

José Manuel Oliveira Mendes. *Do ressentimento ao reconhecimento: vozes, identidades e processos políticos nos Açores (1974-1996)*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2003.

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The history of the Azores has been profoundly influenced by the “exodus” of its people overseas and particularly, during the 20th century, to the USA and Canada. From this perspective its history has been determined by its unique geographical location in the Atlantic between two “Worlds”—the “old” (Europe) and the “New” (America). However, “location” can also be defined in a social context, as individuals and groups define themselves in terms of their social, cultural, economic and political contexts. Thus, while identity is a complex concept, it is also a dynamic one whose meaning and interpretation has changed over time. This is particularly the case in our contemporary 21st century world which is being significantly reshaped by the forces of globalization. While the Azores have not been immune to these profound changes to our global social and cultural landscapes over the past three decades—Portugal’s entrance to the European Union having had a particularly important impact upon the islands—in many respects we can view the local cultural landscape of the islands as a social space in which cultural identity has been used as a means of buffering the impact of globalization.

It is in this context that this book addresses the dynamic and complex subject of “Azorean Regional Identity.” In this work—a revised version of a doctoral dissertation in Sociology (Coimbra University)—the author, himself an Azorean born in the island of Terceira, attempts to understand: “How social actors, located in different islands and socioeconomic contexts, and with social, economic, cultural and symbolic resources differentiated, built and rebuilt their own personal and social identities. . .[and] how these actors incorporated, in their identity discourses, the idea of an imagined regional community” (12).

Apart from an introduction and a conclusion, the book is comprised of six chapters. In Chapter 1 “The Question of Identities” [A Questão das

Identidades], the author presents a well-structured critical review of scholarly debates on the issue of “identities.” Here the author calls for a dynamic conception of the “problematic of identities” in terms of multiple, diverse identities that are constructed through social narrative.

This approach continues in Chapter 2, “Social Memory, Rituals and Performative Identities” [*Memória Social, Rituais e Identidades Performativas*], where the author theoretically analyses the public dimension of identities in terms of the social codification, institutionalization, symbolization and monumentalization of events that define communities. In this chapter, attention is also paid to the relationship between space, region and public rituals, especially to the complexity of regional identity in Europe in general, in particular, Portugal. In this regard, chapters 1 and 2 provide a solid theoretical foundation for the book’s discussion of the dynamic and complex issue of identities.

In Chapter 3, “The Discourse of Identity in the Newspapers: A Permanent Agonistic Relation Between the Regional and the National Space” [*O Discurso Identitário nos Jornais: A Relação Agonística Permanente Entre Espaço Regional e Espaço Nacional*], the author provides the reader with an in-depth and insightful discussion of how identity in the discourse was produced and circulated in the Azores via the written press and, in particular, for the period after April 25, 1974. To accomplish this task the author relied on well-known Azorean newspapers—“Açores” (1974-1978)/“Açoriano Oriental” (1979 to 1996) published in S. Miguel and on the “Diário Insular” from Terceira island. In this analysis, three important periods in the “life” of the Azores are considered: a) 1974-1975 _the revolutionary period; b) 1976-1984 _the foundation and consolidation of the autonomous regime; and c) 1986-1992 _the challenges of Europe and the radicalization of the autonomous discourse.

In Chapter 4, “The Independence of Azores: Personal Positions and Ideological Dilemmas” [*A Independência dos Açores: Posicionamentos Pessoais e Dilemas Ideológicos*], the author _via extensive in-depth interviews with 48 people from S. Miguel and Terceira _analyses the complex, and thus controversial, issue of the independence of the Azores. While this chapter is long, the excerpts of these interviews are nonetheless interesting, and they are analyzed by the author and presented to the reader in considerable detail. In these responses, two different positions are assumed by the interviewees, with approximately 90% (43 out of 48) against the independence while only 5

respondents favored it. However, the controversial theme of Azorean independence serves in this chapter as a catalyst for a detailed analysis of the cultural and political identities of the 48 interviewees.

This is built upon in Chapter 5, “The Production of Subjective Identity: Traces that Unify and Traces that Divide” [*Produção Identitária Subjectiva: Traços que Unem e Traços que Dividem*], where the author tries to understand how the interviewees built their own personal identities with their main reference points being the local political and spatial dimensions of the Azores. Particular attention is paid in this chapter to the subtle, yet complex problematic of the presence (or not) of an identity and/or regional unity in the Archipelago. The main key research questions that guide this discussion are: Which factors were pointed out by the interviewees as inhibitors of this regional unity? Which ones bond the different islands? At the cultural level can we argue an Azorean culture? Is the concept of “Açorianidade” a legitimate one? Finally, is Açorianidade linked to the intellectual class? It is evident from the analysis in this chapter, and according to the interviewees as well, that despite the numerous traits that unite us as “Azoreans” there are other forces dividing us. Among these “forces” the author mentions particularly the political processes at work in the islands, as well as the geographical space (location), as important catalysts for change in shaping both intra and inter-island relations and, ultimately, affecting the way Azoreans are building and defining their own identity.

Finally, in Chapter 6, “Feasts as Performative Identities” [*As Festas Como Identidades Performativas*], the author explores the cultural feasts (profane and religious) that occur on the island of Terceira “As Sanjoaninhas” (Angra do Heroísmo) and “As Festas do Concelho” (Praia da Vitória) and on the island of S. Miguel “As Festas do Senhor Santo Cristo” (Ponta Delgada) and “As Cavalladas do S. Pedro” (Ribeira Grande). The author approaches these as public rituals as well as privileged means for seizing the process in which the identity is formed and/or reconstituted. Some important questions addressed in this chapter include: How these feasts act as catalysts and as resources in the process of identity construction? Which symbols are consensual? How are personal and social identities articulated?

This last chapter is particularly interesting for its discussion of the role played by the important number of Azorean immigrants from USA and Canada in these cultural feasts. According to the author, for these Azoreans who had migrated overseas and return to visit the islands, these feasts func-

tion as significant vehicles for the reaffirmation of their Azorean identity. These feasts give a "status" and visibility to their identity within the emigration space of the Azorean "diáspora." As the author notes: "Todos os anos os emigrantes marcam a sua presença, a sua disponibilidade de estreitamento dos laços familiares e afectivos, e em caso de crise na relação económica com a União Europeia, constituirão sempre uma fonte alternativa de identificação e de apoio, sob a protecção mítica de grande potência mundial. As festas...são momentos de negociação e renegociação identitária, de gestão geo-estratégica e geo-emocional de um arquipélago entre dois mundos, tecendo os milhares de fios invisíveis dos fluxos económicos, comerciais e dos fluxos afectivos e familiares" (345).

In sum, this is a well-written and informative work which should be "recommended reading" for both scholars in sociology as well as lay people interested in the subject of "regional identities" in an era of globalization. As the author notes in his Conclusion, the processes of identity construction in the Azorean cultural and social space remain problematic and not fully understood. From this perspective, while this book fills a major gap in the Portuguese scholarly literature dealing with the Azores and its complex identity(ies), it should be seen not as the "final word" but rather as an opening to further comparative research inter and intra-islands on the ideological and symbolic construction of the Azorean regional identity(ies).

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