THE CURSE OF HANSEL AND GRETEL:
APPEALS OF AN ETHNIC IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT
Taking Stuart Hall’s observations as a premise, where he notes that contrary to some expectations, contemporary identity constructions head for an ephemeral plurality and a paradoxical demand for ethnic references, I induce the hypothesis that such identity characteristics correspond to an immature stage of the global socio-economic system, in a transdisciplinary perspective of a bibliographical and documentary basis research, lacking in coordination with references that go beyond the semiotic and cultural self-referentiation. Since this reflection looks forward to transcend its signic thresholds, its continuation rests on symbolic articulations, guided by Jungian qualitative paradigm. Finally in the culmination of the inductive exercise, I confirm the relevance of the porposed hypothesis.

KEYWORDS
identity; ethnicity; symbol; capitalism; Puer.

Introduction
Perhaps because of its inaccuracy today we can see that a number of consecrated views expected, or still hoped, that the globalized society would sustain large identity constructions and that it could be universally unified. However, what is observed does not confirm its expectations. It is observed instead an identity fragmentation that seeks to cipher the diversity of its experimentations in more narrow ethnic experiences because it’s rather unable to anchor deeper buildings.

In the body of this reflection, I have allied to myself the disbelief that the globalized form of the capital system can house more consistent identities, based on the hypothesis that these identity postures correspond to children’s behaviors which, for some reason, stagnated in denial of its own in order to do not reach more mature stages.

The main problem with a hypothesis like this is that its elaboration and treatment are impossible from purely rational references. Rationality is what makes us human, so to criticize humanity in rational terms is to talk to us, about us, and from ourselves. This self-referentiality is presupposed in our semiotic systems, for the development of signs that rationally mediates is actually ours. It is therefore necessary to return to the sign its substantiality, to dare to deal with the ineffable which always results in the interaction with the object itself, this is to articulate through imagination, our rational side with its irrational substrates (Velázquez, 2015).

It is in this direction that I look for resources in qualitative Jungian paradigm research (Penna, 2004) so through the ways that symbols can offer I extracted from fantasy a different

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hypothesis that I can later induce it before a multidisciplinary theoretical body. There is always a risk in these relationships of the subjective developments which makes us allow it to again hold onto its self-reference which, in principle, it was intended to overcome. Although it is not of absolute assurance, in this regard I proceed through intersubjective confrontation that results in unsuspected “colorations”, which almost holographically brings the object to participation: the so-called “analytic third” (Maroni, 2006).

Finally, unable as humans that we are to move away from overly semiotics interface, it is necessary to assume the partiality and transience of the findings of such as thoughts, as well as the possibility that the descriptive meeting of simultaneous processes on the same object may prove itself paradoxical.

Back to ethnicity

According to Stuart Hall, despite predictions both liberalist or Marxist, that identity constructions are centered on attachment to the local, the particular, the tradition and the roots would give way to more rational and universalist identities, “(...) Globalization does not seem to be producing neither the triumph of the ‘global’ nor persistence in its old nationalist form of ‘local’.” (Hall, 2014, p.56) If it is true that globalization has a “(...) pluralizing effect on the identities, producing a variety of possibilities and new positions of identification and making the identities more positional, more political, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or trans-historical” (Hall, 2014, p.51) what is noted in the observation of contemporary social movements is a paradoxical trend back to ethnicity. Stuart Hall cites Bauman, not only to endorse the validity of this observation, but also so that he may clarify that this contemporary demand for ethnic references has, however, character and a symbolic function (cf. Bauman, 1999).

In Bauman’s texts the term symbol transpires the meaning of a socially agreed representation. Although this meaning coincides with the usual interpretation of semioticians such as C. S. Peirce (2003), for example, in view of an opportunity to extend the limits of this analysis I would regret to see myself confined to such narrowness. There is no room in this paper to discuss Peirce’s texts, so I will limit myself to suggest in the hope of future discussions that a convention can also be held various qualities between the sign and the object. Thus, a symbol can agree, that is, combine, adjust to each other various object’s characteristics which its associations features are not necessarily a match to reality but metaphorically relates to sensations, impulses, elaborations, or less obvious experiences. With this meaning Levi-Strauss (2010) and Lacan (1995) use that term and, moreover, this meaning emanates from Peirce’s observation that the symbol can relate to its object “(...) by a natural instinct or an intellectual act” without the need for a factual connection between sign and object (Peirce, 2003, p.76). For Laplanche & Pontalis, the symbol in psychoanalysis, if we think in a broad sense, would be an “indirect and figurative mode of an idea’s representation of a conflict, an unconscious desire” (1994, p.476) and it is in this direction that Jung (2009) warns us that “symbolic and semiotic meaning are very different things.” (p.443). By analogy, representing something known in an abbreviated way is semiotics; while a symbolic expression introduces

3 Faced with the impossibility of verifying the source of Hall, I refer the reader to this reference, although it does not correspond textually confirms the quotes ideas.
itself as “(...) the best possible formulation of something relatively unknown and that cannot, therefore, be lighter or characteristic (...) [a symbol represents] the unsayable in an unsurpassed way.” (p.444).

That said, I would like to focus the attention on two terms that are central in Hall’s analysis: identity and ethnicity. Identity elapses from the radical Identität that in turn derives from the word *idem*, which in Latin means “the same”, “oneself”. The identity supposes thus a confluence of elements that become a single amalgam, the same thing, a unity. On the other hand, ethnicity has for radical the Greek *étnhos*, which elapses from Indo-European *swedh-no*, which indicates “itself”, “the peculiar unit” (Gomez de Silva, 1998).

Having it overcome, at least within the limits of this text, which Levi-Strauss designated as the “utopia of the century, which is to build a system of signs on a single level of articulation” (2010, p.44), we can see a close relationship between identity and ethnicity, as the second characterizes the unit that defines the first. Characterization that in “semiotics” articulation we tend to relate to notions known as local, nation, race or tradition. However, as it is the symbol itself, as in Jung’s view, this articulation darkens and complicates itself when we extend it to an organic nature’s substrate with its implicit and dynamic modes. I quoted the “utopia of the century,” from Levi-Strauss, as we seem to think that an identity amalgam is possible in the unique confluence of cultural elements, forgetting that the cultural sphere, ethnic (peculiar) of humanity, is inscribed in nature and depends on it.

This is perhaps the most complicating factor in this articulation because given the inability of the human species to survive in the natural environment, culture, as an opposition to nature, raises as a perennial sphere of the species (cf. Flusser 2011, Freud, 1995 Levi-Strauss, 2010). To include nature in analyzes about ourselves implies a consideration of the viability and relevance of our stay as a species on this planet, and that is frightening (Morin, 1970).

Unlike other animals that are born more or less ready to face the wild, marsupials drop out of the mother’s womb untimely so that in an external bag, they would complete pregnancy to the point where they will be able to respond appropriately to nature. Humans also drop out of the protection of the mother’s womb, however, the bag that should complete our “pregnancy” time is not biological, but cultural (Campbell, 2005). The problem is that, although there have been - and there are marginally - societies engaged in directing their cultural development to a harmonious understanding with nature, that is, to complete the maturation of their young to face the outside, this is not the case of modern Western culture (cf. Campbell, 2008 Eliade, 2001).

How, why and at what time this break occurred has been the subject of several epistemes. Nevertheless, given the complexity of the subject, there is always, in every approach, something from the order of ineffable that renews and strengthens itself in the confrontation or in multidisciplinary articulation. For this reason, I will try, then, to approach this rupture through a symbolic view.

Aware that the thoughts that I could extract from the following mythologem could also match my attitude towards the object, I will expose it in an attempt to cooperate with the elucidation of the issue launched by Hall, at the same time that I will submit to the possibility of expansion through confrontation.
I selected the tale of “Hansel and Gretel” (Anaya Group, 2001), collected by the Brothers Grimm in the first place because of the archetypes that it presents, but also because it is a story harvested in the dawn of the nineteenth century next to the proximity of Hansa city, a time and place strongly significant in the affirmation of bourgeois activities that defined the spirit of modern culture. As it is known, the story in question is not really of the authorship of the Grimms and they harvested it in the popular tradition, which in its dynamics, can be introduced into the narrative as an indicator of then current events.

Next to a large forest...

Hansel and Gretel lived in a house neighboring a large forest, with their father, who was a lumberjack, and their stepmother. They were poor, but at this time the poverty in the country was intensified and the family could not even get their daily bread. The stepmother proposed to her husband to abandon the children in the woods and even though he wanted to reject the idea, he could not impose himself to the woman because he was unable to offer an alternative to raise funds.

The theme of the mother who, until a certain moment shows herself indulgent and protective to then show threatening features of expulsion and helplessness is recurrent in mythological reports. It corresponds to a natural stage in the maturation of the offspring that some human civilizations practice with the same purpose in rituals (Eliade, 2001) and pedagogical form (Jung, 1990, p.73). A clear picture of this passage can be found in the mother bird that, after feeding their young in the nest for some time, expels them, forcing them to fly and seek food for themselves.

Symbolically, it is what Jung called the “terrible mother” (2011). Nevertheless, the positive symbol of parental dyad, the father, as a convex symbol tends to be conniving with the expulsion and usually is also a model to be achieved externally. In the case of Hansel and Gretel, the father is negligent, incompetent and without initiative. This detail is important because, faced with a troublesome situation, the creative response we can offer is proactive and therefore symbolized positively. Hansel and Gretel lack a positive reference and therefore in the light of the moon, which is also a symbol of maternal care (Jung & Kerényi 2011, p.189), they can only make a negative response: the parental regression protection.

On the other hand, we have to consider that in the nineteenth century, when this story was told, the industry mechanization expanded, from England to the rest of Europe, devaluing the craftsmanship and condemning to extreme poverty workers that were replaced by machines. In these circumstances, the proactive capabilities that the father had were untimely taken and the children, because of the lack of his model, were forced to make an unusual response. We will return to this hypothesis.

The stepmother/terrible mother nevertheless did not abandon her mythic role and cast her young in a deeper place in the forest. This time, included the Great Mother, or Mother Nature itself, as someone who helped to the task, causing the birds to disappear the way back by eating the crumbs of bread that Hansel had left as a trail.

As explained in Campbell (1988), to enter the forest is an introspective attitude - proper to those looking for resources to face a new conflict - and as negative displacement, entering in the unknown, the unconscious, it is also a movement toward the core of the mother’s
symbol. It is therefore not strange that in the depths of the woods we find the witch, the one who in her spells holds the secrets of transformation. The blind witch who eats children is because the regression that I have been talking about being so intense that reaches the deeper functional layers, instinctive, such as swallowing and digestion without any analytical sieve, therefore, deprived of vision. Always symbolically when the child is introduced in the core of the mother’s womb he or she becomes again an object of transformation. As Jung says, the Oedipal complex - the penetration in the mother - becomes also a Jonas complex who, in the belly of the whale, was initiated into the mysteries of a deep transformation of deified matter - the origin of life forms in the ocean - for matured by the experience, he or she would return to life on the surface (2011, p.488).

It is the primitive myth of “vagina dentata” (Campbell, 2005, pp.71-72) that swallows and pierces the hero until he reappears being able to destroy the menacing teeth and turn the monster (the gross nature) in its fertile complementary. The hero’s tearing usually precedes its reconstruction by the maternal figure who is also renewed, as a young virgin who helps the foundation of a new cycle (Mendes, 2014). It is the subject that transcends his or hers childishness (puerility) because having completed his or hers pregnancy in a “cultural bag”, resurfaces now able to harmonize him or herself with the external environment.

By judging studies of analytical psychology, Hansel and Gretel, as it is typical in myths (such as in Apollo and Artemis, Osiris and Isis, Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl, etc.) represent the sexual bipolarity of a psychic unity: Animus and Anima. When the conscious life of an individual is male, his unconscious complement is feminine, the anima, and vice versa, the male unconscious of a woman’s personality is the Animus (Franz, 2010). Thus, in the witch’s guts, the male aspect of the infant in transformation is strengthened - Hansel was very well fed for fattening - while the female aspect is initiated into the mysteries of transformation, for the witch makes Gretel work extensively in the preparation of her projects: she became her apprentice.

The height of the preparations should be swallowing and digestion, that is, the transformation of the psyche in a maturing process and to that end the transformer element is fire. Gretel was instructed to light the fire of the furnace and she realized that cooking her brother would be only the second intention: the witch intended first to cook her as well. According to Jung:

The furnace (as the incandescent “tripod” in Fausto) is a maternal symbol. From this one Paris and Helen come out, the royal couple of alchemy; in the furnace, according to popular tradition, the children are roasted. The athanor alchemists, this is, the melting furnace means the belly, while the alembicus or the Cucurbita the vas Hermetis, representing the uterus. (Jung 2011, p.200)

And still Kerényi reports us:

(...) Demeter as a handmaid (...) gets Demophon her care, the youngest son of the king. Every night she secretly lays him on the fire: a peculiar procedure to provide him with immortality. (Jung & Kerényi 2011, p.169)
Here is the unexpected formulation of the answer from Hansel and Gretel to the situation which I promised to get back to. The childhood that stars in this story refused to change: Gretel tricked the witch and not only managed to escape, but killed the threshold of transformation with its own resources. Although this outcome is not often observed in the longest traditions of myth, the tale of Hansel and Gretel is not the only one that signals this refusal. In the version originally collected by the Jacobs of “The Three Little Pigs” tale, the third little pig not only managed to escape the wolf (another destructive symbol of nature) by the affirmation and strengthening of his cultural protection - the brick house - but also steamed the wolf in a pot and ate him for dinner (Anaya Group, 2001). In Jack and the Beanstalk he climbed a beanstalk, to reach to the giant’s treasures (parental reference from a child’s perspective) fooled him and caused his death in order to get hold of the goose that laid golden eggs, light eggs, fire, fertile cells designed to regenerate life (Great Mother), and that he turned into wealth.

When Hansel and Gretel went back home the children were faced with the external correspondence of their achievements in the guts of the unconscious: the stepmother also died and their father, in tears, lamented the absence of the children without taking any initiative. Such as the three little pigs, this story culminates with three children: Hensel, Gratel and the father, free from the threat of maturity and of seeing themselves compelled to face the outside world without disregarding that Gretel, given her attachment to the scary meeting with the witch will also become the “mother child” who refuses her transformation into the “terrible mother” and will conceive herself only as a protective mother. Our adventurers will be happy forever, at home, under the care of the extended cultural bag with the threat of hard labor banned forever and secured to obtain all the necessary - and more than that - thanks to the resources that they improperly extracted from nature and that from then on will circulate with new meanings such as values exchange.

Final considerations

Capitalization is a children’s vital attitude. In nature, any offspring finding itself in a development stage must capitalize resources in order to reach their adult size and strengthen their abilities to respond to a hard environment. Of course, during the growth period, the infant attitudes are selfish and their answers can be dull and inconsequential. But this is a stage to be overcome because there is no mother, whether it is the nature or the culture itself that even if so desired would not have conditions of any kind to indefinitely sustain a son who refuses to become mature and ends up becoming a parasite (Hillman, 2008).

Perhaps underneath all Marxist idealization is the intuition of this obviousness and it can hold in a more simple way and therefore more straightforward and direct, any prediction of collapse of the capital system; however, as Duarte says, “(...) the very world that the capitalist system has equipped itself with conditions artificially produced in order to, so to speak, ‘bypass’ its validity.” (2001, p.28) This is the point where the triumphant story of Hansel and Gretel charges with a curse contours: the bird that refused to leave the nest and capitalized resources beyond its young-adult size will eventually win with its obesity, the resistance of the very nest. And what is worse, their wings never confronted with the external environment, will be discovered only in the vertigo of the fall with its atrophied skills.
Hansel and Gretel form the ancestral couple founder of a new era. It is clear that the reversal of the old monarchical system would require a new-born system, a renewed childhood; but it is also evident that this child can only assume “more universalist identities”, such as Hall intended, (2014, p.56) in that if it accepts itself as a stage. Among many other historical passages the international crisis of 1929 might have been a good landmark of transformation. Hansel was fat, was a saturated market, which meant a drastic reduction of needs. It was time to go into the oven so that, like the Phoenix, from the cremation ashes would arise a new life, refreshed, balanced and, above all, better adapted; in a word, matured. But Gretel had a Russia hidden up her sleeves: initiated by the witch, she knew how to deceive the real and strengthen the illusion, the Maya of the Vedic way. Just like magic Gretel laid the bases of the century’s utopia: a self-referenced sign system. Utopia embodied by the industry in addition to producing excessively and indiscriminately and that also started to produce the needs of its consumers (Baudrillard, 1995).

Hansel and Gretel will never suffer the hardships of excesses, there will always be renewed appetites in this new dynamic system. The consumer’s society is a puer aeternus, an ever-increasing and greedy demander, confident in the inexhaustibility of its resources because they are “magical” in origin, they belonged to the witch, and now it has become money. It and only it is able to make more money ... or at least that is what the infant believes.

But turn into what? Socialism? In communism? I do not think so. And after all, it does not matter. An authentic creative act cannot be entirely projected (Jung, 2012). The courage to include the unknown has as reward luminous answers, because they are unexpected. It is not what we precisely expect from creativity? For now, we continue to use the old puerile resources to avoid the sacrifice necessary for transformation. The “(...) pluralizing effect on the identities, producing a variety of new possibilities and positions of identification, and making the most positional identity, more politic, more plural and diverse; less fixed, unified or transhistorical” that Hall observed and assigns to globalization (2014, p.51) also makes sense if its compared to the compulsive transformation that many mythological infants practiced in an attempt to confuse and deter their tormentors. Zagreus, the first Dionysius, son of Zeus and Persephone, wanted to escape the dismemberment by the Titans sent by Hera, metamorphosing himself into a bull and other creatures (Kury, 2009). Another example among man, is the story of the Celtic hero Gwion who, fleeing from the deadly threat of the witch Ceridwen turned himself into a fish, in a hare, a bird and finally in wheat grain; form which the witch, transfigured in a black hen, eventually swallowed him (Wood, 2011, pp.100-101).

I apologize for concluding my text with another obviousness: it is impossible to form a unit when it is denied parts of the whole. If we turn to the deep sense of the term, the achievement of an identity that becomes deep and authentic, depends on the transcendence of an egocentric and awkward stage of childhood to a loving delivery, mature and responsible of the human society towards its surroundings. Mutual respect of love between potentialities and limitations, and with the tacit commitment of transforming together. Only under these conditions an ethnic appeal may be more than blind fundamentalism, diaspora in despair, incompetence mendicant, academicism, eugenics, curation, fanaticism, trafficking, terrorism or the ultimate fashion cry.
Sources


