Provincializing Goa: Crossing Borders Through Nationalist Women

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Abstract. The nationalist movement in Portuguese India has not been systematically analysed and the studies produced exclude women’s voices. In this article, I will present a small constellation of women nationalists who, since the beginning of the anti-colonial movement, were engaged in the larger Indian group of satyagrahis, therefore merging into the pan-Indian freedom movement. As I will try to show, there was a transit of ideas and of ideals from Goa to India and from India to Goa, in which Goan women played a crucial role, crafting nationalism and national belonging against the winds of colonial rule, therefore crossing the geographical borders of colonized Goa to the broader nation of India. They invite us to re-examine the role played by women through their emancipatory actions, under colonial and patriarchal rules that restricted their political and civic participation. Discursive images need, therefore, to be deconstructed when considering women’s participation in the public arena, which overran the boundaries imposed by family, caste and political power. They also illustrate that, unlike what a substantial portion of scholarship on Goa has assumed, Portuguese colonialism was not secluded in the mythical universe of Goa Dourada, “Golden Goa”. I will try, therefore, to borrow a Chakrabarty-inspired expression regarding Europe, “to provincialize Goa”, a procedure that entails looking at Goa not from Lisbon but from India, in the broader extension and expansion of the British raj and of its negotiations with Indian culture, mainly with Hinduism.

Keywords: Goa, women, nationalism, political borders, circulation of ideas, political movements

1. Women in Goa: The Sounds of Silence

As I have often written before, the dominant scholarship on Goa has conceived of Goan society as Catholic and Portuguese-speaking, reducing India to the small territories of Portuguese colonialism. This scholarship was also mainly androcentric, in other words, it was produced by and focused on men. Furthermore, Goan society has been largely analysed through the narratives of the dominant groups that tend to be privileged and hegemonic, even if they are not consensual or uniformly shared. Indigenous views were excluded from Portuguese descriptions, as they were from subsequent analyses of Goan society (Perez, The Tulsi and the Cross). So were women, in colonial and anti-colonial histories and ethnographies. Indeed, women’s voices and women’s representations have been neglected or relegated to remote and unclassified shelves, if not irreversibly deleted.
My current research on women’s representations in colonial periodicals has allowed me to identify women’s voices, sometimes only alluded to, sometimes recovered from the silence of non-canonical archives, often produced by Catholic authors, that allow us to raise a veil that has separated Portuguese from British colonialism, dominant in India. In fact, these texts dialogue with the Indian nationalist movement—that in Goa brought Catholics and Hindus together—in parts of India in which it played a dynamic role, such as Bombay and Calcutta. They also show us that, unlike what a substantial portion of scholarship on Goa has assumed, Portuguese colonialism was not secluded in the mythical universe of Goa Dourada, “Golden Goa”. I will try, therefore, to borrow a Chakrabarty-inspired expression regarding Europe, “to provincialize Goa”, a procedure that entails looking at Goa not from Lisboa but from India, in the broader extension and expansion of the British raj and of its negotiations with Indian culture, mainly with Hinduism. By the same token, I would like to challenge a Portuguese nationalist scholarship that, echoing the Portuguese colonial ideology, tended to immobilize Goa in space and time, under the long-lasting mythology of Goa Dourada.

As an anthropologist, it is at the level of what I have called, probably in an uninspired way—and perhaps unoriginally—“ethnography of colonialism” that it seems possible to recover the specificities not of colonialism but of colonialisms. Above all, it would be possible to identify the nature of the colony through the voices that have structured it, to map its classifications and representations—particularly the very notion of “colony” and “colonialism”—to disclose indigenous categories, forms of affinity and antagonism, endogenous and exogenous negotiations of culture and power.

Such an ethnography should pay attention to native representations, then to the first interpretations of these representations, the passage from local classifications to an analytical and critical apparatus that would later permit its cultural and political manipulation, to the transformations of colonial knowledge. In short, to focus on the local, to move from the general to the particular. This knowledge would allow access to levels of perception and representation hitherto practically ignored, suggesting that we follow Spivak’s theoretical suggestion of “reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding” (Outside in the Teaching 63).

Ashis Nandy, in his essay, “History’s Forgotten Doubles”, criticized the methods of history because, unlike the objects of study of anthropologists, “they never rebelled because they were dead” (61). The ethnography of colonialism, in the dialogue between the archives and social reality, would allow us to give voice to this silence of the past. This approach would also let us dispense with calcified categories—those of the observer—that have removed dynamism and change from the colony and have ascribed them to the colonial process and project; it would let us question narrative conventions that tend to restrain instead of challenge, to allow lived experiences in colonialism to emerge. Thus avoiding, as Said suggested, “sanitizing the culture” (13).
The analyses of the processes through which specific cultural devices have effectively served political goals (or the way in which colonial discourse has often appropriated native practices as a form of legitimation) are quite meager in studies of colonialism. In previous texts, I have tried to demonstrate the replication of this process in Portuguese and, to a greater extent, in British colonialism in India (Perez, “Portuguese Orientalism”; Os Portugueses). Therefore, so many years and so many texts after the beginning of academic studies on colonialism, part of its structural principles is still, at many levels, to be identified. I believe that representations of women and representations by women offer a web of meanings whose disclosure constitutes a relevant process to understand some of the above principles. As Ray put it, “Hindu woman begins to function as a crucial semiotic site in and around which the discourses of imperialism, nationalism, and Indian postcolonialism, and feminism are complexly inscribed” (8).

2. Engendering the Nation: Women and Nationalism
I have argued in another context that the imperial European representations of India were largely built on gender relations (Perez, “The Rhetoric of Empire”). Gender asymmetries constituted a key metaphor for representing Europe and its others, colonized and colonizers, and reified the major cultural differences used to legitimate colonial interference, justified as a reformation of traditions set in motion to liberate Indian women from male oppression (Perez, “The Rhetoric of Empire”).

The relation between gender and colonialism inspired a vast body of scholarship. As Ghosh argued, gender and colonialism, once associated with the narrow definition of the white women in the colonies, is now largely concerned with the ways in which colonialism restructured the gender dynamics of both colonizing and colonized women (737). This author drew our attention to a challenge that the expansion of this field of study raises: how to define and study gender in a way that does not replicate the inequalities and hierarchies of colonialism (738).

Indeed, we should not impose gender on other categories of analysis, which would largely compromise the understanding of the system as a whole (see Perez, The Tulsi and the Cross). Nor should we equate gender with woman (Scott, Gender and the Politics). Although gender first materialized as a descriptive category for woman, woman—being fluid, partial and fragmentary—is not a universal or essential category, on the one hand, nor independent, on the other, of differences of class and caste, religion, age and relationship to power—a view that challenges a generation of feminist writing.

We should also be aware, in a way echoing Rosi Braidotti, that the sex/gender distinction makes neither epistemological nor political sense in many non-English, Western-European contexts (38). Kamala Visweswaran further calls our attention to the fact that, for some theorists, gender itself is a sociologism that reifies the social relations that are seen to produce it by failing to account for how the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are rooted in language prior to any given social
formation (592). I will try to show below that women nationalists in Goa invite us to unsettle gender categories on the one hand, and on the other to redefine them in the light of female agency and self-empowerment that Goan women achieved by claiming their rights as citizens in the public sphere.

In different texts, Partha Chatterjee has analysed the articulation between Indian nationalism and gender (see, namely, “Colonialism, Nationalism” and The Nation and its Fragments). Since then, the study of Indian nationalism has frequently looked at the gendering of political discourse and the sexualization of concepts related to the complex of nation and nationalism, state and nation-building (Ivekovic and Mostov 9). Gender and nation are social and historic constructions which intimately participate in the formation of one another (Mostov 89). To Mostov, “Nations are gendered, and the topography of the nation is mapped in gendered terms (feminized soil, landscapes and boundaries, and masculine movement over spaces)” (89).

With regards to Goan nationalism, gender is far from being a “social shifter” (to borrow Deborah Durham’s terminology “Disappearing Youth”). In fact, gender constructs were important tools for the expression of Goan nationalism, though not as centrally as they were for the Indian national project. Representations of the homeland were often feminized and portrayed as a woman, functioning as a source of Goan cohesion, particularly when its integrity was at stake (see Perez, The Tului and the Cross, chap. 5).

What remains to be studied, through a combination of intensive fieldwork and the analysis of the archive is, as I have maintained so far, the crucial role played by Goan women in crafting nationalism and national belonging against the winds of colonial rule. Therefore, crossing the geographical borders of colonized Goa to the broader nation of India. What follows is a short synthesis of my research in this direction.

3. Provincializing Goa: From the House to the Nation
The nationalist movement in Portuguese India has not been systematically analysed, and, as I mentioned above, the studies produced excluded women’s voices. However, I came across a small constellation of women nationalists who, since the beginning of the anti-colonial movement, were engaged in the larger Indian group of satyagrahis, thus merging into the pan-Indian freedom movement. They invite us to re-examine the role played by women through their emancipatory actions, under colonial and patriarchal rules that restricted their political and civic participation, therefore modifying Spivak’s model of the silent subaltern (“Can the subaltern speak?”).

Indeed, the silence created around women in the Goan nationalist movement vanishes when digging in secondary archives and in once subaltern voices, where we can observe a group that participated actively in the anti-colonial process. It was part of the larger Indian nationalist project, which, inspired by Gandhi, claimed a non-violent path to freedom. Moreover, when moving through the lives of these women, it is possible to acknowledge the extent to which they have left their
imprint on the Goan political agenda, both in the last decades of Portuguese colonialism in India and in the aftermath of the colonial period.

I will now disclose one Goan female voice who played a crucial role in Goa’s liberation and *decolonization*—if one can give that name to operation Vijay, which put an end to Portuguese colonialism overnight. Her name is Libia Lobo Sardesai. From the neighbouring states of Karnataka and Maharashtra, she created a radio station that broadcasted to Goa the silenced voices of the opposition to Portuguese rule. By the same token, her life story helps us to acknowledge, on the one hand, that Goan decolonization was set in motion years before Nehru’s decision to send his army to Goa at midnight on December 17–18, 1961, after 14 years of reluctance to use military force. On the other hand, contrary to the assertions of Portuguese official narratives, the colonial power was clearly aware of the existence of an anti-colonial movement in Portuguese India, which merged into the pan-Indian nationalist one.

When I first paid a visit to Libia Lobo Sardesai at her house in Panjim, she was very hostile, even intimidating. It took me many hours to convince her that, despite being Portuguese, I was never sympathetic to the colonial regime; on the contrary, as a young woman I had lived under the same dictatorship from which she had fled into exile. I had experienced fear and revolt as she did, though I was far from comparing our respective political experiences and our relative distances to power and to the centres of decision making. At the end of that day, which seemed to me like a trial, she invited me for tea the following evening. That was the beginning of many conversations during which Libia spent hours talking about her seven long years of broadcasting news to Goa, sharing with Vaman Sardesai, her friend and future husband, an unorthodox life for a woman at that time, reading me long passages of the news that they had written in Portuguese and in Konkani, offering to loan me her records, which, so far, she did not want any scholar to analyse.

Her surname—half Catholic, half Hindu—is the outcome of a quite unusual marriage in Goa: one of a Catholic woman to a Hindu man. Furthermore, it did not follow the rules of either a Catholic or a Hindu marriage, both of which were traditionally arranged. It was a love marriage decided by Libia after a long period of living together with Vaman Sardesai, despite the pressure of her Catholic family for her to marry this Hindu man rather than having him as her lover. For a Catholic family like the one that Libia belonged to, it was—it still is—unacceptable for a single woman to spend time with a man, not to mention a Hindu man. But this is the end of a life story that started much earlier.

Libia belonged by birth to the Catholic elite, who used to send their sons to study abroad or at prestigious Indian universities. After finishing high school, Libia Lobo persuaded her parents to accept what at that time was quite uncommon for a woman: to take a degree, and additionally to take it far from home. This was how Libia went to Bombay Law School to become the first Goan woman lawyer. Nothing in her life earlier had prepared her for the larger movement that India was experiencing at the time. Moving within a colonial elite,
she was hardly aware of names such as Rajagopalachari, Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, Subhash Chandra Bose and others, who were prominent voices of the “Quit India Movement”, deeply influenced by Gandhi. At home, she would wake up to the sound of Emisora Nacional, “National Broadcast Radio”, stating: “This is Portugal”. Emisora Nacional would not transmit news from British India, let alone from independent India, as part of the political isolation imposed on Goa by the colonial regime.

It was one of Libia’s teachers, a satyagrahi, who first exposed her to a contradiction under which she was living: in a colonial regime that clung on in a subcontinent that persevered in India, a country that had recently become independent from the British raj. The provoking words of her teacher of International Law—”You are Goan, you are not free”—would reverberate in her mind day after day, long after she had concluded her course. Eventually, her teacher’s statement led her to join the satyagraha movement, in 1955. Successive ahimsa raids in which she participated at the borders of Goa, in Maharashtra and Karnataka, culminated with the Portuguese shooting to death many satyagrahis, both men and women, which triggered her long-lasting revolt against Portuguese rule and her commitment to do her utmost to combat it. She therefore offers an opposing version of the one proposed by Tanika Sarkar for the Hindu nationalist movement in Bengal:

“The male body, having passed through the grind of Western education, office, routine, and forced urbanization (…) was supposedly remade in an attenuated, emasculated form of colonialism. The female body, on the other hand, was still pure and unmarked, loyal to the rule of the shastra”. (43; emphasis added)

When she joined the satyagraha movement, Libia gave up her job as a lawyer and began what would be, for seven years, a real emotional and physical ordeal. Actually, on the 25th of November 1955, she launched with Vaman Sardesai an underground radio station called “Voz da Liberdade”, Goenche Sadvonecho Awaz in Konkani.

From Amboli, a hill station at the border of Maharashtra, they started to broadcast news to Goa, morning and evening, in Portuguese and in Konkani. Amboli, receiving an annual rainfall of about 750 centimetres, is considered the wettest region in Maharashtra. The heavy rainfall contributed to the growth of forest along the steep hills of Amboli. Libia coped with the inclement weather, the steady presence of unpleasant animals such as leeches, geckos, rats, not to mention squadrons of mosquitoes that would bite her without mercy. She handled fearlessly an absolute lack of comfort and of regular fresh food. However, the two trucks where she lived with Vaman and an old man exiled from Goa, raised suspicions among the Portuguese soldiers who patrolled the border, leading them to move further inside, to an abandoned railway station at Castle Rock.

The living conditions in this new habitat were much harsher than in the previous one. In Amboli, a priest, Libia’s uncle, would regularly cross the border to bring them medicine, soap, and fresh food without raising suspicions among
the Portuguese authorities. Now, they had to live on canned food, and hygiene was a problem, given the scarcity of water. After a couple of months, the old man who lived with them was unable to cope with starvation and fear, and tried to persuade the couple to abandon their activity. Libia, however, convinced Vaman that, even without much hope concerning the outcome of their mission, they should continue to send to Goa updates from India, insisting on the chance of achieving freedom. The other man left, and they spent the following six years living in a truck, sometimes hidden in a small hut, and broadcasting to Goa news from India and from around the world.

Ghosh has suggested that feminism and women’s activism, even outside the circuits of imperial governance, were nonetheless bound to the class hierarchies of imperial rule (741). When we consider Goan women nationalists, we may conclude that they cross not only the Hindu social structure but also the divide between Hinduism and Catholicism. In fact, the women that we come across reveal a true stratification of roles and performances, as well as of status and social classifications. Moreover, the traditional boundaries for female nature and performances are often blurred and ill-defined, slipping into masculine roles: boundless strength, undaunted courage, complete fearlessness. Therefore, competing discourses on female roles as multivocal and at times even contradictory challenge the dominant heterodoxy on the one hand and, on the other, the pertinence of transferring metropolitan orthodoxies to the colony.

At this stage, I would like to quote a very recent text by Walter Mignolo:

Therefore, white, heterosexual sensibilities from the former First World, can accompany decolonial healings, support them, but whomever did not experience the colonial wound cannot heal others even when becoming aware and cognizant of how colonial wounds are inflicted. But they can of course heal themselves, reducing to size the privileges that whiteness, heterosexuality, and First Worldness bestowed upon them. Briefly, we are all involved in the messy situations provoked by imperial (cf. modern/colonial) racial/sexual classification. (14; emphasis added)

The narrative of this long period would deserve greater detail than I will provide, due to a shortage of space. Let me shift to the other side of the border. Consider the last period of the Portuguese rule in Goa. In January 1958, in a speech at the International Diplomatic Academy of Montevideo, Carlos Fernandes attempted to justify Portuguese sovereignty in India, by conveying to the audience Salazar’s propaganda on Goa:

Any person who, coming from the Indian Union, enters into Goan territory cannot avoid the impression of entering a completely different country, where people feel, think and act in a European way. There is arguably a human frontier, but Goa is the expression of Portugal in India, Goa is the West in the East.

On 5 December 1958, during a ceremony to consecrate a national flag offered to the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Goa (Holy House of Mercy of Goa), the Patriarch of Lisbon said: “in Goa is the very image of the Nation” (Diário da Noite, 14 January 1958).
In the next troubled year of 1959, on his return to Goa, the Vice-Secretary of State for Development made the following statement to the *Diário da Noite*:

I see with emotion and joy the land and the people of Portuguese India. With emotion, because during the five years of my absence a beautiful page of the motherland’s History has been written here. *With joy, because the difficulties were overcome without hatred or injustices*, and thus the bases for prosperity have been not only exceeded but were hardly paralleled in centuries of life in this part of the nation. (4 April 1959; emphasis added)

However, from the beginning of 1958 that same newspaper, *Diário da Noite*, a Goan daily sponsored by the colonial regime, began publishing discrete news items called *Boletins Oficiais* (*Official Bulletins*), written in a small font and located at the lower corner of the pages, which suggested that there were terrorist attacks launched from outside the borders of Goa. “Terrorists” was the label ascribed by the Portuguese to *satyagrahis*, precisely those who espoused non-violent civil action.

There were, in fact, an increasing number of victims of these attacks, which contradicts the official version that the principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*) was being observed by the colonial army. Moreover, this information demonstrates that the Portuguese authorities were somewhat aware of a systematic and increasing local opposition to the regime. Consequently, they were not taken by surprise, as they declared officially, by Operation Vijay. Actually, on the 12th of December 1961 (one week before Operation Vijay took place), the Overseas Ministry made an unofficial statement about a plan to evacuate women and children, and they began to be transported out of Goa in the ship *India*, along with regular passengers. This evacuation followed a flow of continuous communication between Lisbon and Vassalo e Silva, the governor-general, which paralleled the intense religious activity that culminated with a Catholic pilgrimage to the church of St. Francis Xavier. It would be interesting to observe the recurrence of collective public prayers, held since the unstable late 1950s, and announced in the newspapers of Goa: “*At the feet of St. Francis Xavier, a prayer for peace and for Goa, always Christian and always Portuguese*” (Perez, *The Tulsi and the Cross*).

Across the border, Libia and Vaman began to prepare the Goans for the fact that soon they would be part of India, since a military action had been set in motion. As a woman, she was particularly sensitive to the disturbing effects of this news among the population, and wanted them to know Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, better. They focused on Gandhi, on his enormous influence on Nehru, on the 14 years spent by the latter trying to use peaceful methods to bring Goa into the Indian Union against the wishes of Congress, his party, and of the Afro-Asian leaders, enduring two wars with Pakistan and growing tension with China on the definition of political borders.

Most of all, Libia insisted on the price and on the prize of freedom. This is particularly compelling, as it allows us to see the ways in which a Goan woman—as opposed to the dominant representations—could exercise agency in making her own entry into the public domain of nationalist politics. Her biography, yet to be
written, tells us a lot about the social perceptions and representations of an upper-caste woman, Catholic by birth, Hindu by marriage, against patriarchy and a male-dominant political regime.\textsuperscript{19} In fact, her life story shows weak social integration and a complex relation with social and economic power, which would deserve a deeper anthropological analysis.

Her voice emerged in the realm of public discourse to create a collective self, against the silence and immobility imposed by Portuguese colonialism on its subalterns, particularly women. Discursive images need, therefore, to be deconstructed when considering women’s participation in the public arena, which overran the boundaries imposed by family, caste and political power.

Ivekovic and Mostov argued for the precariousness of a woman’s place in the home/nation, which at the same time is her designated space, but which underlines the danger of exclusion and the pressures to conform (14). By opting for dwelling outside the home and the state, Libia rejected the terms of belonging assigned to her by the political and historical hierarchies, therefore wavering protected at the borders of the “national” community (see Mostov).\textsuperscript{20}

Much has been written about the night of 18 December, 1961 that put an end to almost five centuries of Portuguese colonialism in India. Much less has been written about the Goans who lived through that period and suffered an overnight change of nationality, from Portuguese to Indian citizens, and whose losses and traumas cannot be disregarded.

The passage from a colonial regime to a post-colonial nation-state is usually made by an interregnum called decolonization, a problematic category that I will not question here. However, if such a process took place, we should pay tribute to Libia and Vaman Sardesai. Before surrendering to the Indian army, the last governor-general, Vassalo e Silva, ordered the destruction of bridges and of the airport. The Indian commander-in-chief, general Chowdhury, contacted Libia and Vaman to relay the message that Vassalo e Silva had surrendered at 6:00 in the evening, and that they could return to Goa. Libia had a request: to see free Goa from the skies, a request that was granted by V. K. Krishna Menon, Minister of Defence of Nehru, and who had fought Salazar tirelessly. The unmatched role played by Libia Lobo Sardesai in the process, which eventually led to the integration of Goa into the Indian Union was acknowledged in India, to begin with by Nehru himself, who appointed Libia’s husband as the first ambassador of India to Angola, therefore opening a diplomatic path that only recently has been taken.

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin once stated that “Women’s bodies mark the vulnerability of borders and, in another sense, women embody the borders: they are ‘signifiers’ of ethnic or national difference and the boundaries of the State” (252). I would not find a better definition for Libia’s life in exile. Furthermore, I would add that her voice erased the borders that separated Goa from India; in other words, Libia, who was deprived of a proper national belonging, ultimately built amongst the Goans the idea of a nation.

The political itinerary of Libia Lobo Sardesai shows a mobility between Goa and India that the colonial policy tried to freeze and that many academic
narratives about Goa tended to reproduce. Indeed, the ideology of *satyagraha*, which attracted many Goans, crossed the borders of the territory through permanent movements of men and women. These movements, although often doomed to failure, were powerful enough to stimulate an anti-colonial sentiment which India had known for many years and which had led to independence.

It is worth underlining that Libia is far from being the only woman who personified a nationalist awareness that cut off the political seclusion imposed within the narrow limits of Portuguese India, under the mythology of *Goa Dourada*. Other women vehemently opposed the regime, and their lives are a narrative of courage and resilience still to be written.

In a text published by Goa University, expressively titled, “Role of Women in Goan Freedom Struggle–I”, Archana A. Kakodkar considers three main categories of women who participated in the nationalist activity after 1946. The first consisted of a very small number of the social elite (e.g. brahmans), attracted to the pan-nationalist movement, from which she singles out Berta Menezes Bragança (later Berta Antonio Furtado by marriage). Secondly, there was a small group of women who took part in social reform linked to Gandhian ideology, in a campaign for *khadi* and village industry, therefore contributing to the economic improvement of downgraded groups. As an example, she suggests Premilatai Zambaulikar, and Sarubai Vaidya. Lastly, she considers the *satyagrahis*, who were influenced by the mass movement after June 18, 1946. It is important to underline that they belonged to different castes and communities, based in Goa or Bombay, or elsewhere in India (172). The author is worth quoting: “Of course, the number of women who were totally committed to the liberation movement was not in equal proportion to men politicians or even to the total female population. *But their impact was telling*” (172; emphasis added). She further adds, “Nationalism had stimulated change and intellectual activity and involved women in roles that were new and diverse” (173).

When at Lohia’s rally at Margao, in June 1946, Vatsala Kirtany was arrested, a group of forty women marched to Margao Police Station and demanded the immediate release of Vatsala. Premilatai Zambaulikar led this group. On August 15, 1954, a mass *satyagraha* was launched in which people from all parts of India participated. Sudha Joshi, under the auspices of the Goa National Congress (Goa), made a revolutionary speech. She was arrested and put into Aguada Jail. After her arrest, the movement intensified in India. *Satyagrahis* enlisted in Poona, and men and women from Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and other parts of India came to Poona to join Goa’s freedom struggle. Women of Poona took the responsibility of providing food for the *satyagrahis*. Later on, from Aronda came a group of women, comprising Mandakini Yalgi, Kamala Upasani, Prabha Sathe, Shanta Rao, Sharayu Diwekar, shouting slogans such as “Goa Bharat Ek Hai!” Police started firing on *satyagrahis*; many of them fell (Kakodkar 176–177).

The conclusion drawn by the author on the political involvement of these women deserves to be reproduced:
Thus, the successful participation of women definitely dramatized the effective and important role of women in the political movement, and the participation of women in the liberation movement created a tradition of female involvement in politics in Goa. The freedom movement had enabled women to evolve from an oppressed and subordinate position to an enlightened and equal position in social and political affairs of the territory. (Kakodkar 177–178)

Julie Mostov sustained some time ago that the “nation” naturalizes constructions of masculinity and femininity: women physically reproduce the nation, and men protect and avenge it. At the same time, nation collectivizes and neutralizes the sexuality of female (and, to some extent, male) members of the nation (89). The behaviour of Goan women nationalists urges us to question this notion of the “nation”. In fact, when we take into account their political achievements, as well as those accomplished by Libia Lobo Sardesai, we should rather assume that they de-sexualize the nation along the lines of the gender divide and of gender “traditional” roles.

We do not need much more data to start deconstructing the dominant narrative about the nationalist movement in Portuguese India. This deconstruction urges us to abandon the classical archives and search for elusive and obscure sources and, above all, to listen carefully to the voices of the women who participated in that movement and to those who lived closely with them.

Amita Kanekar recovered one of those voices, and one of the most powerful ones: Mitra Bir (born Mitavrinda Kakodkar), her mother’s sister, a schoolteacher who was in prison for many years for opposing the Portuguese regime. A few years after getting her final school certificate examination in Bombay in 1949 (two years after the independence of India), Mitra joined Karnataka College, in Dharwad, to get a Bachelor of Arts. The cosmopolitan and free environment of the city at that time impressed her deeply, yet, she gave up her BA when India’s Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, visited her college, and she could not bear the shame of living under Portuguese rule (46). In Kanekar’s words, “It was a watershed moment in her life” (46).

In 1953, Mitra Bir joined Gundu Amonkar’s school in Mapusa, and given her fluency in both Portuguese and English, she was invited by Pundalik Gaitonde, one of the founding members of the National Congress (Goa), to teach English to his Portuguese wife, Edila.25 It was the beginning of a political itinerary of struggle and endurance. She would quit her job at the Mapusa School to live in a village on the border of Goa, carrying out intense political activity by distributing pamphlets and trying to get women to join and take part in the protests and processions.

The anti-colonial struggle was strengthened in 1954, the year Gaitonde was arrested, and the satyagrahis’ peaceful protests intensified, with thousands of volunteers entering Goa from India, leading to strong restrictions by the colonial regime, detentions and shooting at unarmed satyagrahis (Kanekar 48). Mitra Bir was arrested in March 1955. She was tried and sentenced to twelve years in prison. She was twenty-two years old at the time. Kanekar’s expressive description of that period is quite revealing:
Mitra was kept in the Panjim lock-up for nearly two years. Shashi Almeida who had been there for a few months before her own trial remembers cells that were like small cages, each containing four inmates, with just enough space for the four to lie down, squashed up against one another. They were kept inside the whole day and night, except for one visit out, usually in the afternoon, to use the toilets and bathrooms. The lack of movement was stifling and physically painful after a while. (48–49)

After two years of dwelling under arduous conditions in a prison that had not been conceived for women, Mitra was transferred to Margao. In this prison, she shared a room with seven other women, to whom she taught English and Hindi, and with whom she socialized until 1959, when the Portuguese gave full amnesty to their non-violent opponents.

Amita Kanekar’s text on her aunt, Mitra Bir, a woman about whom the canonical texts do not speak and whose participation in the nationalist movement in Goa was remarkable, leads us to other women, equally unknown when we confine ourselves to the official narratives. These women had, as opposed to the dominant discourses, a central role in motivating and mobilizing other women who, like them, were instrumental in the freedom movement.

Through their actions, they crossed the borders of Goa to India, therefore underlining a cultural and political circulation that went through much of Portuguese colonialism in India, which tried to confine women to the home and to domestic chores. This circulation paralleled a transit of ideas and of ideals from Goa to India and from India to Goa that we can also observe in the archive, provided we are willing to abandon the beaten tracks.

In order to achieve these goals, it is crucial to decentralize the observation, evading the pitfalls of a metropolitan vision (I am avoiding, of course, using the worn-out terminology of “Eurocentrism”), and to pay attention to local phenomena that the colonial narratives did not include. It is also essential to be aware of what Gruzinski has called “the middle-grounds”, to which world conceptions converge, strategies of appropriation and resistance, those places where groups and societies emerged without precedent in history and where the mechanisms to repress and tame them were produced (115).

Notes
1 This study is part of the international project, Pensando Goa. Uma Biblioteca Peculiar de Língua Portuguesa (FAPESP – Processo 2014/15657-8).
2 See namely, O Oriente Portugês. It is not at first sight a non-canonical text like those I have suggested that we should privilege for a comprehensive understanding of the colony (Perez, The Tulsi and the Cross). However, when we focus on women, we can tackle diverse and complex representations that evade the sanitized representations of Portuguese colonialism in India. These representations challenge historically gendered structures and offer new gendered forms.
3 Goa Dourada was promoted by the Portuguese at different levels, the first of which was architecture and urban planning, that were meant to reproduce in the colony at the civil (in its elitist and popular forms), the religious and the military levels the most attractive styles of the Portuguese material heritage. From a social perspective, Goa Dourada was idealized as a harmonious society without remarkable conflicts and cleavages between individuals and groups, converted to the egalitarian values of Christianity, in theory incompatible with the Indian caste system. However, Goa Dourada’s social and political mythology resists with difficulty a deeper historical and anthropological analysis.
4 Chakrabarty’s book, _Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference_, had as a central question the possibility of dislodging the European thought from the practice of history by Indian (and non-European) scholars. Let us listen to the author: “The Europe that I seek to provincialize or to decenter is an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in clichéd and shorthand forms in some everyday habits of thought that invariably subtend attempts in the social sciences to address questions of political modernity in South Asia” (3–4).

5 In a previous text, I emphasized my theoretical identification with Bernard Cohn and other scholars (Stocking 1991, Pels 1997, Mathur 2000, Dirks 2002, Burton 2003, Stoler 2009) who started to analyse colonial archives from an ethnographic perspective (2012). In the case of India, Nicholas Dirks has underlined the need for anthropological historians to engage in an ethnography of the archives, for the archive itself reflects the forms and formations of colonial epistemology in ways that have been misrecognized by historians and anthropologists alike (175). We could add, therefore, that the archive reflects an encounter saturated with power—an idea that I have already tried to develop (Perez, “The Rhetoric of Empire”; _The Tulsist and the Cross_).

6 It is relevant to illustrate Nandy’s comparison between history and anthropology: “History is not the anthropology of past times, though it can come close to it. The growing popularity of anthropological history gives a false sense of continuity between the two disciplines, for they are separated by a deep political chasm: victims of anthropology talk back in some cases and in many other cases retain the potential for doing so (…). In the first instance, the worst affliction is colonial anthropology, in the second the civilizational hubris that claims that not merely the present but even the past and the future of some cultures have to be reworked” (61).

7 Ray draws our attention to the appropriation of the Indian woman by Indian nationalists when “they sought to advance their agenda by fusing their desire for an independent nation with the independence of the Indian woman, who, they argued, could never achieve her ‘pure’ status as an equal participant in the domestic or public spheres within the boundaries of a spurious community” (8–9). Therefore, the author concludes, the discourses of imperialism and of nationalism became increasingly intertwined as each group tried to exercise control over the representations of the Indian woman (19). A deeper analysis than the one that fits into the scope of this article would lead us to a similar conclusion regarding Portuguese colonialism in India and the nationalist movement that antagonized it. Here is a path that I would like to travel in the near future.

8 It is worth quoting Sarah Lamb: “Around the same time that social theorists were refashioning the concept of culture to include the disparate voices and contests of its members, feminist theorists were endeavouring to rethink, de-essentialize, and fragment the concept of ‘woman’” (5).

9 As Purkayastha, Subramaniam and Bose put it, “women (…) emphasized the interaction of class, gender, caste, religious, and regional specificities as key for understanding the conditions of women and men” (506).

10 For this author, the notions of “sexuality” and “sexual difference” are currently used instead. In her own words, “Although much ink has been spilled over the question of whether to praise or attack theories of sexual difference, little effort has been made to try and situate these debates in their cultural contexts” (38).

11 In the Introduction of a book for which she served as editor, Tamar Mayer further illustrated that: ‘Both ‘nation’ and ‘gender’ help construct a fiction of ‘innateness’ in the name of bonds whose fragile, endangered status is evidenced in the fierceness with which they are defended – and in the fierceness with which the role of the imagination in the construction of transcendent categories and the urge to reify those categories are both, at once, revealed and denied’ (3). To this scholar, more than gendered, the nation is sexed, and this sexuality plays a key role in nation building and in sustaining national identity (3).

12 The satyagrahis were men and women involved in satyagraha (from satya, “truth”, and agraha, “to hold to”), a central pillar of Gandhi’s project for the independence of India, based on non-violent civil resistance.

13 As Spivak argued, there is a double circle of subalternity: by reclaiming a collective cultural identity, subalterns re-inscribe their subordinate position in society. Moreover, the academic scholarship, being eminently ethnocentric, does not account for the heterogeneity of the subaltern colonized—therefore merging them in one category of analysis (“Can the Subaltern Speak?”).
Much has been said about the emergence of feminism in India along the lines and the time of nationalism. Libia Lobo Sardesai would be a clear illustration of a feminist, even though she did not have any involvement with a broader feminist project or process. This being said, I am far from claiming the existence of a feminist, organized movement in India.

“Quit India” was a civil disobedience movement launched in August 1942 by Gandhi, to demand immediate negotiation for independence from British rule, in a determined but passive resistance. The All-India Congress Committee proclaimed a mass protest demanding what Gandhi call “an orderly British withdrawal” from India. See Gandhi, Quit India.

The shastras are a genre of Sanskrit texts that give an exposition of a body of knowledge (see Dharma Shastra, the social and ritual duties of individuals in regard to their caste and stage of life, and Artha Shastra, “The Science of Material Gain”, which advises how to run an empire in order to attain prosperity).

Castle Rock is a village of North Karnataka, on the state’s border with Goa. For many years, the village marked the frontier between Portuguese and British India.

For a broader understanding of this period and the respective political and social circumstances, see Perez, Os Portugueses e o Oriente, chap. 5; and Perez, The Tulsi and the Cross, chap. 1.

Yet, we should not, as Tanika Sarkar reminded us, absolutise male and female domains and see them as “seamless blocks, forming opposites of total power and total powerlessness. Patriarchy (. . .) operates through far more complicated trajectories, with crisscrossing power lines that fracture both domains and that, at times, unite segments across the blocks” (21).

Ivekovic and Mostov further consider women’s exclusion from the nation as an inherent, political status; as opposed to men, they are not the nation’s bearers or representatives. Therefore, women’s attachment to the nation is grounded as much on penalties of exclusion as on national representations of inclusion (18). Within the same conceptual realm, see, in the same volume, Ritu Menon’s article, “Do Women Have a Country?”: “‘Belonging’ for women is also – and uniquely – linked to sexuality, honor, chastity; family, community and country must agree on both their acceptability and legitimacy, and their membership within the fold” (56). At this stage, I am not commenting on these approaches. For the moment, it is worth underlining that Libia Lobo Sardesai and other women nationalists in Goa show us how women can contest the borders and terms of belonging imposed on them by both patriarchy and nation.

Khadi is hand-spun and hand-woven cloth. Gandhi adopted it as a crucial goal of Indian economic independence, which led to the dissemination of spinning wheels (charkhas) in the villages. He advocated that the Congress Party should adopt khadi as a condition of membership, as well as daily use of the spinning wheel, which became a symbol of Indian will for self-determination and self-governance.

These “communities” (the term used by the author) include adivasi, animist groups whose women also participated in the nationalist movement and whose analysis I intend to pursue.

Ram Manohar Lohia had studied with the Goan nationalist, Julião de Menezes, at the Humbolt University of Berlin and later met him in Bombay, in 1946, after Lohia was released from the British jail in Lahore. Following Menezes’s invitation to stay in his house in Assolna, Lohia went to Goa, where he vehemently stood against the Portuguese ban on public meetings. On the 18th of June 1946, they were both arrested by the Portuguese police in Margao, under an impressive public demonstration.

“Goa and India are one”.

Edila Gaitonde, born in the Portuguese islands of the Azores, was the first Catholic woman to marry a Hindu. They met in Lisbon, where she was studying piano, and after their marriage they lived in India, where he joined the nationalist movement. Edila wrote a few books about that period, among them, In Search of Tomorrow.

“Shashi Almeida, Suryakanti Phaldesai, Kumud Paiginkar, Laxmi Paiginkar, Caliste Araujo, Shanta Hede, and later on Sharda Savoikar. Sudhatai Joshi joined them for a short while” (Kanekar 50).

Works Cited


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