

The Portuguese in Canada: our Divided, Fragmented and Comical Selves

Today, as I watch the world from the safe walls of the Ivory tower, I can't help but to wonder why my people continue to be divided; as much as the academic world and my research has protected me from all the nonsense, I have not been oblivious to the world at large.

Often, I have been interrogated regarding my background. Yes, just being Portuguese is not good enough. One must focus in on the precise area, which ultimately tends to reside in the following division: mainland or the Azores? And then come other "interesting" questions accompanied by disturbed and puzzled faces. One of the most popular ones that truly amuses me is the accusation that I don't look Azorean or have an "Azorean" accent. And, without these features, why would anyone want to claim to be Azorean?

At first I would entertain this question and explain that there are nine islands in the archipelago, each with its own peculiar accent and cultural difference; and, although I am corisca, I was raised in Faial, the blue island, known for its neutral accent and cosmopolitan flair. But soon enough, I strongly suspected that I was being judged as a "rare breed", where I might be interpreted as some sort of scientific experiment to be handled with care, a creature that could at any minute, regress to its primitive "island ways."

To the chagrin of many, I regret to confess that these experiences have provided much amusement and funny anecdotes that I continue to share with friends. I would picture us, Azoreans, riding our donkeys, speaking, or better yet, mumbling with our most peculiar sounds, going around in circles, stuck in the ever so narrow territorial limitations of our existence... and then the struggle for survival - low key of course - our misery did not grant us a huge Hollywood budget. Yes, I still remember the day when one of us discovered that we could indeed stand on only two legs! Joyous occasion it was!



Maria João Dodman
Assistant Professor
in the Department of
Languages, Literatures
and Linguistics at York
University in Toronto,
Canada.

In my case, it has removed much of the awkwardness and cumbersome logistics of taking public transportation. So, as the reader can at this point imagine, my fantasies grew each and every time more ridiculous and so did my answers. Consequently, the "questioning" stopped, as I became empowered through a heroic stance reminiscent of post-colonialism, where the subaltern does speak back!

Well, I guess that those that divide us won't read this piece, as they are probably occupied with the sacred scriptures, concerned with these infidels that insist on belonging, that continue to corrupt the ever so pure língua de Camões with their regional mambo jumbo... Oh my! But, if they did read it, would they understand it? Would they be able to grasp my humour, my sarcasm? And, if they did understand, would they laugh with me... at themselves? How would they handle all these insults? What would they do when I hurl at them offences peppered with all sorts of regional deviances: boto os pontos nos is, faço de conta que não sou bem-discreta p'ra não me inquietar and I ride off on my donkey. But, along the way I stop in many places, and I greet all sorts of friends. I admire the tenacity of my country folks of the north and somehow I get my hands on a bottle of licor beirão. In exchange, I offer one of mine, licor de maracujá... do Ezequiel of course, the original.

I travel south to tell them how much I admire their revolutionary spirit ... I end up breaking my dietary restrictions and indulge in some regional sausage. In exchange, I offer hydrangeas, blue, like my island. I make a special trip to tell my friends from Madeira that their folklore intrigues me, and I tell them that my fantasy is to arrive at work wearing one of those very unique and interesting hats, that captivate my sight while they dance. My wish is granted. I don't however have much left to barter. So, I tell them about my favourite baleeiro, Dias de Melo, whom I still mourn...

Suddenly, I am back in the classroom, surrounded by my students of all diverse ethnicities, among them, young Canadians of Portuguese heritage. I realize that they have also been on this journey with me, they are re-discovering who they are. We open the forum to discuss the era of the discoveries and slavery, fascism and democracy, gender and equality, our vibrant literature.

We find açorianidade alongside silence, voice, attitude, and hope. We all laugh ... at us, with us and for us. Indeed, the future is bright. In front of me is the next generation of integrated Canadians, who are exchanging stories, feeding of their uniqueness, treasuring each other's company, differences and similarities.

Ó gente da minha terra, have you heard the saying "if you can't defeat them, join them"? Perhaps this is the time. Welcome aboard!



www.ptvirtual.com
o seu jornal diário
e agenda comunitária na internet.

Clique em www.ptvirtual.com para ler
a revista Senso online.