

The Internationalization of Portuguese Historiography

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I am unable to reflect upon the question of the internationalization of research into the history of Portugal and the output of Portuguese researchers without mentioning the experience I had when I decided to dedicate my research energies to the question of Portuguese history. The first intellectual and institutional contacts from which I benefited were those made with the team led by Antonio Hespanha at the Lisbon Institute of Social Sciences, and including Nuno Monteiro, Mafalda Soares da Cunha, Pedro Cardim, and Ângela Barreto Xavier. I immediately became associated with the work of certain intellectual circles that were highly regarded internationally. I encountered historians who enjoyed a long experience of academic exchanges. Additionally, some of them were accustomed to publishing in Europe and in the United States. The interdisciplinarity that had proved beneficial to an organization such as the Institute of Social Sciences, or ICS, was evidently connected to this familiarity with international exchanges. My first steps in undertaking an academic exchange at Lisbon's New University were made easier by the warm welcome I was given by the historians Diogo Ramada Curto, Francisco Bethencourt, and Rita Costa Gomes. In my experience, the capacity of Portuguese historians for engaging in international dialogue has always been regarded less as a problem and more as a simple fact of life.

Rather than being handicapped by the internationalization of Portuguese historical studies, Portuguese researchers are inclined to think along the lines of their country's historical expansion. The various research activities made possible by the long cycle of the commemorations of the Portuguese discoveries only served, on the whole, to further whet the already existing appetite for wide-ranging comparative approaches to research. Although these research areas seem to be diverse and exciting, there is a definite risk that Portuguese historians will feel themselves restricted to the sphere of Portuguese imperial activity, as we are aware from the Spanish case. Here the expansion of Spanish historiography has remained within the restricted domain of imperial Spain. In the last few years research has been carried out on Spanish Italy, Flanders, Portugal at the time of the Habsburg Empire, and of course, on colonial America. We are entitled to hope that at a subsequent stage of their investigations Spanish researchers will be allowed to work on spaces that have never been Hispanic. We can rejoice at the attention now being devoted to Brazilian and Indian historiography by a number of Portuguese historians, as well as the effort to expand that research activities to comprehend China. We should also take note of the dynamism of African studies undertaken in Portugal in recent years. Notwithstanding these accomplishments, it is still legitimate to hope that the research undertaken by Portuguese historians will begin to be directed to other domains not comprehended by the experience of Portuguese expansion.

The presence of Portuguese historians in European historiography is a response to this type of expectation. Most notably, works have been undertaken on various forms of activities within Europe (merchant trade, the spread of books, shared spirituality). It is above all indispensable that in the area of cultural history the Portuguese experience be recorded in the context of its immediate environment – the Iberian Peninsula – as well as in Catholic southern Europe and the wider Christian West. Nothing could be more detrimental than to view historical investigation of Portuguese imperial expansion and the European dimension of the Portuguese experience as mutually exclusive. In particular it seems to reserve the European dimension for specialists working on the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, the transoceanic dimension for modernists and the national dimension for researchers in contemporary history. The best teams of historical researchers in Portugal already have the tools they need to avoid limiting themselves by way of artificial academic boundaries: international contacts, mastery of new research tools provided by information technology, and a remarkable knowledge of the most dynamic historiographies.

It seems essential to take advantage of the proposals and requests formulated by European institutions in order to consolidate the internationalization of Portuguese historical studies. There is no contradiction between Europeanization and internationalization. The two strategies go hand in hand. As far as future priorities for investigation by Portuguese historians, these coincide closely with the European Commission's priority areas for international cooperation: Brazil, India, China, and southern Africa. As such, it is easy to understand that it is pointless to think of historiographical expansion as a dilemma of choosing between Europe and the high seas.

If I could make just one recommendation, as a French researcher involved in Portuguese studies, it would be that Portuguese teams should encourage their younger researchers to write their doctoral theses on non-Portuguese themes. The quality of the support enjoyed by Portuguese Ph.D. students from the best centers in their country should make it possible for them to find equivalent support among the teams receiving them abroad. When these advanced students become our colleagues they will become the best vehicles for academic cooperation and intellectual exchange between national historiographical traditions. The only way to achieve a satisfying symmetry in the modes of exchange between academic circles depends in this case on encouraging Portuguese historians to direct their theses to non-Portuguese subjects, and also on the willingness of Portuguese universities and research organizations to provide professional openings for those who have been prepared to take the risk of educating themselves in this manner.