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Coexisting with Difference in an Age of Pluralism and Globalization



Difference and “otherness” on the brink of dialogue

Candido Mendes

Difference and cultural abolition

At this start of a new century, the discourse of modernity always focuses on the coexistence of cultures and their ever-growing pluralism. And this has been accompanied by an acknowledgement of difference and reciprocal perspectives across the same collective horizon.

Implicit in this understanding is the affirmation of identity that is guaranteed by constant social memory. This in turn persists as a counterpoint between resisting and eventually assimilating dominations in a framework of possible prevalence, or else consented dependence.

The link between contemporaneity and the installation of this collective identity results from the defeat of its civilizational dominion during the last half millennium, which has led to cultural “offspring” being suffocated or even eradicated by the advent of technology and the radical re-ordering of the context in accordance with a rationality proclaimed as universal (Debray, 1992).

The unique impact of the 11th of September was precisely the result of the severing of this conditioning factor by the Islamic world through the intrinsic and radical affirmation of its ipseity by Western hegemony.

204 The terrorism espoused by Al Qaeda mirrors the implacable message that seeks the premise of this recognition, the premise of a world based on differences (Bennani-Chraïbi, 2003).

Parallel to this, contemporaneity, in the very depths of the West, grew conscious of colonial violence and its expansive structure of alienation, and indeed of all historical identity (Mignolo, 2007). In this new century we are still engaged in this task of deconstruction, or as far as the point where colonial dependence attained its own conditions of thinking, and even the *mimesis* of its vision of the authentic and what a collectivity “for itself” would actually be, in its path toward freedom and collective fruition. Now the new century faces the outbreak of violence from the Islamic State, with its radical annihilation of this very feeling of the other and its elimination of recognition as an imperative of universal coexistence. What we are surely witnessing, in the best Jasperian sense, is the rupture of an axial period,

built by historical process over the last half millennium. The paradigms themselves now appear broken in their intransitive assertion of ipseity and their total cancelling of historical time and multiple coexistence.

By force of circumstance, we find ourselves at the first impulse of this new *cogito* that already presupposes the entire elimination of dialogue and the valid presence of the other on the horizon of history.

The whole postulate of dialogue as a precondition of collective existence disappears in the extreme reduction of all historical alliance-forming to the same radical imperative of renunciation of alterity (Sève, 2005).

Nothing other than this is the new challenge posed to epistemology and charged *à la* Windelband and Rickert: the boundary condition of understanding itself. We are heading for the very loss of time synchronies beyond the bounds of epoch or the presumed permanence of historical cycles of failures: "being more", the effective flourishing of the human phenomenon. The clamor for the caliphate of the Islamic state is already the clamor of this loss of temporal synchrony on which modernity is based, and the diminishing of their collective protagonists based on the nation-state. It is on these same premises, then, that the clamors for this same understanding of the last two decades prove outdated, in search of whatever might support this new axial age opened by the aporetic irredentism of the Islamic State (Roy, 2002). 205

One wonders in what terms we can—at least as a *caveat* and using the imperatives of rationality—respond to the

radical impasse that has presented itself, seeking the first returns or remissions, seeking at least the rudiments of a dialectic discourse (Lukács, 2001).

The acts perpetrated by the IS do not represent the final episode of the rebel spontaneism that runs rife in the region. Nor do they represent the revenge of the survivors of the Saddam Hussein government in the war waged by Bush.

206 What has to be read into the sheer radicalism of this confrontation, admitting the presupposition of an axial change in these days of ours, is the exchange of all collective identity for a strict manifestation of ipseity, which is so absolutely and exhaustively repetitive. In the clamor of a revival of the caliphate, ostensibly abolished since 1923, the Shiite-Sunni dilemma will have to be faced in a process leading toward this last uprising of faith. However it may be, the movement is heading for the extreme radicalism of “believe or die”, driven by a fanaticism from which Islam had freed itself ever since the Abbasids (Esposito).

Contradictions and differences: the emerging matrix

It is also important to admit, in these axial-age days, the breaking of the historical matrix of specifying the protagonists of our collective identity. This has to do with the loss of synchrony of this circumstance over the last 500 years. And this has happened in a regression affirmed in the Middle East today by the caliphates, which deviate utterly from the alignment set up by the nations and their geo-

graphic frontiers in a universe of unbreakable interactions. The caliphate wants to agglutinate portions of several present States on behalf of a historical unity seen as something past, and to return today to what is argued to be their canonical, founding moment. And immediately the question is raised concerning the gratuity or arbitrariness of this new historical element in the mistaken syntagm, in whatever—while scanning this canon at the crucial moment of domination—is the recognition of a golden era, the dialogue with contenders in the zone of resistance to Imperial formations (Lewis, 2005). In a parallel with what today is happening between Iraq and Syria, one may ask about the classic floating identity of the Jewish Nation, the forced migratory configurations of Babylonia or the present Persian confrontation, allowing a new dialogue to be set up. Similarly, our days are testimony to this reemergence of the Crusades, amidst a complete uprooting of citizenship, especially in the more developed countries, thus speeding up the creation of diachronic political units in these *jihad*s of radical de-culturalization in which young Americans or Europeans alienate their faces and identities to join a salvationist *jihad*, in favor of, and without any return from, the caliphates being formed. More often than not, these volunteers for death also imply a radical conversion to Islamism, a new fraternity of this ongoing “Holy War”. This is the very idea of the project, the historical achievement of the West challenged by these *jihad*s so eager for a true, intransitive eschatological vision of any and every future. What is wholly distinguishable here, in the extreme of so-called Western

rationality, in the intransitive nature of this militancy of rationality, is a project that sows the sense of being. And in this same *jihad* it can be argued that these volunteers, often springing from the middle class of America or Europe, represent a response to banality which is an unbearable maneuver of their daily existence and the nothing produced by their universe of consumerism and mediatic imitation. Unlike the conquests of the Crusades, what stands out in these new *jihadists* is a strict zeal for testimony and martyrdom (Ali, 2003). But they cannot be likened to the terrorists who kill the other for no cause, mistaking the other for the enemy; rather, they abolish historical formations experienced as obstacles with no return, that most essential pulsation of collective conscience. One also sees on this horizon a new phenomenology of differences in the contemporary, the opposite effect of the cultural resistance of lost identity caused by the extremist contrast between the borders of the affluent world (Scheffer, 1995), at times in its explanatory dynamics, and the real ghettos of immobilism and marginality that gave shelter to sovereign collectivities abandoned for centuries to the inertia of their governments. None other is the situation insinuated today by Haiti, for example, handed over as it is to a growing generational *diaspora* and with its immigrants endlessly searching for better living conditions (Bordes-Benayoun, and Schnapper, 2006). This neo-assimilation process arises with the country also being left behind, void of memory and identity and accepting to live with the host country in affirmation of cultural pluralism. This same parameter even contrasts with migration move-

ments such as the Mexicans in the United States, where the intention of returning and the identifying force of the adventure resist even against the welcoming conditions of the frontier country, which in turn is also marked by the imposing figure of its identity, let alone its overwhelming integrism.

The epistemology of change

This analysis reclaims a definition of the epistemological presuppositions of this reflection by first of all calling attention to various degrees of pseudo-difference that could affect the perception of the collective subjectivity of contemporary agents (Dallmayr, 2010). The first point involves the confrontation between fundamentalism and the true identity that often results from residue points of resistance from the course of history, then leading to a reductionist profile of what might be the full force of the actual contribution of the memory that configures this identity (Baudrillard, and Valiente Noailles, 2005).

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Likewise, the impetus to counterpoint this very domination can lead to the *mimesis* of this polarization by transferring contents of the "other" in a counterpoint that sections the axes of this effective dialectic.

The accelerated historical process produced by these collective subjectivities leads to diachronic perceptions of this forming identity, still in the ambit of a domination made obsolete by the super-domination involved in the historical process (Mendes, 2004a).

Attention is also called to the function of this epistemology, which also entails deconstructing the very "aware-

ness” of the whole historical process, involving a reassessment of moments of setting aside or downright rejection of stages or moments of this process which are subsequently seen as a degrading or discarding of identity.

In this epistemology we would actually also come across the protagonists of modernity effectively and in various degrees assuming their identity within the framework of the nation-state. This counterpoint between the commitment “to oneself” or “to others” made by the collectivities in conflict gives rise to different stages of assuming the collective fates expressed in the emergence of nationalisms in these epoch-making circumstances. What is implied in this collective conscience represents the passage of diffuse feelings of in-
210 dependence and the building of converging, cumulative social systems in all their dynamics: a precise response to the efforts of development in the face of the naïve, inert views of progress as historical time.

These approaches suppose the establishing of epistemological support for such social reflection, starting with the pseudo-differences that possibly encompass the perception of the collective subjectivity of the present historical actors (Hall, 1992). The first such pseudo-difference is the confrontation of fundamentalism against truthful identity, resulting from the resistances emerging from the process of its historical continuity. This may lead to a reductionist profile of the effective memory input which is responsible for such identity.

Subsequently, the facing of a determined domination may lead to a *mimesis* of such polarization in transposing

what represents the contents of such an "other" beyond the real axis of this encounter (Touraine, 2000).

The acceleration of the historical process could produce a diachronic perception of those collective identities and sometimes even jeopardize an obsolete context of domination *vis-à-vis* its new development.

One must also consider the deconstruction of the awakening of consciousness, which implies reevaluating the instances of discarding or fully assuming the acknowledgment of its identity.

In fact, in this epistemological *caveat* we also face the different scales of recognition of an authentic collective self. The nation-state is nowadays the ultimate entity in this historic commitment. No less than this is the imperative of nationalisms as the basic reference to these collective selves.

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Such is the crucial factor in this collective consciousness in respect to the transition from a diffuse feeling of dependence on the part of the previous subjects to colonization as a "social total fact". Such is the impulse that assures the building of effective social systems, in all its convergent and cumulative dynamics: the fulfillment of development according to the ingenious visions and inertia-bound progress that are considered as a category of historical time.

President Obama's decision to annihilate the Islamic State was immediately acknowledged by the consensus of American parties for the vehement support offered by the Republicans. What is at stake is the eradication of an organized force bent on an indiscriminate forming of alliances against the nations. On the other hand one sees the Amer-

ican presumption that immediate cooperation will be given on land by the bordering countries under threat, leaving the air action to the United States, without any involvement of troops.

The question remains as to the extent or limits of the mobilization on the part of the Islamic State, as well as just how far it has already for decades penetrated the collective unconscious of this ever so critical region of the world (Encel, 2002). At the same time, one wonders, in the mesh of these prospective alliances—on one side and the other—whether the vows made with Washington are also linked to the conquering of autonomy by ethnic minorities in the countries involved, especially the Kurds in Turkey or the *kuidish* in Western Pakistan.

Be that as it may, the absolute novelty in the fight against the Islamic State lies in this antagonism directed not towards a government or regime but rather towards a collective protagonist whose militant power is so widespread that it escapes all predictable dissent in the nation-states. The horrendous, unprecedented dramatization of the non-negotiable beheadings of American and British hostages by the IS defines this countdown by the IS as the abolition of any consensus of the period, as the unquestionable threshold of an axial age. This is not just a matter of asking where in the still nebulous ideology of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi the conquests of universal rationality over the last five centuries were abandoned, together with the validity of democracy, human rights or religious preferences. And the question remains concerning the relation be-

tween the IS and Sharia itself, with regard to what today (and especially since Rowhani) involves the Teheran regime's acceptance of pluralism of religions. We are also disturbed by the lack of limits to this radicalization, again in contrast with the perceptible struggle of forces during the Khomeini Revolution, or else the spontaneism of the utterly sacrificial 11th September. Furthermore, the movement is liable to possible nationalist outbursts and temptations following possible successes in confrontations with the sovereign *status quo* of the Middle East.

Cultural diversity on the brink of the new axial age

On the brink of an envisaged new Axial Age, one has to wonder about what the dynamics of cultural diversity represents today in the wake of non-hegemonic globalization.

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One possible issue emerging nowadays concerns the superseding of the old continental regionalities in the framework of their present configuration.

Such a new scenario accompanies the demise of meta-polarities, as set forth by the center-periphery relations of colonial dependence. One may speak of a new matrix of differentiation, as opposed to a globalization whose hegemonic features were formerly closed. Pluralism is no longer a simple rule of coexistence but a real praxis moved by the sense of *otherness* and the surging of a genuine *ecumene* of recognized collective subjectivities.

At the same time, this certainly requires a full understanding of this interplay of cultures—rather than civiliza-

tions—since the historical process, as ruled by the West, imposed the univocity of a world run by *techné* and the instrumentality of nature and its context. So, one may now speak of emerging parameters of cultural diversity confronted with the limit-conditions of the “universal” supposedly implied by globalization (Bhabha, 1994).

Overexposure of cultures, now out of their former shelters under the nation system, may also be at stake in the remaining geopolitical conditioning. Indeed, the ongoing interaction between set social identities and the incoming dynamism of development in its different stages of growth contrast with their previous memories. This outcome is much more prospective-bound than what was previously accomplished by those collective identities.

These new interactions are especially relevant in the former continental arrangements, bearing in mind the appearance of the BRICS more as a deterrent force *vis-à-vis* the old matrices of global power than an effective, coherent and homogeneous counterpoint to their influence. It is difficult to imagine a common action, especially of China and India, despite their control over one third of the world population and their extended common frontier. The BRICS are condemned to their own isolationism, and when they do interplay, they generally enter into a bilateral concurrence, as is the case of China and Russia in Kazakhstan, or of Brazil and China in Africa.

At the same time, on the threshold of this new Axial Age, we see how the emergent world actors have come dis-

entangled from the former continental profile. This is precisely the case of Brazil *vis-à-vis* Pacific Latin America, where the new "Tordesillas Treaty" between Peru, Chile, Colombia and Mexico seeks integration with China. It is also what stresses Brazil's rising Atlantic hegemony towards Africa, together with increasingly unbalanced development of Brazil in comparison with her neighbors, as relations take the form of strict economic assistance to Paraguay and Bolivia, for example.

In such a new and open global conditioning, the struggle for identity moves far from the old rational assumption of the increasing functional interplay between its economic, political, social and cultural components, based on the premise of democracy. Indeed, we may face a regressive outcome of seclusive religious identities, or reductionist forms of wars of religions, such as that launched by the Buddhist factions against the Islamic groups in Myanmar. The military *coup d'état* in Egypt was in turn a reaction to the first modern election of the Muslim Brotherhood as the country's ruling political and religious force. Anyway, it seems clear that, quite different from the old established interlacement between secularization and democracy, the post-Enlightenment age may turn into an era of a state-biased revival of religion, as fostered nowadays by the Christian fundamentalism of the Republican Party in the USA (Todd, 2002).

One has to examine the present world interplay of differences, especially into the contrasts between the West

and the Asian countries. It is fundamental to assess the social reality of colonialism in the last half millennium in Latin America and Africa. The full profile of historical dependence and domination results from the absolute non-functionality of the social pattern established in such territories. It was all conditioned by the interests of the centers of such domination, and the building of collectivities for the other centers. The very idea of a nation in those peripheries became mimetic, overcome only by an awareness-raising process that involved a radical change to the previous inertia-based social dynamism. This is precisely the contemporary effort of development as thorough change, unsuccessful in the full interplay of its economic, social, 216 political and cultural conditionings. It also implies an inner time of achievements, kept within the proportions of the in-takes of such interplay. So, genuine differences may appear in the emergent profile of such countries, especially in the levels of general mobility and awareness-raising to improve such results.

The Westernized side of the world shows the permeating of cultures by the features of civilization, as the configuration of collective identities via the transformation of context through a *téchné* of the world-to-be. We thus face the suffocation of any sense of a previous collective identity with that domination and the set values imposed to achieve it. The mimesis of the nation became the protagonist of that collective subjectivity (Sanjinés C., 2007).

Nowadays this generates the claim for a possible pre-colonial quest for authenticity in contents disparaged from

their present historical frames. Such is the case, for instance, of today's Bolivia, Ecuador, or even Peru, in their claim for a *Quechuan* or an *Aymaran* identity (Kowii, 2007). In such terms, for instance, the present constitution of Bolivia stands for a multinational state, setting the pace for an emerging power system prone to a possible emerging federative format (Albó, 2007).

The historical matricial world in the East did not face the dialectics of civilization and culture, as exemplarily shown by China. Neither has its sense of identity been challenged in full by the chronic invasions from our side of the world. It could necessarily be improved in our times, and its world coexistence could emerge though the inner perception of its threats, as shown by the Maoist cultural revolution.

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New *jihad*s after Al-Qaeda led also to the claim for a fundamentalism *vis-à-vis* the historical national identity. The claim for a caliphate in the Middle-East is the first sign of possible non-synchronic coexistence out of the recognized subjective collectivities in the present historical process. Also, at the same time, a possible regression of identities to civilization turns to the roots of Christianity in the efforts of the Republican Party in the US to reclaim the support of religion in the full-fledged acknowledgement of its increasing fundamentalist stand. Contemporaneity also faces, in terms of a full retrieval of collective memory, a return to religion, which implies the full recovery of a value system, challenged by secularism and science (Lyotard, 2002). Such a surge, engineered by a fundamentalist posture of such beliefs, may lead to new tension in terms of a

state or church confrontation with the contents of social order or the common good.

This other sign of the times, expressed by democracy in the rules of power, shows even more clearly the conflict emerging in terms of the dynamism of civil society *vis-à-vis* the established neutrality of the government stance. This was unquestionably the threat of a possible religious take-over in Egypt, following the resounding clerical victory of the Muslim Brotherhood, and the removal of President Mursi by a military coup.

It turns out also nowadays that the set rules of democracy can also be seen to be forcing a possible hegemonic globalization. This is precisely the claim of the so-called
218 Bolivarist states, under the leadership of Venezuela: to look at the present political situation as a contention between the forces of change and the *status quo*, functionally linked to the international interests of the capitalist order. A sort of increasing limitation of political parties and, especially, the development of new censorship, play on the premises of a confrontation between democracy and genuine national claims supporting what remains of an international order of interests.

Martyrdoms and *jihads* come in the pattern of this new emergence, in the priorities assumed by the witnessing that risk even harming the other in order to accomplish the sacrifice. And terrorism, absolutely intransitive in its message, acquires all its fresh evidence in this new century, contrary to violence at all costs, but claiming the objective goals of a change in the *status quo*, as in Ireland or the Basque Country.

So, the whole isonomous vision of humanity vanishes, and with it the personableness of all *vis-à-vis*. Not even an explicit message is needed, and the anonymous line of human bombs waiting to explode sanctions the rupture of the universality of contemporaneous coexistence. Above all, and contrary to the humanism of a decade ago, one faces the collapse of representation, hampered by an increasingly ambiguous mediation of public opinion in its collective feeling, as the expression—always susceptible of generalization—of individual sum-total accounts, without remnants, in the electoral procedures.

Public space returns once more to the square, after the presumption of achieving consensus in the scales and hierarchies of representative majorities and minorities, as a national body, has been deflated. The “democracy of the indignant” that has recently appeared is *a priori* not reducible in its aspirations to the concerted interplay of Congress plenaries and public opinion. Moreover, it shows the perception of the expropriatory character attained by the universe of the media in inducing and manipulating public opinion towards the complete elimination of the remnants of difference to constitute subjectivity, on the level of the contradictions, synthesis and discrepancies of the global society (Maffesoli, 2000). 219

What we also face today is the threshold of that epistemological condition described by Carl Schmitt—a world that reencounters the friends-enemies polarization to reach the extreme rejection of the other in such intransitive manifestation of the difference. Within what limits, then, would

stand the claims for humanism, bearer of the heritage of the remanding interaction between the universal and the rational, and the old Kantian belief in the advent of humanity, regardless of whether or not the State affirms its configuration?

220 Even more disquieting, in the framework of the “war of religions”, is the extent to which, in the West, the republicanism of the Tea Party unfolds in successive variants of the same fundamentalism, from the Mormons up to radical Catholic extremism. One would have to talk of a limit-heuristic for the maintenance of that dialogue, threatened by the breakdown of the collective recognitions of this world, which would be a haven to civic terrorism and the social subjectivities descended into the trenches. One would have to ask if the first task of this heuristic should be go on thinking of the devolution of the polarities to classic dialectics and to possible remittance of the distinctions, yet driven to the very last step of rationality, to the synthesis at the brinks of analogies and approximations (Habermas, 2005). Perhaps we have not yet realized to what extent the world of the “wars of religion” eliminates the very perspective of the *vis-à-vis* amongst the collective subjectivities. Nor have we considered what in a residual phenomenology of recognition could be the premises for this coexistence to the point of compromising the complete denial of the other.

It is as if the ultimate imperative of such survival did not superimpose itself on a minimal presumable platform of affirmation of human rights, where the *prius* of humanity would at least rise as a natural imperative, and of the ir-

revocable environment for the whole subjective collectivity. As a result of the stirring-up of the "war of religions", one might even say that human rights reflect a "Western ideology". However, the humanism now emerging would settle on the un-conditionality of consciousness, on the exercise of its freedom, *a priori* linked to that of the other, regardless of the advancement of its quiddity or the subsequent manifestation of their differences.

In other words, we could only come upon the recognition, *in minimis*, of this new Humanism if an Enlightenment, perceived as natural, were to unfold and the process of rendering a post-Renaissance rationality immanent were drawn out.

Secularism was perhaps just an *intermezzo* in this new sacralization of the public order by the establishment of the Sharia in the Islamic States. The pendulum reaches its extreme in Iran, which astoundingly deems to have equanimous judicial prowess to the Court of The Hague to judge crimes against humanity. The diffidence of the regimes emerging with the Arab Spring, especially Tunisia and Egypt, expresses the difficulties in conserving such secularism in the face of a State religion. Even if an extremist fundamentalism might not be attained, a rather more rigorous Salafism alongside the Muslim Fraternity grows stronger in the Egyptian ballots.

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On the extremes of such fundamentalism, the Boko Haran in Nigeria are professing territorial separation and, most importantly, adherence to the Sharia—in a direct confrontation with other religions, murdering believers and destroying Jewish and Christian temples.

Such fundamentalism is reinforced by the limitations of collective recognition, which in times of general involvement reveals the mimetic aspect of democracy. The mobilizations and the claim for historical authenticity developed by the Arab Spring now bear their impact on the new international order. Are we going to face a precarious and strict coexistence or are we on the verge, as a founding element of collective subjectivity nowadays, of a defective acceptance of the other and authentic collective recognition (Agamben, 2000).

222 We face a new framework of world polarization that takes root in several grounds, pledging the defense of a West freed from the emerging migratory policies in contradiction with the assurances of the Charter of the United Nations, and for some we may even be facing an ethnic territorial interdiction. The right to migration belongs to the human genre, as does the search for better life conditions and collective well-being. For others, we may face the danger of an anti-Arab West based on a globalization conditioned by a definite social set.

So, one has to discover if such emerging segregations still reflect the trauma of the September 11 catastrophe or if we are facing a new social and economic Malthusianism, prone to increasing prosperity in a more concentrated and exclusive Europe.

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