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# Intercultural relations: Analysis of the communicational dysfunction due to the cultural lag between French, Japanese, and Mozambicans

Germano Vera Cruz

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Based on a field research work, this monograph consists of four chapters. The first (Human Beings, Culture, Intercultural Relations, and Behavior Related to Politeness) analyzes the theories of and studies on interculturality. The second (The Japanese Students in France) studies the interactions of a group of Japanese students with their French colleagues, friends, and interlocutors, focusing, among other subjects, on the behavior related to politeness. The third (The Mozambican Students in France) studies the interactions of a group of Mozambican students with their French colleagues, friends, and interlocutors, focusing especially on the courtesy behaviors. The fourth (French, Japanese, and Mozambicans: Agreements and Disagreements), analyses the similarities and differences regarding some cultural communication related elements among the three groups of participants. In the final section (Discussion, Perspectives, and Conclusion), we conclude the monograph stressing and discussing the most relevant aspects of these intercultural communication based interactions, in particular, and the intercultural relations, in general; we also indicate some perspectives on future research.



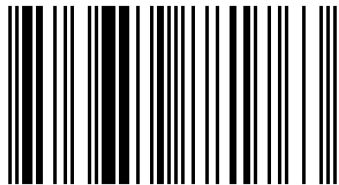
Germano Vera Cruz

## Intercultural Relations

Analysis of the communicational dysfunction due to the cultural lag between French, Japanese, and Mozambicans



Germano Vera Cruz is a professor, researcher, psychologist, sexologist, journalist, writer. He is the author of several scientific articles and books in the field of sexuality, love relationships, physical attractiveness, violence against women, empathy and forgiveness, intercultural communication. As writer, he published novels and travel stories.



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# **Intercultural Relations**

Analysis of the communicational dysfunction due to the cultural lag between French, Japanese, and Mozambicans

**Germano VERA CRUZ**





**To all my friends around the world.**

**I would like to thank you for your friendship, for having welcomed me in your countries, for having hosted me at your houses. For the time we spent together, I am grateful.**

**TO: My French friends** (Frédéric Fontana, Mélanie Valognes, Sandrine Baron, Sophie Guérinet, Ali Cassius, Eric Labussière, Gildas Humeau, Patrice Remaud, Virgil Mangiavillano, Floriant Vaidie, Estelle Bonnet); **My Swiss friends** (Dominique Buff, Claudia Pletscher, Kathrin Pletscher, Michael Bachman); **My German friends** (Barbara Brielmann, Julia Brielmann, Katja Schweiker, Varena Amersbach, Maike Heber, Barbara Armbruster, Ben Le Win); **My Italian friends** (Francesca Scaramuzza, Luca Pavone, Nicoletta Bassanini); **My Swedish friends** (Malin Rosengard, Anna Bjorck); **My Japanese friends** (Yumiko Shibata, Satoko Ito, Azusa Kubota, Masako Lizuka); **My Finnish friends** (Susanna Sierla, Saila Pasanen, Saila Korvenranta, Heini Antila, Jeni Latval); **My English friend** (Sarah Martin); **My Czech friend** (Anna Hanzalová); **My Norwegian friend** (Ana Menezes); **My Portuguese friend** (Isabel Pinto); **My South Korean friend** (Jinha Jung); **My Dutch friend** (Wendeline van der Feltz); **My Romanian friend** (Magdalena Vladoiu); **My Slovenian friend** (Barbara Duh); **My Belgian friend** (Katelijne van der Eecken); **My Brazilian friends** (Zilda Petter, Mariana Matos, Suzana Isaka); **My Canadian friends** (Lise Langlais, Yves Lacroix); **My American friends** (Mark Gonzales, Jon Riehle); **My Russian friend** (Darya Doodar); **My South African friend** (Michael Kekana); **My Mozambican friends** (Edmundo Bulha, Ricardo Tomás, Sónia Jafar, Anicha Jafar, João Manasses, Eva Humbelina, Manuel Jornau, Emídio Guila, Estefanio Muholove, Teófélo Nhampossa, Herculano Thumbó).



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## **Preface**

### **Everywhere and Nowhere<sup>1</sup>**

I return from a trip as I depart from home: Torn apart.

Travelling is building bridges: Bridge between both shores, bridge between the two sides of the bridge; bridge between spaces, worlds; a bridge between diverse cultures.

I feel dizzy when I'm on a bridge: suspended, in between, halfway. I am divided, two, three, four, multiple.

I return from trips as I move away from home: Lost. Here yesterday, gone tomorrow: hanging. I like crossroads, inextricable pathways, provisional honey moons, distant legends and fairytales, sunken ships, rugged coastlines, bird nests, wriggling myself...!

I arrive in a city, I walk at random: Disoriented. To the friends lodging me, I do not require anything, I demand nothing, all cool and stuff; I let myself go. I do not judge, I'm not criticizing; I wonder, I learn and I absorb. That's it.

In any country, I go to the path of the wind, according to the sympathies. I rush into the cries of a spoiled child, somewhere in London. I shoot through the violet depths, marveled, into the magisterial gestures of beach volleyball players and capoeira dancers on the Copacabana Beach. My vagabond heart gets fuddled by the improvised melody welling from the ebony drifter woman, a mermaid bathing in a river, somewhere under the scorching African sun. The

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<sup>1</sup> Given that this text was originally written in French, I decided to put, after the English version, the original version, in French.

nonchalant approach of two lovers who roam the banks of the Seine, in Paris, arm in arm, hand in hand, untangle in my mind the thread of an inspired poem, *it rains on the city like it's raining in my heart*. I rave under the wonderful charm of a young girl I met the eyes of by chance in a Tokyo subway. Female thighs, slightly apart, on the bench of a public garden, somewhere in Finland, set me aflame, completely. Oh! I return from travel always in love... and with a Broken Heart!

I travel poorly, proud of my flippancy. Like my idols, Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Henry Miller, I have long frequented the slums, talking to bum drunkards on their Sunday best. I have long slept in train stations, sleeping with one eye and awakened by the other, watch out, pickpockets, my friends! I hobnob the hovels of squalid streets, populated with busy prostitutes. While travelling, I have often counted my meager pennies until the last, hungry, only having enough to buy low-end sandwiches.

Arrogantly, I declare myself countryless, without wheat, orphan; without race, without origin, without destiny: Zilch, niente, nada, zero!

Lost and damned for good, undocumented, penniless, raked like a desert, helpless as a species under threat of extinction, less than nothing, I have long cried hot tears, imploring fate, the motherland that I have not, and my mother all short, that I do not have neither. To get up, an hour later, and continue on my merry way. That's life my boy, I keep telling myself. That's traveling! Indeed. When we feel mugged, trip up, when we must search for words to jabber a word of a strange language, when you wake up naked and incompetent. Pride disappears and then you can finally starting to truly travel in the depths of Humanity!

... There you will be, dear friends, when you will find beautiful scars, when you have experienced the splendor emerging from blood, sweat and tears:

the millenary traces of all these battlefields without which we would not become *Homo sapiens*.

By dint of enduring rain and thunderstorms, by being always in hallways, at halfway, on the bridges, withstanding low-brow antics, bastards and tribulations; you end up feeling at home everywhere and nowhere! DAMN...

### **Partout et Nulle Part**

Je reviens de voyage, toujours, comme j'en suis parti : Déchiré.

Voyager c'est construire des ponts : pont entre deux rives, pont entre les deux côtés du pont, pont entre deux mondes, pont entre deux, multiples cultures.

J'ai le vertige quand je suis sur un pont : suspendu, entre les deux, à mi-chemin. Je suis divisé, deux, trois, quatre, multiples.

Je reviens de voyage, toujours, comme j'en suis parti : Perdu. Hier ici, demain ailleurs : cramponné. J'aime les croisées des chemins, les sentiers inextricables, les lunes de miels provisoires, les légendes lointaines, les navires naufragés, les côtes escarpées, les nids d'oiseaux... Le vertige quoi !

J'arrive dans une ville, je marche au hasard : Désorienté. Aux amis qui m'hébergent, je n'exige rien, cool quoi, je me laisse aller. Je ne juge pas, je ne critique pas, je m'interroge, j'apprends et j'encaisse. Point barre.

Dans un pays quelconque, je m'en vais au vent des rencontres, au gré des sympathies. Je m'engouffre dans les cris d'un enfant capricieux, quelque part à Londres. Je m'élançe émerveillé dans les gestes magistraux des joueurs de beach-volley et des danseurs de capoeira sur la plage de Copacabana. Je m'enivre sous la mélodie improvisée par une femme ébène, vagabonde, telle une sirène se baignant dans une rivière, quelque part sous le torride soleil africain. La démarche nonchalante de deux amoureux qui arpentent les quais de la Seine, à Paris, bras dessus bras dessous, main dans la main, me retorde le fil d'un

poème inspiré, *qu'il pleut sur la ville comme il pleut dans mon cœur...* Je m'extasie sous le charme magnifique d'une jeune fille dont je croise le regard par hasard dans un métro de Tokyo. Des cuisses féminines légèrement écartées, sur le banc d'un jardin public, quelque part en Finlande, m'embrasent tout entier. Oh ! Je reviens de voyage toujours amoureux... et le Cœur brisé !

Je voyage pauvrement, fier de ma légèreté. Telles mes idoles, Louis-Ferdinand Céline et Henry Miller. J'ai longuement fréquenté les bas quartiers, discutant avec des clochards ivres et endimanchés. J'ai longuement dormi dans les gares, dormant d'un œil, réveillé d'un autre, pickpockets, au garde-à-vous, gare à vous ! J'ai fréquenté les taudis des avenues sordides peuplés de prostitués affairés. J'ai longtemps compté mes maigres sous jusqu'au dernier, affamé, ayant à peine de quoi acheter un sandwich bas de gamme.

Avec arrogance je me déclare sans pays, sans terre, sans blé, orphelin, sans race, sans provenance, sans destin : Que dalle, nienti, nada, zéro !

Perdu et bien foutu, sans papier, désargenté, déblayé comme un désert, désesparé comme une espèce en voie d'extinction, moins que rien, j'ai longtemps pleuré des larmes chaudes, implorant le destin, la mère patrie que je n'ai pas, et ma mère tout court, que je n'ai pas non plus. Pour me relever, une heure plus tard, et continuer mon bonhomme de chemin. C'est cela la vie mon gars, que je me dis. C'est cela les voyages ! En effet. Quand on se sent désarçonné, quand on doit chercher ses mots pour baragouiner un mot de telle langue étrangère, quand on se réveille nu et incompetent. L'orgueil disparaît et on commence enfin à véritablement voyager au fin fond de l'Humanité !

... Vous y serez, chers amis, quand vous y trouverez de belles cicatrices, quand vous y aurez expérimenté la splendeur issue du sang, de la sueur et des larmes : les traces millénaires de tous ces champs de batailles sans lesquels nous ne serions pas devenus des *Homo sapiens*.



A force de supporter des pluies et des orages, d'être toujours à mi-chemin, sur le pont, de supporter des singeries, des salauds et des bobos, on finit par se sentir chez soi partout et nulle part ! PUTAIN...

**Germano VERA CRUZ**



# **Introduction**

## **1. Methodology**

This monograph is based on research done as part of our academic activities.

In order to study the communicational dysfunction due to cultural lag with respect to politeness behaviors (courtesy, civility, good manners) between Western Europeans, East Asians, and people from Southern Africa, during eight months, we conducted a participant observation of activities and group discussion meetings where French (Euro-Westerners), Japanese (East Asians), and Mozambican (Southern Africans) students participated.

The French students (13 individuals: six females, seven males) were between 20–27 years old. They attended different Bachelors and Masters courses in the Faculty of Letters and Language, Faculty of Human Sciences, and Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Poitiers (France). The Japanese students (11 individuals: seven females, four males) were between 19–32 years old. They attended French Language and Literature courses at the Faculty of Letters and Languages of the University of Poitiers. The Mozambican students (14 individuals: five females, nine males) were between 23–34 years old. They also attended French Language and Literature courses at the Faculty of Letters and Languages of the University of Poitiers.

We observed these groups of Japanese and Mozambican students (separately and jointly) interacting with their French colleagues, French friends or simply their interlocutors, during their university activities (e.g., group homework, theatre practicing), entertainment activities (e.g., festive evenings,

sport, walking), and workshop discussions (especially organized by us around certain themes, such as life in France, love and sexuality, cultural and economic globalization, etc.). Thus, with a specially constructed observation grid, we noted the verbal, the nonverbal (gestures, facial expressions, etc.) and the behavioral communicational interactions. the recognition of the existence of

Also, for the purpose of this study, we accompanied these foreigners (the Japanese and Mozambican students), following them in their daily steps (taking the bus, going shopping, support throughout administrative procedures, etc.) during the first months of their stay in France.

This allowed us to tackle the problems they faced in their contacts with French people and vice-versa, to observe and examine their responses, particularly to the “polite” and “less polite” behavior of their interlocutors. As we noticed cultural mismatches – an inconvenience, a problem, an outrage, a misunderstanding – we sought to grasp the origin and the underlying cultural values, asking, among other, questions like:

- What bothered you about his behavior?
- Why did that attitude or behavior upset you?
- In cases like this one, when a person acts differently than you expect, according to you, which important value is violated?

Meanwhile, we have to stress that this research was conducted in the least formal way possible. For instance, we avoided asking questions requiring a direct or curt answer. We believe that in the subject of intercultural communication, especially in this kind of research, it is better to get a satisfactory result by allowing more room for spontaneity, so that both the Japanese and Mozambican students are able to express themselves in their own way.

By the way, we went to Japan to soak ourselves up with Japanese culture, in order to better understand and compare the observations we had to make during our research with the corresponding cultural background. With respect to Mozambican culture, we already knew pretty well this one, as we had lived there many years, and we had already addressed, in another piece of research, from a comparative perspective, the fundamental aspects of Mozambican and Western culture.

Finally, why for this study on intercultural relations and polite behavior have we chosen to tackle the interactions of people from France, Japan and Mozambique? One of the reasons is that we wanted to study a case that include individuals belonging to societies with different characteristics, accounting for a part of today's world: France as a modern Western society; Mozambique, as an Southern African, essentially traditional society; Japan, as an East Asian country, an example of a society that has managed to combine tradition and modernism.

It should be noted, moreover, that we have limited our research to the first months following the arrival of the Japanese and Mozambican students who participated in the study, because we wanted to understand the problem of intercultural communication before the occurrence of an adaptive attitude and behavior. Indeed, as some psychologists have shown (Marc & Picard, 1996), the situation of imbalance caused by the cultural shock creates discomfort and frustration that often induces the protagonists to adapt and to find a balance that is likely to create a sense of stability and satisfaction.

In effect, over time, the Japanese and Mozambican participants tended to adjust their behavior to the French culture. Were these surface adaptations? Perhaps. Anyway, the fact is that adaptation is an indispensable auxiliary of sociability. In order to live with others and be comfortable with them, it is best to adapt to the practices around you. To put it in a simple way, when one is an

expatriate it is better to adjust oneself to the lifestyle of the country where one is staying. Or, as a popular Japanese precept says, *gô ni itte wa gô ni shitagae* (when in Rome, do as the Romans do).

## **2. Monograph Structure**

This monograph consists of four chapters. The first (Human Beings, Culture, Intercultural Relations, and Behavior Related to Politeness) analyzes the theories of and studies on interculturality. The second (The Japanese Students in France) studies the interactions of a group of Japanese students with their French colleagues, friends, and interlocutors, focusing, among other subjects, on the behavior related to politeness. The third (The Mozambican Students in France) studies the interactions of a group of Mozambican students with their French colleagues, friends, and interlocutors, focusing especially on the courtesy behaviors. The fourth (French, Japanese, and Mozambicans: Agreements and Disagreements), analyses the similarities and differences regarding some cultural communication related elements among the three groups of participants. In the final section (Discussion, Perspectives, and Conclusion), we conclude the monograph stressing and discussing the most relevant aspects of these intercultural communication based interactions, in particular, and the intercultural relations, in general; we also indicate some perspectives on future research.

# **Chapter I: Human Beings, Culture, Intercultural Relations, and Behavior Related to Politeness**

## **1. Human Being, Culture and Identity**

As defined by the famous American anthropologist, Edward Tylor (1871), culture is a whole complex which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by human beings as members of a given society. Another American anthropologist, Steve Arvizu (1994), wonderfully defined culture as “what guides peoples in their thinking, feeling, and acting, and serves as an emotional road map or plan of action in their struggle for survival” (p. 75). This latter author also stressed the fact that culture is dynamic, active, changing, always on the move. Even within their native contexts, cultures are always changing as a result of political, social, and other modifications in the immediate environment. When different cultures come in contact with one another, as is currently happening in this time of globalization, such change is to be expected even more.

It is Man who builds culture, which in turn builds or rebuilds Man. That is, Man is an animal that builds culture, whose identity, cognition, attitudes and behavior, the ways he sees the world around him, is shaped by his own culture. Indeed, what characterizes all human beings – what gives human beings their identity – it is the culture and the whole communication structure in which the person grew up: the language, religion, and social institutions, general behaviors and attitudes, the particular way that time and space is apprehended, the meaning and the place occupied by vital activities such as work and entertainment, in the person’s society (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989). All these

elements, in interaction, form a meaningful communication structure, a historical, social and cultural context that, in one way or another, molds the identity of all human beings.

Besides, culture is a particular system of institutions that cannot be understood simply in terms of its content and constituent parts. One has to know the arrangement of all the parts, the operating systems, the key dynamics and the nature of their relationship (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989). As matter of fact, it is difficult to properly speak of a culture only from the inside or outside, without referring to another culture. Individuals who are frequently in situations involving cultural contact multiply the opportunities for making comparisons, and therefore the possibility of understanding not only the culture of others, but also their own culture, in the same way that by learning a foreign language we develop a deeper understanding of the characteristics of our own native language.

Going in depth, it is important to remember that the part of the nervous system that is associated with social conduct operates under a *negative feedback principle*; that is, the cerebral control system remains unconscious as long as what is programmatic or due to happen goes as planned (Hall, 1981). In intra-cultural encounters, at least frequently, the interaction goes as expected. In contrast, during an intercultural interaction, it often happens that “things” do not proceed as they usually do. Thus, intercultural encounters are not just an exotic thrill. They provide an insight into cultural differences and, as a result, provide the much greater advantage of facilitating an awareness of the structures of one’s own cultural system, which can be accomplished only by the frequenting with those who are not part of it – people coming from a different culture (Hall, 1981).

In fact, nowadays, the number of situations in which one can no longer rely on one’s own culture to predict the behavior of others is increasing. People



are constantly called upon to have interactions with strangers; people also have to go a step further and surpass their culture. Moreover, one can even say that now we all have, more or less, an identity that has dual or multiple major components, coming from different origins: local and global, inheritance and transformation, the nation and the planet (Hersh, 1993). We are affected by *the proximity of the distant*, to use an expression from the famous German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1927).

Verily, interculturality is now one of the forms of knowledge and practices inherent to our human civilization. It runs through all societies, pervades them, blending discontinuities and properties, coming on as a flowing water spreading, imposing its omnipresence and its visibility (Abdallah-Preteille & Porcher, 1999). No one is able now to act as if the phenomenon does not exist, inside his own living space, inside his own mind and heart.

Yet, “the other” and “the elsewhere” still harbor fantasies, hopes, illusions and resentments. Denied, systematically, in the name of the universal; or conversely, hypostatized in the name of the difference, in many societies, the culture and the intercultural are now at the heart of a historical, social, ideological, emotional, and symbolic struggle for survival (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989). In any case, the question is no longer neutral and leaves no one indifferent.

Thus, in this research work, we aim to study and to offer reflections on a theme – intercultural communication – linked to this subject – interculturality – that confusingly, but nevertheless, is becoming more and more part of all of our identities: our being-in-the-world, our knowledge and our actions.

In the concrete situations when intercultural contacts occur, the communication complexity increases due to the differences in value systems. Often, in such situations, it is not only the communicational interaction that is

affected, but also especially the nature of the relationship. Consequently, it is important to analyze what it is that mainly characterizes intercultural relations, before we start the study of the misunderstandings and malfunctions caused by cultural differences or cultural lag.

## **2. Intercultural Relations**

### **2.1. Oppositions and connections**

As a sort of language, as a kind of second human DNA, identity is at the meeting point of two movements that tend to keep together the difference and the link, the paradigm<sup>2</sup> and the syntagm<sup>3</sup>: constitutive dimensions of the symbolic order that founded the culture. Indeed, for instance, lay oppositions are constantly producing syntagms (e.g., same/other; familiar/foreign; male/female; child/adult; dominating/dominated, friend/enemy; etc.) that generate signifiers for operating the social codes: each term has value in the relationship that unites it to another term and has no identity (meaning) “in itself” (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989).

Incidentally, this movement in which the identity is made visible and asserts itself is also observed in every intercultural encounter; it leans on the contrasts embodied in the fact that what is visibly salient (physically and psychologically) lends itself particularly to the production of oppositions. Thus, in the deployment of symbolic codes, that is, during a communicative interaction, all difference clues (symptoms) are reinterpreted as inner or outer group belonging signs and signifiers. These oppositions are tension generator’s and flows allowing both conflicts and exchanges; if the oppositions are radicalized, breaks are established between individuals or between social groups, which tend to cut off communication; if fully denied, the interaction

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<sup>2</sup> That is, a combination of words or items that acquire their values and meanings because they oppose each other.

<sup>3</sup> That is, an associative relationship of elements that have something in common and in which prevail various kinds of relations (connections), including complementary ones.

flows run out and each group experiences their unity in the silence or by reciting an ideological creed against others (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989).

But the identity phenomenon is not only a syntagm producer; it also has a fundamental paradigmatic dimension. Signifiers only make sense within a system of relationships that establishes between them links, networks, and associative chains (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989). For example, the difference man/woman produces not only the opposition but also links: matrimony, sexual relationship, relationships between men who compete to seduce women or who tell each other of their sexual adventures, etc. The ethno-cultural differences, also, produce not only opposition but also links: cooperation or trade of various kinds. It would therefore be wrong to see collective identities simply as cleaving structuring of ethno-cultural and ethno-social spaces; they are as much a means of building relationships, communication, and exchange.

Then, it follows from all this that identity appears as a “heat exchanger” that connects and separates at once, and circulates within the multicultural spaces and intercultural encounters. In this sense, its status is comparable to that of a totem (and more broadly of the myth), such as the famous French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) analyzed it. According to this author, the totem system structures cultural spaces through a set of oppositions that allow, in the same movement, the intra-group individual connections and the connection, the communication between the different groups. For each member of the group, the totem, like an identity, has a substantial reality-related attributes; yet, effectively, it socially works as a signifier inside a symbolic code where its value lies less in its own characteristics than in a relational system – difference and contiguity – that it maintains with other signifiers (Lévi-Strauss, 1962).

## **2.2. The self and the otherness**

The dialectics of identity and otherness, as we have seen, marks both the individual and the culture. Now, we must situate its effects with respect to the intercultural relations.

### **a) Ethnocentrism**

The phenomenon that immediately stands out from the observation is the pervasiveness of ethnocentrism. Our view of the other has always had a projective nature, and we can only have as a foundation and reference our own culture (Levi-Strauss, 1987). In this sense, it seems that the diversity of cultures has rarely appeared to men for what it is: a relative phenomenon resulting from divergent human groups' spatial and social development, coming from the direct or indirect relationship between societies; rather, they saw it as a sort of monstrosity or scandal (Lévi-Strauss, 1987).

Indeed, ethnocentrism, far from being a sort of distorted grasp of reality, a kind of pathological symptom emerging from the inter-relationship, proves to be the natural and the first move in front of the otherness. The values, ways of thinking and living that are ours can only seem to us as the natural and indispensable foundation of what is human. That others may not share it can only be a sign of aberration or perversion.

How can one be Persian?! Asked the classic French philosopher, Charles Montesquieu (1721). Montesquieu's exclamation reflects the feelings of disbelief, incomprehension, and rejection that often run through contacts between individuals with different identities. Another classic French philosopher and writer, Michel de Montaigne (1592), also noted: everyone calls barbarism whatever is not his custom. And, the famous French linguist, Joseph-Marie de Gérando (1822), wrote in the early nineteenth century: "Nothing is more common than judge the habits of wild people by analogies drawn from our own manners, which however have so little to do with them" (p. 123). Everywhere,

in every age, every people claimed to embody the very essence of humanity, rejecting the others for their “barbarity” and “savagery”, “wild habits”; saying about whatever they do: “it is not from us”, “we should not allow that”.

For instance, Antiquity labeled all those who did not participate in Greek culture (and Greco-Roman) under the same name: *barbaric*; Western colonial ideology then used the term “wild” in the same way (Lévi-Strauss, 1987). Both these epithets evoke a kind of animal life. In both cases, we refuse to admit the fact of cultural diversity; preferring to reject outside culture, into the nature, everything that does not comply with the standard under which we live.

It must be noted, incidentally, that this attitude towards strangers, on behalf of which we reject the “savage” people out of humanity, is also a significant attitude of these same savages themselves, which means that we in fact share with them the same cognition skills. Indeed, the concept of *humanity* as a notion that includes all human beings without distinction of race or culture, it was formed gradually from the eighteenth century. In the large sections of human beings and during tens of thousands of years, this concept was totally absent.

As a matter of fact, for many human groups humanity stopped at the borders of the tribe, sometimes at the village; to the point that many so-called primitive peoples called themselves a name which means “the humans” or sometimes “the good ones”, “the excellent ones”, the “ones who are unique”, implying that the individuals from other tribes or groups did not have the same qualities, the same nature (humanity); that they at most consist of people who are “bad” and “mischievous” (Lévi-Strauss, 1987; p. 19). It even happened that the foreigner was deprived of his degree of reality by making him a “phantom” (Levi-Strauss, 1987).

For instance, it is known that in the Greater Antilles, a few years after the discovery of America, while the Spaniards sent committees of inquiry to investigate whether the natives had a soul or not, the natives were submerging the white prisoners into an special liquid to check, through extended supervision, if their bodies were or were not subject to rot. The Spaniards regarded the natives as animals and the natives regarded the Spaniards as gods (Lévi-Strauss, 1987)!

It goes without say that this attitude fits in itself a paradox. By denying humanity to those who appear to be its most “wild” representatives, we are also borrowing one of their typical attitudes. “The barbarian is firstly the man who believes in barbarism”, concluded Lévi-Strauss (1987, p. 19).

Thus, we see that ethnocentrism is the most frequent attitude when a person coming from one culture is confronted with elements from another culture, both characterizing modern societies as primitive societies. And, it seems that it is based on psycho-anthropological foundations, since it tends to reappear in each of us when we are placed in an unexpected situation and we react by rejecting outright the cultural forms – moral, religious, social, aesthetic – that are more remote from those to which we identify ourselves (Lévi-Strauss, 1987).

Ladmiral and Lipiansky (1989), two researchers who explored this topic, also think that ethnocentrism is inherent in any affiliation with a socio-cultural, ethnic or national identity. It is the correlative mechanism that distinguishes between what is yours and what is mine, relatives and strangers, “people from here” and “people from elsewhere”.

Another author, the famous American psychologist, Erik Erikson (1968), speaking about the dynamic between identity and otherness, emphasized an element such as “the need for distancing” defined as a tendency to isolate, reject

or even destroy those whose the existence seems threatening to oneself: “the lasting consequence of the need for distancing is the eagerness to strengthen its territory of intimacy and inner-group solidarity, to consider all the outsiders as enemies, with a fanatical overestimation of small differences between the familiar and the foreign” (p. 132).

What we have said shows clearly that ethnocentrism is both a universally prevalent trait and a psychological phenomenon that is itself inherent in the ontological essence of human reality, and that any perception is done through a “reading grid” unconsciously drawn from what is familiar to us and to our own values; this grid operates as a kind of selection mechanism and translates what is different in our everyday language, thus reinterpreting otherness in the register of what we already know or by rejecting it.

### **b) Exoticism**

Exoticism is the counterpart of ethnocentrism: the latter emphasizes the values of a person’s own group and culture, the former glamorizes the otherness and the elsewhere. But, this otherness is usually an-other mythical, idealized picture, built by the desire of expatriation, the change of scenery dream. It features a sort of lost paradise, projected into the most distant elsewhere, in a radical otherness that appears as the reversal of the dissatisfaction and frustration attached to one’s own culture. Also, this kind of *mythification* generally can only be built in ignorance of reality, which is necessarily more prosaic than the dream. There is why the French philosopher, Tzvetan Todorov (1989, p. 378), defines exoticism as “a praise in ignorance”. What this praise expresses is often a nostalgia for the original, that is, a nature that is not perverted or degraded by the technical culture, a simple and genuine humanity, in line with the myth of the “noble savage”; or else, the fascination of ancient civilizations that are assigned a refinement, an art of living, a wisdom we have

lost the sense for; or even, the exaltation of the most advanced modern society, technological prowess, mechanical sophistication.

We can see that exoticism is more an attitude than specific attributes associated with the object on which it arises. Tourism often represents the modern and the popularized form of exoticism, since it raises the trip and the discovery of the otherness and the elsewhere to a value in itself.

Incidentally, tourism is primarily a consumer practice; it is about transforming cultural otherness into theatre, turn into entertainment source. The tourist consumes landscapes, cities, artworks; he/she is hungry for all that is “typical”, hungry for “the one and unique perspective”, local cuisine, village festivals, folk dances, crafts. He/she “seeks to accumulate during his travel the most monuments possible; that is why it favors the picture language, the camera being his emblematic instrument, which allows him to objectify and eternalize its collection of monuments” (Todorov, 1989; p. 378). The target culture remains exotic, that is to say external to oneself. The media often reinforce this trend; they present abroad as a result of a pictorial pure spectacle in which culture is frozen in folklore; they provide the illusion of knowledge without contact.

Besides, the tourism mass consumption nowadays raises more and more its own questions. Indeed, a wise tourist does not want “to travel just for sunbathe”, not anymore! He/she claims something extra, something with local soul. Travel must satisfy an ethnological curiosity to, for instance, see how the natives live, know their customs that are better concealed from strangers; it must mimic an encounter and dialogue, encounter the aboriginal people, live with the locals; even if we all know that these encounter are in fact limited to a sort of mock exchanges (interactions)!

### **c) Prejudices and stereotypes**



Ethnocentrism and exoticism can take many forms: active or passive. In the latter case, it is usually limited to the internalization of the most simplified expressions and the most basic mode of group social representation, which are prejudices and stereotypes.

Prejudices are a sort of theoretical pre-judgments, automatic judgments (“ready-to-think”) about social or ethno-cultural groups, pre-judgments that have the peculiarity of offering a reassuring system of explanation, because it is commonly shared, and which can be employed without personal reflection. They are created and nourished by the spontaneous human tendency for oversimplification, categorizing, and streamlining (Légal & Delouée, 2008). Stereotypes can be defined as beliefs that people of a social or ethno-cultural group have about the characteristics of members of an out-group; beliefs that are generalized to all the members of this group (Fiske, 1998). Auto-stereotypes are beliefs that we have towards individuals of our own membership group. Thanks to their cognitive function, stereotypes and auto-stereotypes are very useful, as they help bring order and coherence in our social world, which would otherwise be quite chaotic (Fiske, 1998; Légal & Delouée, 2008). Prejudices and stereotypes may contain beliefs that are both positive and negative about the characteristics of different social groups. However, prejudices and stereotypes become problematic when they are inaccurate and they resist change even when the factual information contradicts them. In addition, the use of stereotypes often leads to inaccurate judgments because they are too simplistic (Fiske, 1998; Légal & Delouée, 2008).

The simplifications and generalizations generated by stereotypes seems to cohere with human cognitive functioning, which seeks to map its environment in order to better recognize it in the midst of diversity and change; they are more a reflection of a cultural and social situation than it reports on the object to which it applies (Maisonneuve, 1993). For instance, in the conclusion of his study of

prejudice against Blacks in the United States, the American sociologist, Eugene Hartley (1946), stated that the attitudes toward Blacks were mainly determined not by the contact with Black people, but by contact with the prevailing attitude towards them.

In other words, prejudices and stereotypes mainly reflect the relationships that develop between socio-cultural groups. They are largely driven by the characteristics of these relationships (peaceful or in conflict). Thus, a conflict between two nations usually leads to negative representations of both sides; conversely, peace and cooperation between two social or ethno-cultural groups leads to mostly positive representations of both sides<sup>4</sup>.

Stereotypes are also used to justify the state of the existing relationship between groups. For example, historically, the conquerors, colonizers and oppressors justified their domination over the subjected racial, social, or ethnic groups and people by a poor image of them. During the conquest of America, the Spaniards elaborated a theory according to which Indians were not of the same species as theirs, and therefore they could treat them inhumanely (Carpentier & Lebrun, 1990). Proponents of slavery and Nazis ideologists have used arguments such as “superior race” (theirs) confronting an “inferior race” (those subjected to their domination and mistreatments).

This phenomenon also plays with immigrants: when economic conditions no longer make their presence necessary, then they are more easily the object of rejection or xenophobia (Klineberg, 1967). Generally, it is not the characteristics of immigrants that are the cause of antipathy towards them; rather, people give them the characteristics that justify the antipathy they actually already have towards them (Klineberg, 1967).

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<sup>4</sup> A good example of that is the relationship between France and German: hostility before and during the Second World War (mostly negative prejudices/stereotypes), cooperation and friendship after SWW (mostly positive prejudices/stereotypes).

Also, stereotypes can have an anticipatory function. They prepare, at the imaginary level, the goals that a group wants to achieve or the action it wishes to undertake. Thus, in Nazi Germany, unfavorable stereotypes about Jews and Tziganes preceded and promoted the persecution against them (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989).

However, it must be stressed that stereotypes about foreigners or individuals from other groups are not always negative. They can even be quite positive, as is often the case, as we have seen, with respect to exoticism.

Finally, the psychosocial analysis of ethnic or national identity allowed us to highlight the problems associated with cultural identity and intercultural relations. However, until now, we have focused on general and objective facts. Even if our presentation pierced the social dimension of identity and the fundamental problems of intercultural relations, we still have to examine the intercultural relations pragmatic and subjective dimension. Therefore, beyond this general analysis, we will analyze in the next chapters of our work pragmatic questions posed by the confrontation of different value systems concerning, especially, the politeness behaviors that arise in a concrete situation of intercultural communication.

### **3. Behaviors Related to Politeness**

What is called politeness (courtesy, civility, good manners) exists in the form of a set of rules offering conduct patterns adapted to different social situations (Picard, 1998). This code exists in all cultures and its role is fundamental. Anticipating what to do at all times, it indeed facilitates interpersonal relationships, prevents hesitation and saves us from any embarrassment. It allows everyone to find their place and feel comfortable in front of others.

In a word, as pointed out by the famous American sociologist Erving Goffman (1959, 1961), politeness has essentially the function of protecting the “face” (positive self-image) and the “territory” (personal space and private life) of people in interactions. Its role at the social level is to facilitate relations by removing any unforeseen elements and avoiding clashes. Everyone knows what to do or say (at least is supposed to), what place they should occupy and what they can expect from others. Politeness is then a way of relating to others, while limiting the risks of, for example, conflict, misunderstanding, and loss of face. (Picard, 1998).

Politeness also allows individuals “to present” themselves. Because, contrary to what is sometimes thought, the precepts of *savoir-vivre* merely actualize the system of values implied in it, giving them a certain sense, a certain meaning. For instance, the entire system of politeness is based on a set of values – such as kindness, delicacy, modesty, distinction, cleanliness, moderation, dignity, sobriety, friendliness, sense of justice, etc. – whose hierarchy and meaning varies across cultures.

Indeed, while in most civilizations “respect for others” remains a fundamental relational principle that implies both the respect of one’s “territory” and one’s “face”, not all civilizations have the same conceptualization of “face” and what it means to lose it. This is illustrated by the fact that, for example, a Westerner, in case they are offended, saves his face by not letting the offender trample on him or her with impunity; while an Asian, in the same circumstances, saves his or her face by remaining calm and serene. In some Asian societies (such as in Korea and Japan) and some African societies (such as in Zaire and Mozambique), traditionally, between relatives, people do not need to say thank you for a favor (while in Western societies a thank you is highly demanded)

(Vera Cruz, 2007)<sup>5</sup>. Certainly, in the societies mentioned above, to thank a relative or a close friend for a favor could be seen as an unfriendly act of mistrust; a bit like when, in France, one insists on addressing someone as “vous” (being formal) in an environment where everyone is (or wants to be) on familiar terms – addressing each other as “tu” (which is completely frowned upon).

Politeness is therefore interesting to analyze through an intercultural approach. Effectively, it seems to us that this approach towards the analysis of intercultural communication is better able to determine different cultural positions (the essential cultural human characteristics), priorities and values. In politeness, the three components (or levels) that are contained in all acts of communication are clearly there: factual attitudes and behaviors (signifiers, symbols); intentions, representations, and the meanings associated with the factual attitudes and behaviors (signifieds, symbolizeds); and the values (ideology). The economic principle tends to lump these three levels. As a matter of fact, thanks to the reiterations within the in-group, the partners’ behavior becomes unconscious. Politeness behaviors therefore become *habitus*: grids that one uses it to get in touch with the world and others (Bourdieu, 1979). The assimilation of these methods of classification gives a cultural identity to the individual, who thus shares the behavioral and aesthetic standards of his community. When it is well integrated, competence with respect to the norms of politeness becomes natural within the in-group.

By cons, once the person leaves its cultural framework, it faces different and destabilizing modes of behavior interpretation. Then, several attitudes are possible:

- Either one does not see the cultural lag and interprets the messages of others using one’s own grid. This attitude, when repeated, is nothing other

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<sup>5</sup> In some South Sudan ethnic groups, for example, traditionally, it is the giver who thanks the receiver for receiving his gift.

than ethnocentrism, which consists, as we have seen, in holding that its principles and values are universal. This person tends to think that any act that does not match his expectations is rude, and he do not seek to know the true intentions of the person he is engaging with.

- Or, one realizes that the interlocutor did not properly receive one's message or that one failed to understand the message of one's interlocutor. But, this awareness does not mean that one knows the true intentions of one's interlocutor's behavior, or that one has the means to understand it. What is important here is that, at the very least, this first awareness is the beginning of a search for meaning, which is a positive approach.

The approach we propose aims to, firstly, highlight the fact that mismatches are possible within the framework of the exchange, and that in intercultural relations one must be ready to question one's own judgment criteria. Secondly, it aims to provide the means to identify meaningful indicators in the behavior of others, to get past the level of behavior to the level of the intentions and values.

To illustrate this, we will analyze, in the next chapters, the cultural mismatches related to politeness behaviors that confronted the Japanese and Mozambican students who came to study in France. These students were in a state "bordering" between their culture of origin and that of their host culture. Confronted daily with gaps, shifts, mismatches, they had to deal with the difficulties of interpretation and the imbalance caused by this situation, apart from the linguistic problems themselves, of course.

The objective of this study is not to describe the individual background cultures in interaction, but to unveil the attitude and the behavioral communication lags resulting from the interactions, and explain from the culture of the stakeholders, the reasons for the communicational dysfunction observed.

That means to untangle the process of assigning meaning to the communicative attitudes and behaviors surrounding politeness in each culture involved, a process that emerges through the confrontation of corresponding semiotic systems. Indeed, politeness can also be considered as a mode of entry into a cultural system, a path to analyzing its logic and ideology.

So, let's get started, let's get into it...

## Chapter II: Japanese Students in France

### 1. Introduction

The Japanese group that participated in this research (11 individuals – seven females and four males –, 19–32 years old) came to France to study French Language and Literature at the University of Poitiers. Most of them were originally from the Tokyo area, and they had already attended French-language courses as part of their high school or university studies in Japan.

We followed this group of Japanese students once or twice a week, depending on their availability, in their encounters with French people during the first eight months after their arrival in Poitiers. The goal was to tackle issues relating to communicational dysfunction due to cultural lag concerning behaviors related to politeness with their French counterparts in the manner described above. Also, every three weeks, we brought together these Japanese students for a group discussion with French participants to debate either a previously determined social theme (life in France, love relationships, economic and cultural globalization, etc.), or to discuss issues related to our research subject, trying to understand, through a comparative analysis, what elements in Japanese culture and in French culture underpin the mismatches with respect to attitudes and behavior, or the communicational dysfunction, we observed in their encounters.

Thus, what follows is a summary report and analysis of the main problems related to cultural lag that we found among Japanese students in their daily encounters with their French counterparts and vice-versa, and the explanation, from a comparative cultural background, of their *raison d'être*. It is important, whatever is said in the following pages, to keep in mind that within



the group of students studied there were always individual differences. Indeed, for example, to say that men are taller than women, it is announcing thereby a “statistical fact” which means that most men are taller than most women. Of course, this affirmation does not exclude the recognition of the existence of individual differences, and that there are some women who are taller than some men. Thus, the results of our research, presented in the following pages, must be seen in this perspective.

## **2. The Encounters**

### **2.1. Time management**

Japanese participants complained about the fact that for meetings or appointments the French were rarely on time. That was experienced by them as a lack of consideration. Truly, in Japan, punctuality is an essential mark of respect for others (Hall, 1981, 1990). It is integrated behavioral data, incorporated into the binding social norms. Whoever has the rudeness of being late does not deserve the confidence of his friends, colleagues, or interlocutors. Above all, what is experienced as impolite is not so much the delay and the loss of time caused, provided one has a reasonable reason to be late, but the lack of apology that would have a “remedial” effect (Hall, 1990). This parameter (the fact that Japanese participants were discontented) was not noticed by the French participants, probably because norms of politeness dictate that the Japanese participants should not to make any complaints. In Japan, the blame is silent. It is nonetheless striking.

Another point that embarrassed the Japanese participants in their relationship with French participants concerned the duration of the encounters or meetings. In formal meetings, the Japanese participants felt that the French meetings were too disorderly and that often the planned discussion topic was not respected. Several subjects were treated simultaneously, which confused the

Japanese participants. For the Japanese, energy efficiency is a matter of concentration on a single point (Hall, 1990; Lebra, 1976). In informal encounters (e.g., at the house of their French colleagues), the Japanese participants often did not know when the rendezvous should end, and, as a result, they did not dare to ask permission to leave when they wished. This situation was especially uncomfortable to them because, sometimes, the French host would eventually let them know at some point that they had to leave; and, in those cases, they felt as they were kicked out.

## **2.2. Space management.**

The Japanese participants seemed to enjoy this French “space” where they could breathe and move freely. They found larger spaces, the flow of traffic, the means of transportation being less full, the larger homes. In Japan, as a result of the enormous population density<sup>6</sup>, especially in big cities, the houses are too small, there is dense traffic, and means of transportation are overloaded. To enter a train or a subway in Tokyo at rush hour, for example, the most common method is to push and hustle one another.

Yet, even if the Japanese participants were happy to have large spaces in France, they did complain about the lack of compliance with the rules governing the public spaces. For instance, smoking: the Japanese were surprised that smokers in France often did not use the places reserved for them – a behavior they saw as showing a lack of respect for others. They were also shocked that in France smokers often threw their cigarette litter on the street. For them, these are not good manners. As matter of fact, two essential values emerged from these ascertainties. On the one hand, the respect for the space sharing rules that characterize Japan as a “formal” society (Hall, 1981). On the other hand, the

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, 90% of Japanese people live in metropolitan areas, the most important of which is Tokyo, which, with almost 43 million inhabitants in 13 500 km<sup>2</sup>, is the most crowded urban area in the world (data retrieved from the *Tokyo Metropolitan Government* website).

need for a certain aesthetic that allows the individual to be in harmony with its environment (Hall, 1981).

Soiled sidewalks, dirty public toilets, these types of things inconvenience Japanese sensitivities terribly. As emphasized by Berque (1982), cleanliness, sobriety, purification, are core elements of the aesthetic in Japanese culture, coming from the Confucian and Zen tradition. Compliance with these criteria is essential since individuals are traditionally predicated to spiritually fuse with their environment.

### **3. Nonverbal Communication**

The language of communication is the area that generates the most problems between Japanese participants and their French interlocutors or counterparts. First, let us describe some interactional situations:

Situation 1.

- In a university restaurant: The Japanese students spot a French colleague sitting at a table having lunch. They pass without saluting him and they go sit at a neighboring table to have lunch. A few minutes later, the French colleague, seeing the Japanese group, head over to greet them. Then, he leaves his table to join the Japanese one. He strikes up a conversation...

Situation 2.

- In one of the town library computer room: A Japanese student enters the room, sees a young French lady she is acquainted with while in the process of browsing the Internet. She sits quietly in the space available nearby using a computer, but without greeting her French acquaintance. Later, the young French woman, seeing her Japanese acquaintance next to her, wonders, surprised (annoyed?), why she had “ignored” her. The Japanese young lady apologizes, visibly uncomfortable...

Situation 3.

- The Japanese group meets in a bar for a nice evening with some French students they had met one day before. A conversation begins. The Japanese students are often content to listen to their French counterparts. The French students were asking them, among other things, questions about their age, life in Japan, what they thought about France ... On most of these issues they answered by a “hum, hum” “yes, yes” accompanied by a slight and repeated nod forward, a smile or a rhythmic blinking of eyelids. Sometimes, they would say that they did not understand the question, and keep apologizing. Sometimes, they managed to precisely answer the question after having thought for a long time<sup>7</sup>.

In Japan, silence is golden and in some circumstances a verbal expression is less valued than a nonverbal one (McDaniel, 2006). A verbal greeting, for example, is for people that have been legitimized; that is to say, which have been introduced and that can be positionally situated (in terms of who exactly he/she is *vis-à-vis* of us and what is the degree of proximity to us) (Hall & Hall, 1990; Lebra, 1976). Otherwise, anonymity imposes reservation, and there is no question of greeting someone we barely know in a public place, at the risk of disturbing the privacy of the person (situation 1 and 2). In fact, in cases like those reported above, when Japanese meet someone they do not know very well, and they do not want to bother him/her, they usually make a subtle sign with their face and eyes. Actually, in the two first situations we reported above, these Japanese students did make a nonverbal sign to their French acquaintances. But, their French interlocutors either did not perceive it or did not understand what it meant: they wrongly thought the Japanese “ignored” them.

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<sup>7</sup> A few days later, I met with this Japanese group to review the observations that I had made during that evening. They told me, among other things, that since they did not know very well these gentlemen and gentlewomen, they were embarrassed to have to answer questions about their “intimate” lives or give their personal opinions.

Effectively, in Japan, in many social interaction situations, body language replaces greetings or thanks. A nod is a sign of humility and discretion, which are part of the core values. The verbal thanks, in contrast, are often perceived as too blunt and condescending.

Since silence is golden, the face is an essential vehicle of communication (McDaniel, 2006). Body expressions replace speech. As the spectators of *no* theater, the Japanese are able to detect facial signs that escape to the perception of outsiders. The slightest movement on the partners or on the interlocutor's face is perceived and interpreted.

The values of calm and serenity permeate the representations of the Japanese individual's "face", this face that the French participants believed, wrongly, was inexpressive. On the other hand, modesty is a concern that involves controlling one's emotions. For the sake of others, the face should suggest calm. Feelings and emotions are elements of "hidden face", elements that are supposed to be expressed only in private (Elwood, 2001; Hall, 1990).

The Japanese social representation of the "glance" also differs from the French one. During the two first months of their lives in France, the Japanese participants said that they were embarrassed by the fixity of their French interlocutor's eye contact (gaze). In general, in the Japanese culture, the exchange of looks is reserved for the relatives. It expresses transparency and sincerity among friends, which therefore cannot concern strangers to each other (McDaniel, 2006). In effect, among the Japanese, eye contact is an implicative (involving, suggestive) act and can convey lot of personal (intimate) information. Eye contact is reserved for the family, to intimate relations. Also, it might be interesting to note that, for example, in martial arts, fix the opponent eyes enable the challenger to penetrate the former to the soul. The mental strength of the contestant is then tested. Traditional Japanese tales reveals that some samurai battle outcomes were decided in this visual exchange (Hall,

1990). So, making eye contact is often considered rude, may lead to uncomfortableness, and can be seen as a sign of aggression. Looking down, in contrast, is considered as a sign of discretion and non-opposition (situation 3).

According to Japanese standards, the smile is also invested with particular meanings (McDaniel, 2006). The Japanese participants appreciated the spontaneity of French smiles. But, as they pointed out, unlike the French, the Japanese often smile to “hide” themselves. Indeed, in Japan, traditionally, the smile is frequently used as way of “saving face” in some delicate situations. At times, it can bring discomfort and may not be perceived positively.

Facial expressions, gestures, advantageously replace words among the Japanese (McDaniel, 2006). In France, in contrast, it is words that are meant to plainly express the thoughts. One of the Japanese participants explained us that the Japanese word *omou* (to think) also means “to contain”, “face hiding”. This is an interiorized process. The derivative sense may mean that “the feelings are expressed through nonverbal perceptible signs, especially over the face” (McDaniel, 2006, p.267). That is to say that among the Japanese a person’s thoughts are more readable in their facial expressions than in their verbal language, and the sincerity is not expressed through the same channel as among the French. Thus, these kinds of differences in the way the two groups expressed themselves were often the source of attitude and behavior mismatches.

As for politeness rituals, among Japanese, gestures primarily consist of bowing, which means “enchanted” or “thank you”. This gesture, which is a sign of humility, disappears with intimacy (Elwood, 2001). For example, in the beginning of their stay in France, the very French habit of greeting by kissing each other confused some of the Japanese participants who nevertheless made an effort to comply. Over time, they hardly got used to it.

It is important to note that Japanese culture is very rich in rituals of various kinds (to remove one's shoes before entering a house, bowings, washing hands, etc.). Marked by tradition, they are a token of social cohesion. Their common point is mainly to preserve the peace, harmony, hierarchy, and aesthetics within the group. Given that in France those ritual are not the same or are less important, the Japanese participants had to adapt themselves to the French way of social behavior and, thus, to try to minimize cultural mismatches.

#### **4. Verbal Communication**

In the case of verbal communication, the tone of the voice is not perceived in the same way in both cultures. The Japanese consider the French tone too emotional. This emotion is associated with the fact that they speak on their own behalf and that they wish to convey their own very personal ideas. In Japan, positive values are serenity and self-control, calmness and peace (Elwood, 2001; McDaniel, 2006).

Like most Japanese attitudes, the attitudes towards the manifestation of emotions are rooted in the distant past: the time of samurai and knights, for which dominate their emotions was a matter of survival, as a samurai deemed to have the right to behead anyone who displeased him or lacked respect for him (Hall, 1981; Lebra, 1976). Thus, this kind of behavior in public has spread to all levels of society: the servant had to show respect and serenity in the presence of their master; the samurai's wife was not to express any excess emotion after learning that her husband or her son had been killed in battle, etc. (Hall, 1981; Lebra, 1976). Until recently, there was no demonstration of intimacy at all, no hugging in public (Hall, 1990; Kinoshita, 1988).

However, emotional verbal excuses are highly valued in Japan. They allow someone to put himself in the lower position, which is often advocated in relationships (Kinoshita, 1988). Suffice to say that the Japanese do not always

understand the interactions with the French. In a phrase, as one of Japanese participants said, French people say thank you too much and excuse themselves too little.

Also, in verbal communication, among the Japanese, listening is the supreme value. The more important is not the self-expression, but to be in concert with others (Elwood, 2001). As such, the oppositions are seen as a break in harmony contract that unites two partners (situation 3).

Incidentally, regarding the differences between the Japanese and the French over how to communicate, in Japan people favored understanding by sympathy, by empathy; while in France, to communicate means debating, persuading. In the Japanese way of communicating, one must turn one's attention to the interlocutor, being benevolent towards him or her (Abdallah-Preteille, & Porcher, 1999). In the French way of discussing, one concentrates all one's attention on the argument, on the theoretical aspect of the discussion; generally speaking, French people are conditioned by the need to satisfy logic (Abdallah-Preteille, & Porcher, 1999). The technique of rhetoric and debate is a reflection of excessive self-consciousness to the point that one continues to express and assert oneself at the expense of the interlocutor (Abdallah-Preteille, 1999). In Japan, during an interview, especially if it is the first one, for example, as part of a delicate negotiation, when you have to decide for or against something, you avoid to assert your own position or to deny the position of your interlocutor (Abdallah-Preteille, 1999). In cases like this, Japanese willingly employs paraphrases that allow them not to clearly express their opinions, and not to be in favor of or against this or that point being considered; they prefer to suggest their position implicitly.

We can prejudge from the explanation above that, among the Japanese, the phatic and informative language functions are more valued than the expressive language function. The Japanese we followed therefore did not



usually clearly give their opinion (situation 3). During the taking of a decision, it is extremely difficult for the Japanese to get through it, inasmuch as for them it is more important to meet the expectation of others than to express themselves (Kinosita, 1988). Even if the Japanese students we are referring to tried to adapt to the French communication habits, they were still afraid that if they would patently express their point of view they may hurt their interlocutors or cause the communication to break down as a result. Unfortunately, this desire for harmony in the relationship was sometimes wrongly interpreted by their French counterparts as insincerity.

In conversations with the French participants, the Japanese students also had difficulties with what we call “polyphonic exchange”. Indeed, this exchange mode, which allows the overlap of several conversations, requires a certain praxis: one needs to manage to take advantage of the short pauses in the dialogue to speak, to express oneself even when not requested, to manage multiple conversations simultaneously, etc.

We shall add that in Japan the language is particularly revealing of social distance (McDaniel, 2006). Hence the importance for Japanese to socially situate individuals with whom they are set to be in a relationship; which, for instance, underpins the habit of exchanging business cards containing information over the company employing you, your rank within the organization, your degrees, your honors, your titles, followed by your last name, first name, address – in that order (Elwood, 2001; Hall & Hall, 1990). A younger individual must remain silent before a senior. On the other hand, women talk together and men together; although this gender criterion tends to fade. By listening to a conversation, it is possible to know how close people are. According to what the Japanese participants explained to us, in their country, people of the same generation and the same sex exchange a lot together. As we noticed, this Japanese habit of adjusting the interaction to the position of the

speaker made the choice of “tu” (French informal way of addressing the interlocutor) and “vous” (French formal way of addressing the interlocutor) very easy to Japanese participants while in contact with French people.

In the Japanese language, as some Japanese participants told us, a signified has a multitude of signifiers, chosen according the position of the interlocutor. Since one must adjust one’s speech to the person one is talking to, and anticipating his or her expectations, engaging spontaneously in a conversation with someone outside the relational circle is often avoided. Silence can have two meanings, depending on the context: respect or anonymity. Therefore, generally speaking, among Japanese, concerns about aloofness and harmony lead people to place more value on silence and to override their desire for personal expression.

## **Chapter III: Mozambican Students in France**

### **1. Introduction**

The Mozambican group that participated in this research (14 individuals – six women and nine men –, 23–34 years old) came to France to study French Language and Literature at the University of Poitiers. They were originally from different Mozambican ethnic groups, and they had already attended French-language courses as part of their high school or university studies in Mozambique.

We followed this group of Mozambican students using the same terms (methodology) as we did with the Japanese group, and with the same purpose; eventually, we tried to decipher through a comparative analysis what elements in Mozambican culture and in French culture underpin the attitude and behavior mismatches, or the communicational dysfunction, we observed.

Thus, what will follow is a summary report and analysis of the main problems related to cultural lag that we found in the communicational interaction between the Mozambican students and their French counterparts; it is also an explanation, from a comparative cultural background perspective, of the dysfunction's *raison d'être*. It is important, whatever is said in the following pages, to keep in mind that within the group of students studied there were always individual differences. Indeed, for example, to say that men are taller than women, it is announcing thereby a “statistical fact” which means that most men are taller than most women. Of course, this affirmation does not exclude the recognition of the existence of individual differences, and that there are some women who are taller than some men. Thus, the results of our research, presented in the following pages, should be seen in this perspective.

### **2. Welcoming and Hosting Manners**

The Mozambican participants believed that the French were generally unwelcoming. This impression was the result of cultural differences concerning the hospitality customs.

As matter of fact, in any culture, from the perspective of identity categories, individuals can be said to meet two types of people: their “peers”, who have a status similar to one’s own (same sex, same age, same professional or social category, etc.), and “non-peers”, who have a different status (Picard, 1998). With peers, relationships are generally based on equality and reciprocity. With non-peers, relationships depend on whether the relationship is “complementary” or “hierarchical”. For example, the person in a “low position” hands out “deference marks” to the person in a “high position”.

Well, in Mozambique, traditionally, community visitors/foreigners (in the broad sense of the term) are considered to be in a “high position”. They have to be treated with respect, hospitality, and deference. They are offered various activities so that they can become familiar with the local way of live, the local culture; a fact that is supposed to facilitate their integration<sup>8</sup>. The hosts are supposed to always be available to the guests when needed. In the nonverbal register, it is common that the host bows to the visitor; he is supposed to devote the most comfortable place (chair, room, bedroom, etc.) and what’s best to the guests. Mozambicans, traditionally, go as far as sacrifice their entire savings, borrow money or ask for family and neighbors contributions, to give the best to their guests. Traditionally, if you do not welcome and host very well a visitor at your home, you “reputation” will consequently suffer, and people will avoid coming to visit you. We can illustrate “African hospitality” through caricature by recalling those images, which have become stereotypical, of foreign

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, in recent time, due to the socio-economic evolution in progress, this habit (great hospitality) when it comes to receiving visitors is waning.

dignitaries welcomed at the African nations' airports in a festive atmosphere, with groups of traditional music and folks dancing in euphoria.

Among the Mozambicans participants that expressed their frustration about the way they were generally welcomed and hosted by French people in their family homes; one of them, for example, explained to us that while being invited by a French colleague to his parents home, the host made him sleep on the couch while he himself slept comfortably in a bed. In equal circumstances, a Mozambican surely would indeed do the opposite.

### **3. Nonverbal Language (Physical Contact)**

Culture influences the conception, the structure, and the utilization of space, including, for instance, the distance (physical proximity) that people keep between themselves and others. The French avoid, in general, physical contact with people who are not familiar to them; they often have negative reactions when that happens when they did not initiate the move. In Mozambique, the distance (proximity distance) is reduced and the “touching” (skinship) plays an important role in their community life and in their relationships.

Mozambicans use physical contact – even with strangers met occasionally in a bus stop, in the train or at the bar – to attract the attention of the interlocutor. Nonverbal language (touch, glance, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, postures, vocal nuances) often replaces verbal language or enhances that one. Mozambicans also use physical contact to express sympathy, affection, and complicity, which constitutes an invitation to familiarity, friendship and solidarity (Vera Cruz, 2007). Physical contact is also a sign of a commitment to mutual identification and recognition.

It should be noted that this habit is probably a relic of Bantu<sup>9</sup> society's traditions, where tribal members considered themselves all as brothers or parents; and therefore did not establish barriers towards each other in the interpersonal communication, whether physical or verbal (Vera Cruz, 2015).

Consequently, the Mozambican participants tended to interpret the reluctance and the embarrassment expressed by their French counterparts when there was physical contact as a sign of hostility toward their person; that is, as a refusal to establish a familial relationship. This is a typical case of the kind of culturally grounded behavioral mismatch that often occurred between the Mozambicans participants and the French participants – an intercultural communication failure.

It is known that European people from a Latin background are more physical in their nonverbal communication than, for example, people from Northern Europe or Asians. Yet, people from Southern Africa, such as Mozambicans, use even more physical contact with their interlocutors, regardless of the degree of acquaintance, because that is their way to “invite” the newly encountered individual into an informal and friendly relationship.

#### **4. Verbal Language**

In an intercultural encounter, the outsider is immersed in a linguistic environment in which he is forced to use his knowledge in foreign language, as poor as it is, to communicate.

In the attempt to communicate with the means at hand, we found that the choice of “tu” (French informal and familiar term for addressing the

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<sup>9</sup> Bantu peoples (in some languages spoken in Central and Southern Africa, Bantu word means “the Humans”) are ethnic groups that, having agricultural and livestock farming techniques, and coming from the center-west of the African continent (in current Cameroon), spread to the south about five thousand years ago, gradually unsettling the indigenous hunter-gatherer peoples that originally occupied those regions (Pygmies, Khoisan, and Buchmens). Currently living in Central and Southern Africa, the Bantu ethnic groups have a certain linguistic and socio-cultural homogeneity, including a great similarity in their hospitality customs.

interlocutor) and “vous” (French formal term for addressing the interlocutor) posed enormous problems for Mozambicans, because in their countries of origin, for historical reasons, individuals rarely address each other using “tu”, even close friends or relatives.

In effect, historically, at the time of Portuguese colonization, the natives were forced to use “vous” to engage with white individuals, regardless of age or social status. Conversely, white individuals systematically used “tu” to address the indigenous, regardless of the age or social status of those they were addressing. Therefore, the referential and formal way of addressing people (“vous”) was the sign of the deference that the natives should always use to deal with the colonizers, and the familiar and informal way of addressing individuals (“tu”) represented the contempt with which whites treated indigenous people. With the advent of independence, in 1975, the political and social authorities decided to thwart this experience by advocating the use of “vous” in interpersonal relationships, regardless of the kind of relationship (formal or informal/familiar), as the “tu” way of engaging with others had become the symbol of the white European domination over the black natives – a symbol of disdain.

Thus, whether they are close friends and intimate persons, adults or children, in Mozambique, people tend to “vouvoyer” one another. Sometimes, individuals of the same generation use “tu” when engaging with one another. But, it is almost inconceivable that a young individual addresses an older person using “tu”, even if he/she is part of the family. This is due to the fact that, in Bantu tradition, a young person must maintain a certain respect and distance when dealing with individuals older than him; the elderly, especially, are seen as the repositories of tradition and as representatives of ancestor-gods, deserving high consideration.

In contrast, in France, “vous” is used with people you do not know or only know a little; “vous” indicates a certain mark of keeping social distance, while the “tu” is the sign of familiarity, proximity, and solidarity. The young French always use “tu” to address each other, even at a first meeting. Between parents and children, the “tu” is systematically used, including in bourgeois families, where until about the 60s children used “vous” when speaking to their parents.

The differences reported above explain why the Mozambican participants had so much difficulty to “tutoyer” their French interlocutors, even when they were of the same age or close to them like friends. They had even more difficulty when it came to an older person. It often happened that, some French person, troubled by their Mozambican counterpart’s persistence in addressing them with “vous”, stressed the fact that this way of speaking to people is perceived as an “excessive” mark of formality or as a desire to keep a distance and that it is not appropriate in the circumstance, given the kind of relationship they were having together. As I noticed, it took a “long time” for the Mozambican participants to adjust to that.

The different ways of designating people were at the root of another sort of communicational mismatch between the Mozambican participants and their French counterparts.

In Mozambique, the first-name is more often used than the last one (surname) even in a formal or institutional relations. And, when people present someone to others, in general, they say their first-name preceded or not preceded (depending on the age differences) by the word “sir” or “madam”. In France, when it comes to presentations, people simply indicates the first-name of the individual, followed by the surname, or instead, they indicate the surname followed by the first-name, without prefacing it by Mr. or Mrs., and especially without mentioning the person’s title (which often happens in Mozambique).



The mistake one must not commit, and that the Mozambicans often committed, to the displeasure of their interlocutors, is to announce Mr. or Mrs. followed only by the first-name (e. g., “Madame Françoise”). In France, as matter of fact, this way of presenting someone is traditionally used only in prostitution circles!

Meanwhile, the Mozambican participants discovered with delight that, in France, individuals who have graduated are not called “Dr.” as is the case in Mozambique. A custom inherited from the Portuguese colonial power, the love of titles! They use the title “Dr.” to address people with a higher educational level, even when they in reality do not have a PhD degree, even in informal circumstances. Mozambican participants told me that they were struck by the modesty of the French graduates with respect to this matter, compared to the “arrogance” prevailing in their own country where, incidentally, almost half of the population is illiterate.

## **5. The Mind**

Let us describe, first, some situations that we witnessed:

Situation 4.

- The Mozambican participants met a group of French students in a bar for a “drink”. After the presentations (for those who did not yet know each other), a preliminary fraternal toast, the exchanging of some brief exotic information, they begin to talk about football, music, a little bit about politics. A certain animosity starts to spread. Someone tells a bunch of anecdotes... Meanwhile, two French participants make an aside and begin to discuss the question of whether is better to be optimistic or pessimistic. A few minutes later the debate extends to all the French participants. “It is better to be pessimistic because when we are optimistic we tend to believe that all is well and that we are in the best of worlds, and so there is nothing to change...”, says one of them. “What you have just said is a

contradiction...”, argues another who immediately adds: “It is the pessimist who thinks that there is nothing to change, which tend to be conformist; the optimist advocates revolution...”. Then, one French participant notes that while the French existentialist writers and philosophers like Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, André Malraux, were skeptical thinkers, nevertheless, they were very active and the ones who advocated the “revolt against the absurdity of life”. Another speaker believed solving the “hassle” by adopting scholarly expressions such as “an active pessimism” vs. “a passive optimism”. Unfortunately, that did not satisfy some of the contenders who, again, saw a contradiction in those terms. So, they managed to ask the opinion of the Mozambicans, who until then had showed their indifference to the ongoing debate. One of the Mozambicans explains that the subject was beyond his skills and interests. Another replies that he prefers a frugal life, meaning to keep drinking. One French participant retorts that, precisely, it is a matter of knowing what kind of life he prefers. Yet, another Mozambican explains that when one lives in a country where the life expectancy is about 50 years and that in the coming years it may come down to 40 years because of HIV-AIDS, he tends not to be really interested in this kind of speculation: “Anyway, optimistic or pessimistic one must fend for a living”. He adds that, in Mozambique, the majority of people tend to live from day to day and to adapt to the demands of everyday life without much thinking about tomorrow: “Tomorrow is uncertain for most of us...”. Shortly, all together, they agree to change the subject of the conversation. Subsequently, a French participant expresses his desire to learn more about traditional African music and dances, to learn to play some musical instruments like drums and xylophone. A Mozambican who apparently was an amateur musician explains that, contrary to the European style of learning to play musical instruments, in his traditional

homeland, there are no real rules to learning how to make a composition, choreography, or to play an instrument. He explains that the key is to internalize the rhythm you want to reproduce, to grasp it, to “feel” the spirit in an intuitive act. Once filled by the rhythm, once intoxicated by it, the mind transforms the rhythm into a series of spontaneous sensational mechanisms that externalizes the inside feelings through the musical instrument in a sort of contagious enjoyment... The French were intrigued by this explanation (do they find it weird?): “What does it mean to *feel* the rhythm? To *capture* it with the mind?”. How can the mind trigger that “spontaneous sensational mechanism?”, one French participant asks. “It is not supposed to be understood, it is to be felt, to be lived, to be experienced...”, replies the young Mozambican.

“What strikes foreign observers most of all, wrote G. Arm, is the spirit of the French people: they look like intellectuals, rationalists, lawyers; unlike the English, who are practical, empirical, casuists; the Germans, driven by the vital instinct; the Spaniards, passionate, mystic, theological” (Bras, 1952, p. 43).

Is this analysis still true? Maybe, not that much. It looks like a handful of stereotypes...

Anyway, it is certain that in a critical mixture of admiration and aversion, the Mozambican participants saw the French as people that were too argumentative, with a penchant for oratory and litigious debate. “The French like to argue until you agree with them, or at least until you seem to understand them”, sniped one Mozambican, commenting, days after the debate we have partially transcribed above (situation 4). “We (the Mozambicans) tend to debate seriously only when there is something vital at stake; otherwise, we like to have fun; [we are] certainly not going to a bar to discuss philosophy!... We are intuitive, passionate, emotional; we yield easily to our vagabond instincts (so

down-to-earth, so sexual) that often drives our desires and our actions...”, he added.

Is not so much the rational and logical method as it applies to the scientific disciplines that bother the Mozambicans; because, with respect to those matters, they also apply the same methods in their scientific research, since they have inherited a Western epistemology. Actually, what they complained about was what they experienced as a kind of violence done to the mind by trying to be rational all the time, while they think it is better to indulge, let yourself go, especially during times of enjoyment. “French people are to prude, and I respect that. Yet, it is difficult for us, because we tend to be spontaneous”, explains one of the Mozambican participants.

In everyday life, the Mozambican participants also complained about the difficulties of starting a conversation or get into an intimate relationship with their French counterparts.

Indeed, in France, the inner circle – the people with whom we have trust and relationship of confidence – is usually restricted, stable and actually quite closed (Mauchamp, 1998). There is a tendency of sticking together and not easily integrate into the circle people who are seen as not being able to share in the same way. It is between close friends that one can ask for “help”, exchange favors, etc.

In France, when it comes to neighborly relations, for example, discretion is required. In medium or big cities, when you know your neighbors – which is not always the case –, if people greet you it is usually only “good morning /good evening”. The implicit rules require you to keep the distance, to not bother others. “Everyone in the place of his own”. Sometimes, people are surprised to read in the press that a person was found at his home, several months after his

death, with no one in the neighborhood having noticed his absence (Mauchamp, 1998).

There is an important distinction between, on the one side, the public and the professional life, on the other, the private, the family, and the intimate life. Generally, one is not suppose to, for example, speak about one's private life at the workplace. Co-workers or classmates are not supposed to learn about the private life of one another. The key word with respect to this attitude is "appropriate"; to adjust oneself to the appropriate relative distance, according the type of relationship one has with someone. The goal sought: to keep the right distance and not to intrude into the "territory" of others. If a stranger approaches us in the street, the exchange should be short: if he asks us about any information, we simply provide it without comment, then we proceed on our own way; if a stranger greets us, we are supposed to answer briefly, without stopping (Picard, 1998).

It is different in Mozambique where a self-standing commitment to others is based on an ideological foundation that advocates the social superiority of the social over the individual. The traditional conception of the human being implies that this one is more a member of a community, a social "actor", than a single, sovereign individual. As a consequence, Mozambican society, at least traditionally, favors rules and values that foster contacts and social ties: conviviality and solidarity. When you meet a neighbor, it is fashionable to make an exclamation of pleasure, say some heart-to-heart and all that shows an interest and curiosity for his person in its full human dimension, and for his entire family.

When one occasionally encounters a stranger one is suppose to smile, which is a gesture of invitation to familiarity, into a conversation; together, it is possible to talk about family issues, personal projects, advice one another, etc. Mozambicans easily speak about private or intimate life with coworkers,

classmates or even with people they have only occasionally seen in the street, in a bar, or anywhere else. However, it must be stressed that these habits, traditionally current in all Bantu societies, are declining a little bit, probably because of the gradual influence of the Western social way of life.

Anyway, the Mozambican participants seemed frustrated with what they called the “coldness” of French people who, according to them, often impolitely dismissed “strangers” trying to approach them. They said that they were often rudely ignored when they managed to start a conversation or invite a relationship of familiarity with people they had occasionally encountered in public places, in the neighborhoods, or in entertainment places.

## **6. Romantic Relations**

The cultural differences concerning the codes surrounding romantic relationships were source of behavior mismatches between the Mozambican participants and their French counterparts.

Effectively, one of the Mozambican male participants main concerns was to find love/sexual partners. They showed this desire to their female French interlocutors each time they had an opportunity to do so. During entertainment events, parties, whatever, Mozambicans tried to hit on French girls. Unfortunately, on most occasions, the French girls did not appreciate the Mozambican “seduction” methods, being annoyed by what they saw as “rude manners”, that is, their “heavy handed way” of addressing the “issue”. Let us transcribe one of these situations:

Situation 5.

- In a bar :

M (Mozambican young man) – Can I invite you over to my place (home) for a drink?

F (French young girl) – Ooh-ha-ha! How's that? We do not even know each other...

M – Precisely, that is why I am inviting you; this may be an opportunity to get to know each other...

F – So, after drinking, we will do what?

M – We shall increasingly get acquainted...

F – And, then?...

M – Well, then we can play mom and dad...

F – Whoa! You think I'm a cheap tramp, don't you?!

M – No, no, not at all...

F – Hmm... You are funny: you think you are so irresistible that I will be going with you just like that?...

Situation 6.

- At the end of a dance party, somewhere at the university campus:

M (Mozambican young man) – Shall we meet again tomorrow?

F (French young girl) – No, no! Not so fast, don't jump the gun, we don't know each other enough yet...

M – Yes we do know... We even talked about a lot of things just earlier...

F – Do we? I don't think so...

M – Okay, how about exchanging phone numbers?

F – I don't give my phone number to strangers...

M – How do we do then...

F – It's all right, maybe we will run into each other one of these days, here on campus...Who knows?

M – One of these days?! Isn't that relying on serendipity?

F – Yes sir, one day maybe, one day!... Why is it that you're in a hurry?

Effectively, the Mozambicans reported to us that, on their quest to find a love/sexual partner, the French girls reacted to their “advances” mostly by saying: “We do not know each other”; “I'm not a cheap girl”; “Isn't that too straightforward?”; “You Africans, you rush too much”; “Why is it that you are in a hurry, you're desperate to fuck or what?!”. It happened that some got off to a good start, but they would fail somewhere during the seduction process because they “jumped the gun”.

This reflects a cultural difference in the ways one engages in romantic pursuits, how the protagonists are supposed to interact. In general, in France, women do not like to be “approached” in a straightforward manner, which is perceived being rude; they may suspect a person approaches them in such a way of having a purely sexual interest, which could mean treating them as an “easy” girl (Vera Cruz, 2015). In general, a man (suitor) must start by taking the time to “get to know” the girl, and not “go so fast”. The man, who often must take the first steps, are supposed to be gallant, courteous, must demonstrate an ability to seduce the woman and be really interested in the personality of the woman he is interested in; he has to “discretely” show that he really loves the woman, and that he is not only interested in sex (Vera Cruz, 2015).

Moreover, in France, like in most Western countries, many men admit that it is essential for them to give the impression of taking the initiative when it comes to seduction, in order to strengthen their manhood image. Otherwise, they feel somehow frustrated by not having the pleasure of being the conqueror vis-à-vis the woman they want. On the other hand, traditionally, a woman who immediately accepts the man's “advances” might be considered a “cheap” girl, which implies there is less merit in “conquering” her. Also, in France, sexual



fidelity between lovers is still a fundamental value and sexual libertinism is a marginal phenomenon.

Things are quite different in Mozambique. Firstly, we have to say that because of Western influences, at least to some extent, nowadays, there are some similarities between what is considered a smart approach to seducing a woman in France and Mozambique. However, in Mozambique, the local traditional way of dealing with this issue, ultimately, is still much more common (Vera Cruz, 2015). Secondly, we have to say that, in Mozambique, before the influence of Western culture and Christianity, the idea of “love” in the romantic or courtly sense of the term was not valued (Junod, 1927; Vera Cruz, 2015). There was some sexual freedom and sexual fidelity was not considered as an important issue. The initiative to approach a potential partner belonged to either the woman or the man, and these initiatives were, in general, sexually explicit and straightforward (Junod, 1927; Vera Cruz, 2015).

For example, in the Mozambican Tsonga ethnic group, after the rites of puberty, boys and girls could, and were even encouraged, to engage in what was called *kugangisa* (which in local language means *love and sex games*): groups of boys and girls organized to meet in the bush and, to the sound of a drum, they formed pairs according to an agreed ritual and thus began their sexual life (e.g., Junod, 1927, 1936). Between the period of when a person went through the rites of puberty and the moment they got married, boys and girls lived in huts around the village and often sought each other out at night to make love (Junod, 1927). It was nevertheless necessary to take precautions so that the girl did not get pregnant (Junod, 1927), because in that case, the girl and the boy were obliged by the community to get married (Junod, 1927). After marriage, a man could continue to do the *kugangisa* with single women (Junod, 1927). A married woman was not allowed to have extramarital affairs (Junod, 1927), but despite this official ban, our own experience within the Tsonga community allows us to

confirm that women were almost as unfaithful as men. For example, it often happened that they had a lover with whom they exchanged gifts: they met with him when they went to fetch wood for the fireplace or when they went to fetch water at the well, and they made love in the bush. In a case of flagrante delicto, the woman was not convicted either, the community only asked her to confess her act. It would be her lover who, in general, was supposed to be sentenced to pay a fine more or less equivalent to the dowry that the husband had paid for the wedding (in reality it was so common that married men and women were in “cheating” sexual relationships that they were rarely held accountable like that).

It goes without saying that the colonial administration and the Christian evangelists fiercely attacked these allegedly wild and satanic habits, but they continued to exist in the countryside, albeit with some changes. In large cities, this custom has changed, but it has not completely ceased to exist, remaining somehow, in various contradictory forms, often concealed, under the new Western influences.

What we have described above explains, in some ways, the Mozambican participants’ “clumsiness” in the way they approached French women. It may also account for the Mozambican participants’ sexual greed, or what was perceived by the French women as such. Their behavior was indeed perceived to be discourteous and libertine, especially because some of them were engaged or married in their home country and did not try to hide it. Likewise, the fact that some Mozambicans expressed, openly and shamelessly, to their French friends that they had no problem whatsoever to “cheat” on their love partners annoyed some of these French. Some Mozambicans, in turn, thought that the French were “too much conservative” on sexual issues, and thought these “romantic games seductions” involved “hypocrisy” and were a “waste of time”.

It must be stressed, however, that with respect to this issue of seduction there were individual differences, on both sides, and some exceptions as well.

For instance, a few French girls did appreciate this Mozambican “hook” behavior, which they saw as a demonstration of virility and self-assurance (a trait they seemed to appreciate in a man); and a few Mozambicans, especially female ones, did appreciate the French “romanticism”. But those were rare cases. Also, let us not lose sight of the fact that, in this case like in others, the research we are presenting and analyzing was conducted during the first months of the Mozambican participants’ stay in France. We have seen that, along the way, an adaptive attitude occurred.

Furthermore, the distance that individuals have to keep between one another was also source of behavior mismatches amongst Mozambicans males and French females. For instance, in nightclubs, the Mozambicans often wanted to dance in an “adhesive bonding” way with the French girls, while the girls often only said yes to dancing with the Mozambicans on the condition of there being some space between them while they danced. The Mozambicans seemed frustrated by this refusal to dance in an “adhesive bonding” way. Indeed, in Mozambique, people think the charm of the dancing in the evenings, in nightclubs, come precisely from the fact that they have the chance to dance “glued-together” with a partner of the opposite sex that they meet on-site; which is assumed to be an occasion to flirt (even if there is no clear sexual expectation from both sides, generally, revelers like to have fun that way, enjoying the thrill that the tight body contact while dancing can give to them). In France, with the exception of Antillean community, dancing in “tight-bonded” style is generally seen as too sexual, and therefore reserved for partners already in an intimate relationship.

## **7. The Art of Conversation**

Often regarded as the cornerstone of sociability, the conversation is, in many societies, a noble activity that symbolizes successful conviviality: one

must participate in it, and a guest who remains silent commits the worst of improprieties (Picard, 1998).

In France, the golden rule is to discuss subtly. To have a glib repartee, know how to handle a joke with lightness and relaxation, say some witticisms and few good words – that is what charms French people (Mauchamp, 1998).

The discussions are often heated. It is possible to wrestle about any trifle. When they are in hot conversation, generally speaking, the French do not hesitate to challenge the basic rules of politeness, cutting unscrupulously off the other's speech to contradict, to advise, or to finish the sentence of a hesitant speaker. Overall, the protests, criticism, quarrels, dissensions, are a part of the pleasure of the conversation. They talk a lot, one is able to lose temper while defending an idea, then reconcile with the comrades five minutes later (Mauchamp, 1998).

Among Mozambicans, in general, the conversation is less serious than among the French (hence their lack of interest in whether is “better to be pessimistic or optimistic”: see situation 4). In daily life, they do not discuss ideas, concepts or theories. It is not fashionable to be serious. The desired goal is distraction, humor, play, escape, trance, the collective delirium. Each participant tells stories in turn, while the others mime, playing theatrically what the speaker is suggesting. Then, at some point, they all together die laughing. In short, conversation is a matter of acting; it is a spectacle in itself.

Incidentally, among Mozambicans, conversations are often accompanied by alcohol consumption. They soak themselves to the bone. The strongest in the conversation is the one who is most successful in making the others laugh, which means to forget the worries and problems of everyday life. Moreover, they use a lot of black humor, making fun of themselves, laughing at each other,

joking about their own shortcomings. As matter of fact, in general, Mozambicans are not easily offended; they are good sports.

Apparently, in France, during a conversation, is not always welcomed to have an exaggerated demonstration of joy or pleasure. The French laugh is more moderate: a laugh of connivance and consent predominates. Among Mozambicans, a cheerful and rollicking laugh is predominant, which in a conversational situation is not often seen positively by French people, being considered churlish, since it is capable of disturbing the other guests.

For the French people, in general, during a conversation, the pleasure of being together is also important – the laugh, the voice tonality changing, these are signs of friendliness. But, as was raised by the Mozambican participants, when French people are in a conversation, the friendliness of departure often gives way to the art of launching into digressions, parentheses, associations of ideas. During one of the discussion focus groups we had arranged, as part of our research, one Mozambican participant underscored: “My understanding is that, in a conversation, this need among French people to argue, explain, justify, argue against, the need to be right, removes the individual from the collective, from the communion, and sometimes from the pleasure of being together”.

Thus, we have come to the essence of the cultural and communicational difference between Mozambicans and French people. In Mozambique, there is a strong tendency towards the fusion of individualities in the collective mass; the concepts of one’s own “face” and one’s own “territory” are minimized, canceled by the sense of sharing, the sense of *totemic* communion. Hence, the Mozambican participants’ tendency to want to be physically close to their interlocutors; contact and communication is understood in the sense of sharing. The French, more individualistic, seem much more sensitive to challenges to their “face” and “territory”. Hence their greater need to maintain a certain interpersonal distance, especially with non-close friends and relatives, hence the

unwillingness to “show” publicly their “inner-side”. The Mozambicans, in contrast, are more likely to easily share their “soul” with individuals they meet accidentally during the course of going about their ordinary business.

## **Chapter IV: French, Japanese, and Mozambicans: Agreements and Disagreements**

The participant observation study we conducted about the mismatches with respect to the behaviors related to politeness between people of different nationalities, enabled us to analyze the main reasons there are certain communicational dysfunctions related to interpersonal interactions and relationships in an intercultural context, and to try to find their underlying cultural meanings.

In fact, linked to the behavior lags between the French, Japanese, and Mozambican students, we noticed that, in certain cases, the same behavior had a totally different meaning within the two cultural systems that were interacting. With respect to other cases, we have remarked that culturally different behaviors could tend towards the same goal. Finally, in some situation, we have realized that the way one is supposed to behave in a given situation, according to the cultural norms of both the individuals in a communicative interaction, can be similar; but, those norms do not necessarily correspond to the same value system.

### **1. Misunderstandings With Respect to the Intentions**

As we have seen previously, some communicative misunderstandings concerning the interlocutors' intentions between the French, the Japanese, and the Mozambican students we studied were due to specific cultural differences associated with certain attitudes and behaviors, in certain situations. For instance, in each of the participants' respective cultures, the smile is a polite element. It harmonizes the relations through a nonverbal message. However, the Mozambicans participants emphasized that for them a smile means an invitation

to familiarity; it aims to eliminate distances and to create enthusiasm in interpersonal relations. Among the French, the smile tends to express sincerity, connivance, complicity between the individuals in interaction, between friends or relatives. Among Japanese, the smile often serves as a way to “hide” the “face” or to “save face”, in a delicate situation, and also to cover up one’s emotions or embarrassment, for not disconcert the interlocutor. The values that emerge from this behavior are familiarity and enthusiasm for Mozambicans; the expression of one’s emotions to the French; and the preserving or restoring of harmony, a good atmosphere, between the individuals in a communicative interaction, for the Japanese. It is almost always perceived positively by the Mozambicans and the French; while it can be interpreted by the Japanese as the opposite of transparency (transparency meaning here the expression of serenity or sincerity).

So, the misunderstandings about the intentions of the smile of the interlocutor we observed in some of the communicative interactions between the members of the three nationalities, which consequently conditioned the subsequent attitude and behavior, can be explained though these differences related to the meaning of the smile in each of the participants’ cultures.

Furthermore, we find the elements such as the tendency towards social collectivism and uniformity in Japanese and Mozambican culture, in contrast to French culture where people tend to attach more importance to the individual, and to personal development and fulfillment. However, uniformity and collectivism mean, for the Japanese, spiritual and social peace, social harmony, and existential rhythm. Present in the Zen rituals, in the tea ceremony or in traditional art, these elements are associated, firstly, with a respect for life; and secondly, with the social and religious rituals needed in people’s daily life. In Japanese culture, uniformity and collectivism are elements also associated with the need for concentration, to focus on the mental readiness to perform one’s



roles in the society. In Mozambique, although the fact that Western influence is pouring down upon the society, collectivism and uniformity are still considered as qualities necessary for social and community cohesion, for the tribal or clan spirit, for the common ancestor-gods worship. It especially allows to built and preserve de social solidarity within communities, and to ensure a common enjoyment of life.

## **2. When Different Behaviors Aim to Realize the Same Purpose**

To understand something, perform a task or to solve a problem, the French will opt for rationalization. The Japanese will tend to bring out and print a certain rhythm that is seen as adjusted to the situation. As the writing on the five reels prescribes, often studied during the company's management seminars, in all things there is a rhythm, so that when the right rhythm dominates in the execution of a certain task, the performance will be good (Musashi, 1983). To understand something, perform a task or to solve a problem, Mozambicans traditionally tend to turn it into an object of enjoyment by a specific approach, as evidenced by the fact that, for example, while working, Mozambicans used to perform appropriate singing, or even turn the task into a sort of game. That is, they use to dramatize a problem (turn into a play), which means, give it a symbolic dimension, to better solve it.

Probably because of these differences, when the French, Japanese and Mozambican participants had to do together their university homework, or any other sort of task, disagreeing with respect to how to proceed, they often bickered, even if they all remained good natured.

In another context, such as for example with respect to human contact, in the presence of a visitor, a friend, a relative, or someone who he appreciate, the Mozambican express their sympathy through physical contact, contacts that are like a dance, with proverbialized and musicalized expressions: music and dance,

these are essential elements in Mozambican social daily life. The French express their sympathy with a little speech, through words; while the Japanese will prefer to use the silence – meaningful silence – associated with a series of facial expressions. In Japan, the share of silence often allows people to feel a state of calm, to communicate through other sensory channels. For example, among Japanese families or friends, it is common that the tea is drunk in silence prior to the verbal exchange.

### **3. The Role of the Prejudices, Stereotypes, and the Halo Effect<sup>10</sup>**

From the observations we made during the group discussion sessions, we can conclude that:

- The French participants saw Japanese as calm people, nice, clean, polite, well-intentioned, and with appeasing manners (positive prejudices/stereotypes); but also quite shy, very withdrawn, and difficult to access (negative or relatively neutral prejudices/stereotypes). The generally positive perception that the French had with respect to the Japanese, probably through a halo effect, led them to be, in general, patient and understanding with the Japanese participants, considering their intentions to be good even when there were behavioral “misunderstandings” between them. The Japanese participants, at least on their arrival in France, perceived the French as nice people, funny, romantic, and chic (positive prejudices/stereotypes); but also often too talkative (neutral or negative prejudice/stereotype, depending on the

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<sup>10</sup> The halo effect (or contagion effect) is a cognitive bias that affects the perception of people or brands. It is an interpretation based on the selective perception of information along the lines of a first impression that ones seek to confirm (“people only sees what they want to see”). It has been articulated by Edward Thorndike (1920) and experimentally demonstrated by Solomon Asch (1946). Also, in a halo effect, a feature about a person or a social group deemed positive tends to make more positive the other characteristics of that person or that social group (and conversely for a negative characteristic), even without really knowing them. This effect might, for example, play a major role in phenomena such as racism.

circumstances). Thus, some Japanese participants, according to what they told us, were disappointed to eventually realize that the French were not as chic and romantic as they had imagined! But, they still found French people funny and generally enjoyed their company.

- The French participants perceived Mozambicans, whom they designated through the generalizing categorization of “the Africans”, as carefree people, revelers, instinctive people, players, sly people (positive or negative prejudices/stereotypes, depending on the circumstances); but also rude and sloppy individuals (negative prejudices/stereotypes). This perception, sometimes, probably because of the halo effect, led them to not take what Mozambicans said or did seriously; and in the context of intersexual relations, for example, the French tended to interpret, sometimes wrongly, invitations and compliments made to them by the Mozambicans as sexual “advances” or that they were “hitting” on them in a sexual way. The Mozambican participants, who, by the way, did not like at all to be categorized as “the Africans”, perceived French people as being sweet (positive prejudice/stereotype), romantics, idealists, and to serious (neutral, positive or negative prejudices/stereotypes, depending on the circumstances), also cold and unwelcoming (negative prejudices/stereotypes). So, as some of them said to us, they were often surprised to see that many French people were warm (heartily) and welcoming; but, even after spending much more time in France, they still perceived French people as being idealists and too serious, with whom it was quite difficult to have fun.
- Between the Japanese participants and the Mozambicans participants, by their own admission, there was a mutual ignorance. During the communicative interactions between them, this assumed ignorance led to: either they paid more attention to the intentions of the other, more than to the attitudes and the behaviors in themselves; or the interest they had

toward one another was much more guided by an “exotic curiosity” than an emotional involvement, the emotional involvement that often is the source of curt positions (for or against, like or dislike).

## **Discussion, Perspectives, Conclusion**

Our research into intercultural relations aimed to study the communicational dysfunction due to cultural lag concerning behaviors related to politeness (courtesy, civility, good manners) between French students (European Westerners), Japanese students (East Asians) and Mozambican students (Southern Africans).

### **1. Individual Differences**

Thus, in the four chapters that are part of this monograph, we have presented and analyzed the main communicational dysfunction in question.

We have seen and analyzed some nonverbal, verbal, romantic attitudes and behaviors that proved to be problematic during the intercultural interactions we observed, and we have shed light on the cultural backgrounds underlying these.

Also, in some earlier parts of this report, we discussed the various issues and problems that, in general, arise in intercultural relations; while stressing that, together with generalizable factors, we have also observed individual differences. That is, in their interpersonal, intergroup, and intercultural interactions (relations), for example, some participants (French, Japanese and Mozambican) in this research were more flexible than others, showed a greater desire and ability to understand their interlocutors, and consequently quickly adapted their behavior more than some others.

In effect, since no individual feels entirely comfortable or totally suitable in the whole system that constitutes his own culture, we must keep in mind that he is not the “representative”, the “ambassador” of his culture, even when he

suggests that he is. For instance, the politeness system is a collective contract to which individuals adhere only in a relative way. Within that normative contract, each individual makes choices of their own (including the choice of acting outside of the norm). Furthermore, to express the same intention, a wide array of behavior is possible. The understanding a socio-cultural system should therefore not rely on the understanding of each individual or a bunch of them who are part of it. Instead, it must be assumed that an individual (what he thinks, does, does not do, likes, dislikes, his dreams and aspirations) is the particularized form, a miniature version, a defective portrait of his own culture.

## **2. Lessons From This Study**

We explained that, as part of this research, apart from the observation of the Japanese and Mozambican participants in real-world interactional situations with French people, we also organized group-discussions involving members of these three nationalities. In these discussions, we not only debated various themes, but we also talked about the changes (process of development) that each of the participants had gone through as a result of the relationships they had had with the members of other cultural groups, how these changes had occurred, and about the reasons why.

Thus, it was these group discussions that enabled us to conclude that in order to understand the messages, attitudes and behavior of interlocutors coming from different cultures; and to be able to adjust our messages, attitudes and behavior to those of the interlocutors/partners from other cultures requires several skills:

- *At the level of behavior:* Individuals taking part in an interaction must be aware of the cultural lag. We have seen that this awareness was a prerequisite to search the interlocutors' message, attitude or behavior meaning. It can be encouraged and accompanied by educators, policy and

business manages. Any encounter, any interpersonal interaction privileging a certain way of listening and focusing on the other intentions rather than on the particularity of the person's behavior can favor an openness to a new way of thinking. To go along with a stranger, like any process of discovery, poses some risks to the individual: the risk of being destabilized, of undergoing a transition away from his own way of thinking to someone else's. However, this process is one of learning, constructing new knowledge and new skills. Moreover, the approach to understanding should also focus on the discovery of our own way of functioning, which, far from being harmful, enables us to get to know ourselves through the eyes of others.

- *At the level of intentions:* It is good to start to question our immediate interpretation of an interlocutor's attitude and behavior, to try to tease out what the real intentions are of the speaker/partner with whom we are in communicational relation, to try to envisage things from their point of view.
- *At the level of values:* One should try to understand what the values are that motivate or are behind the attitude, behavior, or the choices made by the interlocutor/partner with whom we are interacting. Understanding the values of others requires an open and questioning approach that avoids, whenever possible, prejudices and stereotypes. Allow the person to explain what is important to him.
- *At the level of meaning of a cultural system:* While engaged in an intercultural interaction, it is important to manage to pick up meaningful indicators. Indeed, real observational skill is required here because we tend to pick up on what we already know. Thus, some signs are simply beyond us because they are already meaningful to us. We have our own exclusion and selection criteria with respect to the world around us. We

must therefore, firstly, be aware of this tendency and, secondly, try to pay attention to the indicators of other cultural systems.

### **3. The Intercultural Research Approach**

At present, we have to say that, with respect to the earlier part of this monograph, for the convenience of our presentation and analysis of the relationship between the participants' (French, Japanese and Mozambicans) politeness behaviors and their respective culture background, we addressed these issues using essentially a *substantialist* analysis approach, which deals with culture as an objective, independent, and relatively stable matter.

Now, in this discussion section, we would like to emphasize that the intercultural subject, which is experiencing a certain vogue in the humanities, education, government policies, company management, etc., involves not only ideas of *inter-relationships*, *inter-connections*, and *inter-exchanges* between different cultures; it should not be understood as the contact between two independent objects (two or more cultures, two or more individuals from different cultures); rather, it should be envisaged as the interaction of individuals, groups, cultures, in which the elements in the relationship are formed, positioned, and defined dynamically and progressively during the process of communication itself.

This means that intercultural relations, whether they are pacific or confrontational, should be considered through a systemic and dynamic approach where cultures appear as non-homogenous social processes, continuously evolving, which are defined as much by their mutual relations as by their own characteristics. Effectively, social groups, in these days of globalization, never exist in total isolation: they always maintain contacts with other groups, which certainly leads to an awareness of their specificity, but also leads to increased



exchanges, borrowings, and constant evolutions and developments. In this sense, as pointed out by Todorov (1986), the intercultural is constitutive of the cultural.

Thus, intercultural defines less one referential field, which would be the opposition/confrontation of two objects, than an interactive field, where one wonders about the relationships that are in progress between culturally identified groups (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989). As noted by Abdallah-Pretceille (1999), the goal of an intercultural approach is neither to identify others by locking them in a web of meanings or by establishing a series of comparisons on the basis of an ethnocentric scale.

Methodologically, the focus should be more on the different ways people from a given cultural group *deal* with people from other cultural groups. Also, it is in this particular aspect that this approach differs from that of classical ethnology. Indeed, in the intercultural approach, otherness should not be conceived as if it is an objective phenomenon to be described; rather, it should be presented as something that is part of a dynamic relationship between two entities that give each other meaning. This process takes its foundation in ontology where a person's real relationships with others are guided by the person's own attitudes vis-à-vis the object the person himself is to others and vice-versa.

Besides, the term relationship or intercultural communication may induce misleading images. What enters into contact are not cultures or national identities: communication always involves people and it is they who carry or mediate the relationship between cultures. Whether it is a study trip, the discovery of a country, or something else, behind it there is always a personal approach, a personal perspective. Whether it is the acquisition of knowledge, the discovery of landscapes, monuments, and works of art or traditions, it causes a contact with personal lifestyles, individual ways of thinking, and personal ways of feeling embodied in people's respective social groups.

Therefore, when it comes to intercultural communication, one must first acknowledge the specificity of the *inter-relationships* that exist between people or groups belonging to different cultures. It is the *relational* aspect that should be the interest of future research and analysis; it being understood that this relational aspect brings with it a whole representation of values, backgrounds, codes, lifestyles, and modes of thinking peculiar to each culture.

Drawing on the structures of our most primitive relationships with *the other-in-the-world*, that is to say, the first attitudes and behaviors towards others (language, desire, love, masochism, sadism, hatred, indifference, etc.), as phenomenologist have described it in their works of analyses (e.g., Sartre, 1943), intercultural research studies must aim to capture the vivid processes, the mechanisms, the personal or group implications associated with the specificity of a given intercultural relation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

We hope that, arriving at the end of this work, we have succeeded to attract attention to this subject of intercultural relations and enhanced the interest in the problems of intercultural communication and its vicissitudes. Because, nowadays, the world challenges us from everywhere, we cannot say that we do not know what is going on. We can certainly refuse to see, refuse to know, and keep operating as if we were still living in nations dominated by a single culture. But who could be happy with that strategy?

Businesses, travel, tourism, international conferences, and university student exchange programs multiply the opportunities for contact. The media, and especially television and Internet, puts the images, information, arts and cultural productions of the various countries of the world within the reach of everyone. Young people are especially aware of this cultural globalization, both through their taste for travel, through the interest they show for the encounters

with others, and for the fashions coming from elsewhere. They are more and more getting into a sort of cosmopolitan, globalized culture: they are already wearing the same clothes, follow the same fashions, listen to the same music; and are passionate about the same sports, movies and music stars (Ladmiral & Lipiansky, 1989).

Certainly, one cannot yet really talk about *true openness* to cultural otherness and genuine communication. Because other trends in our societies seem to go in the opposite direction, as shown in the rejections related to immigration issues, as show in destructive reactions linked to ideological, nationalistic or extremist religious confrontations.

Yet, it is precisely because of these confrontations that the intercultural issues have become so acute. They weave our identity, the one we feel and the other that is conferred on us from the outside. It is no longer possible to go blindly towards the nearby presence of the multiple cultures some of which make their presence powerfully felt. The *interculturality* and *multiculturalism* has emerged not as a *response* to the cultural diversity and complexity of each of our societies, a response that would be dogmatic, but as a *questioning* everywhere and in every present moment. We must pursue this questioning as that inherent in the meaning of our lives. Because intercultural is *now-on* our very lives, obscure and clear like our lives, to be built like our lives, to be invented and reinvented in the struggles, like our lives: for better or for worse. ALAS!

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