

PORTUGAL TODAY: BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

PORTUGAL ATUAL: ENTRE O PASSADO E O FUTURO

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Martins, M. L. (2021). *Pensar Portugal – A modernidade de um país antigo*. UMinho Editora.

1.

In November 2021, Moisés de Lemos Martins (2021) published *Pensar Portugal - A Modernidade de um País Antigo* (Thinking Portugal - The Modernity of an Ancient Country). The author is an emeritus full professor of communication sciences at the University of Minho. He directed the Communication and Society Research Centre, which he founded in 2001, until 2022, and the Virtual Museum of Lusophony, which he created in 2017, until recently. He was the director of several scientific journals and president of several scientific associations in his academic area. The book he has now published, adding to the many others he has written, places Moisés de Lemos Martins in a long tradition of prominent authors who have chosen Portugal as their object of analysis. A tradition which includes Antero de Quental (1979), Teixeira de Pascoaes (1920), Jorge Dias (1961), Fernando Pessoa (1978), António Sérgio (1981), Barradas de Carvalho (1981), Miguel Torga (1965, 1980), Manuel Antunes (2005), Eduardo Lourenço (1978, 1990, 1999), José Mattoso (1985, 1998), José Gil (2004, 2009), Gilbert Durand (1997) and Miguel Real (2017).

2.

Pensar Portugal offers us a rich conceptual framework and an excellent critical apparatus, in the debate of ideas with contemporary authors, in the footnotes and in the extensive bibliography. The book has a unique structure, organised in six thematic parts particularly relevant to think Portugal today, which include several essays previously published in different media, preceded, in each part, by a chapter setting the theoretical and methodological framework of each collection of essays.

The book's six thematic parts address "Portugal e a Europa" (Portugal and Europe; Part 1), "Portugal e o Espaço Lusófono" (Portugal and the Lusophone Space; Part 2), "À Sombra da Igreja" (In the Shadow of the Church; Part 3), "A Liberdade" (Freedom; Part 4), "A Cidadania e a Democracia" (Citizenship and Democracy; Part 5), "Ciência, Universidade e Política Científica" (Science, University and Science Policy; Part 6).

Thus, as we have seen, each of these six parts offers an interesting chapter providing a theoretical and methodological framework for the subsequent essays, presented as chronicles. These chapters have the following evocative titles: “A Representação da Identidade” (The Representation of Identity; 1.1); “A Lusofonia e o Desafio de uma Circumnavegação Tecnológica” (Lusophony and the Challenge of a Technological Circumnavigation; 2.1); “O Catolicismo e a Construção da Identidade Nacional” (Catholicism and the Construction of National Identity; 3.1); “O Imaginário Salazarista: O Passado Como Se Fora Presente” (The Salazarist Imaginary: The Past As If It Were Present; 4.1); “Para uma Nova Teoria dos Média, do Espaço Público e da Opinião Pública” (Towards a New Theory of the Media, Public Space and Public Opinion; 5.1); “A Liberdade Académica e os Seus Inimigos” (Academic Freedom and Its Enemies; 6.1).

The academic texts and essays express a general purpose set in the common goal of a reflection on Portugal (p. 13):

its modernity and many of its uncertainties and deadlocks; its people’s daily lives; its language and religion; the vicissitudes of democracy during the 20th and 21st centuries; the colonial past and memory; the European imaginary and the Lusophone imaginary; and, finally, the university and science policy. (p. 12).

However, the essays in the last three chapters “are often more than mere essays on the social and human sciences, rising to cry out against the depletion of the idea of democracy, and also against a scientific policy that dismisses the humanities and social sciences” (p. 17).

Pensar Portugal is a remarkable systematic compilation of previously published texts and offers us the thematic and bibliographical universe initiated with *O Olho de Deus no Discurso Salazarista* (The Eye of God in Salazar Discourse; Martins, 1990/2016). Moisés de Lemos Martins’ research addresses the themes that, in this book, represent his system: Portugal, always, and Europe as its matrix; Portugal as the centre of the Lusophone space; Portugal and the institution of the Church; freedom and Salazarism; citizenship, democracy and the media; the university, science and science policy; and understanding the contemporary world.

3.

The Introduction lays out the standpoint adopted in the book, which “is not exactly philosophical, aesthetic or political” but “an exercise in understanding the contemporary world, with the social sciences and humanities as its theoretical background” and taking “into account the work of essayists, philosophers and writers” (pp. 11–12). The essays share “the recognition of a thought of practice and the importance of the imaginary in all social structuring” (p. 12). The academic texts underlying the essays as the essays themselves “express a general purpose, which is that of the common horizon of a reflection on Portugal, on its history, its imaginary and its modernity”, questioning “the social representations of life as a community” (p. 13).

The first academic text addresses identity, which has already been the subject of the book *Para uma Inversa Navegação. O Discurso da Identidade* (Toward a Reverse Navigation. The Discourse of Identity; Martins, 1996). The identity of a country is built on its institutions, seen as “a realisation of the collective” (Bessis, 2009), as offering its members “the possibility of mutual recognition” (de Munck, 1999) and as a relational, dialectical, chiasmatic space, of the same and the other, inclusion and exclusion, of instrumental activity and communicational activity. Institutions underlie the book when it addresses language, the Church, the State, the media and the university. They are the subject of multiple and interesting approaches well beyond the anti-institutional vulgate imposed on the “barracks” school or the “totalitarian” hospital (Dubet, 2002) elsewhere.

The second text deals with insights into Portuguese language and Lusophony issues in a most relevant, transcultural and transnational space, in “technological circumnavigation” through websites, portals, social networks, repositories and digital archives, as well as digital museums (p. 55), contributing “to the construction of Lusophone communities, whether cultural, artistic or scientific” (p. 57). Here we can find a major strategic point of view to face the Lusophony that should be carefully considered.

The third academic text focuses on the behaviour of the Church involved in the *Estado Novo* regime and the anti-salazarist Church, exploring “José Saramago’s understanding of Portugal’s Christian heritage” (p. 14).

The fourth text deems freedom as the dominant issue of the current democratic condition of the Portuguese nation, not yet free from some symptoms of the past that will require a university (school) that teaches competent, supportive, cultured, critical and sober citizens of Portugal and the world.

The fifth text deals with citizenship and democracy and the role of the media in shaping them. The author then debates what he calls “a new theory of the media, the public space and public opinion” (pp. 15–16) and notes (advocates) the passage from a discursive rationality to a rationality centred on the image as a consequence of information, communication and leisure technologies, a shift from words to numbers and images, from thought to emotion, from ideology to sensology, from a horizon of the human community to nationalism and tribalism (p. 16). It is yet another rich text in which the author relates with the most influential contemporary authors on the topic. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that here too, we have to avoid the dualism of reason/emotion, thought/emotion, and resist the transition “from a horizon of human community” emanating from the Enlightenment or numerous ideals to the “nationalism and tribalism” of societies which we thought would never allow “certain specimens” to govern their countries and which we thought we would never see again after so much tragedy. It is also worth mentioning that an author quoted in this and other texts, Gilles Deleuze (1990), claims that the work of philosophy “is to create new concepts” (p. 48), which, in the present, would temper the mental liquidity of the opinion that “thinks badly, it does not think” (Bachelard, 1938/1996, p. 18).

Image combined with emotion may prompt those who receive it to act with no rationality and do so because the image and the feeling are the only justification. We

know today, according to António Damásio (2020), that feeling is a dimension that, in the evolution of living, is articulated with being and knowing. Life has, in the beginning, the being (protocellular and cellular) through the phases of feeling and knowing. This reference to feeling in the phylogenetic and ontogenetic evolution of life and of human beings only shows the relevance of feeling, knowing that the sensology of which Moisés de Lemos Martins speaks is pertinently part of a different universal phenomenon, but a technological and digital one.

The sixth text has a bold title: “A Liberdade Académica e os Seus Inimigos”. It deals with the current kinetics of the world and the university, knowing that they are different kinetics: the world suffering from a diagnosed acceleration and an inexorable technological mobilisation for the market that is taking over the school (university) world, which in turn requires a slow and long time. The author states:

however, we now see the idea of marketing being applied to the education system. It is about the university putting on the market products with a strong chance of being bought. Hence, teaching is converted into commerce, and teachers become service professionals and consultants. (p. 242)

The governance of universities now takes on “managerial and economics-based” models, and the university itself becomes the object of rationality that is alien to it, instrumental rationality.

This text deserves to be paired with two books. One by Bill Readings (2000/2003), a professor at the University of Montreal, entitled *A Universidade em Ruínas* (The University in Ruins), where we read: “for its part, the University is becoming a transnational bureaucratic corporation, either tied to transnational instances of government such as the European Union or functioning independently, by analogy with a transnational corporation” (p. 13). The other book is *A Universidade Sem Condição* (Unconditional University) by Jacques Derrida (2001/2001), where he states:

in truth, it will be (...) a declarative engagement, an appeal in the form of a profession of faith: faith in the University and, within the University, faith in the Humanities of tomorrow. (...) This university claims and ought to be granted in principle, besides what is called academic freedom, an *unconditional* freedom to question and to assert, or even, going still further, the right to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the *truth*. (p. 9)

What Moisés de Lemos Martins, Bill Readings (2000/2003) and Jacques Derrida (2001/2001) advocate is close to what Daniel Innerarity (2008/2011) considers to be “the tyranny of the present” (p. 18) and the “culture of urgency” (p. 40).

Silvina Rodrigues Lopes (2021) and Martha C. Nussbaum (2010/2019) also advocate the humanities and arts. The latter claims that thirsty for national profit nations and their systems of education are heedlessly discarding skills that are needed to keep democracies alive as critical thought, daring imagination, empathetic understanding of

human experiences and understanding of the complexity of the world we live in. Skills that are drawn on humanities and arts in order to promote a climate of responsible and watchful stewardship and a culture of creative innovation and, ultimately, to a thriving economy and corporate culture (Nussbaum, 2010/2019, pp. 38, 44, 47).

Setting aside the six theoretical academic texts that provide a certain conceptual apparatus, it should be noted that the essays or chronicles disclose another writing context, perhaps more aware of the meaning of living, both personal and collective. That is clear in “Um Paraíso Claro e Triste” (A Clear and Sad Paradise), “A Páscoa Como Ensaio Sobre o Humano” (Easter As an Essay on the Human), “Portugal e o Colonialismo” (Portugal and Colonialism), “No Caminho de Portugal, a Europa e o Atlântico” (On the Road to Portugal, Europe and the Atlantic).

4.

Pensar Portugal offers a structured succession of themes or problems ranging from Portugal and Europe to the university. Its texts can be characterised as cartographic or therapeutic insofar as they provide us with guidance and therapy on a scientific basis, community and personal level. We do not come across a shadow of lamentation in it. We find directions for guidance and drugs for some symptoms. Cartography and therapeutics guide us or take care of us from the scientific and existential point of view, from the community point of view and the personal point of view, sometimes with science and sometimes with irony, almost always with intellectual serenity occasionally broken with the necessary clamour. The text “ Para uma Nova Teoria dos Média, do Espaço Público e da Opinião Pública” is a very thorough text from a strictly scientific standpoint. “A Lusofonia e o Desafio de uma Nova Circum-Navegação” is a guiding text regarding our collective existence. “Um Paraíso Claro e Triste” is a remarkable text for its title, for its fresh irony in diagnosing one of the symptoms of which we suffer, personally and collectively, and which is also a factor (the symptom) in our continuing to be the country we are, “a clear and sad paradise”. “A Páscoa Como Ensaio Sobre o Humano” is a definitive text of our human condition, and I would like to say the following apropos.

The journey is, beyond doubt, the best metaphor for talking about the human condition, and it includes texts by writers, philosophers, and mystics. Today we know that we began the great journey in Africa as *erectus*, *neandertal* and *sapiens* to such an extent that some speak of *homo migrans* and how the *sapiens* “colonised” the *neandertal* (Demoule, 2022). Palaeogenetics provides us with fantastic data to better understand ourselves and avoid being overly absolutist about what has been rooted in us for some centuries, which turns out to be very little in the time of humanity, of life and the cosmos.

The journey is about promise, project, utopia, and passage. The journey contains wandering, doubt, memory and uncertainty, as Moisés de Lemos Martins states. Finally, Pascal Picq (2015) states:

homo erectus goes about the world, carried by the performing bipedalism and animated by new thoughts about the world. Man’s faculties would not

be what they are without our feet, and our feet would not have taken us so far in the world without our thoughts. (pp. 228–229)

More than 70 000 years ago, women and men decided to take a major step in the history of humanity by setting off for lands that were forcibly unknown and out of sight. What a journey from the African savannahs' red lands to the Australian aborigines' dreamlands! Where do these dreams come from, these thoughts that drive our species *Homo sapiens* to go beyond the horizons, the plains, the deserts, the mountains? (Picq, 2015, pp. 230–231)

Lusophony itself is bound to the journeys of Portuguese-speaking people. Today it may be on a journey itself, and its great challenge, as the book's author says, is a "technological circum-navigation" (p. 53). The journey will no longer be by boat or plane but through technology, and one can send Lusophony itself on a journey because the technological means to do so are available. That is the originality of Moisés de Lemos Martins' proposal, which entails an updated and competent conception of Lusophony and its ongoing project, materialising this conception in the Virtual Museum of Lusophony. The voyages are indeed circumnavigations through which the language and the culture of the Lusophone nations circulate in a universal and open space.

The reticular and communicational ocean also has monsters, pirates, and enchanted islands. *Pensar Portugal* reflects on that ocean, technology and communication, proposing a new media theory that will have more to do with image, feeling, and sensology than with word and reason, that is, literary rationality.

The book contributes to Portugal's presence in that universal and open space, in that reticular and communicational ocean, as a country where we want advanced democratic institutions, working clearly towards economic, scientific, cultural and social maturity.

Translation: Anabela Delgado

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