

# THE INTERCULTURAL MEDIATION: LOOKING TO LIVE TOGETHER WHEN WE ARE DIFFERENT

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## Abstract

To talk about intercultural mediation is to admit that there has to be transformations of the parties involved, in terms of attitudes, behaviour, representations and actions, so as to find platforms of understanding which are not fixed arithmetic points, but rather, movable third places, depending on the themes and agreements under discussion. But this process is not linear and it does not always have a happy ending in the story just like in the romantic films. Cultural shocks and the interpersonal shocks, which are also cultural shocks, are always eminent as a present and future hypothesis. Hence, it is important to reflect on the culture shocks experienced, differently, depending on the individuals that interact, each one with their own life story. Therefore, this results in interaction processes in a more dialogical, intercultural, mediating, creative and transformative form, or on the other hand, more enhancers and linkers of personal and social boundaries which become ethnocultural and therefore more monocultural.

It is understood that those who live in cultural stability with few interactions with otherness have the tendency to have more monocultural attitudes and attitudes which are closer to the culture's modal behaviour in which they are naturally inserted with their peers and relatives. Those who, for various reasons, undergo social mobility processes, whether ascendant or descendant, or cross various sociocultural contexts in the social trajectory due to migratory processes, schooling processes or others, are submitted to cultural metamorphosis processes and therefore reconstruct their personal identities: the image that the *self* has of *oneself* and the one that it offers to *others* is reconstructed.

The intercultural mediation is presented as a social pedagogy to learn how to live together when We are from different cultural contexts.

Although using biographical studies that we did with immigrants in Portugal, this communication has a pedagogical intention and not just an investigative one. We intend to show, precisely, how intercultural mediation is inscribed in a different paradigm from that of classical mediation, which is basically based on conflict resolution techniques. On the contrary, we intend to show how in hyper multicultural societies, what is so often called conflict, is nothing more than a clash of cultures because individuals act according to mental frames culturally constructed throughout their life history and in the cultural contexts they cross.

Thus, from a hermeneutic, biographical and ethnobiographical methodology, with immigrants seeking Portugal as a host society for a future life project, we want to show that living together when we are culturally different, implies learning interculturality as philosophy of life, on the part of those who welcome and those who are welcomed. Such interculturality can be achieved through Intercultural mediation here considered as a social pedagogy, as we will exemplify with life stories of Brazilian immigrants in Portugal and with the identity strategies that they use to include themselves in Portugal, and, at the same time, maintain a belonging to the original culture, the Brazilian, without, however, living in an ambivalent way. Rather, interculturality, assuming a plural and composite self of diverse cultural and educational influences.

Keywords: Intercultural mediation, living together, monocultural attitudes, intercultural attitudes.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

To live together when we are different we need intercultural mediation. To mediate implies an active listening and understanding of the other. Of all the others, in its own rationality (logic and understanding). Therefore, it is not enough to tolerate, it is necessary to respect, even when disagreeing with some of the other's/others' positions. To live together people tolerance is not enough.

Any learning produces (trans)formations. These transformations are in cognitive terms, as is the case of learning mathematical, economic calculations and of all the literacies, but not only. There is a transformation of the self whenever new knowledge is acquired, be it at school or in the diverse cultural

contexts. And this learning/training, if there is actually acquisition, which implies self-construction ([1]), originates cognitive transformations ([2]). Therefore, training is transformation. But the learnings also act upon cultural and identity transformations Nobody learns in the cultural void, thus, cognitive learning is linked to relating and not relating to the learning texts and contexts, and to cultural acquisitions and rejections. The complex triangulation between self-training, hetero-training and eco-training may result in the emergence of new cultural forms, third cultures ([3]) and, regarding the people, in particular, it may result in undergoing new trainings and learnings, educated third parties ([4]). The (trans)formed subject is reborn. They are not simply a product of a primary socialization in a given context. They are now an educated third party; a third, fourth, fifth and more dimensions of being.

This third instructed ([4]), this mestizo subject, culturally speaking, corresponds to the process of identity reconstruction. The identity construction/reconstruction always corresponds to the integration of what is new into what already exists (as in certain learning), from which results not an addition, but rather an integration which is done according to each one. Thus, it is self-constructed in triangulation with eco-training and hetero-training. Thus, it is idiosyncratic.

In the interaction between those who are different, with or without mediation of a third element, professionalized or not, there is always transformation of the parties involved too. Even in the case of excessive fundamentalism and a relentless attempt to remain untouchable as well as the demand that a change be made not in themselves but rather in others, that person/those people do not refrain from being affected by a look or opinion from others, even though, at times, barely heard or listened to, they reflect on these at home, day or night, even if this is done in a self-centred, egocentric and ethnocentric way.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

Although using biographical studies that we did with immigrants in Portugal, this communication has a pedagogical intention and not just an investigative one. We intend to show, precisely, how intercultural mediation is inscribed in a different paradigm from that of classical mediation, which is basically based on conflict resolution techniques. On the contrary, we intend to show how in hyper multicultural societies, what is so often called conflict, is nothing more than a clash of cultures because individuals act according to mental frames culturally constructed throughout their life history and in the cultural contexts they cross.

## **3 RESULTS**

### **3.1 Between cultural worlds: identity mediations and transformations**

To talk about intercultural mediation is to admit that there has to be transformations of the parties involved, in terms of attitudes, behaviour, representations and actions, so as to find platforms of understanding which are not fixed arithmetic points, but rather, movable third places, depending on the themes and agreements under discussion. But this process is not linear and it does not always have a happy ending in the story just like in the romantic films. Cultural shocks and the interpersonal shocks, which are also cultural shocks, are always eminent as a present and future hypothesis. Hence, it is important to reflect on the culture shocks experienced, differently, depending on the individuals that interact, each one with their own life story. Therefore, this results in interaction processes in a more dialogical, intercultural, mediating, creative and transformative form, or on the other hand, more enhancers and linkers of personal and social boundaries which become ethnocultural and therefore more monocultural ([5]).

In the immigrant's case, they seek to construct the new self, which is set between the culture of origin and culture of arrival, separating those two worlds, joining them or building a third identity dimension, seeking the safest path from an ontological point of view ([4], [6]).

The identity management comes across as a dilemmatic and conflictive terrain, of incessant negotiation between the objective and subjective conditions.

A recent study carried out in Portugal with Brazilian Immigrants ([7], [8]) intends to show, by using the theory of cultural transfusion ([9], [10]) and the heterogeneity observation of ways of living between cultures, the game of the symbolic barriers of immigrants who consider themselves as Brazilians in Portugal; as Luso-Brazilians; or as citizens of the world, idealizing the utopia of an "imigr nia" where

immigrants, those considered as “landless” are recognized as having composite and mestizo identities, capable of adapting to various identity territories beyond those of the original culture.

In order to explain the different strategies used by these Brazilian immigrants in Portugal, in this study a videogram with all interviews carried out is also available ([11]), we aimed to understand, through various paradigmatic models, the different ways that immigrants find to deal with the situation of acculturation: 1) rejecting the culture of origin (the case of the *oblato*); 2) rejecting the culture of arrival at a given moment (the case of the monocultural according to the culture of departure); 3) living ambivalently between the two (the case of multicultural); and 4) inventing the third margin, which corresponds to a pragmatic attitude of integration into the destination society, including the cultural differences experienced throughout the life story in an intercultural self (the case of intercultural defector). We are thus faced with four polarized models that may be useful to understand identity management strategies with or without objective mediation processes.

Firstly, reflecting about the case of *oblato*. It is relevant to point out that achieving success in a new society may mean yielding to the way of thinking of the new culture and, frequently, resulting in the abandonment of the culture of origin in favour of a second culture. Accessing a new culture, often different from the culture of birth, may also mean leaving behind the first identity and creating another: breaking away from an old way of thinking and living; to become someone who is no longer what they were; become someone who lives entirely according to the culture of arrival. This is the *oblato*. This model applies to those who are afraid to talk about themselves and let their past be known. They never talk about their origins, the places where they were born, grew up and lived before they emigrated. They try to convey the idea that they are products of the culture of arrival. In their communication, they never use elements of their childhood contexts or their culture of departure and this position remains even when they meet people of the same origin. The *oblato* educates their children for the culture of arrival - the second margin - and denies their past. Often, when they reach social maturity, many immigrant's children complain about the lack of knowledge of a past, leading them to search for their roots in the countries of origin of their ancestors.

Regarding the case of the monocultural according to the culture of departure, this case portrays the immigrants who, living among cultures, reveal an attitude that privileges an ontological dimension and leads them to live according to the culture of origin. It is the case that starts from the original culture, but thinks the world is always focused on the values of this identity primordialism: the first margin. The connection to the roots influences the behaviour of the subject in such a way that it can lead to the rejection of the culture of arrival.

In this case,

*immigrants tend to remain together, even if they have been systematically dispersed by the authorities upon entering the host country, as the experience of the United States demonstrates (Portes & Rumbaut, 1990). Immigrants form networks and neighbourhoods in the countries to which they emigrate. ([12]).*

In relation to the bilingual or bicultural, or multicultural model, we exemplify the subject who lives in two or more margins and can be an actor and subject completely contextualized in two or more cultural worlds. Some authors, in fact, refer to the existence of different selves, stating that in an individual there are several identities which express themselves depending on and according to the specificity of the contexts ([13], [14]). For many immigrants coming from pre-modern societies, living between these two worlds may lead to their own division, causing what Roger Bastide ([15]) called the cutting principle as a strategy to live between two antagonistic worlds. With this model, describing the situation of the Afro-Americans in Brazil, the aforementioned author has in mind the capacity that the individuals have to live in each world as a different person, making use of the different rationalities. This is the case, for example, of the person who works in a bank and, a few hours later, may be taking part in the *candomblé*.

The case of the intercultural defector is modelled in the subjects who use the culture of origin as a range of experiences which are as valid as the many others that are present every day in the host society, leading to the conception of an intercultural self. In this model, there is an acceptance of the new culture without rejecting the old one. It consists of a type of identity strategy that is to live perfectly between the two worlds, creating a third culture in the process of intercultural transit. The intercultural defector integrates the culture of the country of arrival into their personal universe, offering a new dimension to the culture of origin without destroying or replacing it, giving it a third dimension which results from the comparative integration of the self and the other, the us and the them. An intercultural defector will identify themselves with Amin Maalouf's ([14]) claim: “I do not have multiple identities, I have only one, made up of all the elements that shaped it according to a particular dosage that is never the same from

person to person" ([16]). The subject with these characteristics has the capacity to invent the third margin, as Guimarães Rosa states, which corresponds to an attitude and a glocal identity that includes the cultural differences that have occurred throughout the life story of an intercultural self. The intercultural defector immigrants accept that they are mestizos ([2], [10], [17], [18], [19]) and have no problem in traveling intellectually to the contexts of the past.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

Living together implies a diatopic and a multi-topic hermeneutics but also through the procedural metamorphoses of cultural and personal identities ([10]), and also through a model of interculturality for communication, education and society as a whole, based on a necessary transformation of all those that are different, not the standardization, so that there is a meeting of bridges and transits from all the margins. That is to say that, all those that are different and who, upon realizing they are incomplete, intend to communicate with others, on their own free will, can withdraw the desired influences from that or whom with which they may identify themselves, even if only slightly.

Thus, from a hermeneutic, biographical and ethnobiographical methodology, with immigrants seeking Portugal as a host society for a future life project, we want to show that living together when we are culturally different, implies learning interculturality as philosophy of life, on the part of those who welcome and those who are welcomed. Such interculturality can be achieved through Intercultural mediation here considered as a social pedagogy, as we will exemplify with life stories of Brazilian immigrants in Portugal and with the identity strategies that they use to include themselves in Portugal, and, at the same time, maintain a belonging to the original culture, the Brazilian, without, however, living in an ambivalent way. Rather, interculturally, assuming a plural and composite self of diverse cultural and educational influences.

The cases presented are guiding models of the multiple ways of managing identity belongings. They are possibilities amongst the diversity of social survival strategies ([6]) used by the subjects in this management of cultural diversity. In addition to these possibilities, there are as many other variants as third parties ([4]) - and all individuals are third persons ([10]). At times, the subjects move their awareness away from this condition, assuming themselves as pure, as monocultural; as if such purity that existed from the cultural point of view and identity were not always the result of métissage processes ([1], [2], [10], [18], [19], [20]).

This reality exists, of course, not only with Brazilians residing in Portugal, in particular, but also with immigrants in general. The social trajectories and the objective conditions experienced by the subjects can create very different internal identifications. There are no pure cultures today. We are, therefore, increasingly culturally mestizos; and with each new interaction and each process of socio-cultural mediation, a new métissage is (re)created - this third dimension that we have been talking about and that sometimes makes the individual incapable of managing the complexity of their métissage and also experience identity crises ([21]).

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