**Does Culture Shape Our Identity?**

The question of cultural identity arises whenever I travel and when I’m far from my home.

The identity problem starts when people address to me. Who am I? Am I the person who I think I am or what the others believe I am? Do I see myself through the reflection of my own eyes or those of others’? How do I see myself, putting aside the external looks, does something stands between the I and the me? Aren’t the others who usually refer to me?

We are not alone. We live in a society, as wild as it is. We live in groups, we define ourselves through them, and hence, at least in some aspects, we belong to them. Other questions arise again: Who am I within the group? Am I part of it? If so, what’s its purpose? Does the group identify itself by what is imposed on it or does it oppose to the other groups?

Thus, culture has a major role in shaping our identity; however, can we conclude that the individuals sharing the same culture end up having the same identities? Does culture shape our identity?

Such an assumption is quite traumatic, for it reduces us to robots and denies us our “being” and “self- awareness”. Individuals possess a dynamic nature and are in constant interaction with their community. A person’s understanding of their own cultural identity develops from birth and is shaped by the values and attitudes prevalent at home and the surrounding, noting that the cultural identity, in its essence, relates to our need to belong.

Everyone needs to feel accepted and “at home” with a certain group. However, one must emphasize on the fact that we cannot only be reduced to a part of our community; we are living beings that exist by themselves as well, through introspection. Personal experiences have a tremendous role in making us who we are. Every person’s path is unique. How does that “not” contribute to making us unique?

The same can be said about the relationships we step into. They contribute to changing or adding up to our identities and the identities of those who we relate to.

By “choosing oneself among possibilities”, as Sartre said, we reveal who we are through every choice we make; and with every choice we make, we reshape our identities.

The individuals’ dynamic nature and interactive aspect make them an ongoing active project, a project to be, a project that they continuously work on throughout their lives.

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