portrait, is full of symbolism and evokes the isolation and solitude that both Camões and Metrass experienced. Moreover, as Maria Aires Silveira writes:

Camões and the slave Jau are represented in a scenic space, constructed by grotto elements and maritime references. The painting falls within the imagery of the Romantic hero where the representation of the poet of the Lusitanian epic, melancholic and infected with a moral pessimism and despair in human abilities, seems to coincide both physically and spiritually with that of the painter. The choice of a suffering Camões turns it into an emblem signalling the intellectual path followed by Portuguese Romanticism that had first been announced by Domingos António Sequeira and which finds its literary support in Almeida Garrett. In fact,

14 This painting earned him a gold medal at the 1824 *Salon*. It was subsequently lost in Brazil but a charcoal and white chalk drawing on paper, a sketch for the painting, can be seen at the National Museum of Ancient Art in Lisbon.

the theme carries a dual inspiration: if Camões drinks in the springs of Classical Antiquity, then Metrass plunges into the antiquity of his 16<sup>th</sup> century Patria. In this work the dramatic quality is linked to the chromatic tones of deep brown in which the illuminated face of Camões stands out. The warrior-poet rests from his crusade, his sword at his feet, his quill suspended. The two figures are reflecting; Camões looks fixedly at the horizon while the slave stares at the ground, perhaps reminding us of the words of the poet: ‘Amorous Malays and valiant Javanese/ all will be subject to the Portuguese.’ (*The Lusiads*).<sup>15</sup>

Continuing with the topic of the theme of Camões (one of the most beloved themes of Portuguese Romanticism), we should mention António Manuel da Fonseca (1796-1890), a painter who in 1861 painted *Camões reading the Lusiads to Dom Sebastian*. We should also note that at the Camões Centenary Exhibition, held in 1880 at the Crystal Palace in Porto, the same artist repeated his emphasis on the poet of *The Lusiads* but this time in *Camões invoking the Tágides*. There are also other works by him with the same motif such as *The Landing of Vasco da Gama in Calicut* and *The Landing of the Portuguese Sailors on the Isle of Love*.

On a separate note it is important to mention Miguel Ângelo Lupi (1826-1883),<sup>16</sup> a teacher of drawing on the ‘Painting of History’ course at the Academy of Fine Arts in Lisbon. This is because of his unfinished canvas *The Negroes of Serpa Pinto*, or *The Negress Mariana and the Negro Catraio*, (c. 1879), a work that given the theme portrayed — two Angolan slaves who served Alexandre de Serpa Pinto (1846-1900) on his travels through the African continent — is a rare example of a colonial experience truly lived (and not just imagined). Between 1851 and 1853 Lupi lived in

15 Online at: <http://www.museuartecontemporanea.pt/pt/pecas/ver/47/artist> (accessed on 22.11.2016). English translation by Vanessa Boutefeu.

16 He was a state scholar in Rome (1860-63) and visited Paris in 1864. He took part in the ‘Promotora’ salons at the *Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes* in Lisbon (1863-68) and in various exhibitions abroad: the Fine Arts Exhibition in Madrid (1<sup>st</sup> class medal, 1871), in London (1868), in the *Paris Salon* (1866, 1867, 1875), in the Universal Exhibition held in Paris (1878) and in Rio de Janeiro (1879).



Luanda where he worked for the Treasury of the Province of Angola and he left behind works with a clear colonial stamp but which, according to Diogo de Macedo (1889-1959), «have gone missing and of which there is no news».<sup>17</sup> It is worth adding here that the way in which the characters are portrayed obeys Academy rules, but the same cannot be said of the abstract background, which is atypical for the time. This type of gender painting contrasts with his 1880 history painting *Departure of Vasco da Gama for India*. An artist's study for this work exists and was exhibited at the Camões Exhibition held at the Crystal Palace in Porto and also at the Lisbon Geographical Society.

Another artist who deserves a mention for his pen and ink drawings done during the Public Works Expedition to Mozambique in 1876 is Isaías Newton (1838-1921), a disciple of Lupi and Tomás da Anunciação (1821-1879). Throughout the journey, Newton was concerned with recording part of the colonial landscape. He later reproduced these landscapes in *Occidente*,<sup>18</sup> a magazine he collaborated on, as well as taking part in exhibitions<sup>19</sup> and winning various prizes.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, it is important to remember the name of Veloso Salgado (1864-1945) whose oil painting entitled *Vasco da Gama before the Zamorin of Calicut* is an outstanding example of his work. This picture won the gold medal in the painting competition organised in 1898 for the 'Commemo-

17 Diogo de Macedo «Um Álbum de desenhos sobre Angola» in *O Mundo português*, n.º1, Ano XIII, IIª série, 1946, pp.17-21.

18 *Occidente*, 21.10.1881, n.p.

19 Triennial Exhibition of the Academia Real de Belas Artes, Lisboa (1856); Sociedade Promotora de Belas Artes, Lisboa (1863,1864, 1865, 1866, 1867, 1868, 1870, 1872, 1874, 1876, 1884 and 1887); 10th Triennial Exhibition of the Academia Portuense de Belas Artes, Porto (1869); International Exhibition of Madrid (1871); Fine Arts Exhibition of the Associação Industrial Portuguesa, Lisboa (1888); the Grémio Artístico, Lisboa (1891, 1892, 1893, 1894 and 1896); Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes, Lisboa (1903 and 1905). He also exhibited with João Ribeiro Cristino at the Salon of the «Ilustração Portuguesa», Lisbon (1918).

20 1856 — 1st Medal — Academia Real de Belas-Artes, Lisboa; 1863 — 2nd Medal — Sociedade Promotora de Belas Artes, Lisboa; 1865 — 1st Medal — Sociedade Promotora de Belas Artes, Lisboa; 1867 — Honorable Mention — Sociedade Promotora de Belas Artes, Lisboa; — 2nd Medal — Sociedade Promotora de Belas Artes, Lisboa; — 2nd Medal — Sociedade Promotora de Belas Artes; 1868 — Gold Medal — Academia Real de Belas-Artes. José Júlio Barbosa de Moraes Sarmiento Archive, Coimbra.

rations of the Fourth Centenary of the Discovery of the Sea Route to India.’

From outside the borders of the Empire but showing a vision that was a result of Brazil’s independence in 1822, we find João Ribeiro Cristino da Silva (1858-1948), the son of the painter Cristino da Silva (1829-1877). Based on his experiences in Brazil (in the state of Pará), he captured many of the local landscapes as can be seen in his oil painting *Site of Marco da Légua*, a canvas exhibited at the *Sociedade Nacional de Belas Artes* [National Society for Fine Arts].<sup>21</sup>

The examples cited above, however, merely punctuate the work of these artists without being a recurrent theme in their pictorial legacy. Moreover, these references (with the exception of Lupi) show them to be but part of an idealised painting of History, the objective of which was to aggrandise through the plastic medium the mythic nature of the empire, which was imagined and bore no relation to geographical, anthropological or ethnographic reality.

This absence of empire painters was noted at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when various voices demanded the presence of artists in the overseas territories who would be able to transpose into the plastic arts images of both the landscape and indigenous societies. One of these voices was that of Diogo de Macedo who, in various articles, called for ethnographic and artistic collections to be increased as well as for the creation of a Museum of Colonial Art. He also encouraged artists to travel to the colonies with a view to capturing the atmospheres and nuances of the natural and cultural landscape. Macedo even said that they should stay

... as long as possible in each region, gathering all that is picturesque, typical, artistic and historical, recording on canvas, in albums or in clay, the landscape, (...) singular individuals, the movements and the expressions of every action, researching legends, superstitions and mysteries, etc, etc.<sup>22</sup>

21 *Arquitectura* Revista Mensal, Ano IV, n.º 19, julho 1931, p. 64.

22 Letter from Diogo de Macedo addressed to Augusto Cunha on the subject of the organisation of cruises to the overseas territories by the *Mundo Português* magazine, in *O Mundo Português*, Ano II, Vol. II, 1935, n.p.

However, this objective would only be fully achieved from the 1930s on when it became necessary to show the empire to the Portuguese public and to legitimate it abroad, a subject for another reflection.