"OH, YOU’RE A BRAZILIAN WOMAN! WELL...”: SYMBOLIC AND GENDER VIOLENCE, SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS AND IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT
The proposed article is to contribute to the reflection regarding contemporary relations from the question of identity and from the intercultural dialogue, elements considered important to the overcoming of stereotypes and of social representations. In this way, we intend to discuss the reproduction of practices of structural violence of gender in relation to the Brazilian woman, who even today comes being manifested, through attitudes and behaviours, by a considerable part of Portuguese society. Such dispositions can be considered worrisome in any context where there is a social construction of a specific reality, however, in regards to the academic context, such a view causes perplexity in face of the affirmations of the principles and presumptions of the State of Democratic Right and the respect to the human dignity. From the complaints and protests that were exposed in the Brazilian and Portuguese media that generated diverse debates regarding the construction of social representations, based on the inheritance of a colonial patriarchal, sexist, destroyer of ‘otherness’ (particularly femininity) mind-frame, there was a strong discussion in the internal organs of the University of Coimbra. In the face of this, using a bibliographic revision and semi-structured interviews extracted from focus groups between Brazilian students at the University of Coimbra, we propose a discussion about the permanence of stereotypes and entropies in the dialogue and in intercultural relations, and reflect on the judgements of relative values of the Brazilian woman’s sexual morals, which is not unrelated to the relationships that are the sphere of private and social life “outside the academic limits”.

KEY-WORDS
symbolic violence; gender violence; identity; social representations; otherness.

Social Representations and Sexuality
The existence of social representations linked to Portuguese society, a society which we take as a reference to raise this question, relative to sexuality and the sensuality of the Brazilian woman, is rooted in stereotypes. In this sense, we place an importance in approaching the theme that, in a certain way, refers to the difficulties to the construction of Lusophone relations free from the colonial mind-frame. The negative social image generally associated to the Brazilian woman, to this day, remains in a considerable “fringe” of Portuguese society. For example, we observe that, in 2003, the movement “Mothers of Bragança”4. The fact was

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4 On April 30, a group of Portuguese women created a movement in the city of Bragança, located in the Northern region of Portugal that began with a formal and public campaign, called “The Mothers of Bragança.” The movement wanted to eliminate prostitution in their city. The indignation of the Portuguese women in relation to the Brazilian women centred itself on the accusation that they were “playing around with their husbands”, who were Portuguese husbands of the city. (http://www.tsf.pt/vida/interior/dez-anos-depois-da-guerra-das-maes-de-braganca-3192894.html).
recorded again in 2014 in social media and in the main newspapers of the city of Coimbra and Brazilian ones, from the repercussions of a set of complaints regarding the practices of symbolic and gender violence by Portuguese students of the 1st Cycle (Undergraduates) and by some teachers (from the Faculty of Letters of the University of Coimbra) in relation to Brazilian students, the majority of them female, in the Programme of International Mobility for Undergraduates."5

Such episodes reveal a vision of Portuguese society with a very negative view regarding Brazilian women. What calls attention, in this last instance, is the fact that the movement is not led and mobilized by Portuguese women against Brazilian women, but rather through the complaints by Brazilian students against the thought structure of the teachers and the Portuguese students, who established a gap and a contradiction with the ideas of education of intercultural dialogue, as well as infringing presumptions of human rights.

It therefore requires, from these events, an urgent reflection regarding how to break the stereotypes that derive from an abyssal thought relating to the Brazilian woman that is still in use. These behaviours generate resonances and reinforce the stereotypes that, in turn, reproduce social representations and contribute to the propagation of practices of structural gender violence and symbolic violence.

However we point out, through the described facts, not just the difficulties brought through the presence of social representations of identity and the otherness of the Brazilian woman, as well as question of sexuality and gender, which are present in the scope of relations. Whereas such questions do not arise as a “special case”, but as a critical dimension that invalidates the fight against violence and the affirmation of human rights, with regard to the discourses that promote resistance to discrimination.

The existence of an abyssal thought

Brazilian society, just like Portuguese society, finds itself in a process of social change with differences relative to each of their respective frameworks. The experience of the effects of a democratic expansion on one side, and a crisis of legitimization on the other. The expansion of democratic legitimacy has proportioned significant advances in the conquest of guarantees and fundamental rights. However, the set of austerity policies in the Portuguese case and the political crisis that unlock an economic crisis are elements that profoundly impact the day-to-day life.

Citizenship, the dignity of a human being, sovereignty, political pluralism and the social values of work and of free initiative are fundamental to the State of Democratic Right, present in both the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic and in the Brazilian Federal Constitution of 1988 (“Citizen” constitution). Both Magna Cartas reiterate the principles of equality and universalization that orientate their fundamental objectives.6

5 A campaign in 2014 by a group of Brazilian students at the University of Coimbra, through social networks, from photos with posters that denounced phrases overheard in the academic environment against xenophobia, racism, chauvinism and homophobia. (www.noticias.uol.com.br/album/2014/01/30/campanha-denuncia-casos-de-dis-criminacao-e-xenofobia—na-universidade-de-combra.html).

As such, the object and the problem of the investigation, while targets of criticism by the social actors that fight for the necessary transformations, represent ideologies that are still hegemonic and align themselves with an abyssal thought. Therefore, they overlap and manifest themselves through language in a type of abyssal rationalism, because:

It consist in a system of visible and invisible distinctions, being that the invisible ones ground the visible ones. The invisible distinctions are established through the radical lines that divide social reality into two distinct universes: the universe “this side of the line” and the universe “on the other side of the line”. The division is such that the “other side of the line” disappears as reality and becomes inexistent, and it is produced as inexistent. Inexistence means not existing in any shape or form to be relevant and comprehensible. (Santos, 2009: 23)

The existence of an abyssal thought relative to the comprehension of identity, otherness and the way of being of the Brazilian woman in the face of many women of other nationalities expresses itself as a fetish that does not restrict itself to a fringe of the population that possesses a cultural capital and a level of lower intellectual development. It reflects itself in the relations and the day-to-day representations of the academic environment and of the numerous socially privileged environments. It reveals the consistency of such ideas in what is referred to as its sedimentation in mental structures. Behind the good intentions of creating a Lusophone space, there are mental structures based on a logic of the abyssal thought, which could compromise and could have compromised the intercultural relationship. The fluidity in the exchange of equality of positioning and of conditions becomes fragile. The consequences around the construction of a Lusophone space are strong, since reforms would be necessary not only in terms of formal public policies (intercultural education), as well in the investment in the realm of social communication that reveal itself as a fundamental dimension to be rethought, with views to its reformation and effective contribution to an overcoming of the stereotypes in the scope of the Lusophone space.

Social representations, identities and otherness

It befits to highlight that one should not reduce the sense of representation to the notion of stereotype. The traces of stereotyping can be observed in discourses about groups in general (Deschamps & Moliner, 2009). How, for example, can someone have never heard of the punctuality of the British, the beauty of Brazilian women, the sense of organization of the Germans and the unbridled consumerism of the Americans? As one can see, the stereotype is a simplification or generalization of some well-known characteristic of a given group. In thinking of “representing or self-representing”, it equates to an expression of thinking to which the agent relates his or herself with an object, that is, there is no representation without object. This object could be a person, an idea, an event, a phenomenon, etc. In this sense, representation is characterized as a way of knowing practically what links a subject to an object, always being a representation of something (object) or of someone (subject) (Jodelet, 1993).

A social representation is a phenomenon and a way of structural thinking that weaves resonances formed in the middle of processes of socialization established in the group, as
Jodelet highlights (1994). They act in the origin and in the web of relations that occurred in the processes of primary socialization and of secondary socialization, as is in the case of the relations of teaching-learning and the analysed representations in question – the context of formal education (Martins; Pardal and Dias, 2011). We believe that the problem that is placed around the commentary/social representation: “Oh, you’re a Brazilian woman! Well...” acts against what would be supposed in a relationship between undergraduate students and even masters and doctorate students, including teachers.

The questions of sexuality and gender treated in this work, in addition to having the existence of social representations which, in this specific case, characterize “labels” still associated with the Brazilian woman, partly through some members of Portuguese society, also discusses the importance of the fights and the resistances to discriminations that violate their human rights, just like the neo-colonialism exercised by academics. In this way, we can reflect on behaviours attributed in functions of a past dominated by colonialism that reiterates a critical dimension, in what is reported to the discourses that involve the effective construction of intercultural dialogue.

The influence of this colonial inheritance associated to the social behaviour and the dissemination of the social representations, together with Portuguese society, causes the intercultural relationship/dialogue to have a dialectic that deserves attention, for one notices still a traditional structure that contradicts and involves academic thought, despite the existence of a great proportion of knowledge and the circulation of new ideas debated with the intention to deconstruct the force of stereotypes profoundly caught in the mentality of many.

In this sense, we highlight how much social representations also revert themselves in everyday representations in the way that “an emergency, development and the approach of determined terms (scientific, philosophical, theoretical, etc)”, migrate this sphere and are appropriated by common sense to characterize a determined reality, they are also, like in all ideologies, inverted and appear like Marx mentioned “from head to toe,” as they are “social products involved in social fights, just as the options that the individuals assume in the use or determined type of use of these terms” (Viana, 2008, p5).

In this way we recognise the function of representations that refer to a perception of a common reality about a construction of identity. They are representations of others and that we share with others that make use, at the same time, individual and collective beings (Deschamps & Moliner, 2009).

Considering that social representations are themselves “productions of practical knowledge orientated to the comprehension of the world and to communication” (Spink, 2010, p.14), the work presented addresses the weight that the social imagination and the dissemination of stereotypes exercise regarding the configuration of identities and otherness, observing, primarily, the problems and the discriminations that they are underlying and intervene in the construction of intercultural relations.

In Analysis

The object of the study in question: “Ah, you’re a Brazilian woman! Well...”, involves the whole fundamental notion in a stereotype and a conjunction of pejorative ideas that reveal the manifestation of a notion of social representations designated as “deaf zones”, conceived...
by Jean-Claude Abric, at the school of Aix-en-Provence in 2003. This concept reinforces the
existence of everyday representations and of everyday representations in parallel, as relations
of common sense that are constructed through three centuries of colonial domination and
the almost two centuries of relations established in the post-colonial context between Brazil
and Portugal, conserve ideas formed in the logic of exploitation and of patriarchy.

The discussion is seen as a whole articulated and unique in what is interdepended, in-
terlinked and mutually conditioned to the objects and the phenomena, therefore, the direct
influence of the social environment and the impressions that they are subjacent to, turn the
language, the most powerful of instruments. Beyond such conditions, it can be interpreted
as mere images or thought structures that merely “tangent” the construction of social reality.
In this way, the dialectic in question treats a determined social phenomenon and refers to
discursive structures, considering that “[…] the discussion contributes to a construction of
all the dimensions of social structure that, directly or indirectly, they mould and restrict: their
own norms and conventions as well as relations, identities and institutions that they are sub-
jacent to” (Fairclough, 2008, p.11).

In this sense, we present the excerpts from semi-structured interviews extracted from
a focus group between Brazilian students at the University of Coimbra, in the scope of a doc-
torate investigation regarding “the social representations reciprocal of identity and Luso-
phone between Brazilian and Portuguese students at the University of Coimbra”, in which
questions regarding the Brazilian women were debated, considering not only the reasons
that they align to an inheritance of colonial thought, patriarchal and sexist, but also an adop-
tion of a practice of symbolic and structural gender violence, which in turn is sustained by
an abyssal thought. As the excerpts and debates proffered by three Brazilian students show,
the most recurring situations that reinforce the expression “Oh, you’re a Brazilian woman!!
Well…” exposes itself:

“It wasn’t so good for me! What I thought…I’m going to Europe, right? There is that vision
of living in Europe, people are open-minded and it’s not what I saw. In some moments, as
much inside the university as outside, I saw situations of prejudice. Prejudice against the
immigrant, racial, gender, etc! For example, I think that the Portuguese…in my particular
view, they are, for example, chauvinists! (…) And this question of gender…it’s really
strong…they are very conservative and (…) principally the question of chauvinism and of
prejudice with the immigrant” (Brazilian doctorate of the Programme of Economics and
Management, 52 years old).

“I think about the two sides and weigh the two sides: positives and negatives. Ah…First, I
always put it this way: yes, I am an immigrant here! And I know there is a whole stereotype
about Brazilians and beyond these questions, there are questions, as my colleague said,
which is the question that the university is very traditional and conservative, just as Portugal
is very traditional and conservative…and there is a very evident chauvinism! And this chauv-
inism is manifested in speeches and positions in relation to us women, principally, in touch-
ing the stereotype and when the stereotype, in my case, for example for being homosexual
and of other colleagues that came here and suffered threats, like what happened in 2014,
and left the press that same year” (Brazilian doctorate in the Programme in Medieval History,
30 years old)
“Beginning with the most recent time, which was now during the “Queima das Fitas”[7], where a colleague in the master’s course and she’s pretty and all...and then a Portuguese man came to this friend of mine saying: “So? How about it?!?” And I looked and I said: “She’s not for sale and she’s not a prostitute and that’s not how it works!” And he said: “But you’re Brazilians! And Brazilians are so much easier!” And I don’t know what...a situation like this...there are various cases like this here. (...) But do you know when you’re very close to the situation, you understand that everything existing has already been spoken and... in the question of conservatism, bureaucratic and traditional in the situation, people understand that it’s all or nothing! The context...I think they are really very closed, boxed, squared off over certain types of thoughts or they are really, ultra, mega liberals! Anything can happen! Everything’s a party! You’re a Brazilian woman so let’s party...then there’s a “wow, wow” in this sense” (Brazilian doctorate in Law, 28 years old).

As Fairclough (2008) defends, the discourses that unveil an existent phenomenon and that cause the establishment of ideas and of qualified information that hang and contribute to determine new practices, can also be understood as a social action. For the author, “the discourse contributes to the construction of social identities, to the construction of social relations between people and to the construction of systems of knowledge and beliefs” (2001, p.91). In this sense, we observe that the dialectic perspective expresses itself and is evidenced in such narratives by means of stereotypes and discriminations, contributing to the reproduction of practices of structural violence of gender in relation to the Brazilian woman and representing an abyssal thought that derives to be fought and not reinforced in the academic environment. In accordance with the critical interpretation of the discourse, we also understand that the preservation of attitudes of stereotypes and prejudice is not that far from the thought that circulates the University of Coimbra, as it may see, where it also claims judgements based on the culture of customs in this academic environment.

**Conclusions**

From Fairclough’s vision regarding the critical dimension that takes the discourse as “(...) a way of social practice and not purely as an individual practice (...) what implies the discourse to be a mode of action, a form in which people may act regarding the world and especially regarding others, as well as a mode of representation” (2008, p.91), we propose to reflect and highlight the existing dialectic relations in the structures of thought of Brazilian and Portuguese students and this way question how the intercultural relationship is affected.

We stress that the structures of thought that hover over the students and Brazilian women, in the academic environment, demonstrated through their depositions, directly affect the intercultural relations necessitating to establish the deconstruction of stereotypes and logics based on the inheritance of abyssal thought, colonial, patriarchal and sexist, that seem to be still very representative.

In the two episodes referred, there is a logic of thought that the other, in this case, the Brazilian woman, is seen as “different”. Therefore, we treat an object of study regarding the social constructions of gender, that fall over the condition of inequality that is at the core of

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[7] Festival characteristic of the University of Coimbra had during the Academic Week.
xenophobic practices, chauvinistic and other types of prejudice. For these considerations, the existence of a conservative thought not only prevents the affirmation of social transformations and behaviours based in new dynamics and diversity, as well as de-characterize the social experiences, the identities and the otherness that can only be understood from the practices of dialogue and equality, considered mediators of the relations of familiarity and sharing.

In this way, we understand that a coherent perspective of diversity can only exist if it is altered to the idea of overcoming a vision/concept of culture as something static and composed by identities surrounded by themselves. Therefore, three exercises are fundamental: the dislocation, the permeability of cultural frontiers and the work of creative potential to see the richness of differences and contributions that can be acquired through the interaction with the diversity. This way, the recognition of universal nature of human rights can make sense for all, from their identities and otherness, with a base of thought exposed by Fish, who affirms that it is possible to “celebrate the difference without making a difference” and at the same time understand that the centrality of culture transforms itself daily (Stuart Hall, 1997; 2003).

Nevertheless, we conclude with a critical interpretation of discourse regarding the social representations of identity captured in the presented reports, that the existence of a strong influence of a colonial past maintain in action not only a dialectic relation as well as an abyssal of a symbolic and systemic violence in relation to the Brazilian woman. The permanence of anti-social and anti-democratic behaviours weaken the cultural dynamics that could be potential in the Lusophone space, in addition to attaching the strengthening of critical consciousness as a form of fighting the hegemonic power in the various social institutions and this way break with a metonymic and arrogant reason that tries to maintain the loss of social experiences (Santos, 2004).

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