



History

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Seeking community through History. The Portuguese Case

The term ‘community’ refers to groups of individuals with shared interests, identities, goals, geographic locations or history who interact and develop bonds with each other. Nowadays, the concept applies to both physical and online groups, and communities can be categorized in various ways, depending on their purposes. In this sense, they can be based on interests or themes, on geographical location, or on history. Communities are important because they foster a sense of belonging and closeness, facilitating the exchange of information, experiences, and mutual support, since what transforms a collective into a community are interpersonal relationships and the sharing of experiences.

The search for community has always shaped human history. But there is a difference between what a community is and what it aspires to be.

In his work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson introduces the concept of the imagined community, emphasizing that an imagined community is different from a real community, as it is not based solely and exclusively on the interaction of its members. On the contrary, it is an example of a socially constructed community, imagined by people who perceive themselves as part of a group or cultural community.

In formulating and presenting this conceptual tool, Anderson methodologically highlights the importance of the press and literature, since, in his view, these are the most important practices and techniques for creating a discourse capable of giving meaning and significance to an imagined community. This allows for sharing common interests or

aspects of identity, creating and maintaining a lively and conscious notion of belonging and shared legacies. In order to get to know a community and to have a sense of belonging, it is necessary to have direct or indirect contact with it to perceive its common cultural capital, as Pierre Bourdieu calls it.

Anderson emphasizes the fact that it was only at the end of the 19th century, for various reasons, including the increasing massification and education of the population, that people aspired to greater participation and, at the same time, awareness of the cultural community to which they belonged. This gave rise to new sciences that sought to study these aspects: history, anthropology and, in some countries (and at that time not yet in Portugal), sociology.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Portuguese intellectuals made multiple observations about Portugal and, at the same time, about the Portuguese people, seeking to define and understand this imagined community as real. The recognition and identification of Portuguese culture, in particular popular culture, with its specific formations, and the appropriation of these formations as symbols of nationality are common denominators in the discourses of authors from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, forming what Rui Ramos called the “second foundation” or refoundation of nationality, after its original foundation as a country in the 12th century.

It was important for them to recognize and identify the unknown Portugal, and it was often in the historical exploration of the traditional, national and ancient world that the authentic and true Portugal was supposed to be found. It was argued that only by understanding Portuguese history and its driving forces, would it be possible to construct Portugal as a ‘collective individual’ characterized by specific cultural and national elements, as was done throughout Europe in the tradition of seeking a kind of ethnic psychology or *Volksgeist*.

The Portuguese community is defined as a combination of historical, geographical, political and cultural factors that have shaped its identity over the centuries. More than just a nation-state, Portugal is understood and represented as a community whose cohesion lies in a shared history of expansion and migration, the permanence of its language and culture, and a collective awareness of identity.

Portuguese identity has been forged for centuries and has remained remarkably stable in its main definitions compared to other European

nations. In this view, language is perhaps the most powerful unifying element. Portuguese is not only the official language within the national territory; it is the main link with the vast Community of Portuguese Language Countries (CPLP), which formalizes this historical heritage shared by more than 265 million speakers worldwide. Language is the vehicle of collective memory and cultural expression. The Portuguese language works as a living extension of the historical Portuguese community, because its collective identity does not dissolve with distance or time. It is a persistent cultural and emotional connection, maintained through language, memory and a shared awareness of global history.

With a history inseparable from the sea, migration is a structural feature of the Portuguese community, both historically and to the present days. From the 15th to the 21st century, it is impossible to understand this community without considering the dynamics of migration. These dynamics have resulted in communities that, in every corner of the world, bear witness to and consolidate a Portuguese presence and that of people of Portuguese descent. At the same time, Portugal is today a country of immigration, mainly for people coming from African states and from the Indian subcontinent.

As Zygmunt Baumann argues, community is not a static and stable phenomenon. On the contrary, it requires a constant search for what is longed for, what is desired, constant vigilance and care to maintain the balance between freedom and change and the needs of belonging. History herein serves as a vehicle of confirmation and consolidation: open to a permanent future to be shaped together in community.

References

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