On Difference and Inequality:

The Lessons of Ethnographic Experience

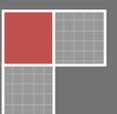Miguel Vale de Almeida
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Introduction

In setting myself the task of talking about 'Difference and Inequality', I had imagined that I would be able to transpose to this hour-long conversation the experience that I have been having with my students in a subject called 'Identities and Discriminations'. Namely: understanding both the common features and the distinctive features in the mechanisms of discrimination and in the mechanisms of the politics of identity and resistance in matters relating to race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation. These three dimensions of identity relate to the social codifications of the body, as well as to the social constructions of reproduction, kinship and the formation of communities. At the same time, they have been the target of discursive and institutional forms of regulation, as well as of the forms of social mobilisation enabling social actors, subalternated by their condition as blacks, women and homosexuals, to resist and change meaning.

But I soon realised the difficulty of such a task. Both for me, as the author of this paper, and for you as the listeners and readers, interlocutors and critics. Talking about (almost) everything normally results in saying (almost) nothing. And, since this initiative of discussing The State of the World is clearly related to the question of cultural and ethnic alterity, as well as to the population movements that have made this very much a present-day issue, I decided to follow this path. To a large extent, my decision was prompted by an anonymous person who placed one of those slips of paper seeking employment in the post-box of my building. The note said: 'Ukrainian woman provides cleaning and laundry services at the home. Ring mobile number such and such.' In defining herself as a *Ukrainian woman*, she was transmitting a message that corresponds to both the old and new codes of a juxtaposition between inequality and difference. I shall attempt to explore this very point here, by transporting you, first of all, to the historical and anthropological contextualisation of the construction of the nation state and of colonialism, where the notion of difference with which we are faced nowadays was formed as an idea of a deviation from the norm, marginality,

subalternity, symbolic asymmetry, etc. – and not as a merely descriptive and symmetrical difference, a mere acknowledgement of diversity. I shall then take you to a society such as Brazil, built upon that very process, where racial and class-based difference and inequality have been undergoing a clear politicisation. Finally, we will return to the Portuguese Republic, of which we are or wish to be citizens, and where, nowadays, a Ukrainian woman volunteers for domestic work, at the same time as, on a poster displayed in the centre of the city, someone who believes in difference as the essence of inequality, wishes her a 'pleasant journey', instead of greeting her with a 'welcome'.

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In 1848, the *Communist [Party] Manifesto* written by Karl Marx began with the famous phrase 'A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism.' We might usefully appropriate that phrase and say that today 'a spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of difference.'

Marx referred to communism – a project that he defended – as a spectre that haunted the established economic and social order, of course. Today many of us see communism as an emancipatory project with its roots in humanism and illuminism, but nonetheless as an emancipatory project that – if you will pardon me the plebeianism – went seriously pear-shaped in the attempts made to put it into practice. In the project's actual illuminist and humanist roots, others see the modern western tendency towards social engineering and the hyper-rational organisation of society – something fairly problematical, especially since the catastrophic experience of the concentration camp and the gulag. Both groups, however, manage, through historical contextualisation, to underline that emancipatory intention, beyond the totalitarian deviation of 'real socialism' and beyond the embryonic hyper-rationality of the western illuminist project.

Can something similar be said in relation to difference? Think of the positive connotation that the expression 'difference' has in vast sectors of contemporary Euro-American societies: the 'praise of difference', 'we are all different and a good thing too', 'how sad it would be if we were all alike'; these are phrases that have acquired the status of common sense, as has its semantic equivalent, 'diversity'. We therefore witness quite heated reactions to difference when it lies at the basis of the so-called politics of identity or when it seems to call into question republican principles of universal citizenship or to promote positive discrimination, or even when it seems to lie

3

at the basis of policies of multiculturalism. This widespread attention paid to difference also appears to have connotations with an emancipatory project, in which multiple positions of social identification – ethnic and racial, national and regional, religious, based on gender and sexual orientation – have flourished as a way not only of counteracting the grey area of similarity, but, above all, of fighting against a central and hegemonic definition of the person and the citizen built up around a dominant social type. In Portugal, for example, this is the white, Portuguese-speaking, middle-class, heterosexual man, with a Catholic background. In a similar way to the example just given, this empathy with difference survives the social and political catastrophes resulting from the exaggeration and purification of the principle of difference – from apartheid South Africa to the civil war that led to the break-up of Yugoslavia.

But we must put forward a hypothesis and apply it to all these contradictory forms of talking about difference: and what if the current usage of the term 'difference' were to end up, in all cases, resulting in the normalisation and naturalisation of inequality? And what if this use of the word 'difference' were to reproduce a concept of 'culture' and 'identities' as being something untouchable, essential, natural, objectified – *reified* – and not to see them as a process of constant material and symbolic transformation?

Because the difference that is talked about all across the contemporary Euro-American world is, undoubtedly, cultural difference. In a double sense: on the one hand, there is the difference between cultures, and, on the other hand, the difference between life styles. The amalgam – covering ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, language, etc. – is identity, both social and individual. It appears crystallised in the slogan 'all different, all equal'. Now, what does this slogan mean? The difference that is referred to is one of identity. The equality that is referred to is, above all, equality before the law, but also the equality of opportunities – which, while not being the same as the abolition of class inequality, would correspond to lessening, through the application of concrete policies, the disequilibria that are generated from the outset by economic inequality and by the inequalities that are either set in motion or exacerbated by difference. Equality before the law (an integral part of the liberal project) is therefore joined by the equality of opportunities (a mitigated form of the socialist project), as well as by the equality of human rights, a kind of return, in our contemporary times, to the universalist humanism of the Enlightenment.

As an anthropologist, I cannot and must not take phrases such as 'all different, all equal' merely at their face value. I have to see them as the manifestation of a discourse, as a representation, or even as a belief – in the same way that I see a phrase such as 'there is no other God but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet' or 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' These phrases are specific cultural and historical products, which must be seen in their appropriate contexts. What is the context of its use? What is the context for the formulation and use of a phrase – taken here as a leitmotiv for our discussion – such as 'all different, all equal'?

The context of its use is the Euro-American world of the last two decades of the twentieth century. Note the geographical, cultural and historical specification that I have just made. Despite the differences between specific national contexts, we are talking about a reality that is marked by a series of features relating to social and cultural dynamics, associated with processes of material transformation and symbolic reconfigurations: the social and economic changes of the globalisation process; the end of colonialism; the migrations from the former colonised territories to the ex-metropolises; the creation of multicultural and multi-religious societies in Europe; the crisis of the unitary Nation statenation state; and the politicisation of 'identity' and 'difference'.

The State of the World or the World of the State?
Let us then look at the 'spectre of difference' and the anthropological history behind the slip of paper left by the Ukrainian woman who provides cleaning services. The European nineteenth century – continuing well into the twentieth century – was the century that marked the appearance of the Nation statenation state as we know it today, and as we now see it vanishing today: the idea that the ideal form of political, social and cultural organisation is the existence of a correspondence between a territory, the exercise of sovereignty by a state, a national language and a people. We know today how the creation of the Nation statenation state was based on real and symbolic acts of violence, on the forced creations of identity and alterity.

We also know that, for some European nations, this process coincided with the construction of large colonial empires. Colonial entrepreneurship and national entrepreneurship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries shared the same characteristics and were ruled by the same logic: while each state defined itself as the political embodiment of a supposed ethnically and linguistically defined civilisation, its

colonies were the place of confirmation of a supposedly civilising vocation, corresponding to the 'spirit' or 'genie' supposedly contained in the national character of the coloniser. But the colony was also the place for the invention, verification and application of the concepts that made it possible to legitimise the Nation statenation state and place it at the top of a line of historical evolution.

Whereas, on the one hand, the Nation statenation state made it possible to conceive of an idea of 'community' that would gradually do away with internal differences and inequalities (of gender, class, region, etc.), the colony, on the other hand, guaranteed the 'natural' order of a hierarchical inequality, implicit in the idea that some peoples or nations would be superior and would be obliged to act as the guardians of the other inferior ones. Nationalism and colonialism mutually fuelled one another and this was how the communities were built – now unstable and disputed – in which we have lived through the twentieth century and into the new one. And note how the political and economic process of national construction and colonial construction was also a symbolic process of classifying and categorising types of people, types of populations: in the metropolises, these would the popular classes, sometimes dangerous and sometimes romanticised; in the colonies, these would be the savages, sometimes in need of civilisation and sometimes romanticised.

In the mutual establishment of the colonial thing and the national thing, the greatest similarity is to be found in the field of representations about subjects, bodies, culture and society. The notions of people, ethnic group and race are established within this universe. *Races* served to differentiate between the colonisers and the colonised; *peoples* or *nations* to distinguish national units that were supposedly from time immemorial in the midst of European diversity; and *ethnic groups* to confer a more universal concept that covered the differences between endogamic groups, distinguished from one another above all by the criterion of language – no matter whether they were European or extra-European.

The spectre of difference comes into play at precisely this point. The fact is that we *still* think according to this model. But this model is in a state of *crisis*. How and why? First of all, because the national *thing* imploded with the advent of Nazi-fascism and the extreme point reached by racialist and nationalist theories. Secondly, because the colonial system exploded with the independence of the ex-colonies and with the changes in the productive and financial system of the world economy. Finally, the nationalist processes of decolonisation have created a somewhat mystified reality in

6

which, on the one hand, the European colonising nations have supposedly been reduced to their original territorial and ethnic expression; and, on the other hand, the ex-colonies have passed, also in a rather mystified fashion, to the condition of nation states, according to the European model. These are two fallacies that have had terrible consequences. In the case of the ex-colonies, as is known, the territories marked out with great precision by the Europeans cut across lines of ethnic differentiation (many of which had, in any case, either been created or exacerbated by the colonial administrations). In the European case, the supposed return to the historical frontiers was not any kind of return at all: on the one hand, because in the colonial period it was considered crucial to distinguish very clearly between what was a national citizen and what was a colonised person; on the other hand, because both the post-war European societies and the ex-colonies found their social structure being considerably altered by migratory movements. The colonial system gave rise to an international system whose basic features are well-known to us: the creation of underdevelopment according to the dividing line between the First and the Third World, and the unexpected appearance of multicultural societies in Europe based on profound social inequalities between national citizens and immigrants.

In the host societies, the immigrant is represented as someone who intrinsically *does not belong to it*. And as someone who, instead of having a homeland that he can no longer recover, has a homeland to which he *must* return sooner or later – according to the canons of thought of the nation state. From the symmetrical point of view, i.e. in the mind of the emigrant, he constructs his identity as that of someone who is staying only temporarily in the host country, but who either wishes to or must return to his homeland one day. Both are victims of the same system: in other words, they both think in terms of *origin* and *arrival*, a legitimate place and an illegitimate place. Because their identities were both historically constructed by the discourses and practices of nationalism and colonialism, the real *politics of the place*.

I mentioned above that this model has entered into a profound state of crisis. Some theoreticians have chosen to describe this crisis by using the term 'postcolonial'. I would prefer it also to be known by the name of 'post-national'. What are the features that identify this crisis? First of all, the disillusion that is felt, above all in those countries that have emerged from decolonisation processes, with the illusions of the modernising growth and development that have not happened; disillusion with the construction of nation states that did not happen; and also disillusion with the socialist

utopias of constructing an egalitarian and internationalist order. Secondly, the disillusion that is felt in the ex-colonising European nations: the nation state has ceased to be the place of accumulation or the place of origin of production, due not only to financial globalisation, but also to the displacement of the productive processes and the need for migratory flows of labour. At the same time, nation and state have gradually begun to lose the hyphen that used to join them together.

Curiously – and perhaps paradoxically – the most flagrant reaction to these inconveniences has, furthermore, been the rebirth of nationalism and of the model of the nation state. It is enough to look at Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall; it is enough to look at the processes involved in the break-up of African and other states. But this nationalist despair is precisely this: it is despair and no longer a driving force, even sometimes a force of a progressive kind (as in the early stages of the unification of Italy or of the anti-colonial movements). It arises at the moment when the processes of globalisation have become irreversible; when it is difficult to raise barriers or introduce national regulations to stem the tide of globalisation; when the flows of migration are unstoppable and the socio-cultural realities created by them have put down inextricable roots. In short: the only way to overcome problems may be through the *international regulation* of globalisation (namely the globalisation of financial business), the *development* of the underdeveloped countries, and the creation of a political order of *citizenship* that is genuinely *multi- or transcultural*.

In the contemporary Euro-American world, we have managed to find two terms with an equivalent currency: 'immigrants/emigrants' and 'ethnic minorities'. The reason why 'migrant' is not a word that is particularly beloved by the present-day discourses on transcultural realities is that it is marked by the *socio-economic and class factor*. In the common acceptance of the idea, and not only that, the migrant is that person who leaves his country because he does not find there the conditions necessary for his *subsistence* and so moves to another country where he can find them. He is not seen as an 'expatriate' or a 'cultural exile'. In his country of origin, he is seen in two ways, depending on the place of the observer on the social scale: by his peers he is seen as someone who has managed to transcend adversities, his monetary remittances being appreciated and his return admired insofar as it demonstrates his upward social movement; by those above him on the social scale he is seen as a person without culture or a nouveau riche who, in the host country, transmits an 'erroneous' image (because it is a popular and subordinate one) of the national culture as defined by the elites and, on

his return, is presented as a nouveau riche or hybrid in the derogatory sense of the word. In the host country, he is simultaneously the labour that is needed to perform menial and unedifying tasks, and the quintessentially *different* person, who 'is unable to integrate', who brings with him 'barbarian' habits, who is a potential danger to the social order and, in the final analysis, the target of xenophobia, the scapegoat for social tensions, when he is not seen as the person who needs to be liberated from the supposed (and not always real) violence of his own culture. Let us not forget this: the category of migrant is simultaneously marked by *subalternity* and by the *threat of disorder*.

This interpretation may make the analysis more complex, shifting it from the mere field of national and ethnic difference to the field of class and economic inequality. But there is an important analytical dimension missing: time. The migrant in my example is the migrant who, in his individual lifetime, leaves his homeland for the host country and returns to his country of origin, fulfilling his role in the international economy. What happens, however, if he remains in the host country? What happens if he has children in the host country and they remain there, and so on in a continuing process? We then have the third category that has to be dealt with here – that of the 'ethnic minority'.

There is no doubt that there are ethnic minorities that have nothing to do with migrations, as we shall shortly see. Either because the nation state which I referred to earlier was built by fire and sword and never managed to establish its ethno-linguistic purity with any great perfection, retaining within itself pockets of difference in relation to the norm that, by being sucked into the hegemonic model of the nation state itself, have become crystallised and radicalised as minority identities; or because these minorities resulted from processes such as slavery. But, because of the time factor, the ethnic minorities to which I am referring have, for the time being, a characteristic that makes them more fragile: the period of their arrival is both known and recent (*postcolonial*), as are the reasons for their arrival (*socio-economic subordination*), the activities in which they have become engaged (the most *menial*), the spaces that they have occupied (the *margins*). But perhaps the most flagrant marker of the ethnic minority, today, is 'race', subsuming culture, language and/or religion.

This terrible concept is the direct descendant of colonialism. What we are currently witnessing today, especially in Europe, is the return of the excluding and naturalising characteristics of racism, but with an alteration of its actual name due to the opprobrium that has been heaped upon the expression 'race' in the post-war period.

Now the terms 'ethnic group' and even 'culture' are used for the same purposes. The colonial situations – and, today, the postcolonial situations in the ex-metropolises – are spaces and times in which populations differentiated by segmentations of inequality live together side by side. Nothing new here, up to a certain point, for any society is segmented by differences and inequalities. But matters become exacerbated when the criteria of ethnic and racial difference are mixed with the criteria of economic and social inequality. While a boss and a worker may already have an established protocol for dealing with conflicts and negotiations, a national citizen and a foreigner are still constructing the terms of their understanding – and the only already established script that they can resort to is the one that they have inherited from the colonial relationship. While the colonial situation, because of its nature of being a form of occupation, established the rules of separation – implicit or explicit and across a broad spectrum, ranging from the multiracial rhetoric of late Portuguese colonialism to the South African apartheid – the postcolonial situation in the modern industrialised cities has not managed to do so. It only accepts either the ghetto or full assimilation. It does not accept anything in the middle or the transcendence of that dichotomy. It accepts *acculturation* or *separatism*. And this is true not only for the populations and institutions of the host countries, but also for the members of ethnic minorities. What does not seem to be accepted is *transculturation*, the condition that is 'translated', cosmopolitan, 'in-between'. Unfortunately.

'Contamination' – the end of the pure, the birth of the hybrid – works in two ways. In one of them, cultural products of the immigrant, the ethnic minority or the diaspora contaminate the host society: food, music and dance are in the front line, and not by chance, for they enter through the door of the body and the senses and are also susceptible to merchandising. In the other direction, the institutions and laws of the host society contaminate the groups that have arrived from outside. This latter form of contamination is obviously more powerful and more complex (contrary to what xenophobic thinking would have us believe): it ranges from police repression to the culture of human rights and citizenship; it ranges from exploitation at work to social security benefits; it ranges from racist discourses to exposure to specific forms of critical thinking (how many anti-colonial movements were not generated in the metropolises by colonials attending western universities?).

But this framework has to be made more complex if we do not wish to subscribe to a theory of culture that sees this as something that is watertight and the property of a

discrete group. The fact is that the groups of migrants/minorities/diasporas are socially diversified, as are the host societies. This is one side of the picture. And cultural realities in today's urban societies are not dyadic, i.e. they are not composed of hosts and guests, but rather they are composed of several types of hosts (and several types of guests...) and of populations from the most varied origins that are meeting each other for the first time.

As far as the first aspect is concerned: a certain ethnic group in a large European city, for example, is immediately composed of men and women, and therefore of unequal gender relations; it is composed of economic migrants and diasporans, i.e. the cultural migrants that I have already mentioned (professionals, intellectuals, political refugees, etc.), and therefore of unequal social relationships of class and status; and, finally, it is composed of different age groups, corresponding in this case to different periods of arrival, and therefore of unequal generational relationships. As for the second aspect, we now enter into one of the more controversial areas: the argument that stipulates that western society is simultaneously the inventor of scientific racism and the holocaust, on the one hand, and the idea of universal human rights and citizenship, on the other. This being the case, the place of immigration is quintessentially both the place of exploitation of immigrant labour and the place of the possibility of obtaining citizenship. It is, in fact, these contradictions of the western world that make it possible to accept – contrary to the dictates of moral relativism – the universality of aspects such as human rights and their appropriation/claim by immigrant communities – both in the host country and at 'home'.

An irreversible reality has resulted from all of these contradictions: the pure nation state has failed and, at the same time, some form of multiculturalism – in the descriptive sense, not in the normative sense – has come to stay. The first model is that of the resistance/resurgence of the nation state, or *nationalist state*, in all of its purity. It is similar to a kind of fundamentalism: it seeks in the present to update a past that never existed as a reaction to a present that irremediably displays itself as Other. This model prescribes linguistic and religious unity, the distinction between nationals and foreigners based on *jus sanguinis*, temporary immigration with a work visa that has an expiry date but without allowing the possibility of becoming a resident, family reunification or the exercise of citizenship.

The second model is based on what one might call *essentialist multiculturalism*, corresponding to the normative multiculturalism that has been so heavily criticised

recently. In reality, it corresponds to a variety of sub-models: that in which the distinction between nationals and foreigners is not the same for different generations, as when *jus soli* is applied to give nationality to a child born in the host country; that which accentuates cultural difference, but under a form of coexistence as citizens, as in Holland, whereby the state promotes the specific cultural identity of foreign groups, despite their enjoying citizenship, thus perversely marking out a difference that leads to the establishment of personal and group identities; or that which accentuates integrative and assimilationist national citizenship, presupposing that multiculturalism is transitory.

The third model and the one that is yet to come: a model that is not a model, but rather a process of transculturation or, as I would prefer to call it, *cosmopolitan citizenship*, in which 'multiculturalism' would no longer be a necessary expression. Multiculturalism is a complicated concept due to its political ambiguity and the rhetorical manipulation to which it lends itself. We do not need to go very far: it can be a merely rhetorical resource, as it was during the final period of Portuguese colonialism; or it can be a way of justifying forms of exclusion: apartheid was largely based on the theorisation of an irreducible cultural difference and on the defence of those differences (which is, at the very least, ironic: to hear people speak of the right to difference as a duty and as the basis for inequality). The problem, of course, lies in the *concept of culture* that is used in these systems, and which is the concept that is still in force today in the commonsense interpretation of the word, and is the same concept that lay behind the creation of the colonial and nation state projects: culture as the sum total of the essentialised attributes of a specific population (as if natural, without giving any thought to the historical process, interculturality or the internal diversity of any group), with a geography that can be circumscribed and marked out. In short, culture as a *thing*. Now, while this *objectifying* concept of culture serves, above all, to exclude and to prevent contamination, it can also be used by those who are excluded to set themselves up as groups and claim rights for themselves thanks to the acceptance of this concept by those who exclude them. For this reason, ethnic and racial identities and, in the most extreme cases, different forms of nationalism and fundamentalism, are strategic: in certain situations they are in fact the only way to react and to negotiate. We will talk about this again shortly.

One of the results of this reality of the objectification of culture is its *merchandising*. In so-called multi-ethnic contexts, multiculturalism is nothing more than the setting up of a supermarket of cultures, with each of them providing a certain

12

good: African music, Chinese food, Oriental spiritualism, American pop culture, etc. The members of the marginalised minority groups themselves naturally resort to merchandising as a form of constructing identity and occupying niches in the multicultural society. When they cease to reproduce these expectations, they cease to be regarded as members of culture *x* and begin to be regarded as accultured or – with the passing of generations – as members of culture *y*.

Is there an alternative to this binomial of separation / acculturation? I believe that there is, but for this to happen social analysis must assume its political component. Instead of offering you a recipe – which I don't even have – let us look at an ethnographic case.

Race and Ethnicity in Motion: A Case of Politics, Identity and Culture in Brazil

I don't want to lecture you by arguing from grand theory, from the top downwards, nor by arguing from an impossible position of empirical purism, from the bottom upwards, as one might expect of an anthropologist, who is always inclined to praise the methodology of fieldwork with participant observation. Either of the two approaches may err on the side of generalisation and particularism respectively; through excessive political directionality, on the one hand, or through an excessive lack of the same, on the other hand; through an excess of analytical distancing, or through an excess of demagogy. I should instead like to situate myself at a level that we might term *ethnographic*: when the observation of the real experience of practices and discourses (the fieldwork of the anthropologist) encounters social theory (the intellectual work of the social scientists) in the analytical, but also inescapably political, act of the writing of a text by an anthropologist for an event such as this one that we find ourselves at today. It is not, unfortunately, a question of listening to reports of the subjective and everyday experiences of the informants, especially those who live in the state of inequality described as difference. This would be too illustrative. It is instead a question of systematising areas of critical tension between the analytical and the political.

The case that I present here is a Brazilian case, and an American one, where what is at stake is not recent or postcolonial immigration, but instead the continuity of the colonial situation, in which the statutory inequality (freemen/slaves) corresponded to a racial difference (white/black). This is the complementary Euro-American model to which I referred above, based on the forced movement of populations.

13

The case that I present here relates to a social situation in which lines of cleavage are at the same time lines of difference and inequality. The basic fact of classification as a necessary condition for social existence, in the sense that Durkheim gave to it, does not mean that these lines have to be drawn along certain types of social relations and institutions and not along others. But nor does it mean that 'anything goes' and that the strategies, circumstances and instrumentalisations are the sum total of individual decisions or the necessary precipitate of a determining principle. The historical construction of race in Brazil, and the process of the division of labour are decisive factors and are intertwined. But, today, they are found with local and regional lines of cleavage, with ethnic languages for the reconstitution of politically active identifications, as well as with global landscapes in which the diasporan meanings are made available.

The city of Ilhéus is the second largest in the state of Bahia, in the north-east of Brazil, with a population of roughly 200,000 inhabitants. The coastal region of the south of Bahia, where the city is located, experienced a sharp increase in population in the mid nineteenth century when the cocoa plantations became the main economic activity, after the violent struggles to capture land (most of it seized illegally) fought between pioneers, who soon became the local owners and bosses of a growing number of migrants from the dry lands in the interior of the north-eastern region, as well as black migrants employed in port activities. Nowadays, cocoa production has diminished, migration from the country to the city has increased, as well as poverty, unemployment and the *favelas*. The local elite (whether they are descendants of former cocoa plantation owners or managers and white-collar workers) are classified as 'white', hold political power and are now investing in the reconstruction of the local and regional economy through tourism. The rhetoric of tourism as a great alternative is centred on the contemporary opportunities arising from ecotourism and cultural tourism, i.e. the merchandising of the representations of authenticity and the natural and cultural specificity of a *place*.

The state of Bahia was one of the regions of the plantation economy of the early colonial days, built on the basis of slavery. It was the most important place of arrival of African slaves in Brazil. In the twentieth century it became the symbolic centre of Brazilian negritude or Afro-Brazilianity (although such changes had already begun to happen after the abolition of slavery in 1888 and the growth of Salvador as an urban centre). In the last twenty years, Salvador has been promoted as the capital of the

14

expressive Afro-Brazilian culture: carnival, Afro Blocks (*Blocos Afro*), music and dance, *capoeira* (a Brazilian martial art dance), gastronomy and religion (*candomblé*). The evolution of a black identity in Brazil, especially as far as an increasingly orthodox definition of the Afro-Brazilian religion is concerned, transformed Bahia, and Salvador in particular, into the centre of authority of this identity. Not only is it represented by the Afro-Brazilians as 'Africa in Brazil', but it is also represented as the *locus* for the preservation of Africanity, which Africans themselves (having been considered de-Africanised as a result of colonialism) might resort to for their inspiration and as a way of contemplating their past.

This construction of an African Bahia was achieved through a policy of cultural expression adopted by the blacks and was co-opted as a popular culture by the intelligentsia and the state. After the re-establishment of democracy in Brazil in the 1980s, the public arena was occupied not only by second-generation social movements (political parties, trade unions), but also by those of the third generation, especially those whose activities are centred around questions of culture, ethnicity and race. These movements came out into the street at the same time as, in the international arena, ethnic politics and the politics of identity had reached their greatest height. Furthermore, black identity politics had already established itself and legitimised its presence in many countries, especially the United States. The blacks came out into the street in Salvador during carnival and other public and traditional cultural events. They did so through the blocks, large groups of people dancing to the sound of percussion bands playing rhythms that were inspired by the *candomblé*, wearing 'African' clothes, singing about their African roots and the resistance to slavery or racism in Brazil. These blocks from Salvador – especially *Olodum* and *Ilê Ayê* – were to become, over the last twenty years, large organisations engaged in the recovery, maintenance and promotion of black expressive culture. In this sense, they were not immune to processes for the merchandising of this culture, while at the same time they became politicised.

Simultaneously, democracy in Brazil witnessed the emergence of a black political movement whose main focus was on the fight against racism. This movement was a direct descendant of previous experiments that dated back to the 1920s and 1930s. But in the 1970s and 1980s, it re-emerged as part of a political culture shared with the theology of liberation, trade unionism and the left-wing socialist parties. The political movement was never completely effective in setting an agenda of racism/anti-racism in

Brazilian society, unlike the cultural movement, even in those cases in which people tended to belong to both.

The Brazilian 'racial problem' has been the focus of attention in the projects and debates on national identity. Like the rest of Latin America, Brazil became independent (in 1822) for the benefit of the local white elites. In the nineteenth century, in keeping with the dominant racial ideologies in the west, the future of the nation was regarded with apprehension because of the number of black people and/or slaves. The main source of anxiety was the practice of miscegenation, seen as causing 'racial degeneration'. At the same time, the so-called 'myth of the three races' was established, which defined the Indians as the romantic children of the earth (albeit conveniently subjugated and marginalised), the whites as the heirs of European civilisation and the blacks as representing the 'dangerous classes'. Miscegenation was, paradoxically, recognised as being a specific and original characteristic of Brazil. The debates about its effects (racial degeneration versus the creation of a new people in the Americas) were recurrently resolved by theories and expectations of 'whitening', i.e. the notion that, were miscegenation to continue, the superiority of the 'white blood' would prevail.

An important change was to occur in the 1930s, a period when there was a clear and heavily accentuated definition of national identity. Gilberto Freire's work – based on the separation between race and culture that came from American culturalism – represented the high point of a new approach to the racial problem, an approach that was already present in the ambiguous nature of earlier approaches on the part of doctors, anthropologists, writers and politicians. According to Freire, Brazil was an exceptional case in human history because Portuguese colonialism had also been exceptional. Why? Basically because of a supposed predeliction on the part of the Portuguese for miscegenation. The colonial period was therefore seen as the period when, through sexual intercourse and reproduction (between free white men and black slave women), the conflicts inherent in slavery and the plantation system had been overcome. Thereafter, the whitening process had turned into something different: a process through which the population of the country would become less black in their phenotype, but blacker in their culture (i.e. in music, food, religion, corporality, language, etc.). Freire's interpretation became official, largely because it fitted in with the commonsense notions about the national identity and with the nationalist project of the New State at that time. Race became a taboo subject – and still continues to be so to a certain extent. The notion of racial democracy was thus established as part of the

propaganda of the Brazilian New State, and all of the explanatory power of race was transferred either to class or thrown in utopian fashion onto the rubbish heap of History after the expected result of the miscegenation process.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Brazil was to become an exemplary case study in the international production of the social sciences on race. The project promoted by UNESCO sought to find the secret ingredients that had turned Brazil into a racial democracy, as well as the recipe for its application elsewhere. The project was largely based on comparisons between the racial formations of Brazil and the United States. The results did not confirm the hypothesis, since, after all, many of these studies revealed the existence of racism at the interpersonal and socio-economic levels, even though it was absent from the legislation. Florestan Fernandes (1965) was to supply a famous interpretation of these studies, by defining the relationship between race and class as being the locus of the Brazilian racial formation after the abolition of slavery, a trend that was followed by many studies carried out in the 1970s based on statistical data. But the argument based on the comparison between the *one drop* rule of the southern United States and the supposedly gentler 'colour *continuum*' of Brazil has continued into the present. Perhaps not so much in social science, but certainly in commonsense notions.

One fundamental aspect of these developments must be remembered, namely the fact that, until the 1980s, the question of race was a depoliticised subject in Brazil, thanks to a dual discourse: the supposed absence of racism proved by the (equally widely presupposed) practice of miscegenation (without it being specified who exactly was 'mixing' with whom), and the hybridisation taking place at the cultural level, with the strong contribution that the blacks were making to the development of areas of the expressive, sensorial and corporal culture. The historical composite of notions such as racial degeneration, miscegenation, whitening or racial democracy creates a problem for those blacks who wish to affirm their identity and make it possible to enjoy upward social mobility. There is no doubt that things have changed, however, in this contemporary period of a global ethnic resurgence, of local and regional demands in the midst of weakened nation states, and in a context of economic and cultural globalisation, as well as in a situation where there is a weakening of the policy based on class loyalties.

The two tendencies of the current black movement coexisted in Ilhéus. On the one hand, there was a local group of the Unified Black Movement (MNU). On the other

hand, there was CEAC (Ilhéus Council of Afro-Cultural Entities). CEAC was a committee that brought together representatives from roughly fifteen Afro Blocks and a *capoeira* group. The leader of the MNU was also the head of cultural programming at the Ilhéus Cultural Foundation, sponsored by the local council. This was the reward for the political alliance between the prefect and the Black Movement. He also attended all the meetings of CEAC, the aim of which was to organise the carnival celebrations, find sponsors for the performances of the blocks and establish the themes of each carnival, which would serve as the basis for the creation of music, costumes and choreographies.

The leader of the MNU always oscillated between two attitudes. On the one hand, he wanted the Blocks to be more affirmative in their demonstrations of anti-racism, and more political. On the other hand, he recognised that the municipality intended to transform Ilhéus into a tourist destination and accepted the notion that the Afro blocks lay at the centre of what the city had to offer in terms of its cultural specificity and authenticity. Above all, the members of CEAC were concerned with finding money for their projects and competed for the same funds. Fieldwork was to show that not even the leader of the MNU had any real power, nor were the blocks able to adopt any political stance. The power to allocate public funds was in the hands of the prefect. Officially, that is, since it was his wife who, unofficially, took decisions on cultural matters in Ilhéus. Access to public funds largely depended on a relationship of the patron–client type with her. Most of the blocks ended up resorting to previously established forms of fund raising: performing in hotels, but, above all, agreeing to the sponsorship of candidates during election campaigns.

In Ilhéus, the music and dance groups known as Afro Blocks are neighbourhood organisations. Furthermore, the hard core of their members is almost always composed of relatives who have been joined by neighbours (although neighbourhood and kinship may overlap). In some cases, the nuclear group of relatives coincides with the 'family' of a *mãe de santo* (the candomblé priestess). Common to all the blocks is the fact that their neighbourhoods are amongst the poorest in the city, their members are mostly unemployed or work in the informal sector and are socially classified as Negroes. During fieldwork, the leader of the Dilazenze Afro Block was elected president of CEAC. His block is certainly the most important and popular block in Ilhéus. It went further than any other block in emulating the great blocks of Salvador; it was also involved in a most efficient way in local politics and used a rhetoric that affirmed the cultural capital of the blocks as a contribution to the project for the promotion of local

tourism. Finally, it was the block that best exemplified the intricate web that united neighbourhood, kinship and religion. According to local theory, the *terreiros* were developed as places with two important functions: maintaining a memory of Africa (where the *orixás* [spirits] live and where the dead go) and resisting slavery and social marginalisation. It is here that the notions of roots and resistance intersect with those of kinship, legitimised by what we might call the 'sacred' (but which, in a magical and practical religion such as candomblé, takes on a facet of the practical administration of everyday life, its ups and downs). 'Race' or 'being black' are the ambiguous terms that the surrounding society has historically used to refer to this complex web of relations.

This powerful social engine is today the springboard for the public demonstration of the black expressive culture, as well as for political and social mobilisation. There, in Ilhéus, as in other parts of the Black Atlantic referred to by Paul Gilroy, there was a clear development from the politics of black identity based on the struggle for relationships of representation to a politics of representation in itself, a formative and no longer merely expressive process, signifying that the inversion of negative stereotypes about negritude is giving way to a creation of self-representations. The two phases are not separable, of course. And in the Brazilian case they seem to go hand in hand. The Dilazenze Block invested not only in the creation of music and choreographies for performances and for carnival; it also had a dance group that invested in the stylisation of ritual candomblé dances, performing them on the local dance circuit. The Dilazenze Block was also engaged in social work in the neighbourhood. The mobilising slogan was *conscientização* (raising awareness), which means creating pride in being black by developing and demonstrating the wealth of the black expressive culture. But such awareness implies recognition of the social inequalities of Brazilian society that cause race and social class to be frequently confused.

I mentioned earlier that, in the Brazilian racial formation, the praise that is given to miscegenation contains an implicit suggestion of whitening: miscegenation would be the process whereby the population would ideally become whiter, although blacker from the cultural point of view. This not only reifies the notion of races as separate populations (waiting to be mixed), but it also reifies definitions of black culture as being merely expressive, sensorial or based on corporal *performances* (which, in the western Cartesian scheme of things, are placed in an inferior position). Underlying this position

is the persistence of race as a natural category – and this is a consequence of the project for the construction of national identity that promoted the myth of racial democracy.

In parallel to this, the last few decades have seen the emergence of a more politicised discourse (from the social movements to social scientists) revealing the trap of racial democracy, by demonstrating that racism in Brazil has implicit hidden characteristics. In many cases, both opinion makers and activists are inclined towards strategic essentialism, reaffirming race. A discourse on hybridism does not seem to be particularly welcome in contemporary Brazil, since it is seen as something that takes away power and blurs the lines of inequality and also because it seems to echo the ideas of Freire.

The growth of a black cultural movement has been centred on putting the *black* into black expressive culture (and no longer, for example, allowing it to be passed off as a Brazilian form of eclecticism). Candomblé is increasingly portrayed by black activists as being of African origin, and there has even emerged an orthodoxy that is based on the Yoruba-Nagô lineage, especially in Salvador, with the expulsion of the Catholic saints from the *terreiros*; similar events have been happening in the universes of *capoeira* and music. Everything seems to suggest that we are faced with a pendular situation, in which certain cultural expressions have to be portrayed as Brazilian in order to be accepted; but, in another pendular movement, they are claimed as being specifically black. What seems to be happening is that the emergence of what anthropologists normally call 'ethnicity', covering a broad spectrum of feelings of belonging and differentiation: a notion of place of origin (Africa); a notion of history and place of destination (the Diaspora, the Black Atlantic); a notion of a common trajectory based on a common suffering and a reaction to it (slavery, resistance); a notion of genealogy, kinship and family; a notion of specific capacities in relation to which a certain authority can be claimed (the expressive culture); and a notion of a vision of the common world (religion) which, in this case, also provides a structure of fictitious kinship, historical continuity and mythical foundations.

The people with whom I undertook my research use a primitivist language, in keeping with commonsense notions about kinship and genealogy. This claiming of an identity that was not chosen, however, is not necessarily based on the same classificatory premises that were used to define race. It is much closer to notions of extensive kinship as a basis for ethnic belonging. Since they are not a group of

immigrants, or an ethnic group competing for a territory with others, and since the memory of slavery and their incorporation (as subalterns) into the citizenship of the post-abolition Brazilian nation state is part of their collective identity, they are more like an ethnic group under construction – subalternated Brazilians with a growing awareness of their connection with a Diaspora. This cannot hide the basic fact that cultural expression is being used – *instrumentally* – as something that can be exchanged for access to citizenship: an ethnic loyalty may very well be a resource for making oneself seen and heard when the only available capital one has is symbolic capital.

I tried to follow Peter Wade's advice about how 'racial and ethnic identities should be seen, in a national and global context, as interchangeable and decentred relational constructions, subject to a politics of identity and cultural difference that involves [many levels of social identification and many] cultural expressions' (1997: 108). In times of ethnic resurgence, with a proliferation of authenticities, as well as 'hybrids' and 'new ethnicities', and given the political and economic relevance of Culture, the people into whom I researched tend to use some of their so-called primordial bonds (namely kinship) and their primordialist discourse in order to haggle – instrumentally – in the public arena. But what they most use are false primordial bonds (such as race) and constructed bonds that emulate the primordial bonds (for example, the kinship of the *saint*). In another situation, many of them might well adhere to a Christian religion (as they did in the past and many still do), refusing to participate in Afro blocks, dedicating themselves to racial hypergamy and adopting many other strategies that run counter to their primordial bonds. The irony is that those who did this would no longer be called Negroes.

What we can ask, together with Comaroff, is whether the roots of ethnicity lie 'in so-called primordial consciousness, or is it a reaction to a particular sequence of historical experience…' (1987: 302). His proposal seeks to show that the attribution of ethnic belonging is juxtaposed with class differences, but that ethnicity still has (or gains) its own life, presenting itself to actual experience as primordial bonds. Negritude in Brazil is seen, in the common sense of the word, as being the cause of class inequality and therefore as a resource of primordial identification that can be called upon in the event of collective action and socio-political demands. Class mobility is seen as a possible result that can be attained through individual effort, through reproductive strategies that make it possible to escape the diacritical signs of racial and

21

ethnic identification. However, the most politicised segments of the Negro movement present their audiences with a class-based analysis, while at the same time accepting the mobilising function of cultural identification, provided that this is constructed upon a historical consciousness of the experience of slavery and the subsequent socio-economic marginalisation of black people. This is a case in which the historical formation of the class is justified by essentialism and racial naturalisation. These aspects – essentialism and naturalisation – have become the bases for group identification and its reproduction, transmitting cultural materials through social relations that are then interpreted as being primordial – both by the natives and by their observers.

Comaroff says that 'as ethnic affiliations are realised and solidified in statutory groups as a result of such historical processes, they present exactly the opposite trajectory to the one theorised by Weber. In the Weberian tradition, affinities based on status, being primordial, should emerge before those based on class' But, he continues, 'it is not only Weber that is turned upside down by the growth and persistence of ethnic groupings. In classical Marxism, too, ethnicity was seen as something that should not appear with the emergence of class differences' (1987: 318). And he concludes: 'However, instead of disappearing or remaining as a mere epiphenomenon of "real" contradictions, ethnic identity assumes an important role in the dynamics of many historical systems – sustaining yet masking, reinforcing yet refracting, their dominant lines of cleavage' (1987: 318).

This comes very close to what the people I worked with are doing: they turn certain social relations into primordial relations, drawing from this the strength to act in a social formation in which race and class are confused and in which access to citizenship is increasingly codified according to lines of identification of the ethnic and para-ethnic type. The result may well be the reproduction of their identification (by the dominant ones) as subaltern black/poor people. But they are playing by the rules of a game that they did not invent.

An Arrastão of Inequality and Difference: 'They're in our midst'
And it is about the rules of the game that I'd like to continue speaking. I must say that my interest in postcolonial questions, and in the problems of citizenship related with immigration, was aroused by the Brazilian experience and by the historicity that, through slavery and colonialism, links the cultural experience of my informants in Ilhéus to my life in Lisbon, as a citizen of the Portuguese Republic. I could hardly have

known that, some years later, we would have the fantastic event of the *arrastão* of Carcavelos. *Fantastic* is the right word here, for we know that the *arrastã*o did not happen and yet it did – in our imaginary, in our representations, in our ghosts. It too is a 'spectre'. This (non-)event had the merit of revealing the network of contradictions in Portuguese postcolonial reconfigurations. The ease and speed with which an event such as the *arrastão* was associated with black criminality contrasts, in an apparently shocking way, with the representations of the Portuguese as non-racists. These are representations that have an extremely clear colonial history in the constructions of the lusotropicalist discourse in its colonial Portuguese version/appropriation. There is no doubt that such contradictions are the very stuff of social relations, and that there is a thin line between hegemonic representations and ideology, causing reality to be wrapped in brightly coloured cellophane. But what seems to be specific about the Portuguese situation is the fact that the explanations for the supposed non-racism are anchored in a historical colonial process that, in itself, is the quintessential process of the racialised and racist constitution. It is not our place here to diverge into the subject of the production of colonial knowledge, fortunately something that has been given increasingly better treatment in the Portuguese bibliography of the social sciences. I only wish to put forward the following proposal for reflection: the perceptions of immigration and the new forms of social relation (of which immigration is a part) add the critical (in the sense of 'crisis') overtones of the national narrative, at a moment when, as the European narrative is still weak, what is left over is a profound and deeply repressed colonial narrative.

In 2005, when the *arrastão* occurred/did not occur, Portuguese society had already produced a new categorisation centred upon immigration – certainly with the help of both specialist knowledge and the institutions of the state and civil society: there are the Portuguese and there are the immigrants; these are divided into Africans (*Palops*), Brazilians and those *from Eastern Europe*. In this system of classification based on history, geography and language, *ethnicity/race*, once so deeply repressed in the colonial subconscious, seems to be returning in all its splendour (it is in this scheme of things that one can understand the various meanings contained and condensed in the phrase 'Ukrainian woman provides cleaning and laundry services').

Why did the *arrastã*' happen? (Yes, because the *arrastão* did happen; it just didn't happen on the beach at Carcavelos.) Because *the colonised are in our midst*. Not for the first time, it's true. But the amnesia about Portugal's black population until the

23

eighteenth century, as well as the amnesia about the earlier presence of Jews and Muslims, is as powerful as the excessive negative visibility given to the contemporary Portuguese black population. An extraordinary proviso is thus introduced into the hegemonic lusotropicalist narrative of miscegenation and the supposedly exceptional nature of Portuguese colonial practices: the immigrants are not the people we mix with. The colonised have acquired our language; it was offered to them as a gift, but to be used in their land, as a way of setting up the new empire of the compensatory geolinguistics, *lusofonia* (the speaking of the Portuguese language). The narrative of the mixture is based on the gift that refuses the counter-gift: some Portuguese people mixed with Africans; in the process they created lusotropical societies; they offered cultural materials; but they were not meant in any way to 'return' to Portugal, there would be no cultural and even fewer ethnic or racial reasons for doing so.

The epitome of this way of seeing, representing and managing things was the legal apparatus, but also the anthropological, ideological, literary and administrative apparatus, which guaranteed and promoted the separation of the populations in the colonial territories. Let us call this the Colonial Constitution. The material processes of obtaining capital gains from raw materials and the workforce, took on a culturalist guise, corresponding to an ethnic-racial classification, updated into law under the form of the division between citizens (from Portugal, the *whites*), the *indigenous* (Africans, *negroes*, whose culture would be preserved through separation) and the *assimilated*, that tiny category – that project for a category – of people who through hard work, through Christianisation, through learning Portuguese, through the creation of habitus in their way of dressing, working and being (or the performing of these acts), would demonstrate that they deserved access to a mitigated form of citizenship, in a *mimesis* of the coloniser.

When postcolonial Africans migrate to Portugal, they migrate to occupy class-based jobs that will take from them each and every added value they might enjoy as localised exotic people. They now occupy the margins of the centre, both in terms of the relations of production and in the social geography. They preserve what we might call the compulsory work of the indigenous colonials (or rather it is preserved for them); just as the 'roots' of their indigenousness are compulsory, under the form of differentiating cultural expressions. Their indigenousness, now glossed as nationality, i.e. what makes them foreigners, is what prevents them from having access to citizenship. What is demanded of them as a way out is *assimilation*, now glossed as integration. The first

24

process, in colonial times, did not produce more than 1 per cent of the population. The second process, characterised by the same degree of bureaucratic requirements, legal impediments and discretionarity, will, under present circumstances, not produce more than the tiniest percentage of those who manage to escape from the vicious circle of a form of exclusion that is clearly defined by the use of expressions such as 'problem neighbourhood' or 'second generation'. There is a perverse game that the state plays and this game is called sovereignty: it is exercised not only in the supervision of the fact that there is a coincidence between territory, language and subjection to the state, but also in the creation of subjects that are culturally competent, as well as in the greater complexity added to the procedures that afford the foreigner access to the very table at which the game of cultural competence is played.

The process involved in the postcolonial reconfiguration of the Portuguese state is based on the creation of a geopolitical space (corresponding to a previous sovereignty) within the globalised world and, at the same time, on a European integration that challenges the traditional concepts of national sovereignty. Belonging to the first of these two elements are the two new categories of the democratic regime: the term *Palop* (Portuguese-speaking African countries), used as a euphemism for the ex-colonies, and the term *lusofonia*, a process of transforming the Portuguese language into a common field of identity, but without a radical criticism of the claims made for the ownership, ancestrality or legitimacy of the language (in short: what might be called the 'sovereignty of the language'). It is a process that replicates the culturalism of lusotropicalism, for it lays greater stress on the cultural dimension and pays far less heed to the political and economic processes of colonial times. And, within this same cultural dimension, it sets greater store by the (Portuguese) gift, refusing the (African) counter-gift.

I suggested as a proposal for reflection that what is being constructed as 'the problem of immigration' is occurring at a historical moment of stumbling attempts at Europeanisation, in which the only available narrative that is anchored in history is still the colonial narrative. In this sense, the constitution of subjects in the Portuguese post-colonies runs the risk of bringing back to life the Colonial Constitution, with its citizens, indigenous and assimilated people; its lusotropicalist culturalism; its elision of the political economy of forced labour; its repressive discourse of race; and the return of this form of repression as a statutory symbol.

But the problem is not exclusively a national one. My suggested proposal for a final reflection has to do with a greater contradiction that characterises both the acceleration and the deepening of the process for the globalisation of the political economy under which we live. Here, despite everything, the model of the sovereign nation state and of its political subjects as national citizens is still maintained, however empty it may have become. This contradiction is the one that is to be noted between, on the one hand, the accessibility to civil rights, to citizenship, through national belonging, and, on the other hand, the growing recognition of the universality of human rights. These rights are entering into a state of crisis and are manifestly and shockingly at odds with reality in the case of the figures and situations of migration, especially in a period when this has increased exponentially. Invoking here Seyla Banhabib, various human rights cannot be guaranteed and assured when the subjects begin to occupy two positions: as citizens of their nation state of origin and as residents in the nation state of immigration. A fierce contradiction is established, due to the privilege afforded to the nationals of the nation state in their access to labour rights, public services and the welfare state, in the exercise of their voting rights in democratic decision-making processes, in their access to all kinds of cultural capital. And, of course, at the level of the recognition of immigrants and their exclusion from the national narratives. The requirement of assimilation, in this situation, is transformed into a form of cynical provocation, unless civil rights and the possibility of citizenship are understood as universal human rights – something in relation to which there seems to be a preliminary refusal. And silence. A dramatic silence when the naive but terrible question is asked: Why do we boast about the free circulation of goods and capital and yet completely reject the free circulation of people? The answer is rarely given: Because it is through the refusal to allow the free circulation of people and the possibility of their being citizens in the place where they live that it has become possible for there to be an illegal circulation, or a legal one, but with restricted citizenship, of people as goods – creating situations that range from the exploitation of illegal labour to the most flagrant trafficking of people.

Some people, perhaps the more culturalist ones, will wonder what this has to do with questions of national narrative, sovereignty and the construction of political subjects as citizens. The answer is that the narrative cannot be simply cultural. More: its restriction to culturalism is a condition that enables the concealment of the material processes that are part of the processes of signification. The attempts that have been

made to reconcile the contradictory terms outlined in the previous paragraph have been disastrous. From republican universalism to the multiculturalisms promoted by the state and or the communities. Just like the lusotropicalist narrative – whose utopian and humanist features evaporate as soon as the ideological package is opened – multiculturalist narratives vanish as soon as the underlying basic and objectifying premise is revealed, rather in the manner of receiving a booby prize: the idea that there are several cultures corresponding to territories of origin, *separate but equal*, coming into contact with one another in the exchanges that are made for the consumption of cultural products. Multiculturalist experiments, as a policy of different states, establish a regulatory body that defines who is tolerated and who tolerates, frequently introducing serious inequalities at the level of human rights and civil rights (a prototypical example: accepting the social subordination of women for reasons of 'culture'). Alternatively, the universalist republican model of citizenship does not prevent (quite the opposite) its juxtaposition with an exclusive national narrative, as is pathetically demonstrated by the French case (immediately visible in the controversy that has developed over the wearing of veils at schools).

The revisiting of Portuguese colonial narratives – about the state, knowledge, the arts and the people – is a fundamental undertaking that is necessary for understanding how the community of subjects and citizens is configured under today's Portuguese state. It is particularly important for understanding the process of cultural and social complexification resulting from the processes of immigration. This happens in a context that has been expanded at two levels: on the one hand, there is the context of European integration, the space where other colonial histories and/or other immigrations have taken place, and where the sovereignty of the nation state has been faced with some interesting challenges; on the other hand, there is the global context, in which there is an increasing contradiction between civil rights based on nationality and universal human rights.

Conclusion

In order for us to begin to understand the state of the world – or even, under the scope of this theme, the world of the State – we have to ask some basic and quite simple questions. And, more than ever, we have to undertake anthropological and ethnographic surveys of postcolonial situations. Not in order to solve 'social problems' (whose definition itself needs to be questioned), but in order to know how subjects and their

27

collective identifications are constituted. What is Difference? What do common sense, social movements, NGOs, advertising and the media, and social scientists mean when they talk about difference? And, furthermore, what is Inequality? What do all those agents mean when they talk about inequality? The beginning of an answer to these questions is not to be found in definitions, but rather in the identification of what these discourses actually *do*. We have seen that the discourse of difference organises the perception of social identities in a way that can lead to their essentialisation; and that essentialisation leads to an apparent depoliticisation, removing certain levels of social identity from the possibility of change. In this sense, the discourse of difference may be a discourse of the concealment of inequality. But we have also seen how, once a classification has been established of the levels of social identity, difference may be strategically mobilised in order to transform itself into a factor on which claims may be based, into a factor of recognition of the inequalities created by the identification of difference. Inequality therefore appears more clearly as a process that links together the material and the symbolic, and whose arena of resolution is a broader conception of the political. It is, however, crucial, that, in this process, there should be a participation of critical thought, and that the analysis should not bow down to political strategy. It is crucial that the politics of identity that move the minorities and the subaltern segments of society should not reproduce the essentialising and naturalising categories that have set them up as minorities and as subaltern, but that they should have the capacity, when questioning the material and symbolic system that legitimises inequality with difference, of being able to question themselves too. In order to achieve this, it is crucial that the notions of culture and identity with which they operate should be seen as processual, contingent and plural. That is the pedagogical task of a contemporary anthropology. And it is necessary that the idea of 'all different, all equal' should explicitly join together the rights of individual citizenship, the active principle of equal opportunities, and the recognition of differentiated social experiences, whose difference is unequal not because they are variations of the same, but because they have been organised to be asymmetric and hierarchical.

Translated by John Elliott