

A Reading of *The Gift of the Holy Cross* by Lino Leitão

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Resumo: O presente artigo traz uma leitura do romance *The Gift of the Holy Cross* do escritor goês Lino Leitão, no qual ele critica tanto os colonizadores portugueses como o Movimento Nacional de Goa para finalmente propor a política de “não violência” do Mahatma Gandhi. Na presente discussão levamos em conta a teoria do romance de Mikhail Bakhtin.

Palavras-chave: colonizadores, nacionalistas, dialogismo, forças centrípetas e centrífugas.

INTRODUCTION

In his novel, *The Gift of the Holy Cross* (1999), Lino Leitão¹ textualizes the passage of Goa, former Portuguese colony in India, from colonialism to post-colonialism as he narrates the end of the Portuguese domination and Goa's entrance into the Indian Union. In so doing, Leitão deconstructs the discursive formation of both the colonial order as well as that of the new growing nationalism.

Leitão's critique is shown not only in his presentation of the conflict between these two orders that, echoing Bakhtin, act as centripetal forces by trying to desperately cling to the center of power, but also through his creation of the allegorical

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1. Lino Leitão, a native of the area about which he writes, was born in the Goan village of Varcá, in India. He studied in Portuguese and English schools and attended Karnataka University in India and Concordia University in Montreal. His other works include: *Collected Short Tales*, *Goan Tales* and *Six Tales*.

character of Mario Jaques, the unsettling centrifugal force in the novel that, like a Christlike figure, ends up crucified as a result of the conflicts of the two groups just mentioned. Through a highly ironic narrative voice that in a Dickensian fashion deconstructs the establishment, Leitão moves between the historical and fictional frames of the novel turning the text into historiographic metafiction.

In the present paper I propose to analyze the way in which Leitão, through the character of Mario Jaques, not only plays the discourse of colonials and anti-colonials against each other, to expose the ills of the old and new regimes as well as their indifference to the needs of the people, but also proposes a new order that, rising above barriers of caste and religion, brings together Gandhi's policy of non-violence and Christ's doctrine of love.

This discussion will be carried out, at one level, within the frame of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on the discourse of the novel to show how *The Gift of the Holy Cross* counterposes "...a diversity of social speech types and a diversity of individual voices artistically organized" (1981:262). At the same time since, as already mentioned, this novel is a postcolonial text dealing with the passage from a colonial to a postcolonial order, I will also interpret it in terms of postcolonial historical discourse as discussed by Lynn Mario Menezes de Souza (1994-1996).

THE DISCURSIVE MESH IN *THE GIFT OF THE HOLY CROSS*

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the novel, as genre, "...orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions" (1981:263). As already said, the speech types that Leitão is bent on textualizing in his novel are those of the old Goan colonials who, when already close to the end of Salazar's regime in 1961, still stuck to old imperial values, as well as those of the Goan nationalists that had been forced to emigrate to the Indian Union and, with Nehru's support, planned their return to Goa.

Against this historiographic background Leitão gives voice to 'differing individuals', his fictional characters, whom he presents as the outcome of such a historical process and, at a fictional level, help him textualize the sterility of the fight between the two groups above mentioned. This is orchestrated by an omniscient and ubiquitous narrator that permanently crosses the boundary between the historiographic and the fictional tightly intertwining one to the other, fact that

contributes to lending verisimilitude to the novel. At the same time, it reveals the author's will to truth though in the preface he makes a point of saying that *The Gift of the Holy Cross* should not be considered as a historiographic novel but as a fictional account:

This story is set in Goa, a former Portuguese colony in India. It tries to analyse the colonial system and the mores bestowed upon the colonised populace of Goa. As the story moves along, it comes to present-day Goa, a Goa free of Portuguese colonialism.

Though there are historical incidents and personalities in *The Gift of the Holy Cross*, it is not a historical novel. Nor is it the historical story of two villages, Carmona and Cavelossim. It is a fictional story. Historical incidents are made to fit into the novel's narrative, and the characters in it are from the author's imagination. No reference to any person living or dead is intended.

Evidently, Leitão is conscious that his novel is one among many interpretative statements on the painful process of liberation undergone by his people and I understand, reading his preface, that he fears it might be misread as a mimetic reflection of a decisive moment in Goan history and not a discursive construction as all narratives both fictional and historical should be considered. After Homi Bhabha, Leitão seems to believe that his text considered as "image", in the fashion of traditional Realism – style that he adopts in the novel – might be measured against the "essential or original" (1984:100), namely what might be considered as the "true" historical facts in Goa's fight for freedom. Hence, he feels the need to say that his novel is not *historical*, implicitly lending to this genre a higher level of verisimilitude, and that all that is being narrated in *The Gift of the Holy Cross* is "pure fiction" thus stressing the creative/inventive aspect of fiction in general to the detriment of its ideological value and somehow downplaying the fact that historical novels and even historiographic texts are also discursive constructs, not "true" copies of reality.

As to what makes a novel historical, Avrom Fleishman says that "regarding substance, there is an unspoken assumption that the plot must include a number of historical events, particularly those in the public sphere (war, politics, economic change etc.) mingled with and affecting the personal fortunes of the characters" (1971:3). As Leitão himself confirms in the preface, historical incidents act as the main dominant of the narrative. In the same way, *The Gift of the Holy Cross* makes continuous references to leading political personalities of the time both in India

and Goa, thus complying with another essential tenet of the historical novel namely that "...the presence of [historical characters] is not a mere matter of taste. It is to include one such figure in a novel if it is to qualify as historical" (*idem*, 3). Fleishman also goes on to explain that "When life is seen in the context of history, we have a novel; when the novel's characters live in the same world with historical persons, we have a historical novel" (*idem*, 3). In *The Gift of the Holy Cross*, Mario, as Count Bolkonsky and Pierre Besukoff in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, lives among historical personalities: those Goan who fought for the end of the Portuguese regime in India.

For all the prescriptive quality of the preface² then I believe that Leitão's writing about historical events, though in a fictional manner, actually shows his desire to recapture the past, to reorganize it in a new palimpsest of a story many times told. Hence, the text of *The Gift of the Holy Cross*, to paraphrase Bakhtin, cannot but become an active participant in Goan social dialogue "...[brushing] up against thousand of living dialogical threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance" (1981:276) namely, the conflict generated by the passing from colonial to postcolonial regimes in which "different socio-ideological groups [...] supplement one another, contradict one another and [are] interrelated dialogically" (*idem*, 291).

In establishing two frames of discourse, a historical and fictional one, and actually enacting the second in terms of the first, Leitão inscribes the text of *The Gift of the Holy Cross* in the realm of what Hayden White calls "mythic narrative" that "...is under no obligation to keep the two orders of events, real and imaginary, distinct from one another" (1990:3-4). In so doing, Leitão is actually making explicit the literary and extra-literary levels of language that go to make up the texture of the novel (Bakhtin, 1981:298). Therefore, when in the preface he posits himself as "author" to say how his novel should be read, he seems to be deconstructing what he states when his voice is refracted in the novel through that of his narrator and characters.

2. According to Hayden White in *The Content of the Form*, "...a preface is, by its very nature, an instruction on how to read the text that follows it and, by the same token, an attempt to guard against certain misreadings of the text, in other words, an attempt at control. In his masterful meditation on the preface as genre in Western writing, Derrida notes that the preface is always a narcissistic enterprise, but a special kind, that in which a proud parent looks upon and praises, excuses or otherwise prepares the way for his child, the text that he has at once sired and given birth to" (*The Content of the Form*, Baltimore & London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 201).

Mikhail Bakhtin points out that, “The activity of a character in a novel is always ideologically demarcated: he lives and acts in an ideological world of his own, [...] he has his own perception of the world that is incarnated in his action and his discourse” (*idem*, 335). *The Gift of the Holy Cross* is organized in four books that spin around the life of Mario Jaques, from his birth to his death, which as the title to the novel shows, bears a close resemblance with Jesus Christ’s own passion and death. At a symbolical level, Mario’s sufferings at the hands of the colonials might be read as the ordeals that Goan people have to go through as a result of the historical process depicted in the novel.

Mario Jaques’ character, then, clearly becomes significant when resignified against the historical and political context in which he is presented. It might be said that he functions as a “social ideologeme”, “an image assumed by a set of social beliefs” (Bakhtin, 1981:357) that reveals the author’s intention “to show a particular way of viewing the world” (Bakhtin, *idem*, 332), this being, in the case of Leitão, the Goans’ subjugation first to the Portuguese colonials and, after “liberation”, to the Indian Union. The liberation theme is also discussed early in the novel, in a way that anticipates Goa’s fight for freedom, in Cavelossim’s fight, the village where Mario is born and his family have lived for generations, to earn the status of a separate village independent from that of Carmona.

From the perspective of a postcolonial analysis of history *The Gift of the Holy Cross* can be read as a text that “[oferece] resistência à normatização do processo colonial, desmascarando e desmistificando a autoridade colonizadora européia e seus valores excludores, delineando assim, uma estratégia descolonizante que visa à recuperação ou criação de identidades alternativas” (Menezes de Souza, 1996:45).

The novel significantly opens with Mario’s almost miraculous birth at a time when rains had been so late that “No Goan alive remembered such a severe drought” (9). Through the parodic tone of the narrator’s voice that acts in the novel as a disruptive force, permanently appealing to the reader’s ‘belief system’, Leitão unmasks the colonials’ desire to keep the submissive Goans under their yoke who, due to the drought, go to church looking for solace in religion. The Catholic priest, in a way that, from the start, reveals Leitão’s critique of the culture brought to India by the Portuguese, is constructed as putting the blame on them for their sufferings: “Your sins surpass all understanding. Why shouldn’t God punish you? [...] You will writhe and die of thirst and hunger. Now is the time to remember all the sins that you have committed. Remember them now and repent” (11). The irony, as presented in this double-voiced speech image, resides in that the Goans humbly

kneel down in front of this powerful God and mentally confess petty sins that more than reflect their trespasses denounce the village notables' heartlessness who stick to Portuguese customs and religion and take advantage of the villagers:

A peasant woman, Patrocín, remembered that she had taken a fallen palm leaf from her landlord's land. Tears came to her eyes and she let out a loud sigh. The preacher looked down at her reproachfully. Bosteão Menin, the village launderer sobbed, "Never again, never again my Lord". He had muttered curses against his landlord. At that time, he had thanked his stars that the landlord hadn't heard him, but now God was punishing not only him but everybody. All of them remembered their sins. They were appalled at the blackness in their hearts. They vowed to tread the path of God; to live in subjugation to their superiors on earth (11).

The preacher, on the other hand, is ironically portrayed as considering himself beyond man's sins: "But he was relaxed. He wiped his forehead with a clean handkerchief and *drank a glass of water*" (11). From his Catholic and Portuguese certainty and superiority he offers a way to appease God's anger: "I ask of you women", he roared, "Who among you will give a son to the Holy Cross? Who? Who?" (11). The people knew that he was asking their sons to become priest but the irony was that "The lower castes were barred from becoming priests" (12). A barren woman of higher caste, Dona Rosa Jaques, who had been willing to have a child for more than fifteen years, was ready to make the sacrifice to this God that more than love inspires fear: "God give me a son and I'll present him as a gift of the Holy Cross" (12). And her wish is granted and Mario is born putting an end to the drought and giving to his life an almost supernatural edge:

Suddenly, a flash of lightning lit up the room dazzling [the midwife's eyes]. "Jesus!" cried Concentin, and at that instant, in a flood of blood and birth liquids, her deft hands brought forth the baby. She looked at the newborn's face. It was made radiant by a second flash of lightning. Was she holding a humane or divine child? There was a deep rumble in the sky – the voice of God above. The room should have smelled of steamy hot water and human blood, but when Concentin inhaled, what she smelled was an exquisite fragrance. This would be a blessed baby. Then Concentin heard thick drops of rain pattering on the roof. Now the earth would be dressed in green and become fruitful again (14).

From the start, then, Mario is seen by the people as a redemptive force that has come to rescue them from their oppressed condition at his own peril since he has

been promised to the Holy Cross. As the villagers tell Rosa, Mario's mother, "Ocobae, your son brought us rain and the promise of food. He's no doubt a heavenly offspring. May he grow into a man to save us all" (25). This idea is conveyed in the novel once and again, then, not only from the narrator's perspective but also from that of the other characters thus demarcating what Bakhtin calls "the character's zone" namely, that area in the novel that goes beyond the characters' own words and is established by the internal dialogic relation between his/her voice and that of the narrator or the other characters (*idem*, 320). In this way, Leitão builds the mesh of discourses in *The Gift of the Holy Cross* to narrate Mario's fate who like Jesus Christ, trying to save the Jewish people from the Roman Empire, will offer his own life to help free his people from the Portuguese yoke. This is a recurrent image in the novel, very often voiced by Mario's mother who sees the shadow of the feared Holy Cross reflected in the actions of the common people:

...Rosa opened the window and looked out. It was drizzling. On the path to the paddies, she saw Plough Francis, a pair of oxen, skeletal and obedient, trotting in front of him; on his naked shoulder he was carrying a wooden plough. For a moment, Rosa stood in thought, faintly remembering the traces of a dream. There was something in the scene that disturbed her (31).

What disturbs Rosa is what actually makes up the knot of the novel. In identifying with his people's ways and, therefore, sharing their sufferings, Mario will take upon himself a heavy burden and will thus oppose the notables of his village, among them his own father Senhor Maximiano Jaques.

This conflict can be read in *The Gift of the Holy Cross* in terms of what Bakhtin calls the "centripetal" and "centrifugal" forces in the novel. He explains that "unitary language", *i.e.*, the centripetal forces of language, "oppose the realities of heteroglossia" (*idem*, 270). He goes on to add that "... a unitary language gives expression to forces working towards concrete verbal and ideological unification and centralization, which develop in vital connection with the processes of socio-political and cultural centralization" (*idem*, 271).

In *The Gift of the Holy Cross* these centripetal forces are first represented, as already suggested, by the Goan notables who stick to a colonial ideology and, therefore, want to maintain their status quo. One way of enforcing it is by imposing a rigid education, based on European models, and the language of the colonizer, in this case, Portuguese. Therefore, Mario's father, who wants his son to eventually

join Goans' colonial administration and be among those in power forces him to become proficient in Portuguese as a way to become familiar with the colonials' culture to the detriment of his own native culture as represented by his mother tongue, Konkani: "[Maximiano Jaques] set out rules for Mario: the time to be at home, the time to be with his books, and the most important rule of all, that Mario should talk Portuguese with his parents and other notables. His mother tongue, Konkani, he could use only when talking to the uneducated villagers" (54-55).

Mario is sent by his father to the Portuguese Primary School. Though he clearly resents it, emulating the Gandhian policy of non-violence, he does not openly rebel to it but quietly resists it, to the despair of his teacher Marcos who takes him for a dunce. By again resorting to a highly ironic double-voiced speech image Leitão, through his narrator, criticizes the Portuguese education system in Goa that, at another level, can be read as an open criticism of Portuguese colonialism:

Teacher Marcos said he had never come across such a dullard. Even the sons of the lower castes, he said, had more brains than Mario. Marcos had a very high reputation as a teacher; he had polished the intellects of many of the village notables in their childhoods with his cane, and many of them, particularly those now high in government posts, were forever grateful to him.

Marcos couldn't neglect Mario as he did the children of the lower castes. For them, education wasn't important; none of them would be given Government jobs; but Mario was a notable's son so it was his duty to do his best. With his long whip in his hand, like a lion tamer, Marcos drilled lessons into Mario but nothing went in. He whipped the boy mercilessly and made him kneel on sharp stones. Mario took all these punishments without shedding a tear, and with a faint smile on his face, as if he were untouched by the pain. This further enraged Marcos and he would shout at him in Portuguese, 'You are nothing but a donkey!' (54).

In this tension-filled piece of narrative, pervaded by dramatic irony, Leitão through the covered dialogized relation he establishes between the narrator and the characters, turns the teacher's criticism against himself: only a brute can use violence to teach; only an ignorant person can still mark differences of caste; only somebody blinded by his own stupidity can fail to see the passive but tough resistance in Mario's attitude.

Hence, Mario is constructed in the novel as a disruptive force that quietly but in a determined fashion resists the Portuguese domination. In terms of Bakhtin's theory

of the novel, his role can be decoded as a “centrifugal force”: “Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward” (*idem*, 272). All this process, as already suggested, is articulated in the novel by the highly critical narrative voice which plays one discourse against the other in the desire to “superar essa limitação cultural monoglóssica” (Menezes de Souza, 1996:49).

If Mario resists the domineering quality of colonial education because he associates it with corruption: “Why should he learn Portuguese? The more he thought, the more clear it became to him. Education made people pompous, made them look down on the poor. If they became officers in the Colonial Government, what did they do? Steal. Why should he become a thief?” (59), he actually feels among his own kin when in contact with the poor and lower caste people of Goa:

But at Apolinario’s school, Mario, gradually, unfolding like a flower bud, was developing in a different way. The more he came to know the hardships of the poor and the families of the lower-caste children who attended Apolinario’s school, the more he reflected. The chaplain and his godmother Neunita had taught him that God created man in His image. How could the lives of the rich and poor be so different? (58).

Both excerpts just mentioned are highly hybrid since behind Mario’s voice, still in his childhood, the reader cannot help perceiving more than the voice of the narrator, Leitão’s own voice posing himself as writer, through a veiled authorial intrusion, that actually exceeds both the narrator’s and the character’s zone in order to establish a link with the historical frame of the novel. The reflections on the colonial government officials being thieves actually go beyond the limit of the fictional to openly voice political criticism.

As Mario grows up, the speed of the centrifugal force he represents gathers momentum and he becomes ripe for political action together with Goa’s liberation movement. In the style of historical novels, Book III opens with a portrayal of the political scenario in Goa at the end of the Second World War when India has already freed itself from the English Empire:

Time passed. In Goa, as in Portugal, and in her other colonies under the authoritarian regime of Prime Minister Salazar, the people had no rights of political expression. But when Dr. Manohar Lohia came to Goa on June 18th, 1946, at the invitation of his friend, Dr. Julião

Menezes, opposition started to take shape. Lohia was a socialist who had participated in India's freedom movement. During his brief stay in Goa, he and Julião Menezes started a civil rights movement. This campaign gathered momentum and the colonial authorities, unused to any opposition, didn't know how to deal with it. Mario was now seventeen years old, studying at the Institute of Abade Faria, Margão, the capital town of Salcete and an active centre for civil liberties (71).

The birth of the liberation movement is presented in *The Gift of the Holy Cross* as a renewing centrifugal force that comes to break the monoglossia of colonial discourse thus revealing, to paraphrase Bakhtin once again, the dialogized heteroglossia in which centrifugal forces are embodied (*idem*, 273). The fictional and the historical become one as Mario is presented reading papers edited by Fanchu Loyola and participating in the QUIT GOA movement as he comes to listen to Tristão da Cunha, Bertha Menezes, Bakibab Borkar, Laxmikant Bhembre, Dr. Rhama Hegde, Purushotam Kakodkar representative names in Goa's fight for freedom, when they meet "in June and July of 1946" at "Jorge Barreto Square the Hyde Park Corner at Margão" (72), all of them historical personalities who urged the end of the Portuguese domination in Goa.

As Mario identifies with the ideas of Goa's freedom movement, he turns himself into a threat for the colonials and gets their warning: "Portugal will return love for love, but if you disturb their order, then you have had it. With the largeness of their hearts, they took pride in *lusitanising* us, but why do we pay them with ingratitude? Who can blame the Portuguese if they let loose terror on unworthy Goans?" (80-81). But Mario does not take their heed. Not only does he defy Portuguese authority by sympathizing with the rebels and, because of that, being labelled a Communist – "Chaplain says Mario-Bab doesn't believe in God and he's a Communist" (85) – but he also speeds up his way to the Cross by significantly falling in love with a Hindu girl who, when her parents do not let her relate to him, commits suttee triggering the death of her mother and grandfather. Goan authorities thus find a good excuse to put him in jail and, when he is arrested on the false charge that the girl had committed suicide because she was pregnant, his own father has a heart attack and dies. Mario thus creates enemies not only among Goan Christians but also among Brahmin Hindus:

Though Mario knew that most people looked upon him as the worst kind of criminal, he could not feel responsible for all the deaths he had been blamed for.

Could he have set in motion the chain of reactions? This was surely God's doing, but a god with divergent personalities, each clashing with the other. In this case the Saraswat brahmin personality of God clashed with the Catholic personality of God killing Nirmala [his girl-friend], her mother, her grandfather and his father. God who boasts that he created man in his image had wantonly killed these people. What kind of god was this? (116)

All these events, highly charged with ideological value, come to show the functionality of Mario's character as allegorical figure in the novel as it is through him that Leitão textualizes the counterpoint among irreconcilable voices in Goan society. In a Bakhtinian manner, *The Gift of the Holy Cross* "...deliberately intensifies difference between [the different social groups], gives them embodied representation and dialogically opposes them to one another in unresolvable dialogues" (*idem*, 291), to thus textualize the cultural conflicts that rip apart a society marked by colonialism.

What makes Leitão's novel so interesting is that he does not try to substitute the colonial norm for an idyllic pre-colonial or a simply idealistic anti-colonial one but, through Mario's character, understood as "social ideologeme", what he actually does is to question the concept of 'norm' not only at a literary level but also at a cultural and historical one (Menezes de Souza, 1994). If the nationalists are initially presented in the novel as the centrifugal force that tries to oust the Portuguese government in Goa, when the colonials' power starts to weaken, and the government of Goa becomes more and more of a reality for the Goan nationalists exiled in India, their attitude changes and the narrator constructs them as a unitary centripetal force that tries to wipe out any trace of heteroglossia to impose their own monoglossic discourse.

After being imprisoned for Nirmala's rape, Mario escapes to India in a very confusing episode in which his prison guard gets killed. Though innocent, Mario is blamed for it. When he arrives in the Indian Union and, of his own accord, turns himself in, the Indian police first suspect him of being a spy. But further research convinces them that he is a "genuine nationalist" and, in spite of Mario, they make a hero of him:

He had taken part in protest marches and had written an article exposing the lewd behaviour of the Portuguese troop [when a fringo had raped the daughter of one of the local villagers]. His imprisonment for rape, the Indian police now thought, was clearly intended to discredit him. When reports confirmed his escape from Fort Aguada and his daring killing of a Portuguese soldier, Mario was released as a hero (128).

Soon, Mario is sought by many Goans nationalists resident in the Indian Union:

The Goan political parties in the Indian Union – and there were many – the National Congress of Goa, United Front of Goans, Azad Gomantak Dal, Goan Peoples' Party and others all rushed to recruit him to boost their sagging morale.

Mario saw now how the Goan political parties in India functioned. They fought with each other about who would lead the liberation, and competed for Nehru's approval, without whose blessing they would not undertake any political activity.

Even when Nehru's policies hurt Goans, they would never dream of challenging him, particularly over the blockade³. Mario had always thought that the liberation of Goa would be a farce without the support of the Goan people and what he saw of the Goan parties in India convinced him of this. They were only too ready to sell out Goan nationalism to the interests of their Indian political masters. Mario knew he would never join any of these parties (128).

Leitão's critique of the Nationalists resident in the Indian Union sounds like Vargas Llosa's depiction of leftist parties in his novel *Historia de Mayta*: weakened and divided by faction wrangles the Goan nationalists exiled in India are more interested in their own political careers, for which they need Nehru's support, than Goa's welfare. Notwithstanding, for all his critique, Leitão does not want to present all the nationalists as a fixed, homogeneous stereotype that does away with the heteroglossic quality of any social discursive construction. He thus creates the character of Henriques Mendes who, according to Mario, is presented as "a Goan who seemed very different from those politicians who were so supine to Indian interests" and "...had been campaigning ceaselessly to persuade the Indian Government to lift the blockade" (129).

I understand that Leitão narrates the nationalists' political strategy in the novel in terms of the concept of "the war of manoeuvres": "O objetivo principal da estratégia contra-discursiva da guerra de manobras [...] é a inversão do mecanismo discursivo da alegoria maniqueísta..." (Menezes de Souza, 1994:62) that will change one political order for an opposing one but, substantially, the same. In the case of the Goan nationalists resident in India, a frontal conflict which aims at the

3. To force the Portuguese out of Goa, Nehru starts a blockade that, more than hurting Portuguese economic interests, helps smuggling flourish with the Indian Union filling up the pocket of those in power and making the poor even poorer. According to Leitão, he backs up the Goan Nationalists resident in the Indian Union to further his own political designs in Goa.

substitution of the Portuguese colonial regime for a Goan one with the support of the Indian Union – that, evidently, Leitão sees as new type of colonial master – and will not significantly improve the condition of the Goan people.

Leitão's most pointed criticism of the nationalists resident in the Indian Union is enacted in his characterization of the leader Edmundo Barbosa, based on a Goan political personality, "who had high hopes of becoming the first Chief Minister of Liberated Goa" (139). He is indirectly presented through a dialogue between Mario and one of the leader's disciples, during the campaign in India, thus confronting two social languages that allow Leitão to voice his critique of the facts being narrated. The characters' words are permeated by dramatic irony as Joe, Barbosa's disciple, is made to say that "Barbosa is the right person to be a leader" because "Like Nehru, he is a brahmin. Doesn't matter that he is a Catholic. He comes from a traditional fidalgo family in Goa, so he's like a bat in the fable, a bird and a mammal" (139). In this view, Barbosa is the most suitable candidate because he will please the powerful and rich of Goan society. To go deeper into the political scheme, and reveal the politicians' dark maneuvers, Mario is presented as not understanding Joe's explanation:

The Indian National Congress sees that he can be put to use for their benefit. The Hindu and Catholic brahmins in Goa trust him too. Nehru wants to free Goa without firing a shot. If Barbosa can deliver that, Nehru has a chance to win the Nobel Prize for Peace. And you know how much he wants that! The other Goan parties here can't free Goa, they're just barking dogs. You don't understand the scheming behind Goan politics, Mario (139).

Little by little, however, Mario not only comes to see through the politicians' schemes but also to oppose them from a standpoint that implies not a maniqueist change of discursive constructions but a questioning of the discursive norm of all political systems.

Menezes de Souza points out that an alternative to the "guerra de manobras" is the "guerra de posição" according to which "o logos colonial é questionado como logos, sendo que tal questionamento estende-se a todo tipo de logos, colonial ou anti-colonial" (1994:62). Hence, if Mario was first presented in the novel as deconstructing the discourse of the colonials, now he is enacted as deconstructing the discourse of the Goan Nationalists in India for the same reason: their greed, their subservience to a new master, Nehru, and their indifference to the Goan people. To exemplify this point, Mario is made to bear witness to the scene when Barbosa

receives “black money”, to support his campaign, from Ashok Patel (also based on a real political personality) an Indian businessman whose illustrious uncle had dressed the Gandhian homespun uniform and cap and is now interested in backing up Nehru’s plan for the liberation of Goa. He is not only presented as living in a house that resembles Ali Baba’s “cave full of riches” (140) but also, to Mario’s astonishment, that implicitly voices the narrator’s critique, he has an array of imported whiskies in “prohibition-bound Bombay” (141).

The discourse of the nationalists is thus presented as being as vulnerable as that of the colonials since though apparently opposed to each other, they are constructed as sharing the same belief system. As Mario is made to reflect, “What India got was politicians who simply mimicked the styles of their former colonial bosses, Gandhian in appearance but rapacious in substance” (147). Behind the characters’s stories the reader can perceive the author’s story, in this case, Leitão’s pointed criticism of Nehru and his designs on Goa. As Bakhtin explains in his discussion on the discourse of the novel, “This interaction, this dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems, permits authorial intentions to be realized in such a way that we can acutely sense their presence at every point in the work” (1981:314).

The only discordant voice to the end is Mario’s. I believe that through the creation of this character Leitão, the same as Wilson Harris, comes to show that, for him “o papel do escritor pós colonial seja o de construir um discurso alegórico através do qual o colonizador quanto o colonizado possam se enxergar de uma maneira nova, mais esclarecedora do que aquela permitida pelos tradicionais discursos anti-coloniais maniqueístas” (as quoted in Menezes de Souza, 1996:48).

In fact, this is what Leitão does through Mario’s character: he unmasks Barbosa and all his followers’ real intentions. In so doing, he criticizes not only the Goan nationalists but also the Indians, who, in Leitão’s opinion, evidently betrayed Gandhi’s principles. As Mario is made to tell Barbosa,

You don’t want the masses to be liberated; you want them to be passive and to accept you without challenge. Isn’t that so? Leaders like you make the masses promises, but never fulfil them and leave them in the gutters and the slums; that’s democracy for you, isn’t it? You are nothing but a bunch of hypocrites. You can preach Gandhi and you can preach Christ, but none of you want to act according to the principles of these masters (145).

Mario, on the other hand, proposes a policy of love and understanding that goes beyond differences of caste or religion and thus unites the beliefs of both

Buddhist and Catholics. He is the centrifugal force that flourishes among heteroglossia. Disappointed by the intellectual elites, he goes back to Goa as he feels the need to reconnect with his own culture, as represented by the Konkani language, and act on behalf of his own people: "Cursin, Hut João, Mud Bosteão, Tar Menin, Plough Francis, Oji-mai Concentin, Modo-mai Majakin, senhor Tolentino and others" (147). But as soon as he reaches Goan soil, he is put in prison by the colonials. Once again, Leitão uses Mario's character to show both colonials and anti-colonials identical discourses and common designs.

After his arrest, Goan colonial authorities publish an article in the newspaper saying that Mario had confessed that "he had been paid to act on behalf of the Indian Government": "The story and Mario's photograph appeared on the front pages of the Goan dailies. At last, they said, the WANTED CRIMINAL had been caught and they enumerated all his crimes and published his written confession with a photograph of his signature" (156), the truth being that after being mercilessly tortured, Mario had done what had been requested of him. On the other hand, the Goans exiled in India also use him for their own purposes. Going against Gandhian non-violence policy, Nehru looks for an excuse to invade Goa and thus put an end to Portugal's presence in India, fact that took place on December 18, 1961:

The Indian newspapers also displayed his photograph on their front pages, praising him as a hero, a true patriot, a true son of the soil. They claimed that Mario had been sadistically tortured to death and his body burned. How long, they asked, was India going to tolerate, in the name of nonviolence, the barbarities of Salazar's regime on the sacred soil of India? Nonviolence didn't mean cowardice or impotence. How could nonviolent India's conscience be at peace when dauntless nationalists like Mario and many others were being brutally murdered in Goa? Enough was enough (156).

Mario is finally set free in a Goa that finds itself under the rule of a new master, India. The Goans are made to ask themselves "Who will now drive away Indian imperialism from Indian soil?" (153). Against this political scenario, Mario starts preaching his policy of love. After a Gandhian gesture, he is constructed as shedding his Western clothes, adopted by the Goans from the time of the Inquisition, and wearing "a *kasti*, the outfit of the old-time Goan labourer" and holding "a *pezecho-podgo* in his hand" (161). To counteract the centripetal forces of the anti-colonials now in power, Mario starts preaching his creed of love in his desire to represent the

voice of the poor, of the weak and submerged; he embodies the centrifugal force that for ever tries to break the homogeneity of the discourse of power:

In Goa, we're still united with a bond of love. When I was young, I thought love was a string and Goans were beads strung onto it, like rosary beads. We understand what virtue is and our morality isn't yet corrupt. Our duty is to strengthen the love that binds us together. If we break the string, the beads will be scattered. In the welfare of your brothers and sisters lies your own welfare.

Since man can't live without food, our economic policies shouldn't deprive our brothers and sisters of their livelihood. If we do that, the cord that holds us will weaken and break and won't hold us any more. Then, liberation will be no liberation, it will be enslavement (162).

Nevertheless, Mario's word goes unheard by the majority of the people: "In the name of progress, all manners of evils came racing into Goa and the Goans, brought up under dictatorship and religious authority, didn't know how to handle such things" (173). Once again Leitão marks the tight links between the discourse of both colonials and the anti-colonials against which Mario's effort to cross all cultural barriers appears useless: "Mario was pained. The rosary was broken and the beads were scattered. He tramped the villages preaching like a Hindu sanyasin, but he couldn't string the rosary beads together again. He was a madman, a curiosity from the past" (173). Mario exists in an in-between space from which he tries to show the shortcomings of both discursive norms and, at the same time, find a path that could be common to both, one that propounds the welfare of all thus uniting Gandhi's and Christ's creeds. But like the leaders whose doctrine he preaches, he dies the victim of people's anger due to religious and political intolerance. He is literally crucified by the children of a Goan citizen who had been murdered during the liberation struggle and had been led to believe by the colonials' political propaganda that Mario had perpetrated the crime. As Mario is dying on the cross, Goans looked at him in surprise:

As they watched Mario on the cross, some of the crowd wondered about his preachings. He had told them to love one another, that they must be spiritual beings, that they must not be blinded by the material civilization of the dominant nations. He had wanted Goa's and India's civilization to be built on the foundations of love, as Mahatma Gandhi had preached and practised. Had such teachings brought him to this fate? (183).

The last question might be paraphrased as saying “Did Mario’s death on the holy cross lead to nothing?” On the contrary, it shows the way for a new order based on the welfare of the people that might be more propitious for all. In this sense Mario stands for the ‘gift’ that the Holy Cross grants the Goan people. As at the time of his birth, Mario’s death brings rain and food for all: “...Tar Menin said, ‘Mario has twice saved us from malignant droughts’” (183). However, for all of Leitão’s serious belief in the possibility of men living together in spite of social, religious or cultural differences and, to a certain extent, downplay the somber tone of his text, he playfully makes Tar Menin say, “Who will save us from the politicians?” (183).

CONCLUSION

If the colonial/anti-colonial centripetal forces tried to silence all voices to impose their monoglossic discourse, Mario is presented as trying to give the voice to all, overcoming social and religious frontiers. Through his creation of Mario’s character, Leitão pays heed to Hayden White’s words that

A consciência histórica falha quando esquece que a história no sentido tanto de eventos quanto de relatos de eventos, não acontece apenas, mas é construída.

Ademais, é preciso acrescentar, ela é construída em ambos os lados das barricadas, e de forma igualmente eficaz, tanto por um lado quanto pelo outro (as quoted in Menezes de Souza, (1996:46).

Hence, Mario’s character, for all its fictional quality, is ideologically saturated. All he does has historical and political connotations and, as already discussed, his story becomes meaningful when considered against Goa’s historical background. This comes to show that in spite of the fact that in his preface Leitão makes a point of saying that *The Gift of the Holy Cross* is not a historical novel, the value of the text, as an example of postcolonial literature, resides in that it calls attention to the way in which the historical discourse of former colonial countries has been constructed. However what makes the discourse of *The Gift of the Holy Cross* distinctive is that Leitão goes beyond the maniqueist dichotomy colonial/anti-colonial to show how, in certain ways, both belong in the same order of discourse and, therefore, are on “the same side of the barricade”. Mario, on the other hand,

stands on the other side. Though alone and at the verge of death, he anyway reads as a message of hope.

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is a reading of the novel *The Gift of the Holy Cross* by the Goan writer Lino Leitão in which he makes a critique of the old Portuguese colonials as well as the Goan Nationalist Movement to finally favor a Gandhian policy of non-violence. The theoretical frame of our discussion considers Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory of the novel.

Keywords: colonials, nationalists, dialogism, centripetal and centrifugal forces.