

## EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SPACES AND CITIZENSHIP

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### Resumo

Partindo de um conceito desconstrutivista de *identidade*, neste artigo analisam-se processos de construção/desconstrução identitária, através da observação de impactos produzidos no exercício do relacionamento económico-político entre espaços, não mais, necessariamente, os Estados. Observando a aceleração do tempo económico, estabelece-se uma análise dos impactos nos relacionamentos políticos globais, com ênfase no significado da produção/destruição de identidades no âmbito de uma nova geografia económica.

### Abstract

This article builds upon a (de)constructivist concept of identity and analysis processes of identity construction/deconstruction through the observation of the impacts produced upon the relationship between spaces, no longer, necessarily, the States. By observing the acceleration of time, an analysis of the political relations is established, giving emphasis to the significance of the production/destruction of *identities* within the renewed economical geography.

## 1. A (des)construção da diferença

Looking into the algebra, d'Alembert (Apud Rambaldi, 1988:24) observes how «contiguous transformations» progressively give birth to variations of «identity», visible in its continuous passages, in the same way that «difference» becomes visible when one compares the extremes of such transformation:

«(...) Se examinarmos uma série de proposições matemáticas deduzidas umas a partir das outras de maneira a que duas proposições resultem imediatamente contíguas, sem passagens intermédias, observaremos que todas elas não são afinal senão a primeira, a qual, por assim dizer, se desfigura progressiva e gradualmente na passagem de cada uma delas à sucessiva, adquirindo formas diferentes sem, no entanto, resultar realmente multiplicada. É como se se quisesse exprimir a referida proposição numa língua que tenha vindo progressivamente a desnaturar-se, e se fosse exprimindo essa proposição de maneiras diferentes, representantes dos diferentes estádios pelos quais a própria língua foi passando: mas já não o seria num outro mais longínquo, embora este dependesse sempre dos precedentes e fosse destinado a transmitir as mesmas ideias.(...)»

Accordingly, identity may be presented as the «development of differences», such as Rambaldi (1988:35) indicates when suggesting that *equality* does not preclude variability, but rather holds *difference* within its centre, thereby turning this «effort of *identification* through difference» closely linked to the mathematical analysis and the political action, both of them decisive factors of our social existence. In this sense, note how *profound differences* do not alter *identity* but rather contribute «precisely through *difference*, to know it» (Rimbaldi, 1988:41).

The process of the construction of identity is not indifferent or without consequences, not even strictly from the point of view of the individual. As Delgado, A. J. (2005) suggests, a rejection (external or internal) felt by the individual and based upon a *profound difference*, does not necessarily result from any (possibly existing) minority stigma. Indeed, it may well emanate from a process of indefinition or internal uncertainty

as to what and who one *is* – a knowledge upon which identity could be constructed and the anchor to a societal frame could be secured.

The construction of identity is, thus, rather turbulent. On the one hand, its internal dynamic, gregarily sublimated, will determine that the individual constructs his self-image through a (de)constructivist process *within*, that dilutes his most authentic identity so that he may get closer to the identity of the *other*, the latter also holding an *altered identity*, in a semiotic process equivalent to that expressed by Jean Lartéguy, «*tout home est une guerre civile*». On the other hand, its external dynamic, will determine that identity is constructed through processes of accommodation /adaptation between *altered identities*, which will only persevere when succeeding in diluting what remains of significantly *different*.

If one looks at the problem from the point of view of the relationship between States, the paradox remains. Indeed, «the (cultural) authenticity asks for (political) difference, but the difference between States demands for the eradication of differences within each State» (Aurélio, 1996:207). Note that this assertion may find an exception within the western civilization and following the laicization of States, which, as Aurélio (1996) put it, dilutes the differences of thought and religion, and standardizes law, language, history, custom and culture, in general.

Within the spectrum of contemporary societies, this article focus upon some processes of identitarian construction/deconstruction of *identities* within the renewed economical geography, sculptor of new global actors that alternate, battle and change continuously, determining new ways in the search of their own identity.

## 2. The renewed hierarchies of space

In a scenario of progressive globalization, practices of great turbulence now converge in the city (circulation of people, commodities, services, capitals, and above all, information), asking for the continuous development and modernization of major land, air and sea communication roots (which will guarantee an efficient transportation network) and a progressively efficient telecommunication network (which will allow a much more rapid and less costly access to capital, investment alternatives, capital market operations and economic and financial consulting). A city

will be as more global as much more density can be found in these networks that provide and act as linkages to other cities, regions or States.

As such, cities and regions can be ranked and graded in accordance to their capacity to act as world-systems, thereby moving beyond a classification of cities based merely upon the population size. Beaverstock et. al (1999) have provided such an inventory of world cities based upon their level of advanced producer services (graded for accountancy, advertising, banking/ finance and law), and produced a roster of 55 world cities at three levels (ten alpha and beta world cities and thirty five gamma world cities), mostly concentrated in Northern America, Western Europe and Pacific Asia (see table 1).

**Table 1:** THE GaWC INVENTORY OF WORLD CITIES

Cities are ordered in terms of world city-ness with values ranging from 1- 12:

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**A. ALPHA WORLD CITIES**

12: London, Paris, New York, Tokyo

10: Chicago, Frankfurt, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, Milan, Singapore

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**B. BETA WORLD CITIES**

9: San Francisco, Sydney, Toronto, Zurich

8: Brussels, Madrid, Mexico City, Sao Paulo

7: Moscow, Seoul

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**C. GAMMA WORLD CITIES**

6: Amsterdam, Boston, Caracas, Dallas, Düsseldorf, Geneva, Houston, Jakarta, Johannesburg, Melbourne, Osaka, Prague, Santiago, Taipei, Washington

5: Bangkok, Beijing, Montreal, Rome, Stockholm, Warsaw

4: Atlanta, Barcelona, Berlin, Buenos Aires, Budapest, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Istanbul, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Miami, Minneapolis, Munich, Shanghai

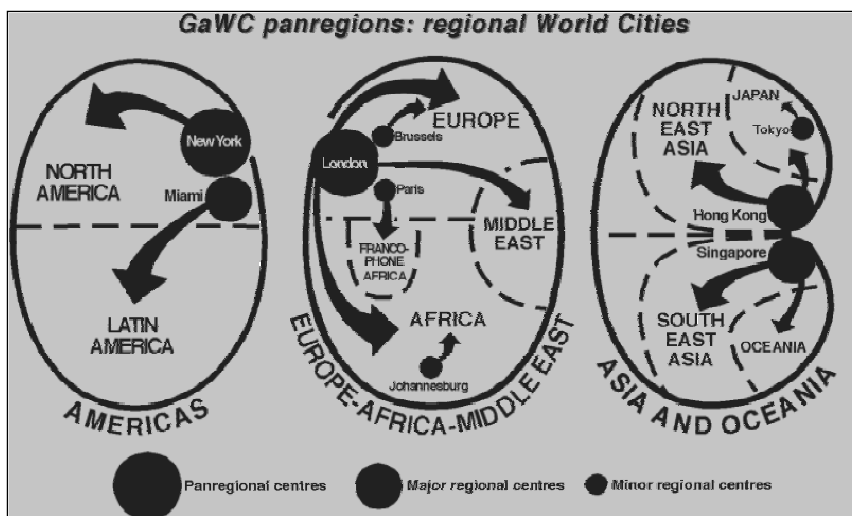
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**Source:** Beaverstock, J.V. and Smith, R.G. and Taylor, P.J. "A Roster of World cities", *Cities*, 16 (6) (1999):445-458, Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network – Research Bulletin 5, via Google, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/>.

Accordingly, the global system appears to stand under the influence of central regions, highly economically integrated, modernized and computerized, and holding the supremacy in technological aptitude and ability to operate within the international financial system. These central

regions are centred around global cities, of which New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, London, Tokyo, Paris, Frankfurt, Milan, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and Singapore stand as examples.

As Taylor (2000) points out, however, ranking cities by a global capacity measure does not define an urban hierarchy, which requires evidence of inter-city relations. Taylor (2000) does so by attempting to cross-tabulate the cities against the roster of states, and finds that only thirty three of the world's states house world cities and of these twenty four have just a single city<sup>1</sup> (see Figure-1).



**Figure 1**

**Source:** Taylor, P.J. "World Cities and Territorial States under Conditions of Contemporary Globalization", *Political Geography*, 19 (1) (2000):5-32, Globalization and World Cities Study Group and Network – Research Bulletin 9, via Google, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/>.

<sup>1</sup> Note that Taylor (2000) finds that levels of world city formation hold a positive relation to the size of national economies as measured by gross domestic product (e.g.: eight of the ten alpha world cities are located in the big six economies). Exceptions should be noted, however, since they show that beyond the size of the economy, the economic opportunities that exist in a country are of utmost important, such as Hong Kong and Singapore demonstrate. Note that Honk Kong and Singapore engaged on an export-led development strategy only in the middle of the twentieth century, having rapidly gained a significant regional influence and international presence, and presently scoring encouraging results in indicators related to information society.

Accordingly, one may refer to global cities around which global regions emerge as centres of the world economy, the home to the majority of multinationals, and the centre of major finance, communication and transports networks. They are followed by peripheral or semi-peripheral regions, which stand as suppliers of the central regions, and are characterized by low intensity technology, weak initiative, low investment and short decisional power.

As such, one has but to recognise a new hierarchy of spaces worldwide, with diverse impacts in human lives: globalization acting as a unifying element, looking at every space as a possibility for production and trade; and the international division of labour acting as a fracture element, producing hegemonic spaces that foster action somewhere else. In such a scenario of renewed economic geography, can one devise a hierarchy of cities replacing the mosaic of States?

## 2. The search for *identity*

One can imagine a new economical geography consisting on an integrated system of global cities within global regions, symbiotic in the search for a global common design (although adversaries in the competition for financial and information flows), and possibly benefiting from the supervision of a central organ focused on the resolution of problems that are transversal to societies.

However, as one has stated elsewhere (Vasconcelos and Lovie, 1996), even if one considers the contemporary growing influence of non-state actors (namely global cities), one also has to recognise that states have the alternative to act / to respond under the framework of global, regional or trans-regional organizations (as in the IMF, the World Bank, NAFTA or the EU), in which the State remains the fundamental pawn. Indeed, economical geography does not equal political geography.

As Amartya Sen (2002) suggests, the market economy does not operate by itself in the global system, nor even within a given country – it remains dependent on economic, social and political institutions and institutional arrangements that operate nationally and globally. Similarly, the distribution of the benefits in the global economy depend on a variety of global institutional arrangement such as the international rules for

fair trade, international medical initiatives, protocols for technological dissemination, ecological and environmental restraints, and so on. All these, as it is, can only be provided (and sustained) by an integrated system of centres of political power, rather than centre of economical power. The fact that the two no longer coincide does not endow the latter with the needed political legitimacy.

Until such political legitimacy is obtained by global cities, what one observes is but a multitude of tensions that emerge from what may be called a paradox between globalization and fragmentation: destruction/construction, desertification/urban planning, elimination of frontiers/re-drawing of Nations, diminishing relevance of political centres/formation of strong financial centres, modernization/destruction of feeble social relations. Whereas State units seek for economic safety in regional economic integration areas, the latter equally strained by the globalization pressures, in national terms the issue is placed on how to accommodate trans-national practices in the cities, which have been lived, so far, as cultural and identity referential spaces.

Indeed, it is through the place that Man practices the global, but he sustains its practices in what is authentically his, culturally determined and established, thereby emerging a collective conscience that supersedes the individual. Hence, cultural globalization is not a synonym of homogenization or integration – it only implies non-territorialization, simultaneously to ethnical pluralism and cultural diversity. As Nye (2002) well put it, rather than producing homogenization, globalism amplifies differences, and makes people more aware of them. The globalising phenomenon is, in this sense, an element of identity, since it convenes and becomes sustained within the place. As one prefers to put it, «a identidade, sempre uma fracção de identidade», that is, «identity, always a fraction of identity».

This concern over the production/destruction of *identities* within the renewed economical geography appears to be of utmost importance. Indeed, as Macfarlane (1994:26-35) suggests, an exclusive, all embracing and unconditional allegiance to the state is an integral part of absolute sovereignty, and allegiance (not obedience) rests on some conception of shared purpose or shared benefit. Processes of disorientation from this sense of belonging or dissatisfaction with the conduct of government will undermine any common conception of allegiance and endanger the

state – factions within the community may deny allegiance to the state and dedicate themselves to overthrowing the established system. As such, it would classify as myopia to neglect the tensions brought about by the migratory flows upon the renewed geography.

Although it is true that migratory flows resist the global process (mostly due to governmental restrictions, but also as a result of language difficulties, cultural differences and family concerns), it is equally true that global flows of labour do occur. The expected result is twofold: the assimilation of qualified labour by the global regions, or the unwanted pressure of a human flow that corresponds to population segments that attempt to avoid social exclusion. In either case, as global cities and regions evolve, they become increasingly pressured by these migratory flows, determining the expansion of their metropolitan areas and the need for the qualitative development and modernization of their physical and social infra-structures.

A response to this increased pressure will have to include the re-dimensioning of the accessibilities, the improvement of the habitation park, sanitation, educative, cultural, sports and commercial equipment, and the concern for environmental issues, traffic control and pollution levels, prevention of crime, and all sorts of social exclusion. The remaining poverty spots, corresponding to those excluded from the global processes, will promote the increase in clandestine work and economically survival strategies, which often include illicit activities (Madureira et. al., 1998). Again, these poverty spots may undermine allegiance to the State, since the minimum necessary condition of allegiance is that those from which allegiance is requested from are equally recognized and treated by the state as part of a community.

As such, a global region has to be prepared to guarantee its own sustainability beyond the financial resources and the improvement of communication networks and urban policies. It should equally act as a vehicle to culture, which becomes more and more abstract as a way to encompass the societal diversity – a global culture emerges through the rapid dissemination of ideas, tastes and behaviours, through the circulation of people, the media, and electronic communication, which, often, interpret and inflate events and content to a global scale. The political leaders themselves are often produced and sustained by the media, and take advantage of every opportunity to use the media as the



element that better promotes political-consume. The resulting implications, however, also include the recovery of places as «tribes», the rediscovery of difference within homogenization, and the demand for solidarity beyond the immense and impersonal agglomerates.

In summary, in the sphere of global political economy, the central problem is to inhibit the emergence of abysses between the emerging regions, and to do so by steering (rather than dictating) labour, trade and investment flows. This global endeavour should support policies that provide for the change in investment patterns, the qualification of the labour force, and the favouring of entrepreneurship initiative and qualitative technological usages.

Moreover, in a renewed political geographical scenario, all of these may find their best breed when allied to an increased regional power within the local organs of the global economy. Less State appears to be beneficial, since it de-centralizes decisions and allows organizational flexibility, at the administrative, managerial and decision level. And plural-centralism appears to be desirable, as long as it is qualified, technological able and innovative, and in the possession of global social and material infra-structures, with organizational capabilities (capable of producing transnational practices) and decision power (capable of putting into practice inter-regional or inter-government policies). In either case, however, less State (understood as de-centralized power) presupposes a prior strong and intervenient State, capable or «regulating» the «de-regulation» of markets and institutions.

## Conclusions

One finds a major abyss between global regions bred by global cities, and peripheral regions, destitute of the global system. Such segmentation is mostly promoted by the globalization of capital and production, which, by expanding the limits of the division of labour, separate the central zones from the peripheral ones, the former being characterized by capital-intensive (and high value-added) productions, and the latter failing to capture investment, production processes, technologies and managerial know-how.

In such a scenario, cities and regions can be ranked according to their global capacities determining a renewed economical geography in which global regions emerge as centres of the world economy. However, such new hierarchy of spaces does not stand as a synonym for the downfall of the Westphalia system since it is in the State that remains the political legitimacy. Accordingly, one finds it more appropriate to address the issues of inequality and identities, in the sense that the unbalanced amplification of both may undermine any common conception of allegiance to (and endanger) the State.

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