Editor
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IDENTITY

**Concepts, Theories, History and Present Realities
(a European overview)**

Vol. I

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EDITOR

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III. IDENTITIES IN SPACE AND TIME

CULTURAL IDENTITY / IDENTITIES FOR EUROPE: DOES IT SERVE FOR ANYTHING?*

The identity discourse has a tragic history in Europe (both inside frontiers and outside our own geographic space). The first part of this reflection will try to present an overview of the most important literary, political and philosophical theories of this concept which is particularly connected to the understanding of the Other in Contemporary Europe.

In the second part we will aim to discuss the importance, the need and the utility of such a concept in our multicultural Europe that has ambiguous and contradictory discourses about its own cultural identity/ies.

We also will try to compare Contemporary European perspectives on this issue with other ways of understanding identity in other continents such as Africa, America or Asia, in order to develop and bring more complexity, ductility and also theoretical and practical depth to this concept.

Finally we underline the main contributions of the essays that compose this book, each one contributing to draw a complex, wider and deeper picture of the possibilities that the concept, theory and history of identity may raise in different European cultural, historical and geographical contexts.

1. Against the evidence

Identity has transformed itself into such a widespread concept that it seems now absolutely transparent. This means it is no longer a provocative or a problematic concept, both in common usage and in large academic fields of knowledge (Barata-Moura 1995, 1999). The aim of this reflection is to recover and point out the deepness and the difficulty of the theoretical and practical problems involved in the use of this concept.

The concept of identity gained academic and social status with modernity, but it also captured its main antinomies and contradictions. As we are moving away from the exhausted Enlightment and Modernity we propose that this is the right moment to question against the evidence: what is identity? Do these

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* Parts of this introduction recover the text, «Cultural Identity/Identities for Europe: Does It Serve Any Purpose?», *Ideas of/for Europe*, Teresa Pinheiro, Beata Cieszynska, José Eduardo Franco (eds.), Frankfurt Am Main, Peter Lang, 2012, pp:405-411 (ISBN: 978-3-631-61974-2)

concepts have any utility now in a post-modern Europe or in a globalized world (Steger 1996)?

2. Identity/ties and the Other – the globalization of Europe and Western culture

The postmodern concept of the subject lives from the endless nostalgia of identity. This is a paradoxical situation because if anything it characterizes the postmodern condition[1] (Lyotard 1987) that is the fragmentary subject, multiple and divided, non-consistent and fluid. Unable to retrieve the unity and coherence of modern subjectivity, and also after crossing the postcolonial experience and women's, gender, racial and ecological movements, it seems impossible for Europe to come back to thoughts of modern identity. But the problem is that in no other moment of our European history have we seen such an interest and need (first of all for practical reasons that are magnified with globalization) to consider identity: individual identity, social identity, national identity, postnational identity (Brágue 1997).

From our point of view, this is one of the main reasons why contemporary intellectuals, academies and researchers changed their focus to the other side of the identity concept: progressively the reflection about identity leaves place for the thought of the Other.

One of the first consequences of this important change is that we can no longer talk about identity, but only about identities, because there is not only the Other but the multiple Others. Of course terrorism, globalization, migration and intensive travelling imposed on us the reality of the Other/Others in a totally different way. The Other/Others are no long the distant reality but they are now our neighbors and co-citizens, some of them with the same nationality and passport as us, Europeans. This is a totally new reality for Europe and it is a new challenge we have to face. Our research hypothesis is that maybe this situation of the unsurpassable otherness in Europe will oblige us to rethink our own identity/identities in new terms. In our opinion, this will made us leave the pseudo-evidence of the modern identity concept.

In these terms what may be new and challenging in the old identity issue is the possibility of new research lines through the urgent and almost new problem of the Other/Others.

Under a cultural, historical and philosophical point of view Europeans (and Westerns in general) never had to face the radical Other[1].

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[1] We can only think of one exception and that is the metaphysical confrontation with God, that in western culture has been the truly Other (even if sometimes anthropomorphically approached and transformed as an almost human being).

The other has been the 'rational other' with the Greeks, the analogical other with Descartes, the 'transcendental and moral other' with Kant, 'the same and the other' with Hegel, the 'others' will and pure subjectivity' with the romantic pessimism, or the 'exotic other' that ethnography and ethnology transformed into an object of pure curiosity and oddity. Finally, the other has become the 'other subject of the language' to which linguistics and structuralism deny ontological consistence.

With Foucault, following Heidegger in this particular point, Western thought faces the death of subjectivity, the death of the Self and of the Other(s), being both the verse and reverse of the identity problem

Without anything that may be the radical Other, inside and outside western culture, that can truly challenge the European subjectivity, the identity issue had become transparent and may have seemed non-problematic. In a time where almost every man has been touched by Western culture, the evidence of identity appears as an axiom.

According to such apparent evidence, economic globalization, and cultural policy could easily spread, because the resistance to the 'Other' is weak and the desire for Europe and for the European lifestyle is everywhere, and is greater than the resistance to and the denial of Europe itself. The 'rasure' of the Derrida 'différence' is then denied, while homogeneity and unification become the main rule of globalization.

From our point of view, the main difficulties about thinking of European identity in the 21st Century have their own roots in this hegemonic situation of European and Western culture. With no significant and truly 'Other(s)' that could require an effective cultural dialogue, European identity becomes an 'obvious' and weak reality and finally lacks interest, in particular for the Europeans.

3. European culture, science, literature and philosophy

European identity problems are not only grounded in social, economic and cultural globalization. Within Europe, in its own geography, history and epistemology lie some of the greatest difficulties with identity.

As Gonçalves stresses (Gonçalves 1999 a) e b)), among the most important cultural achievements of Europe are science and philosophy, but both contain a very dangerous propensity for unification and universalization and, less strongly, for differentiation. When this tendency drives social or religious groups or even entire nations, the concept of identity becomes static and reified. Moreover, it starts to produce a kind of 'self full-filling prophecy' that may change the life of the social and historical nation.

That kind of identity concept, 'obvious', 'self evident' and unquestionable has already made its own history in Europe, when it has served to justify Holocaust. As Habermas puts it:

> The complex preparation and network organization of the mass murder coldly prepared, in which hundreds of thousands were implied, and indirectly all the nation, took place under an appearance of normality and its success has even depended on a social life highly civilized. The horror happened without damaging the tranquility of daily life routine. Since then it is no more possible a conscientious life without the suspicious above all the unquestionable continuity that pretends to legitimate itself precisely on that continuity (Habermas 1998).

Only under a consideration of the self evidence of Aryan identity, socially accepted and lived with tranquility, could such a horror have taken place. Against the dangerous illusion, that comes from self evident identity speeches, a critical attitude is absolutely required.

In our opinion, this critical task may also find its deep roots precisely in the same ground where static and ideological identity theories have flourished: European culture.

4. Identity and tragic European thinking

All cultures have the tendency for universalization. This aspiration is even more important in our European culture because we have been a continent where metaphysics was born, but also philosophy, science and in a certain moment even a common language (Latin).

But Europe is not only uniformity; on the contrary its history is full of controversy, disharmony, contradiction and internal opposition, diversity and crisis (Queiroz 1996). This continuous internal disagreement is not only episodic, but constitutional of European culture. It is even one of the most powerful mechanisms of its human and cultural processes, in all the senses this concept may be taken. Different languages and literatures, different histories, arts, poetries and behaviors, opposite interests and positions, both inside and outside European geographic spaces, are the most common features of our common Europe (Silva 1994).

But it is this permanent internal tension, this kind of constant state of crisis that also gives Europe its deeper and more minimal identity. Moreover, it is this state of negation and polemics, which now includes much more of the Others' point of view than in past times that ensures European cultural productivity worldwide interest and the power of attraction. "

As Gadamer points out, the main task of Europe is to understand the Other, and in particular the Other inside of us because this is simultaneously an "(...) invitation and contribution to encounter with our selves" (Gadamer 1998). As a part of our identity has always been negation and difference, we Europeans have the task and the responsibility to integrate the other in our own thoughts about identity (Pires 1994).

According to Eduardo Lourenço, a 20th century Portuguese philosopher and essayist, the right way to deal with this problem is to assume the traditional concept of European culture, that means accepting our criticism and self-criticism, the conscientiousness of historical differences between cultures that have to maintain an intense and creative dialogue. It is this critical continuous exercise that may be called 'European tradition', because "(...) only Europeans maintain with what could be said as culture a dramatic relationship or, if we want to be more precise, a tragic relationship (...), only for them culture has defined as an intellectual behavior without any ground than of the dialog with itself (...)" (Lourenço 1994:160).

Avoiding the simplification of the identity concept, assuming our tradition of a tragic and critical culture (on the Greek sense of struggle and polemics, internal constant questioning about itself, about the human condition, the meaning of truth, beauty and justice) we can better understand the Other and move forward on our common European identity. In this context, identity is care for us but also care and openness to the Other (Gadamer 1998,1999).

Of course this is now only a strong challenge for Europeans, a kind of utopia that comes from the future and shows us a possible future, because now we know that identity more than a descriptive content of our own historical narration (that should include the Other narration in this postcolonial times) it also contains an idealized project, a prospective content, a Utopia (Macciocchi 1992).

The content of this utopia has to be grounded on our historical successes but also on our permanent difficulties (where manichaeism and classic antinomies are so frequent, dividing the world between us/others; civilized/non-civilized; white/black, Christians/non-Christians; woman/man, center/periphery, North/South, human sciences/physical sciences, and so on). Above all we need new models of thinking and acting to overlap this predisposition of European culture to simplify in an uniformization process that forgets and darkens the differences while suppressing the dialogue with the Other (Barata-Moura 1999).

5. Other models of identity

The spiritual and creative strengths of Europe are deeply connected with its permanent state of crisis. Its multilingual character, internal cultural diversity and in some cases exacerbated nationalisms and xenophobia constantly feed this feeling of permanent crises that, in turn, instigate multiple identities and diverse representations of the world.

A 'community of destiny' is Edgar Morin's project for Europe, not as a 'supernation', but as a 'metanation' (Morin 1998). Such a reality does not exist yet. Europe has to build it: its own political, economical and (multi)cultural model. Its identity will certainly contain others' identity, but should also create a new concept and a new content. In any case, Europe may no longer avoid becoming simultaneously, an universal and particular culture.

As a matter of fact, in different world contexts identity has also been, in last two centuries, the field of important social, historical and political struggles. In our opinion all those theoretical and practical identity experiences should be the object of attention and research, for two main reasons: firstly because we, Europeans, are concerned with the most important social and historical identity struggles all over the world; secondly, because we all need to learn from each other's experiences (and also so as to avoid the horror and pain caused by some of them).

From the United States of America's way of leaving identity, we propose that we retrieve how heavily ethno-racial becomes and how it is so deeply connected with the history of prejudice that divides white Europeans emigrants from Blacks, Latins and, more recently Indians and Asians. By transforming biological differences in cultural differences, North Americans have been forced to assume fixed and homogeneous cultural identities in their lives, that have transformed themselves in politics of identity. This was possible by assuming only one part of the identity dynamic (particularity) and denying all the universal aspiration of all the cultures. In very simple terms, as Hollinger (2004) puts it, before being White-Americans, Blacks-Americans, Latin-Americans, Indian-Americans or Asian-Americans, all they want to be is American citizens and human beings. Moreover, all they want is to be able to choose with which social or cultural group they identify themselves.

But also in Africa, identity has become an important field of struggle against pre-defined categories of the European colonialist thought and political action. Even in times of postcolonialism, the struggles against the powerful distinction between race (for the European whites) and ethnicity (for natives) still a reality: leaving without rights or land those that Europeans considered in the past not

to be local native tribes but emigrants from other regions, thus, colonial identity is made perpetual. As Mamdani (2004) stresses, the Rwanda genocide lies in this permanent colonial distinction that had become socially internalized and geared towards the State's political policies.. While trying to explain how the identity/ties always develop within a context of a struggle for power, Mamdani uses the following story:

> Lenin once chided Rosa Luxemburg with being so preoccupied with Polish nationalism that she could not see beyond it and so risked being locked in the world of the rat and the cat. For the rat, there is no animal bigger in presence of the cat: neither the lion, nor the tiger, nor the elephant looms as large. For the cat, there is none more delicious than the rat. The political world set in motion by the modern state and modern colonialism also generates paired identities endlessly. For every settler, there is a native. In a world where cats are few and rats are many, one way for cats to stabilize rule is to tag rats by taping their historicity through a discourse on origins – indigenous and non-indigenous, ethnical and racial. This is why in a world where rats have belled cats, it is entirely possible that rats may still carry on living in the world as defined by cats, fired by the very identities generated by institutions created in the era of the cats (Mamdani 2004).

For us Europeans, it is also time to understand that the changes of the modern state are bringing new claims for identity and recognition. Immigrant communities in Europe have to be seen in a new perspective, outside the classical pairing of native/non native. But that will only be possible within other political institutions that do not simply reproduce the national modern state, with its classical ideological discourse on authenticity or even on the already exhausted multiculturalism. As Hollinger points out, multiculturalism in America has only achieved different monolithic identities that are unable to mix in a hybridity process producing synthetic identities (Hollinger 2004). In multiculturalism, usually distinctiveness is reinforced and stereotypes are stronger and more powerful in social and political discrimination.

In order to change all this process the focus has to be on cultural communication, in a process of dialogue that starts with the individual, but achieves the multiple and reticular social groups within communities. On the other hand, identity may never become a legal imposition, frozen and reified:

> All postmodernity talk about hybridity and multiple identities belong to the domain of culture. Once enforced by law, however, identities cease to be all these. A legal identity is not voluntary, nor is multiple. The law recognizes you as one, and as none other (Mamdani 2004).

Maybe it is also time to learn something from the Indian culture, which presents a strong impact on the community concept of individual identity. As Jayaram puts it,

> In India individuals do not see themselves as abstract entities devoid of attributes. They articulate different ways of life, reflecting their circumstances and expressing their distinctive identities. Having multiple identities, invoking specific identities in different spheres of life, and reacting to the perceived identities of others, all seem to be socioculturally embedded. Both, self-perception of one's multiple identities and perception of and reaction to the identities of others, are learned as part of one's socialization (Jayaram 2004).

All these different perspectives on cultural identity lie in very different social and historical processes. They also reveal contradictory aspects and it is possible that they deny each other, obliging us to review our truths and evidences.

But no other world culture is so prepared to handle and to sustain such a contradictory, antinomic and polemic issue as European culture. Not only because most of these contradictions and difficulties were generated by European philosophy and politics, but also because the most powerful dynamics of our tragic culture are precisely contradiction, polemic, and denial.

If we, Europeans, can maintain and understand, while moving on by not suppressing these dilemmas and difficulties, we certainly are on the right way to build a multiple and reach cultural identity to/for a Europe of citizens of the world.

In this context (that in our perspective is grounded in a tragic European culture, in the Greek sense of the concept), the most important question should not be about the content of a Cultural European Identity (that one already exists and it is made of historical facts), but to ask in what conditions may citizens understand their European belonging as a relevant dimension to understand themselves, the Others and the world where they live.

In times of psycho-sociological and national identity articulated to post-national identities (Habermas 1998) will it be possible for Europeans to feel, live and build the project and the desire of Europe (Marques 1993)?

We hope the chapters that follow may help delve further into this issue.

6. Identity in Europe: concepts, theories and methodologies

This book is divided in three main sections: Politics of Identity, Identity Poiesis and Identities in Space and Time.

In the first part the authors try to define the concept of identity in a political and theoretical way, but also giving practical examples from their own European realities.

In a second moment we present four essays that show, with very different methodologies and using different European writers, how language, literature and cultural identity may be deeply connected, recreating each other's meaning.

The last part of the book presents several studies that try to understand identity in monuments and buildings in public spaces, using the historical point of view in order to understand particular developments of this concept in some concrete European villages, cities and regions.

The first essay seeks to articulate the issues of identity (briefly engaging in the history of the evolution of the concept in Portugal) with the building up of the Lusosphere in the context of strong economical, political, mediatised and cultural globalization.

The Lusosphere, far from being a movement, is an aspiration shifted in time. It now experiences very strong prospects to develop and assemble, no longer as the dream of the Fifth Empire (that so deeply seduced the luso-phones, from Vieira to Pessoa, and Camões) but as a way of articulating different cultural and linguistic perspectives capable of building the bridges of intra and intercultural dialogue that the world nowadays requires.

Our second essay brings us a particular Spanish insight to the question of identity through the important works of the historian and anthropologist Julio Caro Baroja. Using the concept of 'character' to understand the identity processes, the author underlines the complexity and ambiguity of the national background of this concept. In his latter works he still repeats the same idea: identity speeches may be on the origin of stereotypes and commonplaces that science and media echoes, usually for political and ideological reasons.

The postmodern point of view for the identity concept is the proposal made by a Slovakian author. In this theoretical context he articulates the concepts of 'radical and plural democracy' with the idea of 'minimal identity' (applied not only to Slovakia, but also to the Europe as a whole). In a second moment of this essay he gives us two illuminating examples of this concepts arguing in favor of the need to close some non-democratic discourses to maintain the possibility of democratic dissenting. Finally, the need for an ironic point of view over identity is presented in order to cross over a modern to a postmodern concept of identity.

The Turkish 'complex mosaic' of religions, languages and cultures is the main issue of a political essay written from a researcher that deeply knows from the inside the claims for identity recognition in Turkey. This paper presents the particular cases of Kurdish and Syriac communities living in Turkey to show how these citizens feel their identities going through a 'turkification' policy.

The paper concludes that although there still are many problems in the concrete lives of the minority communities, important steps have been taken in recent years (some of them with origin in European Community) toward the 'introduction of empathy' between different cultures, languages and religions in Turkey.

The text that opens the second part of this volume aims to outline some dimensions, taken into account when considering the identity/ies of an island. Madeira Island was uninhabited when "discovered" (cf. Vieira 2009) by the first Portuguese voyagers, in 1418.. Throughout the path of its History, the island received the - either accepted or enforced - visits of multiple individuals, coming from so many different parts of the world, hence building a small scale "melting pot" and promoting Funchal, its capital, to the statute of the first European town off the European continental borders. The people known nowadays as *madeirenses* congregate an extremely rich combination of proveniences since the very beginning of the settlement.

In the study that follows, which comes from a French context, the author chooses a particular moment for the II World War to show us how much identity is a process of co-construction and negotiating of senses. Using the romance *Silence de la mer* (Vercours 1942) as an hermeneutic engine, the researcher evokes the mirror metaphor to rescue the identity discourse from the traditional Manichaeism such as us/others, the goods/ the bad, etc.

The reflection presented under the title "Who needs 'italianness'? Postcolonial and Migration Italian Literature'" follows and precisely deepens the ways opened by the previous French study, because it strongly stresses the need of decentring notions such as identity, colonialism, literature, exile, diaspora and so on. Using the theoretical paradigm of Cultural Studies, the author reminds us of the need to see identity as a co-construction and permanent negotiation, in particular with our own migrants, our colonized communities but also with the second and third generations which live a kind of hybridation that requires a new and more complex concept of (cultural) translation.

The essay from a Hungarian researcher, under the title 'In the Beginning was the Void' presents us the Imre Kertész Nobel Prize thoughts about identity (European, Jewish, Hungarian, human, etc.) to invite us on a voyage of the complexity of identity processes, concluding that there is no possibility of an European vision on this subject out of biography, out of history, out of fiction or memory. The holocaust showed to the Europeans, in a definite way, that the process of denying the self is always a possibility. Under these circumstances, Kertész argues that only literature can save men from the void.

Using a comparative perspective between two European Cultures that seem to have very little in common, two central words of Portuguese and Romanian

identity common descriptions by both cultures are explored and approximated with several important dimensions. Those words are *saudade* for Portuguese culture and *dor* from Romanian culture. The paper discusses lexicographical definitions, as philosophical and lyrical dimensions of both concepts, while developing the hypothesis that, not only the common Roman roots may approach these two far away European cultures, but this particular proximity may also be due to historical reasons that made the Romanian live the 'fundamental experience of loneliness' traditionally as shepherds, like the Portuguese that traditionally were sailors during their historical maritime expansion.

The third part of the volume opens with a study centered in one of the most peculiar and important identity traits of Azorean culture (a Portuguese archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean): the strong Catholic religiosity lived by those communities. The author, while presenting the history of Azorean people, tries to inscribe and describe the Azorean identity religious dimensions, also visible in an important collection of built heritage, in particular chapels, altars, churches and other important religious buildings.

In order to picture the possibilities for a transnational culture, the second text of this last part of the volume bases its research in a very particular European Region: the Alps Adriatic area where transnational monuments and historical memories could be found in a cross-border context. But as the researchers show, the national perspectives of the past are perpetuated. Even when the same symbols and monuments are used by more than one community they definitely don't promote a shared identity but mainly stimulate separation and opposite actions.

Grounded in 20th Century Russian history, the essay "Staging the Hero: 50 years of Memorial Ensembles in St. Petersburg" studies some of the greatest monuments, and memories of this city. It describes the way St.Petersburg-Leningrad dealt with its memories of the 'Great Patriotic War of 1941-45', or the ´Blockade', expressed in its city monuments. Concepts of 'veracity', 'authenticity', 'public memory', 'private memories', 'individual hero', 'collective hero' among others, are discussed along the text. The author concludes that important changes in memory are reflected on city monuments, showing the projected identity for the city for the past 50 years:

The intricate picture of Slavonic South identity(ties) countries/regions is the object of a comprehensive essay that explains how may an apparent linguistic *continuum* may hide several deep cultural differences that were made throughout History (modern, but also pre-modern). In order to explain them, the author uses several traditional dichotomies that still function in that region

such as East/West, Orthodoxy/ non Orthodoxy, Balkan/non Balkan; North/South, Ottoman Empire/ Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Several hypotheses of understanding the relationships between Yugoslav, South Slavonia, Slovene, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Bulgaria and Macedonia identities are displayed in this study. This last text of the volume points out where, how and why such realities are still problematic nowadays.

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