Postcolonial social drama: The case of Brazilian dentists in Portugal

Angela Torresan
University of Manchester, UK

Abstract
By the late 1990s, when I was conducting ethnographic fieldwork research in Lisbon, the ‘dentists’ case’ had become a familiar trope for the presence of Brazilian immigrants in Portugal. Although it involved a small group of Brazilian and Portuguese professionals, it gained visibility in the media of both countries, escalating into a political and diplomatic quarrel, and culminating in the amendment of the 1966 Cultural Accord. I use Victor Turner’s concept of social drama to address the case as a chapter in the cyclical pattern of connection and disconnection of postcolonial Luso-Brazilian relationships. Drawing from a recent discussion on the concept of cosmopolitanism in migration studies, I employ the idea of postcolonial sociabilities to help explore the seemingly inherent ambiguities in the relationship between Brazilians and Portuguese.

Keywords
Brazilian immigrants, Luso-Brazilian relationships, migration, sociability, social drama

Postcolonial Luso-Brazilian relationships have been subject to a continuous process of redefinition over the last two centuries, wavering between difference and commonality in a game of doubles (Bhabha, 1994) that has never achieved a sharply defined binary. In her analysis of Luso-Brazilian relationships,
Feldman-Bianco (2001a) describes this ambiguity as a play of sameness and difference that is expressed in an old rhetoric of common descent. Since Brazilian independence in 1822, Brazilians and Portuguese have used an idiom of Luso-Brazilian brotherhood, of common historical roots, friendship links, and reciprocity of treatment (Ribeiro, 2002, 2010) that has continued to be called on in recent exchanges between the two countries. However, together with this magnanimous idiom of common descent, comes a set of resilient and pliable racialised colonial and postcolonial stereotypes. These representations are often deployed in the supple parlance with which the postcolonial Luso-Brazilian contact is recounted in the Brazilian and Portuguese media, in diplomatic avenues, in scholarly work, and by people on the streets. Either in spite of, or owing to, the ambiguity of Luso-Brazilian relationships, the mutual representations have also served as a racial and cultural element of mimesis and self-authorship in the other’s hegemonic national ideology. This, in turn, has helped to establish national identities through cultural symbols that converge and separate, which are at times ambivalent, at times essentialising.

In this article, I employ Victor Turner’s (1974) model of social drama to explore a specific example of how this relationship was reconfigured during the first wave of contemporary Brazilian migration to Portugal. This case concerns the widely publicised dispute between Brazilian dentists, who were practising their profession in Portugal in the 1990s, and their Portuguese counterparts. Between the late 1980s and early 2000s, the dentists’ case became a widespread trope for this unprecedented presence of middle-class professional Brazilians in Portugal. Old mutual prejudices (Ribeiro, 2002) reappeared with new political garb as Portugal found itself caught between its then recent position as a member of the European Union (EU), with all the regulations with which it had to comply, and its equally recent situation as a destination for immigrants from its former colonies. Like every phase in the Luso-Brazilian postcolonial cycle, this encounter had its own idiosyncratic elements; the various mechanisms put in place to define Brazilians as immigrants according to immigration control policies consonant with EU regulations triggered a public discussion about the validity of the links which had tied together the destiny of both countries. The mirror image that had so often been at the foundation of political affective discourses of historical friendship, reciprocity and common destiny began to give way to the pressure of a new political project of European nation-statehood. Such attempts to engender a new clear-cut division between Brazilians and Portuguese were part of a cycle of constant and simultaneous connection and disconnection between the two countries and people, a cycle that I term postcolonial sociabilities.

The Luso-Brazilian postcolonial moment comprises both a historical period after Brazilian independence from Portugal, and a discursive field of power relationships informed by a long common history. Cautious about the idea of rupture which studies on postcoloniality have often emphasised (Bastos et al., 2002), Feldman-Bianco (2001b) urges scholars to examine the continuities of the former colonial relationships in terms of sameness as well as difference in order
to understand the rearrangement of colonial legacies within contemporary global capitalism. Other authors have examined different aspects of Luso-Brazilian relationships, and their combined production provides a much more nuanced presentation of this history than I have room to set out here (see Feldman-Bianco, 2001a; Horta, 2009; Ribeiro, 2002, 2010; Souza et al., 2010; Thomaz, 2002; Vieira, 1991). Following Feldman-Bianco (2001a), this analysis focuses on how a specific chapter in the relationships between Brazil and Portugal brought into relief this cycle of sameness and difference and marked the onset of the current disposition of Luso-Brazilian ties. The Brazilian dentists’ case occurred at a time when the presence of Brazilian migrants in Portugal was still a novelty, but already influential enough to provoke public reactions ranging from enthusiastic approval to plainly xenophobic.

The multiplicity of exchanges and negotiations between the categories of Brazilian and Portuguese, the unsettled boundaries and identities, and the political and diplomatic disputes the dentists’ case raised, while complex and at times chaotic, in fact obeyed a cyclical pattern of postcolonial sociabilities. That is, the many breaches, in Turner’s (1974) term, within Luso-Brazilian relationships resulted not in absolute ruptures, but in continuities that went through sometimes traumatic processes of renewal. The concept of sociabilities is useful here because it foregrounds the concomitance of collaboration and dispute, a combination that is at the heart of Turner’s model of social drama. Sociability (Glick-Schiller et al., 2011) highlights the interactional and contextual aspects of Luso-Brazilian colonial legacies, locating the paradoxes and ambiguities in specific moments. Turner’s model of social drama helps to situate these moments in the cyclical nature of the relationships between social groups whose projects of self-identity are intrinsically linked to experiences of past interactions.

The notion of stereotype is important. It aligns with Stoler’s reading of Foucault’s 1976 lectures, in which he describes the ‘polyvalent mobility’ of certain notions (Stoler, 2000: 89, 2002: 149) that are reinscribed in renewed strategies, used for contradictory aims, and recounted in different discourses at different times, ‘making it possible with a particular set of concepts, to play different games’ (Foucault, 1972: 36–7, quoted in Stoler, 2002: 159). Stereotyping works by generalising notions that one believes to be true about the other and is, therefore, the other side of the coin of identity-making processes that contrast the self with a perceived different other, in what McDonald (1993: 222) calls ‘categorical mismatches’. The polyvalent versatility of stereotypes is what allows the same generalising notions to be deployed in a variety of shapes in different contexts.

The evidence I examine here, both the original ethnographic material and the newspaper articles, is almost 25 years old, dating from ethnographic fieldwork research on Brazilian middle-class migration I conducted in Lisbon between 1996 and 1997. Its current significance is both historical and anthropological. The group of Brazilians with whom I studied in Lisbon was part of a first wave of middle-class young, trained, urban Brazilian emigrants, which was later boosted by circular migration, family reunion and a more heavily lower-income base. In
view of what seems to be a new wave of middle- and upper-class Brazilian migration to Portugal, sparked by the current economic crisis and the emergence of extreme-right politics in Brazil, this article offers a historical and theoretical framework to new research on a recurrent theme. Furthermore, it explores the Luso-Brazilian setting as a constant reconfiguration of relationships that are experienced in everyday forms of collaboration and disputes between Brazilian migrants and Portuguese people that, in different spheres and with new shapes, are still relevant to the lives of those who are migrating now. The dentists’ case, for instance, resulted in the amendment of earlier diplomatic agreements in accordance with a new set of immigration rules that has greatly affected white-collar Brazilians’ prospects for exercising their profession in Portugal.

Sociability

Migration scholars at the turn of the millennium revived the concept of cosmopolitanism to critically address social scientists’ recurrent practice of reproducing in their theoretical frames the artificial boundaries of national identities (Ribeiro, 2005; Vertovec and Cohen, 2002; Werbner, 2006). This was a call for a humanist political project that highlighted connections beyond territorial borders and national allegiances (Cheah, 2006), and a general ‘willingness to engage with the Other’ (Hannerz, 1996: 103). Subsequently, Glick-Schiller et al. (2011) cautioned that although the literature on cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan diasporas offers a useful conceptual template to explore transnational cross-cultural encounters, it does so while taking for granted the very divisions created by the forces that it claims to challenge. Instead, they call for a working concept that enables researchers to explore instances of ‘sociability’ that do ‘not negate cultural or historical differences’ or divisions, but allow for the ‘simultaneity’ of multiple expressions of difference and sameness (Glick-Schiller et al., 2011: 403). As they see it, ‘cosmopolitan sociabilities’ refers to those moments when different people come together, even if temporarily, to ‘create relations of communality’ (2011: 414).

In the case of Luso-Brazilian relationships, at different moments in time Portuguese and Brazilians have been involved in a number of forms of social interaction and identification that could be defined as cosmopolitan sociabilities. A feeling of solidarity that comes from a sense of partaking in a common colonial history and language, despite unequal political and economic positions, has been synchronous with the need to create distinct postcolonial national identities and follow different nation-building projects. Such simultaneity of closeness and separation has resulted in the perception that Luso-Brazilian relationships contain an unusual and special kind of ambivalence, making it difficult to institute a clear division between the categories of Portuguese and Brazilian (Feldman-Bianco, 2001a, 2001b; Rocha-Trindade and Fiori, 2009; Santos, 2006; Xavier, 2007).

Notwithstanding later critical reviews, the adjective ‘cosmopolitan’ in the concept of cosmopolitan sociabilities still evokes ideas of universality and individualism that are not pertinent in the current analysis. Rather, the focus shifts to
historical, collective and contextual characteristics of sociability. Hence, sociability between Brazilians and Portuguese obeys concomitant cycles of communality, in which power struggles are suspended or used for a common purpose, and hierarchical distancing. When the latter are taken to the extreme, however, one side feels that the agreed terms of the relationship have been breached and the sociability has to be reshaped. This is what happened in the contentious dispute between Portuguese and Brazilian dentists. However, before I go on to explore how this happened in the dentists’ case, I should introduce this migratory process in the late 1990s context that I observed.

**Brazilians in Portugal**

I have shown elsewhere (Torresan, 2011, 2012) how, in the mid-1980s, people from different regions in Brazil and from all walks of life, tired of living in a persistent political and economic crisis, took up the idea that they could pursue their goals outside their country. The main destinations of this movement were the US, Japan (mostly for those of Japanese descent), Paraguay and Western European countries. Although at the time Portugal did not feature at the top of the list, a few crucial attributes made it very attractive for a significant group of professional Brazilians in the 1980s: the common language, the possibility to apply for Portuguese citizenship inherited from an immigrant progenitor, a handful of agreements that facilitated the transit of people between the two countries, an expanding job market in need of qualified professionals, and, of course, the familiar old rhetoric of common descent which gave the impression, as one of the Brazilians with whom I worked remarked, that ‘Portugal was a little like home’.

This first wave of Brazilian migration into Portugal, which lasted until the end of the 1990s, mostly comprised highly skilled middle-class professionals (Torresan, 2007). When I began conducting fieldwork in Lisbon in 1996, there were 20,082 Brazilians with legal residence in Portugal, most of them qualified professionals (SEF, 1997). The number of Brazilians increased annually, while the socio-economic and occupational profile gradually changed, until in 2010 it had reached its peak at 119,363 (SEF, 2011). Researchers defined this greater flow as a second wave of migrants, predominantly from less privileged backgrounds, with no formal qualifications, who entered the low-paid job market (Góis et al., 2009; Machado, 2009; Malheiro, 2007; Marques and Góis, 2008). Portugal’s adverse period of austerity (2011–15) in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis slowed this migration cycle. Brazilian arrivals contracted and the number of residents decreased by 30% in that period (Pereira and Esteves, 2017; SEF, 2017).

The cycle accelerated again in 2016, with the end of the Brazilian economic boom and the beginning of a damaging political crisis, which coincided with the recovery of the Portuguese economy. In 2018 the number of Brazilians legally residing in Portugal increased to 105,423 (SEF, 2019). Although still recent, França and Padinha (2018) have already identified this resurgence as a third migratory wave mainly due to the recurrence of a middle- and upper-class flow.
However, unlike the situation their compatriots found two decades earlier, the attraction for this group is no longer a favourable new market of qualified employment, but rather a series of immigration and tax incentives that Portugal put in place to attract foreign investment. Recent statistics also show a variance in terms of generation and distinction in occupational profile. In addition to qualified professionals, more higher-education students, investors and retirees seem to be leaving Brazil for Portugal (França and Padilla, 2018). Although additional research is required for further comparison, like their previous middle-class fellow nationals, this group of Brazilians seems to be running from a political and economic downturn that affects not only their financial stability but also their ability to reproduce their class position (Torresan, 2012).

Whether looking to recover or maintain their privileges, in the case of middle- and upper-class Brazilians, or improve their quality of life, in the case of working-class Brazilians, their presence over the last three decades has influenced Portuguese society in irreversible ways (Torresan, 2004; Machado, 2009; Malheiros, 2007; Padilla, 2006a, 2006b). Brazilians have not only occupied but also created qualified positions and new industries and commodities, participating in the construction of new spaces for Portuguese middle-class modern practices of consumption. Brazilian migrants have impacted the spoken Portuguese language, social practices and cultural codes of conduct that, for good or ill, are now part of Portugal.

Traditionally a sending country, Portugal only began receiving immigrants from its African colonies in the mid-1960s. This movement continued after colonial independence during Portugal’s Carnation Revolution in 1975 and with the creation of an interstate organisation comprising the five Lusophone African countries in 1992 (PALOP – African Countries of Portuguese Official Language). Immigration diversified and became a phenomenon of significant proportions after Portugal joined the European Economic Community in 1985/86 (renamed the European Union in 1991 by the Maastricht Treaty) (d’Almeida, 2004). It began receiving people not only from its former colonies, but also from Eastern Europe, India and eventually China. The Portuguese government responded swiftly to these changes. In a short period of time and in accordance with the Schengen Agreement, it caught up with the other EU member countries by implementing a series of laws regulating the entry, stay, work, family reunion and naturalisation of immigrants.

While some denounced the increasing immigration controls as evidence that Portugal was turning its back on old colonial alliances to embrace an unknown European future, others discredited the old rhetoric of friendship and a community of affection as a false dream and a delusion that had to be dismantled in order for Brazil and Portugal to develop a clear political and economic partnership (Lourenço, 1999). The diplomatic conflicts that arose in the 1990s also reflected the divergence of political views among Portuguese officials on the balance between Portugal’s European project and its connections with the colonial past.
Social drama

Turner’s model of social drama provides an effective framework to present this instance of Luso-Brazilian relationships. It helps to show that Luso-Brazilian postcolonial sociabilities, however ambiguous and varied, work in a spiral structure that goes beyond its specific social dramas. The idea of social drama involves three main supporting concepts. The first is ‘paradigms’, which consist of sets of rules and notions used to regulate social practice and interaction. Luso-Brazilian paradigms would include the rhetoric of common descent, symbolic kinship links and special friendship, but also the idea and practice of reciprocal rights between Brazilians and Portuguese in one another’s countries, rights that had been established by a series of accords signed by both countries during the large wave of Portuguese migration to Brazil in the 20th century.5

The second supporting concept is ‘fields’, which are the abstract cultural domains where paradigms are formulated, established and contested. In this case, the Luso-Brazilian fields would be the mutual images exchanged by Brazil and Portugal, constructed over time within the bounds of shared historical events. The final concept is ‘arenas’, which comprise the concrete settings where paradigms are transformed into metaphors and symbolic concepts according to which political power is mobilised. That is, the sites where the paradigmatic Luso-Brazilian historical connections and affective links descend into polyvalent stereotypes (Stoler, 2000, 2002) of, for instance, the humane and yet exploitative coloniser and rude Portuguese immigrant, and the sensual, friendly, but untrustworthy and irresponsible Brazilian. Arenas are an interesting idea, consisting of a variety of articulations and socio-political spaces. The arenas of the dentists’ case were the clinics where the Brazilians worked, the media that reported the conflict, the meetings between the two parties, and the political negotiations about reciprocal rights. Luso-Brazilian postcolonial sociabilities took place in all three domains; they were practised face to face in the concrete spaces of Brazilian circulation in Lisbon, but they were informed by the paradigms and stereotypes that were conveyed and discussed in the media of both countries and, in turn, informed the various instances of political negotiations.

Furthermore, a social drama is not a distinct phenomenon in itself; rather, it represents the ‘phased process’ (Turner, 1974: 17) through which paradigms and stereotypes circulate and different political forces are challenged. The following are the phases that loosely compose social dramas:

1. At first, there is a breach of contract between the parties. One believes that established norms, or paradigms, have been deliberately breached by the other party or parties in events that become ‘symbolic triggers of a confrontation’ (Turner, 1974: 38). These incidents have to become public in order to gain the status of a ‘dramatic breach’.
2. The second phase of the drama is the crisis. This happens when the conflict is extended to other areas of social interaction, ‘until it becomes coextensive with
some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which
the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong’ (Turner, 1974: 38). In other
words, a more extensive crisis usually follows the breach. This phase is also
highly public, exposing affairs that would otherwise be kept circumscribed
within an arena.
3. The third phase involves a ‘redressive action’ (Turner, 1974: 39), when there is
an effort to alleviate the crisis and limit its expansion through ‘adjustive and
redressive mechanisms’, usually employed by the leading participants. However,
the application of these rectifying mechanisms does not guarantee an end to the
social drama. Further transgressions can generate a relapse into crisis.
4. A solution can only be found by a process of ‘reintegration’ (Turner, 1974: 41)
or by ‘the social recognition and legitimisation of irreparable schism between
the contesting parties’. This constitutes the fourth and final phase in Turner’s
model.

Social dramas do not have to follow these phases in a linear way. For example,
a series of public breaches might occur before it becomes a crisis. Also, a crisis can
be solved for an undetermined period of time and may be triggered again even by a
slight incident of violation. The different participating parties may not necessarily
be related to fixed social groups; what is important is the construction of an
opposition, which can manifest itself in different ways, and which nourishes a
struggle for power. There are clear affiliations and splits between these parties,
but the criteria of what defines them, and who belongs where, are subject to con-
stant negotiation. Parties, like social categories, are also reproduced and renewed
in the very drama they provoke. It is the flexibility of Turner’s model that makes it
so productive for the analysis of public crisis of sociabilities between national
categories in migratory contexts.

Social drama: The dentists’ case

The social drama I describe here is grounded in long-term fieldwork research I
conducted in Lisbon between 1996 and 1997, when I interviewed Brazilians and
Portuguese who were directly or indirectly involved in the case. I also resort to
information I collected from large-circulation Portuguese and Brazilian newspa-
pers and magazine articles, which comprise the most public arena for the unfolding
of the drama. In addition to doing my own research in the archives of different
newspapers in Lisbon, I had access to the Portuguese newspapers and magazines
data bank of the Brazilian immigrant association House of Brazil (Casa do Brasil),
which housed a significant collection of items concerning Brazilian affairs in
Portugal dating back to the late 1980s. I do not have space here to develop an
analysis of the newspapers’ production, circulation and reception. Although I am
aware of the social and political implications in the knowledge produced by any
media, I used these publications independently of their political orientation as a
means of information to compile a story.
Like other liberal professionals, Brazilian dentists seized the opportunities offered by a booming Portuguese economy with a surplus of skilled jobs and a scarcity of qualified labour. The shortage of dentists in Portugal was announced in various Brazilian newspapers, helping to attract Brazilian dentists. The Brazilian newspaper *A Tribuna*, for instance, stated in 1980 that there was 1 dentist for every 10,000 Portuguese (*A Tribuna*, 1980). However, when the first wave of Brazilians arrived, a group of Portuguese dentists affiliated to the Medical Association of Portugal (Ordem dos Médicos de Portugal, OMP) had been trying to gain corporate autonomy and organise the practice of dentistry in Portugal. Their proposal was simple: to suspend the activity of those who had not attended one of the Portuguese schools of medical dentistry, and those whose foreign certificates did not comply with the European directives regarding dental practitioners. Accordingly, in 1989 the dentists’ section of the OMP began denouncing the practice of Brazilian dentists to the Public, Finance and Work Ministries and the Judiciary Police (*Expresso*, 1989). In 1991, the most active group of Portuguese dentists founded the Portuguese Association of Medical Dentists (APMD) and gained authority to fully regulate the practice of dentistry in Portugal. Registering with the APMD became a mandatory condition for practising dentistry anywhere in the country. Those holding foreign diplomas could only register after obtaining a certificate of recognition from one of the Portuguese public universities. Unauthorised practitioners were penalised with a five-year ban from registering with the association.

The main argument put forth by the APMD to restrict the practice of Brazilian dentists was that Brazilian dental training did not correspond to some of the criteria established by the 1978 European Council Directives. These sectoral directives were part of the EU instructions to supervise international movement in several health professions, including doctors, dentists, nurses and midwives. In fact, the courses offered in Brazilian universities fell one year short of the five-year full-time programme minimum requirement and there were differences in curriculum. At stake for Brazilian dentists was another set of legal agreements between Portugal and Brazil that they believed should take precedence over the European directive. Crucial to the Brazilian argument was Article 14 of the 1966 Cultural Accord (Brasil–Portugal, 1966), which stated that the governments of both countries would recognise the university degrees and professional titles of each other’s citizens, thus allowing them to practise their profession without legal restrictions.

In conflict with the Cultural Accord, in the late 1980s the Portuguese government granted public universities the right to recognise foreign qualifications. Recognition of titles then became linked to the varied interests of the universities and professional associations. Dentists in the APMD saw no reason why Brazilians should not comply with the same requirements as any other dentist qualifying at a university outside the EU territory. Exacerbating what was beginning to configure itself as a social drama, Brazilian dentists were well received by the general Portuguese public who attended their practices. In addition to the
scarcity of professionals, many patients favoured what they perceived as an informal and friendly and yet professional demeanour towards them, and the care they received. In this instance, the stereotype of the agreeable and outgoing Brazilian worked in favour of Brazilian dentists where their patients were concerned, which intensified the reaction of their Portuguese peers.

Returning to Turner’s model of social drama, this initial phase of the dispute signalled what he defines as a breach of contract. Both the Brazilian and Portuguese dentists contended that the other had deliberately breached established norms, or paradigms. On the one hand, the Portuguese party accused Brazilian dentists of practising illegally, according to the 1978 European Council Directives. In reply, the Brazilian party accused the APMD of infringing the 1966 Accord that had benefited Portuguese immigrants in Brazil less than 30 years earlier and, therefore, of breaching the Luso-Brazilian reciprocity paradigm. The two parties based their premises on clashing legal instruments, which created such divergent points of view that reaching common ground was nearly impossible. There were equivalent struggles with immigrant dentists in other European countries regarding the same directives, however, unlike those, the Brazilian dentists’ case in Portugal provoked a public dispute and eventually a diplomatic quarrel that exceeded the boundaries of its own corporate protectionism. Such incidents become ‘symbolic triggers of a confrontation’ (Turner, 1974: 38) but only gain the status of a ‘dramatic breach’ when they become public.

After the APMD imposed the European directives on Brazilian dentists, many found themselves in a bureaucratic limbo. In order to apply for a residence permit, immigrants had to produce a promise of a job contract, or the contract itself, and show evidence of qualifications to practise in Portugal. This required their degrees to be recognised by the Portuguese educational system. If the universities did not accredit their diplomas, they could not gain full residency and had to work with a temporary residence visa while waiting for a permanent residence permit. According to stories I heard from Brazilian dentists who had been in Portugal at the end of the 1980s and the media material I gathered, the APMD fuelled a public campaign against them in the newspapers. Many articles lumped Brazilian professionals together with other non-qualified practitioners in a public discourse that pleaded for caution and tried to provoke fear in the general public, who were portrayed as innocent victims of illegal charlatans. Different agents engaged with the premises of this campaign in different ways at various times. Portuguese newspapers covered the dispute with both alarmist (Correio da Manhã, 1991; Diário de Notícias, 1991), and more practical (Expresso, 1991; O Jornal, 1991; O Público, 1991b) diagnoses and at the same time published accounts and opinions of people expressing their sympathy with one side or the other, or bemoaning the absurdity of it all (O Jornal, 1992; O Público, 1991d). On the other hand, Brazilian newspapers in general published articles that expressed open discontent with the case, highlighting Portuguese racism and further fuelling stereotypes (Jornal do Brasil, 1992; O Globo, 1991, 1992). Opinions were far from consistent, but one event worked as a strong ‘symbolic trigger of the confrontation’ (Turner, 1974: 38). In
March 1992, Portuguese dental students protested in the streets of Lisbon against the presence of Brazilian dentists, carrying placards with remarks that, according to the Portuguese newspaper *O Público*, racialised their Brazilian colleagues: ‘out with devil’s Zeca’ and ‘Brazilians only in soap-operas’ (*O Público*, 1992). As the dispute reached the streets, old stereotypes of uncivilised, fraudster and trickster Brazilians were publicly re-enacted leaving immigrants in general feeling betrayed.

A Portuguese dentist I interviewed in 1996, who was an early member of the APMD and active in campaigning for the regulation of the profession in Portugal, resonated with the European-leaning discourse put forth by Cavaco Silva, Portuguese Prime Minister at the time:

“It was not an attack on Brazilians, even though some newspapers exaggerated the plot, it was a matter of regulating a professional field. We have nothing against Brazilian dentists, but they can’t arrive here and just work as if they were in Brazil. They need to comply with the laws. We know that there are good schools in Brazil, but there are some pretty bad ones and we don’t want inept professionals practising without being checked. It’s not a matter of controlling the job market but of public health. Many Portuguese who were practising without the proper qualifications were also affected. What Brazilians don’t understand is that our campaign was not targeted at them.”

Notwithstanding the pragmatic stance of the above argument, many Brazilian dentists and government officials had interpreted the campaign as a discriminatory act and a ‘dramatic breach’ (Turner, 1974) in the long-established paradigms of historical friendship and, most importantly, reciprocity based on diplomatic accords. What the Brazilians asked for was not to be treated like just any immigrant, but to be granted the same special treatment Luso-Brazilian sociabilities had conceded to Portuguese immigrants in Brazil.

A group of Brazilian dentists took their case to the Brazilian Odontological Association (OBO) and registered within it a Portuguese branch of the OBO, the Brazilian Ontological Association in Portugal (OBOP). The OBOP pleaded for assistance from different bodies of the Brazilian government, both in Portugal and in Brazil. Different parts of the Brazilian and Portuguese governments became involved in the quarrel. In late 1991 a group of Brazilian congressmen arrived in Portugal specifically to discuss the dentists’ case with their Portuguese colleagues (*O Público*, 1991c). The social drama reached its second phase, the crisis, which occurs when the conflict is extended to other areas of the interaction, ‘until it becomes coextensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting or antagonistic parties belong’ (Turner, 1974: 38). The case became coextensive with other diplomatic disputes over reciprocity of treatment and immigration control of Brazilians.

In 1993, a new law was designed to bring Portuguese immigration control into conformity with EU directives regarding the movement of non-communitarian foreigners, and especially in anticipation of the application of the Schengen Agreement. The prerogative to partake in the Schengen Agreement required following austere EU policies of immigration restraint and the exclusion of
immigrants from the celebrated European citizenship. In spite of some clauses positively discriminating in favour of Lusophonic foreigners, the admission of Brazilians into Portuguese territory had to comply with the conditions required from any other foreigner seeking entry (for instance, the possession of enough resources to provide for the entire duration of the visit, a valid address and a valid return ticket).

During this time an incident of border control prompted the first diplomatic crisis in the initial phase of Luso-Brazilian relationships within the context of Brazilian migration: the Portela case. In 1992, in anticipation of the Schengen Treaty, 11 Brazilians were prevented from entering Portugal at the Lisbon airport, Portela. At first, the Brazilian authorities protested over the strictness of the control, which Portuguese representatives dismissed by referring to Portugal’s new responsibility for securing EU territorial borders and remarking that those obstructed did not meet the new minimum requirements for entry as tourists. During this time an incident of border control prompted the first diplomatic crisis in the initial phase of Luso-Brazilian relationships within the context of Brazilian migration: the Portela case. In 1992, in anticipation of the Schengen Treaty, 11 Brazilians were prevented from entering Portugal at the Lisbon airport, Portela. At first, the Brazilian authorities protested over the strictness of the control, which Portuguese representatives dismissed by referring to Portugal’s new responsibility for securing EU territorial borders and remarking that those obstructed did not meet the new minimum requirements for entry as tourists.13

Brazilian officials then objected to the way immigration officers were mistreating Brazilian citizens at the airport, and demanded proper lodging for the group of 11 travellers and for any other Brazilians who might face the same situation in the future. Aggravating the situation, the Portuguese ambassador in Brazil declared publicly that Portugal could not give leave to a group of ‘vagabonds’ and ‘nice little mulatto women in miniskirts’, who pretended to be tourists but in fact intended to work (Folha de São Paulo, 1993). The explicit racism of his remark widened the diplomatic chasm, reaching the higher political echelons of both countries. It also escalated the heated discussion surrounding the dentists’ case. When the Portela case erupted, Brazilian dentists jumped on the bandwagon and turned their specific corporate struggle into a cause against the discrimination of Brazilians in general. As a Brazilian dentist reported to me in 1997:

“We realised then that our case was not only one of professional regulation but of regulations that discriminated against Brazilians. These problems started to generate an anti-Brazilian sentiment everywhere. The dental students demonstrated against us, Brazilians were apprehended in the airports, people began to look at us with reservation, and we’d hear racist remarks even at the beach. We know and they [the Portuguese dentists involved in the APMD] know that our qualification is better even if our course is shorter. It hasn’t been about us being unqualified even though this is what the APMD wants the public to believe. It’s because they don’t want the jobs in the hands of Brazilians, even when there was a serious shortage of dentists. The Portuguese, it has to be said, are racists.”

The polyvalence of certain notions is thrown into relief here. While the idea of friendliness, frequently attributed to Brazilian immigrants in Portugal, worked for the relationships some Brazilian dentists had established with their patients, in the Portuguese ambassador’s reference to low-income mixed-race Brazilian women caught at the airport immigration control, it was synonymous with prostitution.

The dentists’ case continued in an increasingly hostile diplomatic and public environment. To make matters worse, the Brazilian dentists’ suspicion that the APMD was running a smear campaign against them was further reinforced when
the association began summoning the police to investigate clinics that employed Brazilian dentists and prosecuting a number of those who were practising without their diplomas from Brazil having been recognised by Portuguese universities and without APMD registration. Bela, one of the Brazilians I interviewed in 1996, described that period as one of heightened tensions:

"I was in the clinic one day and received the visit of two undercover police officers who asked for my documents and my registration in the APMD. I showed them my documents but had no APMD registration. I couldn’t register because I couldn’t get the recognition of my diploma. They told me I was going to be summoned by the court and that I had to stop practising. It was very humiliating and I felt like a criminal. My patients would often ask me whether I was illegal and I had to explain to them that I was only illegal because my Brazilian diploma was not recognised by the [Portuguese] universities. I showed them that I did have a diploma on my wall. We began feeling really attacked when the police started showing up unannounced at the clinics where Brazilians worked. Up until then it was a public smear campaign, but with the prosecutions it escalated into a war."

Like many other Brazilians, Bela had only acquired permanent resident status with the 1992/93 extraordinary regularisation process. Despite holding a permanent resident visa, Bela had not yet managed to have her diploma recognised, at the time of our interview, nor was she registered in the APMD. Bela’s ambiguous situation was typical of most Brazilian dentists practising when I conducted my fieldwork in Lisbon in the late 1990s.

In an attempt to alleviate the escalating dentists’ crisis, in 1992 the Portuguese government implemented a ‘redressive action’ (Turner, 1974), which took the form of an ordinance that legalised administratively the professional status of Brazilian dentists already practising in Portugal. Redressive actions feature as the third phase in Turner’s model, where there is an effort to limit the expansion of the crisis. The solution was to create an exceptional technical category of surgeon dentists maintaining the distinction between Brazilians and their Portuguese counterparts, the medical dentists. However, the ordinance was unpopular with both parties and did not solve the long-term problem. With no real equivalence of diplomas, Brazilian dentists argued that the exceptionality of this measure would still cast doubt on their professional competence. In 1993, the APMD contested the ordinance judicially. In an act of protest the APMD declined the right of registration to these newly regulated surgeons and maintained the litigation it had initiated against them (Machado, 2001). The APMD also summoned the EU Comité de Liaison Dentaire to put pressure on the Portuguese government to resist Brazil’s demands. With this turn of events, the Brazilian government refused to negotiate any changes to the provisions of the 1966 Cultural Accord, which had been the condition for legalising the 417 Brazilian dentists who would have benefited from the ordinance, and which the Portuguese universities and government had been eager to accomplish.

In an outburst, the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and future Brazilian President, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, evoked the Luso-Brazilian reciprocity
paradigm: ‘we have never asked any Portuguese immigrant what they came to do here, we just let them in’ (Folha de São Paulo, 1993). In the midst of this critical phase of both the dentists’ case and the Portela drama, Brazilian President Itamar Franco revoked a couple of clauses in Brazilian immigration law that guaranteed special privileges to Portuguese immigrants. The same kind of restrictions the Portuguese law had enforced on Brazilians were now being imposed on the Portuguese entering Brazil (O Público, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c). The Brazilian immigrant association, the House of Brazil (Casa do Brasil), and governmental and non-governmental agents who had been voicing their opinion on the changes in Portugal and Brazil, criticised Franco’s decision to amend the articles, arguing that this would weaken even further the paradigm of reciprocity.

The Portuguese Prime Minister, Cavaco Silva, whose Social Democratic Party (PSD) kept him in office from 1985 to 1995, constantly reiterated the need for Portugal to conform to the new European regulations. He offered no apologies for the Portuguese ambassador’s gaffe nor seemed willing to interfere any further in the dentists’ dispute. Meanwhile, the Portuguese President, Mário Soares, from the opposing Socialist Party (PS), embraced a conciliatory role. Soares tirelessly repeated the rhetoric of Lusofonia, of historical connections, community of affection, and common destiny that united both countries, while condemning the new immigration policies (O Público, 1991a). These two major political figures used their political position to demarcate their differences with one another and maintain the appearance of balance within the administration. As Cavaco Silva endorsed stronger immigration controls, establishing a clear hierarchy within this new European articulation, Mário Soares professed that Portugal’s European project did not have to be incompatible with its Lusophone alliances.

Regardless of the differences between the Portela and dentists’ cases – one the result of a clumsy enforcement of a new immigration control law at the border involving low-income Brazilians, the other a case of internal immigration control brought into play by a professional class concerning middle-class Brazilians who were earning good salaries and were well-informed of their rights – the Portuguese ambassador’s remarks seemed to have had the effect of racialising Brazilian immigrants in general, feeding on old stereotypes. It was the racist effects of such control – the practices of discrimination, of classification and differentiation – that resonated with stereotypical racial categories (Stoler, 2002; Wade, 1997) and which most offended middle-class Brazilians living in Portugal and the Brazilian diplomatic circles. On the other hand, many Brazilian newspaper articles and people I interviewed would underline another set of stereotypes against the Portuguese. Instances of corporate protection and immigration control turned the Portuguese into people ungrateful for the reception of Portuguese immigrants in Brazil in the mid-20th century.

After a while, diplomatic relations between Brazil and Portugal were tainted by failed attempts to solve the dentists’ conundrum. This continued for almost a decade. At last, under pressure from political officials of both countries, the APMD and the OBOP reached a special agreement in 1999. It stated that after
one year of supplementary courses, Brazilian dentists would gain recognition of their diplomas and be accepted into the APMD. In compliance with Turner’s model of social drama, the solution was achieved by what he defines as a process of reintegration: ‘the social recognition and legitimisation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties’ (Turner, 1974: 41). All parties recognised and legitimated the irreparable rupture in the original social contract of reciprocity at the foundation of Luso-Brazilian diplomatic accords, finally leading to a change in the provisions of some 1966 Cultural Accord articles by which Brazilian dentists had claimed their right to practise in Portugal.

The alteration of the 1966 Accord acknowledged Portuguese universities’ authority to review Brazilian diplomas and secured Portuguese professional associations’ total autonomy to regulate their respective practices, ultimately transferring to them the power to control the qualified job market. As Machado (2001) rightly argues, this resolution was detrimental to other Brazilian professionals entering Portugal after 1999, ending a reciprocity agreement that had been ‘good for immigrants’ on both sides, for the benefit of a small group of Brazilian and Portuguese dentists. Machado also recalls how, at the ceremony that celebrated the end of the dispute, dentists of the APMD and the OBOP joined in the old rhetoric of Lusofonia, paying tribute to the historical friendship and community of affection between Brazil and Portugal, following the spiral cycle of Luso-Brazilian postcolonial sociabilities.

**Conclusion**

Recurrent instances of ‘breach of contract’ (Turner, 1974) would lead to other ripples in the social drama involving immigration control versus the rhetoric of irrevocable historical links, which required consecutive actions of redress. Over the decades the global position of Brazil and Portugal would change in a way that both Portuguese and Brazilians would have found difficult to predict at the time I was doing fieldwork in Lisbon. Migration flows between the two countries adjusted to alternate periods of political and economic expansion and retraction in Brazil and in Portugal.

The first decade of the 21st century was marked by economic growth and political optimism in Brazil, and the country sailed through the 2008 global financial crisis. Portugal, however, was deeply affected by the same global crisis and was forced to implement a series of austerity measures that decelerated immigration flows, simultaneously prompting a surge in emigration numbers. Between 2010 and 2014, Portuguese people crossed the Atlantic again in a migratory wave that resembled the first tide of Brazilians to Portugal in the mid-1980s. Attracted by the shortage of skilled workers in specific sectors of the growing Brazilian job market, Portuguese professionals went in search of better opportunities. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Justice, between 2010 and 2011 alone, the number of Portuguese with temporary or permanent visas in Brazil grew by 52,153 (globo.com, 2011).
Observing the cyclic character of Luso-Brazilian socialities, the changes in the 1966 Cultural Accord that concluded the dentists’ case now affected this new migratory wave to Brazil. Frustrated with the bureaucracy involved in the recognition of foreign university diplomas, Brazilian employers, Portuguese immigrants and the Portuguese government were now asking for a simplification of the process. In 2012 Portuguese and Brazilian public universities signed a memorandum to review the mechanisms of equivalence of engineering and architecture diplomas, with the intention of extending it to other professions in the future (SIC Notícias, 2012). Under the same rhetoric of common descent and historical connections, the reciprocity paradigm was deployed again. The Brazilian National Secretary of Justice stated in a 2012 interview with the Portuguese newspaper Expresso that ‘the arrival of Portuguese brothers who come to contribute to the nation’s growth is very welcome’, adding that the relationship between the two countries was one based on reciprocity; ‘it is an inviolable diplomatic relationship’ (Expresso, 2012).

By 2015, Portugal had started to recover from the austerity phase while Brazil entered a period of political instability and economic recession compounded by the election of an extreme-right government in 2018. Concurrently, a new migratory movement of middle- and upper middle-class Brazilians to Portugal began to unfold, but the often complex web of reasons for migration still needs to be investigated. However, notwithstanding the differences between the early 1990s Brazilian crisis – when international migration moved into middle-class Brazilians’ field of possibilities for the first time, becoming a strategic alternative to maintain their class position (Torresan, 2012) – and the current downturn, there seems to be a recurring theme in middle-class Brazilian immigrants’ narratives about Brazil. In França and Padilla’s (2018) preliminary study on the Portuguese media reaction to this recent wave, Brazilians interviewed in different newspapers conveyed a sense of estrangement from their country and a disbelief that things would improve in the future. For reasons that also need to be investigated further, Brazil was failing them again. For the time being, Portugal offers not only relative political stability but also economic opportunities through specific policies of tax incentives and new immigration visas for large and small Brazilian entrepreneurs, higher education students, and wealthy retirees.

As França and Padilla (2018) suggest, given that low-income Brazilians have also joined this recent movement to Portugal, these Portuguese newspaper depictions of Brazilians seem to make clear the need for an investigation into the impact of class distinctions on Brazilian migratory waves. However, regardless of immigrants’ class position and employment status, the tone and content of Portuguese news has been in alignment with governmental incentives for specific groups of migrants, which, in the case reviewed here, follows the whims of the social political context in which Luso-Brazilian relationships are played out. In contrast to the negative portrait the mainstream media painted of Brazilian dentists and other middle-class professionals in the 1990s, most newspaper articles the authors analysed refrained from referring to these newcomers as immigrants, in favour of using their socio-economic status –
entrepreneurs, students, retirees – dissociating them from the negative stereotypes immigrants in general had been given throughout the decades.

The tables will probably turn again at some point within this cycle. The persistent use of stereotypes, that is, the repetition of racial and culturally prejudiced images time and time again, can turn any one of them into a subject of desire or paranoia. It is the ambivalence of the fluctuating hierarchies played out in Luso-Brazilian relations that provides the constant shift between a sameness that is not quite the same and a difference that is never absolute. The dentists’ case was a catalyst for the recognition of a rupture in the paradigm of reciprocal treatment and a good example of instances of separation and disconnection in this phase of the cycle of Luso-Brazilian sociabilities. If the conversion of Brazilians into legal immigrants was antithetical to the consociate paradigms of reciprocity and a rhetoric of common descent, it was, on the other hand, consistent with colonial disjunctures embedded in these sociabilities. Rather than disavowing Luso-Brazilian sociabilities, the social dramas that keep playing out in the arenas of Brazilian migration to Portugal reinforce them. The ambiguities of this continuous relationship are maintained intact; Brazilians and Portuguese are concomitantly ‘the same’ and ‘the other’ at different moments of their cyclic sociabilities.

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ORCID iD
Angela Torresan https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8247-4979

Notes
1. In the1930s, Gilberto Freyre gave form to the Luso-Brazilian historical constitution with the concept of Luso-tropicalism, according to which an innate Portuguese disposition to engage in amicable and peaceful relationships with other races provided the tool for a successful adaptation to the tropics. This harmonious mixture of races during colonial times, Freyre concluded, resulted in a Brazilian social structure of racial democracy made up of fluid racial categories and an absence of racism. Before both theories were criticised and debunked (Boxer, 1963; Fernandes, 1972; Hasenbalg and Huntington, 1982; Skidmore, 1992; Twine, 1998), they were appropriated as ideologies to obscure structural racism in Brazil and legitimise Portuguese late colonialism in Africa. Notwithstanding the false image of humanitarian colonialism it affords, and despite reported evidence of racism against current immigrant populations from the former colonies (Santos, 2013; Vala et al., 2008; Valentim, 2011), Luso-tropicalism is still very present in the Portuguese collective imaginary (Almeida, 2000; Bastos, 1998).
2. The production of statistical data by both the Portuguese National Institute of Statistics and the Service of Borders and Foreigners (SEF) is complicated by the various changes in legal status granted by successive immigration laws and extraordinary regularisation processes, and the way in which holders of specific permits were considered in the statistics.

3. The PALOP – Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa – are Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau, and the Atlantic archipelagos Cape Verde, São Tomé & Príncipe and, since 2011, Equatorial Guinea.

4. Since becoming an EU Member State, Portugal has implemented three immigration laws: 1993 Law 59/93, 1998 Law 224/98, and 2007 Law 23/2007. All were amended by a series of decrees and accompanied by laws related to nationality, asylum and extraordinary regulations of immigrants. Designed to comply with EU policies of border security and movement control, the laws positively discriminated in favour of immigrants from former colonies. Many Brazilians in Portugal argued that these discriminatory acts still did not match the treatment that former waves of Portuguese migrants had received in Brazil (Alencar, 2010; Machado, 2012).

5. Most of the accords between Portugal and Brazil in the 20th century concerned reciprocal rights of the citizens of one country who were residents or visitors in the other (1922 Treaty on Military Service Exemption and Double Nationality; 1922 Convention of Emigration and Work; 1948 Accord on Intellectual Collaboration; 1953 Treaty on Consultation and Friendship; 1960 Accord on Visas and Passports; 1966 Cultural Accord; 1971 Convention of Equal Rights and Duties; 1971 Additional Protocol to the 1966 Cultural Accord). A few other agreements had more circumscribed applications (1924 Postal Reduction of Taxes on Newspaper and Books Exchange Accord; 1943 Orthographic Convention, 1981; Tourist Domination Accord).

6. I did research on the local archives of Diário de Notícias, one of the oldest daily newspapers in Portugal, whose relatively independent stance allows for a pluralism of coverage and opinions; Correio da Manhã, another daily newspaper with a popular profile, but also varied in its political orientation; and O Público, a more recent newspaper that targets a professional and younger audience, with liberal inclinations.

7. For a comparative analysis of Portuguese and Brazilian newspaper editorial style see Chaparro (1998). See Sousa (2003) for an investigation of the image of Brazil in Portuguese newspapers.

8. The APMD was established on 29 November 1991, under Law 110/91.

9. Directive 78/687/EEC ‘concerning the coordination of provisions laid down by Law Regulation or Administrative Action in respect of the activities of dental practitioners’ and 78/686/EE ‘concerning the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates and other evidence of the formal qualifications of practitioners of dentistry, including measures to facilitate the effective exercise of the right of establishment and freedom to provide services’.

10. Some parallels can be traced to the case of the Latin American dentists in Spain, see Herranz (2000). On the demand for dentists in Spain, see Cuenca and Casals (2009).

11. There was a profusion of newspaper articles that covered the controversy of the Brazilian dentists’ status. Many were sensationalist pieces in popular local newspapers that reported on the illegal status of Brazilian dentists who were deceiving their patients and encroaching on a regulated profession. Some examples are (my translation): ‘Brazilian dentists invade Portugal’ (O Comércio do Porto, 2 April 1989); ‘The judiciary investigates Brazilian dentists’ (Actualidade, 17 October 1989); ‘There are about two
thousand illegal Brazilian dentists in the country’ (Jornal de Notícias, 2 April 1989); ‘The days of the dentists without licences are numbered’ (O Comércio do Porto, 19 January 1990).

12. Law 59/93, 3 March 1993.
13. Feldman-Bianco (2001a) provides a comparative analysis of this case. See also the news piece ‘The last fado in Lisbon’, Isto É (1993).
14. The name is a pseudonym.
15. Directive 180-A/92 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Health) recognised the titles of 417 Brazilian dentists who were registered at the Brazilian consulate up to 1991.
16. Law 86.715, December 1981.

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**Author Biography**

**Angela Torresan** was born and raised in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She teaches social and visual anthropology at the University of Manchester.