

Life Stories, Cultural *Métissage*, and Personal Identities

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Abstract

This article encompasses an underlying notion of personal identities and processes of interaction, which distinguish essentialist identity from relational identity in contexts involving subjects, fields of possibilities, and cultural metamorphosis. It addresses the idea of the individual and her/his transformations: “I am who I want to be if I can be that person.” Any one of us could hypothetically have been someone else. The question of the reconstruction of individual identities is a vital aspect in the relationship between objective social conditions and what each person subjectively does with them, in terms of auto-construction. The complexity of this question reflects the idea of a cultural kaleidoscope, in which similar social conditions experienced by different individuals can produce differentiated identities. The title and structure of this text also seek to encompass the idea that in a personal life story, the subject lives between various spheres and sociocultural contexts, with a composite, *mestizo*, and superimposed or displaced identity, in each context. This occurs as the result of a *cultural metamorphosis*, which is constructed both by the individual as well as by heterogeneous influences between the context of the starting and finishing points at a given moment. This complex process of cultural metamorphosis—the fruit of interweaving subjective and objective forces—reveals a new dimension: the truly composite nature of personal identities.

Keywords

identities, metamorphosis of identity, cultural *métissage*, life stories

Educational Sciences and the Anthropology of Education

To better understand one of the key concepts of this text, that of cultural *métissage*, derived from the French and absorbed into the English language through the concept of *mestizo* (via Spanish), I begin with a short autobiographical account of my own scientific, professional, and cultural *métissage*. This concept is explored further on in the article, as is my own multi-layered identity, an amalgam of what has been termed a composite identity (Maalouf, 2002), superimposed identities (O'Neill, 2008), or a *mestiza* identity (Anzaldúa, 1987; Laplantine & Nouss, 1997; Vieira, 2009, 2011; Wiewiorka, 2002). However, there is a wide literature on the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean regions which is not technically “French,” but derivative from studies of communities and islands within the (former) French colonial empire.

Here I am using the concept of *métissage* following Laplantine and Nouss (1997), who have dedicated themselves to the theme of “cultural *métissage*,” itself close to the concepts of Deleuze’s “rhizome” (1968/1994) and Amselle’s “connections,” the latter concept—in the latter author’s classic work *Mestizo Logics* (1998)—being based on electrical communications, to emphasize the open nature of cultures and detaching it from the biological connotations of hybridism. The use I give to the concept of *métissage* is close to

Homi Bhabha’s “third-space” (1994) and to “cultural hybridization,” a concept used more often in North America. We understand that cultural *métissage* results from acculturation processes, in the sense of transformation, as referred to by Roger Bastide in his works on Afro-Brazilian cultures (1955, 1968/1979). More than a clash of cultures, as Roger Bastide has always well defended, we prefer to speak of the transformation of differences through dialogue (Bastide, 1955). Therefore, *métissage* cannot be scheduled, as it results from the idiosyncratic creation that two or more cultures originate when entering into dialogue. In this sense, João André, a *Professor of Philosophy* at the University of Coimbra in Portugal, addresses “*Métissage in depth as a project of an authentic intercultural dialogue*” (André, 2005, p. 137).

This does not mean setting aside the cultural and the social. It intends to demonstrate that the social and the cultural are not entirely external to the subject. Indeed, the social and the individual also pass through the subject (not simply the subject through the contexts), making him or her a multiple being, constructed through continuities and

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discontinuities within a multicultural socialization. This is, effectively, an anthropological stance, but it does not intend to analyze societies and cultures outside of the subject or vice versa. *People, just as societies, create and (re)create their personal culture* (Vieira, 2009)—a mixture of various cultural collectivities; the different cultural and linguistic contexts through which they pass constitute a complex process of self-oriented and heterogeneous social construction.

Thus, I would like to recount a brief story about Educational Sciences and the Anthropology of Education that took place in Portugal: I joined the Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais (ESECS) in Leiria,¹ in October 1987, after having been selected via a public call for applications. At the time, I encountered a strong dichotomy between the fields which since then have been designated as Scientific Fields versus Educational Fields. I was hired for the scientific area of the Social Sciences and, as such, I was classified as being someone from a scientific field. As a consequence, I was not classified as belonging to the field of education. With the invaluable assistance of Professor Raul Iturra (1990a, 1990b), I began to supervise a master's program in Social and Cultural Anthropology and the Sociology of Culture, which was established at that time, to study the educational process. Curiously enough, it was here that my first book (Vieira, 1992) was published, as part of a collection known as "Learning Outside School."

This perplexity with regard to the scientific/educational dichotomy, where, at the time, anyone who was not from the field of Educational Sciences was a social minority, induced me to invest in the educational sciences; I thus became even more *mestizo* than I already was as an anthropologist. However, gradually, perhaps thanks to the program in Educational and Cultural Sociology that I attended in Paris at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS),² I realized how since the Educational Sciences were excessively centered on didactics and pedagogy, it was difficult to carry out solid research without analyzing the educational process as a socio-cultural—and hence an anthropological—process.³

Later, in the context of my doctoral studies, I firmly resolved to try and overcome this dichotomy and hope to have contributed toward building bridges in this regard. I sought to study personal and professional identities, not from the culturalist, essentialist, structuralist, and determinist point of view that had somehow characterized my initial training (the result of the influence of French studies during the 1970s), but rather from a perspective based on the aspect of self-construction, reflection, life stories, etc. On the other hand, I also sought to understand cultural contacts and their effects on social agents, both at school as well as in everyday life: intercultural communication and intercultural education, which I developed in other research projects.

In 2000, I was awarded the Rui Grácio Prize for outstanding work in the field of Educational Sciences. Needless to say, in this context, since I was keenly aware that I had

written various critical texts about the school system, it was a great honor to have received an award from the SPCE—Portuguese Society for Educational Sciences. It also demonstrates that perhaps the Educational Sciences are today more mature and no longer wish to focus exclusively on the school system, isolated from real life, instead seeking to foster closer ties with the society and cultures that promote the very institution of schools. After several decades of having focused on technological and rationalist models, the Educational Sciences now appear to have incorporated more cultural, ecological, anthropological, and finally, more human models.

A report about research in the field of education was considered to be scientific if it contained enough statistics and reflected the presentation of an experimental study. There is no doubt that this viewpoint still persists and seeks to occupy the spotlight as the "scientific" aspect of the human sciences. However, other more interpretive research paradigms are gradually emerging, which attempt to incorporate a subjective and human dimension of the individuals being studied. In fact, these paradigms seek to reinvent an epistemology, a methodology that is attuned to the specific needs of the Educational Sciences and consequently the Human Sciences. This is where the insights afforded by research about life stories are also relevant.

Education does not only concern schools. While the current connotation of the word "Education" and even the term "Educational Sciences" often equates teaching and learning with schools and classrooms, it is also true that Anthropology has long highlighted the fact that formal schooling only plays a relatively weak role in the enculturation of children and youths and in the construction of their identities. "Learning, remembering, speaking, imagining, all this is possible only through construction within a culture" (Bruner, 1996, p. 11). Moreover, children are not parachuted into schools. Before setting foot in a school, any child has already experienced a process of cultural construction that provides him or her with an understanding of life and an epistemology with which he or she sits as a student in a chair in a classroom (Iturra, 1990a, 1990b).

However, studying educational processes is not a synonym for studying teaching and learning in schools. In a work dedicated to the culture of education, Jerome Bruner, who has moved from cognitive psychology to cultural psychology and has thus drawn closer to the field of Anthropology,⁴ states,

The present age of mutation has been characterised by profound conjecture on what schools should do in favour of those who enrol or are obliged to enrol in them – or [...] on what schools can do, given the force of other circumstances. [...] If one thing has become increasingly clear in these debates, it is that education has little to do with conventional scholastic matters such as curricula, levels or examination systems. What we decide to do in schools only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what society aims to achieve by means of the

educational investments of its youths. [. . .] The central thesis [of the book entitled *Education and Culture*] is that culture moulds the mind, that it equips us with the tools which we use to build not just our own worlds but also our real conceptions of ourselves and our faculties [. . .] A mental outlook is experienced with others, it is formed in order to communicate and it develops with the assistance of cultural codes, traditions and similar elements. But this goes beyond the sphere of schools. Education does not only occur in classrooms but also around the dining table when family members compare the significance of everything that happened over the course of the day [. . .] (Bruner, 1996, pp. 9-11)

This is why I speak of education between schools and homes, and why I affirm that scholastic success and failure are constructed socially (Vieira, 1992): “Schools first have to seriously research the cultural categories of the local people before teaching the bourgeoisie knowledge that has little to do with the understanding of a mind that believes” (Iturra, 1990a, p. 97). For this reason, I defend creating professors who are capable of acting in intercultural terms and of building intercultural pedagogies (Vieira, 1999a, 1999b), linking education at school with education in life. These biographical notes intend to show that all of us constitute a dynamic process, that is, a cultural miscegenation transforming the self. In this case, a construction between life and school.

This short autobiographical account also demonstrates the construction of the third person—the third instructed (Serres, 1993, 1997)—which is neither the sum of experienced cultural landscapes nor of the disciplines through which each subject navigates, studies, or develops as a profession. In this case, having traveled from anthropology to the educational sciences, through sociology and, later, social work, does not make me the sum of monolithic, mono-disciplinary, and static identities—that of the anthropologist, the sociologist, the educator, and the social worker. Rather, we might imagine a composite self, though not reducible to the personal melting pot, better understood through the French concept of *métissage*, introduced into the United States via the concept of *mestizo* through Hispanic cultures. This concept, fundamental to the understanding of this text, does not denote a half-term (hybrid), or dilution (assimilationism), or separation (separatist multiculturalism), but refers rather to the potential that the relationship “1 and 1 = 3” holds in terms of complexity, non-predictability, and creativity.

When I speak of “1 and 1 = 3,” I mean the emergence of a “third place,” a *mestizo* result of middle terms between different locations and possible courses or paths (Serres, 1993, 1997). From the relationship, a third is born, which is a metaphor designed for creativity (Vieira, 2003), to distinguish it from the mechanical and exact relation evoked by the simple addition: $1 + 1 = 2$. However, the result may be either 3 or 4, or 5, etc. This suggests the idea of transformation, although its result is always unfinished (Vieira & Trindade, 2008). So, rather than a product, it still stands as an unfinished process,

open to renewed acculturations (Vieira, Margarido, & Marques, 2013; Vieira & Mendes, 2010). In this regard, Michel Wiewiorka says that “when between strong cultures there’s an encounter than doesn’t intend them to disappear, reciprocal influence processes will take place (of acculturation, as I would say in another vocabulary), innovative transformations and not necessarily impoverished [. . .]” (Wiewiorka, 2002, p. 93). Also, similarly, with *mestizo* logics, Amselle (1998) deconstructs many assumptions about peripheral places. In rethinking this concept, the *mestizo* becomes not as we are used to imagine him/her, as an alienated figure without a stable identity, but as a powerful metaphor for a relation. It shows us that different cultures, or different languages and religions, are not necessarily as different as we may believe, and definitely not as fixed and pure as we usually consider them to be.

This is why we need to connect the educational sciences and the anthropology of education. This is also why we need to lead teachers and other social professionals to reflect on themselves and on these bridges between all types of knowledge as inherent processes of *métissage*.

Anthropology and Contemporaneity: The Anthropology of Personal Identities

The fact that the Educational Anthropology which I advocate intersects with psychological concerns, especially with cultural and intercultural psychology, does not mean that a psychologically conditioned approach has perforce been applied, nor does it discard the idea of social aspects as an object of study.

Anthropology’s interest while representing the individual does not just lie in the fact that it deals with social construction, but also because any and all representations of the individual are necessarily a representation of the individual’s essential social relations. At the same time, we owe this discovery to the anthropology of faraway places and the people this anthropology studied: the social begins with the individual; the individual stands out in the ethnological gaze. The substance of Anthropology lies in the opposite of the substance, defined by certain sociological schools as being learnable according to orders of greatness from which individual variables have been eliminated. (Augé, 1995, p. 27)

Lahire (2002), who is inclined toward an anthropological sociology that does not wish to lose the dimension of the subject and individual, also reflects upon this question and even speaks of the field of psychological sociology, which he distinguishes from a social psychology, which everyone has verbally distanced themselves from but which has gradually been emerging. Jean-Claude Kaufmann even wrote a book titled *Ego, For a Sociology of Individuals*, where he clearly emphasizes that “[. . .] The person is a process, mutable,

caught in a confusion of contradictory forces” (Kaufmann, 2003, p. 243).

In this article, the dialogue is, effectively, more ethno-psychological than ethno-sociological, but this does not transform it into a specific work of psychology.

This does not involve setting aside the cultural and the social. It aims to demonstrate that the social and the cultural are not entirely external to the subject. Indeed, the social and individual also pass through the subject (not simply the subject through the contexts), making him or her a multiple being, constructed through continuities and discontinuities within a multicultural socialization. This is, essentially, an anthropological work, more essayistic in nature than ethnographic, but also drawing on the latter.

The educational anthropology professed here does not limit itself to the ethnography of the educational contexts at school, outside school, in families, during a student’s spare time, and so on. It also seeks to understand the cultural metamorphosis that occurs during the lives of individuals as a result of the convergences and divergences during a trajectory of life, as compared to the culture of the point of origin. Thus, more than an idea of the anthropology of cultures, it assumes the notion of an anthropology *aimed at people*, who are themselves cultural processes, engaged in the auto-, hetero-, and re-construction of their own personas and the image they project to others. Therefore, there is a great deal of emphasis on studying students and teachers through their educational biographies to comprehend how they became what they are (Vieira, 1998, 1999a). In modern societies, society itself plays an increasingly minor role in determining identities. Society offers support that facilitates the task of considering individuals as self-contained units, closed unto themselves. Auto- and hetero-formation take place side by side but, at the end of the day, individuals construct themselves and are not the product of the blueprint of the “pattern of culture” of the theoretical school of *culture and personality* (Vieira, 1999b; Vieira & Trindade, 2008). Hence, the importance of capturing the subjectivities of the individuals, studied from this emic point of view that Malinowski had already proposed at the beginning of the 20th century.

In seeking greater interdisciplinary dialogue between anthropology, education, psychology, and sociology, I began to realize, as Geertz (2000) had, that what Bruner initiated in American psychology can be barely distinguished from interpretative anthropology, apart, obviously, from the historical background of both disciplines. Bruner says that “boundaries which separate fields such as psychology, anthropology, linguistics or philosophy were administrative convenience issues rather than intellectual substance” (Bruner, 1990, p. 4). Bruner, who has moved from cognitive to cultural psychology, recognizes that interpretative narrative is a suitable process to “construct the present, the past and the possible human condition” (Bruner, 1996, p. 137). Geertz (2000) even wrote a chapter (“Cultures, Mind, Brain/Brain, Mind, Culture”) about the importance of Bruner and cultural psychology in drawing closer to anthropology both

disciplines interested in studying culture and mind (p. 179). He also wrote another chapter (“Language, Culture, Self: The Philosophical Psychology of Jerome Bruner”), where he refers to Bruner’s position as conciliating, eclectic, vigorous, and optimistic, indicating a mind-in-culture study, situated within a more anthropological perspective (p. 173). To Geertz (2000), “building a powerful ‘cultural psychology’ (or a powerful psychological anthropology, which is not exactly the same thing) is less a matter of creating hybrid disciplines, of putting hyphens between them, than it is a matter of reciprocally unbalancing them” (p. 176).

Hence, this is the reason why in this text I have included a brief autobiographical narrative to relate the notion of self-comprehension. I seek in this fashion to demonstrate that the *mestizo* self, that is to say, *mestizo* cultures on a personal level, also pass through the individual.

Identity and Cultural *Métissage*

A person is never just the past. A person is the present and is a project (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2004; Bourdieu, 2007; Boutinet, 1992; Carvalho, 1992; Le Grand, 2004; Nóvoa & Finger, 1988; Velho, 1981; Vieira, 1999b). Training for adults, training for teachers, and training for trainers must emphasize this transformation, this awareness of incompleteness, this desire to set out, to seek other shores. This is why I affirm that, in one way or another, learning always means transforming oneself.

Michel Serres (1993) clearly highlighted the fact that in all processes of learning and of identity construction and reconstruction which we experience over the course of our lives, we transit from one bank of a river to the other, metaphorically speaking. Between those two banks, there is a center—a center of doubt, of all possibilities: the opportunity to follow any direction. This center is like the central point of a star that irradiates in all directions. On the other hand, this central place, which this author called the “third place” over the course of his work, is a place of transition, a change in phases and, consequently, of sensibilities, with obstacles of exposure. However, Serres referred to the third place as something that is necessary for acquiring knowledge and learning, and also as something that affords a constant instruction to a “Troubadour of Knowledge”—to a “third person,” the *mestizo* individual. This *mestizo* individual results from being in the middle of the different places and possible pathways that each individual experiences through the course of the learning they acquire over a lifetime.

This so-called *Troubadour of Knowledge* (*Le Tiers-Instruit*) thus refers to whoever appears between two banks—between the right and the left, between man and woman, between one bank of the river and the other. I have referred to this aspect in the past, affirming that “one and another = 3,” insofar as a third element exists—the relationship that is established between both elements, the transformation (Vieira, 1999b). In a similar way, Amin Maalouf also approaches this question very well, and in a

similarly autobiographical manner: “A person’s identity is not a patchwork, it is a drawing on stretched skin; if you touch even one of the parts, the entire person vibrates. “[. . .] Identity cannot be divided into halves, nor thirds, nor can it be delimited in closed margins” (Maalouf, 2002, p. 10).

With respect to cultural clashes, culture encounters, and the emergence of new cultural forms or third cultures, the concept of *hybrid* in Anglo-Saxon contexts is probably more frequently used than *métissage*. Few English texts refer to *métissage* or *mestizo*; they can be found in Anzaldúa (1987), who writes about the *new mestiza*, and in Homi, who also refers to this concept in “Culture’s in Between” (1996), but there are few references elsewhere. It is far more usual to encounter the concept of hybrid. Yet, hybrid refers to a very Cartesian classification in which cultural normality is located at one end of two poles, with everything outside these emerging as impure or hybrid. But there are no simple dichotomies in the language of complexity: There are other terms (Serres, 1993) such as *mestizos*, new dimensions constructed from mixtures that maintain traces of origin, traces of adoption, and traces of creation. As such, the concept of *métissage*, correctly perceived in the context of new francophone analysis, refers to intercultural contexts and never multiculturalism. Multiculturalism, in its classic meaning, simply tolerates cultural differences coexisting in the same space, yet without fostering a socializing dialogue which leads to *métissage* and to the acceptance of a new paradigm that breaks with the idea of purity, to show that all cultures are dynamic, composite, and *métisses*.

Hybrid turns out to be a classification used by those with a monolithic perspective. Clearly, Stuart Hall is cautious when he considers himself a hybrid. He is well aware of the fragility of the concept of hybridity (Hall, 1992), which comes, as does *mestizo*, from biology, although the latter allows creativity (Laplantine & Nouss, 1997; Serres, 1993; Wiewiorka, 2002). A hybrid does not reproduce biologically, so inevitably it will become extinct. On the other hand, syncretism also leads to the idea of fusion, of the melting pot, which does not correspond to the paradigm of creativity found in the cultural meeting points of people, music, painting, and culture in a general way, where the whole and the parts dynamically coexist in a new *métisse* totality.

As for multiculturalism (the North American “political correctness,” the claiming of rights for minorities and “ethnic communities,” the apologia for therapeutic pluralism . . .), it is, as can be seen, the opposite of *métissage*. It is based on the cohabitation and coexistence of separate and juxtaposed groups, which look to a past which guards against the encounter with others. (Laplantine & Nouss, 1997, p. 75)

The concept of *métissage* cannot, obviously, be used naively:

It is true that, among these notions, the concept of *métissage* has the most pitfalls—either for its historical genesis in the context

of forced colonization under the weight, strength and power of religion, chains, whips, gunpowder and rape, or for the possibility of its contamination, for the confrontation with the notion of purity appearing as its counterpoint, being manicheistically contaminated with a sense of impurity to what it refers [. . .]. (André, 2012, pp. 95-96)

However, if used contextually and prudently, stripped of the racial, assimilationist, and monist connotations which are not intrinsic to the concept, *métissage* does not appear to be less suitable—quite the contrary—than other concepts emerging as alternatives, as in the case of hybridism. As noted by the Portuguese philosopher João André, who has been carrying out remarkable work approaching anthropology, intercultural education, and *mestizo* thinking,

the concept of hybridization or hybridity has been used by other authors who view “*métissage*” with certain reservations. This can be applied, in particular, to García Canclini, who, in his work *Culturas Híbridas: Estratégias para Entrar y Salir de la Modernidad* (1990), prefers this expression to characterize processes of cultural mixtures currently taking place, but which, simultaneously, are also characterized by the incorporation of diversified histories and memories. (André, 2012, p. 96)

This logic of *mestizo* thinking, which opposes the dominant monistic thinking, can nevertheless leave us, at times, somewhat apprehensive. We are, effectively, very much the product of Cartesianism and positivism, which, for centuries, has taught us to think factually rather than procedurally, and to think about structures rather than processes. And when one talks about *métissage*, it does not simply mean to join, to mix, to cross, and so on. However, at the level of common sense,

insofar as *mestizo* is usually in contrast to pure, [. . .] it will favour, albeit unconsciously, pure as good and *mestizo* as contaminated [. . .] it refers to the constitutive tension of the relationship between those who are different, to the dynamism that it implies [. . .] And to creative conflict. (André, 2005, p. 126)

Métissage should be considered as something different from juxtaposition or fusion, as argued by Jean-Loup Amselle with his “*mestizo* logics” (Amselle, 1998).

J. André places *métissages* in two major groups:

If there are *métissages* which are constituted in encounter and dialogue, there are others that result from conquest, rape, blood and semen mixed in a project of domination that is simultaneously, and not infrequently, a project of exterminating differences and homogenizing otherness. (André, 2005, p. 104)

When I apply the concept of *métissage* to personal identity and personal culture, it is, as reiterated above, precisely to convey the idea of the mix, of the process of the unfinished, which is how each individual is in each moment of her

or his life story. We cannot think of ourselves as static beings. There is always something changing in us based on the relationships we establish with each other. There are always exchanges between both. And it is from these exchanges with each other that we build our own learning (Vieira, 2011). As such, we construct our path by walking—through multiple experiences in which we participate throughout our existence—and our identity is being (re)constructed in that our cultural identifications are not exclusive nor always the same, as is the particular case of the *intercultural trânsito* (Bourdieu, 2007; Vieira, 2009). Therefore,

. . . we are not all the same, and as Amy Gutman notes, not everyone is as multicultural as Rushdie, but the identities of most people and not just those of the elites or Western intellectuals, are formed by more than one single culture. People are also multicultural, not only societies. (Wiewiorka, 2002, p. 23)

Project, Life Stories, Cultural Metamorphosis, and Personal Identities

In this study, I seek to demonstrate how individuals internalize the various cultural elements that they appropriate, in a *bricolage* process (Lévi-Strauss, 1977) and how they manage their various parts and identifications.

The construction of identity consists of giving a consistent and coherent significance to one's own existence, integrating an individual's past and present experiences, to confer sense upon the future. This entails an incessant definition of oneself: what/who am I, what do I want to do/be, what is my role in the world, and what are my future projects? It is not always a pacific process and sometimes causes many existential crises and anxiety (Dubar, 2000).

Identity is thus a complex and dialectic process; it is a permanent, flexible, and dynamic (re)construction, it is a "constant restructuring—a constant metamorphosis—towards a new whole" (Vieira, 1999b, p. 40). A whole constituted on the basis of the interaction between parts. Here, the expression "interaction" is a fundamental element in terms of understanding this entire process underlying an individual's composite identity.

Thus, the (re)construction of an individual's personal and social identity is a complex process that is intrinsic to each individual (I am exclusively me, although I have many other elements and am shaped by other elements); it is not merely a reproduction of the social and cultural sphere in which an individual moves. This also holds true because even social groups (I have deliberately used the plural as individuals are successively and simultaneously linked to different groups) are neither homogeneous nor immutable, as Lahire (2002) has observed referring to Halbwachs. And the individuals whose paths cross with them are also the *mestizo* product of this heterogeneity and mutability (Velho, 1981). All the experiences that have an indelible impact on a life trajectory,

from infancy to adulthood, the memories of all those people and situations, which, in either a negative or positive manner, became significant and had meaning, do not merely accumulate, nor are they synthesized in a simple and elementary manner. Without going to the extreme of speaking about absolute discontinuity, one can consider that individuals switch from one social group to another, from one situation to another and even from one society to another (e.g., rural to urban), from one "dominion of existence to another," without there necessarily being any continuity, homogeneity, or compatibility between all these experiences.⁵

I have already expounded upon this continuous and/or discontinuous passage of and between social cultures/groups (Vieira, 1999a, 1999b). Using the metaphor of a river with its opposite banks, a person can transpose the banks that separate the culture of origin from the culture of arrival by negating the former. This is what the individuals I have dubbed *oblatos* do. They acquire a "new educational and cultural clothing when they accede to one social group and leave another whose values they now reject" (Vieira, 1999a, p. 89). In this case, the individual re-educates himself, assimilates and assumes the inherent values to this new culture, that is, she or he seizes and absorbs those values in such a way that it seems to anyone that she or he never knew any other way of seeing the world and being in it, relegating one's cultures of departure to a forgotten corner of one's inner being. We could say that the individuals who adopt this way of being and living construct their identity using a thick layer of *make-up*. They metamorphose with the products of the new culture to hide the *old* culture. However, it is hard for them to achieve this. The matrix of the culture of origin marks their language, clothing, aesthetics, consumption, etc.

The *oblatos* do not explicitly form a link between two river banks. The river separates the two cultures; there is no continuity between them. *Oblatos* deny their past; they hide their cultures of departure. A good example of the *oblato's* attitude is the strategy used by Márcio, a Brazilian living in Portugal, who established a way of avoiding being homesick for Brazil. From his culture of departure, Márcio only wants his daughter to get to know his Brazilian family:

[. . .] the only thing I would enjoy is for her to know the family [. . .] the entire Brazilian family she still doesn't know. [. . .] I was supposed to go back this year [to Brazil], but I won't. But yes, I have to go there. (Vieira et al., 2013, p. 89)

There is, however, a certain rejection on Márcio's part of the first bank, given that the return is only seen as the fulfillment of a family obligation, almost like the accomplishment of a promise or a personal duty:

I don't miss Brazil, it's boring for me to go on vacation to Brazil. It's because . . . there's also religious tourism, cultural tourism, family tourism, that is, when I take a vacation to Brazil. In

addition to being expensive, if I go with my wife, the flights are an added expense. And when I get to Rio [de Janeiro] . . . it's about visiting my home, my uncles', my grandmother's . . . It is important to think about family obligations, but it's boring [laughs]. (Vieira et al., 2013, p. 78)

The *intercultural trânsito* is an individual who, despite accepting and receiving the new culture, does not reject his original culture. On the contrary, he builds bridges in terms of contexts and attitudes between the cultural spheres experienced, or incorporates into his personal universe a cultural acquisition which confers a new dimension to the original culture but neither annihilates nor substitutes it. *Intercultural trânsito* redefine and auto- (re)construct themselves as per the "others"; that is, they become a new "other" on the basis of the new others that populate their new cultural universe, without, however, turning their backs on all the previous "others" that they might have already incorporated until this point and which played an extremely important role in comprising who they are now. They combine multiple endogenous and exogenous elements, align them, mix them, intertwine them, and do not negate any of them. Considering such individuals as the product of the various cultures they have experienced and been touched by, they build a personal and culturally *mestiza* identity. This *métissage* is idiosyncratic, unique.

With a foot on each bank, where he established his roots, Rowney is like an "orchid," traveling through space in search of the third bank, a place that does not exist or that could be anywhere on Earth: "[. . .] I don't have any boundaries." In this regard, Rowney says that, once, during one of the interviews he gave, he metaphorically compared himself to an orchid, which led to a certain resistance:

[. . .] I said I'm like an orchid and I'm just fine wherever I am, and this created an antagonism on the part of my family, who asked me: "So you don't have roots in Brazil?. Of course I have roots, [. . .] Of course I have origins in Brazil! Of course I have my roots in Brazil and I don't deny it, it's quite the contrary . . . I am full of Brazilian roots! Moreover, you can see it from top to bottom! So, there is no way of denying it, but it doesn't mean I can't be alright where I am . . . because the roots of orchids are to be found in the tree that sustains them, but they sometimes go into the soil, orchids' roots are very large, it is the plant that is tiny. And the feeling I have is that Brazil is too small, Portugal is too small. If I had . . . For whatever reason, if I had to go to Russia or Bulgaria—because I have been asked to go and live in Bulgaria—[. . .] I would probably go to live in Bulgaria . . . I do not know if I'd have greater difficulty, but I would have no qualms about moving to Bulgaria. I'm sure that if I'd arrive today in Bulgaria, at least one family would welcome me . . . and that's how I was greeted by a family in Portugal, that's how everything began. (Vieira et al., 2013, p. 92)

Rowney's interculturality is based on his way of being, not only from a more objective dimension—nationality,

football, food—but also from a deeper dimension, a more subjective dimension that leads Rowney to consider himself a "borderless" individual without a "place in the world," thereby suggesting that the immigrant "has no place in the world" (Vieira et al., 2013, p. 93).

Both the *oblatos* and the *intercultural trânsito* represent cultural *métissage*; their identities were submitted to cultural metamorphosis. In doing so, they are multicultural in terms of the construction process. However, while *intercultural trânsito* reveal their hybrid nature (setting out from the left bank to reach the right bank, as they reach the latter they know they have already lived on the left bank and do not hide it), *oblatos* conceal it. In other words, in reality, they are also "third persons" but do not reveal themselves to be so. In terms of attitude, they affirm themselves to be monocultural. At an explicit level, they only manifest the point of arrival—the second culture—at any given moment.

There are also other ways of being and identity strategies (Camilleri, Lipiansky, Kasterzein, & Malewska-Peyne, 1990) that can be found in the school context and non-school education, namely the examples of teachers, elderly individuals, and immigrants whom I have studied recently, although limitations of space impede their analysis here. In fact, I have regularly researched issues of the *métissage* self in various contexts. In the late 1990s, when I was doing doctoral research, I carried out ethno-biographical interviews with nine teachers (working in primary and secondary school education) from Leiria, Portugal. Six women and three men were interviewed, as I attempted to understand how they contextualized their own life and historical past, as students, with their present, as teachers. The idea was to understand the *métissage* of their personal and professional selves, articulated between the past and the present dimensions of their life histories. In their teaching practice at schools that I observed in the center and outskirts of Leiria, I came to realize that *intercultural trânsito* practiced more intercultural pedagogies than *oblatos* did (Vieira, 1999a).

For my post-doctoral research in social work, I used the same methodology to understand elderly people's identities through the narratives of two women and two men, all more than 80 years old: one man and one woman institutionalized and one man and one woman living at home autonomously. My purpose was to understand their representations of the social world, their self-representations built together with their otherness throughout the aging process, and to know how they had been rebuilding their personal identities through their social trajectories. In a more recent investigation in Leiria, conducted by José Trindade, Cristóvão Margarido, and José Marques, three men and one woman were interviewed—Brazilian immigrants living in Portugal—to understand the acculturation processes generated by their experiences in Portugal, and the strategies used by these migrants to reinterpret their departure cultures (Brazilian) or arrival cultures (Portuguese) (Vieira & Trindade, 2008). The

topic of this identity reconfiguration led to the publication of a book and a documentary in Portugal (Vieira et al., 2013).

Who I Was and Who I Am: What Stories Teach Us

Given the multicultural aspects of an individual, it would seem essential to consider life stories as a methodology to think about the transformation of people and therefore about their metamorphoses and reconstructions of identity (Delory-Momberger, 2004; Dominicé, 1984; Josso, 2002; Nóvoa & Finger, 1988; Souza, 2006). Life stories seem to be in vogue in the field of the social sciences (Balandier, 1990; Bourdieu, 1986, 1998; Bruner, 1986; Ferrarotti, 1990; Glick Schiller & Fouron, 2001; Hall, 1992; Hoggart, 1991; Poirier, Clapier-Valladon, & Raybaut, 1989, among many others). In sociology, work with life stories is normally carried out using a sample of individuals that has been defined beforehand based on open and semi-structured interviews, or by asking the individuals under study for written statements about their life experiences based on a guide, which gives it a more or less nomothetic tinge (Bertaux, 1976; Conde, 1991; Ferrarotti, 1990) to identify regularities. A far more ideographic perspective is used in anthropology, which is inclined toward the point of view of the individuals (normally single individuals), and the subjectivity with which they experience social facts, thereby underscoring the idiosyncrasies more than the frequency of the elements common to the individuals under study (cf. Balandier, 1990; Bourdieu, 2007; Casal, 1997; Durão & Cardoso, 1996; Fernandes, 1995; O'Neill, 1995; Vieira, 1999a). "Here, the human individuals have an active voice in the social sphere; the social-scientific analysis can unveil (instead of hiding or suppressing) the strategic role of the individual and his or her personal dispositions" (O'Neill, 2008, p. 238).

In this regard, I have defended the use of ethno-biographical interviews (Spradley, 1979), which allow one to not just gather information and know more about others but, simultaneously, also create moments of learning with people involved in the interview context. Individuals shape themselves as they reflectively access dimensions that had not been rationalized before. These in-depth, unstructured interviews, which use the categories and interests of the other, allow the person being interviewed to make sense of what had never been said, thought, structured, or explicitly expressed (Vieira, 2003; Woods, 1990). As mentioned above, personal identity is constantly being constructed and reconstructed. This is why I believe that it is possible to use specific methodologies to set in motion changes in the mentalities and representations pertaining to cultural diversity (Leray, 1995). In this context, biography is not just a way of understanding personal identities but can itself be a way by which adults can train themselves. Life stories do not merely represent the past. They are historical processes, in the fullest sense of the term. This is why an individual and his or her social life cannot be considered to be simple data, but rather

a construction that is permanently being auto-re-organized (Dominicé, 1984; Josso, 2002; Nóvoa & Finger, 1988; Pineau, 1983; Souza, 2006; Vieira, 1999a, 2003). The challenge of understanding life through biographies and genealogies is presented here as a method that has the potential to be used by education to understand representations and to construct change in the light of new social requirements.

The actors, individuals, or better still, the social agents that constitute our informants themselves reflect about our intentions and about themselves. They are also researchers about themselves; they do not lack theory. The role of the researcher is not that of magically identifying the true meaning of the practices of the individuals under study. By means of ethno-biographical interviews that result in the construction of life stories, I seek to demonstrate the inter-actionist interest of the subject under study knowing the intentions of the researcher, so that both of them can access the interpretive dimensions that were not explicitly expressed for them. It is not just the researcher who has comprehensive capacities. Comprehension is patent in the most banal activities of everyday life. Both parties, the interviewer and the interviewee, can access new informative and formative dimensions.

The model of "one and another = 3" cited above, considered to be a metaphor, essentially deals with how, through an informal and ethnographic interview about the practices of the subject under study, or about his/her social trajectories, one can find a path to rediscover oneself. Or to become aware of the reasons for actions that are practiced systematically and routinely. In short, for the teachers themselves to rationalize the construction of their personal culture, a blend of idiosyncrasies and collective influences. It also serves to find a path toward rationalizing the force of the professorial *habitus* as a guide for attitudes and conducts. Following the critical position presented through his famous notion of the "biographical illusion" (1986), Bourdieu came to redefine his theory, by stating the following:

There is no doubt that it is possible to discover an active principle in the *habitus*, which cannot be reduced to passive perceptions, of the unification of practices and representations (in other words, the equivalent, historically constituted and therefore historically situated, of that "I," whose existence must be postulated, according to Kant, to realise the synthesis of the sensitive difference of intuition and fusing of representations into an awareness). But this practical identity is not conducive to intuition unless in the inexhaustible and non-understandable series of its successive manifestations, so much so that the only way of learning it as such is perhaps to try and recapture it in the unity of a totalising narrative (such as the different, more or less institutionalised, forms of "talking about oneself," "confidence" etc. are authorised). (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 55)

Training consists of providing other human beings the means that allow them to structure their experiences, so as to continually expand knowledge, rational beliefs, understanding, autonomy, authenticity, and the sense of the situation in

the past, present, and future of humanity. Therefore, training is transforming, or rather, training is to induce individuals to want to (trans)form themselves.

Educating and training a human being consist of giving her or him the means to structure her or his own experiences, so that they contribute toward expanding what a person knows or has reasons to believe or doubt. It does not consist of providing knowledge, rational beliefs, etc., but rather of providing the means to achieve access to knowledge and understanding and to continue to augment them. Paulo Freire refers to this throughout his work. In his *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Freire, 2006), he expresses the idea that the function of education is to domesticate or liberate people. Freire speaks more of an “awakening of consciousness” rather than the construction of reflexive thought, although he does not delineate much difference between the two processes. Freire spoke of the role of awareness in the liberation of man (Freire, *ibid.*). According to his method, this reflexivity, this awareness, is also sought likewise by means of life stories and narratives of everyday experiences. The idea is that

we can know what we know placing ourselves behind our past and prior experiences. The more we are capable of discovering why we are what we are, the more we will be able to understand why reality is what it is. (Freire, 1974, p. 44)

From this point of view, there is no true training without personal reflection (Dumazedier, 1985). And whoever is trained ends up, as has been seen, by being that very person, who never sets out from zero. That is why Pierre Dominicé (1984) prefers to speak of (self)training. This is also why it is necessary to rely on methodologies that are conducive to constructing the researcher professor/trainer.

This is also why, according to this perspective, the training of trainers and professors should simultaneously have an anthropological and ecological dimension, which manages to increasingly foment comparative thought, reflexive thought, comprehensive thought, cultural relativism, the integration of the local and the global into the learning process (Geertz, 1983; Iturra, 1990a, 1990b; Stoer & Cortesão, 1999; Vieira, 1992; Zanten, 1990; Zeichner, 1993). Also fomented are the “de-occultation of the story of the teachers, the school and their own courses in this institution” (Benavente, 1991, p. 295), the stories of the students themselves (Cortesão, 1994), constructing a sort of bazaar, “with forms of citizenship linked to the local site but with a global dimension, based on discourses in the first person singular and plural” (Stoer & Magalhães, 2005, p. 163). This could be possible in a program that implements comparative studies of biographies and autobiographies (Vieira, 1999a, 2003), intercultural education and pedagogy (Silva & Vieira, 1996). “Thus, a biographical approach must be understood as an attempt to find a strategy that allows the individual-subject to become an actor in their own training process, by means of a retrospective approximation of their life’s course” (Nóvoa & Finger, 1988, p. 117).

Final Notes

Finally, I think I have shown the importance of the comprehensive use of biographical narratives and life stories as a methodological approach of an ethnographic nature, as an important way of understanding how exterior social reality is incorporated into the self. This self thus becomes multicultural, *mestizo*, with numerous possibilities of managing its sense of belonging.

As Pierre Bourdieu explains in his account of his last course in the *Collège de France*, where he submitted himself to an exercise of reflexivity, “understanding is, in the first place, to understand the field in which we are active and against which we are active” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 15). In this type of research, the researcher is concerned with attaining a detailed and in-depth understanding of what the subjects think, how they develop their reference frameworks and present themselves in everyday life, and how they manage their various personal identities and sense of belonging.

The narrative is an ontological condition of social life. It is through narrative that the subject reinvents her or himself by articulating, in the present, past events, and future projects. The biographical narrative here is seen as a powerful tool to handle the process of cultural *métissage*. Identities are, therefore, constructed in and through narratives as reflexively organized discourses, and this is how the subjects present themselves in social relationships. In the field of anthropological sciences and interpretive interactivity with their actors, narratives constitute a methodological revolution against positivist technocracy. In turn, this allows for the emergence of knowledge based on a *subjectivity which is conscious of itself* and, on the other hand, an experiential knowledge that values the reflexivity arising from personal experiences.

Considering the metaphor used by Michel Serres in his book *The Third Instructed* (1993), although we are born on one bank of the river, this initial location of the personal and social self will not match all the locations in which the subject will dwell during his or her life course. The social transformation of each individual is continuous: Each learning process is transformation; it is the space of *métissage*. Nobody is from just one place. Our borders are not primarily physical: They are, above all, symbolic (Barth, 1969). And given that the subjects of the contemporary world are increasingly socialized in multicultural contexts, it is vital to understand how each subject is formed and self-identifies. Moreover, every transformation or cultural journey opens doors to identity transformations of subjects, creating ambivalences, completeness, overlaps, and identity dualisms.

It should be said that although this process of transformation and identity (Vieira, 2009) is probably better understood with migrant populations, these cultural metamorphoses also occur with non-migrants. Entering the school environment can be, for some young people, a good example of how to conceive of personal and cultural reconstruction as a cognitive and identity-laden migratory process. Furthermore, the

greater the contrasts in cultural spheres experienced by individuals, the more visible these phenomena become for themselves and others, and the more complex identity management may become between the extreme poles of *oblatos*, who deny their origins, and *intercultural trânsfugas*—the utopian model for the acceptance of all cultural *métissage*, and for communication and identification with all the cultures which have been traversed and incorporated.

When speaking about cultural, professional, or other groups, there is probably a tendency to think more of what unites them culturally than of what their differences are. Human thought is largely categorical and seeks to find more similarities than differences. In this article, I have attempted to move from analyzing cultural identity to the analysis of personal identity, demonstrating that it is different from subject to subject. However, although we may be dealing with similar social trajectories, everything depends on the identity *bricolage* that individuals construct with their own cultural *métissage* throughout their own singular life stories. There is, therefore, no unique cultural identity within each one of these groups, but rather different ways of living, of living together, and of identifying with the cultural worlds through which each individual passes in each specific social trajectory (Vieira & Trindade, 2008).

Contrary to the functionalist and culturalist approaches that take the unity of the social world as a given, and, therefore, reduce socialization to any form of social integration, the subjects we studied, whose *métissage* we sought to understand, show us how the management of identity constitutes a field of negotiation (E. Bruner, 1986; Vieira, 2009; Vieira et al., 2013; Vieira & Trindade, 2008). The identity process is a journey of constant learning, of *variable geometry*, where the project, always incomplete and ongoing, can focus us more on the process of *departing not to return*, or, alternatively, on the process of *reconstructed returning*, as another person, a kind of augmented and enriched *mestizo* (Amselle, 1998; Laplantine & Nouss, 1997; Vieira, 2009, 2011; Vieira & Trindade, 2008).

The ethno-biographical method of using life stories (Vieira, 2009, 2011; Vieira & Trindade, 2008) allows for privileged knowledge and insights into the ways in which subjects experience migration, school education, cultural meeting points, or other *métissage* processes, and of understanding how these processes affect their attitudes with respect to diversity as well as the hierarchy of their personal identifications. First-person narrated life stories, updated daily and in the ethnographic present, allow for greater understanding of the possible ways that teachers, professionals, immigrants, and others can integrate their cultures of origin in the acculturation processes they have experienced. In addition, these stories heighten awareness of the possibilities of accepting various self-belongings and cultures incorporated into the self or, conversely, the strategic need to assume a unique identification. These apparently unique identifications make subjects appear monocultural when they are, in

fact, *mestizos*, thereby misinterpreting them as *oblatos*—as a social and cultural survival strategy—in the contexts of the culture of arrival.

Someone who learns means, in some way, that they have changed, that they have become culturally *mestizo* (by virtue of incrementing their knowledge, wisdom, and values), as we have seen. This cultural metamorphosis takes place by accessing the dominant culture, as in the case, for example, of students from rural areas entering school, and can lead to the construction of two extreme models. Either one ignores and forgets the cultural past from which one came, which enhances a cultural mind-set toward the understanding of life, or, conversely, one is able to take advantage of that original culture's wealth, such as experience, such as everyday life among various everyday lives, to practice a pedagogy of cultural relativism, a pedagogy against racism, against social segregation, against social discrimination, and social and sexual discrimination, that is to say, a pedagogy that I designate as *intercultural*.

In the processes of teaching and learning, we all end up crossing a multiplicity of cultures and linguistic codes—more restricted, more elaborated, more local, more universal—as well as beliefs, values, knowledge, etc., and we become one of the following *mestizos* to a greater degree:

1. Either we identify ourselves externally with only one of those cultures—usually the one possessing greater cultural capital—yet although *mestizos*, we have a monocultural attitude, usually as an identity strategy;
2. We identify ourselves with various cultures, we accept ourselves as multicultural or bicultural, though there may be a feeling of some ambivalence, and a somewhat hypocritical attitude in the sense that we identify ourselves with the context in which we find ourselves, omitting identifications with other contexts that we also consider to be part of ourselves;
3. We are able, in a conscious way, to connect the various everyday lives that we cross, the various worldviews of the social strata through which we navigate; we can build bridges between them, be reflexive, and become not only *trânsfugas*, yes, but intercultural ones.

Notes

1. ESECS—Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais | Higher School of Education and Social Sciences.
2. École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.
3. Of course there are several exceptions in Portugal to this educational normativism, comprising researchers who have claimed the field of Educational Sciences as their own.
4. It is Bruner himself who, in another work, *Acts of Meaning*, states that “To know Man it is necessary to see him against the backdrop of the animal kingdom from which he evolved, in the context of culture and language, which provide the symbolic world in which he lives, and in the light of the processes

of development that cause these two powerful forces to converge. At the time we were convinced that Psychology could not do everything alone. [. . .] And, in the midst of all this, the 'Centre for Cognitive Studies' was founded [...]. I mention it here only to express a doubt about another community that convinced me that the frontiers that separate fields such as psychology, anthropology, linguistics or philosophy were more a question of administrative convenience than intellectual substance" (Bruner, 1990, pp. 15-16).

5. This is the case with the cultural transfusion that constructs the *oblato* (Vieira, 1999a, 1999b).

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Books referred to in the article are in different languages and does not have English versions or translations.

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