

Tradition and modernity in the memory of an empire: the writing of A. Lopes Mendes

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Abstract

A. Lopes Mendes' writing encapsulates the way in which tradition and modernity were conceived in Portugal in the late 19th-century. The imperial topic commands these discourses on modernity, namely when we focus on the debate that took place around the centuries-old imperial memory. In this essay, we analyse memory as discourse about an empire, bearing in mind the way authors deal with coeval epistemological and historical perspectives. This theoretical ground frames my conceptual proposal of A. Lopes Mendes' writing in reports, biographic and descriptive memories. My aim is to unveil discursive subtleties in several 19th-century writings, supported by the concepts of ethno- and ideo-landscapes that lied then at the core of the imagetic representation.

Keywords: tradition; modernity; representation; imperial discourse; A. Lopes Mendes

When we analyse how the memory of a 16th-century empire was represented in the narratives of the Portuguese presence in Asian lands, we come across an orientalism¹ conceived as those narrative practices where the "art" of description, communication, and representation unfold. These discursive practices reveal economic, social and political purposes while emerging under different aesthetic forms. (Avelar, 2018:269).

These narratives belong to a dialogue among civilisations that emerged as guiding line of a later Orientalism. On the other hand, one

must also bear in mind that, underlying this, lies a historicist perspective that

claim to have gained more knowledge of the text's meaning because of their acquaintance with the new meanings it had for subsequent historical periods. (Hamilton, 1996:4)

And where

Modernity itself is defined by the idea that we can break from the past by claiming to be the measure of all things and not vice versa, and that this subjectivity is not an embarrassment for science but the grounds of its possibility-an attitude shared by otherwise opposed modes of thinking from Renaissance onward. The critique of modernity is a historicizing one, which exposes the ideological content of the logic of a subjectivity that supposedly transcends local interests. (1996:4-5).

These interpretations of the present often are dysphoric, and signs of modernity show up around "collective ideas"² that laid the foundations for concepts such as social and collective memory, which conceive of the societies as organisms or wholes. While pondering on the 19th-century, Portuguese historian Fernando Catroga states that these emerging theoretical approaches are due to deep social changes that were aroused by the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of mass societies

A process that, as we know, had as one of its major consequences the identification of "collective social subjects"(civilisation, nation, people, class, race) conceived by Western historicism as immanent keys of historical dynamics.

In this context, History gradually became represented as an *iter* in which the knowledge of the past was a necessary premise to understand the present and to change the future. (Catroga, 2009: 14)³

In the late 19th-century, historical memory

emerged as a “sentiment-idea” lying beyond its useful social function. Indeed, it reveals a self-evident spiritual dimension of the whole, since it summons all human faculties and to all spiritual resources to provide meaning to existence.

António Lopes Mendes is one of the authors that help to build that later 19th-century modernity where “sentiment-idea” is part of the interpretation of historical time, while it reads tradition in another reality, the one of an empire that aims an ever-changing present in a future that wished the return to a euphoric past...

His historical condition determined Lopes Mendes' writing. One must bear in mind that Paul Ricoeur conceived historical condition as a sharp criticism of the limits of historical knowledge that often break the hybris of knowledge and time modalities (Ricoeur, 2000: XVI). While performing different roles in the Portuguese colonial administration, Lopes Mendes conceives of his historical purpose within the scope of later 19th-century Orientalism which is echoed in his concept of empire, above all in his work entitled *Portuguese India*.

After graduating in veterinary medicine, Lopes Mendes worked in this field in continental Portugal. From 1862 got the job of “veterinary-farmer” in the State of India, where he remained until 1873, carrying out different functions in the Portuguese administration, namely producing documents and topographical charts. During these years he gathered a wide range of information, wrote a book on Portuguese India, and several articles and drawings in different magazines⁴.

Between October 1882 and September 1883 he sojourned in Rio de Janeiro, and took some time to visit other places in Brazil; Minas Gerais, São Paulo, Paraná, Santa Catarina, and the Amazonia rain forest. He also travelled to other South American countries: Uruguay, Argentina, Chile and Peru. A. Lopes Mendes kept a log of these voyages in an intimate tone, aimed at his friends, and more digressive narratives that were published in the periodical press. Between 1893 and his death on the 31st of January 1894, some of

his letters were printed in the Lisbon Geographical Society journal.

In his texts, Lopes Mendes describes either what happened or could have happened. Verisimilitude and need are the main principles that stand at the core of the hybrid discourse of his personal digression. On the other hand, the voyage moulds another world: he starts from what is known, overlapping differences and contrasts, describing the others, their mores, e.g., he exhibits the cultural atmospheres.

We must ponder then on A. Lopes Mendes' discursive model having in mind his more relevant work, *Portuguese India*. To achieve this, and fully understand his colonial discourse, I shall put forward three analytical descriptors. In my reading, I follow Ania Loomba who considers colonial discourse analysis to be a place of engaging

different approaches to questions of colonial subjects and power relations and to see where lie the real differences of method. (Loomba, 2005:53)

This spatiality must also be conceived in line with Fernando Catroga's concept of epistemic memory

Remembering, as present-past, is an inner experience in which the self's identity, or we should better say, *ipseity* unifies different social times that belong to its own experience. (Catroga,2009:12)⁵

Thus, starting from this conceptual geography and bearing in mind the narrative purpose, I rest my analysis on three discursive categories: the report, the biographical memory, and the descriptive memory. All these documents aimed to provide strictly denotative information, where the author himself assumed specific roles: while the report keeps a neutral descriptive tone, providing brief factual contexts, both biographic and descriptive memory select data according to the author's main concern. In the first case, he selects a biographical record and in the second the chosen topic.

The following table shows the different titles and their inherent *discursive categories*

Year	Title	Discursive
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		category
1863	information about India's woods and forests, collected in line with government instructions.	Report
1864	Notes on the province of Satari in the Portuguese State of India.	Descriptive memory
1866	Report of the commission in charge of the defining Satari's province borders [1 st]. [co-author]	Report
1866	Report of the commission in charge of defining Satari's province borders [2 nd]. [co-author]	Report
1866	Report of the commission in charge of defining Satari's province borders [3 rd]. [co-author]	Report
1866	Final Report of the commission in charge of defining Satari's province borders. [co-author]	Report
1866	Report along with a list of the items that were sent to Lisbon Central Commission, director of Paris 1867 Universal Exhibition, by the Portuguese Commission of India State [co-author]	Report
1874	Bussaco.[co-author]	Descriptive memory
1877	State of Goa	Descriptive memory
1879	Cunha Rivara	Biographical memory
1883	A. Lopes Mendes's letters and drawings written in South America to his friend Augusto Cesar da Silva Mattos during his sojourn in Brazil	Descriptive memory
1884	Biographical note on Jorge Augusto de Melo	Biographical memory

	published in the newspaper The Portuguese Colonies.	
1886	The Portuguese India: a Brief Description of Portuguese Possessions in Asia.	Biographical memory/ Descriptive memory
1892	The East and America; Notes on the Uses and Mores of Portuguese India peoples, compared to those of Brazil...	Descriptive memory
1893 1894	South America. Letters written in America in the years of 1882 and 1883 (1 st ; 2 nd)	Descriptive memory
1894	D. Joaquim [Augusto de Barros], Bishop of Cape Verde	biographical memory
1896	South America. Letters written in America in 1882 and 1883(3 rd)	Descriptive memory

Fig. 1- A. Lopes Mendes's Titles and Discursive Categories by Ana Paula Avelar

This enunciation demonstrates that A. Lopes Mendes's textual approach lies mainly in his descriptive memories, where his personal insights coexist with the data that he gathered.

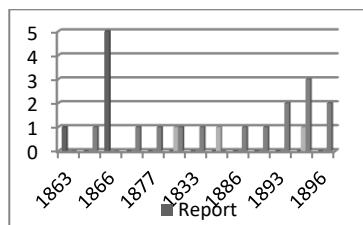


Fig. 2- Discursive Categories I by Ana Paula Avelar

It is also interesting to observe how different kinds of textual register have evolved throughout his life.

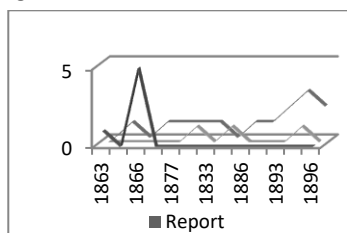


Fig. 3- Discursive Categories II by Ana Paula Avelar

As we can see, perhaps due to his professional background, A. Lopes Mendes starts by mainly writing reports, mostly in co-authorship. His favourite kind of record is the one of descriptive memory. On the other hand, since his life was spent in such different places as India, where he stayed between 1862 and 1873, and Brazil, between 1862 and 1873, his works reveal what he witnessed: the voyage functioned as a process of discovery and mastery of the unknown.

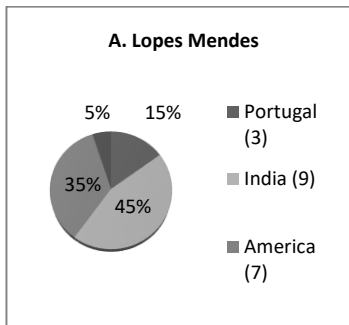


Fig. 4- A. Lopes Mendes's Titles by Ana Paula Avelar

Although one may recognise a certain balance in his textual production about India and Southern America, it remains relevant to the fact that his *Portuguese India* only comes out in 1886, when he is living in Brazil. This text emerges than as

our memories, pointing out the result of some studies we made then, involving not only drawings of nature that we show below, but also several aspects of geography, history, geology, meteorology, agriculture, statistics, ethnography, religion, mores and laws of the peoples of the State of India (Mendes, 1886: XIV)⁶

It should also be borne in mind that after the publication of this work, Lopes Mendes would write his *The Orient and America: Notes on the Uses of the Peoples of Portuguese India Compared to those of Brazil*. Memory Delivered to the 10th Session of the International Congress of Orientalists.

This comparatist dimension lies at the core of A. Lopes Mendes' analysis. In his writings, we witness a permanent connection between the textual narrative and the visual representation of the spaces he depicts; there

the digression echoes his memory.

The historian, an actor in this decoding of perception, must develop a method of suspicion towards the memory he receives, thus challenging *the ontological transparency of his own narrative* (Catorga, 2001:65).

We should be aware of the fact that whenever we analyse a cultural field, we move within a whole set of practices that derive from the art of description, communication and representation which have acquired their autonomy from economic, social and political areas, and that have specific aesthetic existences with their readers in mind.

In my view, *ideo-landscapes* and *ethno-landscapes* are the two central hermeneutic concepts in A. Lopes Mendes' narrative perceptions (Appadurai, 1996:33). *Ethno-landscapes* are social constructions which, even though they may change, aim to preserve the objectives and interests that groups have conceived and disseminated. They may be embodied in social groups' representations that interact multi-spatially projecting impressive pictures. They derive from what is usually known as landscape, e.g., the observation that emerges as a discourse that has helped to build the difference from one social group to another, both interacting with another and in its ground. This landscape falls within Benedict Anderson's and Arjun Appadurai's concept of *imagined worlds* (Ibidem). On the other hand, it incorporates a palimpsestic matrix that remains alive in all these texts, e.g., in all these descriptive memories.

The travel reports also reveal a discursive structure where the *kairos*, e.g., the singular moment prevails, thus enhancing dialogue with *kronos*, the temporal flow of the personal journey in successive instants. Chronography as notation system (one must remind the fact that Lopes Mendes points out that he left Lisbon on August 11th, 1862) stresses the relative relationship between a fact and another one, and among a different set of circumstances. Ricoeur states that

The noted episodes are defined by their relations to other episodes: a succession of unique, good or bad, joyful or sorrowful

events. This time is neither cyclic nor linear, but amorphous. It is what relates the presented chronicle to the narrator's position, before narrative detaches the told tale from its author. (Ricoeur, 2004: 156)

In turn, and exercising the *longue durée*, the use of historiographical discourse, in the descriptive memory, consubstantiates a History understood as

an iter in which the knowledge of the past was a necessary premise to understand the present and to change the future. (Catroga, 2009:14)⁸

This last dimension prevails in the discourses about and of the empire produced on the Asian/Eastern spaces. To take just one example in A. Lopes Mendes, the presentation of Goa:

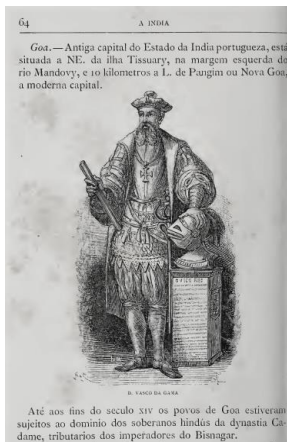


Fig.5- A. Lopes Mendes, *A Índia Portuguesa...*
<https://archive.org/details/indiaportuguezab01lopeuft>

The ethno-landscapes flow along with the historical sign (drawing of Vasco da Gama Fig.5).



Fig.6- A. Lopes Mendes, *A Índia Portuguesa...*
in
<https://archive.org/details/indiaportuguezab01lopeuft>

Notice how he contextualises historically a space -Goa- by representing it through either the sellers of beads or the snake-charmer selling the same article.

The signs of an imperial presence are described, as when Lopes Mendes describes the viceroys' arch

The arch of the Viceroy, so named as it allows the viceroys and governors to enter, when they take possession of the government of Portuguese India, is situated in front of the pier with the same name, adjacent to the ruins of the Palace of the Fortress, where the viceroys resided.

This was one of the old gates of the old city of Goa, which had been built by Viceroy Francisco da Gama, Count of Vidigueira, by the charter dated 4th August 1599, in memory of his great-grandfather Vasco da Gama.

The façade, facing the Mandovi, and which our drawing represents, is made of granite. Above the arch stands the stone statue of Vasco da Gama, and on the coping of the niche, is the following inscription:

REIGNING KING FILLIPE I .» THE CITY WAS ESTABLISHED HERE VASCO DA GAMA FIRST ADMIRAL COUNT AND DISCOVERER AND CONQUEROR OF INDIA, WHEN COUNT FRANCISCO DA GAMA, HIS GREAT GRANDSON WAS VICE-ROY IN THE YEAR OF THE LORD 99 JVLVIS SIMON ING. MA. INV

In the tympanum of the pediment one sees the bronze sculpture of the image of Saint Catharine of Alexandria, patron saint of Goa, and above the niche, the arms of the city, which are those of Portugal, and represented in the base is the wheel armed with knives, on which the infidels broke this same saint. (Mendes, 1886: 66)⁹

The drawing completes the narrative digression.



Fig.7- A. Lopes Mendes, A Índia Portuguesa... in <https://archive.org/details/indiaportuguezab01lopeuoft>

Lastly, and along with the ethno-landscapes, there appears in this East an indicative sign of a more or less imprecise orientation and historical-epochal soil, the ideo-landscape, where the author's "I" is the dominant actor of discourse and where, beyond of narratives about the "other," ideal representations of reality are projected. Let us take a final example, in the waters of the Mandovi, with Goa as the destination, of the interdiscursive dialogue between word and drawing

When the boat was sailing near the leafy palm grove of Carazalem, near the fort of Gaspar Dias, we could not contain an exclamation of astonishment caused by the splendour of the landscape that lay before our eyes. (Mendes, 1886: 16)¹⁰

The drawing depicts the traveller's delights



Fig.8- A. Lopes Mendes, A Índia Portuguesa... in <https://archive.org/details/indiaportuguezab01lopeuoft>

Finally, again evoking Fernando Catroga and his hermeneutic reflection on the subject/author of a memory speech

Each individual participates, simultaneously, in several mnemonic fields, according to the perspective in which he places his retrospection. Nevertheless, it can be reduced to two nuclear attitudes: the autobiographical and the historical. Moreover, if they are not confused - the latter is more extensive and transmissible -, the fact is that, as Halbwachs himself acknowledges in *La mémoire collective*, both imply reciprocally. (Catroga, 2009: 11)¹¹

In this vision of a modernity in which the present, sometimes dysphoric, is preceded by the euphoric evocation of a past, lies the intention to shape the future.

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¹ This study is part of the project "Textos e Contextos do Orientalismo Português – Congressos Internacionais de Orientalistas (1873-1973)" (PTDC/CPC-CMP/0398/2014) funded through the Foundation for Science and Technology within "Projeto 3599 – Promover a Produção Científica, o Desenvolvimento Tecnológico e a Inovação – Não Cofinanciada"

² Durkheim's perspective.

³ Processo que, como se sabe, teve como uma das suas maiores consequências a entificação de "sujeitos sociais coletivos" (*civilização, nação, povo, classe, raça*) postulados, pelo historicismo ocidental, como motores imanentes do dinamismo histórico.

Neste contexto, a história foi cada vez mais apresentada como um *iter*, no qual o conhecimento do passado era premissa fundamental para se entender o presente e se transformar o futuro.

⁴ *Arquivo Rural* (Lisboa), *Arquivo Pittoresco* (Lisboa), *As Colónias Portuguesas* (Lisboa), *Ilustração Goana* (Nova Goa) and others.

⁵ A recordação, enquanto presente-passado, é vivência interior na qual a identidade do eu, ou melhor, a ipseidade, unifica os diversos tempos sociais em que participa.

⁶ as nossas recordações, apontando o resultado de alguns estudos, que então fizemos, relativos não só aos desenhos do natural, que adiante apresentamos, como a vários pontos da geographia, historia, geologia, meteorologia, agricultura, estatística, ethnographia, religião, usos, costumes e leis dos povos do Estado da Índia.

⁷ *Annales* School perspective.

⁸ um *iter*, no qual o conhecimento do passado era premissa fundamental para se entender o presente e se transformar o futuro.

⁹ O arco dos Vice-Reis, assim denominado por dar ingresso aos vice-reis e governadores, quando vão

tomar posse do governo da Índia portuguesa, está situado em frente do caes do mesmo nome, contíguo ás ruínas do Palácio da Fortaleza, em que residiam os vice-reis.

Era uma das antigas portas da cidade velha de Goa, mandada construir pelo vice-rei D. Francisco da Gama, conde da Vidigueira, por alvará de 4 de agosto de 1599, em memoria de seu bisavô D. Vasco da Gama.

A fachada, voltada para o Mandovy, e que o nosso desenho representa, é de granito. Tem por cima do arco a estatua em pedra de D. Vasco da Gama, e sobre o remate do nicho, a seguinte inscripção :
REINANDO ELR. D. FILLIPE I. » POS A CIDADE AQUI
DOM VASCO DA GAMA I. » CONDE ALMIRANTE
DESCOBRIDOR E CONQUISTADOR DA ÍNDIA SENDO
VISO-REI O CONDE DOM FRANCISCO DA GAMA SEU
BISNETO. O ANNO D 99
JVLIVS SIMON ING. MA. INV

No tympano do frontão vê-se a esculptura em bronze da imagem de Santa catharina de Alexandria, padroeira de Goa, e sobre o nicho, as armas da cidade, que sao as de Portugal, tendo representada na base a roda armada de navalhas, em que os inféis despedaçaram a mesma santa.

¹⁰ Na occasiao em que o escaler navegava nas proximidades do frondoso palmar de Carazalem, junto ao forte de Gaspar Dias, não podemos conter uma exclamação de espanto, que nos provocara o esplendor da paizagem que se nos offercia á vista.

¹¹ Cada indivíduo participa, simultaneamente, em vários campos mnésicos, conforme a perspectiva em que coloca a sua retrospecção. Porém esta é passível de ser reduzida a duas atitudes nucleares: a *autobiográfica* e a *histórica*. E se elas não se confundem – a última é mais extensa e transmissível –, o certo é que, como o próprio Halbwachs reconhece em *La Mémoire collective*, ambas se implicam reciprocamente.