INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY AND THE EXPATRIATION OF PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT:

This article belongs to the Intercultural Organizational Studies. It seeks to discuss the building of a transitional identity as a trend in our contemporary society, in which the professional expatriate is one of its most recent and important configurations. We call professional expatriate the individual whom lives successive expatriations without going back to his country. As he always has to develop new knowledge and mental schemes to interpret and deal with new cultural situations and new social interactions he is always a foreigner and he might assume his "foreignness" as a "natural" part of his identity. This is what we are calling transitional identity. This theoretical exploratory paper brings up three main issues: a) views of our plural society; b) the mental schemes of interpretation of reality implicated in an intercultural routine; c) the development of a transitional identity by the professional expatriate that might help him in his personnel and organizational life.

KEY-WORDS: Intercultural Management – Identity – Transitional Identity – Expatriation – International career

Introduction

We live in a situation when creativity and innovation are the touchstone and when knowledge, or intellectual capital, is the major differential. This is a world in which knowledge changes in an extremely short period of time and specializations become obsolete in the blink of an eye; where large corporations extend around the world, follow the sun, capitalize on time-zone differences (LES ECHOS, 2001) and colonize markets with their armies that have to competent when it comes to maintaining them and expanding them. Living with change and with what is different is the rule in this new world (ADLER, 2000; CERDIN, 2002).

Today there is an intense movement of people on the planet. This has accelerated because of the trend towards an increasingly globalized economy, which makes the circulation of highly qualified professionals a fundamental element in this consolidation. The world's diversity is

absorbed and appropriated by global companies, not only via the mega-mergers of their production units, but also with the merging of their multicultural teams (CHEVRIER, 2004; MUTABAZI, 2004). It is easier to understand and deal with the complexity of the world and markets when the men, cultures, ideas or desires of this world are represented in each company's own stock of knowledge and creativity. Consequently, it has become urgent to assume diversity as an intrinsic need of time that is flying, intercultural management as an imperative and the mobility of professionals as a new symbolic capital in the organizational world, all driving a new type of nomadism (FREITAS, 2005).

Now, we all know that there is no such thing as a man deprived of his culture, or a global man, which raises the question of identity in which culture is a fundamental element. On the other hand, we talk today of a plurality of worlds (AFFERGAN, 1997), of a society in flux, or a network society (SEMPRINI, 2003; CASTELLS, 1999) and of the plural and hyper-modern man (LAHIRE, 1998; AUBERT, 2004), constituting a universe of multiple and simultaneous experiences, with each individual having to organize these experiences and knowledge within the context of his own biography. This being the case, there is consequently a level of articulation from the general to the particular, in which the plural world interferes in the building of individual identities. As this plurality is in constant change, especially in successive experiences of professional expatriation, it may favor the emergence of transitory identity constructs.

In this article, which is an essay of a theoretical-exploratory nature, we shall look at three key points we consider to be important pillars of our thinking: a) the faces of contemporary society; b) intercultural coexistence and interpretation schemes; and, c) transitional identity and the forever foreigner.

1. Faces of contemporary society

Today, the statement that various worlds coexist, or that there is a plural world, does not seem strange to us. In as arbitrary a way as any would be, we might say that today there are already the known and fully explored worlds (continents, countries); known but not yet fully explored worlds (Antarctica, oceans, the Moon); unknown worlds (other planets, other galaxies); artificial and imaginary worlds (museums, as fragments of the real world, theme parks, with their caricatures of the real world, art and the cinema, as the real world in the imaginary world, or the imaginary world in the real world); sacred worlds of an earthly or heavenly nature (all the temples of all the religions, the forests, rivers, the sky, the sea, paradise, libraries) and virtual worlds, particularly represented by the possibilities provided by the internet. And each of these worlds seems to contain others...

In contemporary western societies a lot is talked about the possibility of us living in a plural world (AFFERGAN, 1997; De CERTEAU, 1993; CONINCK, 2001; MAFFESOLI, 1997 and 2000; LAHIRE, 1998) and in a society that can be called in flux (SEMPRINI, 2003) or a network (CASTELLS, 1999) or hyper-modern (AUBERT, 2004) society. Increasingly, anthropology is demanding respect for the need to seek the meaning of human worlds, the fruit of plural cross-fertilization between cultures, and the need to learn from foreign figures, in such a way that the diversity of the present world may be better understood through formal knowledge. There is agreement that the Second World War started a new geopolicy, a process that is still-on-going. Many countries were broken up others became independent, thereby increasing the total number of countries formally recognized by international bodies (DAVEL, DUPUIS & CHANLAT, 2008). Cultural, religious and ethnic issues are today being revived, returned to, relived, reclaimed, revised and recognized in the great human debate.

Geographic mobility, resulting from different causes (political, economic, social, cultural, humanitarian and environmental), among them the increase in knowledge and information available about other people, as well as the cheapening and speed of transport and communications, registers large numbers, whether in relation to the world tourism account (RSH, 2004), or whether for professional reasons, i.e., relative to the number of refugees for various reasons (ATTALI, 2003). Allied to geographic mobility there are other social contemporary phenomena that modify the way individuals, groups and the social world interact, such as the internet and what Castells calls the network society (1999), Semprini (2003) calls a society in flux and Aubert (2004) calls a hyper-modern society. Among the many features that are common to these studies, one of the main ones refers to the trend towards a new relationship of man with time, which ceases to be objectivized, fragmented and measurable to become continuous and homogenous. There are many indications of this social time, among which are: continuous transport (air shuttle services, subways and railroads), electronic trade and services, news on- line, multiple-function cell phones, on the move flexible working, the loss of the importance of the notion of space and distance, multiple and simultaneous communication, etc.

Semprini (2003) outlines the main characteristics of this new social configuration, which he calls the society in flux: a) continuity – elements flow freely; b) homogeneity – the process is holistic and not differentiated; c) destructuration – a whole, where there are no criteria for introducing the logic of organization; it is fragmented for insertions, but they are continuous; d) freedom – flux has no limits; it is a flowing river; e) movement – cognitive register, in which criteria, values and behaviors are in permanent evolution within society, mobility exists in every sense of the word; f) quantity – flux is a record of abundance, of profusion; g) immediatism – flux is

instantaneous and accessible whenever access is wanted; h) strength – the capacity of the flux to exercise continuous pressure and at an ever faster pace. In flux, temporality is multidimensional and an inexhaustible category; it is homogenous even though it is not uniform, because it is being constantly updated.

In the society in flux, the individual plays a major part in the construction and reconfiguration of the multiple action and social insertion plans, because spaces are not physical, but spaces of the senses, called semiospheres. Multiplication of the plans allows the individual to dominate the feeling that his identity is breaking down and gives meaning and unity to his own experience; he is the one who constructs the plural worlds and can, by using his imagination, move simultaneously between them; reference plans are individual and changeable, they multiply and the experiences of individuals are fragmented and even contradictory. So, society in flux demands that the individual makes a permanent effort to construct his identity and meanings, because it does not provide the individual with the values or ideological systems that allow him to become established, since the great explanatory narratives of the world and the future no longer exist. On the contrary, it is up to the individual to permanently make and remake his own choices and projects, adjusting them to the opportunities and restrictions of the changeable context, because freedom is central to the logic of flux. It is worth saying that the ties that bind the individual to the social world are various and multidimensional, but it is up to him to organize the meanings that join together the different strands in his own personal history, in other words, in a short space of time man must become the creator, *par excellence,* of his own history, which only he can interpret.

In an approach that lists ill-feelings and pathologies, Aubert (2004) clearly assumes this modification in relation to time and also analyzes man in this "real time" and the traps associated with living in this instantaneous moment in time, this intoxication with speed and this search for eternity by this flexible and plural man, whom he calls hypermodern. This is not a uniform phenomenon, nor is it exempt from contradictions; in fact contrasts and paradoxes are characteristics of hyper-modernity: excess and lack, an excessive number of messages, loss of meaning and references, the suppression of frontiers, a reduction in critical thinking and authentic sentiments, an over-valuing of image, fragmentation ad discontinuity, fluid images that are adaptable to the short term, the fantasy of the autonomy, accessibility and multiplicity of group bonds and at the same time disaffiliation and loss of collective meaning. In this context we exist as, and are faced with an individual who is required to be plural, to develop multiple identities and to hierarchize them; he himself must create his own life, be the creator of himself and develop his own relational identities, when there is little continuity of social roles. At the extreme, hypermodern time

appears like an explosive cocktail of pleasure and anguish, which each one must manage according to his own competence.

In a society with such markedly fluid, flexible and changeable characteristics there is, therefore, no place of honor for individuals who are attached to values, ideologies, ready responses, rigid forms and rules or relationships that cannot be quickly modified, recycled, substituted or changed. The present is the verbal time, *par excellence*, and the short term is the horizon by which actions are structured and developed. Social players are asked to give up their certainties and security, their close ties (family, social, geographic and even affective) and the structural notions, which have been valid up until now, of social class, *habitus* (BOURDIEU, 1980) and territoriality seem to become obsolete. The picture of man forged in this emerging society is that of plural man (LAHIRE, 1998) or of flexible man (CONINCK, 2001), who favors fragmentation of the ego, of the individual, of his roles and his experiences, of his actions adjusted to practical and voluntaristic situations. The plural player is the one who assumes a different action logic, who is alive to the diversity in the real world and who is not concerned with the coherence of his habits, but in demonstrating great sensitivity to different points of view, who takes part in multiple socialization schemes and in various transitory groups, because they come from an interaction with other people, they are immersed in many groups and live different and simultaneous experiences in the course of their trajectory.

Plural man synthesizes what is lived, undergoes his crises by constantly adapting, incorporating new practices, new conduct and new behavior and linking the past with the present in a permanent updating of his biography. Abundance of choice, multiple group ties and access to different and constantly updated knowledge stimulate a vast field of interactions and the possibility of breaks, ruptures, variety and mobility. This flexible man is also a fragile being, because he can no longer rely on the resources of the past, which supplied him with meaning, tranquilizing content or external support (FREITAS, 1999).

Even so, we are referring to a man who lives immersed in his environment, who still has a family name, who enjoys the recognition of a culture within a culture, or of groups with which he shares a common language, certain meanings and subjective understandings. However, the plural man who has been described so far still lacks recognition by some of his sources of identification. But what happens when he uproots from his own territory? Mastering information about other people, other cultures, other societies and other ways of living is not the same as being able to plunge headlong into another life without experiencing any type of discomfort, trauma or shock. The cognitive aspect is fundamental when it coes to choosing and analyzing the possibilities of

realizing the personal or professional potential of an individual, but it is not sufficient to qualify him for a cultural transplant without the psychic mediation to which we are all subject when faced with major changes. Moving countries, changing one's culture, changing one's language and changing one's life are decisions for which there is a large price to pay, psychically (TODOROV,1996; MÉNÉCHAL ET COLL, 1999; DUBAR, 2000). Man may already be plural, but he is still human.

2. Intercultural existence and interpretation schemes

Increasingly the professional world is demanding a wholehearted and desirable agreement to change and mobility in every sense of the word. The highly qualified professional understands that having some international experience, or being available for it is intrinsic to his survival and worth as a professional; today he is asked to go all over the world, to uproot and adapt ever more quickly to the new demands of a more global and integrated economic reality, to recycle his knowledge constantly, to incorporate different experiences in his biography and to present an ever improving performance, regardless of the cultural scenario in which he happens to find himself (FREITAS, 2005; PIERRE, 2004). The invitation to be a professional nomad began to be a differential and an option, but it appears to be fast becoming an obligation in some circles and in some corporate sectors and activities.

But as we said before, no human being is totally lacking in culture. We are also a product of our mother culture and interacting with another culture or renouncing our culture of origin to assume another is not an easy or simple process. Changing countries and cultures means building a new life, making new representations and giving different meanings to things that were already familiar to us. It means being aware of common behaviors that may be considered bizarre or offensive to other people and seeking to see others through their eyes in order to understand in what way one is seen by them. It is reassociating emotions with facts and gestures and reading between the lines and interpreting silences and looks that were hitherto unknown. This plunge into the different is only possible through an internal psychological reconstruction, because it places in check the issue of identity (FREITAS, 2001 e 2005; DUBAR, 2000; TODOROV, 1996).

Identity is a result, a psychosocial state that can vary over time, which is not fixed and depends on its point of definition, because at one and the same time it has to do with an individual, a group and a society. An individual has several identities and overall they allow him to experience a certain feeling of identity, even though we all have an unconscious, about which we know nothing; but even our unknown unconscious is unique and "belongs" to us, even though we are unable to access it. An identity nucleus is constituted as a source of internal coherence that characterizes a being that has consciousness of his own existence. It is a self-categorization that

may vary according to criteria such as nationality, gender, age, profession, culture and history (MUCCHIELI, 1992; DUBAR, 2000; DUPRIEZ & SIMONS, 2000). We understand, therefore, that changing culture may engender a process of disidentification, of subjective distancing which will not lack contradictory and, in some cases, painful emotions (TODOROV, 1996; TOURN, 2003).

It is difficult to think about and represent the country of one's birth because it clearly overlaps with the archaic body that sustains it and its loss is also linked to the loss of language, which is more than its mere use for communicating; the mother tongue has to do with our thought space, with the effects of censure, with impoverishment of meanings and forms of expression. Changing culture is assuming the fact of being a foreigner. According to Simmel (1994) a foreigner is a person who makes what is close far away and what is far away close; he is simultaneously both a door and a bridge. Aforeigner is someone who establishes himself in a given environment, but is right from the outset is not of this environment. He brings to this environment qualities that are not inherent to it. A foreigner is an element of the group that includes exteriority and confrontation, who synthesizes proximity and distance; he is constituted by this formal position. A foreigner is close to us, to the extent that we feel in him and in us certain national, social and professional similarities and, more generically, similarities as a human being. His individual characteristics are not perceived as being individual, but as coming from his foreign origin. That is why foreigners are not felt to be individuals, but foreigners of a certain type.

Schütz (2003) speaks about the "typical" situation of a foreigner who tries to be accepted, or just tolerated, by a new social group and who seeks to orient himself. In the routine world the man does not have homogenous knowledge, but knowledge that is incoherent, only partially clear and not free from contradiction. But it seems to him to be sufficiently coherent, consistent and clear for him to understand and be understood by his group. Now, every cultural group has knowledge of recipes, a general perception and action precept, which can be called its "interpretation scheme". The function of culture is to eliminate the need to be always seeking or constructing new ways and responses; they exist and are collectively appropriate to certain situations. An interpretation scheme presupposes that the individual is in the center and the foreigner finds it difficult in the new group to have this starting point in common with the others, so he tries to translate and seek out the equivalent terms in his own model. If these terms exist, they can be understood; if not, the individual cannot just pretend they exist, because this would generate strong psychological dissonance.

The foreigner does not share this recipe with the natives, because he has others that belong to his own culture and therefore he finds it difficult to validate in another model what in his eyes seems inappropriate; this generates great psychological anxiety and insecurity. But little by little, the foreigner will go beyond this, to the point at which, as a spectator, he can become a member of the group, when his pertinence system changes and his interpretation will require another type of knowledge; the distant knowledge that becomes close. He becomes enriched with these new experiences and acquires simple convictions about the strange objects that no longer coincide with his experience of life in the midst of these same objects. So, he then realizes that his customary way of thinking can no longer resist the life he is experiencing and his social interactions in this new environment, and so it loses validity and starts to be progressively substituted by the local code.

This demand to redraw the picture makes our foreigner something other than a tourist (MICHEL, 2002 e 2005). By nature, the tourist is motivated by a commitment to the pleasure of traveling and enjoyment. We do not deny that some type of learning cannot take place in this rapid contact, but generally it is for immediate consumption and frequently it is to avoid situations of displeasure; the tourist has the autonomy to change his program when he feels disappointed; he does not need to renounce his position at the center of himself and he can dispense with accepting the local people. For the tourist the native he is visiting is the one who is foreign...

But, for our foreign professional the players in the new group are not simply the executors of typical functions; they are felt and seen as individuals because that is the way our foreigner has awareness of himself; for individual character he is inclined to take what is merely typical; he builds a social world made of pseudo-anonymity, pseudo-intimacy and pseudo-typicalness (SCHUTZ, 2003). What for members of a group is seen as security, for the foreigner is adventure and risk that he must investigate, question and seek to understand. This role as investigator gives him an aspect of objectivity. He discerns and can perceive limits, but this generates an ambiguous loyalty to the new group to the extent where he is reticent to, or incapable of fully substituting his model for that of the group that welcomes him. He will be a "cultural hybrid", who may be seen as ungrateful because he does not unconditionally accept that which others assume naturally. Strangeness and familiarity are general categories in our interpretation of the world, defining the new, seeking to understand meaning, making the new compatible with what we already know and trying to pin down a degree of coherence. Cultural adjustment consists in transforming what is strange into something familiar, which is almost always accompanied by sudden alarm, pain and wounds, but also by surprise and joy.

With regard to the cultural adaptation of expatriates, some authors (ADLER, 2002; JOLLY, 1992; CERDIN, 2002) describe some of the phases as an integral part of the process, even though they may not be considered to be a pattern, but only a trend. These phases suggest a U-curve, which comprises: a) enchantment, or the honeymoon period; b) negativism, shock and disenchantment; c) adaptation and integration. In rapid brush-strokes: the first phase is the moment of arrival, of contact with the excitement of what is new, of a meeting with what fascinates and that awakens all the individual's senses; little by little, contact with day-to-day difficulties makes for frustration and confusion as a result of being bombarded with signs that are unknown in the spectator's code; he has difficulty understanding the behavior of the local inhabitants and he is disconcerted when his actions do not produce the result he expects. This is the phase of cultural shock, of disillusion, of depression, of a "confirmation" of negative stereotypes or crude, even aggressive projections. Finally, the individual acquires knowledge of how things work. He begins to distinguish and neutralize the negative effects of what is strange; he learns some typical behaviors, in the sense of Schütz, and he begins to lead life in a "normal" way, with just the problems of normal life to deal with. He does not master everything; he does not know everything, but he no longer suffers so much for this reason. So, he can assume what he is ignorant of without feeling unqualified and incompetent vis-à-vis life and himself. His gains in self-confidence imply identity gains resulting from the learning experience and improvements in the relationship of the individual with himself. He recognizes himself, he finds his bearings or recenters himself and so he can accept what is different and deal with it without feeling inferior to other people.

These phases bear a strong resemblance to the process described by Tourn (2003) about the adaptation process experienced by exiled people, who generally go through a euphoric phase in the land where they were received, followed by a period of criticizing the local culture and possibly severe depression when it comes to adapting to a new form of life and accepting themselves within another cultural context, even though the myth of return is always present. These observations are based on the studies of Freud (1968) with regard to the mourning that follows great loss, which might also be the loss of the fatherland.

3. Transitional identity and the forever foreign being

Foreigner is a generic category, frequently received with reticence by those who are so classified, because it ignores multiplicity, diversity and singularity. Foreigner, in the absolute sense, does not exist. The word itself has various meanings, is used differently in expressions and names various experiences that the contemporary world favors.

Without meaning to typify, we can talk about different statuses of foreigner (FREITAS, 2005), which are defined by the reasons or conditions of their displacement to a place that is different from their place of origin. Some of these meanings are old, while some are contemporary. They bear a relation not only with the different space, but also they mark different degrees of temporality, i.e., some are more transitory than others. We see as foreign types: a) those in exile for political or religious reasons; b) war and economic refugees; c) tourists who travel the world; d) business "men" who live in airplanes; e) professional expatriates who, out of necessity, live abroad (diplomats, the military, frontierless professionals and others); f) professionals expatriated for a fixed time (managers, executives, specialists, scientists, sportspeople, artists, writers, others); g) the scientific community and students who live abroad for reasons of education, interchange and research; h) modern nomads (globe-trotters), who settle in no fixed place; i) voluntary immigrants (those who live exclusively on their income, the retired, adventurers); j) spouses, who come from different cultural backgrounds and who can choose to live in the country of origin of either of the partners, or in a third country.

The foreigner is a foreigner relative to others, but he may also feel he is a stranger relative to himself, depending on the way he accepts his condition, lives his experience of foreignness and articulates the objective and subjective world in his own personal history (KRISTEVA, 1998). It is not even uncommon for an individual only to see himself as having a culture when he first realizes he is a foreigner in the land of others, when he perceives that he is not at home and that his alterity is the reflection in a mirror that may show what he never saw or even thought existed. It is understandable that a fish does not "see" the water in which it lives. The discovery of other worlds, of other codes, of other looks, of other temporal rhythms, of other spaces or other meanings, may be frequently experienced as the discovery of ourselves as a person who is different, strange, fearful, frightened, insecure, sullen, small and mortal, and who time transforms as contact with our own strangeness modifies us, humanizes us and confronts us with the stranger who lives inside us.

We believe that the experience of being a foreigner varies not only from individual to individual, but also as a function of the conditions and reasons that motivated the individual to settle in a foreign land. We also believe that the image that the chosen country has of the foreign country may either favor or prejudice the feelings the person has about the fact he is foreign. Little by little the foreigner discovers that his identity is also formed by the image of a "we", in other words, a collective umage that has been developed by local inhabitants. Unquestionably, some nationalities may be looked at more kindly, with more interest and more openness than others. It is obvious that individuals are not responsible for the reactions they arouse merely by the fact that their culture is different, but unfortunately they cannot ignore the fact that the image of their own country goes

before them and may or may not encourage friendly or less non-hostile interactions. Here it is worth recalling what Schütz says about the fact that the new group does not consider the foreigner as an individual, but as a certain type of foreigner, i.e. we are not seen or evaluated for our personal qualities, but as the bearer of a passport. It is no coincidence that many feelings are hurt, especially in the first few months after arriving in a new country... The foreigner has a name and an identity, but he will be first identified merely as a foreigner from such and such a country (SCHUTZ, 2003; TODOROV, 1996)

As companies have increasingly resorted to expatriation processes and have developed different possibilities for the professionals involved, in this article we have introduced the qualitative difference between the expatriated professional and the professional expatriate. Over and above the semantic play on words we see a difference in the nature of expatriation and the possible impact it might have on the individual. In the first case, we find those individuals who are transferred to develop a project or carry out a mission in another unit of the company located in another country for a fixed period of time, of a maximum five years, at the end of which time it is planned they return to the country of origin. In the second case, there is no undertaking of a return to their country of origin; on the contrary, it is expected that the professional will be sent to other locations at the end of each mission, i.e. that he will continuously assume the role of foreigner.

Each expatriation is a new story that will be undergone with greater or lesser difficulty. If, on the one hand we suppose that this nomadism is highly valued by some individuals, we can also suppose that it leads to a certain mental fatigue at the end of a certain time, or even that the individuals who adhere to this life style or who need to assume it develop some defense mechanism against the possible psychic damage it may cause by virtue of the frequent destabilization and the pressures experienced (TOURN, 2003; DUBAR, 2000; DUPRIEZ & SIMONS, 2000; MÉNÉCHAT & COLL, 1999). Constantly reconstituting your life, relationships and daily personal and professional routines within a new cultural environment is an extremely new demand being made by the needs imposed by the recent globalization and one that fits in very well with ideas of plurality, mutability, mobility and flexibility. The time lived by the expatriate professional is the present time in the gerundive and a gerundive says no more than that; it is a overly mortal language, limited to recognizing the instant in which an action happens and that only exists at the moment it is said: "I am doing". The gerundive gives the true dimension of what is provisional, temporal and ephemeral and can be interrupted at any moment (AUBERT, 2004; AMADO & AMBROSE, 2000)

Given that in successive expatriations our professional must reorganize his new physical and existential experiences, as well as his anguish, expectations, pain, anxieties and surprises, we can

suppose that his psyche will constantly re-organise, revise, re-read and re-interpret what he sees, hears and feels. Both the product and the producer of multiple experiences, our professional expatriate, this plural and multidimensional man, pays his dues by reconstructing his existence, in the multiplicity of the praxis that his heterogeneous and simultaneous acts of socialization impose on him as he changes and constantly adapts his behavior, language, practices and conduct, by rearticulating bith his past and present repertoires. This expatriate is constantly exposed to confrontation with the establishment, the durable, the certainty and with what is said and what is done, in a permanent effort to extend his resistance limits and constantly raise his capacity for learning how to learn.

It is this constant revision and temporary incorporation of what is appropriate and acceptable within one context, but not in another, which we call transitional identity or identity in transition. It has a specific validity and, therefore, it is usable only in the transition from one moment to another, or from one expatriation to another. It is more than content; it is the adjustment process to each pertinent system that is discarded at the next expatriation, which appears to us to suggest the possibility that there is a feeling of identity that needs to be assumed: that of always being a foreigner. It is like wearing a particular type of clothing that is appropriate only for a specific event. What "wardrobe" should a Brazilian professional who spends five years in Chile, four years in Thailand, five years in South Africa, three years in Australia and five years in England or France have? Perhaps the only certainty that the individual has in this situation is that he is no longer from anywhere and that his home is only his provisional address, or even his e-mail address.

We believe that the feeling of foreignness, or transitional identity, may emerge every time the individual changes cultures and needs to reconstruct his daily life, in other words, his concrete, routine life, in which the most primary and elementary knowledge becomes a question of survival and forms the meanings of the life being experienced. Establishing a routine is the most urgent measure to be taken when one arrives in a new place and this is not done in a painless way, without a loss of reference, without confusion, without uncertainty, without fear, without mental blocks and without many stories to tell. Progressively discovering what is "normal" or "acceptable" in another culture does not come without various frights, frustrations and questions. Much of what is learned results from imitation; a new way of interaction establishes itself between the foreigner and the group that welcomes him and little by little new conventions take the place of those of the foreigner's base culture.

Time, patience and goodwill are necessary to overcome all the objective and subjective obstacles of this task, which may imply a lot of inter-psychic tension, seeing that it destabilizes the

individual vis-à-vis the suffering he is experiencing because of the loss of his points of reference and his practical knowledge (TOURN, 2003; DUPRIEZ & SIMONS, 2000; TODOROV, 1996). Daily adaptation is understood as being the power the individual has for formulating adequate responses to the situations that are presented to him, without experiencing major discomfort and disorientation. In this situation, not only may linguistic codes be insufficient to express the most complex thoughts that each one of us is capable of having, but so may those words we use to express the emotional and affective manifestations that are typical of our moods. In some way, abdicating the mother tongue means assuming another structure for thinking, language and world order; it is not a grammatical issue, but an issue of generosity to oneself; a self that renounces one's very way of existing to assume another that is full of risks, errors, imperfections and ridicule (FREITAS, 2001 e 2005).

One of the most urgent measures that faces the expatriate with the unknown and with the feeling of impotence is that of setting up home; with rare exceptions, most of the people strongly resist living for a long time (in this case, years) in hotels or other impersonal installations. This is particularly true when the expatriate is accompanied by his family and each member needs to establish his or her own routine and study and work agenda (SERFATY-GARZON, 2003). Undoubtedly, it is almost always possible to rely on specialist help for the physical installation process, but decisions must take into consideration personal aspects and the lifestyles of those involved, which are not always respected and that do not go unscathed. It is important to remember that however much expatriations are motivated by professional reasons and that rational benefits accrue from them, other hidden reasons may influence or underlie a life change (FREITAS, 2005).

Home comforts are more than just a detail of comfort; the home is the personal reference point that has a strong psychological and affective appeal. It is the record of one's life, of personal expression, of intimacy, of biographic construction, the identification mirror, and it also frequently marks the genealogy of families. As basically inscribed in the record of the daily routine, the home is a place of rituals and intimate gestures that anchors the family member, that welcomes the internalization of personal life and that guards the intimacy of each one of us (SERFATY-GARZON, 2003). Now, if the home is the central place, filled with feelings and affections, we can deduce that it is not easy for most people to uproot from their homes and leave them behind in the silence and with the murmurs of the past. Every family has its secrets, its useful and its insignificant contents, a wall that separates what is of the world from what is intimate and the objects that tell the life story of each one. These are not mere objects, but objects lovingly invested as we plunged into what was experienced, discovered, admired, desired, loved at some moment in time and in some

place, and they are worthy of being preserved as a witness to the past. For many people renouncing their home is like renouncing their own history and identity.

Just as a new home gains biographic features that form part of the continuity of its former dweller, the expatriate begins to see himself within his new environment, to feel a part of it, to be a foreigner without being such a foreigner any longer. The nomad has temporarily settled and will live this experience, by incorporating new learning experiences, reinterpreting the past, reconstructing meanings, mapping out the plurality, joining together pieces of the new and the old picture, correcting perceptions, establishing routines and ways of dealing with the new, making new friends and understanding that some cuts heal with time and disappear, while others remain open (MAFFESOLI, 1997; De CERTAU, 1990; MICHEL, 2005).

The foreigner will live in this transition from one discovery to another, from one state to another and from one incorporation to another. This will be seen with each daily experience, which leads us to suppose that successive expatriations may awaken memories and provide learning experiences that either facilitate or make future experiences difficult; after all, we have to consider that, despite the fact that the cognitive incremental aspect provides faster responses to situations that are uncomfortable at other moments in time, or that helps with our understanding of new contexts, the psychic life may record feelings linked to these experiences in a more intense way and develop accommodation and defense mechanisms of another nature. Redefining tastes as a function of what is easier, converting into legacy only what the memory retains, choosing relationships based on convenience and not on affinity, defining time as a function of which things are urgent and not on what is important, thinking about the next destination as your home forever, assuming that you are a world citizen and that where you live does not matter to you, not knowing where your home is, or depriving it of any importance are just some of the possible defensive reactions to the feeling of loss of something important, or the response to mourning not assumed, or not carried out.

We strongly believe that not all individuals want, or manage to live away from their family, social and cultural origins. We also understand that the degree of difficulty experienced in adapting to a new cultural context and a new life varies from individual to individual. But we suppose that the impact on the identity of the individual who lives as a constant expatriate is much greater than the case of the professional who goes on a specific mission and then returns to his home. In this case we believe it is legitimate to suppose that the individual who constantly moves his reference points and contexts may harbor a feeling of foreignness as part of his own identity, i.e., he may feel comfortable being a foreigner and no longer having one place to call home. Accepting his foreignness as a part of himself may be a defense mechanism against anguish, anxiety, insecurity

and the ambiguity of the unknown; it may be a way of dealing with the psychic pressures deriving from the choices, from the non-choices and from accommodating the inevitable, the non-negotiable and the merely supportable at some moments in time. It may also be merely the profound discovery that the foreign land is his very own soul.

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