

THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW IDENTITY (IES)  
FOR THE LUSOSPHERE:  
ASYNCHRONY AND DECENTRING

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## ABSTRACT:

This paper will seek to articulate the issues of identity (briefly engaging in the history of the evolution of the concept in Portugal up until how it is contemporarily addressed in the context of Cultural Studies) with the building up of the Lusosphere in the context of strong economical, political, mediatical and cultural globalization.

The Lusosphere is far from being a movement / an aspiration shifted in time. It now experiences very strong prospects to develop and assemble, not anymore as the dream of the Fifth Empire (that so deeply seduced the lusophones, from Vieira to Pessoa, and Camões) but as a way of articulating different cultural and linguistic perspectives capable of building the bridges of intra and intercultural dialogue that the world nowadays requires.

To this end, we will convene Portuguese authors such as Eduardo Lourenço and Boaventura Sousa Santos (the latter from a post-colonialism perspective), which will outlook the construction (critical, but optimistic and productive) of a Lusosphere to be grounded. Other authors like Gadamer and Lotman, particularly vacationed to the understanding and intercultural communication will be taken into account in order to collect their contributions for the construction and the deepening of the beautiful utopia that is the Lusosphere.

**Keywords:** *Lusosphere*, identity, Globalization, Postcolonialism, Intercultural Communication

## 1-THE CONCEPT OF IDENTITY EPISTEMOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS.

In *L'identité*, Lévi-Strauss refers to the theme of identity and analyzes it problematically. There he states that this concept, although widely used, has no real existence. He claims that all the approaches to this notion should first start by criticizing it.

Undeniably, the use of the term identity must include a critical position directly from the outset. Somehow, and at first level of approach, it contains a kind of appeal to tradition and to what it can imply of 'uniqueness' and 'difference'. Therefore, the 'issue of identity' implies in itself a question, and simultaneously a resolution: a question, because it represents an approach that chooses the problematical and critical procedure. It understands identity not as a response but as an always-open problem. In addition, it is a resolution proposal because the single choice of this approach to culture implies a philosophical positioning of resistance to the logic of post-modern societies' cultural industries.

The very notion of 'Portuguese culture' and even 'Lusophone culture', does not cease to signal that space of resistance, also cultural and political (in the broadest sense of the word) against the cultural standardization and globalization of the contemporary age. Far from accepting the concept of culture as a rigid, fetish form, it seems to us that, in the current cultural context, it has a strategic value. It therefore allows a thorough critique of modern reason

instrumentality in order to prepare epistemological and didactically the path towards a rationale that can only avoid some of the major difficulties of the concept of identity if it is deeply critical and historical (self-critical, since the beginning).

We clearly know the criticism that has already undergone the concept of cultural identity and the constant risk of instrumentalization of all kinds taken by this cultural approach standpoint. We know how Foucault opposed the concept of identity and all social constructs that implied it (including the pairs male / female, homosexual/heterosexual, criminal / non-criminal, etc.), for being too present the risk of passing from implicit acts to implicit identities (e.g., the case of the identity of homosexuals throughout history). Foucault considered not knowing who he was, not always being the same, not even wanting to be always the same. Well, this is the very sense of critique, open problematic and constant reversibility, which is nowadays sought of to address identity issues.

Similarly, regarding the consideration of dialectics which necessarily implies a certain 'negative experience', Adorno emphasizes that in our day societies tend not to recognize any philosophical dignity to this kind of experience, as they are submitted to the identity/reckoning of a rationally abridged to its instrumental condition. Thus, it is crucial that a theoretical path over the question of identity allows reflection on non-identity, in order to achieve a perspective of the humanities potentially refractory to the interchange between rationality and domination.

We nonetheless know that neither the matter of culture nor the identity issue can completely evade the political question that is, moreover, the basic assumption of 'cultural studies'. In this domain, the greatest risk would be the one of allegedly finding shelter under any political debate, refusing it, in order to avoid certain issues of concern, potentially dangerous, such as identity. It is rather, as we do in this context, to delimitate the concept and know its hitches, tensions and ambivalences, adopting an attitude of critical vigilance, setting off a dialectical and controversial conception of cultural identity itself.

In an even more incisive way, Marcuse (and before him Horkheimer and Adorno, Georg Lukács and even Marx) refuses the national identity discourse, because it commonly refers to an exaggerated nationalism, which usually results from bourgeois mercantilism now expanded and involved in the concept of nation.

Criticism upon the identity issue, which underlies the most diverse contemporary nationalisms, we find it also in Savater in one of his most radical formulations, one that points to the pure and simple abolition of a certain concept of nation and even of the concept of homeland. Indeed, for Savater, men identity with a nation firstly through the confrontation with other men and the exclusion of other homelands. The concepts of nationalism (loyalty to an ethnical or cultural lineage) and patriotism (belonging to a particular place of birth), although sometimes they are understood as essentially biological, upcoming from a social pact, the result of a political will that creates them arranging and imposing them on others.

We therefore consider, in the path of Savater that violence has been inherent to the concept of nation state, which has used the national identity as a legitimizing myth of the centralizing function of the state, the linguistic and national claims akin other movements that proclaim the right to difference (racial and sexual, difference etc.).

With Savater it appears to us essential to distinguish the national consciousness of an exacerbated nationalism, considering the first as a lucid and balanced form of national identity, while the second involves a traumatic origin and implies an aggressive behaviour and narcissism. Nationalism has isolationist logic, but also expansive, it has a fetishistic obsession for a certain concept of national identity, a special fondness for unanimism and popularity and is essentially heterophobic.

On the opposite, the identity topic, issued by a Lusophone Community would have to be very different: the current cultural and political situation requires dialogue, intense communication between different cultures, accepting the inevitable principle of ethnic, linguistic and cultural fusion within an unavoidable multiculturalism context. Despite the fact that language itself is also violence, it is nonetheless the only way to escape barbaric and, in the case of Lusosphere, the element that can serve as a powerful articulator between the different cultures that this community shelters.

Moreover, the challenge of postmodernism is precisely to transform the old European cultures, living in an age-old concept of nation-state (first Spain itself, but also Portugal, France or England),

so that they can integrate multiple cultures and let cultural diversity live within their environment, while integrating in a coherent super-structure level. In the case of Portugal and the Portuguese speaking peoples, that super-structure level could precisely be the Lusosphere.

## 2 - IDENTITY, GLOBALIZATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

Formerly Eliot, in his reflections on the question of contemporary societies' culture, highlighted the tensions and difficulties concerning the traditional concept of culture. Cultural studies particularly pluralized or sprayed the very concept of culture while seeking to escape the discourse of cultural relativity in search of a concept of culture that would define man in terms of quality and a universal form.

Indeed, Eliot quickly realized that a global culture would not be any culture, a finding that is nowadays particularly relevant in times of globalization. However, on the contrary to what Eliot thought, the representatives of this world culture are not poets or intellectuals. Rather, what we find is a 'McDonaldization of society' (Ritzer), a homogenization of the responsibility of transnational economic networks and rituals of global consumption. It is precisely in opposition to this tendency toward homogenization that the expression 'cultural identity' (or 'cultural identities') can have a decisive importance.

We are nevertheless aware of how the manipulation of a reifying concept of cultural identity can have negative impacts on cultural practice (the same way that multiculturalism began as a positive concept and at present is acquiring a negative connotation, sometimes bringing more trouble than solutions). One of the authors who stressed the consequences of use (or misuse) of identity was Samuel Huntington to describe the 'clash of civilizations'.

It is obvious that neither the word 'globalization' nor the word 'identity' are neutral: they both represent different viewpoints on a range of social phenomena, political and cultural. The whole issue is on bringing to reflection their key theoretical assumptions, reflect on them and take positions that are primarily theoretical and political choices. The challenge of Lusosphere resides exactly here, at the critical point that requires theoretical and political choices, that is the will and power of man, of the various Portuguese speaking worlds.

Considering Lusosphere as a mere organizer that enclose as the sole point of support culture and language, has been in our opinion one of the strategies for which Lusosphere has not been achieved. Firstly because the Portuguese language we all, Portuguese, speak is not, strictly speaking, the same Portuguese language. Secondly, because we all, Portuguese speaking peoples, are culturally very different. Aggravating this situation is the fact that the very use of the term 'culture' is at present so inflated, that we can scarcely fail to agree with Adorno and Horkheimer when they claim, in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, that talking about culture, has always been an act against culture. This inflation of the term is a

clear symptom of a profound crisis of our societies, but especially of the centres of knowledge production, the universities. The fact that the term has gained such a wide meaning has been leading to its void. Simultaneously, culture becomes an object of fetishistic consumption, losing all its character and essential constituent of self-reflection and could therefore come to serve any instrumental purpose.

The fact that culture can not be reduced to a friendly object nor hold a special status in any field, but be present at all levels of social practices is a crucial piece of evidence in the context of Cultural Studies. From here, it seems to us that one of the very first tasks of any reflection on the field of culture must begin by deconstructing the concept of 'culture', a propaedeutic task to any reasoning.

The very concept of globalization deserves to be rethought. The contemporary world has become an interactive system so powerful it can no longer deal with culture without addressing issues related to new communication technologies, which are offering us an increasingly integrated world, a global culture with the trademarks of totality and of an extreme compression of space and time. Appadurai proposes that globalization continues to be seen not merely as a process of standardization, but as the production of a complex system, internally diverse and accepting difference. Then there is certainly the possibility of eruption of identity movements and differentiators. Thus, heterogeneity and fragmentation will be an indispensable part of the globalization process. In turn, the alternative to globalization is not necessarily the affirmation

of cultural relativism, which would restrict the concept of culture within a purely local, bearing only ethnographic or ethnological interest. If the notion of culture can have some critical role within an eventual hegemonic process of globalization, it is because there is still room for a notion of culture at the global level. Its premise would rely upon a global ethics grounded on human rights and respect for cultural diversity. Culture, in that sense, is not an abstract idea but historical and social for it is rooted in the history of culture.

At an intermediate level we propose the establishment of units aggregating linguistic and cultural sense but also holding a story with a common ballast, by societies who claim through their wills, political and economical power a desire for greater integration (at several levels) and of increasing approximation. That is the position where the Lusophone Community stands: an epistemological crossroads, but also social, political and historical. Briefly and to summarize it all, cultural crossroads.

## 2.1 - LUSOSPHERE AND GLOBALIZATION A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

A re-evaluation and redefinition of cultural identity is closely related to the understanding of the process of globalization. Evidently, for certain cultural features to be regarded as marks of identity, they must be viewed in a broader context. As stated by Boaventura Sousa-Santos, the more certain phenomena pretend to be global,

the more others seem local. The fact that the global can be no more than a globalized localism is very often hidden and denied, in order to give rise to a new kind of cultural imperialism.

The trend towards ethnicization of cultural identity is certainly one possible answer to the pressure of globalization and is part of an overall mechanism (now designated as 'intercultural relations' or "dialogue of cultures") that connects the cultures of the centre to peripheral cultures, simulating the absence of asymmetrical power relations. With the digital age, the very concepts of centre and periphery are in the process of dissolution, through the compression of space and time.

Therefore, both the notion of 'interculturalism' and of 'cultural identity' finds in the process of globalization some possibilities for reconstruction, despite being ambivalent and tenuous. Indeed, what seems to be emerging is a new and dynamic concept of cosmopolitanism that starts from an attitude that does not yield to the logic of a blind globalization nor accepts the simple, pure cultural relativity.

In this context, Lusosphere has an opportunity: escape from the ethnicization of cultural identity, as well as from the overwhelming centripetal absorption of globalization. Under the condition, that it is understood as a political process, asymmetrical, from whatever point of view we want to consider it, wills in construction, a community of Portuguese speaking people is a beautiful project, a utopia that is there to challenge and test us, the lusophones.

### 3 - A LUSOPHONE CULTURE CONCEPT TO CONTEMPORARY AGES

The concept of culture created and already criticized by modernity, has undergone significant shifts in post-modernity. In this context, we have no other purpose than to propose a concept of culture with which we can operate within the path that we will follow on the issue of Lusophone cultural identity.

The critical and hermeneutic perspective we have been adopting leads us to the difficult problem of formulating a concept of culture not only didactically operational, but also theoretically relevant to the Portuguese and Lusophone contexts proving to be resistant to modern and postmodern criticism.

Fernando Pessoa has said that "my language is my homeland", meaning the place from where I view the world, my history, personal and collective, and even the Other or Others who engrave themselves in me through my cultural memory, a presence that language itself is responsible both to veil and unveil.

Obviously, in this sense, the Lusosphere is the place of construction of bilingualism, which requires at least the membership of two homelands, that is to say two worlds and two memories, which are often not compatible with each other, communicate little and are operated at different times and cultural opportunities. Now all this is more frequent and common in post-Modernity than ever before, whatever the moment in the History of humanity might be.

Today, the identity issue is a question of multiple identities and different belongings: one world, one language, one nation, one memory can be evoked almost always in a rational and technical-instrumental context, while another may operate primarily as a family homeland, affective and emotional (cf Amin Malouf)

Moreover, that is why in bilingual or multilingual communities, the question of cultural identity is far more complex, because in each subject constantly lives the Other, the Other loved or hated, desired or tolerated, but that is in him/her, that inhabits him/her or where we permanently inhabit.

Difficult is, however, to know who is truly the Other or what Others dwell in it and in us.

Ultimately, each (subject or culture) is enclosed in itself. It is just not alone, but with its Others. Perhaps, though in other ways, Sartre was right to say that the Others are my own hell. Simply the Others are not the pure externality, but cohabit, uncomfortably with the Self, a space made of memory and time. To think such reality we only have our cultural memory and powers of language.

Now this is, in our opinion, precisely the situation of cultural crossroads in which Lusosphere finds itself.

Perhaps some light can be thrown over this issue if we understand that each of us (as every culture) is always an Other to someone and that the Other is never a pure externality, but is made of immanence, for it only exists in the speech act that names it on or after our own cultural memory.

In the case of Lusosphere, misunderstanding may arise leading us to think that way is done. Reality shows us that we stand at crossroads built upon paradoxes and ambiguities, from which we highlight some of the most widespread, more dangerous and stereotyped: that we have a common History and that we all belong to the same country when and if we all speak the same language.

The most striking recent events that shook the world, and particularly the west (I am referring to September 11) are involved in this very logic of the denial of 'otherness' which has a logic of terror and scandal. The Other can neither be thought of as radically different and incomprehensible, irreducible to our worldview and, ultimately, irrational, unpredictable according to our own logic, nor can it be diluted in the sameness of a global human being bearer of the 'average' American culture who speaks the internationalized English language. Ultimately, we ought to acknowledge that, from a historical and cultural perspective, the Other, Barbary is also caused by us or even that it never really left us - us - the Lusophone first.

If we go deeper, we shall have to accept that in each one of us there is a potential barbarian whom we exercise by attributing to the Other all the barbarism (the Other African, Chinese, Romanian or South American ...).

The whole question is misplaced: the issue of the Other will always have to go through the issue of the Self; the language and the foreign cultures require listening and learning. Knowing the cultural memory of the Other is the way that allows us to access the Another not as one in itself, but other worlds, that language in its historical

and ontological density, encloses and keeps on enclosing. Just so can we build a Lusosphere which is not made or guaranteed in advance, but for which we can all, or not contribute.

In this postmodern era of globalization, the recognition of the Other within and outside the Lusosphere, begins as a struggle, that only each culture alone can fight with itself and in face of its Others, so that afterwards it can become a battle between men, thereby saving the humanity of its own Barbary. When such a struggle has no place in the spirit of each one of us, or it is immediately resolved in favour of a static and misleading speech about my Self, my country, my culture and my language, then the Other is permanently lost or that is to say my Self was hopelessly amputated and Barbary can finally settle down.

In short, it is the co-construction of identities, of the Self and the Other in me, constantly rebuilding my memory from an internal and external cultural point of view, which is unavoidably Lusophone as well, through the powers of criticism, art and, in particular, of poetic language that the question of Lusosphere may come to know crucial developments so to solve the main problems; the ethical, aesthetic, political and cultural crossroads in which it finds itself to be immersed in this fascinating and chaotic post-modernity time in which we were offered to live.