

SYNCRETISMS AMIDST INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN
GOA/SOUTH INDIA AND PARAGUAY/SOUTH AMERICA

Indrani Mukherjee
Jawaharlal Nehru University

The present paper purports to dwell on the question of transculturation as understood by Fernando Ortiz wherein it unfolds as a «celebration» of impurity; Ortiz had meant to correct Malinowsky's concept of «deculturation» and then «acculturation» as the result encounter of two peoples through violence. Transculturation, on the other hand, is a proposal which takes off as a decolonizing discourse against the backdrop of the Iberian obsession of «la pureza de la sangre» or purity of blood ever since the culmination of the Reconquista. Ortiz, in this context, highlights the general mood of this kind of situation and reacts instead by saying that the violent encounter of two cultures, however violent, cannot and does not wipe out completely the «culture» of the defeated peoples. Transculturation is a result of this kind of violence implicated in any colonial encounter and the Goan and the Guarani examples are a strong case to the point. It is conceived of as the result of a process of shock and meeting, and not as product of harmonic mixtures or as an unchanged essence. The result of a violent encounter of cultures transforms both cultures through moments of tolerance and accommodation until what emerges is another new culture, a «transcultured» one¹.

¹ See Mignolo 2000, pp. 14-16. Our stance here is that of reckoning with both the national as well as the Coloniality issues as marginalities within nation-states. Perhaps Mignolo's concept of *Osmosis* is an interesting conjugation of this 'in-between-ness' that we seek to address here.

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The paper also piggy backs on Walter Mignolo's critique of this proposal as appropriate only for a narrative of the nation; Ortiz had made issue of transculturation in order to make sense of Cuban identity. However this concept has been deployed quite often to address general questions of Latin American identity and sometimes is reduced to a simplistic understanding of essentialist categories. Mignolo, however, maintains that when seen from the perspective of Coloniality, the question of the «impurity of blood» ought to include «impurity of signs» as well, as gendered notion of colonizer/colonized unwound itself within the realms of European narrative of privileged dispositions. He also revokes the true spirit of Ortiz' proposal which had not dwelt on essentialist notions of identity nor any claims of authentic identities, rather as traces and reminiscences, thus addressing the complexity of the process in a manner which was more subtle and rich².

Subjugation of the Latin American peoples is achieved not only through violence and military action (colonization) but also through imposing the ways of thinking, knowledge and value systems of the dominator upon the dominated. This is where the *encomienda* system (where Indians were to be 'protected' through organized hard labor) and the evangelization missions (shed the light of God) fit in. In this ambience the Jesuits in Paraguay worked for the «protection» of the indigenous peoples to create a class of «pure» Guaranies; however, after the expulsion of the Jesuits, these clusters of Indigenous peoples thenceforth protected by Jesuits disappeared. In Goa, miscegenation was very common as was conversion. What is interesting in Goa is that we find that the Hindu converts of the first generation would often move to and from his converted status. Also that they included Brahmins and Kshatriyas as caste was accommodated into Christianity and upper caste Hindus were often incentivized to convert for economic and social gains. The Jesuits did not try to «organize» these peoples into any protective enclaves. That is why the Inquisition was deployed, but then many of those who could afford to flee, left Goa. My final submission is that any form of «accommodation» of a foreign culture always has a trace of reckoning with the local and this leads to syncretism in spite of Inquisition. The result is not only transculturation but also decolonization of both the colonized as well as the colonizer as suggested by Paulo Freire.

² Mignolo, 2000, p. 14.

nized as well as the colonizer as suggested by Paulo Freire. However this is not to underestimate the extent of violence and terrible «loss» suffered by the indigenous peoples.

I must submit here that as I talk of «accommodation» and syncretism, the question of the struggle and conflict, both figurative and literal, which Mignolo calls as Coloniality of power informs the continuous backdrop of the whole discursive space articulated here. Such Coloniality of power involves conflict of episteme, signs, languages etc. and he defines it as Anibal Quijano does, «a conflict of knowledges and structures of power»³. This leads us on to make issue of the fact that transculturation has often in recent times served to camouflage state power deployed to aestheticize subaltern groups, as an ideological manifestation of peripheral modernity⁴. Mignolo maintains, elsewhere that Coloniality of power plays out as unidirectional rules of «translation» which only in the twentieth century has, through people's movements of indigenous groups, been possible to reverse. Mignolo gives examples from Aymara and Nahuatl experiences in this regard, of peoples who break into continuous violent «frontiers» to reclaim citizenship rights within an imagined participatory national identification⁵.

Having said this, we can see how the project of «civilizing» of the indigenous peoples in Iberian colonies thus involved translation, both metaphorically and literally, in a manner which was violently unidirectional. Even if Jesuits often learnt local indigenous languages, their aim was to «colonize» through evangelization and also through a kind of protective citizenship of indigenous peoples; such citizenry was informed by cartographies of 'textualizing' unknown worlds and underwrote a kind of blindness of cultural difference in terms of languages, religions, colors and community practices. Such blindness was constructed by Nebrija for whom language was not about cognition, rather about control of colonized peoples; by the Torquemada for whom religion was about intolerance and conflict; by the Catholic kings themselves, who felt the need to «protect» indigenous peoples from the «innocence» of «superstitions» and «idolatry». This blindness continued well across several centuries of conquest and

³ Quijano cited by Mignolo, 2000, p. 16.

⁴ Neil Larson's observation used by Trigo, 2000.

⁵ Mignolo, 2003.

colonization of its overseas Indies, the occidental and the oriental. The former covered Latin America and the latter India and the Philippines given that Portugal was under Spanish domain from 1580-1665. It is extremely important to highlight here that in spite of all this, the Goans refused to give up Konkani and the Guaranis continued to speak their language, given that languages archive ways of articulating and organizing knowledge. Both Konkani and Guaraní are the official languages of Goa and Paraguay respectively, along with English/ (earlier Portuguese) and Spanish⁶.

Thus one may see that syncretism as Coloniality in Latin America, at the moment of contact of two cultures, is most relevantly articulated by Fernando Ortiz' submission on Transculturation. It is a result of colonization and conflict, after which there is a process of «tolerance and adjustment» on both sides. Thus he explains:

The white, with or without the slave system, exploits the black who, powerless against force, defends himself with his shrewdness and makes clever adjustments based on his mistrust of the white. Physical attraction soon mixes the blood of the two races. The white man begins to relent because of his brown offspring and the black man, who has lost his family, his homeland, and consciousness of his historic past, goes on readjusting himself to the new life and [...] The black man is now able to dance and the white man is amused by him. There is praise for types such as the «good Negro» and «the good master»; but even so, the ruler and the ruled distrust each other. The former wishes this system to go on indefinitely, while the latter awaits his own day⁷.

It deserves to be mentioned here that unlike the post-enlightenment colonies of France and England, the Iberian experience was a post-Renaissance one. The implications of this is that the colonized subject was not a Saidian Oriental «other» but the Mignolian Occidental «same» who was a «vassal» of the Iberian crown and who therefore could not be enslaved or humiliated and had instead to be «protected» and «civilized». This was so because the Occident was never Europe's other but the difference within sameness: Indias

⁶ There were many groups of Guaranis who did not accept Jesuit alliances and today there are nearly 12,000 Guaraní speaking peoples in Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil. See Zajícová, 1999, p. 152.

⁷ Ortiz, 1940.

Occidentales, renamed later as America was the extreme West, not its alterity. America, contrary to Asia and Africa, was included as part of Europe's extension and not as its difference. America became conceptualized as an inheritance of Japheth's descendents as against Shem's and Ham's descendents in Asia and Africa. The Goan subject, in this context, is different from the Guarani one. Such «specificities» of the indigenous peoples, I submit, are not necessarily always fully syncretizable and instead prevail on a play of different layers of the indigenous (which are often hidden/forbidden) and of the European signs⁸.

Thus going back on the concept of Ortiz' transculturation, as a celebration of «impurity» and decolonization, it played out in the two worlds in the moment of contact of the two civilizations. Indigenous peoples wavered between two worlds and what transpired was not a happy «accommodation», rather a conflictive «hybridity». Ortiz' use of the Black experience is very different from those of the Goan or the Guarani Indians, yet the implications of power as was wielded on both sides were comparable. This power had to reckon with indigenous subjectivities, weather Goan or Guarani, which were not passive receptacles of oppression and dehumanization. They selectively adopted or negated whatever was imposed on them. Despite all the violence inflicted/suffered, Iberian-Guarani-Goan paradigms were as much ones of «accommodation» as well. It is to be acknowledged here that Guarani societies remained completely destroyed while in Goa one would rather have to reckon with transformed societies. The Christian perspectives on the Guarani Indians and the Goan ones seem contradictory in this sense.

The reductions were formed based on strategic alliances between Jesuits and some Guarani elites in order to protect themselves from Spanish encomenderos and Brazilian «bandeirantes». This Alliance had been a result of lot of internal dissent and political conflicts among the Guarani leaders. It was premised on a Guarani political model as the traditional Karai, or the local shaman, was substituted by the Jesuit priest. The reductions were actually Guarani neighborhoods which received the «protection» of the Spanish crown. When the Jesuits were expelled many indigenous peoples were captured

⁸ For details of this Christian conception of the inheritance of Noah's sons, Japheth, Shem and Ham, see Mignolo, 2000, pp. 58-59.

and enslaved; however those who were «educated» by the Jesuits in the fine arts, Latin, castellano or trained carpenters, constructors, blacksmiths, jewellers, painters, musicians, taylor etc. actually «lent» their services wherever required in the big ranches or estancias coming up in Uruguay and Argentina, and did not run away into the forest as neither they nor their grandparents ever lived in the forests. By the nineteenth century the large estancias also entered into crisis and these groups of Indians disintegrated into smaller groups. These people were already very alienated from the indigenous groups living in the forests. They had become Americans with mixed blood and were seeking out better ways of life. This kind of selective adoption and accommodation which starts at the moment of first encounter continues throughout the colonial period and extends to today also. It is an ongoing process which is irreversible and seeps into not only the «native» cultural experience but also the culture of the colonizer who's so called «purity of blood» syndrome remains exposed. It has been because of such experiences of resilience among these people of Guarani descent that they were able to survive although and at least as an underclass⁹.

In 1510, Afonso de Albuquerque defeated Adil Shah, the ruler of Goa, and quickly enacted his *Política dos Casamentos*. The Marriage Policy's purpose was to encourage inter-marriage, particularly with the desirably fair-skinned widows of the vanquished Muslim soldiers, and create a progeny of «white» children. This new white tribe, created out of racialized and gendered subjugation, would ostensibly form the basis of Portuguese rule in the East. But other than whitening of local elites, domestication also involved conversion of Hindus into Catholicism and an incentivized loyalty to the Portuguese crown. In India conversions had been few and those too overwhelmingly among low castes, outcastes, and tribal groups—the «heartlands» of upper-caste Hinduism remained not simply unconquered, but almost untouched. In Goa however, approval of the caste system did attract the upper castes also. The Portuguese colonial government offered rice donations for the poor, good positions in the Portuguese colonies for the middle class, and military support for local rulers. Many Indians were converted opportunistic *Rice Chris-*

⁹ See «Las reducciones jesuíticas» and Charmot where they articulate the patronizing vision of the mission.

Rice Christians who continued to practice their old religion. In Goa syncretism therefore is unique and rich as it continues to be colored by so many native Hindu traditions of culture. As compared to Paraguay, in India the Portuguese had to reckon with other competing colonial forces like the Dutch and the British. Citizenry of the local converts had to be prioritized for the strength of the empire, although there were some problems initially about the so-called «purity» of Christian practices¹⁰.

The Jesuits in Paraguay, on the other hand, formed Guarani militias which served both the crown and the Guarani peoples. The formation of the Reductions by the Jesuits in Paraguay from 1609-1768 has been one of the most extraordinary histories of colonization. Here Christianized Indians served to secure territorial control for Spanish crown against unpacified and unchristian Indian tribes in exchange for tax exemption. This kind of «paradise» of both Guarani and Jesuit conveniences arranged for and by the Jesuits towards the protection of Indian Christians for over 150 yrs was destroyed in 1750's after their expulsion. A territorial treaty between Portugal and Spain dictated evacuation of reductions on the banks of Uruguay; the Jesuits loyal to their flocks joined in futile resistance which was fi-

¹⁰ «The superimposition of religious sites in the context of conquest, one may add, was not a rare thing in the medieval and early modern world. In a similar way, Turkish Moslems had transformed the Byzantine Hagia Sophia of Constantinople into a mosque, Spanish Reconquistadores had implanted a Christian cathedral into the Muslim Mesquita in Cordoba, the Portuguese King had made the largest Jewish synagogue of Lisbon into a Christian church —to name but a few prominent examples. Noteworthy, however, in Goa, this kind of religious conquest gained a special effect by becoming a space-filling project. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, the systematic superimposition of existing religious sites, and the substitution of local deities by Christian monuments and saints not only replicated the ancient spatio-religious system of the Hindus, but also prepared the ground for its eventual duplication and synthesis.

Crucial here was the fact that Goan Hindus, though fleeing the Portuguese territories in large numbers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, did not abandon their village deities. Instead, the fleeing Hindus managed to salvage many divine images and icons from destruction by the Christian missionaries to reinstall them in temples outside the Portuguese control. Remarkably, many of the new temples emerging in this process not only brought together a whole series of “escaped deities” under one roof, but often also became more sumptuous and gained a greater significance, than the old temples ever had. More important yet, the «escaped deities» became central symbols in a Hindu «diaspora culture», which, through temple histories, legends and rituals, kept alive a distinct memory of its original terrain and, in due time, provided important incentives to reclaim it (Axelrod & Fuerch, 1996)», in Henn, 2000, p. 335.

nally crushed in 1754 by a joint Spanish-Portuguese army. Thirteen years later, in 1767, the Indians demonstrated their own loyalty to the Jesuits rising in revolt in Potosi where royal troops came to arrest the fathers in the aftermath of the Borbourns' suppression.

Paradoxically Iberian identity was, unlike other colonizers who were already enlightened, constructed on their Renaissance experience which dwelt on the question of «purity of blood». The Jewish/Muslim problem was thus a continuation of their internal problem and Portuguese inception of whiteness in Goa was to function as a continuance of Portuguese identity in the colonial sphere. This would reinvent what it meant to be Portuguese in the new world order. The opportunity to recreate whiteness, notwithstanding, race-making in the new colony was not predicated on any illusion of erasing difference; it rather served to perpetuate racialized colonial hierarchy. Ultimately, the Portuguese would still be whiter and more powerful than their native wards. This is exactly how it was also in Spanish America. In this sense the Goan Indian was neither so much of Iberia's exotic Other, rather an extension of the Portuguese identity but given the question of «pureza de la sangre», it may be said, an extension of «sameness» with a difference. This is the complication one faces while dealing with Goan Coloniality, as it looks like a dot of Occidentalism in Shem's Asia. As Iberian sameness got imposed on to indigenous peoples, the latter got even more frustrated and alienated.

The third phase constitutes a period of adjustment. The colored man is now in his second generation in America and tries to outdo himself imitating, at times quite blindly, both the good and the bad traits of the white man. This is perhaps the most difficult phase. At times the colored man becomes desperate and hates himself. The mixed blood is made white, by law or through wealth or ancestry; but his life is a constant frustration aggravated by ceaseless pretence¹¹.

Here, however, we need to focus on the other aspect of that whiteness, which is the question of the converts. There were indigenous peoples in the two Indies who suffered miscegenation from within or outside of marriage. They were the Hindus and tribal of Goa, and some Amerindians from Paraguay. Both in Paraguay and Goa, experiences of transculturation have been unique. Yet the

¹¹ Ortiz, 1940.

paradox is that, both in India and in Latin America, the indigenous peoples had to suffer the Inquisition both politically and culturally.

In India, although the upper castes did not usually convert themselves, the case of Goa was unique as the caste system was accommodated within catholic practices. Unlike colonial experiences in the post-enlightenment period, the Portuguese and Spanish experiences were somewhat different. The religious agenda was very significantly intertwined with the political and the economic one. Colonized subjects were mainly the indigenous peoples in India and Latin America and it's very difficult to ascertain how much miscegenation/conversions actually took place in Goa. Missionaries actually often exaggerated the number of actual conversions that they achieved as often such numbers attracted funds as well as promotions to the persons concerned. In Paraguay also, as the reductions became prosperous and gave lot of power to the Jesuits.

Christianity had already established itself both in India and in Latin America where missionaries carried out intensive conversions. Looking back today at such events, they seem ridiculous as they taught some biblical «verses» to peoples who did not understand the language of the colonizers. For the Goans, it was like the utterance of a new «mantra» for another set of rituals of a new god, at least initially. So they carried on with their Hindu rituals alongside the Catholic ones. However soon they understood that that was not the case. Hence relapses were common, perhaps because the Hindus used to hesitate to abandon their religious practices completely. This was not just because of forced conversion but also because initially there was no clarity on orthodoxy of Christianity and given the pluralism and syncretism of Hindu religious practices prevailing then. But over the years there were punitive actions against relapses and conversions from both faiths. Unchristian behavior included attending temple festivals, swearing falsely, consulting witches or making offerings to idols. Some times repentant Christians whipped themselves for mystical redemption. This was actually a Hindu practice but tolerated by the inquisition.

Relapses were not deliberate, planned or uncommon. They were often unconscious behavior or reactions against European tendencies of imposing uniformity in religious practices among a people who had been used to polytheism and syncretism. The missionaries therefore did not approve of such relapses. As the neoconverts swing be-

tween these two faiths, they did practice this or the other faiths without understanding or doubting either of the two as the true faith. The two faiths could be practiced simultaneously and reconciled with each other. However, the missionaries saw any syncretism a threat to the purity of the faith and unity of Christendom. Hence could not be tolerated¹².

Hence the Christian layman and missionary criticized these neo-converts as people of weak faith. However, Francis Xavier understood that given that these people had so little exposure to Christian practices and had very little instructions, they were not as bad as some Europeans who lacked devotion and often abused of their power and privileges. He did write to the monarchy about the need for the Inquisition; however it arrived in Goa only eight years later. In the meantime relapses were a matter of great laughter for the Portuguese and great scandal for the missionaries but it did not bother the locals. Some missionaries felt that since the neo-Christians mixed freely with their Hindu relatives it would not be possible to control relapse. Local Christians also participated in Hindu festivals since they were attracted to them. Yet the neo convert lead very chaste Christian life. Francis Xavier understood that conversion alone would not make them forget their old religion; there would also be a need for cultural conversion. That is why he felt that the Inquisition was needed. He also disallowed the Hindus from entering the Society of Jesus premises¹³.

As mentioned earlier, transculturation was an ongoing process. But given the horrible violence of the Inquisition, many Goans who were «impure» Catholics also fled Goa further south and they continue with Catholic practices even today. It is significant that Goa today celebrates its 50th anniversary of independence from Portuguese rule as also that it celebrates Francis Xavier. (Significantly while Spain celebrates 12th October as the day of discovery, the indigenous peoples of Latin America celebrate 11th October as the last day of freedom). This is the perfect example of a climaxing of trans-

¹² Mendonça, 2002, pp. 298-299.

¹³ Way back in 1514, a Franciscan friar had proposed separate quarters for the Christians so that they could not mix freely with the Hindus and so that they would not dilly-dally between the two cultural idioms (Mendonça, 2002, p. 52). The formation of the Reductions in Latin America also used to have such an agenda with respect to entry of the whites or blacks in them.

transculturation. And it is an ongoing process because as Goan Catholics entered into independent India, they continue to practice Catholicism and also reclaim their Indian heritage. Many of them have claimed that Goa has been only culturally influenced by the Portuguese and that there was no miscegenation. Independent Goa still struggles with conflicts between the «native elites» (Catholics of Brahmin and Kshatriya descent) as they continue to be locked in a caste battle, not only with each other, but also against the local 'Portuguese' i.e. the Luso-descendants, who proudly claimed a Portuguese lineage although the presence of this group in Goa is largely erased. The notion of transculturation as a national narrative fits perfectly in the Goan case.

Yet any notion of transculturation becomes some what problematic when seen as an ongoing process. As Mignolo argues, transculturation need not necessarily entail just a physical mixing of races but also of «signs». Thus the Guarani peoples in the reductions were seen always as a people lacking the written word, history or «culture». Hence they had to be colonized in order to be endowed with the written word, their history or culture. In Goa, the Indians had to be pushed towards «modernity» as they had to be redeemed from superstitions of their idols. In Paraguay the Indians had to serve the Crown in order to fight against other Indian groups who did not accept Christianity; in India too they had to serve the interests of the Spanish/Portuguese crown through direct trade, thus leaving out any middleman to access spices and other goods. Christianity as a civilizing mission justified all the violence inflicted on these peoples. Civilizing is like a unidirectional translation project seeking out of a history based on rational knowledge which Coloniality enables on those who it touches.

However, as Mignolo argues, modernity only keeps on reproducing Coloniality. He draws from Anibal Quijano to posit that Coloniality as the darker side of modernity «unveils an embedded logic that enforces control, domination and exploitation in the language of salvation, progress, modernization and being good for everyone»¹⁴. The blindness behind Weber's celebration of occidental knowledge is thus exposed. Mignolo argues that the more a people of the margins move towards modernity the more they enter into the realms of

¹⁴ Mignolo, 1995, p. 8.

Coloniality. The latter has perpetuated itself across our times as progress and development. Creole and secular trends of «modernization» in India and Latin America and their blind faith of Euro-American models have not been liberating nor empowering neither for themselves nor for the indigenous peoples across these continents.

Hence his observation on how grassroots level indigenous movements have had to only in recent times turn the table around, untranslate even at the cost of breaking Spanish/Euro-American syntax and grammar from indigenous languages and undo all that over 500 years of Coloniality/modernity agendas have imposed on them in order to reclaim their own «histories» of the present and future. This articulation of another kind of transculturation is also worth reckoning with, as it once again brings to the fore an acknowledgement of diverse kinds of unequal modernities struggling with «the epistemological fracture under the impact of the transnational»¹⁵. This is also premised on violence, though the other way round.

And the mestizo today, whether of Goan or Guarani descent, continues to swing between his two identities, between the shifting paradigms of differing modernities, like Octavio Paz' Pachuca who, is still trying to figure out where he belongs and weather he belongs at all. They have to continuously contest and configure their «national» status in their respective parts of the world, revealing that that was not a homogenous category, in the first place. They still conjecture a provisionality of their status and imagine different nostalgias.

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¹⁵ Trigo, 2000, p. 94.

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