

# Is There a Trend Towards Internationalization in Portuguese Historiography?<sup>1</sup>

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The internationalization of Portuguese historiography has been a militant topic for historians of my generation. Rather than describing the ways of exercising this militancy – well perceived by Jean-Frédéric Schaub in his contribution to this issue – one should start by asking: why has it historically been such an important issue? My first answer would be to relate it to the existence of a generation gap between the historians who are now in their forties, and an older generation in their eighties and nineties, represented by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho and the now deceased Charles Boxer. When we completed our degrees at the beginning of the 1980s, we started to lecture and develop our graduate research almost immediately. The opportunity to start an early career gave our generation the experience and a level of self-assurance which were in correspondence with the demographic explosion of the university system after the Portuguese Revolution of 1974. But at the same time we were all still reproducing habits and ideas of social status and individual authority traditionally ascribed to the Portuguese university professor. Godinho provided supervision to a small group of people. His age reinforced the sense of distance between us, adding to the respect that we all accorded his intelligence and charismatic personality. Simultaneously, however, this distance gave us an opportunity to challenge him, as we referred to authors and arguments that he could not control, sometimes in a very provocative way. I worked with him myself, and benefited from his extensive international experience and encyclopedic knowledge. However, this experience of close collaboration between our group and Godinho cannot be generalized.

The general situation is characterized by the existence of the so-called missing link between my generation and that of Godinho. Historians now in their fifties and sixties, like António Manuel Hespanha, Joaquim Romero Magalhães and Luís Filipe Thomaz, who were finishing their doctoral dissertations as we were starting to publish articles and books, could neither interact with our group with the same distance as existed between us and Godinho, nor provide us supervision. Thomaz, the most cosmopolitan and well-traveled of the three is today recognized as the mentor to the largest Portuguese group working on the history of the Portuguese expansion. He developed an empirical project under the influence of the French historian Jean Aubin, who was ideologically oriented towards the right. Hespanha, shifting from Marxism to fashionable postmodernism within the field of the history of law, has never been able to demonstrate much interest in historical analysis, nor been able to overcome the perspective of a normative understanding and hermeneutics of his juridical sources. Romero Magalhães, the most sophisticated historian of his generation, dedicated to the guidelines passed down by Godinho, was always perhaps too isolated to fill the gap. This is of course a partial and incomplete picture. In order to provide a full understanding of the situation experienced by my generation, we should note the various attempts made towards the creation of institutions. Instead of presenting general remarks on the institutionalization of historical research, I would prefer to illustrate three or four concrete examples of this process.

The Instituto de Ciências Sociais (Institute of Social Sciences, or ICS), for instance, was created by the sociologist Adérito Sedas Nunes in the sixties as a direct result of an effort towards internationalization. The original aim of the Institute was to bring together historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists who had studied (or had been sent to study) abroad. Once

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<sup>1</sup> In reflecting on Portuguese historiography of the early modern period, I wish to remember the historian Sérgio Soares, the best historian of my generation, who died recently.

back in Portugal they were to work together in the pursuit of social research. The ICS journal, *Análise Social* (Social Analysis), demonstrates the tenacity of this noble dream. Despite Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro's exemplary books and articles, the history of the early modern period does not seem to be a priority for the ICS, as one can infer from reading Schaub's contribution. My second example, the Instituto de História e Teoria de Ideias (Institute of the History and Theory of Ideas) at the Universidade de Coimbra, represents one of the most consistent products of the same process of institutionalization of historical research. Founded by José Sebastião da Silva Dias and organized by one of his most dynamic disciples, Luís Reis Torgal, it has brought together a very productive group of Portuguese historians. However, the research conducted by its members does not necessarily reflect a great investment in what can be called historiographical internationalization. The founder of this institute was eager primarily to provide congenial working conditions for his disciples. Other historians from the same university continued to reproduce the logic of the small research institute while developing individual projects (this is especially true of António de Oliveira and Ferrand de Almeida). My third example concerns the field of Portuguese expansion. Here a set of small new and existing institutes and a graduate program at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, benefiting from various public funds made expressly available by the government, were used to develop theses and fields of research defined by Luís de Albuquerque and by L.F. Thomaz. The intellectual homogeneity of the agendas launched by the latter historian, in conjunction with a selection of topics and debates developed by the aforementioned French historian Jean Aubin, created an effect of amplification. However, I believe that it would be valid to ask if Aubin's disciples, whose ideas have been generalized and diffused in English by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, participate in any genuine process of internationalization of Portuguese historiography. More discreet but perhaps more efficient has been the work of the group assembled by José Adriano Freitas de Carvalho at the Universidade do Porto. There, the fields of book history, the history of spirituality, and the importance attributed to Iberian cultural history from the fifteenth century to the Enlightenment have been treated with particular originality.

The historians of my generation have been located more or less at the margins of all of these specific institutionalizing processes, which unfortunately are more superficial than they would seem at first glance. More defining have been the interests defended by academic patronage networks, or *clientelas*, as can be seen in the field of the history of Portuguese expansion.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, facing the so-called generation gap and struggling with the lack of institutional conditions to develop sophisticated research programs, historians of my generation struggled to establish international reputations. This militant project was determined by an ambition to widen the boundaries of historical knowledge as well as by the specific institutional environment within which we found ourselves. However, it is necessary to recognize that for us internationalization was something that was possible, considering that most of us had been able to achieve stable careers by the eighties. In any case, this is a situation that will be impossible to replicate if one takes into account the closing of Portuguese universities to younger researchers and the feeling nowadays that only the few able to go along with the pressures of the *clientela* system or the wills of the patrons will one day research and lecture.

What concrete forms of internationalization have been followed within what has been presented simultaneously as a strategic and a militant project? In his contribution, Schaub underlines the real importance of a global way of framing historical analyses in relation to a specific object of study, in this case the Portuguese empire. But he also stresses the lack of studies conducted by Portuguese historians of non-Portuguese subjects, and fashions this into a project for future development. These are extremely pertinent points. However, I still think that a global way of thinking historically does not distinguish the work of the dominant school of Portuguese historians working on Portuguese expansion. Due to a criterion of labor division apparently justifiably only from an anthropological perspective, some members of this group feel obliged to concentrate on limited geographic areas and topics during short and sometimes very artificial periods. Indeed, I believe that internationalization is not necessarily dependent on the object of study selected, be it

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<sup>2</sup> This is what I argued more extensively in a recent debate. See *Anais de História de Além-Mar*, vol. 2 (2001), pp. 484-489.

Portuguese or not, but on the approach to the subject, and the idea that one should also demonstrate a comparative frame of mind in one's work.

To talk of an approach involves taking an inventory of the different forms of internationalizations the historians of my generation have used consistently. Such a list includes participation in international research groups and enrollment in Ph.D. programs abroad, the presence of historians in departments, centers and programs of Portuguese History (as in Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, King's College in London or the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales and the Cultural Center of the Gulbenkian Foundation in Paris), systematic invitations of leading historians and social scientists to lecture in Portugal (a special welcome has always been extended to foreign scholars working on Portuguese matters and sources, who in general benefit from the help of Portuguese foundations), and the undertaking of efforts to translate the works of leading historians and social scientists, under the assumption that works of translation favor a comparative approach.

Taking stock of all of these items of a militant agenda, I cannot but express my satisfaction in reading Jean-Frédéric Schaub's contribution: the efforts of people of my generation deserve some recognition abroad. Nevertheless, I feel obligated to express some skepticism concerning the future outcome of this process of internationalization. Indeed, I have considerable doubts about what could after all be seen as a romanticized and celebratory view of my own generation. First, I am only too aware that the conditions of precarious job stability and isolation in which we started our careers are impossible to reproduce or even to imagine in this day and age. It is difficult too to overlook the fact that the historians who preceded our generation working in a completely different environment. They too can talk about the gap that preceded them, the lack of conditions for research inside academia, the isolation and the difficulty in finding publishers abroad, etc. Second, the international experience of historians of my generation is perhaps more the result of an accumulation of individuals efforts not easily absorbed at the level of Portuguese institutions. Institutions, like the universities in which we are taught, tend to be conservative and oriented towards the reproduction of old habits. Therefore, an agenda of internationalization only becomes useful when it serves the reproductive interests of each institution. By the same token, a series of individual experiences will remain perhaps at the level of individual careers, without producing real change at the institutional level. The strongest evidence of this problem can be found in the lack of revision of the curricula of all Portuguese departments of history, which are deeply involved in establishing hierarchies, in discussing promotions, and in advancing petty individual interests, patrons and clients, but are totally unable to plan for the future in intellectual terms. Finally, it may be more important in the long run to address the new changes in historical and comparative studies, which tend to challenge the nation as a unit of analysis. What in French is called "le jeu des échelles" and in English the micro-macro link is undermining old certainties about the nation-state as the only scale by which to select objects of study. In this sense, it can be difficult to establish programs that proceed by the consideration of one, two, or three nations together. In any case, the work of constantly reinventing new forms of historical analysis cannot proceed by amnesia, by forgetting the results acquired by older generations of historians who worked almost exclusively within the ideological boundaries of the nation-state, nor by absorbing, generally without critical distance, what are supposed to be more fashionable and universal theoretical models.