The collective volume *Intercultural Crossings: Conflict, Memory and Identity* edited by Lénia Marques, Maria Sofia Pimentel Biscaia and Glória Bastos (Peter Lang, 2012)

The collective volume *Intercultural Crossings: Conflict, Memory and Identity* aims to address issues that relate directly to intercultural encounters. However, encounters initiate advantages as well as disadvantages: on the one hand they can endorse mutual understanding, permit sharing of knowledge, amplify people’s horizons and expectations, and encourage liberalism in the face of difference, what is described as *lato sensu* cosmopolitanism; on the other hand, encounters of/in difference engender cultural locations where conflicting lifestyles and temperaments can transform into a space of skirmishes. More often than not, these encounters render an opportunity to scrutinise matters of identity which have been largely covered up by socially induced notions of political correctness, such as tolerance and multiculturalism. In Western society the former has been used as a contrivance to accommodate notions of difference which are at odds with a given identity, providing a means to appease discomforts which the humanist principles saw reinforced by the values of liberty, equality and fraternity and homogenising Enlightenment universalism.

These essays assume that some peculiarities must be recognised; one can speak of cultural diversity which, although it has always characterised our histories, has reached extraordinary range due to diasporic and/or exilic movements, primarily connected to globalisation. However, multiculturalism should not be construed as a synonymic term. Though most Western societies are considered culturally diverse, they are not unanimously viewed as multicultural. Often cultural diversity is linked to post-coloniality as the former imperial centres are these days peopled by migrants from their old colonies who, nevertheless, come to occupy liminal physical and cultural spaces. France and England, for example, are indisputably culturally diverse but the idea of a multicultural identity is not unanimously accepted, for it presupposes the equation of the ‘new’ cultures with the home culture, thus putting at risk its supremacy. The defense of a multicultural society entails the rejection of minorities, or rather, of their status as ‘other’ identities and the promotion of a full-scale civic participation. Moreover, it questions the existence of a single national identity whose purpose has historically reinforced boundaries and difference from neighbouring nations. It thus demands the rejection of the identity defense mechanism which endorses a country with a very sense of nationhood.

The first essay firmly pronounces that cultural landscapes are not static and constitute not a pre-existing reality, but a process under constant (re)construction and (re)negotiation. It sets out to establish that current social, cultural and technological circumstances have changed people’s relationships with spaces and the consequent integration of the individual in the world.

Joana Miranda’s essay in the volume appraises three fundamental dimensions of the life of immigrant women in Portugal. The first of these dimensions is the memories of the country of origin, the second deals with the difficulties of integration in Portugal, and the third with the women’s life projects.

The analyses of language and thematic issues Glória Bastos presents in her essay show the importance of the choices made by authors, particularly in children’s literature. These choices show their vision of society and the role played by children and, particularly in children’s literature, the language they use is viewed as a process of indoctrination.


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The study by Joana Passos discusses a set of writers whose nomadic biography has given them a plural cultural heritage. These are committed writers, using literature a form of public intervention and as a pedagogic and effective means to spark awareness and political literacy among their readers.

Maria Sofia Pimentel Biscia’s essay aims to provide a strategy to accomplish two goals in the process of deconstructing monolithic cultural configurations: one, to question Western agency solely in relation to imperial white masculinity so that in the process many alterities within the imperialistic phenomenon can surface; and the other, to initiate a debate beyond the discursive trap of Self and Other.

Lénia Marques in her discussion of Nicholas Bouvier’s stories foregrounds the fact that memory is as much an exercise as an act of identity. It is through memory that the subject will relate to others and will be able to permanently reposition her/himself in the world. Memory is part of the subject: either there are happiness and pleasant encounters, or striking and painful misencounters.

This volume tenders the possibility, or rather possibilities, of crossing between the debates and the cultures underlying them. Crossing induces notions of action, and therefore agency, dislocating subjectivities that are often unquestioned and thus forcing others to continuous displacements. Crossing also brings into play imaginary places as much as actual locations where several cultural paths intersect one another, one could say, establishing intercultural encounters. Another interpretative possibility is that of constructing a means to connect disjuncted subjectivities or cultural locations; the crossing is in this sense the place at which an obstacle can be crossed.

The essays in this volume seek to observe and interrogate the complex crossings introduced with its title: in an intercultural framework between identity, memory and conflict. In fact, these topoi have individual substance but they acquire added meanings when positioned in an intercultural context as well as when interconnected. This is then a collective work that interrogates several aspects of this complex network.

Some essays examine the cultural constructs of space and reflect on the way people associate to new spaces and cultures, particularly in the context of the diaspora. The volume begins with an overview of the concept of ‘cultural landscapes’ through an analysis of some of its materialisations. João Luís Fernandes shows how migration movements, emerging from distinctive cultural backgrounds, model the territory they are going to move onto with their own cultural markers. These forms institute (re)formed ‘geographies’ and (re)formulated identities. Christian Hummelsund Voie’s ‘Preamble Borderlines’ shares his experience in the field of ecocriticism, revealing its productive relationships with architectural projects. In this case, an intercultural dialogue takes place between different disciplines and discourses – architecture and literary ideas – while taking into consideration the cultural and social responsibilities of both fields. The idea of identity and of its reconstruction is also at the centre of the study developed by Joana Miranda. Focussing on the integration of immigrant women in Portugal, the author investigates the psychological dimension of that process in what is for them a new society. The personal stories told by these women emphasise the vivid tension between the memories about their home country and the new individual experiences, contributing to what we can call an reform of identity.
Such inquiries also find manifestation in literary works, as literature can be a viable place for the depiction of tensions between identity and memory. These essays expatiate on literary analysis, sometimes also through the methodologies of sociology of literature, to underline the ways fiction constructs national history and approaches closely related matters such as colonialism and diaspora. In the process, they highlight the role of memory in the construction of identity as well as the power of language to preserve experiences from present and past times. The referred authors and books are instances of literatures or literary related discourses written in Portuguese, French, Danish and English coming out from countries such as Brazil, Portugal, Canada, South Africa and Denmark. Through them, conflicts between past and present, memory and cultural identity, images of the Self and the Other are revealed.

The last two essays consider the topic of travelling, not only across space but also travelling inside ourselves. Dwelling on notions of multiplicity, travelling is also an act within the subject’s own identity, which can be reflected in several ways. Lénia Marques’s essay explores the idea of traveling as an intercultural crossing, illustrated by the work by Nicolas Bouvier. His writings and photographs display and unveil images of people and spaces which forge a voyage not only through memories of otherness but also through personal identities. Taking off from the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and his concept of dialogism and the dialogic nature of discourse, in ‘Bakhtinian Dialogism and the Adding of Meaning’ Dionísio Vila Maior develops the notion of dialogic movement, where the idea of identity plays a crucial role. The works of well-known Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa and his heteronyms demonstrate the balance and the same time the tensions between Self and Other, sometimes an internal Other.

The approach of this volume is not restricted to national expression, but rather seeks to cover a range of texts and cultures that may be comprehensively significant and whose joint reading offers still unexplored interpretative approaches. This work is the first step in an extremely relevant and complex approach which highlights the pressing issues in the globalised world we live in, in the process suggesting new possibilities of research and lines of action in the field that needs further research.

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