

MEDIA AND IDENTITY: AFRICANNESS IN PORTUGAL

MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN E IDENTIDAD. AFRICANIDAD EN PORTUGAL

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Abstract: In this article we review the panorama of communication studies in Portugal, which since the 90s, have been reflecting on the relationship between media and African identity, (particularly of young Luso-African). How identities are negotiated, constructed and reconstructed in environments of intense media consumption? What is the role of the media as agent of socialization? How the media sphere contributes to the identity building processes (be it personal or social)? In which way are minority identities recognized or silenced? We propose to discuss the question of African identity from three central topics of analysis, structured in the following sections of our article: 1. Social identities and recognition 2. Social identities and media representation; and 3. Social identities and media consumption. **Keywords:** Identity; Africanness; media discourse; reception.

Resumen: En este artículo haremos un repaso al panorama de los estudios de comunicación en Portugal que reflexionan, desde los años noventa del siglo XX, acerca de la relación entre medios de comunicación y la identidad africana (en particular de los jóvenes luso-africanos). ¿Cómo las identidades son negociadas, construidas y reconstruidas en ambientes de intenso consumo mediático? ¿Qué papel ocupan los medios de comunicación como agentes de socialización? ¿Cómo la esfera mediática contribuye para la construcción de las identidades (personal y social)? ¿De qué forma las identidades minoritarias son reconocidas o silenciadas? Proponemos debatir la cuestión de la identidad africana a partir de tres tópicos centrales de análisis, estructurados en otros tantos apartados de nuestro artículo: 1. Identidades sociales y reconocimiento; 2. Identidades sociales y representación mediática y 3. Identidades sociales y consumo mediático. **Palabras clave:** Identidad; africanidad; discurso mediático; recepción.

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1. The recognition of African identity in the Portuguese media space

Identity represents one of today's most contradictory, evasive and "slippery" concepts. "Primary identity" (Bauman, 2005), as a result of belonging to an *ethos* and being characterised by its national essence and innate social existence, has been overcome. Today it is presented from a reflective perspective because "if in traditional society identity is received, in modern days it is built" (Lyon, 1999: 50). This crafting of the self, falls within the current trend of the individualisation processes and increasing mass migration flux. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in its regular reports¹ indicates around one billion people as emigrants.

This aspect assumes a manifest importance in the Portuguese case, a historically emigrant country and also immigrant since the second half of the 60's decade, when the first groups of Cape Verdeans arrived at the metropolitan area of Lisbon. The phenomenon rapidly intensifies and transforms into the structural framework of Portuguese social morphology and, "40 years later the PALOP² African immigration is largely implemented" (Machado, 2009). The last official data made available by the Portuguese government, indicate that in 2012 there were 91,358,000 Africans in a total of 416,610,000 immigrants residing legally in Portugal in that same year, according to the Foreign Nationals and Borders Services (SEF – Servicios de Extranjeros y Fronteras).

The African presence has been questioning the cultural uniformity of Portuguese society. The institutionalisation of monolithic culture was fuelled by the longest dictatorship in Europe (1926-1974), in which the socialisation of "Portuguese-ness" was alone ("proudly alone" as their leader preached), with devotion (on the ideologies of national Catholicism) and silent (censorship imposed by repressive political police³). With the fall of the authoritarian regime in 1974 began the "third wave" of democratisation in Southern Europe (Huntington, 1991).

Transitions from dictatorships to democracies created new issues, such as the reconfiguration of citizens to democratic values. This established the need for a sociopolitical re-socialization of populations, defined as the intentional modification of socialization conditions made in dictatorial patterns. The process of cultural recomposition of an entire socialized generation in authoritarian values

[01] <http://publications.iom.int/bookstore/>

[02] African Countries of Portuguese Official Language.

[03] The International and State Defence Police (PIDE), was in force between 1945 and 1969 as a security unit in service of the Portuguese dictatorial Regime, severely controlling and repressing all actions and activities that questioned the nature of Salazar's political activity.

operates slowly, since the root is deeply conservative. The signs of transformation address the normalization of the country's international relations, in particular the processes of decolonization in 1975, in recognition of the sovereignty of the occupied African territories.

The Europeanization of Portugal, which becomes a member of the EEC in 1986, increases economic development and transforms the country's human geography. Community funds produce employment generating activities and the immigrants' flow increases. The signs of the globalised world go from latent to manifest and the Portuguese society modernises itself, incorporating new knowledge and cultures, fruit of the expansion of a work market that requires manual labour.

From the last decade of the twentieth century, by intensifying African immigration (and consolidating of a first generation of descendants) there is an addition of Brazilian migration flows and of residents from Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Romania and Moldova)⁴, communities that reinforce the idea of omnipresence of the other in the increasingly daily presence of linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity.

Nevertheless, the first studies in Portugal that the academy systematically develops about the immigration issue have a privileged focus on African communities, who have a historically stronger bond with the Portuguese reality and are imperative to perceive in more detail. 30 years after the arrival of the first batch of immigrants coming from Africa, a pioneering sociological approach reflects about the issues of inclusion and integration of these social characters (Saint-Maurice and Pires, 1989).

Only after the 90's do we see a visibility of Africans in the media. Between 1983 and 1989 the key references in the press were very limited (Guibentif, 1991) to sensationalist approaches related to issues of marginalisation and that forgot the precarious social context of these communities (Carvalho, 2006). For a long time, investigation has verified that the coverage of peripheral areas of large cities, social neighborhoods, communities of immigrants and ethnic minorities raise concerns, and these territories are often ignored and represented as dangerous (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, 1978; Wilson II, Gutierrez and Chao, 2003).

Issues of identity/ethnicity then assume leadership in communication studies, specifically the topics subordinate to how the media shape social representations of Africanness (Ferin, 1996 and 1997).

[04] For detailed information on the immigration figures from the 80's to the present day view; *Portugal: Atlas das migrações internacionais*, document coordinated by sociologist Rui Pena Pires (2010).

2. Africanness represented; a state of the matter.

The work of identity developed by the media complies with basic social functions; of social reproduction, socialisation and integration of individuals. It is a wide range of patterns of thought and action, symbolic pictures that spread by ritual practice (Esteves, 1999). The media apparatus, thus proposes to rebuild the social fabric by means of a narrative that offers an interpretation of recognition for their own identities, and others (Woodward, 1997: 14).

But in the current picture of today's information business, identities have been commoditised and the media have hierarchized them, to the extent that "the status of media depends on their electoral and economic value" (Sampedro, 2004: 143). Social representations of identities are configured to the extent that they oppose the hearings (imperative to identify the consumer type), in which the discourse generates appropriate identifications of message recipients (Carriço Reis, 2009). The media construction of informative discourse about identity is well marked in Portugal by narratives that meet the average white, middle-class newspaper reader (Carvalho, 2006). The identity discourse built in the public sphere largely depends on: 1) the relationship between communication media, institutional sphere and market, 2) the internal organisation of media institutions and 3) the role assumed by the media on the significance and representation of identities (Sampedro and Carriço Reis, not yet published). As such,

"the true managers of contemporary public identities are the media. The public identity is projected outwards, questioning the other members of the community. And the media presents to social groups in terms of equality or difference, exhibiting inclusive identity marks (for community members) and exclusive (for foreigners, considered as 'alien'). The political significance of this "identity function" of the media is huge, as only publicly acknowledged collective identities can file complaints with the institutions" (Sampedro, 2004: 136).

Public recognition of a given identity is directly connected with the visibility that a certain group assumes, ethnic or collective in social discourse, be the news informative or fictional. So in the Portuguese case, the studies linking media and African community recurrently focus on analyzing the role of media producers in the building of social representation of "immigrants". The analytical trend focused on content analysis of mass media, particularly television and newspapers.

The first significant conclusion that these studies deduced was that there is a direct connotation among African migration and marginality. The journalistic discourse negatively polarised the other's territory. By criminalising the

“Ghetto”, double exclusion is enhanced. The social periphery is now a space where ethnic identification produces a discourse that feeds an imaginary segregation (Ferin, 1997). Van Dijk (1993) had already identified a subtle racism in media coverage, normalizing power relationships and building strong ethnic stereotypes.

This narrative trend is also reproduced from the late nineties for other emigrant communities. In the time period between January 2001 and March 2002, the observatory of communication studies the representation of the image of immigrants and ethnic minorities in newspapers and mass-circulation magazines in Portugal. With the arrival of increasing numbers of immigrants from the East to Portugal, and the subsequent crystallisation of a community, immigration assumes a greater role in the coverage. We witness a depersonalisation of immigrants’ national identity that ceases to hold a nationality and instead answers to the generic label of “immigrant”. The origin and consequently the issues of (dis)integration are diluted, which socially raises this new wave of immigration to Portugal. The print media respond with a minimum coverage of the debate on the issues associated with migration and ethnic minorities, and reproduce earlier agendas, focusing visibility on the criminal approach, criminalizing the other and not clarifying other interpretations of the phenomenon. This negative visibility does not have a real translation, as the crimes committed by foreigners or ethnic minorities were residual in relation to the officially registered number of crimes (Barra da Costa, 1999).

The year 2006 introduced a change in the described trend of media coverage. The emergence of the Communication Regulatory Agency (ERC), which replaces the previous high authority for social communication, sets stricter criteria in media coverage of minorities. Specifically sensitizing to comply with the law No. 1/99 of the Journalists’ Statute, in which its 14th article refers to the need for non-discriminatory journalistic treatment, particularly in relation to the issue of race. In the same year the immigration laws are relaxed, the Organic Law. N.º. 2/2006, of April 17 assumes the *ius soli* principle (right of the soil), which facilitates the acquisition of Portuguese nationality by immigrants.

This transformation enhances inclusion, by assuming the possibility of a more egalitarian and participatory citizenship. We are seeing a slight transformation of the news coverage of minorities. The negative tone, specifically for the visibility of immigrants’ criminal actions, undergoes a narrative transformation in the sense that it clarifies whether perpetrator or victim of crime. Racial profiling decreases, which dampens the overseas representation of being immigrant. We verify an introduction to the integration difficulties of Africans in Portuguese society, despite a lack of attention to the innumerable activities produced by immi-

grant associations, and we equally witness the introduction of critical discourse denouncing the stigma (Carvalho 2006).

But there are nuances depending on the different media that builds the ethnic discourse. From the press, the focus on issues related to ethnic minorities summons greater reflectivity, discussing causes and consequences, while television assumes a simplified narrative approach (Ferin, Policarpo, Monteiro, Figueiras; 2002; Ferin, Santos, Filho, Forte, 2008a and 2008b). In the regional press a proximity approach humanizes the immigrant and centers its focus on the question of reception and education (Cadima and Figueiredo, 2003).

Despite a remarkable transformation in media coverage, with a more neutral clipping focus, all studies identified point to the discursive subalternisation of emigrants in relation to official institutions, which favors the institutionalisation of discrimination. The focus of the studies concentrates sharply on the issue of media representations and scarce are the approaches that try to understand how the targeted reinterpretate the representations.

Ethnographic studies suggest a different perspective on the subject. There is the perception in narratives of Guinean residents in Portugal, that their imagined life constitutes the migration experience as a disappointment, an impossibility to return (Bordonaro and Pussetti, 2006). The expression of disappointment of a first generation that arrived in Portugal in a context of insecurity and informality, maintains these elements as it verifies unemployment rates higher than the average in the Portuguese population (Machado, 2008).

It matters to understand, how the media particularly assumes African heritage in a context of polyphony, Creole as an assumption of a particular reality (Counter, 1998), which Stuart Hall defines as “fragmented identities”. A concept subordinated to the dynamics of flexible current social relations “plural insertions which question hallowed beliefs” (Jelin, 2002: 124). This identity assumes a strategic concept and position, as it is constructed and adapted to each new twist (Ferguson, 2007). Other authors, such as René Gallissot (1987) and Zygmunt Bauman (2001 and 2005), prefer to replace the concept of “identity” with “identification”. “Identification” comprises the essentialist connotation which has always been associated to the term, nurturing a constantly changing meaning and underlining its unfinished character (Gimenez, 2000).

As Bauman (2005: 179) indicated: “identification is a process of unstoppable experimentation”. Ethnicity thus assumes a varying role in understanding identity, through the constant encouragement and appeal of “poly contexts” in which we move (Flores, 2001). According to Simmel (1986), one of the main characteristics of modernity is that it allows the individual a simultaneous affiliation to different groups, through the ability to incorporate different cultural pat-

terns, starting with an assimilation of a growing multicultural context that enables a process of plural socialization. Therefore, it is not surprising that young people of African descent “are positioned on a continuum of non-confrontational identities ranging between Portuguese and African” (Padilha, 2011: 171), hybridity over which it matter to reflect.

3. The case of the “second generation” re-Africanisation and media

In Portuguese public speaking it has been normalized to use the term “second generation” to refer to young Africans living in Portugal, which is an sociological inaccuracy, as these young people are Portuguese by birth. This normalised discourse, greatly amplified by the inaccuracies of the use of the concept in the media, encouraged a strong ethnic identity which diluted their own Portuguese nationality. Racial hostility continues to be strongly present in the speeches of the Luso-African (Carvalho, 2006) despite its integration into Portuguese society. Specifically for remote African origins, a society they see as distant, made recurrent in a socialisation process that reinforced its “Portuguese-ness” by its way of schooling, professional market integration and access to consumer society .

Gradually, integration difficulties suffered by the first generations of African immigrants (less educated environments and precarious contexts) are dilluting, to the extent that “the children of immigrants are more like young people from an equal social status, whether indigenous or from immigrant background, than like other children of immigrants from different social statuses” (Machado, 2008: 155).

The current youth condition, very much marked by strong job insecurity and high unemployment, seems to consequently determine structural explanations which condition inclusion and social mobility (Calvo, 2011). For young people of African descent, adding to the challenges inherent to the condition of youth, are other aspects recurrent from the question of identity, such as ethnic and class dimensions. Taking into account a large study with young African immigrants from former Portuguese colonies in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, Padilha (2011: 171) speaks of a “hyphenated” Afro-Portuguese identity, where they are positioned in a continuum of identities where being Portuguese does not conflict with being African.

The author describes identities as a complex mixture of elements and markers of both African and Portuguese origin, highlighting in the process a recurrent social stigma, discrimination and racial inequalities of everyday experience. The self-identification marks, to young Africans, are: culture, sexual orientation (for young people), economic status, skin color and religion. These indicators come

from different experiences and so there is a need for a different social recognition, as identity is a game of expectations.

Padilha (2011: 167) states that young immigrants “do not intend to reproduce or assume as acquired the African culture of their ancestors, preferring to give it new meaning by creating their own forms of African culture or of being African” full of hybridity, miscegenation and youth consciousness, which contrasts with adult and Portuguese identity.

This results in sub-cultural approaches, especially hip-hop, whose connotations are derogatory in nature. The author concludes that this context leads to racial emphasis of youths, with a perception and identification assigned by others based on color and social prejudices, reinforced by a negative external image of the neighborhood where they live. Young people feel discriminated, especially by their skin color and not for being African.

Social discourse, facilitated by the media reinforces a double stigma, racial and age-related. Based on an exploratory analysis on the Portuguese press discourse on youth, Coelho (2009) concluded that the dominant representation rests on the stereotype of troublesome youths, being focused as the problems created for the authorities or as a generator of problems, their voice never appears as the bearer of explanations for what happened. The category of being young intrinsically gains negative connotations, because it is used as recurrent in criminal acts. On the other hand, reference to age is omitted when a crime is committed by adults. “Behind the attribution of a role, identity is constructed, borders are outlined, which favors detachment from the reader in relation to the young people concerned” (Coelho, 2009: 370).

If to a stigmatized media coverage about the condition of youth we add an equal discursive matrix in relation to racial status, we strongly amplify exclusive identities, something that has often dominated the news in Portugal about minority groups, characterized by attributes such as poverty, violence, social deviance (Ponte, 2009: 2). We can assume contours of greater severity when the media representations of different treatments produce similar social groups. As an example we can point out that criminal acts by youths of higher social strata are generally represented as attributes of frivolity, deviation of character, “age-related” or acts of recreation, but if the same acts are perpetrated by youths identified with ethnicities or disadvantaged social groups, they are often exacerbated by stimulating dramatic coverage (Carvalho, 2009), contributing to their moral condemnation. In the same way, Azeredo (2007: 205) states that the representations of black youths are associated with this phenomenon of delinquency, amplifying the social stigma.

The news coverage of an incident that occurred on the beach of Carcavelos on Portugal Day (June 10th) in the year 2005 has been paradigma-

tic. The popular beach, frequented by black youths from the periphery, has been the set for robberies and clashes with police (four people were arrested, three civilians and two policemen were slightly injured), an episode highlighted and with extensive media coverage outlined as ‘arrastão’⁵. ‘Juvenile Violence’, ‘gangs’, ‘bunch of youths’, ‘Brazilian-style robbery’ were the terms used in the headlines of reference press in a discursive imposition of fear and other symbols as culprits (Ponte, 2006: 13).

Rosa (2011) analyzes the coverage of the event as a news wave constructed from the consensus established by primary sources (police) around a diversion behavior by a stigmatized ethnic group. For the author, the phenomenon reveals a predisposition for frivolous representation of minorities, previously associated with deviant behavior. Before social media representation, in negative tones, it matters to reflect on how these young Luso-Africans incorporate these discourses in their identity conformation, which in a dialogic form relates to the dominant perception that is built (Hammarberg, 1997: 248).

It is interesting to analyze how meanings are negotiated by the intended audience. Discussing media consumption of young Africans living in Portugal means understanding how they integrate their social identities into their ‘biographisation’ (Beck, 1998) through media discourse.

The analysis of perceptions lingers between skepticism and criticism (Buckingham, 2000). Skepticism denotes a distance and difference in the face of events and their representation in the news. On the other hand, criticism implies emotional involvement and the belief that the truth about the fact can and should be told. How and in what situations do young Africans adopt these different reactions and in what measure do they conjugate with their ethnic constructions?

As referred previously, few studies are emphasizing this approach. We highlight Carvalheiro’s work (2006) which, on the basis of interviews to children of Cape Verdean immigrant adults (ages 20 to 30), presents us with direct speech of youths; “The empirical material on which this article is based clearly indicates that the descendants of Cape Verdeans in Portugal associate their representation in the media to a strongly negative image in the news genre. That image is polarized by episodes of delinquency, groups of young men and neighborhoods presented as dangerous in the suburbs of Lisbon” (Carvalheiro, 2006: 79).

We also note the attempt of Marôpo (not yet published) to analyse, through discussion groups, how 15 children and youths (ages 9 to 16), African inhabitants

[05] Collective robbery tactic popularised on the beaches of Brazil in the 80s, in which a significant number of elements simultaneously attack in one location.

of a social neighborhood in the outskirts of Lisbon construct their identities in light of media discourse. The study group has a strong local identity, also marked by skin color (“us blacks” as opposed to “whites”), constantly confronted by negative media representation of the neighborhood they live in, with attributes of diversion and violence.

This mediation is seen as the main cause of a negative external image of the community and significantly marks the studied group, contributing to the construction of identity classified in three categories:

1. Distraught identity; marked by a sense of fear and anxiety, especially in younger individuals, reliving, through the media, violent episodes experienced personally or proximally;

2. Suspicious identity; feeling of distrust regarding the media and other stakeholders outside the community who deliberately “speak ill” of the neighborhood;

3. Stigmatized identity; refers to the consequences of stigmatisation of the news, in the perception of these children and youths. These lead to “neighbourhood outsiders” excusing themselves from coming when invited.

Marôpo concludes that children and young people react differently to news discourse representations, according to their skills and interpretive capabilities. But both face the stigmatizing challenge, which involves transposing barriers in the unequal relationship with others, those who are beyond the geographical/emotional border of the neighborhood. In face of such evidence we perceive a criticism that makes young people from an early age internalize an asymmetrical place in Portuguese society, in a way that the media proposes as a reflexive sense of social status, a picture of stable expectations in a highly dysfunctional reality (Galtung and Ruge, 1981).

4. In conclusion, the features of the media coverage of Africanness in Portugal

Taking into account the contributions of empirical studies on communication, in relation to the conceptual debate about the question of identity, this paper attempts to analyse the relationship between media cultures and the construction of African identity in Portugal. The research focused mainly on the analysis of content in television and press, which allowed us to observe a clear transformation of the representation of communities originating from African Portuguese-speaking countries over the last decades. In the 80's, media references began to be residual, while in

the 90's we witnessed a significant increase in the visibility of Africans in the media. In the first decade of the XXI century, with the increasing migration flow, we witnessed the depersonalisation of the national identity of the immigrant, ceasing to be identified by their nationality and emerging as a foreigner (in a growing process of "media dehumanisation").

The dominant trait of media representations that studies show is a clear discursive correlation between immigration and marginalisation, which configures a distorted portrait since there are never corresponding criminal statistics which formalize that evidence. We recorded a media representation that operates from a dual mechanism of symbolic annihilation; reinforcing the identitarian visibility of Africans in situations which intensify their moral condemnation, while invisibility is built on the capability of associative mobilisation of these communities to overcome shortcomings in integration.

From the middle of the first decade of the XXI century, we have witnessed a gradual transformation of the negative portrayal of African identity, due to increased media regulation from official agencies. It was established that the media should strive for the promotion of media settings in line with the parameters of multiculturalism and for openness to critical discourse that denounces and removes the stigmatising mechanism. Despite all this, the studies reported the unanimous criticism of prevalence of official speeches in light of absence of immigrant discourse.

Taking as valid the more serious contributions of cultural studies, we reaffirm that the meanings of identity are not simply transmitted and distributed to the public by the media. The powerful role of the media as disseminators of significance maps (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts, 1978), delimit and to some extent determine the possible meanings that can be built (Buckingham, 2012). Important for those are the scarce studies that are concerned with focusing on how the affected reread media representations. We note with special attention, that the social actors under study perceive the media as stigma catalysts, particularly those based on skin color. This means highly educated Africans and of Portuguese nationality need to daily counterpose these inferior identities reflected in public opinion, which generate, *a priori*, unequal relations and distrust.

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