CHAPTER 7

# Intercultural Polyphonies Against the 'Death of Multiculturalism': Concepts, Practices and Dialogues

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## Introduction

The contemporary intercultural travel is a global journey, a circumnavigation powered by the speed of digital technologies and this concept of intercultural underwrites all the comings and goings, the transmission and reception of information that are implicit in communication, diversity and in the transit that the prefix *inter* suggests. Intercultural transits have always been present, from the perverse intercultural dialogue of colonialism to the current cultural heteroglossia of the Internet. This is why I propose to examine the motivations, characteristics and regulations of cultural interactions in their perpetual movement, devoid of spatial or temporal borders, in a dangerous but stimulating indefinition of limits. This reflection approaches the topic of intercultural competence (IC) and the concept of interculturalism (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Costa & Lacerda, 2007; Dervin, Gajardo, & Lavanchy, 2011; Ibanez & Saenz, 2006; Sarmento, 2010) as movement, communication, dynamics, but also encounter and synthesis between cultures, with the purpose of discussing their pragmatic

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consequences in academia and society. Ultimately, the objectives of this chapter are both scientific and political because the *intercultural* stands at the junction of knowledge and politics (Dervin et al., 2011, p. 1).

I start this reflection by discussing the differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism, before proceeding to a definition of IC as the result of interdisciplinary dialectics, resorting to the concepts of hybridity, cultural translation, contact zone, emergent/absent narrative, threshold, and intersecting discursive fields. The discussion will be located within the Western European and particularly Portuguese contexts, with references to Portugal, France, Germany, USA, and the English-speaking world in general. The author of this chapter assumes a Western-centric perspective and a clear preference for Portugal-related issues, due to a long experience in teaching, researching and fieldwork in this Portugal. Portugal is also an excellent, albeit seldom explored (at least at the international level), case study, as far as colonial and postcolonial narratives of dominance, hybridity and intercultural contact are concerned because of its recent and contemporary history. In fact, Portugal fits within Achille Mbembe's image of 'interweaving logics in a continuous improvisation and negotiation' (Mbembe, 1992, p. 5), since the country is still struggling with the reconstruction of its post-1974 identity, as a former colonial power once central within its own empire, though always peripheral in Europe.

Normative practices of modern research in the Humanities do not privilege relations of permanence any longer, to the detriment of relations of movement—a perspective that changed as a result of the endless mobilities in the world today. As Stuart Hall (1994) states, the notions of belonging and homeland have been reconceptualized in contexts of migration, deterritorialization, diaspora, virtuality, digitalization and other features of the globalized world, that make even more pertinent the principle by Hall that cultural identities are not fixed but fluid, not given but performed. In this way, we cross the first great border of intercultural transits—the frontier created by the concept of culture itself—avoiding the commonplace notion of the intercultural as a mere 'us *versus* them', and steering clear of the fundamental error of a form of interculturalism that ignores the diversity contained in its own definition. This approach generates an interdisciplinary dialogue between fields that have traditionally ignored each other, such as translation studies and anthropology, law and the sciences of language, history and literary studies, because IC entails the ability to understand the close relationship between language, culture, arts, conventions and discourses, in a constant process of problem solving and anticipation, adaptation and awareness.

Moreover, this methodology is also intercultural at its source and subjects, not only in the objects that are examined; because one should not fear the alterity that, after all, one proposes to study. Hence, the present approach to the notion of the intercultural functions as a sort of third space, to quote Homi Bhabha (1994), a third space for hybridity, subversion and transgression. Hybridity—and cultural translation, which Bhabha regards as a synonym for hybridity—is politically subversive. Hybridity is the space where all binary divisions and antagonisms, typical of conservative political and academic concepts, including the old opposition between theory and practice, critical reflection and politics, science and humanities do not work anymore. They do not work in IC either, since I understand it as the capacity for unceasing movement, communication and cooperation between cultures.

## The Power of Definitions: Between Science and Politics.

In contemporary cultural diversity, past and present, global and local, converge in the analysis of concepts and objects closely related to ongoing political, economic, social and cultural transformations. Scientific research is also an area of intersections, of permanent cultural translation; that is, of reinterpretation, of repositioning of symbols and signs within existing hierarchies. In this reflection on IC, I encourage critical readings that attempt to look beyond arbitrary meanings, favouring contextualized interpretations that, in their uncertainty, are likely to produce new hypotheses, theories and explanations.

Present-day converging interests are evident in the expectations of both publishers and the reading public and in the relations of power that pervade Western academic life, with its tenure tracks, 'publish or perish' mantras, rankings and indexes, and general anti-humanities trends. These notions and expectations persistently transform the output of researchers, to the extent that they tend to adapt their practices and creative capabilities to professional and economic pressures. However, many researchers often respond to such pressure with their own strategies, innovations and subversions, and seldom do they remain passive within the process of incorporation in large-scale political and institutional systems. Networks and echoes emanating from the international academic community spread rapidly throughout the globe, and their multiple forms of cultural interaction bring with them their own forms of manipulation and subversion of power. These actions carried out in the peripheries—and which are, in turn,

central in the lives and experiences of individuals—can be designated and described, more or less metaphorically, as 'borderzones' (Bruner, 1996, pp. 157–179), 'thresholds' (Davcheva, Byram, & Fay, 2011, p. 144), 'intersecting discursive fields' (Tsing, 1993), or 'spaces on the side of the road' (Stewart, 1996), all of them reflecting the dialogic nature of culture and IC.

This is why IC is the place where the overlapping of cultures occurs, which is the characteristic of a site of cultural translation. Cultural translation—both as Judith Butler's 'return of the excluded' (Butler, 1996, pp. 45–51; Butler, Laclau, & Žižek, 2000) and as Bhabha's hybridity—is a major force of contemporary democracy, also in the academic field. For Judith Butler, the universal—here understood as a synonym of hegemony, a Gramscian combination of power and consent (Gramsci, 1971)—can only be conceptualized in articulation with its own peripheries, the aforementioned 'borderzones', 'spaces on the side of the road' and other metaphors. Thus, what has been excluded from the concept of universality forces this same concept—from the outside, from the margins—to accept and include it again, which can only happen when the concept itself has evolved enough to include its own excluded. This pressure eventually leads to the rearticulation of the current concept of universality and its power. Butler calls the process through which universality readmits its own excluded 'translation'. Cultural translation may work as the 'return of the excluded', pushing limits, bringing about epistemological changes and opening new spaces for free discussion and independent research. Because, for Bhabha, as well as for the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2006, 2008), the potential for change is located at the peripheries. Peripheries marked by hybridity, where the 'new arrivals' (Santos, 2006)—'new arrivals' or 'excluded' such as polytechnics and universities from peripheral countries and regions, but also unconventional research groups, young female academics—are able to use subversion to undermine the strategies of the powerful, regardless of who they are.

When talking about intercultural experience, it is tempting to talk on behalf of the others—a notion that is always contingent and relational, as 'we' are the others' other—but seldom do we grant a voice to those 'others' themselves (Cerqueira, 2013). However, the true intercultural experience occurs when we are able to see ourselves and our work as if we were those so-called others, whose otherness originates, for example, from their nationality, gender, orientation, academic background or field of research. Let us remember that Derrida (1981 [1972]) has shown how

the construction of an identity is always based on exclusion and that a violent hierarchy results from such dichotomous pairs, as in the binaries man–woman, white–black, colonizer–colonized, straight–gay, elite–masses, and nowadays also in science & technology–arts & humanities.

But local and global practices and knowledge—with their associated discursive productions—do not form a dichotomy. Instead, their correlation provides a stimulating dynamic tension, as the search for local concepts generates new concepts, which encourage challenging epistemological and phenomenological adaptation, under a genuinely interdisciplinary and intercultural perspective. Any approach must be located within the network of ideological and material contexts of a given region, which is always an evolving territory. In a postcolonial world, the intersections of past and present, global and local, define the guidelines to explore the negotiation and evolution of concepts, as well as the material forces that influence individuals, communities and nations. Postcolonial societies, either Eastern or Western, Northern or Southern, are in a continuous intercultural flow. This constant need to negotiate and construct identity through a polyphony of narratives actually underlies life in most territories of the world. The concept of interculturalism explored here and the related idea of IC also develop from polyphonic narratives of dynamic tensions. This concept of interculturalism might be compared to the concept of multiculturalism which I understand as a delimited space, within which different cultures cohabit in a self-enclosed, stationary ignorance. But in reality, the multicultural space exists as a result of intercultural, multidirectional and reciprocal (random?) movements, and as such, will be discussed here.

In general, multiculturalism has been analysed under an ontological approach, as an existing or desired social reality. Multiculturalism has also been widely subjected to a political-ideological lens, focusing both on the dominant or host society, and on the migrant or (allegedly) minority groups. Conversely, interculturalism is analysable as movement with an underlying stream of consciousness, as manifested in critically aware journeys, in mutual knowledge, understanding and communication. Interculturalism is then, and preferably, a hermeneutic option, an epistemological approach, as Martine Abdallah-Pretceille emphasizes, because no fact is intercultural *per se*, nor is interculturalism an attribute of the object. Only intercultural analysis can give it this character, through a paradigm of hybrid, segmentary and heterogeneous thinking (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, pp. 480–483).

Multiculturalism is a judgement of existence: in the same physical or conceptual space, different people coexist, from different cultures (in terms of memories, options, references, values, preferences, projects, expectations, experiences, practices and attitudes), but—under ideal circumstances—they mutually recognize the right to live together. Multiculturalism preaches not only the right to share a territory, but also the obligation to live in it according to the cultures of those various groups and communities. Thus, multiculturalism tends to assume a utopian character, stripped of dilemmatic or conflicting aspects, ignoring all impending cases of conflict of norms, values and practices. By following this argument, and bearing in mind that utopias are by definition unreal, it is tempting to pretend a shocked disappointment at the alleged failure of multiculturalism and jump into the easy conclusion that it is in fact impossible for different cultures to coexist. Therefore, when this discourse becomes an actual practice, those who are identified as agents of difference might be segregated or ultimately erased—through illegalization, deportation, imprisonment, assassination—in the name of common sense, so that a normal(ized) society may prevail.

In fact, there are political implications when distinguishing multiculturalism from interculturalism. The political exploitation and ideological abuse of the concept of multiculturalism can be related to a polemical speech by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who declared the 'death of multiculturalism', without elaborating on the nature and causes of such failure. Merkel was referring to the implicit illusion that Germans and foreign workers could live side by side, once German workers lost the hope that '*they* wouldn't stay', 'they' being the *gastarbeiters*, or 'guest workers', who arrived in Germany to fill the labour shortage during the economic boom of the 1960s (*The Guardian*, 17 October 2010). In Merkel's speech, the representation of these groups and their competences is underpinned by a certain shared notion of culture, multiculturalism, and their agents. The 'death of multiculturalism' implies that its agents, those who have brought along multiplicity and difference, have also failed and are no longer welcome, thus recalling Giuliana Ferry's approach to 'conditional hospitality' in this volume (Chap. 6). But recent history—in Germany as elsewhere—has taught us that discursive categories and symbolic markers of identity have actual and very dramatic effects in the everyday experience of groups and individuals.

The apparent shortcomings of multiculturalism require the transition to a more complex stage, that of IC, in the context of diversity that now

characterizes Western societies. The depiction of interculturalism as facilitating an interactive and dynamic cultural exchange is concerned with the task of developing cohesive societies, by turning notions of singular identities into notions of multiple ones. Based upon a deep sharing of differences of culture and experience, interculturalism encourages the formation of interdependencies, which structure identities that go beyond nations or simplified ethnicities (Booth, 2003, p. 432). According to Meer and Modood (2012), there are four ways in which conceptions of interculturalism are being positively contrasted with multiculturalism. These are, first, as something greater than coexistence, interculturalism is allegedly more geared toward interaction and dialogue than multiculturalism. Second, that interculturalism is conceived of as something less groupist or more yielding of synthesis than multiculturalism. Third, that interculturalism is something more committed to a stronger sense of the whole, in terms of such things as societal cohesion and national citizenship. Finally, that where multiculturalism may be illiberal and relativistic, interculturalism is more likely to lead to criticism of illiberal cultural practices, as part of the process of intercultural dialogue. Modood goes even further to state that the multicultural framework has allowed the evolution from biological racism to cultural racism, emphasizing the old dichotomy of self and other, and producing an idea of culture that is naturalistic and essentialist, through the homogenization of identities (Werbner & Modood, 1999, pp. 3–4). Indeed, racism can exist without race, operating through reductionist discourses that favour the cultural explanation at the expense of other levels of analysis, and approaching interactions in a mono-causal way (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1985). Such interpretations posit that cultures, in essence, occupy different, irregular spaces and that cultural belonging explains mutually exclusive and incompatible behaviours.

Despite the obvious difficulty of the task, for the sake of argument it is appropriate to establish here a brief diachronic perspective. The concept of interculturalism emerged in France during the 1970s, due to the need for the inclusion of immigrant children and consequent adaptation of educational methods in the face of an increasingly multicultural society. This simple chronological information contains two conceptions already noted earlier: the use of the prefix *inter* assumes that two or more cultures interact, while the prefix *multi* does not assume hybridization, but instead the coexistence of various cultures, stratified and hierarchical. This model of IC began to be defended in the francophone world and soon spread throughout Europe. Actually, French interculturalism is less anchored in

civil rights movements and more influenced by international organizations, such as UNESCO and the European Council. Schools, as a means of inclusion of different communities, were the first institutions to feel the need for IC, through the practice of sociocultural mediation (Meunier, 2008a, 2008b, 2009, 2014). In Portugal, sociocultural mediation emerged in the 1990s, as a result of the country's joining the then European Economic Community. Through it, Portugal established further contacts with countries where sociocultural mediation was already an essential institutional way to achieve inclusion. Portuguese policies of sociocultural mediation are essentially performed by qualified communication agents, who promote dialogue between cultures and social groups, seeking to mitigate differences by knowing and understanding them (ACM, 2014).

On the other hand, the multiculturalism concept prevails in the Anglo-Saxon world, where groups of different cultural matrices are integrated in public life in order to ensure social cohesion, but not inclusion. Integrating or assimilating migrants is not part of the same national and societal project as creating a society that offers similar opportunities to everyone. And even if it is not made clear right away, not everyone of foreign nationality is labelled similarly. Moreover, a 'well-integrated' person is one who has become 'like us' and thus, implicitly, will never become 'us' (Dervin et al., 2011, pp. 7–8). Ultimately, a 'well-integrated' person has rejected or concealed those features that might be identified as foreign, thus rejecting or concealing a significant part (if not all) of her own identity, the stable core to one's individuality and sense of personal location.

Interestingly, a significant part of the existing literature on multiculturalism in English is, in fact, an exhaustive list of differences between an individual *us* shocked but full of good will, and a collective *other*, characterized as homogeneous and hypersensitive to offences to their strange traditions. This literature takes the form of empirical manuals with very pragmatic purposes: to facilitate economic relations with exotic partners, and/or become popular university toolkits. Departing invariably from artificial situations of conflict, misunderstanding, lack of communication, latent hostility and general embarrassment caused by exposure to the cultural norms and practices of the 'other', seldom do the explanations provided equate to the possibility of a certain action being dictated by the individual's conscience (see Dresser, 2005; Storti, 1994, 2007 [2001]; Trompenaars & Hampden Turner, 1997). For the authors who favour this essentialist approach, it seems to be inconceivable that a non-Western (i.e., non-Anglo-Saxon) behaviour may derive from something other than the

simple dictates of tradition and culture, met without dissonance or place for the agency of autonomous individuals. This rather deceitful naiveté (see Chap. 1, and politically biased strategy that supports such 'efficient' models of IC.

When highlighting intergroup differences instead of intragroup and interindividual differences, business, education, training and communication in general become strictly culturalized. Yet, it should be recognized that the margin between the sheer refusal of the cultural dimension and the overemphasis on culture as the determining factor of behaviour is narrow. However, any excessive focus on the different characteristics of others leads to exoticism as well as to communicational void, and enhances, consciously or not, stereotypes and prejudices, because all work representing the other is political and expresses power relationships, as any labelling or categorization does. When an individual—who is seldom the prototype of a group—fails to be incorporated into the expected (prejudged) framework, serious difficulties arise, because in reality people cannot be understood outside a process of communication and exchange. Questioning one's identity in relation to others is an integral part of IC, as the work of analysis and of acquiring knowledge applies to others as much as to oneself (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, pp. 476–478).

A statement that marks the emphasis currently placed on IC can be found on the seventh 'Common Basic Principle[s] for Immigrant Integration' of the European Union (European Commission, 2004), which argues that the frequent interaction between immigrants and citizens of member states is a fundamental mechanism for inclusion, emphasizing the importance of communal fora, intercultural dialogue and information about immigrants and their cultures. The key point here is the inverse of a mere celebration of diversity of cultures as folklore or as ethnic versions of classic multiculturalism. What is involved here is the positive encouragement of actual encounters between different groups and the creation of dialogue and joint activities. Of course this does not mean that intercultural dialogue has not been part of the multicultural philosophy and practice. But it becomes evident that the idea of multiculturalism has succumbed easily to an interpretation of ethnic cultures, with strictly defined boundaries and static essential components, without internal dissent. In other words, multiculturalism has been oriented towards essentialism, albeit tacitly or implicitly, as is the case of the above cited 'manuals of intercultural communication'.

Alongside multiculturalism's seemingly neutral surface, there is a political discourse that overstresses and may even produce difference between groups while reproducing, justifying and obscuring oppression and inequality. Mainstream multiculturalism, at its core, normalizes the idea that there are different categories of human beings, 'essentialized, primordial, and fixed. Furthermore, multiculturalism posits that it is natural to "stick with your own kind"' (Kromidas, 2011, p. 73). In her thought-provoking work on multiculturalism, essentialism and critical cosmopolitanism in New York primary schools, Maria Kromidas describes a new accommodationist and routinized multiculturalism that has been hegemonically incorporated as the perfect ideological counterpart to global capitalism, very distant from any notion of social justice. This approach to multiculturalism as folklore—where commodified cultures orderly display themselves for the comfort of dominant groups—entails a superficial and acritical understanding of cultural diversity. Relying heavily on the writings of Abdallah-Pretceille, Kromidas also contrasts a multiculturalism that depends on a reified and static conception of culture, with an interculturalism that deconstructs this homogeneous entity, seeking a complex and dynamic multiplicity instead. The former stresses typologies and categorizations while the latter emphasizes mutations, fusions and relations. Again, and as stated above, typologies and categorizations are expressions of power, politically and historically constructed, and are by no means universal truths. Hence, the ultimate goal of multiculturalism is a cautious tolerance, while that of interculturalism is conviviality and, again, communication. The very borders that encapsulate the static taxonomy of the former become the object of critique of the latter (Kromidas, 2011, p. 75). For Abdallah-Pretceille, interculturalism implies the shift from an analysis in terms of structures and states to one of complex, changeable and arbitrary situations, processes and cultural phenomena, such as acculturation, assimilation, resistance, identity or hybridity. In brief, culture in action, instead of culture as an object: that is the aim of IC (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006, pp. 479–481).

As it has been argued in this section, interculturalism is conceived through the exchanges, interactions and alterities that take place when cultures meet, and also through the transformations and processes of communication that derive from it. I now discuss interdisciplinary and intercultural dialectics, in order to underpin the dialogue between epistemological and cultural categories, while overcoming the risk of categorization and exclusion that they would otherwise entail.

## Interdisciplinary Dialectics for IC

The key skills for IC rely on interdisciplinarity and creativity, in order to generate a productive intervention both in society and science. Creative, interdisciplinary approaches to intercultural phenomena are, therefore, likely to select unexpected fields of study, with their own hybrid methodologies. This will be the core argument of this section, as the relational and even dialectic epistemology of our perception of IC is crucial for a study that goes beyond meaningless cultural multiplicity. I use here the term 'dialectic' because, although conflict is a necessarily part of the intercultural process—both in social practice and in academic research—synthesis will hopefully emerge from it.

IC and the capacity for dialogue between cultures are not a mere passive acceptance of the multicultural factor, nor the utopia of complete harmonization, but rather an essential component of every culture that wishes to assert itself as such. This type of dialogue occurs among individuals who speak different languages and for whom words and objects have diverse meanings. However, this does not result in a new Tower of Babel nor in social chaos, because there is an attempt at communication, and there is something that is actually shared, which is exactly what allows awareness of, and openness to, differences. When differences are left aside and considered as non-existent, the result can be an insufficient understanding of self and others. That is why it is necessary to understand the communicative challenge presented by the unlimited amount of discourses and texts, within the framework of IC (Ibanez & Saenz, 2006, p. 15).

Although identity and difference are not exclusively discursive, they are contained in discourse, both framed within the broad scope of interaction. It is for this reason that language (or rather, the recognition of the diversity of languages that can be used to express communicative meanings) becomes a major factor when dealing with interculturalism. Understanding the other and what he says requires a coincidence of cultural horizons, along with the recognition of linguistic diversity. On the other hand, linguistic diversity is also present within the boundaries of a national language through intralinguistic social, regional and stylistic differences, as well as through variations in dialect and register, thus calling for an intracultural variety of IC. Some examples are the Portuguese dialect *Mirandês* or the typical accent of Porto, that can be interpreted either as marks of social background, statements of regional identity or as everyday forms of resistance to the cultural centralism of the capital. The

symbolic value attached to different languages or to variants of a common language has to be interpreted in conjunction with other meanings shared within social interaction, because cultural signs are polysemic and their meaning can only be provided through a contextualized analysis that goes well beyond the mere recourse to a dictionary.

Communicative competence develops at the intra- and intercultural levels alike. In other words, speakers need to be aware of the variety of registers and of the plurality of discourses that exist in a culture, either their own or others', following the principle of self- and hetero-analysis, characteristic of IC. The richness of the worlds discovered through linguistic diversity and communicable meanings is such that every translation is necessarily imperfect. As a prerequisite for intercultural dialogue, we must recognize the different languages used by other actors and know their 'hidden dimension[s]' (Hall, 1992 [1966]), even if we cannot do it other than through translation, in order to assimilate the unknown culture as a variation of our own. But practices and styles of translation that are not truly interpretative may hinder rather than facilitate intercultural communication. The hegemonic power of a culture can be enhanced if we accept as natural a translation in which the voices of other cultures are domesticated, without being understood as originated elsewhere. Cultural polyphony can be both facilitated and stalled by academic discourse, so great is the responsibility of the studies conducted on the coexistence and interpenetration of voices from different cultures (Ibanez & Saenz, 2006, p. 18).

If diversity is now more visible than ever, it is also more communicable. This has gradually become obvious with the emergence of *English* as a *lingua franca* in a globalized world and with the growing need for translation skills by individuals and institutions alike. This is why the work of the translator acquires new dimensions: on the one hand, the translator establishes relationships that make knowledge more accessible and that bring people and cultures together; on the other hand, she directly interferes in her country's textual production, to the extent that she recreates, according to a pre-determined model, aesthetic shapes, ideologies and epistemologies to be included in her own tradition. The subversive nature of translation creates a renewed vision of the figure of the translator, granting her an importance that was not evident before, because 'translation is one of the most obvious forms of image making, of manipulation, that we have' (Lefevere, 1990, p. 26). Thus, the study of translation can tell a lot not only about the literary world, but also about the actual world

in general. In other words, translation is another path for the study and acquisition of IC.

Resistance to the impositions of globalization is marked by the way local communities preserve and transmit their oral traditions, dialects, founding myths and precepts of common knowledge, whose cultural symbolism, ethics and aesthetics may function as educational tools for IC. Such manifestations of memory as part of identity, both individual and collective, are also a key factor for the essential sense of continuity, coherence and (re) construction of communities. For the present chapter, the main relevance of narratives of local and oral culture does not lie in their credibility as documents in the positivist sense, because, and according to Sidney Chalhoub (2003, p. 92) on literary fiction, they search for reality, interpret and tell true stories about society, but do not have to function as a glass window over, or as a mirror of, the social 'matter' represented. Their relevance for IC lies instead in the search for complex meanings, in the fact that they allow us to analyse critically the discourses that guide the logic of identity and the practices that move (and are moved by) current and retrospective representations of reality.

The development and extension of the processes of mediatization and migration, which characterize globalized modernity, produce a considerable intensification of deterritorialization, understood as a proliferation of translocalized cultural experiences (Hernàndez, 2002). Deterritorialization implies the growing presence of social forms of contact and involvement which go beyond the limits of a specific territory (Giddens, 1990). Consequently, since culture is intimately related to the practices, regulations and values that structure life within a given society, then intercultural competence should also be aware of how these conventions have been influenced and hybridized by different cultures, as commonly accepted institutions. Depending on the complexity of those regulations, intercultural awareness may focus on everyday tacit rules—the so-called 'commonsense'—as well as on complex political, religious, economic, legal and philosophical systems, because all these ideological processes act at the subliminal and the conscious levels alike, and contribute comprehensively to the construction and regulation of social identities. Systems of social and cultural regulation offer multiple perspectives for understanding in the present field of IC. Some possible topics for consideration are the politics of intervention across borders, court interpreting, codes of conduct in virtual social networks, localization of marketing campaigns, power relations in global tourism, immigration and emigration laws, the unspoken rules of

gender prejudice, or even the history of the laws of slavery and their power over the fate of millions forcibly displaced around the globe.

Indeed, the transition from multiculturalism to interculturalism reinforces principles that emphasize the historical interconnectedness of cultures. Societies have never been static throughout history, as they have always adapted and changed according to the stimuli received from other cultures. The main difference is that, nowadays, cultural contacts and exchanges occur in a much faster and globalized way. When Antonio Perotti writes that 'the intercultural approach to the teaching of History is critical for the understanding of cultural diversity in European societies' (Perotti, 2003, p. 58). This statement has historiographical implications, since intercultural understanding implies a search for syncretic expressions that allow us to achieve a truly universal history, composed by all groups in communication. Thus, the centrality of dialogue for a new ethics of the intercultural requires not only respect for other cultures, but also the understanding of how much they already have in common, how they have interacted in the course of time, and how those similarities provide a basis for the development of new shared insights.

Taking as a paradigmatic case the history of Portuguese expansion, it becomes clear that even in a system of cultural dominance, the global interaction provided by the decompartmentalization of the world was made of reciprocal influences. Europeans left their mark in the world, but while interacting with people overseas they have also experienced significant cultural changes. One should note that contemporary Western culture is in itself the result of hybridization, under the influence of the so-called minority cultures, in a mutual exchange that should not be reduced to mere conflict (Costa & Lacerda, 2007, p. 9). The Portuguese role in the making of an early globalized modernity has to be taken into account when the first steps towards full integration of the planet as 'old world' and 'new world' are brought into systematic conjunction. The creation of a regularized, globe-spanning network from the early-fifteenth to the late-sixteenth centuries involved the interpenetration of the commercial and the political, the material and the imaginary, the elite and the popular elements of the Portuguese experience. This experience forged particular forms of global consciousness that came to affect not only Europe, but also, through the means of the oceanic networks thus created, much of the rest of the world. Thus, if we are to seek some of the most important precursors of present-day modes of globality and thinking globally, sixteenth-century Portugal has to be considered (Inglis, 2010). The interactions of

Portuguese expansion took place not only throughout the empire, but also at the metropolis back home, because of the way overseas people, their objects, habits and beliefs merged into Portuguese society, leaving indelible traces in various fields, from visual arts to erudite music, from poetry to myth, from culinary to navigation instruments, from philosophy to natural sciences. Although the crimes of colonial history are obvious, it would nevertheless be relevant to question—albeit carefully and critically—the process of European expansion as a vehicle for the creation of syncretism, with contributions from multiple sources, encompassing similarities and differences, where fusions happened alongside segregation (Costa & Lacerda, 2007, p. 21). And here we are talking about dialectics and synthesis, once again.

As a result, the colonial and postcolonial world is a space of constant translation, a permanent contact zone, to quote from Boaventura Sousa Santos, a worldwide frontier where peripheral practices and epistemologies are the first to be noticed, though seldom understood. Intercultural encounters and communication—or translation—bring the aspects that each cultural practice believes to be more central or relevant into the contact zone. Therefore, in intercultural contact zones, each culture decides which aspects should be selected for translation, although there are elements that are considered as being untranslatable into other cultures, or too vital to being exposed to the perils and doubts of a contact zone (Santos, 2006, p. 121). The issue of what should or should not be translated is not limited to the selection criteria each group decides to adopt in the contact zone. Beyond active selectivity, there is something we may call passive selectivity, which consists of what has become un-nameable in a given culture, due to long-term severe oppression. These are deeply seated silences, absences that cannot be fulfilled but shape the innermost practices and principles of a cultural identity, such as slavery, racism, religious intolerance, colonial oppression or the subjugation of women, to name but a few.

Taking as an example again the Portuguese colonial space, it has often been represented as a mere adjuvant or antagonist in the dominant narrative of the quest for religious conversion, power, wealth and social promotion. Contact zones thus created were never truly hybrid, as everything that did not fit into this grand narrative had very little meaning for the actors on stage. Similar processes of silencing and production of non-existence—like the silencing of women, minorities, slaves, returnees from ex-colonies, colonized communities and oppressed groups in general—have contrib-

uted to the construction and strengthening of deep asymmetries between cultures, individuals, societies and genders, characteristic of colonialism and patriarchy. Because cultures are monolithic only when seen from the outside or from a distance; when seen closer to, or from within, it is easy to understand that cultures are constituted by many and often conflicting versions of themselves (see Chap. 1, this volume).

More than ever, IC is to be practised both at home and abroad, since the scope may encompass the relations between distant Eastern and Western cultures, as much as between marginal and mainstream, youth and senior, rich and poor, erudite and popular cultures, within the same society, which is only apparently cohesive (for a similar defence of cultural self-analysis see Chap. 8, this volume). Still, the need for intercultural understanding among such diversity is often neglected in favour of issues facilitated by distinctive ethnic markers, which in turn evoke the simplistic dichotomy of the archetype white *versus* black, that is, light *versus* darkness. But then, how to face the deep cultural rifts that exist between generations in a WASP family, for example? Or the growing gap between rich and poor in the receding Western economies? Or the stereotypes that underpin the political dialogue between the countries of Northern and Southern Europe? Michael Chapman argues that, unlike in his home country South Africa, in societies where language, race, religion, class and comfort are reasonably homogeneous, cultural memory hardly needs to be invoked in the daily round. However, the more homogeneous a society, the easier it is to conceal the manipulation of its cultural memory by the politics of power (Chapman, 2005, p. 113). Likewise, within the only apparent homogeneity of Portugal—if we leave aside the presence of the Roma community throughout the country, or the racial variants that postcolonialism and immigration have recently brought into the major cities—there are profound cultural differences between urban centres and rural countryside, coast and inland, north and south, capital and periphery that, although devoid of visible ethnic markers, require IC so that dialogue and knowledge may emerge (see the studies by Cole, 1994 and Wall, 1998, for instance). Only then is it possible to confront the contact zone, the threshold between what we take to be the image of a culture and what is in fact involved in that culture.

When IC is put into practice as we understand it, narratives gradually emerge from a centuries-old silence, narratives that have been absent from history, to adapt once more the concepts developed by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008, pp. 11–43; 2006, pp. 87–125). Emergent narratives grant a voice to subaltern groups, to all those 'others' history is slowly

recognizing. But the narratives of absence are also to be heard as, beyond emergent voices, or maybe through (and because of) them, it becomes possible to access otherwise silenced narratives of the everyday experience lived in the margins of dominant social structures. These narratives generate a source of vital information that complements official history and is absent from the canon of great narratives, with their underlying discourse of power. It is then possible to understand the infinite diversity of human experience as well as the risk it faces of—due to the limits and exclusions imposed by strict isolated areas of knowledge—wasting fundamental experience, that is, of seeing as non-existent or impossible cultural experiences that are in fact available (the 'absent') or possible (the 'emergent') (Santos, 2008, p. 33). Here we may recall the aforementioned thresholds, borderzones, contact zones and intersecting discursive fields, as well as Bakhtin's spaces of enunciation, where the negotiation of discursive doubleness—which is not synonymous with dichotomy—engenders new speech acts (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 360). But while borders imply obvious barriers to be challenged, thresholds emerge as subtle intellectual constructions, which—surprisingly or not—are rarely part of the academic institutional routine. They imply access rather than a dividing line and suggest a potential for making the academic territory more collaborative and intellectually powerful, through new processes of identification and interaction (Davcheva et al., 2011, p. 144), that is to say, through new processes of IC.

However, if deprived of a careful critical analysis, the diversity of practices, knowledge and experiences that result from those narratives may generate a diffuse plurality of self-enclosed discourses and identities, devoid of any actual interaction, much similar to the concept of multiculturalism criticized above. Once again, IC should foster communication, generate mutual intelligibilities between different worldviews, find convergent as well as divergent points and share alternative concepts and epistemologies, so that distant (in both space and time) cultures may ultimately understand each other. Once more—and taking into account that communication occurs through multiple, overlapping and even conflicting discourses—the communication model underlying the concept of interculturalism used here is a palimpsest, a constant intertextuality with other discourses and texts from the past and the present, that will, in turn, be used in future discourses and texts, in a permanent translation and dialogue between cultures.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed IC in some non-traditional perspectives, aiming at the emergence of interstitial spaces that refuse the binary representation of cultural antagonism. The discourse of hybrid spaces is based on a dialectic that does not imply cultural hegemony; instead, hybrid spaces reposition the (necessarily) partial culture from which they emerge in order to construct a sense of community and a cultural memory that grants narrative power to excluded groups. The condition of the contemporary world, within which the social and cultural multiplicity of the human being has become explicit and visible both in the streets and through the media, makes the phenomenon of diversity ubiquitous and necessarily open to discursive, ethnographic, anthropological, historical and semiotic analysis, among endless other possible approaches. As a consequence of such diversity, intercultural transits need a map drawn by disciplines that are seldom taken into account in a conservative approach to the notion of culture. This is why IC should circulate across disciplines, a line of thought that implies hybridization, dynamics and a permanent challenge to itself.

Interculturalism, as we understand it, is a cohesive process of culture making, rather than a mere encounter of inherent cultural characteristics. It draws attention not to rules, structures or explanations, but to exceptions, instabilities and misappropriations (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1985). Interculturalism focuses on processes. It is deeply involved with everyday reality, changes boundary lines, negotiates conceptions and explores transformative dynamics of communication. While questioning definitions, we go further than Meer and Modood (2012) and, instead of contrasting interculturalism and multiculturalism in equal terms, we claim that multiculturalism, as a mere political ontology, is a subcategory of interculturalism. Interculturalism, its study and respective competence go beyond contemporary circumscribed issues, towards the understanding and fostering of global communication, both past and present. Interculturalism and IC are epistemological solutions to the political misuse of multiculturalism as a utopian ontology. As a political stance, multiculturalism becomes anchored in a specific, therefore ephemeral, context. Conversely, as an epistemology, interculturalism becomes atemporal and, if transferred into the political arena, likely to function as an effective answer to the essentialism of multiculturalism. Ultimately, if repositioned within alternative academic strategies, it may lead to understanding and reconciliation.

Resorting to metaphors to summarize better our point, interculturalism can be seen as the movement of the matter that multiculturalism is. And, as there is no static matter in the universe, interculturalism becomes a synonym for the history of humankind, where static, culturally pure societies have never existed. Interculturalism is the grammar that connects the words of the global text and renders their juxtaposition understandable, communicative and eventually translatable. Conversely, these words remain orderly—but meaninglessly—stacked, in parallel columns, in the dictionary of multiculturalism, which is but a survival toolkit for those lost in a strange culture. As it becomes evident, those who are willing to join the intercultural dialogue must follow new paths across old challenges. This renewed experience implies a dynamic force among cultures and disciplines, and this is the reason why we must question and reposition the motivations, discourses, definitions, strategies and rules of cultural interaction in their perennial movement.

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