

In keeping with character – early encounters with ethnography in *Os brahmanes**

Dentro do seu papel – primeiros encontros com a etnografia no romance *Os brahmanes*

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Resumo: Este ensaio propõe ler o primitivo romance indiano não enquanto desenvolvimento secundário face aos modelos da representação empírica, ou enquanto imitação imperfeita dos modelos literários europeus, mas antes rastrear a forma como tais influências geraram estruturas internas ao romance, o que aconteceu em simultâneo com outros gêneros da escrita e da representação. *Os brahmanes*, de Francisco Luís Gomes, marca um encontro entre o romance colonial e a etnografia, antes de o realismo se ter tornado a manifestação dominante da descrição empírica no romance. A obra absorve e antecipa o trabalho da etnografia em solidificar concepções de entidade política nacional, abrindo-se a possibilidade de examinar um *continuum* de estratégias narrativas entre o relatório e o romance.

Palavras-chave: Goa, etnografia, Francisco Luís Gomes, raça, casta

Abstract: This essay suggests that instead of seeing the early novel in India as a secondary development to empirical representation, or as a flawed imitation of European literary models, studies can profitably trace how these influences generated structures internal to the novel, as it emerged simultaneously with other genres of writing and representation. *Os brahmanes* by Francisco Luís Gomes marks an encounter between the early colonial novel and ethnography, before realism became the dominant manifestation of empirical description in the novel. The novel absorbs and anticipates the work of ethnography in petrifying conceptions of an Indian polity and opens up the possibility of examining a *continuum* of narrative strategies between the report and the novel.

Keywords: Goa, ethnography, Francisco Luís Gomes, race, caste

* A preliminary attempt at reading ethnographic strategies in this novel was undertaken in Pinto, 2007.

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Authors of early novels in India often disavow the novel as a form, occasionally through self-deprecatory comments about their own literary abilities, but often through signs that suggest there was something about realist novels that had led them to resort to alternative narrative strategies. The frequency of these disavowals would suggest they are not always to be taken at face value, as each novel seems to approach the technique of novelization differently. Rather than see the ambiguity with which received European forms were adopted, as a sign of incomplete mastery, it is useful to think about the challenges posed by novelistic representation in a colonial context.¹

When *Jacob e Dulce - cenas da vida Indiana* (scenes from Indian life), by the Goan writer Francisco João da Costa appeared in 1895, the author stated that his work “ [...] served (me) as a pretext to describe those of our uses and customs, which are supposed to be ridiculous” (COSTA, 1896, p. III). The term “uses and customs” had been employed for specific application in colonial settings (such as Goa) for centuries prior to its appearance in nineteenth century novels.²

When the term “uses and customs” appeared in the late nineteenth century in the novel in Goa, it had expanded from being a source for the codification of Hindu practices, to denoting secularized compendia of knowledge about the colony, whose categories were administrative ones and tended to be seen by the Portuguese and the Goan elite as a decisive factor in the achievements of British governance in India. When da Costa used the term, the position of power implied in the use of ethnography was unmistakable, as his novel reversed the terms of the colonial practice through a satirical exposé of a Catholic upper class in Goa, more accustomed to deploying rather than being the subjects of ethnography.

¹ Recent attempts to offer explanations for the emergence of different literary genres in Goa include (MACHADO, 2008, p. 203; MELO E CASTRO, 2012) Hélder Garmes notes for instance, that in early literature from the colonies, amorous conflict between individuals is replaced by cultural conflict (an analysis not dissimilar to Meenakshi Mukherjee’s in *Realism and reality*): “A la place du conflit amoureux, nous avons le conflit culturel”, as quoted in Machado (2008, p. 203) e Mukherjee (1996).

² Historians suggest that the beginnings of ethnographic categories may lie in attempts by Jesuits to demarcate a spiritual or internal notion of belief from externalized ritual or practice; an attempt to come to terms with the persistence of ritual practices even among the converted. This resulted in “the creation of the two master categories that became a routine epistemological distinction [...] one was *civility* encompassing customs, habits, and rituals and the other is *religion*” (XAVIER; ŽUPANOV, 2015, p. 153).

Jacob e Dulce is not the only novel in India to have successfully dodged the compulsion to deliver colonial society through the divisions into which colonial states had bifurcated social practices into categories more familiar to western scholars. The Oriya writer Fakir Mohan Senapati's novel, *Three acres and a third* (*Chha Mana Atha Guntha*) of 1897 likewise eludes the hold of legal categories by satirizing the conceptual inadequacies and the inherent biases of the colonial institution and local elites, through the idiom of local humour and irony that replaces the categories of social organization offered by the gazette or the census, with a localized recognition of the structures of social oppression (SENAPATI; MISHRA, 2005). The fact that in both texts, colonial knowledge is explicitly acknowledged, but displaced, suggests that satire allowed questions of social power and moral value to be left ambiguous by enabling the narrator's abdication of the position of authoritative omniscience. The narrator's potentially disinterested or detached view of society enables a withholding of absolute judgment, allowing the social world of the novels to elude the lens of ethnography. The frequent appearance of ethnographic segments in several other novels is distinctive enough to date such novels as nineteenth or early twentieth century productions.

Within European literary history, realism is said to have formalized, the social reordering effected by capitalism and by secular rationalism, of which the notion of individuated autonomous subjectivity was a significant effect, in the spatial and temporal organization of the novel. (BERNSTEIN, 1984). Critical studies of colonial ethnography have pointed to how the discipline adopted the narrative structure of realism to ventriloquize the colonial subject's desire for self-knowledge, positing the colonial subject as complicit with the statistical impersonation and fragmentation effected by the structures of knowledge production (CLOUGH, 1998).

It would appear that in the colonies, the relationship between realist narrative and ethnography was intertwined, with ethnography visibly framing and structuring the relation of persona in novels to their social and political world, and providing the architectonics for the depiction of colonial society. In many early novels, we see the appearance of isolated sections that seem to respond to the realist demand for verisimilitude and truth, but without the agency of the realist subject. This worked as a mechanism for the management of cultural difference, deflecting the narrative flow that would normalize daily life or complicate social

structures through the actions and unpredictable desires of three-dimensional subjects, towards the customary appearance of the social world as objectively derived and ordered information.

Perhaps this strong imprint of ethnography resulted from the fact, as Arjun Appadurai suggests in relation to the role of statistics and enumeration, that unlike in its European context, it did not primarily concern itself with the management of the domain of fiscal and military activities, but was applied to the definition and management of society as a whole (ARJUN APPADURAI, 1993; ANDERSON, 2004). The creation of enumerated and exoticized categories, he points out, shaped structures of political representation whose resonances and effects unfold into the present (ARJUN APPADURAI, 1993, p. 317-319). In the novel, these categories provided a kind of iron frame of reference that, in the nineteenth century at least, seemed to have been successfully evaded only in satires.

This would suggest that the prototypical realist novel offered realms of freedom and represented liberation from colonial ethnography. However, the potential of realism to paper over or sublimate contradictions or threatening identities through its formal devices has been sufficiently explored to inflect our recognition that while realism broke through the strictures of ethnography and provided a counter dynamism in some early novels, this did not represent a simple political counter narrative.

Encountering British ethnography in a Goan novel

Francisco Luís Gomes' Portuguese novel *Os brahmanes* of 1866 is an early acknowledgment of the hold of British ethnography over the idea of society and colonial governance as a whole, before the practices of enumeration and identification had acquired the status of a discipline.³ There are several attempts to characterise the changes in the practices of enumeration and visual and written representation across the nineteenth century. Arjun Appadurai for instance, distinguishes between "the empiricist and disciplinary moments of colonial numerology" to suggest that the concern with measurement and quantification as a guarantee for equitable governance of land of the first half of the century,

³ Quotes in this text are from the English translation of 1971 (GOMES, 1971).

was extended to the enumeration of human identities in the latter half (ARJUN APPADURAI, 1993, p. 321-325). Other studies of early attempts at identifying and classifying criminal bodies suggest that these mechanisms facilitated the transport and identification of labour across time and space (SINGHA, 2000, p. 151–157).⁴ Schemes to imprint the body with tattoos, or to create a record of the body on paper to demarcate social boundaries and hierarchies helped create and sustain distinctions of caste, and race, and eventually, a social order that was acceptable to colonial officials and new economies (GORDON, 1969a). Yet, the colonial distrust of fluid social categories and political boundaries had not as yet generated the extensive projects to arrive at universalist knowledge production and categorisation of indigenous populations that would mark the end of the nineteenth century. Reports and opinions that made porous identities a political liability had however, begun to circulate, to generate conceptions of criminal bodies and of political states (GORDON, 1969a).

Os brahmanes represented Goan society through the lens of Anglocentric suspicion of blurred boundaries of blood, race and caste. The prevalent anxiety over blurring and maintaining social hierarchies perhaps explains the punishing exploration in the novel, of the encounter between indigenous Christian and racially hybridised populations, with the social strictures of upper class British India. Paradoxically, while the census in British India had yet to emerge in its fullest form, racial tension between Portuguese born in the colonies, the *descendentes*, mixed race and indigenous elites had manifested itself in the form of race-divided census reports and the competing political priority of different elites through the constitutional struggles in Portugal and its colonies.⁵ It is therefore imperative not to see early novels as a secondary development to the thrust of empirical representation in other fields. *Os brahmanes* posits a liberal critique by narrating social violence as the effect, equally, of (colonial) racism and (indigenous) casteism, but its transformation of ethnographic enumeration

⁴ Singha states on p. 154, “The problem was that by the 1840s imperial interests lay not only in settling disorderly communities, but also in mobilizing demographic resources for key economic sectors of the empire. Within India, labour had to be prised out for public works, plantation and mining enclaves and new areas of agricultural colonization”.

⁵ District censuses that categorized race were compiled from the early nineteenth century in Goa (PINTO, 2007, p. 19). Francisco Luís Gomes, the author, travelled to Portugal as an elected representative from Goa published a journal in Lisbon, and is known primarily as an economist and advocate of political economy.

into symbols of a moral order, marks an encounter between the early colonial novel and ethnography, before realism became the dominant manifestation of empirical description in the novel.⁶

The novel, which was written in 1866, and published in Lisbon, has a complicated structure. It is located in British India, in Faizabad (Fyzabad in the novel) just prior to the Rebellion of 1857. Its personae are an Irishman, his wealthy uncle, Mr. Davis, and an itinerant Brahmin called Magnod who served the Irishman. After an altercation that leaves him insulted and defiled through forced contact with servants of a lower caste, Magnod leaves the house, and through a series of disguises, seeks his revenge. The two (assumed) orphaned children of Magnod are baptized and raised at the expense of the remorseful Irishman in London, where his daughter Helen lives.

The three children, two Indian Christians and Helen, return to India as adults to find that their race and class make them misfits, vulnerable to social sanctions as they seek alliances across racial divides. The novel ends with a series of tragedies provoked by the social unacceptability of racial mixing, of pre-marital childbirth, inheritance disputes and Magnod's attempt at murderous revenge. The imploding of the 1857 rebellion in which Magnod is implicated provides a politically destabilized landscape that mirrors the violent domestic encounter between caste, race and colonialism.

Os brahmanes reveals the centrality of the process of sexual and racial differentiation to the thwarting of romantic love in the colonial novel, indicating, as suggested earlier, that realism did not provide a counter to the determinations of ethnography. The asymmetry between the caste origins and social position of Thomas and Emily at the beginning of the narrative is a perpetuation of local narrative conventions, as the children's birth to a Brahmin is temporarily obfuscated, and they circulate as outcaste but upper class Christian subjects in colonial society until their caste status is revealed and restored at the end. The novel ventriloquizes and warns of the fractures in Goan society through the prospect of political violence already enacted in British India in 1857.

⁶ Melo e Castro quotes Joanna Passos who asserts that *Jacob e Dulce* is not quite a "romance", with the connotations the genre has in European languages across time, but suggests that a novel like *Os brahmanes* should be seen as inhabiting a liminal postcolonial consciousness, in whose political horizons, the space of an autonomous nation did not exist (PASSOS, 2010).

Ventriloquizing race

As a continuation of the narrative strategy of ventriloquizing Goan society through the lens of British India, the Indian Christians who are Anglicised by association with their English adoptive family embody the displaced racial status of the Goan Catholic elite in their encounter with Anglo-centric race discourses. This structure of racial othering is the inverse of the Iberian racial order in which proximity to whiteness and being Christian secured race privilege. Thomas and Emily as Christians stand to lose their caste status within Indian caste hierarchies, while within the British racial order, their Christianity and familial association gives them the socially uncertain status of miscegenated subjects of empire.

It may add another dimension to the caste identities and critique in the text to note that the author, Francisco Luís Gomes came from a powerful non-brahmin caste and was unquestionably a member of a Lusitanized elite. As though holding up the inverted mirror of English race relations to his own status, the British appear as the master race in his novel, while Indian Christian children circulate as potential agents of miscegenation, a source of contamination for both indigenous and colonial society, as the events in the novel reveal. The leadership for the violence of 1857 is attributed in part to fakirs of whom the Brahmin Magnod has become a part albeit in disguise. This violence is seen as an inevitable cleansing, not to be admired, but viewed as the natural outcome of the evils of both racism and casteism that have decimated the body of the land.

This brief if sweeping reading of race in the novel is necessary to indicate that in novels based in Goa, the possibility of racial mixing is not as threatening as the suggestion of cross caste and cross class romances. The horror of the mixed race subject mirrored in the novel by social disgust at cross-caste contact, signals an epistemological shift towards Anglocentric knowledge systems in the constitution of the political and social world in the novel. It is a sign of entry into the discursive order of British India, which impinged as much on the realist sections of the novel, where desire and subjectivity are disciplined by racial taboos, as other sections of the novel would be by other disciplinary discourses.

Moral economy as a diagnosis of Indian polity

As a whole, the novel essentializes character attributes and individual events into idealized concepts, a feature that resembles romantic idealism as a literary genre, and that allows the novel to turn proto-ethnographic studies into narrative form. Historical facts and events such as the conquest of Awadh or the fact that Fyzabad belonged within the dynasty of Suja-ud-Daulah, for example, are embedded in an obtrusive moral economy that synthesizes racism and casteism into a predominantly Christianized morality inflected with colonial critique. The novel is poised on the threshold of rebellion, the portent of violence, which is the consequence if the moral lessons of the novel are not learnt.

The violence resulting from Magnod being touched by non-brahmin servants in his employer's household, and having roast beef thrown at him, as his employer flies into a rage, is a central conflict of the novel. The supposedly irreparable loss of caste results in Magnod's self-expulsion from society, from which position he plots revenge and restores his economic and social status. While the colonizer's cruelty and racial arrogance are criticized as moral flaws, the depiction of actions and social phenomena (such as caste and Thuggee) that result from their misrule reproduce colonial structures of classification. The narrative actualizes attitudes and beliefs seen by colonial discourse as flaws that structured Indian society, an orientalist device, as has been elaborated over the past decades, that rendered Indian society static, or in decline as a result of these fetishized flaws. The question of which genre the novel best exemplifies is ambiguous as the devices through which romantic idealism constructed a relationship between subject and society, and those used to incriminate the nature of the Indian polity are similar, as may be seen in the representation of Thuggee as both, an objectively perceptible phenomenon and a metaphor for India as a whole.

Moral logic lends the narrative coherence and is flexible enough, if implausible in realist terms, to absorb even those elements that stand apart from the plot and from the personae of the novel; elements that seem to derive quite

explicitly from orientalist productions.⁷ Both caste and the cult of Thuggee, which had become a category of classification in the colonial era, were viewed as a moral corruption arising from physical deprivation. This parallels colonial writing on Thuggee, which saw it variously, as an individual inclination for murder and lawlessness, or a caste grouping whose hereditary occupation was murder and looting, or as a pan-Indian conspiracy of defaulting sepoys or soldiers to attack the army (GORDON, 1969a).

Stewart Gordon's detailing of popular and official writings on Thuggee, including Captain William Henry Sleeman's influential *Ramaseeana* of 1836, reveals that *Os brahmanes* was contemporaneous with forms of writing that synthesized ethnographic description as commentary or explanation for society as a whole, at a time when there was little certainty about the emerging terms of classification.⁸ Novelistic narrative therefore worked as a realization of the moral and imaginative possibilities of social classification that otherwise had a legal and institutional outcome. Gordon's critique of the consolidation of the legal category of Thuggee unravels the process through which stereotypes eventually shaped state policy. He simultaneously unfolds a theory of state formation in the eighteenth century to indicate how in times of crisis, disparate groups of armed marauders were called on as a supplementary resource by small states in times of battle, to secure revenue or provisions through plunder (GORDON, 1969b, p. 425-429). It was these armed groups who were the subject of the phenomenon called Thuggee, and criminalized by the colonial state. The links between Thuggee, errant sepoys and the nature of wars of supremacy between small pre-colo-

⁷ The colonial invention of Thuggee for example, features prominently, with Bhavani as their deity, an attribute that Sleeman attached to the practice in 1830, by piecing together information from disparate legends and practices (MCDERMOTT; KRIPAL, 2005, p. 155-158).

⁸ Stewart Gordon's examination of the various reports on thugs unravels the process through which William Sleeman's interpretation of the phenomenon eventually shaped state policy on the question, and the uncertainty over its definition: "In spite of thirty years of Thagi and Dacoity Department reports and popular books such as Caleb Wright's *A description of the habits and superstitions of Thugs* (1846) and Edward Thornton's *Illustrations of the history and practice of the Thugs* (1837) which took uncritically-often verbatim-from Sleeman's writings, the term was still not fully stereotyped until at least the late 1860's; that is, even within the government hierarchy there was no consensus on the answers to the question "Who or what is a Thug" and "What are the characteristics by which one knows them?" (GORDON, 1969b).

nial states, lends itself to the theory of political decay which was the assumption framing much historical and ethnographic production about this period.

This combination of stereotype and vision of political decay provides *Os brahmanes* with a politico-moral framework. When the novel rehearses the colonial account of Thuggee, it endows the phenomenon with an essentialist power that English law cannot disturb:

The thirst of men is satiable, the thirst of gods must be unquenchable. The mission of the Thug will last as long as Bhavani is a man-eater. The Thug who may fall into the hands of justice walks to the gallows with the serenity of the just, with a forehead beaming with hope, [...] amidst marks of respect and admiration from the multitude who proclaim him a saint. (GOMES, 1971, p. 36; MACHADO, 2008)⁹

Thuggee appears in the novel as an aberration but also as a resistant and secretive cult, which inducts and brutalizes the fleeing Brahmin while providing him a social structure within which to reinvent himself. Magnod's transition from being a Brahmin to a Thuggee blurs social boundaries in a manner that colonial states abhorred (SINGHA, 2000, p. 166).¹⁰ The many disguises successfully adopted by Magnod for the length of time that he plots revenge, do not disturb his caste identity. This is the inverse of what his children endure as Indian Christians whose troubled lives result from their inability to pass as authentic members of either colonial or indigenous circles.

Moral and physical decay, a strand of orientalist explanation of the history of India before it was replaced with the regime of classificatory studies, provides a wellspring of morality in the novel: "Cholera and the Thug were born in the same country and in the same year. India is their native land...Born of corruption, nature destined them for one and the same mission. They live on death" (GOMES, 1971, p. 36). Because of explanatory structures that dissolve the boundaries of the individual, social, physical and moral, the novel has been read as typifying the cusp between late Romanticism and European idealism (MACHADO, 2008).

⁹ Machado notes that *Os bramânes* repeats the logic of colonialism and stays within the framework of colonial rule.

¹⁰ Singha notes the discomfiture of Company officials who found that crime did not "seem to erode a person's reputation provided caste rules were not infringed," and describes the indecision over how to punish a brahmin criminal.

Visual and verbal description as narrative symbols

The following sections detail the narrative slide towards the visual and verbal codes of colonial knowledge production, to indicate how they are reabsorbed into the moral framework of the novel in the form of verbal symbols. *Os brahmanes* translates the experience of a colonial elite in the fourth century of Portuguese colonial rule encountering the ascendance of the English, by deploying codes of visual representation recently authorized by British commentators, but that had acquired layers over centuries in the travelogues of other European travellers.

I. The Bungalow

The first chapter titled, “The bungalow”, begins with a brief historical account of the British acquisition of Oudh as a descent into the “abyss of the British Empire”, from which Fyzabad still retained a fragile autonomy as a remnant of the Suja-ud-Daulah dynasty (GOMES, 1971, p. 16). A bungalow on a hillock is then described with its enclosing foliage, extending in a mass “down the hill until it was lost in the extensive plains below” (GOMES, 1971, p. 16). Phrases such as: “there glittered to the left, in the light of the bright tropical sun, the waters of the Gogra”, suggest that the descriptive account repeated the act of looking at a picture of the bungalow as though it were a figure in a wider image of a landscape. Thus our eye loses sight of the foliage, as it is lost in the plains below, as though we were fixed at a particular point in space. Our view of the tropical sun, “to the left” of the bungalow reinforces this positioning (GOMES, 1971, p. 16).

This distanced eye then shifts to a closer view: “On closer examination, the bungalow conveyed an idea of Oriental luxury and of the light and graceful style of Indian architecture” (GOMES, 1971, p. 16). The structural elements of the bungalow are described less as they strike the eye than to draw attention to stylistic highlights, as an architect might, commenting on how the vines and flowers and the punkahs in the verandah are designed to cool the structure. Another sensory element, the perfume emanating from the “aromatic roots and perennial flowers” of sandalwood is noted. The perspective widens once more to describe the stone steps leading from the verandah right down to the foot

of the hill, encased in a canopy of overhanging vines. The last paragraph begins with the sentences:

In India, similar bungalows are not rare, in which luxury vies with the conveniences and comforts of life – real temples wherein the Nawab, the Rajah and the Sahib, reclining on the richest ottomans in a state of voluptuous drowsiness, receive the adoration of crowds of submissive and lazy servants. The reader has doubtless heard of the bungalow of General Claude Martin, *Constancia*... (GOMES, 1971, p. 16)

The initial description of the bungalow incorporates at least two points of vision, rendering what could be a photograph or painting of a bungalow on a hillock. The view closer to the exterior of the bungalow however, verbally presents the structure through smell and structural detail, as a combination of Oriental luxury and Indian architecture, as though repeating an architectural description of houses in India. The suggestion that both of these derive from orientalist and colonial accounts of the physical attributes of India is strengthened by the transition from description to generalization – “In India, similar bungalows are not rare [...]” which transforms the preceding paragraph from an individualized instance to an exemplary one, and the bungalow becomes a sensory metaphor of political decline and social decay. As the bungalow turns into a type, narrative time is briefly stalled to detail the symbolic construction of the bungalow as a temple of luxury, of excess, which leads to the corruption of the oriental body politic. The last line of the paragraph returns the reader and the bungalow to history, to its owner, Claude Martin, whose bungalow *Constancia* features in histories of rebellion, and is pinned to verifiable historical facts. The framework for the moral structure of the novel is put in place with the image of reclining rulers, and pressessorientalist description into the service of a moral order that was also a product of early orientalist imaginings of moral decay and sexual and corporeal decadence.

The juxtaposition of tropical pastoral as a genre to represent nature, alongside orientalist decadence to depict the interiors of the bungalow is repeated in another description of the bungalow with an account of the intertwined areca nut grove and pepper tree, providing shelter with their interlaced “thousand and one pillars”, from which “is seen at a distance the sun of the tropics scor-

ching with its heat extensive plains [...] It is the blaze of noonday out there; here the morning just begins; here the cocks always crow; [...] here the shepherd rests from the fatigue of the day [...]" (GOMES, 1971, p. 54).

In contrast, inside the bungalow, Robert Davis, the English "nawab" is described reclining and being sung to, by a Brahmin, about the rescue of Sita. The detailed interiors of the bungalow, Davis' expensive art objects and possessions and vivid clothing are a cornucopia of colour, textile and valuable oriental handicrafts. The Rebellion of 1857 is in this way, foretold as the product of the moral flaws of the rulers of India.

The areca nut is mentioned again at a later stage, but this time it is served by a dancer to her audience, and is explained as "the Indian masticatory", a deflection towards the classificatory categories of colonial botany (GOMES, 1971, p. 113). It becomes evident that Luís Gomes leans on the many strands of orientalist representation available by the mid-century. Botanical and descriptive accounts had been available to him from non-English sources, and English accounts would have provided the modified pastoral and the rigors of natural history as ways to contain perceptions and experiences of the colony. The post-1857 novel had begun to cull the growing authority of colonial writing.

II. The banyan tree

There are instances however, when ethnographic description is most proximate to the commissioned report, when it stands apart from the logic that weaves together other sections of the novel, a feature that becomes more prominent through the century in other novels. In *Os brahmanes*, these sections occasion temporary intervals in the movement of characters; once when they arrive at their host, the Nawab of Kanpur's house as wedding guests, and the next is when they are on their journey home. The Nawab's entertainment for his guests involves nautch dancing, (preceded by the narrator's parallel between the European prostitute and the Indian nautch girl and the nautch girl and the devadasi) a simulated tiger-fight performed by the Nawab's son and a view of a wondrous banyan tree, a tree "that tradition relates", could afford shelter to a whole regiment (GOMES, 1971, p. 115).

As an audience for staged wedding entertainment, the protagonists plausibly participate in the pleasure of viewing what are represented as indigenous forms of entertainment, to be distinguished from their own culture as English or Anglicised subjects. The act of looking does not seem out of the ordinary in the case of the first two forms of entertainment, but the third diversion, appreciating the dimensions of the banyan tree, objectify it as a wondrous plant of the Orient by aligning it with the performances to be viewed. Yet this act of viewing is partially deflected from an orientalist frame as the novel produces a symbol (akin to the bungalow) from a cluster of images. The banyan tree is said to have roots that form “arched gates [...] rooms and storeys; that houses at least five varieties of birds, performing the hymn of the Dawn” (GOMES, 1971, p. 115). From its dimensions, we are led to “[...] imagine Christians, Fakirs and Yogis slumbering beneath these vaults and, at the break of day, beginning in divers languages and creeds their morning prayers, which are not reverberated by echoes, but appear rather to ascend straight to heaven [...]” (GOMES, 1971, p. 115).

We are invited to “picture [...] a temple uniting the symmetry of the basilica with the extravagance of the pagoda [...] open to all and closed against none” (GOMES, 1971, p. 115).

“(B)ehold the banyan-tree of India”, the narrator urges, “the temple of all religions, the inn of all pilgrims, the ark of Noah...” (ibidem, loc. cit.). By synthesizing preachers of various religions under the tree, *Os brahmanes* uses an associative logic common to Romantic novels, to create a symbol of perennial and diffuse religiosity. This labored symbol thwarts the scopic pleasure of looking, providing the context for a gaze but replacing its object with a verbally layered symbol instead of seemingly unmediated description. It needs to be read along with other references to Christianity in the text, that try to restore an ethical charge to the religion, deploying it against racism and discrimination while staying within the political constructs of colonial rule.

Long before the mid-nineteenth century, the banyan tree had become an orientalist trope, (initially associated with the fig tree) and figured in travelogues

describing its size and capacity for regeneration.¹¹ It figured as a noteworthy species in both East Africa and India, in botanical accounts by the Portuguese and Dutch. By the seventeenth century, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier's image of a tree with temples and fakirs beneath it circulated widely and generated adaptations and copies (TAVERNIER; CLOUSIER; BARBIN, 1676). Tavernier's text among others, associated banyan trees with temples and divinity, so that both image and text furnished a symbol of Hinduism (PINNEY, 1992).¹² Botanical metaphors typified aspects of life in the colonies, and the banyan tree, as historians Bernard Cohn and Ronald Inden have noted, denoted grotesque, uncontrollable growth, or, conversely, plenitude (PINNEY, 1992).

As a metaphor for the spread of Christianity, it sometimes appears as an impediment to growth – its spreading shade allowing nothing to grow beneath, though it perhaps more frequently helped produce “flowery accounts of mission transformed by the alien botany of the banyan tree” (TENNANT, 2013, p. 266; ANDERSON, 1857, p. 17).¹³ In India, it featured in accounts of miraculous acts and divine power but the missionary under the banyan tree was a stock verbal image in texts about Christian evangelicalism (MOSSE, 2012).¹⁴ Luís Gomes draws on the accruing connotations to the tree, derived from missionary and Christian narratives of India, but transforms the tree itself into a symbol of civilizational unity.

¹¹ While Philemon Holland's 1601 translation of Pliny's *Natural history* mentions the Indian fig tree, Portuguese accounts also associated the *Ficus Indica* with the *Ficus Ethiopica* (YULE; BURNELL, 1996, p. 65). A glossary of 'Luso-Asiatic' terms produced in 1919 lists at least sixteen texts dating from the mid-sixteenth century, which describe the banyan tree (DALGADO, 1919, p. 60-61).

¹² Christopher Pinney details cultural difference and fecundity as some of the pliable meanings that could lend their associations to objects or figures placed next to the tree.

¹³ It featured once in the context of the New Hebrides, as an analogy for the human body that could spread the word of God, but was also a mortal vessel like the roots of the tree (MICHELSEN; SCOTT, [1893] 2010, p. 24).

¹⁴ At least two accounts by missionaries mention preaching under a banyan tree as a common enough activity, suggesting that this was a practice that also became, as Pinney suggests, a composite image of preaching in India (LOWRIE, 1842, p. 123).

III. Watching the sepoys

Lastly, the text foregrounds a third image, that of the Indian sepoy, often the subject of colonial photography, and whose physical endurance perhaps circulated as legend after the Rebellion of 1857. Indian sepoys initially appear in *Os brahmanes*, as objectified life forms. On the journey back from a ball, the protagonists who have recently arrived from England are invited by their English companion “to watch the sepoy’s supper” (GOMES, 1971, p. 138). This invitation, issued when the caravan of wedding guests are settled for the night, is inserted into the story as a diversion. The narrator enumerates the details of the sepoy’s diet, proof of the inverse relationship between the sepoys’ endurance of long campaigns and the quantity they eat: “When the sepoy is about to start on a journey, he orders circular cakes (*apas*) of the flour of nachiny (*dolichus biflorus*), a span in diameter and of the thickness of a Carlisle biscuit [...] As a rule he never eats more than two cakes a day” (GOMES, 1971, p. 138).

The protagonists watch thirty or forty men eat and sing as a kind of live exhibit. There are however, two scenes that meet the eyes of those who watch. While the soldiers dine at the foot of a tree, a reclining Brahmin at the foot of another tree reads to four or five men, providing a story within a story. The book he reads from is the *Hitopadesa*, “a collection of maxims and tales” which was available in English translation from the 1830s, and whose narratives were often embedded within longer tales.¹⁵

The narrator intervenes: “Richard and his fair companions wished to hear the reading. Let us listen also”. The reader is drawn, along with sepoys, the narrator and the protagonists into watching and listening, temporarily replicating the structure of the *Hitopadesa*. A brief story of false and true friendship ends the chapter with the sentence, “Here the Brahman closed the book”, pronounced by the narrator who withdraws from the frame of the story within a story. (GOMES, 1971, p. 141) As the protagonists switch from watching sepoys to listening, narrative authority is lent to the reading Brahmin and to the *Hitopadesa*. In *Os*

¹⁵ Translations of the *Hitopadesha* into English were available from 1830 (Nayalankar’s translation) with a translation by Vishnu Sharmar in 1841 and Wilkins’ translation emerging in 1844 (LAKSAMINI NĀRĀYANA NYĀLANKĀRA, 1830; SHARMAN, 1841; WILKINS, 1844).

Brahmanes, upper castes, such as Magnod struggle to retain authority under colonial rule. The brahmin reader on the other hand, figures as the voice and symbol of indigenous knowledge recovered and subordinated to colonial rule.¹⁶

These brief episodes are situated in a time and space that is removed from the main plot of the novel. Yet these departures are scarcely obtrusive in a novel, which combines disquisitions on moral and civilizational crises with rapid tragic developments. The muted moral centre of this novel is the retiring figure of a Catholic priest who begins to work towards the end of the novel to bring the brahmin back from the brink of murderous revenge. Yet none of these figures emerges as distinct from the social conflict or moral dilemma they represent. At a time when the “Evangelical, crusading tone of the British Indian administration of the 1830’s [...] played up [...] small-scale marauding groups [...] into a hideous, widespread religious conspiracy, somehow typical of India and Indian ‘national character’”, the novel as a form, often did not carve out a conception of character that was very different (GORDON, 1969a, p. 429). In fulfilling and anticipating what ethnography would do to an understanding of Indian society, *Os brahmanes* opens up the possibility of examining a continuum of narrative strategies between the report and the novel.

The cross-embedding of official forms of writing with the novel has a long history in works that examine the significance of forms of writing in early centuries of colonial rule in Latin America (GONZÁLEZ ECHEVARRÍA, ROBERTO, 1990; PRATT, 1992). Nineteenth century representations in Goa often embodied the intense pressure to acknowledge the shift from an Iberian political culture to an Anglocentric one, with the differences between the two emphasized by the dominant power. Luís Gomes’ novel however, continues to be informed by humanist conceptions of difference and an impetus to synthesize difference into a whole, a remnant of the Iberian tradition that reappears in this novel to transform categories of classification and orientalist signs of difference such as the banyan tree, into moral and visual symbols of civilizational unity. Studies of colonial rule in Latin America constitute an underexplored theoretical resource for the analysis of colonial India, particularly so for Goa where the encounter between different colonial traditions can be unraveled through a recognition of the

¹⁶ The *Hitopadesha* was translated at approximately the same time as Sleeman began to publish his letters on Thuggee.

varying political concepts and forms through which difference was encountered and negotiated, and brought into sharp confrontation in the nineteenth century.

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