

## IDENTITY POROSITY IN THE PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING HINDU DIASPORA: SOME REFLECTIONS ON SYNCRETIC WORK

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### Resumo

Sem negligenciar a importância da reflexão antropológica em torno de noções como hibridismo, creolização, sincretismo, etc. subscrevemos o insight de Peter Van der Veer quando afirma que tais conceitos se tornam bem mais interessantes quando utilizados, reinterpretados ou reavaliados pelos discursos veiculados por actores sociais, em contextos históricos concretos. É neste sentido que me proponho analisar um conjunto de narrativas mobilizado por hindus portugueses na definição e negociação das suas fronteiras identitárias, bem como na avaliação do seu grau de permeabilidade, fluidez, incorporação e mistura face aqueles que, ao longo de uma longa vivência migratória multifaseada e multifacetada, configuraram como «outros».

### Abstract

While believing that the anthropological reflection on notions such as hybridity, creolization, syncretism, etc. continues to be valuable, I will subscribe Peter Van de Veer's insight, according to which such concepts become far more interesting when they are mobilised, reinterpreted, or reassessed through the discourses conveyed by social actors in actual historic contexts. It is in this sense that I will analyse a number of identity narratives presented by Portuguese-speaking Hindus in the definition and negotiation of the limits of their identity, as well as in the evaluation of their degree of permeability, fluidity, incorporation, and mixture towards those who, during a multiphased and multifaceted migratory experience, they configure as «others».

### Introduction

In the concluding remarks of his recent article on the keywords of the emerging transnational anthropology, Ulf Hannerz (1997) emphasises how notions such as hybridity (Bakhtin, 1968; Bhabha, 1994; Young, 1995), creolization (Hannerz, 1987, 1996), syncretism (Droogers, 1989; Stewart e Shaw, 1994; Mary 2000) etc. constitute anthropological constructs that are not necessarily validated or invalidated by “native” categories and interpretations. He therefore acknowledges that there is much work still to be done on the ways and strategies in which subjects, in an interconnected universe, define and redefine boundaries and interpenetrations between their identity representations and practices.

While believing that the anthropological reflection on such notions continues to be valuable, I will subscribe Peter Van de Veer's insight (1994:208), according to which such concepts become far more interesting when they are mobilised, reinterpreted, or reassessed through the discourses (religious, national, cultural, ethnic, etc.) conveyed by social actors in actual historic contexts. It is in this sense that I wish to analyse a number of identity narratives presented by Portuguese-speaking Hindus in the definition and negotiation of the limits of their identity, as well as in the evaluation of their degree of permeability, fluidity, incorporation, and mixture towards those who, during a multiphased and multifaceted migratory experience, they configure as “others”.

The identity narratives in analysis result from the multi-situated fieldwork I have been carrying out with the descendants of Gujarati Hindus who settled in Mozambique since the second half of the XIX century.

### 1. Migration history

Contemporary historical research demonstrates how, since the late seventeenth century, commerce in the North of Mozambique was mainly carried out by traders from Diu. Following the creation of the Company of Banyans of Diu in 1686, they had made the small Island of

Mozambique (Ilha de Mozambique) their base. We also know that, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, a significant part of the Hindu population (*vaniás* or, in Portuguese, *baneanos*) active in commerce moved to the southern part of Mozambique, in particular to the provinces of Inhanbane and Lourenço Marques. The migration of Hindus of various castes (*fudamiá, khandia, kori, vanja, suthar, mochi, dobhi*, etc.) from Diu to these same regions also increased substantially, in particular after the implementation of the Liberal regime in Portugal in 1820 (Pereira Leite, 1996: 2001).

Additionally, in the late nineteenth century, the implementation of legislation restricting Indian settlement in Natal, especially in the Transvaal, while Portuguese policies considered the presence of Indians indispensable to the economic development of Mozambique, influenced the arrival of groups of British Indians (Pereira Leite, 1996), in particular of Gujarati Hindus (of *lohana, patel, bhatia, surti, brahman* and other castes), the majority of which originated from Porbandar, Rajkot and Surat.

The main strategies for the professional insertion in the Mozambican context for this group lay in trade, both the trade between the interior regions and urban centres and – especially for those who arrived in the 1930s – investment in traditional commerce, while the castes of Diu masons mostly became employed in the construction of infrastructures. However, a small number of families took advantage of the economic boom of the 1960s to expand their activities to the industrial sector (mainly in textiles). At the same time, a number of subgroups invested in the secondary and university education of the youngest generations, thus laying the foundations for a diversification of professional opportunities.

Established in a Portuguese colony, Mozambican Hindus belonged to a polynuclear spatial organisation. The networks they maintained allowed the circulation of people, goods, capital, information, etc. between their regions and groups of origin in Gujarat on the one hand, and the various groups of Gujarati Hindus settled in the British colonies of East and South Africa on the other. Indo-Portuguese Hindus gradually established small satellite communities in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi. In much the same fashion, the British-Indian Hindus in Mozambique maintained strong ties with the larger «communities» –

based on caste (*lohana, patel, and bhatia*) or on origin – settled within the British colonies and protectorates of East and South Africa.

The expulsion of all holders of a Indian passport (ordered in 1961 by Salazar) as a retaliation for the Indian invasion of the then-Portuguese colonies of Goa, Daman and Diu; and more importantly the decolonisation of all Portuguese colonies after the revolution of 1974, forced a significant part of the Gujarati Hindus living in Mozambique to migrate once again. The nationalisation process implemented in Mozambique, as well as the high political instability of the country and the civil war that broke out in the mid 1970s led to a peak in emigration in the early 1980s.

Most of these Hindu families chose Portugal as their destination. They already had the experience of religious and «community» reconstruction, mostly travelled in family groups and had professional experience, the majority in construction and trade. They also had an intercontinental network of contacts and support, all of which enabled them, once established in Portugal – mainly in Lisbon, the capital city, but also in smaller nuclei in the Northern cities of Oporto and Coimbra – to enjoy rapid but not uniform socio-economic progress.

The economic strategies to which Gujarati Hindus resorted to in Portugal were similar to those deployed in Mozambique. Therefore, men from Diu belonging to castes of masons (*fudamiá, khandia, kori*) and carpenters (*suthar*) soon became active in construction, both in Portuguese firms and in firms owned by same-caste Indians; they also invested in hawking (in street markets across the whole country), while Gujaratis of *lohana, vania, darji*, and other castes became active in traditional commerce, often in the same branch as previously (mostly ready-to-wear and the sale and import of Far Eastern products). Many of those whose activity had extended to industry, banking or various learned professions were also able to resume their previous occupations.

In Portugal, ties with the places of origin and with the Hindu population still residing in the former Portuguese colony are maintained. In addition, connections with Mozambique have been intensified by resorting to a strategy of family-unit fragmentation (part of the family stays on in Mozambique, while others emigrate to neighbouring African countries or to Portugal, in order to sustain and strengthen the family business), and through the resumption of investment policies in Mozambique, made possible by the accumulation of capital during the

years spent in Portugal. The exchange – especially of people, information and symbolic capital – with the surviving communities of Gujarati Hindus in Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, or South Africa is also maintained. Finally, a number of Portuguese Hindus have also established trade and matrimonial relations with co-religionists currently residing in various areas of the United Kingdom, thanks to previous ties with the Gujarati Hindus who migrated from East Africa to the United Kingdom since the late 1960s (Baumann, 1998; Vertovec, 2000).

The integration of Portugal in the European Community in 1986 and the numerous opportunities for professional and status improvement offered by the United King, together with a migratory culture transmitted down through the generations, led many Portuguese-speaking Hindus to emigrate for the first, second or a third time in the early 1990s. Contrary to expectations, those who did choose to do so were not among the Hindu subgroups that already had a network of contacts and support based on caste and family relations.

In addition, the competition observed in the Portuguese construction market, resulting from the arrival of thousand of immigrants from Eastern Europe, significantly increased the number of Portuguese-speaking Hindus settled in the UK between 1998 and 2000. In 2001 and 2002, the migration continued at the same or even higher levels thanks to the global context of economic crisis and labour market contraction, the effects of which were more marked in Portugal than in many other EU countries. Since the majority of those originating in Diu and emigrating from Mozambique to Portugal had reprised there their traditional activity as masons, it is not surprising that this was the group that most profited from the job opportunities offered by the expansion of the British market.

The salaries offered in the construction sector in the Greater London and Leicester areas were approximately three times as much as those earned in Lisbon; however, the sector offered no job safety, and this led many to seek factory jobs instead. This option was usually accompanied by investment in the education of the younger generations, and by the insertion of women in the job market outside the home, in full- or part-time employment. After some years, a number of these migrants are able to leave their salaried employment in factories or warehouses and invest their hard-earned savings in a small independent commercial activity. Among those who did do so, however, many express the aim to

sell their activity and return to a salaried job, since the latter offers more certainties and shorter working hours. This aspiration – which so far has been attained by a very small number – is usually also justified by the increasing disinvestment of the younger generations in commercial activity, made possible by the qualifications – in engineering, computer science, accounting etc – they have attained in the UK.

## 2. “He thought that he would come back even more powerful”: the Indian appropriation of the identity powers of the sea

Portuguese-speaking Hindus form a limited polynuclear network, and they also maintain contacts with other diasporic groups of Indian origin. Complex transnational flows of images and messages (thanks to their gradual access to the Internet and the widespread presence of Indian TV channels in their homes) made it possible for a series of miraculous events to be witnessed in Maputo, Inhambane and Xai Xai (Mozambique), as well as in Lisbon or Porto (Portugal). These include the ‘*milk miracle*’ in September 1995 – when significant quantities of milk were absorbed by *murtis* (the icons of gods) in Hindu temples across the world (in London, Leicester, Birmingham, Leeds, New York, Delhi, Hong Kong, Bangkok, etc.) – and the ‘*Shiva Lingam miracle*’ – that is, the miraculous apparition of the *Om* symbol atop the *Shiva lingam* (after this had been aspersed with water and milk), also witnessed in various parts of the world.

The story of the ‘*Indian from Chibuto (Mozambique) who went to the bottom of the sea to get a doctorate in witchcraft*’ had a far more limited circulation – only involving Maputo, Lisbon, Porto, London and Leicester – but is especially significant to us, since it has generated a new space of (re)interpretation (Tarabout 1999: 331) of the inter-ethnic experiences of Portuguese-speaking Hindus.

Everybody in Chibuto and Xai-Xai knew that he frequently met with the witches and medicine men’ because ‘he wished to learn more’. One day, he told his wife ‘I’m going to be away for some months’, and headed towards the Xai-Xai beach. ‘His son (who was with him) later reported that he had seen his father enter the sea with a cutlass in hand. He then waded in and

out a few times, but then disappeared.' Worried with the absence of her husband, the wife 'consulted an African medicine man to learn what had happened.' He explained to her that in that area (Vilanculos, Maboine, Chibuto, Xai-Xai, etc.) 'there were many spirits of people who died in the water and remain there.' These spirits enter the bodies of certain people and call them. This is why they walk to the sea and dive in. They go there to become doctors in traditional medicine. It seems they have to sit a number of exams, and if they fail, they die. Others return.' After advising the woman not to carry out any funeral ceremonies, he predicted that the vanished husband 'was alive' and that 'when he came out of the sea, even his wife would not recognise him, he would not be able to speak, but then everything would go back to normal.'

(Extract from field diary)

The subject of this extract was born in Fudam (Diu) 'in the time of the Portuguese', and migrated to Lourenço Marques (Mozambique) in the 1960s, to work as a mason. Unlike most of his fellow-countrymen, the majority of which migrated to Portugal after the independence of Mozambique in 1975, Kumar (the pseudonym which I will be using) stayed in Chibuto, where 'he made a lot of money'. His well-known post-colonial wealth and political influence, associated with the management of a network of personal influence, met with the suspicion that he 'knew much about witchcraft' (as did a number of his consanguineal and affinal relatives). It is possible to say, paraphrasing J.-F. Bayart's expression, that Kumar reunited in himself all the tactics of the 'politics of the belly' (Bayart, 1989) to impress, take care and be generous in order to later be able to 'eat' the «other», that is, to consume his vital force (by causing illness or death), to take possession of his material goods, and to use his political support to obtain more and more power. According to several co-ethnics: 'The first time, he would perform a miracle to impress, and he asked so much for his services, then he only had to eat the others. He did the same in his business.'

The accusations of witchcraft directed at Kumar however are not to be interpreted as resulting in his transformation into an eminently negative and anti-social character. His initiation to witchcraft (which began within his microfamiliar environment, and was subsequently enlarged to local African witches) was, just as many times, seen as an accumulative

source of intertwined powers which allowed him to obtain that which many co-ethnics could not. In fact, in the late 1980s, Kumar mobilised his political and economic resources, as well as the strong symbolic production originated by the war,<sup>1</sup> to save his family, kidnapped by the RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana – Mozambican National Resistance) movement. Other than the 'lunches he offered the leaders', he was not indifferent to the thousands of people who moved from various parts of the Chibuto and Manjacaze districts, in the province of Gaza, to the village known as 'of the Mungoi spirit' (approximately 70 kilometres from the provincial capital Xai-Xai), where a well-known witch (possessed by the Mungoi spirit) promised full protection against 'armed men' with 'bad intentions' and collaboration in handing over people who had been kidnapped by RENAMO. Following the narrative of a family member (currently living in Leicester), it was on that very occasion that

He met a witch<sup>2</sup> who made some spirits appear in dream to one of the leaders. Africans fear the spirits of the dead very much, because their religion is mainly that. (...) So the leader, fearing punishment, freed dozens of people who had been kidnapped, among which, his wife and numerous daughters. He left them just outside their home.

<sup>1</sup> The ideological stance of FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique – Mozambican Liberation Front, the political party that established Mozambique as a new independent country in 1975) led this organisation to reject the symbolic and material systems that supported ancestor cults and the phenomena of 'healing' and 'witchcraft'. However, the emphasis on the opposition between tradition and modernisation and, as a corollary, the lack of articulation between symbolic and political power led to a significant fall in its popular support, in particular in periods of deep economic and social crisis. In order to win the war (and popular trust), FRELIMO was forced to reconsider the role of magico-religious authorities and traditional chiefs, attributing them a far more central position in the new socio-political arena. Besides restoring the dignity of traditional symbolic systems, FRELIMO recognised the dynamic and/or regenerating character of those same systems (when they did not clash with the implementation of other programmes – economic, social, political, etc.) in the redress of all sufferings caused by the war (Honwana, 1996). Even the most sceptical interviewees regarding 'issues of witchcraft' told me that 'to win the war, both FRELIMO and RENAMO used those beliefs.'

<sup>2</sup> The use of African witchcraft on the part of Gujarati Hindus is not however, to be interpreted as an unprecedented event, typical of the post-colonial period in Mozambique. Even during 'the time of the Portuguese', and despite measures against 'medicines and witchcraft' taken by the colonial authorities (Honwana, 1996), many Hindus went to African medicine men. "They asked them to look, at shells, at little bones", 'to know why something bad happened to them'. However, 'back then', 'we could not speak, as we do now, of these matters'.

But Kumar did not resort to the use of this most effective resource only to solve his own microfamiliar crises in wartime. Years later, he acted like a *tinyanga* or apprentice *nyanga* (diviner, medicine man, medium) who studied under these *xicuembos*, that is, in a culturally codified way for the older population in Chibuto, who still have memories of the education (on the bottom of the sea in Xai-Xai) that brought fame and material profit to Mukhomi Txawuke. Uncle Pandhe, talking to the younger generations in Chibuto about what his father, uncles, aunts, and many other old people had told him so many times, related the 'events' that had happened to his father, when he himself had yet to be born:

My father was a warrior, he lived in the time of the wars between the sons of Manukusse, Mawewe and Muzila. He was a partisan of Muzila, having therefore fought at his side, when (...) he invaded Mozambique from South Africa. In these wars, my father killed a woman called Mubukwazi (...). This woman (...) appeared in my father's body, in the aspect of Xikwenbu (...) she did not come with bad intentions (...) but to turn him into a *nyanga*, and so it happened. (...) After he got his «doctorate» in traditional medicine in the school of N'wamay'imele, he began practising, but one day, when he entered a trance, his Xikwembu asked for him to be sent by the sea. (...). When he got to the beach, (...) he entered into a trance and stayed close to the sea, waiting for the first big wave, which when it arrived, dragged him into the water; seconds later, he was pushed ashore again by another one. He was soon thrown out of the water by another wave, holding a *tinhlolo xikhwama* in his hand, as well as many drugs. He gave all this to his sister (...). After this, he went back to the shoreline, where once more he was taken in by the waves, never to be seen again. All the while, people sang, danced and touched the *matxomana*. This went on for two days and two nights. Since nothing happened, all the family members went back home, to Chibuto (...). When the relatives got home, they did not carry out any death ritual. After two months had gone by, my father returned home, followed by many sick people, some already half healed and others still needing treatment (...). He earned so much money that he married my mother, giving her parents, as a *lovoló*, his profits as a practitioner of traditional medicine.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Pandhe Johanise Txawuke, of 75 to 85 years of age, son of Mukhomi Txawuke, by Sansão Mutemba in September 1972 (published in the magazine *Cooperador*, October 1972)

The news that an Indian had been to the bottom of the sea to 'take a course' to 'learn more about witchcraft', spread particularly through family and caste networks, and was a cause for apprehension with many Gujarati Hindus, whether they resided in Mozambique, Portugal or the United Kingdom. Despite there being no information on the existence of 'witchcraft courses' taken to the bottom of the sea, Kumar's performance was not classified as incomprehensible. As a Hindu woman living in Lisbon told me:

We Hindus believe that at the bottom of the sea there is another world. It is *nag devta* who lives there on the bottom of the sea, he may take a human or a serpent form, he is like mermaids. For instance, when I go near the sea, I feel sick, I couldn't go and swim. I go to the beach, but keep away from the water. And it's been like this since I was a child. One day, my father asked a *Maharaj*, 'why does my daughter feel sick when she gets close to the water'. The *Maharaj* explained: 'Your daughter may not get close to the sea, or she will be pulled in, transported to the other world. This happens because *Nag devta* likes her very much and wants to take her to the bottom of the sea. When she goes to India, she must visit the *nag's mandir* and offer much food, many litres of milk.

The existence of a 'world at the bottom of the sea', peopled by serpents and associated with positive processes of identity transformation, be they processes of reparation and/or acquisition of identity gains,<sup>4</sup> or processes of creative and/or regenerating hybridisation,<sup>5</sup> do not pose doubts to the common Hindu. The real issue surrounds the possibility of a return from that 'world'.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in the *vrata katha* performances carried out by the majority of Gujarati-Hindu women (Bastos, 2001; 2005), young orphaned daughters-in-law who are mistreated by their affinal families, regain esteem, a genealogy, children and various riches by recurring to the co-existence within them of two affective languages, one linked to the human world, the other to the (aquatic) world of serpents.

<sup>5</sup> According to a narrative (which is presented as historical), the first Indian/Hindu to land in Delagoa Bay (Lourenço Marques) underwent an identity transformation while crossing the *kali pani* (the black waters of the Indian Ocean); after being the subject of an undifferentiating *communitas* (Turner, 1969) – symbolised by the ingestion of salt water – he is reborn with new communicative powers, that is, as the owner of a double identity and linguistic conscience (Bakhtin, 1968) that is put to the service of both the Mozambicans natives and Gujarati Indians.

Following the announcement of Kumar's disappearance, a number of his relatives, who then lived in Mozambique, immediately sought a *nyanga* to ask him 'whether he was still alive', and since the answer was positive, they hired him to 'bring drugs and carry out rituals upon the beach'. At the same time, '*matxomana, tingoma e magoxa*' were played for various nights. His wife did not 'break the bracelets that indicated her married status' and 'no funeral was carried out, because they believed he might come back'. When the news reached Lisbon, Wembley and Leicester, however, numerous relatives consulted Indian specialists. In Lisbon, one *mataji*<sup>6</sup> was peremptory: 'Do not think that he is alive. He will not return. Only a miracle, and I will not allow it since he would only return to perform evil deeds.' The words of another *mataji*, who was consulted in Leicester, were also clear: 'He will not return'. However, the events were explained according to the cultural codes which apply to those who are lost, go mad, or destroy themselves:

The Mother Goddess said us that he had something in his hand, and lost it. That is very frequent. Sometimes, we go to medicine men, asking for help to keep to the right path, to obtain what we wish for, and they prepare something and give it to us to guide us. But if we loose that, we are lost too. Or maybe the African witch gave him something, a formula to repeat, to remember. But when you loose one word of those sentences, or make a mistake, everything turns upside down.

Even without consulting any specialist, many of the Hindus with whom I discussed the matter, offered with conviction other explanations for the events. One of the most frequent was repeatedly conveyed by sentences like, 'It was that witch, who put such ideas into his head, and directed him to the bottom of the sea, to avoid him becoming more powerful than himself.' Or, simply, 'he had much power, and wanted more. But he was bewitched, and captured at the bottom of the sea, dead or alive, that we do not know.'

Even though the expected time for his return has long since passed, doubts remain, especially since the African specialist had predicted that 'when he came out of the sea, even his wife would not recognise him'.

<sup>6</sup> Person possessed by the Hindu Mother Goddesses.

Mozambican symbolic ecology itself does not seem to propitiate the elimination of all doubts. As a Hindu woman resident in Maputo told me

Nobody knows. There are many who did go there to study and came back, they even print the news in the papers, they say they cure asthma, AIDS, the evil eye and so on. And speak of how life was down there, they say they ate algae, they grew scales, and describe the studies they undertook below the waters.

The impossibility of Kumar's return does not seem therefore to be eminently ontological. Many other reasons were in fact evoked to justify his failed return: a mistake in carrying out a ritual performance, his anti-social interest in seeking the arts of witchcraft and, lastly, the possibility that he may have been deceived by his cunning witch friend, who promised him more and more power.

### 3. 'Fátima is Ambá, Ambá is Fátima': identity productions on the position of the mother

Regardless of being currently resident in India, Africa or Europe, the presence and invocation of Our Lady of Fátima in the domestic altars of Portuguese-speaking Hindus is observed in families both of British Indian and Portuguese Indian origin, among the socio-economic elites as well as the most disfavoured classes. Fátima is also a reference in domestic rituals, both of those who say they have not 'assimilated much of Portuguese culture' and those who represent themselves as Hindus and, at the same time, Portuguese, emphasising that they maintained the best of their original references as well as drawing the best from their plurisecular contact with the Portuguese.

Our Lady of Fátima is not merely present in the house; she is also the object of individual, microfamiliar and collective peregrination. On certain dates of the Hindu calendar, in particular during the sacred month of *Sravan*, *tirtha* or pilgrimages to Fátima are organised. Many Gujarati Hindus who hail from India, Mozambique, other neighbouring African countries, or from Great Britain, when they visit Portugal, usually set aside one day to fulfil their vows in Fátima.

We have a lot of faith in Fátima. She is a form of our Mother Goddess. The name is different, but it is the same *Shakti* (feminine divine energy). We go there to fulfil our vows (...). Other people are amazed – they ask us: «Are you Catholic?» And we answer, «No, we are Hindus. But there is only one God, and one Ma, be it Ambá or Fátima.

A conversation with Portuguese speaking Hindus on Fátima is a strategic passage to attain an understanding of their representations on the *sui generis* nature of their polytheism, and the comparative advantage they attribute to it in comparison to other religions. In fact, in their own words, Fátima is conceived as ‘one of the forms of the Hindu goddess’, that is, one among the multiple ‘*shakti pitas*’ that resulted from the self-sacrifice of a supreme deity, holder of an excessive primordial energy (*Shakti*). The dismembering, energetic reduction and dispersion of the parts of this being gave origin to the ‘*shakti pitas*’ and organised the world, in its diversity and differentiation, in a framework of dependence between the different parts (representing the fragmented body of one original mother) and between each part and a primordial totality.

Hindus describe themselves as polytheist (‘we pray different gods’); however, when considered within this mythical framework, these descriptions may easily be simultaneously understood as characterising monotheism (‘there is only one god, but it has different names’), and a religion that is ‘more tolerant than others’ since, while it does recognise formal differences (which are however considered illusory), it succeeds in the integration and unification of various divine manifestations and different modes of the religious being. To journey to Fátima is, as underlined by numerous interviewees, to follow in Gandhi’s footsteps, to state that one is a Hindu and, despite appearances, to reclaim that what is shared with the believers of different faiths is actually more important. It is also, as a corollary, an occasion to restate that the *Sanathan Dharma* is the main source of Hindu tolerance, and also one of the variables that most differentiates Hinduism from other religions.

In fact, the hegemony of the Hindu Mother Goddess in the practices of Portuguese-speaking Hindus justifies their incorporative opening towards representations and practices which are central in the Portuguese socio-cultural and religious ecology, one that typically facilitates the imbalance of symbolic power at the service of maternal and filial positions (Bastos, 2000).

The same organizing principle (together with numerous other historic and situational variables) seems to determine the degree of permeability and tolerance, of boundary and conflict that Hindus establish with other diasporic communities of Indian origin, in particular, with ‘Indian Muslims’ (Sunnis) and Indian Ismailis (the *Khoja*) who share their migration history. For example, the exclusive option for a masculine divine figure, together with the neglect or the disqualifying inferiorisation of the maternal divinity, which is attributed to (Sunni) ‘Muslims’ by Hindus is profoundly depreciated and makes interaction between the two groups impossible. On the other hand, the acknowledgement of the supremacy of a maternal divinity in times of crisis, which is attributed to the ‘*Khoja*’ by Hindus are seen as ‘proof’ that the ancestors of Ismailis ‘were Hindus but were converted’ and, in parallel, as one of the reasons underlying the greater opening of Hindus in relation to the *Khojas*.

I have never seen or heard of a Muslim going to Fátima. For them there is only Allah, Allah, and Allah again. The rest are all wrong (...). Those that we call *khoja*, they are different. Many have faith in the *Ma*, and in Fátima too.

People think that we are all Indians. And so they are amazed because we pray Fátima. But Hindus and Muslims, it’s very different. A Muslim, unlike a Hindu or a Christian, has no faith in the *Matajis*. It’s only Allah. Among them, those who are most like us are the *Khoja*. And why? Because they were Hindus once .

The hegemony of the Mother Goddess may also be mobilised in the construction of identity differences among Gujarati Hindus. This happens, for example, in a number of areas of Greater London (Wembley, Alperton, Harrow, Edgware, Southall, etc.) where Portuguese-speaking Indians coexist with other Gujarati Hindus who previously migrated to British East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, etc.). In effect, many *patels* and some *lohanas*, who have been living in these areas since the 1960s and define themselves as *vaishnava*, followers of the *Sanatan Dharm*, or of a *sampradaya* (religious sect) of Vishnuite orientation (usually *Pushitmargi* or *Swaminarayan*), believe that a ‘huge gap’ separates them from the ‘Portuguese Indians’ or ‘Portuguesiá’ – the name they use for Portuguese-speaking Hindus. To justify this statement, they manipulate the Brahmanic distinction between *shatrik* (scriptural, immutable, and

superior) and *laukik* (popular, changeable, inferior, etc.) traditions to self-represent themselves as 'superior' (that is, followers of 'superior' traditions of Vishnuite orientation) in comparison to Portuguese-speaking Hindus, who are described as fervorous devotees of the Hindu Goddess, and as acritical believers in possession.

Another important difference is that, for them, the Goddess is paramount. They even believe that the Goddess can appear in human form and perform miracles. In this community, the majority of Hindus are devotees of Krishna, one of the *avatara* of Vishnu.

As a response to these representations, the majority of Portuguese Hindus with whom I spoke in West London offered the counterargument that 'the *Devi* is also what matters most to many *patels* and *lohanas*', and that they even know many *matajis* of *lohana* and *patel* castes, at the feet of which many kneel during *navaratri* (the nine-nights festival). They add that devotion to earthly forms of the Goddess 'has nothing to do with belonging to an inferior caste', or with age, sex, socio-economic position or educational qualifications.

This last argument leads many *lohanas* and *patels* to lay an emphasis on other differences (socio-economic and educational, for example) that separate them from the Portuguese Indians instead. As one of the best-known British Indian businessmen in London, a *patel*, told me: 'Even those who say they do not believe in the *Mataji avé* business, they are Hindus after all, and Hindus believe that any human can be a god, and that any god can have a human form.'

#### 4. Cultural bireferentiality or structural correspondence?

Syncretic work, according to Roger Bastide's hypothesis, is seen as the alternating participation in compartmentalised categories and universes of meaning that may be incompatible or even irreducible. However, the 'double indissociability of mentalities' (1970b:139) and/or symbolic bireferentiality (that may justify, according to Bastide, the participation of Blacks in Brazil in two opposed and juxtaposed repertoires – the Catholic Mass and the *candomblé*), does not seem to be applicable to Portuguese-speaking Hindus.

The parallel cult of the Catholic Holy Virgin and the Hindu Goddess implies, to the contrary, a symbolic work of identification of two references that implies various operations: the preferential focalisation of the maternal position occupied by the Virgin Mary (in detriment of the narrative system that organises its original meaning), followed by the attribution to the preselected functions and attributes of the Hindu Goddess. Fátima can thus be incorporated into the daily lives of Portuguese-speaking Hindus, without requiring a reorganisation or transformation of the referential symbolic organisers of her non-Catholic devotees.

The consultation, on the part of Portuguese-speaking Hindus, of an African *tiniyanga*, parallel to that of the *mataji* or of the Indian specialist in witchcraft, is not to be interpreted as a phenomenon of cultural bireferentiality. Beyond mentioning the performative similarity of the specialists in possession, many informants also refer the existence of a structural correspondence between certain Hindu and African symbolic organisers, in particular in the area of the interpretation of evil and sickness, the representation of the person, and the relation between humans, ancestors and gods.

Among these symbolic organisers, the common presupposition of the instability and porosity of the identity of beings (Daniel, 1984; Freeman, 1999; Mayaram, 1999; etc.), according to which any being may influence and be influenced by another being (of the same or a different category), stands out. This is the acknowledgement that, according to a number of Hindus, enables the Mozambican specialist to 'even pronounce the name of the *pitrus* [Hindu ancestors], saying that they are dissatisfied with something or other', or that 'the spirit of a dead black man may enter the body of an Indian to cause suffering'. Admitting the possibility that Indian/Hindus may be possessed by Muslim, Catholic or even African spirits and/or deities, and, at the same time, allowing for the possibility that Hindu spirits and/or deities may manifest themselves in 'whites' and 'blacks', Portuguese-speaking Hindus do not merely reject the relation of discontinuity between past and present, between the space that is perceived by the sense organs and the space that is not perceptible (that of ancestor spirits and deities); they also insist in stating that human and superhuman alterity is a mere illusion (*maia*).

Even though it is validated by numerous Hindu (and even African) statements, the theoretic model of structural correspondence risks dissimulating the difference between the points of view, motivations and identity strategies of the actual social actors who mobilise, in specific situations, the correspondence, dialogically recognised, between the respective symbolic systems.

According to quite a number of Hindu informants, the power of interference in the processes of evil influence attributed to Africans is mainly due to the fact that they are 'nearer' to 'impure', 'unsatisfied' and/or evil spirits (independently of the race, religion and ethnic group they belonged to when alive). In this sense, the power of the African diviner/medicine man/witch may be seen as the equivalent of the power of untouchables, to whom Portuguese-speaking Hindus also attribute similar magical powers (Perez, 1994), as well as varied abilities in the field of exorcism. The recourse to African magic and performances of possession is also represented as the incorporation of a level that is inferior (if compared to Hindu traditions of reference), but necessary and effective (in times of crisis). Structural correspondence does not therefore result in the elimination of inter-ethnic hierarchies. It does however seem to keep the relation «us»/«them» from turning into a binary, irreversibly determined opposition.

## 5. Syncretic work, interpretation and symbolic project: the centrality of the maternal power

Very much like the worship of Fátima and the recourse to the African *tinyanga*, the performance of the Indian who went to the bottom of the sea in Xai-Xai to obtain a doctorate in witchcraft cannot be interpreted as a mere phenomenon of symbolic bi-referentialism, since the common Hindu does not perceive Indian and African witchcraft as distinct symbolic systems, opposed and contradictory. The discourse generated by the intercontinental dispersal of this particular event leads us to take into consideration one of the first theoretic models of syncretic analysis, namely the hypothesis that the appropriation of exogenous cultural products demands that these always be reinterpreted in light of endogenous symbolic organisers.

Less frequent than the incorporation of exogenous material to which endogenous meanings are attributed, the incorporation of exogenous meanings which are attributed to endogenous and/or to pre-existing material seems however to be the explanation that best suits the Hindu understanding of the strange disappearance of the Indian man in Chibuto. The Hindu belief in the creative power of the submarine world acquires an exogenous meaning (inexistent, as far as I know, in the original symbolic repertory), that of a more advanced initiation ('a Doctorate') in the arts of witchcraft.

Following another Bastide's hypothesis (1970a), according to which the incorporated cultural partly guards a memory of the larger system of which it is a part, and tends to reconstruct the mental organisation which it expresses, we may be led to conclude that the journey of Kumar to the bottom of the sea requires a recomposition of the Hindu symbolic system. On the contrary, if we consider the Lévi-Strauss's insight<sup>7</sup> that the effective process of external assimilation does obey to constraints of the symbolic structure (which limit not only the possibilities of any loan, but also which cultural transitions are possible), the 'Doctorate' in witchcraft is to be interpreted merely as the filling of a «void», which is made possible and foreseen by the structure. Since the return (or lack thereof) from the bottom of the sea is pictured as dependent on the power of a Hindu deity, the incorporation of an exogenous meaning into a Hindu cultural belief is only possible through a sequential process of subordinating incorporation of the exogenous meaning into a wider endogenous meaning. While apparently open, the Hindu symbolic matrix constrains the loan process and seems to veto the emergence of an unprecedented reconfiguration.

However the analysis of the worship of Fátima as well as of the 'Doctorate' in the arts of witchcraft does however require a questioning of the contingent and random dimension of processes of bricolage, repeatedly formulated by Lévi-Strauss himself in *The Savage Thought*.

<sup>7</sup> When applied to historical situations (and in particular to colonial contexts), the Lévi-Straussian hypothesis (1991:292) according to which the irruption and the very symbolic denomination of the «other» are foreseen «as a void» in the symbolic matrix of the invaded and/or dominated peoples (which even offers them resources for their self-defence) has been repeatedly contested. However, historical evidence of actual transformations that modified the possibilities foreseen by the structure does not imply a complete invalidation of certain structural insights on the conditions of the possibility of cultural loans

The two cultural loans in question, originating in well-differentiated historical circumstances and belonging to different matrilineal fields (Catholicism and African witchcraft), hierarchically related among themselves (also by the Hindus themselves), were not selected randomly (within a relatively wide field of possibilities). They both appear to form a previously-defined symbolic project. That is, they are chosen and incorporated because they confirm the symbolic hegemony of the maternal position and its uterine and renewing functions. Moreover, the Hindu acceptance of the creative power of the bottom of the sea seems to be strengthened by the fact that the discursive field of *arrebamento* (rapture) itself, in Mozambique, evokes symbolic idioms that are typically associated to the Hindu Mother Goddess: giving oneself up to be eaten, be eaten then resurrect; be sucked in and be reborn, penetrate, then appear renewed (Bastos, 2001).

While the correspondence between Fátima and the Hindu Goddess seems to be an almost conscious process for Portuguese-speaking Hindus, the emotional impact that the 'courses' taken at the bottom of the sea cause to them requires that we introduce one more concept. The conditions for the symbolic possibility of the loan seem to be based upon a dramatic correspondence between an element that some authors (Biardeau, 1976, 1989; Malamoud, 1989) define as the Hindu logic of sacrificial violence<sup>8</sup> and the African symbolic logic of the regenerating violence that is associated to the bottom of the sea.<sup>9</sup> The Hindus with whom I talked about the events of Chibuto do not explicitly evoke the notion of sacrificial violence; this however does not mean that it has become non-operative (even though, to be verbalised and acted, it may require the recourse to the symbolic logic of the «other»). As stated by Madeleine Biardeau, 'The passage from conscious to unconscious does not necessarily imply a loss of meaning' (1988:116).

<sup>8</sup> Consisting in the giving oneself to be «devoured» by the gods and ancestors, then miming a new process of gestating uterine in order to be reborn, one's identity transformed.

<sup>9</sup> Where the ancestral spirits of Black men, killed by other Blacks during the ancient ethnic wars or the recent civil war reside, and pull in the living, sending them back to life with renewing powers, or from which in the past the Portuguese Whites emerged, and became powerful because they ate and/or sucked the life force of Blacks. About this type of regenerating violence, see the analysis carried out by Pina-Cabral (1999).

## 6. Identity strategies of symbolic power: the ambiguity of witchcraft

Any reflection, no matter how exploratory, upon the syncretic work carried out by Portuguese-speaking Hindus must include the analysis of underlying power relations and identity strategies of symbolic domination (and insubordination).

The statement 'Fátima is Ambá and Ambá is Fátima' produces a symbolic symmetrisation between polarities whose statute is asymmetrical – between colonised and colonisers in Diu (before 1961), between middleman and dominating minority (in Mozambique, until independence), and between a religious minority and the religious majority (in current-day Portugal). However, in my perspective, it may not be reduced to a mere strategy of cultural resistance or identity ruse; one that, while signalling an apparent conversion to cultural standards defined as Portuguese, allowed the defence and the renewal of endogenous religious and cultural resources. In the former Portuguese colony of Diu, over 90% of the population maintained their Hindu identity (religion, name, etc.) and, with few exceptions, there is no record of systematic attempts to convert the population to the Catholic religion. Concurrently, in Mozambique, the Portuguese colonial administration legalised Hindu associations and temples, while recognising that 'the tranquil serenity with which Hindus [...] encourage and help their children to attend in [...] secondary schools classes of Christian morals and religion' did not seem in any way to affect their private beliefs and practices,<sup>10</sup> that is, could in no way be interpreted as an indicator of their cultural and/or religious assimilation to Portuguese civilisation. Hindus did in fact periodically offer the Portuguese colonial administration 'proofs' of their political subordination to the regime that were far more significant than their worship of Fátima. Among the most widely recognised, the confirmation (by Hindu elites) of racial and religious tolerance as moving forces of the Portuguese Colonial Empire, the inclusion of Portuguese language instruction among the basic objectives of the main Hindu associations in the colony and, more importantly, the numerous demonstrations of

<sup>10</sup> See the document entitled "Estudo sobre indianos" ["Study on Indians"] (commissioned by the Ministry of Overseas Territories to the Government of the Province), Lourenço Marques, 28<sup>th</sup> August 1962, page 27 (Historical Archives of Mozambique).

deference, admiration and homage to the Colonial Government (Bastos, 2003).

On the other hand, the discursive arena generated by 'the Indian who went to the bottom of the sea to obtain a Doctorate in witchcraft' does resort to an identity stratagem, as a moving force of the work of cultural interpenetration. However, it conceives it as a secret and/or as a typically African skill. According to the Hindus themselves, the growing monopolisation of economic, political and even symbolic power on the part of 'foreigners' in postcolonial Mozambique, apparently accepted by the Mozambicans, corresponds to the development of strategies of resistance and symbolic opposition against all those who, as well as gaining political and economic power, still dare to steal their 'power of witchcraft'. Among these, the friendly transmission of African representations and performances to the 'foreigner' on the part of local witches seems to confirm, once more, the indocile nature (Mbembe, 1988) of African traditions. According to numerous Hindus: 'It was that witch, who put such ideas into his head and directed him to the bottom of the sea, to avoid him becoming more powerful than himself.'

In addition, the representations produced about Kumar therefore to reveal the ambiguity of witchcraft in its relation with power (Geschiere, 1997). Witchcraft, as the very source of accumulation of economic and political power and, as a corollary, a weapon in the hands of those who are deprived and excluded from such powers, still offers a whole set of notions, strategies and tactics to elaborate, express and reinterpret inequalities and asymmetries in new socio-historical circumstances.

## Concluding remarks

As Appadurai has recently argued (1998), ethnic violence produces a sort of "dead certainty", that is, constitutes a mode of resolution of uncertainty with respect to identities created by the flows of weapons, refugees and immigrants, trade, information and modern taxonomies which are characteristic of globalization. However, it may not be conceived as the only cultural strategy to negotiate with the «foreigner». For example, Dominique Desjeux (1987), on the basis of a study of the Sundi region, near Brazzaville, attempts to show how witchcraft, by

emphasising the dimension of uncertainty, is one mode of managing insecurity. Similarly, Shail Marayam (1999), uses a case study of possession in Rajahstan to conclude that the anti-binarising conception of the «self»/«other» relation underlying the event of possession diverges from ethnic annihilation as a response to the otherness of the other. The emphasis laid by Portuguese-speaking Hindus on the incorporative, metamorphic and porous nature of «self»/«other» relation also suggest alternative solutions to managing identity power dynamics.

Recognising the importance that this conception have in the daily lives of Portuguese-speaking Hindus, many British Hindus – in particular, those who developed opposite identity strategies (of closure and self-control of their boundaries, oriented towards the rejection of processes of influence and the religious concentration upon non-maternal religious positions) – conceive Portuguese Indians as 'less pure' (that is, in one of the possible religious registers, hybrid). The accused however do not conceive the Hinduism they recreated in Mozambique, Portugal or the United Kingdom as a syncretic product. Similarly, to an outsider, the episode of the 'Indian from Chibuto who went to the bottom of the sea to get a doctorate in witchcraft' would be described as an indicator of hybridism. However, if this were the case, it would be the result of the «arqueological disposition» or ethnocentric «habitus» of separating the original from the exogenous, and, more importantly, of corroborating a single point of view, among various possible interpretations, of what «being a Hindu» means.

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