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“Immigrants in Portugal: embracing diversity and inclusion”

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Embracing diversity: strategies of personal identities

We will present here a study about immigrants in Leiria, Portugal, in order to understand the personal identity's creation process in people who cross social and cultural frontiers.

People who live a cultural stability and have few interactions with alterations tend to have larger monoculturalistic attitudes, closer to the type of behaviour belonging to the culture in which they are originally integrated with their peers and family. Those who, for various reasons, undergo through a process of social mobility whether ascending or descending, are subjected to a cultural metamorphosis and, therefore, recreate their personal identities: they recreate the image they have of themselves and the one they show towards others. Immigrants seek to create their new self amid their culture of origin and their newly found culture by separating the two worlds, joining them or creating a third identity dimension, in an attempt to find the most secure way in an ontological perspective.

Contrarily to what is normally assumed in cultural studies about immigrants which tend to explain social and mental pathologies as a result of emigration, especially amongst children of immigrants, allegedly tormented because of living divided between different cultures, we believe that these individuals have the capacity to live comfortably in different worlds without any type of pathology.

In sum, this text departs from the general idea that immigrant's integration strategies oscillate between an attitude of commitment and an attitude of intercultural evasion. The first model can both deny the culture of origin and idealise the target culture, or deny the culture of arrival, being in accordance with the culture of departure, leading to the monocultural immigrant, as we will approach with Nelson and Soraia's voices. The second model refers to the immigrants who integrate their culture of origin into the emerging cultural identity both implicitly and explicitly, living regularly in 'two worlds', or in a third world, as Rowney says when he refers the *immigraland* (Vieira & Trindade, 2008).

The Immigrated's Culture *versus* the Immigrants' Culture

When we talk about immigrants, there is probably a greater tendency to think about what culturally unites them rather than what distinguishes them. In this text, on the contrary, the starting point is the principle that there is no immigrant's culture, but rather different ways of living, coexisting and identifying oneself with the cultural worlds that each subject crosses on his social paths.

So, considering the ethnobiographical interviewing as a method for our research, we shall reflect on the transformations and metamorphosis of identity which occurred with two immigrants from Brazil, from their social paths and life experiences, and made them an "other", very different from their peers who stayed in their original country, "which constitutes one of the greatest problems for people who have immigrated to return to their countries: they aren't recognized, so changed are they, and many times more culturally than materially" (Cucho, 1999: 165).

"[...] The so-called 'culture of the immigrants' is, in reality, defined by others, in order to serve the others' interests, from ethnocentric criteria. The culture of the immigrants is all that makes them appear different, and only that. [...] The more an individual is perceived as different, the more they are considered "immigrant". From the cultural systems of the immigrants themselves, they only retain what comforts the dominant representation of these cultures, namely the most visible and surprising aspects. The most "exotic traditions", "customs", "cultural traits" [...] that allow the definition of the immigrated person as immigrant, that remind them of their origins and, according to Sayad's expression, "call them to their origins", which is a way of "putting them in their place [...]." (Cucho, 1999: 156-157).

For this reason, we refer to immigrated individuals, in the plural, to the different persons and strategies in order to manage the multicultures which cross throughout each one (Hall, 2003). We intend to mark the heterogeneity within their universes, assuming more the idiosyncrasies of each immigrated's identity than, actually, the cultural identity of the social category of Brazilian immigrants. The focus is to understand the identity of each immigrated reconstructed between two banks: the cultures of departure and the cultures of arrival in each moment of a social path (Vieira & Trindade, 2008).

The intercultural self case: Rowney, the citizen of the world

Rowney is a dental surgeon. He has been in Portugal for twenty years. He has a Luso-Brazilian family and he claims for himself the right to belong everywhere: the first, the second and all banks. He sees himself as an ongoing project:

"[...] I feel a citizen of the world. I'm not who I was born as, I'm the one who I constructed, I am what I am, today. If I'm going to be alike tomorrow, I don't know, probably not [...]. My life experience was essential for this chameleon-like capacity of mine to adapt. [...]"

His adherence to the cultures of departure manifests itself through the affection both for the Portela's samba school and for the Brazilian Flamengo football team (an emotional investment that he doesn't make in any Portuguese club):

"Don't ask me to support any other school than Portela, [...] the samba school of my heart, which colors are blue and silver. I religiously watch Portela's parade [...] [laughs], it's a bit of a ritual; [...] when I sit down to watch Flamengo play, it isn't the

same thing to sit down and watch Porto or Benfica play. When Flamengo plays, move away from me, because, then, fanaticism almost borders on madness [laughs]. I have my weaknesses, I'm human. Flamengo is what my heart is, what am I going to do? I can't support any other team [...]”.

If samba and football translate an important anchor to the cultures of departure, this ontological dimension, the call to roots, is reinforced by his preferences to culinary traditions of Brazil and, then again, strongly asserted by the firm refusal to the Portuguese ones:

“[...] I continue, today, to feed myself in the Brazilian way. I hate kale, so, green soup is out of question; Portuguese traditional stew [...] doesn't suit me at all; however, codfish, made any way, I eat it, I love it. [...]”

Through his Portuguese family, his daughters and the nation, symbolised by the anthem that he emotionally intones, this Brazilian immigrant claims his Portugality:

“[...]my daughters are Portuguese, they were born here, daughters of Brazilian parents, but they're Portuguese, I've always felt this. The question is to know which focus you're giving to this question: officially dimension or symbolic dimension... [...]Initially, I kept myself completely Brazilian, a tieless immigrant. [...] when I arrived in Portugal and saw the eloquence, the speed with which the anthem arrives for the Portuguese... I was completely enchanted [...]. Today, when the anthem is sung at national team games... for example, a few time ago, Portugal was about to start playing, and we began to sing the anthem “Heroes of the sea, noble people...”, and my daughters were staring at me and they asked me if I knew the entire anthem. Of course I know it, how could I live here for 17 years and not know the national anthem? This anthem makes already a big difference to me. “Portugality” is already very costly to me, but I'm never going to stop being a Brazilian.”

As we see in Rowney's case, the views of others allow us to objectify the brought about transformation and become aware of this identity disjunction:

“I'm not Rowney all the time [...]. I'm “The Brazilian”, “oh, it's that Brazilian doctor”. This gives you a dimension of the importance of each person's behaviour as an individual outside his own country; you are your country's representative. I'm not Brazilian, but I can't say that I'm Portuguese neither.”

Despite the others' classifications based in a monocultural position, tending to see Rowney as a unique category (the immigrants one), the truth is that he assumes himself as a citizen of the world, as an immigrant capable of adapting to multiple cultural contexts, like the orchidea's roots. However, he claims the *immigraland* as a secure ontological place (Camilleri, 1989), because the others do not understand him (Vieira, 2009).

“Immigraland”: the escape through the third bank

With one foot on each bank, where he laid down his roots, Rowney is like an “orchid”, travelling through space in search of the third bank, the third place, the place that doesn't exist in anywhere else, or which could be every place on Earth:

“Of course I have roots; there is no denying it, but it doesn't mean I can't be fine where I am. The orchid roots are inserted in the tree that supports them, but sometimes they reach the ground; the orchid roots are very long, it's the plant that's small. [...] Brazil is too small, Portugal is too small. If [...] I had to go and live in Russia, or Bulgaria, I'd go; I don't know if I'd have more or less difficulty, but I wouldn't face it with any apprehension [...]. The immigrant is landless, he has no place in the world, they have to create immediately the 'Immigraland' [laughs] because it's a very serious problem; here in Portugal I'm a Brazilian and when I'm in Brazil, I'm a Portuguese. "Immigraland" doesn't exist, I don't have a place. Today, when I go to Brazil, everybody calls me 'the Portuguese guy' [...].”

The Monocultural case – Nelson and Soraia

The returning as the project

Nelson and Soraia are a married couple with a new born baby. Nelson worked for 11 years in a petrol station, the same job he develops now in Portugal. Soraia stopped working when they married. They are now going through the legalisation process: *“We have a visa for three months, but it is ending; now we need a working permit”* (Nelson). They share a house and divide its rent with one of Soraia's brothers and a Brazilian friend. Soraia has another brother living in Lisbon, who helps her financially. For Nelson, [...] adjusting [to Portuguese reality] was very difficult:

“[We took] one year to adjust... in the first two days I wanted to fly back to Brazil. [...] the contact with people, to see them, the way of speaking, the climate... there is more joy in Brazil. Here it is quiet [...]. Then I was homesick and I wanted to leave. It is different. I am not saying that this is bad [...]. We don't know very much about Portugal; we only know Leiria and Lisbon. [...].”

The two banks of the river

The traditional barbecue which gathers the Brazilians on the weekend is not a regular habit of this couple for economic reasons, they say. On special occasions like New Years Eve, and on birthdays, they usually visit other Brazilian immigrants to mitigate the longings of home:

“[...] We have channel 25 which brings to us the news of Brazil; we can also see lots of Brazilian serials. All that Brazilian people want is TV, football and Carnival, nothing more [...].” (Soraia)

“[...] They come here, and we go to their houses... just two or three couples.” (Soraia)

“[...] In Brazil, it is usual to do a party to be together for almost all day long. Here it is more difficult.” (Nelson)

“[...] We telephone home on the weekends, and that helps to endure the longings from home. We need to know how are doing our brothers and sisters, how is mother doing... she loves talking about the baby.” (Nelson)

“[...]The more we talk the more homesick we feel[...].” (Soraia)

“[...]When Nicholas was born, Soraia’s mother came to stay with us for three months to help her daughter[...].” (Nelson)

The project is to return

Nelson and Soraia show little interest in achieving success in Portuguese society:

“[...] if we had better conditions here, if I had a job, Nicholas in a kindergarten... we still would have to go for a visit to Brazil, because there is too much longing[...].” (Soraia)

“[...]The longing is the most difficult thing. All our family there, and us here... it makes us want to leave.” (Nelson)

The rejection of metamorphosis as an identity strategy to be there

With regard to the possible transformations that immigrants undergo, in the case of Nelson and Soraia, there seems to be no great will to integrate into local society and joining in the festivities and in the rhythm of daily life. They do not feel much changed, because their mission in life is a quick return to Brazil, as little acculturated as possible.

Even in relation to food, this couple refuses Portuguese culture. They know the Portuguese dishes but they do not like them: *“I try to obtain as much as possible Brazilian food”* (Soraia). Nelson likes to drink Portuguese beer, but he adds immediately: *“I like Brazilian beer too [...]”*.

Nelson uses sports to emphasise his Brazilian identity:

“[...] in Brazil the competition is bigger, there are more teams; here there are not so many teams, but it’s also good because there are many foreigners playing. There are three good teams: Sporting, Porto and Benfica, but I am not a fan of any of these teams [...]. If there’s a match between Portugal and Brazil, I’ll be supporting Brazil, it’s the best.” (Nelson)

Imagining Portugal

Before leaving Brazil, this couple had an inherited image of Portugal, from their Portuguese grandparents, who were born on the Madeira Island. For those who remain in Brazil:

“Portugal is a very rich country. They think that we are rich, full of money, [...] having a great life, because they don’t know the sacrifices we are enduring, and how hard this is for us [...].” (Soraia)

When questioned about their relation with the Portuguese, and the existence of discrimination, their answer is ambivalent:

“[...] We have always presented ourselves as Brazilians, but we were very much discriminated in the beginning. Many people were rather unpleasant to us when we were working, talking to us with spite: ‘do this, do that, you are here to work! [...].’” (Nelson)

The changing project

[...] Our plan was to work until the end of this year, to bring some money to the house, and then return to Brazil. (Nelson)

We came here with the intention of staying for one or two years, the most. (Soraia)

Nicholas’ birth changed their plans and their return was postponed:

“[...] Now it is not possible; maybe next year. Because if she doesn’t find a job, and I am the only one working it is not worth to be away from your friends and not being able to save any money. [...]” (Nelson)

Their project remains to return to the lost paradise of the culture of origin, although, as they say, life there is difficult:

“[...] it was hard for us when we were only two, now with the baby to feed, it is harder.” (Nelson)

However, the project is in permanent construction, giving rise to new doubts:

“[...] I made a plan [...] last year, which changed because she was pregnant; now, we are planning to leave, maybe next year, but this plan may change too.” (Nelson)

While Soraia is certain that happiness is located back home in Brazil, Nelson is divided, saying one thing and almost immediately saying the opposite, no matter what the subject of discussion is: food, drink, leisure, Carnival, or his ideas about the Portuguese and Portuguese society:

“[...] I hadn’t any idea of Portuguese; I didn’t know the culture, but now that we know it, we like it more. The first year was terrible, but now I have a good impression, I like it so much that I am inclined to stay longer [...]. After saving a year’s salary to pay for our house there, and enough to buy another one like that, if she finds a job, we will stay; otherwise, we will leave. To stay here without saving any money, far from our family, not being able to get out of the house, that is the question: to stay or not to stay.” (Nelson)

Conclusion

We’re in front of two different ways of managing identifications in a heterogeneous life trajectory analysed here, which we simply denominated between the first and the second cultural bank. There are similarities between the two voices, but it’s more about the differences that we wish to take some conclusive readings.

Placing ourselves on each subject's particularities and singularities, we have tried to understand the way in which each one manages their subjectivities within a different reality from the one they've left. A different reality they inhabit today, although some of these voices choose to identify themselves with one of the banks, while others welcome internally the multiple experience references found between the banks.

It is possible, in these two cases having Brazil as a first bank and Portugal as the second, to perceive those who admit themselves as citizens of the world, who don't see the second bank as the culture of arrival, but rather as a living gerund (Vieira, 2009); there are others that use the second bank as a passport to return to the first with some dreams fulfilled, believing that on returning they are still the same, that they return to the same left reality, when neither one nor the other ends up happening, as is Nelson and Soraia's case.

The identity process is a path of constant acknowledges, based on the reflexivity and agency of each subject, in a game between the possible and the desirable, which seeks the balance between the self in a settled moment and the other, to attribute meaning and continuity to the dynamic self. Each subject includes, thus, in a syncretic manner, the plurality of references available, possessing "an identity of variable geometry" (Cuche, 1999: 149).

Key Words

Personal Identities; Metamorphosis of Identity; Immigrated's Culture ; Immigrants' Culture

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