

The Padre António Vieira Chair: Teaching, Research and Cultural Action

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The Padre António Vieira Chair in Portuguese Studies was created on 7 October 1994, as the result of an agreement signed between the Instituto Camões and PUC-Rio [<http://www.letas.puc-rio.br/catedra/>]. Since then, the Chair has developed into an interdisciplinary space for the training of teachers and researchers in the social sciences.

Promoting academic exchanges between Brazil and Portugal, the Chair's main aim has been to deepen the cultural dialog that already exists between the two countries within the university context. Operating in close collaboration with the Graduate Studies program in PUC-Rio's Department of Letters, the Chair undertakes research in core thematic areas. In this sense, the formation of a team composed of researchers and research assistants has been one of the most relevant outcomes in the consolidation of the studies undertaken.

The Chair is involved in the training of teachers in the areas of Portuguese Literature and Culture, Portuguese Language, and Lusophone Literatures. Since 1994, fifty-six master's degrees and twenty-four doctorates have been completed in the department, many of the successful candidates having already joined the teaching staff of some of the most important universities in Brazil. Currently, there are twenty-eight students regularly enrolled in the graduate program in Portuguese Literary Studies at PUC-Rio, eighteen of whom are pursuing Ph.D. degrees, while the other ten are masters students.

Research projects

I. Literature and Urban Experience – The aim of this project is to study the ways in which the city is represented and the relationships these representations maintain with the wider universe of culture. With this aim in mind, attempts are being made to assemble an interdisciplinary and trans-disciplinary bibliography in the field of urban studies, to construct a theoretical framework that makes it possible to read the images and representations of the city in poetic, narrative and reference works from 19th and 20th century Brazilian and Portuguese literature, and, from a comparative standpoint, to interact with texts from other literatures. This research is focused on the question of the legibility of the modern and postmodern city.

II. Representation and Testimony in Contemporary Literature – Research is directed toward the reading and analysis of the mechanisms by which individuals represent and report limit-experiences, focusing on writers and other artists working over the last fifty years. The aim is to detect a return to the forms, genres and languages enshrined in tradition and reinscribed as a strategy for representing and reporting historical processes, such as the one that took place in Portugal and involved the Estado Novo (New State), the Revolution of the Carnations in 1974 and the decolonization of the Portuguese-speaking African countries. Furthermore, attempts are made to map out the discursive territories created by voices that embody both extreme experiences of the curtailment of freedom and the diverging paths of displacement, migration and reconfiguration that identify societies marked by regimes of exception.

III. The role of the intellectual in modern society – Research seeks to identify and analyze the mechanisms of writing that have positioned the writer as a committed citizen and politically engaged intellectual in Portuguese and Portuguese-speaking African societies over the last few decades. It is dedicated to interpreting the “procedures” of reading/writing with which, in modern and postmodern societies, the writer calls into question the verbal scenarios that dominate everyday life through the production of “reality effects” and social control. The project also seeks to analyze the role of the writer as a producer of meaning and a constructor of alternative histories that unweave and then reweave the “fabric of narratives” with which the history of Portuguese and Portuguese-speaking African societies has been read over the last few decades.

IV. Literature, politics and culture: relations between Portugal, Brazil and Africa - Research here looks at the relations between Portugal, Brazil and Africa, highlighting the role played by tradition, or the break with it, in the construction of identifying cultural landmarks. Adopting a clearly comparative critical standpoint, an attempt is made to give shape to an in-between place, making it possible to generate new readings of Portuguese, Brazilian and (Portuguese-speaking) African cultural production that move between times and spaces where they are housed between present/past, colonial history/post-colonial experience, nationality/transnationality. Analysis is directed toward the production of Portuguese, Brazilian and African literature, essays and iconography over the last fifty years, focusing on the configurations and reconfigurations of cultural marks of identity and their possible relationship with media production.

V. Creditors, debtors and innovators in Portuguese Literature – This project examines the continued influence of Camões and Fernando Pessoa on poets who, whether they admit it or not, always retain them as present in their minds, even when rebelling against these indispensable references. Intertextual relationships are analyzed in which the poetics of either homage or opposition to the great names are manifested, allowing for the development of new forms of dialog with literary tradition.

VI. Vieira and the Portuguese language in the 17th century – This diachronic research effort, which has been under development since the 1990s, has placed the greatest emphasis on Vieira’s inflective words, with special attention paid to the factors that make it possible for migrations

to occur between processes of grammaticalization. Although the majority of linguistic changes in Portuguese were implemented during the 15th and the first half of the 16th centuries, this research project offers valuable insights, particularly with regard to the introduction of concessive constructions. Among the most noteworthy features of Vieira's text are the syntactic processes used to express concessivity. The following are examples of items being researched: the use of the gerund; the agreement of the past participle with the direct object in periphrastic constructions with the verbs *haver* and *ter*; the links between compound tenses and periphrasis with *ter* and *haver*; forms of treatment; the prepositioned direct object; the emergence of the opposition between *lhe* (singular) and *lhes* (plural); the expression of finality through the use of structures introduced by the preposition *por* and the conjunction *porque*.

VII. The oratory of Padre António Vieira: the doctrinal message in a new style – This project considers Vieira's extensive and important oeuvre, specifically his *Cartas*, *História do Futuro*, and *Sermões*, placing special emphasis on the sermons. An examination is made of the way in which writing reveals the domination of the sacred books and the discursive expression of faith. In texts of high literary quality, descriptions are given of the ways in which the author makes critical use of the processes of oratory in general, and the baroque style in particular.

International Seminars

Since 1995, the Padre António Vieira Chair in Portuguese Studies has been hosting seminars at PUC-Rio that have sought to discuss themes and questions related to present-day concerns, to promote methodological approach, and to respect the tradition that has been bequeathed to us. The seminars also foster interdisciplinary discussion by bringing together researchers from Brazil and other countries, who represent various teaching and research institutions and disciplinary backgrounds. Seminars undertaken by the Padre António Vieira Chair are listed below:

- **“Revisiting Luís de Camões: 400 years of the *Rhythmas*” (1995)** – This first seminar organized by the Chair paid homage to Luís de Camões on the four hundredth anniversary of the publication of his lyrical work, the *Rhythmas*. The seminar addressed the princeps edition of the *Rhythmas* against the broad panorama of Renaissance culture.
- **“The 150th anniversary of the birth of Eça de Queirós” (1995)** – This seminar commemorated the 150th anniversary of Eça de Queirós's birth. In addition to honoring Queirós as a great Portuguese novelist, the main feature of this meeting was the exchange of experiences and the debate that took place between teachers who have used Eça's work as one of the central avenues of their research.
- **“The various faces of António Vieira” (1995)** – The three hundredth anniversary of the death of Padre António Vieira, the patron of the Chair, was commemorated with lectures given by four Brazilian and Portuguese specialists on Vieira.

- **“Vieira 300 years later” (1996)** – Taking advantage of the presence of Professor Margarida Vieira Mendes, a leading specialist on Padre António Vieira, as a visiting professor to the Graduate Program in Letters, this seminar was organized on the subject of Vieira’s work and brought together a new group of specialists.

- **“Cities in Dialog: literature and urban experience” (1997)** – This seminar was planned in close conjunction with the Chair’s research project on “Literature and the Urban Experience”, using texts that deal with the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Lisbon as its main axis. It also sought to promote the exchange of experiences between Brazilian and Portuguese researchers on the urban themes in literature and other disciplines.

- **“Must one be absolutely modern?” (1998)** – The main aim of this seminar was to create a forum for debating questions and theories referring to the terms *modern*, *modernism*, *modernity* and *postmodernity*. In this sense, Rimbaud’s famous and emblematic phrase was taken as the seminar’s theme, though it was presented as a question. Examining the issue from this standpoint, the Chair’s 6th seminar sought to prompt a debate on the theories of modernization and their determinants, particularly with regard to the insertion of cultural products in political, social and cultural fields.

- **“Culture and Democracy: the 25th anniversary of the April 25th Revolution” (1999)** – The linked themes of culture and democracy (as well as their impasses, advances, and retreats), which have been topical in the modern and now postmodern ages, functioned as the lynchpins for this interdisciplinary seminar. The commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Portugal’s Revolution of the Carnations, which took place on April 25th, 1974, provided the occasion for a reinterpretation through a comparison with the cultural effects of Brazil’s own return to democracy. The seminar also acknowledged the Portuguese writer José Cardoso Pires, an intellectual who resisted the dictatorship and defended democratic principles throughout his life in order to safeguard culture as a right to be enjoyed by everyone.

- **“Scenes from Modern Life and the Globalization of Culture: Madrid, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, the World (2000)** – The title of this seminar references Eça de Queirós’s project, “Scenes from Portuguese Life”, which was intended to map the society of his time. The title additionally refers to globalization as a force that calls national cultures into question, and contests the heretofore-dominant idea that the nation establishes cultural boundaries. The homage paid to Eça de Queirós, in the year that marked the centenary of his death, was coupled with a tribute to Cesário Verde, a writer considered decisive in the development of “modern” Portuguese poetry. These two Portuguese artists and intellectuals were considered together as a bridge for reflecting on this new fin de siècle period, in which cultural phenomena interact with tradition in new ways.

- **“Nostalgia for Scheherazade? – The state of the narrative at the beginning of the 21st century” (2001)** – This seminar invokes Scheherazade as an archetypal narrator, in whom tradition has placed all the supreme skills of the art of storytelling - prodigious inventiveness, seduction, the ceremony of storytelling, listening, plot and enchantment – in order to investigate the

role of the narrative at the beginning of this new century. What can the figure of Scheherazade teach us in these postmodern times? What today can be said to be the most appropriate form of storytelling?

– **“Theatre and Society: Gil Vicente – 500 years of theatre”** (2002) – This seminar maintained a certain openness in its choice of participants from different areas and from various Brazilian and Portuguese universities, although Gil Vicente served as its central figure remembrance, study and discussion. Vicente was selected for his role as the founder of Portuguese theatre and a playwright still considered as Portugal’s greatest, whose 500 years of theatre were commemorated in June 2002. The expansion of the seminar’s theme to encompass the relationship between theatre and society allowed for approaches based on centuries worth of challenging theatrical work and for reflection upon the role of the theatre in Brazil and Portugal.

– **“The Role of the Intellectual Today”** (2003) – The term “intellectual” certainly carries a double meaning, which can be seen in the historical and sometimes oppositional relationship between the formation and composition of the cultured classes and the political efficacy of a culture. The Chair’s eleventh seminar therefore set out to discuss, in general terms, the forms through which intellectuals as a particular category or social class, which is distinguished by its education and competence, acquire more specific connotations that point toward the role of the “socially committed” writer. Moreover, the seminar considered the term *intellectual* as a designation given to artists, scholars, scientists and, in general, anyone who, through his or her cultural endeavors, has acquired authority and influence in public debates.

– **“In 10 Years: Literature, Politics, Culture”** (2004) – University Professors from Brazil, Portugal and Mozambique met in Auditorium of PUC-Rio’s Rio Data Centre (RDC) to reflect upon events, works, authors and phenomena from literature, politics and culture from the past ten years. In 2004, the Padre António Vieira Chair in Portuguese Studies additionally commemorated its tenth anniversary of continuous activity.

– **“Species of Spaces”** (2005) – Its title taken from the book *Espèces d’espaces* (1974) by the French writer Georges Perec, this seminar sought to question space, or more specifically the reading of it. Based on this simple and open premise, space was chosen as a privileged category for thinking about the contemporary world. In the discourses of the most varied disciplines, there is a tendency to resort to this category and its correlates, such as place, non-place, in-between place, territory, limit, (de)territorialization, globalization, worldwide and local, center and periphery, nation-state, cosmopolitanism, etc., which have removed the category of time from the center of analysis. It has indeed been said that time, which was given a privileged place in Modernity’s formulations and proposals, is now giving way to space, to which the general context of postmodernity affords a privileged position. It is there that spaces have taken on new dimensions that, with the internationalization of cultures and economies, merit new forms of research. The chair’s 13th Seminar sought to open up debate to include an interdisciplinary perspective, or more radically, a post-disciplinary perspective.

The Chair's Research Forum

The idea of creating an annual forum arose from the need to grant visibility to graduate students' academic output. The aim is to broaden the horizons of discussion through exchange with researchers from other disciplines and academic institutions, always with the aim of enriching the work of all those involved.

The title of the chair's 1st research forum was "Photographs: Interpretations of Time in the Empire of the Ephemeral," with the expression "the empire of the ephemeral" taken from the French title of a book by Gilles Lipovetsky. In this study, Lipovetsky analyzed the central role played by fashion in contemporary societies. The forum once more brings this expression into play, broadening its scope and emphasizing its relationship with time and its interpretations as photographs. The meetings made it possible to engage in discussions and analyses about the universe of contemporary man. Presently, there is a constant concern with establishing oneself as an individual, and with asserting some particularity in the midst of the crowd, which means that we are constantly recording and photographing our own footsteps. In Lipovetsky's view, one of the driving forces behind this movement is a kind of dictatorship of fashion that involves the metamorphosis of ethics, a new economy of the sexes, and, above all, the explosion of consumption to meet the requirements of a hedonistic individual, the product of frustrated modern idealizations.

The 1st forum brought together graduate students from PUC-Rio and other universities in order to promote multidisciplinary discussion of the representations of time and the snapshots that mark a literature in action.

Publications

Publishing has been one of the lynchpins of the Chair's existence. Since 2004, efforts have been made to diversify our line of publications, resulting in our present number of three annual titles – the *Semear* and *Gândara* journals and a book related to the Chair's international seminars.

Semear, designated an A concept by Qualis of CAPES and charged with disseminated professors and students' output, was given a new look, design and layout in 2004. From issue No. 11 onwards, in keeping with its monographic line, the journal will be dedicated to publishing works related to the Chair's various lines of research, as well as pieces by guest specialists petitioned in order to stimulate debate and responses from multiplicity of viewpoints.

Gândara, published by the Chair's research assistants, is regarded as a fundamental vehicle for encouraging dialog between researchers from different graduate programs by publishing works that are currently in progress or have recently been completed.

The book the Chair publishes annually under the auspices of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG) makes it possible to disseminate the intellectual output of our international seminars to booksellers all over Brazil, as well as to reach a broader Brazilian and international reading audience through online bookstores. The books *Literatura, Política, Cultura* (2005) and *O Papel do Intelectual Hoje* (2004) are included in the Humanitas Collection, which publishes essays written in Brazil and abroad in the areas of the social sciences, letters and the arts.

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To conclude, I should like to mention that the Padre António Vieira Chair's various activities have as their central aim the granting of a well-deserved, broad visibility to the Chair's research team in the academic sphere, in the field of cultural production taking place in the city of Rio de Janeiro, and among national and international audiences.