



BRAZIL AND EUROPE: THE FEEBLE STRENGTH OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

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Heritage of our time

It is at once extremely easy and extremely difficult to try to find one definition – or even, furthermore, an icon with strong symbolic burden – which compresses the complex tangle of relations, feelings, attachments, oppositions, that distinguish a relationship, founding, on the one hand, but, on the other, one which had suffered – and still suffers, progressively – substantial transformations such as the one established between Europe and Brazil. However, it would be a banal observation, and also largely dissected, in a time of the making of the Brazilian cultural modernity, which would add nothing of the critical strength that, otherwise, this relationship implies and reproduces.

Maybe for this reason it is suitable to previously question, before discussing the matter of the strengthening of the dialogue responsible for developing the Institute for Studies Brazil Europe partnership, about the essential chiasmus of what Brazil means to Europe and, especially, what Europe means to Brazil. It is crucial not only to verify the still existence of stereotypes on both sides – a singular primary image of a jolly Brazil, country of the everlasting-future, and a sepia image of an Europe as an oxidized heritage of already extinct traditions – but also to perceive, in a critical point of view, the nature and the consistence

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of the relationship which constitutes the chiasmus oppositional rhetoric figure, the one responsible for combining the two worlds (with irreducible times and identities) and representing the problematic and polymorphic link of this combination, simultaneously its crucial element.

Antônio Cândido, on a classic definition which compresses several layers of modern interpretations on the Brazilian making process constructed by founding thinkers of 1930s in particular, observes: “In our culture there is a fundamental ambiguity: we are a Latin people, of European cultural heritage, but ethnically half-caste, located in the Tropics, influenced by primitive, Amerindians and African cultures” (CÂNDIDO, 1980: 119).

The expression “cultural heritage”, used by Cândido and associated to a problem found not exactly on the origins, but at the beginnings (to continue Cândido’s discourse slope which constitutes the basis of the fundamental dial of *Formação da Literatura Brasileira*), is very accurate and leads the reader to rethink an alternate idea of tradition. It situates tradition on the horizontal line of present, what values its actual state and working inside contemporary Brazil, although it also signs the difficulties (the “ambiguities”) which are associated to these complex identity roots. In his understanding, heritage indeed do not refer to a relic or museum-like idea of European culture reminiscence, but the very concept stresses a boundless process on the transformation of Europe image in another one which Brazil have already appropriated, especially on the seminal years of twentieth century Modernism.

It is convenient to remember here the relevant contribution of Ernst Bloch and his 1935 article (written in 1932), in which the author re-conceptualizes heritage, inscribing it precisely on an *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* perspective, of “heritage of our time”, therefore a current heritage. Indeed, the philosopher, setting apart from an idea of homogeneity or contemplative and limited understanding of the presence of the past in the present, captures the non-synchronic character which defines the concept of heritage, how it constitutes a complex time, structured on a plurality of times, from a famous *incipit* of reflection: “Not all people exist in the same Now. They do so only externally, by virtue of the fact that they may all be seen today. But that does not mean that they are living at the same time with others.” (BLOCH, 1977:22)

The contemporaneity-of-the-non-contemporary such as represented (which becomes a crucial conceptual tool to read the cultural processes of the “semi-periphery”, not only in Brazil, as illustrated by Franco MORETTI, 1994:47) also suits

Bloch to show that beyond the Hegelian scheme it is possible to find utopian and changing spaces, and, on a current heritage reformulation, from the incomplete richness of the past is plausible to derive an “additional revolutionary force” (38) on Now.

Such as the image, one could say, Europe can be placed in relation to Brazil not from the representational processes simplification which characterizes it, with some alive and strong figures that in the meantime keep influencing the production of a image (just to mention one example, the idea of Brazil as “Europe boundaries” or “periphery without centre” – after the loss of a metropolitan centroid –, such as Sérgio Buarque de Holanda thinks it, before the 1935 seminal article “Corpo e Alma do Brasil”, – to show to non-Brazilians a “theory of America” – and *Raízes do Brasil* celebrated exordial chapter, published in 1936), but it transfers indeed to the force field associated to the image.

Hence, thinking critically on the current European heritage on Brazil, it can be meaningful to stay not only on the exchange phenomenological aspects, but to rethink this exchange from a *provincialization* of European image which has been historically settled, though in a unstable and variable manner, in Brazil. This effort can be inscribed on what Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests, in Postcolonial Studies, concerning the modern making of Southern Asia in *Provincializing Europe*, where Europe works as an “imaginary figure”, articulated from schematic and stereotyped forms, which is settled on another context because, notes the Indian critic, “it is impossible to think the phenomenon of our political modernity – the presence of modern institutions such as the State, the bureaucracy and the capitalistic enterprise – without turning to categories and concepts that deepen their roots on European intellectual, even theological, traditions.” (CHAKRABARTY, 2004: 16). One declination which somehow produces a fertile tension with Roberto Schwarz’ celebrated model of “misplaced ideas” that, although pivotal to understand local processes of universalist dynamics and derived from the European centre expansion (colonial, capitalist, modern, etc), nonetheless considers lessen the plastic character that it associated to the re-location of the idea or the copy, i.e. on the creative act of reading which can be more than a literal reproduction, a translation refounding the original.

Thus, in this perspective, what emerges would be not so much the quantitative dimension of Europe-Brazil dialogue, which, as we know, for historically and

geopolitical issues, passes through a rough reformulation from the end of the World War II, culturally and politically shifting the Brazilian axis to the American side of the Atlantic, but the relationship responsible for unite the different Europes which constitute Europe image, current and branded by the difference, in Brazil.

It is interesting, in this perspective, to create a strong and substantial partnership, between Europe and Brazil, to qualify the kind of strength which would articulate the current European heritage in Brazil and modify radically the idea of tradition and replace its conservative with its transformer trace: the idea that tradition always is an inexhaustible translation. It is the strength, the one resulted from the deconstruction of the relationship link (which would be conveniently called tradition) between Europe and Brazil, that, due to its dissemination in multiple angles of Brazilian culture and social praxis, does not possess homogeneity or centre, but is substantiated by its dispersion. It is the strength which can define, oxymoronically, a feeble strength, without any reductionist connotation of the rhetorical figure which constitutes it.

The ideas of the last Jacques Derrida also contributes to clarify the role of this feeble strength, especially when the author is concerned with deconstructing the sovereign power paradigm, a power that, according to him, always has to do with a *phatasma*, especially in antithesis with other paradigms somehow dominant in current debate, for instance the one thought by Giorgio Agamben from the connection between sovereignty and biopolitics. Derrida devises a new political thought (in the context of threats and disasters at the beginning of the millennium) structured on the idea of a feeble strength or a strength of feebleness, i.e. with no strict power but not at all devoid of strength. The French-Algerian philosopher also leverages to redefining this key idea a famous thesis on the concept of history by Walter Benjamin, which states that 'to us, as every generation before us, was given a feeble messianic strength ('eine schwache messianische Kraft'), which the past is entitled. This right does not elude.' (BENJAMIN, 1997: 23). In this rearrangement of the concept of power, a minor power, deflated but not annulled, an interesting conceptual metaphor may arise to rethink the relation between Brazil and Europe, also apart from the hegemonic forces which dominate nation and its narratives, which can reestablish new ways of constructing Euro-Brazilian 'in common' projects, from a minimal but effective and affective force, buried in the heritage of the present.

Thinking about the relations between Brazil and Europe today is to question about not only the historical power, but also the cultural that this alternative 'in com-

mon' implies. What perhaps allow us to overcome that 'fundamental ambiguity' highlighted by Cândido. And show otherwise other possible paths of which the Institute for Studies Brazil Europe (IBE) is called insistently to think.

Common archive

Modifying the perception modes of 'tradition' in the relations between Europe and Brazil, it is possible to think about new bilateral paths and partnerships. It would be in fact a complex exercise if the relations perspective were reduced exclusively to the cooperation and economic exchanges plans. The World Trade Organization (WTO) data, in this sense, show how during 2000 and 2010 the Brazil-European Union trade suffered a contraction, in variable measure, in all items but hydrocarbons and mining products. As it would be abstract thinking that the two divergent phases with which Brazil and Europe are crossing the international crises – the former with inclusive tendencies growth; the latter with a de-growth process with considerable menaces to a rights heritage built over many decades – have created paradoxal conditions of new symmetries and complementarities. It would be possible indeed to decline, here and now, the concept of feeble strength, considering that two blocks, national and transnational, could find original ways to compensate the respective criticalities from an appreciation of residuary affinities and convergences that have marked the historical singularities on both sides.

Another voice of a relevant European thinker – Portuguese, but with an effectively continental projection and teaching –, Eduardo Lourenço, author of an unexhausted reflection on the 'European crisis' of more than six decades, also points to a shift in the Europe's paradigm from a de-powering of its historic and symbolic strength.

Of his prolonged questioning, it is relevant to quote a fragment of one of his innumerable essays on Europe. This is one of the best known and mentioned of *A Europa Descantada*, 'A Europa no imaginário português' (1992), where the threshold, the relational 'outside', also implicated by the very European countries in transnational perspective, emerges very clearly:

It was not only in political terms, but in all others that our European option – actually inevitable and necessary – was never or little thought of as it should have been. Is this non-thinking of our European adventure that suddenly reappears

– and not only just for us, Portuguese – under a concerned figure, as it happens to all the thoughtless, disturbing from inside the image of our *exhilarating Europe*, the one we adhere to. (LOURENÇO, 2005a: 114)

Eduardo Lourenço's community thought (focused not only on Europe), derived from an enlargement of the thought's boundaries on the factual unthought-of European history, can be inscribed on a singular and symmetric direction towards the problem outlined above. Discussing, for instance, the European identity as a labyrinth and plural exception inside an anti-essentialist and perplexed key about the lingering nationalism, which designs the continental community on an ideal and utopist plan, of abstract existence, Eduardo Lourenço concludes, stating that 'An acknowledge European utopia is just worth living as a Europe's victory over Europe, over its own fiction that, consciously or unconsciously, has conditioned its destiny, against its reality. In short, the triumph of its *sublime non-identity* over the ghosts of its delusional identity.' (LOURENÇO, 2005a: 240). In contrast, strength declines as power rather than an act, the community set in thus depowered from the historical point of view (as work) and repowered from the cultural point of view.

The sense of a centre or the practice of European studies in Brazil, derived from a reconceptualization which repositions both Europe and Brazil finding their affinities in the less brighter side of their histories (faults, omissions, misunderstandings, etc.), which may become an array of new modes of bilateral relationship. In a way, Europe and Brazil remain trapped in each other's imagination that is feed sometimes by specular surfaces. The operation complexity of *Euro Bureaucracy*, for instance, is inexistent to the non-specialized Brazilian public opinion, as well as Brazil continues occupying in Europe first an imaginary position rather than a real one, especially its human, geographic, and cultural richness are leveled within conventional readings and marked by rhetoric always related to the problems and mythologies of 'origins' (an Edenic rhetoric as well as other drastically opposite).

The relationship restructuring from a tenuous strength will especially value the extent of knowledge about that other aspects also relevant on the dialogue between both sides. One might say that, accordingly, the quality of a renewed relationship would establish over flows of different nature. The knowledge required to promote another partnership is not that of a grand narrative. It is, on the contrary, the rescue of residuary or smaller knowledge, of scattered or buried fragments, of discriminated bodies, not hegemonic voices. Is a minor

policy, apparently dedicated to attenuation, one that finds in this risk its own survival, which is what Michel Foucault calls genealogy and founding of a less flashy but more 'effective' way to rethink proper and improper pasts.

Here also arises from an institutional point of view the requirement of a common archive. I do not use here the concept of archive on a always foucauldian 'a priori historical' sense, but, instead, in a more immediate way, rescuing its etymologic sense (*archeion*) of public structure, a common and open space, able to build, both in Brazil and Europe, a collection of practices, knowledge, not necessarily hegemonic narratives, but otherwise not reported and scattered that precariously survive as traces or signs.

What *European Studies* in Brazil and *Brazilian Studies* in Europe (to also highlight the interlinguistic dimension of the dialogue), in a relation based on an explicit reciprocity, as well as uprooted from indecipherable cumuli of narratives and pasts, can modify the knowledge from both sides and innovate both European and Brazilian discourses from a rescue of a relationship based not on tradition, but on the broad sharing of figures and values, visible or faded, belonging to themselves and the other at once.

In fact is the chiasmus figure that should be recast, outlining the 'in common' of Brazil in Europe and of Europe in Brazil. A study centre, therefore, can be positioned on a third, intermediate and translating place between the members and would be called to value on the one hand the archives, but on the other to dialogically find a shared methodology which would fully comprehend the potential of the chiasmus for a greater European cohesion and an acceleration in the Brazilian growth with quality social inclusion.

Heritage and communities: a thinking perspective

In order to seek a qualification to this methodology, one can say that it is differentially articulated through a perspective closer to Foucault's genealogy, which is considered one of the major analytical tools in cultural studies. That genealogy refers to a human dimension usually detached from the monumental and teleological construction of history, or inside the eroded traditions of historicism, is attested by one of its known definitions that stated it figuratively and effectively, placing it 'in the joint of the body and of history: it should show the entire body marked by history, and the history that devastates the body' (FOUCAULT, 1977: 37). Through genealogy is possible to draw up a 'wirkliche Histoire', an effective history, (42) that does not introduce powers, but discontinuities of power – valuing them –, turning inside out

strength's very sense and magnitude: for this reason it finds an inscription first in the body than on logos.

Thinking about this reconceptualization of Europe-Brazil relationship contributes to re-place (such as genealogy indeed implies) the poles of discussion which can restructure the dialogue between both sides. In the sense that, beyond themes or disciplines, is the dimension previous to the construction of critical fields that is affected by the processes. Crosswise, therefore, it is a Brazil-Europe cut imposed accordingly to the concepts so far outlined that will determine the relevance of placements, instead of knowledge, concerning the genealogic dynamics of the project.

From this point of view, the lesson that arises in Brazil at the time of modernization and crystallization of some of the leading modern ideologies of the 20th century, and whether it is attached to a powerful building capacity through the lessen, by subtraction or the margin, supporting constructivist principles based on the rest or in this residue – this field definition will evoke the poetic roots on which is structured this thought – in gaps, in debilities reorganized into new, not defibrillated but vigorous other-figures that can show Europe other horizons beyond the crisis.

Always falling short of any thematic reduction and proposing a case-by-case, otherwise 'paradigmatic' thought, which could provide a discreet side access to macro-problems of our present, I would say that the ways in which community is rethought by the Brazilian culture – including the historic contrast with the also tragic archive that Europe was able to produce throughout its history, where community ideologies have provided the way in which negative protections and the immune excluding identification measures of groups and territories were practiced – create the conditions for new forms of 'in common', crucial in the harsh times of progressive dissolution of European social certainties and confidence in welfare state. This opens up an axis of cooperation and confrontation, useful for the Brazil Europe dialogue, not only on theoretical implications, but also on the practices implied.

What fragility and vulnerability expose to Europe, as well as the state modernization projects highlight both Europe and Brazil, in the already contemporary globalised contexts, is the reconfiguration – the re-harmonization – of heterogeneous social bodies to let ripen an idea of citizenship not partial

or disorganic in relation to rights, but capable of exercise its governance within a more complex and rich framework of the exercise of sovereignty. What is at stake, here as in many other contexts, is a redefinition of the idea of community – which explains the dispute between at least two Europes which Eduardo Lourenço often makes reference – suspended, according to the Jean-Luc Nancy critique and anti-essentialist review (also articulated later by Giorgio Agamben and Roberto Esposito), between a common being, a full and nostalgic identity, which assumes the production and completion of its own essence as a work, or a community that is not the ghost of the lost community, but is what actually *happens* to us, from the society (citizenship) with a constitutive loss of the very community (NANCY, 1992: 37). The difference of this critical joint resides in the permanently incomplete character, not homogeneous, dynamic, of the idea of community; the later therefore does not find its principle in construction, but on incompleteness, a structured community in lack of work, thus *désœuvrée*, inoperative.

It inaugurates the field for the relevant thinking about Eduardo Lourenço's Europe, for who Europe, including in the current crisis, is a reflective field, pivotal to the construction of a contemporary thought. Lawrence points out as Europe's potential precisely what a exclusively exterior geopolitics analysis would criticize, i.e., to quote again the terminology of the Portuguese philosopher, its 'sublime non-identity', a 'sublime imperfection', a powerless lucidity. It is an image of community without work, feeble but, once consciously admitting its feebleness, redraws its role in the world, making it a negotiating and mediation role, intermediate and dialogic, necessarily devoted to seek polyphony or a counterpoint, to remain in the field of musical metaphor.

It is not a coincidence that a reconfiguration of the European project, based on a thought of the strength, comes from a thinker who is primarily a literary critic. Because, and this is a disjunctive perspective I would like to add, maybe it is in Literature as a field of the impossible that becomes possible (how it should be, by definition, politics), it is only on the rippled surface of the literary text that becomes possible to reconfigure a community design project, exposed on its vulnerability and limits by the ruthless mirror of demographic change (such as migrations) or social problems (such as the aging) or in the relationship between the technique's world and sustainability in the resources management, just reminding some of the IBE key topics.

Europe and Brazil have, from this point of view, a unique heritage to deepen this topic, and Brazilian culture has a single repository to think, within the also violent conflicts of modernity, in feeble communities, in complex inter-culturalisms which disrupt and put, nonetheless, the essentialist identities constantly under discussion (I quote as a relevant example a story written by Guimarães Rosa, 'Recado do morro', from *Corpo de Baile*, showing a possible and decisive community, although articulated outside the norm, in the margins, as an alternative to institutional bias).

To finish, moving from theory to life (which marks the return to Antônio Cândido's thought), there is an agenda of possible work for the IBE which stems from these considerations on Europe in one of its most critical moments, with an involvement on the reconstruction processes of citizenship in Brazil. What Brazil can provide as relevant is how to anchor social issues associated to its historical experience (migrations, identities, citizenship, human rights, etc), not only on a broader agenda, but also as a strategic planning that could find effective syntheses to conflicts among the confrontational Europes.

Actually, Europe and Brazil can find in this terrain, of construction of a new being-in-common, which rearticulates fragilities and fragments within new inclusion figures, their own modes – effectively inter-national – to renew the rights and found new citizenships, both complementary and alternative from those solely imposed by the markets. This is a mission that deserves to be attempted by both sides, Europe and Brazil, which motivates the critical and fully open development of an Institute Brazil Europe.

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