

ISHIGURO'S *WHEN WE WERE ORPHANS*: FROM THE MODERN REALISTIC SHELTER TO FLOATING SHATTERS

Silvia Mara TELLINI*

■ **ABSTRACT:** The present work is a reading of the tension forces between the modern and what some critique calls 'post-modern' logics in constant dispute, by focusing on detective Christopher Banks' narrative, in Kazuo Ishiguro's fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans* (2000). The binary positivist logics of this narrative encounter a world where the simplistic jigsaw puzzle solving rationality cannot aid to signify the new social and political context, now under extreme changes. Therefore, this analysis discusses with cultural studies the implications of new theories regarding the concepts of identity and memory, in its interrelations to the sociological and historical discursive aspects of collective memories in the narrative.

■ **KEYWORDS:** *When We Were Orphans*. Kazuo Ishiguro. Identity. Memory.

Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Japan and moved at the age of five to England. However, his family kept him under the Japanese customs shelter while he was experiencing the British world at school. Bauman (2004, p. 14) believes that great authors and philosophers, such as Jacques Derrida, Samuel Beckett, Jorge Steiner, Jorge Luis Borges, Vladimir Nabokov, have a particularly easiness to move in different linguistic universes, as they create from a "cultural cross-road". That seems also to be truth to this author, raised in between-worlds.

One of the recurrent themes explored in Kazuo Ishiguro's narratives is wartime spaces and moments of intense political and social crisis. In his first novel, *A Pale View of Hills* as well as in *The Remains of the Day*, his third novel, Ishiguro (1991, 1986) portrays characters inhabiting the world subsuming to pressures due to conflicts raised during the Second World War. However, it is in both his second novel, *An Artist of the Floating World*, and his fifth novel, *When We Were Orphans*

* UNESP – Universidade Estadual Paulista. Instituto de Biociências, Letras e Ciências Exatas – Departamento de Letras. São José do Rio Preto – SP – Brasil. 15054-000 – smtellini@hotmail.com

(ISHIGURO, 1989, 2000), as he places the narrators in the areas of conflict when he is able to capture, through their fragmentary memory, a singular perspective of modern societies which have been shattered, leaving no safe shelter to those conformed within the binary positivist mode of thinking.

It seems no coincidence that Ishiguro seems particularly interested in these two novels to explore different linguistic, as well as cultural territories. His protagonists enunciate from different lands-in-between, or lands that have not-yet-become, be it from the psychic or linguistic dimensions, or else from the interrelations within the different historical and social worlds, as they do not quite belong to their lands any longer, if they had ever, indeed, belonged once. The fantasy idea of fully belonging to an idealized community is constantly at stake in Ishiguro's work.

At the present moment, the discussion regarding whether there is a new historical period that could be identified as post-modernity is not a concern. The parameter here is the Second World War as the turning point between two stages in history; however, both stages are understood as in a relation of continuation and discontinuation simultaneously.

Christopher attempts to solve the great mystery of his life, the disappearing of his parents in Shanghai when he was a child, a narrative which seems at first in the modes of the realistic English detective novels; however, the modern ideologies come to a halt, at a time when the stable concepts of nation and family do not fit the context anymore. Christopher's perception of his role in the world as being central to the combat against what he refers to as "the great evil" loses its signifying anchor, thus, provoking the fragmentation of histories, which are retold during the narrative. As the world becomes decentralized of its binary colonial political and economic relationships, identities became fragmentary, allowing multiple voices to emerge in the narrator's subjective memory, which in turn, will represent their subjective voices in interrelations with collective memory, which struggles to crystallize a representation of those societies.

Therefore, this analysis aims at discussing with cultural studies the implications of new theories regarding the concepts of identity and memory, in its interrelations to the sociological and historical discursive aspects, considering both the psychic dimensions and the collective memory work in the narrative.

Before resuming to that, one might ask what is the relevance, if there is any, in discussing the Oriental Stage of the Sino-Japanese War, under the lenses of Western culture?

In his review, "International settlements: Ishiguro, Shanghai, humanitarianism", Alexander Bain (2007, p. 240), asserts that "[...] at the same time, economic globalization normally serves as a kind of substratum upon which developed nations and their citizens balance narratives of strategy and interest against those of ethics and obligation [...]", hence connecting far away crises and conflicts globally. Nevertheless, simultaneously, there are disruptive chaotic tensions active

in signifying such connections, or else, de-signifying and re-signifying what seems homogenous at an economic global level.

In times of traumatic wars, meaning can be easily distorted, creating what he calls “schisms” (BAIN, 2007, p. 241), in other words, a chaotic lack of connection. He explains that in war periods the distortions of realities can be generated through manipulative discourses, for instance, those pseudo-humanitarian interventions performed by governmental institutions such as the United Nations and NATO.

He understands that *When We Were Orphans* portrays a scenario which has been recurrent in a number of recent novels and films, in which there is a convergence between the globalized economy and the chaotic political and ethnical identities in struggle to survive a conflict. This novel can be schematized according to the following passage:

An impassioned citizen from a Western nation travels to a war-torn land for reasons that are, at least to the citizen, clearly defined. This citizen is armed with specialized professional competency, and has a deep knowledge of the area which should allow for an effective but also thoughtful intervention. But, drawn into a politically opaque landscape in which no one is innocent and no one can be trusted, the citizen is increasingly torn by competing demands that can't be satisfied, and by conflicting motives that can't be articulated. The result is cognitive breakdown, a rupture in habit which might presage some alteration in outlook or outcome. (BAIN, 2007, p. 241).

This scheme points to two elements at stake in the narrative: memory and identity, because they are contextualized in a world where values such as state and nation are crumbling, allowing through the cracks silenced and multiple voices to be heard; thus, identities can be articulated in the interconnections of different remembered discourses that emerge from memories, be it individual or collective, creating areas of crystallized substance; conversely, identities are also built (or avoided in the case of Bauman's liquid societies) in amidst conflicting tensions, leading to the shattering of the trusting positivist rational view of the world, as detective Christopher Banks experience in Ishiguro's novel.

According to Nikolas Rose (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 128-129), human history needs to be thought from the perspective of ideas attempted to be understood in their interconnections with philosophy, cosmology, aesthetics and literature, but need also to be approached as changing ideas, practices and techniques of everyday life, while not excluding the psychic dimension of the *self*.

Considering these historical, sociological and psychic dimensions approached from the perspective of cultural studies theories, the concepts of identity and memory, pertinent to a reading of Ishiguro's *When We Were Orphans*, will be further discussed.

Identity: theoretical discussions in cultural studies

Identity and culture are necessarily related, but if culture is historical, then we will think of the “American or European culture”, ideologically replicating the ethnocentric and imperialist view. Considering that, the umbrella term ‘multiculturalism’ already offers a problem, since it is in fact a normative ethical concept, insofar as societies cannot not be multicultural, once they constantly rearticulate and negotiate its culture through differences.

In cultural studies discourse is constituted by three logics: difference, individuality and temporality, which encompasses the logics of otherness and productivity.

Identity is understood as incomplete, fragmentary, relational, and unstable and its relations are established upon differentiation. This is one of the fundamentals to bear in mind when approaching identity in this context, a concept which cannot be in alignment with those analyzed as having an integral, originary and unified identity. Identities can only be understood in a contextualized scenario, hence being able to open up to the discourse of minorities, whose singularities such as ethnics, race and nationality are also taken into account.

When we take the deconstructive approach, key concepts are examined under some blurriness, some distrust, indicating key concepts themselves can no longer offer a totalizing, unifying and complete explanation. They do not serve to think with anymore, but since there are no substitutes or replacements to them, there is nothing to do rather than to think with them, keeping in perspective that they are, indeed, detotalized and deconstructed in their forms.

In this manner, identification can draw its significations from discursive, psychoanalytic repertoire as well as from the semantic field, without being limited to those. It is always incomplete as a process from the discursive point of view. It is not determined as it can be either sustained or abandoned in the area of contingency. It is always thought in the articulation between subject and discursive practices. Therefore, identity is a strategic and positional concept rather than an essential one (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 1-3).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Freud (2008, p. 161-178) asserts in “Mourning and melancholia” that identity is not constructed in relation to that which binds one to a present object, but it rather emerges in that relation to an abandoned object choice, hence it is a process that seeks and finds in the relation to the other, that is, through alterity, a compensation for the loss of the libidinal pleasures of primal narcissism. The loss of the other can be processed in the mourning, a loss that may be related to some abstraction which has taken the place of the one, such as fatherland (motherland), liberty, an ideal and so on.

Stuart Hall relates that to the discursive process Derrida describes as being subject to the play of ‘*differance*’. Identity is not formed by the imposition of, for

instance, an ideal of nation; it is not molded within common stable history. Identity is fragmented and fractured and subject to an ongoing transformation. He, thus, defines identity as our possibilities of the representation of ourselves and to the other, which is inevitably constructed discursively as he explains:

We need to situate the debates about identities within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively 'settled' character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the process of globalization, which I would argue are coterminous with modernity (HALL, 1996) and the processes of forced and 'free' migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called 'post-colonial' world. Though they seem to invoke an origin in a historical past with which they continue to correspond, actually identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being. (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 4).

Identity is understood in cultural studies as constituted within the play of power, hence is more a mark of exclusion and difference than the all inclusive sameness. It is constituted in the relation to the other, the one which is not the same, and which is yet-to-become.

According to Lawrence Grossberg (HALLS; DU GAY, 2005, p. 98-99), everyone exists within a phenomenological field, having access to experience and acquiring knowledge about themselves and their world. Everyone has some form of subjectivity that can be both 'subject' and 'subjected', occupying more than one position. The modern subjectivity functions to authorize experience itself, producing an epistemological value, an authority to the subject.

That is due to the fact that the unity of the subject depends on time, subjectivity is constructed as the experience of internal time and the special experiencing of the world from a determined position; identity is the temporal construction of difference and agency is the temporal displacement of difference.

Heidegger (1998) had already hinted on how to think outside the binary mode, in *Being and Time*, as he deconstructed traditional ontology, displacing 'Being' from the abstracted and detached conception of the Platonic tradition, repositioning it as the idea of 'Being' as *Dasein*, or, a 'being-in-the-world', which has not-yet-become. In other words, men recognize themselves in relation to themselves and the world, as they build an identity which is never complete, which is in constant projection into the future.

Nevertheless, if identity is not a stabilized concept, but emerges out of differences and is incomplete, Avtar Brah (1992, p. 143) asks: "How is post-colonial gendered and racialized subjectivity to be analyzed? [...] How do the symbolic

order and the social order articulate in the formation of the subject? In other words, how is the link between social and psychic reality to be theorized?"

Ideology works at both levels, psychic and discursive formation and practices. Identity arises at the intersection between these two non-identical areas, therefore being apprehended in-betweens, in the fractures and divisions of representation. Hall cites Peter Osborne's review of Lacan's mirror stage to explain that point:

The mirror stage (Lacan's essay) is not the beginning of something, but the interruption – the loss, the lack, the division – which initiates the process that 'founds' the sexually differentiated subject (and the unconscious) and this depends not alone on the instantaneous formation of some internal cognitive capacity, but on the dislocating rupture of the look from the place of the Other. [...] Furthermore, that place has only meaning in relation to the supporting presence and the look of the mother who guarantees its reality. (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 9).

He criticizes Lacan's exaggerated focus on the process of the development of subjectivity as been exclusively dependent on the resolution of the Oedipal crisis, not considering the context, as if the image of the child constituted an abstract absolute being. Moreover, Lacan posed the problematic as if it were related to the opposition between the individual (small animal that is not yet a subject) and the subject, considering the individual could possess a *tabula rasa* in his mind.

Despite Foucault's contributions, Hall (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 11) has a critical view of his emphasizing the idea of the body as the point of application of disciplinary regulation, between the subject, the individual and the body through discourse.

Hall considers that Judith Butler developed and amplified Foucault's theories when inter relating them to psychoanalytic theories, being able to analyze identity as constituted in a dimension less concrete and more volatile. Butler explains how imagination and the capacity to symbolize play a part in identity formation:

[...] identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmagoric efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitations, they unsettle the I; they are the sedimentation of the 'we' in the constitution of the I, the structuring present of alterity in the very formulation of the I; Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give away. (BUTLER, 1993, p. 105).

Significations composing multifaceted identities can only exist in relation to an imagined project. If in "Mourning and melancholia" Freud (2008) focalizes the relation of identity formation and the loss of the other, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (FREUD, 1962) he approaches this imaginary, focalizing the capacity one has to project into the future, as a mechanism of the delay in achieving gratification, which constitutes this gap between the primary processes, the *Lust-Unlust* principle, and the secondary processes, realities of the present, thus, constituting a driving factor of identity-building (FREUD, 1962).

If these psychic mechanisms are expanded to the functioning of cultures, the concept of culture as difference allows us to think of what Habermas (1987, p. 346) calls the "[...] differentiation and condensation at once – a thickening of the floating web of the intersubjectivity threads that simultaneously holds together the ever more sharply differentiated components of culture, society and person."

These intersubjectivity threads are represented in Ishiguro's stories, through hybrid features of the protagonists' discourse. In the case of Christopher (ISHIGURO, 2000), hybrid discourses are constituted in the intersections between individual voices and collective representing conflicting forces, which can be manifest in Christopher's constant dislocation, which leaves him disoriented.

Hybridity is another umbrella concept being used in different contexts. Here, hybridity is taken as the dialectic territory of differences that is constituted in the cross-roads between decentralized voices, minority positions, inscribing versions of collective memory. Bhabha (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 58) refers to Bakhtin to explain this territory as a space of interconnected knots which have not been assimilated one another, as we can read in the passage below:

The hybrid is not only double-voiced and double accented [...] but also double language; for in it there are not only (and not even so much) two individual consciousness, two voices, two accents, as there are [doublings of] socio-linguistic, consciousness, two epochs [...] that come together and consciously fight it out on the territory of the utterance [...] it is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words. (BAKHTIN, 1981, p. 360).

Bhabha (HALL; DU GAY, 2005) understands Bakhtin asserts that the dialogic negotiation opened by the hybrid agencies does not imply assimilation or collaboration, but makes possible the creation of a space in-between which refuses the binary representation, inasmuch as it is free from determinism.

The approach of identity in cultural studies can assume different dimensions according to the areas of interconnections one focalizes. Considering the narrative

strategies Ishiguro articulates in his novels, be it discursive, linguistic, or historical, memory from different perspectives is a concept that needs to be addressed in its relation to theories considering identity formation.

Memory and identity in Christopher Banks discourse in *When We Were Orphans*

Bauman (2004, p. 11) understands that the question of identity becomes an issue once you are exposed, not only to a community of individuals that live together, but also to a community that is ‘welded together by ideas and principles’. Individuals try to come to terms with the contradictions and impossible demands from society.

Christopher Banks, in *When We Were Orphans* is also trying to find meaning in putting together his jigsaws as a detective. He moves from Shanghai to London and back to Shanghai, also travelling to Hong Kong and to the countryside of England.

Christopher is living at the threshold between two eras, between the modern, and what some have defined as the post-modern world. According to Bauman (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 18-36), in his article “From pilgrim to tourist: a short history of identity”, the symptoms of post modernity could already be manifest in that period of the great world wars.

For Bauman, the figure of the pilgrim, from ancient Christianity, has gained a new twist in modernity. Whereas the pilgrim connected his present with a history of the past and a possibility of the future, through the delay of his gratification in time and space, the figure of the tourist is that of a systematic seeker of experience. The tourist willingly experiences the bizarre and strange, so that he can tame and domesticate it, while notwithstanding he has a home. And yet, this home is both his shelter and prison.

For the pilgrim, beyond identity building, identity preservation is important. For the tourist, however, the effort is to prevent the sticking to one identity, as he keeps his options open in an ever ending sequence of *nows*, of presents, without either a past or a future.

The easiness with which Christopher travels from one continent to the other, and his obsession in deciphering conundrums (taming paradoxical strange realities) can be associated to the figure of the tourist, whereas Ono’s inability to cope with the fast changing ideologies of his time, as well as his efforts to preserve every element of his identity as they were once in history, reminds us of the figure of the pilgrim.

Bauman argues one of the characteristics that starts to change after the great wars is the fact that people started to believe in identity as something to be created rather than to be discovered, a process still current and intensified in modern societies

in late capitalism. That is the reason why, he observes, it is not adequate to try to ask Durkheim or Weber what identity is, since their readings were from a different time, when identity was an object of philosophical thought. The difference is that today, it is not identity that is at the center of our thought, but the fascination that it draws (BAUMAN, 2004, p. 17). To illustrate the transformation in the position of identity from the modern world to the world after the second war, Bauman (2004, p. 19) explains:

The nation-state, as Giorgio Agamben has observed, is a state that makes 'nativity of birth' the 'foundation of its on birth'. 'The fiction that is implicit here', Agamben points out, 'is that birth [nascita] comes into being immediately as nation, so that there may not be any difference between the two moments.' [...] After all, asking 'who you are' makes sense to you only once you believe that you can be someone other than you are; only if you have a choice, and only if it depends on you what you choose [...]. But this is precisely what did not occur to the residents of the back-water villages and forest settlements (in Poland before the break of the II World War) – who never had a chance to think of moving places, let alone to seek, discover or invent something as nebulous [...] as another identity.

In the era of nation-states, the power play needed to be legitimated through a fiction embedded in identity. National identity formation took a lot of force, subjugation, vigilance in order to maintain the cohesiveness of the aggregate, holding centralistic ambitions, insofar as 'belonging' may have become seductive when opposed to exclusion.

Modern societies created an artificial national identity, as they were part of an era of non-mobility, a time when they were born and died in the same place.

Changes happen as the disintegration of institutions such as family, state and church is caught within new social interactions that have emerged. Therefore, "[...] once identity loses the social anchor that made it look 'natural', predetermined, and nonnegotiable, 'identification' becomes ever more important for the individuals desperately seeking a 'we' to which they may bid to access." (BAUMAN, 2004, p. 24).

Bauman asserts that globalization shook the state-nation marriage and drove the hierarchy of identities to a collapse, as national assets, both labor and capital, is taken over in the free flow global market finances. In such a context, Bauman understands that the longing for identity is also the longing for security.

Christopher is in search of a vanished past, of ghosts, of parents that only exist in his memory. At a certain point, towards the end of the book, he recognizes he has been chasing ghosts. It is the aurora of post-modern times, an era when bonding and investing in relationships has become 'wax and wane' (BAUMAN, 2004, p.

29). Engagements become increasingly frailer, whereas intimate and more personal relationships are not sought.

Another aspect Bauman approaches is how the association with a working class determined identity during imperialism, but in the end, it has created a social exclusion; humans have become disposable and wasted once they no longer are active in the economical cycle. He argues:

The stake of imperialism of the solid modern era was the conquest of territory in order to magnify the volume of labour subject to capitalist exploitation. Conquered lands were taken over by the conqueror's administration, so that the natives could be reprocessed into a sellable labour force. That was [...] a continuation, a restaging on the global stage, of the processes internally practiced by each of the capitalist countries of the West; [...] and reaffirmed the Marx's selection of class as the principal determining factor of social identity. [...] however, it has become salient that a most spectacular [...] dimension of the planetary-wide expansion of the West has been [...] the production of human waste, or more precisely wasted humans – humans no longer necessary for the completion of the economic cycle and thus impossible to accommodate within a social framework resonant with the capitalist economy. (BAUMAN, 2004, p. 40).

Was human waste only produced during late capitalism? In *When We Were Orphans* (ISHIGURO, 2000), Christopher, a child in Shanghai, faces two worlds, which are not actually two worlds, as his narrative develops bifurcation points. They include the inside the walls of his colonial house, managed by his mother, who helps underclass people by promoting charity programs. However, their house with a “grand stair case”, a “[...] gleaming banister rail following the curve of the stairs down to the spacious entrance hall [...]” (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 60) was maintained by the company Morganbrook and Byatt, where his father worked. M&B is a company that like other British companies, engaged in illegal trade “[...] by importing Indian opium into China in such massive quantities [that] had brought untold misery and degradation to a whole nation [...]” (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 61), a sentence Christopher's mother says as she shames an inspector from the company when he comes to instruct her to get rid of her servants on the account that they lived in Shantung where “[...] opium addiction [...] has now advanced to such deplorable levels that entire villages are to be found enslaved to the pipe.” (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 61).

While having their lives supported by the company, the Banks are caught in between the moral, social dilemma, of both perpetuating the economical impoverishment of the local community by the importation of opium and the labour-servant relations, as well as by Christopher's mother's moral discourse

in campaigning against the Chinese miserable social and economical conditions through charities and tea meetings.

Nikolas Rose (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 140) points to the fact that since the Victorian period, England was indeed under the ideology of the good morals of virtue and promotion of charity were representations of that, as he explains:

Victorian intellectuals were problematizing all sorts of aspects of social life in terms of moral character, threats to character, weakness of character and need to promote good character and arguing that the virtues of character – self-reliance, sobriety, independence, self-restraint, respectability, self-improvement – should be inculcated in others through positive actions of the state and statesman [...] one sees the programmes for the reform of secular authority within the civil service, the apparatus of colonial rule and the organizations of industry and politic, in which the persona of the civil servant, the bureaucrat, the colonial governor will become the target of a whole new ethical regime disinterest, justice, respect for rules, distinction between the performance of one's office and one's passion.

In those new forms of relations, they found meaning in altruism and philanthropic work as measures of one's good character.

The British merchant companies in Shanghai, particularly those engaged and largely profiting from the opium trade, reduced what Bauman refers to as the "bios" of the underclass to a pure "zoo" in Giorgio Agamben's words (2000, p. 21), that is, reduced their social identities, to an attribution of animal-like qualities. There is a dehumanized identity to the ones living outside the walls of Christopher's beautiful childhood home, a place which works as an alienating bubble from the real world. There is a distortion of reality, affecting both, the inside family intimate life and the awareness of their social context in Shanghai.

This huge social and economical gap, between the privileged colonizer and the underprivileged colonized would be one of the dilemmas modern societies would need to tackle. While overcoming nationalist systems, and also guarantying minimal citizenship rights in the welfare states, governments would bear in mind what Bauman calls 'the quandary' of those thirty years of post war reconstruction, that is, "[...] *how to achieve unity in (in spite of) difference and how to preserve difference in (in spite of) unity?*" (BAUMAN, 2004, p. 41-42).

The nation state homogenizes differences by mastering social time, having one measure reducing all temporalities into one time, producing a special binary between whole and partial societies, "one as the principle of the other's negation" (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 57). Minorities are assumed to be a foreign body, an imposition from the outside, as well as a disjunction inside the whole.

Christopher lives at a time when the identity of a person was still very much determined by the productive role one performed in the social division of labor. Notwithstanding, his trajectory anticipates the posterior period when identities do not invest their trust on a notion of nation-state anymore, and are “floating and drifting in search of alternative havens” (BAUMAN, 2004, p. 45). Particularly, in detective novels the city can be a dangerous metropolitan labyrinth represented.

In this context, for James Donald the male character usually cannot recognize himself in the image of the other he created for himself and has obsessively chased. He believes citizenship is a substancelessness, as he explains:

The citizen-subject has no identity [...] other than that produced by the law. [...] But it is the lack of primordial identity that produces the need for identification. [...] This fantasy structure of identification shows why citizenship inevitably becomes enmeshed with questions of national belonging and communal self-definition. (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 171-176).

As mentioned previously Christopher can be associated with the image of the tourist Bauman describes as a figure model of post modernity, inasmuch as he is constantly drifting from one city to another, convincing himself his greatest case will be to discover the truth about his parents’ disappearance, only to conclude at the end of his journey that “[...] for those like us, our fate is to face the world as orphans, chasing through long years the shadow of vanished parents.” (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 335-336). He anticipates the position of “[...] the exile of the thrust from the home where it dwelled for the most part of modern history.” (BAUMAN, 2004, p. 45).

Consequently, his social interactions change constantly, as he comes in contact with people who have come from different backgrounds. His parents are British, who lived in a house in Shanghai with Chinese servants during his childhood, while his best friend was a Japanese boy named Akira. Later on, when he goes back to Shanghai to try and find his parents, he describes the city as an international community.

At that point, he mentions a typical social practice of the city that irritates him: “[...] the way people [...] seem determine at every opportunity to block one’s view.”, assuming it is a custom that has grown in Shanghai’s International Settlement due to “[...] all the national groups that make up the community here – English, Chinese, French, American, Japanese, Russian – [that] subscribe to this practice with equal zeal [...] cutting across all barriers of race and class.” (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 163). He continues to explain that such a costume was the cause of a “disorientation” which threatened him during his first days back in the city (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 164). Contrastingly, he believes that after a few days he has come to adapt himself to Shanghai’s life, but his story develops into actions and

discoveries that are increasingly disorienting and his narrative seems to be on edge of hallucination.

While crossing the city in search for his parents, in an unreal scenario of war, he believes he has met his childhood friend, Akira, now a soldier on duty. Later, he finds out his father died of typhoid, while his mother was kidnapped by a warlord, Wang Ku, who had kept her as a sexual slave during years, while being the true benefactor of his inheritance. His Uncle Philip, a close friend of his mother's, finally confesses that he helped Wang Ku take her once he lusted her (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 316).

It seems Christopher's reminiscing narrative announces the subsequent increasing deregulation of the state government insofar as he is a private detective dwelling in-between nation states, which are cohabitated by multiple nationalities, composing a picture of globalized territories, despite maintaining the roles of colonizer and colonized still alive. On another dimension, Christopher's orphanage seems to glimpse into the disintegration of the family institution, which according to Bauman (2004), follows suit the nation-state decadence.

Contrastingly, Christopher's identity is furnished with modern features. For instance, his work as a detective pursuing the goal to find out the truth about his own family, leads him irrevocably to the conclusion that nothing seems to be what he thought they were. Bauman (2004, p. 49) asserts that "[...] the solving of puzzles follows the logic of *instrumental* rationality (selecting the correct means to a given end)". The problem is that such rationality will not bear identity constructions since this "[...] is guided by the logics of *goal* rationality (finding out how attractive the ends are that can be achieved with the given means)" (BAUMAN, 2004, p. 49). Particularly in the modern period Bauman (2004, p. 49) explains how the individual's role is connected with one's identity:

Once modernity replaced pre-modern *states* (which determined identity by birth and hence provided few if any occasions for the question 'who am I?' to arise) with *classes*, identities became tasks which individuals had to perform [...] through their biography. As Jean Paul Sartre memorably puts it then, to be a bourgeois is not enough to be born a bourgeois – one needs to live one's whole life as a bourgeois [...] one needs to prove by its on deeds.

It is as if life was a mission and your deeds would be the proof that you have lived up to your life.

Christopher presents some contradictory voices at the end of the book, when he suddenly seems to find meaning in Sartre's project of life. The detective concludes at the end of the story that: "There is nothing for it but to try and see through our missions to the end, as best we can, for until we do so, we will be permitted no calm." (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 335).

Nevertheless, he adds to that that “[...] there are those times when a sort of emptiness fills my hours [...]” (ISHIGURO, 2000, p. 335), pointing to the moment of change his world is experiencing, when blind spots appear, opening up to disorienting experiences, still empty of signification before his eyes. After all, the “[...] strategy of *carpe diem* is a response to a world emptied of values pretending to be lasting [...]”, in Bauman’s words (2004, p. 53).

Final considerations

Christopher’s experiences seem to be lived in-between the threshold of modernity and what has become known as the post modern world.

Modernity was invented by Northern Europe and North America and transformed tradition in ‘the pre- modern’. Modernism relies in the difference between tradition and modernity. Traditional societies are thus those which are not open to self-awareness and have absolute certainties. Therefore, kinship can involve both traditional and modern sources of identity-constitution to individuals, inasmuch as they are developed in the tensions between those two different values (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 41, p. 45).

For Marilyn Strathern (HALL; DU GAY, 2005), what separates modernity from post-modernity is exactly the direction towards societies where traditions would cease to exist (theoretically). Not changing equates now to a static life, which is unconceivable.

Moreover, Kevin Robins (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 62) argues that the dynamic modern spirit questions everything and is self-questioning. In western culture modernity is established through a constant negation, moving things into a constant change, without limits as opposed to the imagined static Orient. The dual polarization established the Other, the Orient as the opposition to the western world project of development. This project was admired and the ones who were not modernized yet made themselves open to the development, suffering in the end, from not having the expected outcomes. The efforts to imitate did not result in authentic modernization. According to him, “[...] the exposure to modern culture (that is to say, western culture) resulted, not in cultural creativity and emancipation, but in conformism and dependency. This was the consequence of an excessive openness.” (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 62). Just to mention one of the dependencies, the simulation of an open trade led the Chinese to engage in the opium business, traded from India by the British.

There were counter reactions, attempts to recover an ideal of the traditionalist past compensating for the lack of creativity. The relation of dependency on the West, implicates that “[...] there is an obliteration of personality; [...] a borrowed mind, a borrowed life.” (RICOEUR, 1992, p. 123).

In terms of the dualistic construction Orient/West, Said (2003) in *Orientalism* describes how the dominant power constructs the repressed other as difference. The notion of Orientalism is ambiguous, as Said suggests that it is a representation used to differentiate us from the other, as well as is the I a thought based on ontological and epistemological distinctions. The question is: does the Orient exist apart from Orientalism, that is, is there an Orient which is not constructed through the colonial discourses? If the Orient can only exist as a construction of colonial discourses, then the knowledge of it must be appropriative and oppressive. This construction has put the west and the orient in an unequal relation. For Said, "Orientalism involves actual material process of colonization, travel, exploitation and domination." (HALL; DU GAY, 2005, p. 96).

The Orient as it was before that, existed independently of these processes. Colonialism produces a different subjectivity of the colonized and it also creates impediments to certain possibilities of subjectivity.

Spivak (1988) actually questions the concept of subjectivity as she understands it is a western category in the colonial relation, as the West can then name its other in the imperialist world. Therefore, difference and diversity constitute two of the modes to manage the politics of race, class and gender, creating the marginal and the oppressed.

Identities can be contradictory as they are situational, involving the political game around the multiple representations of decentered identities (HALL, 1992).

In conclusion, Ricoeur (1992, p. 123) has a point in saying that it is time to leave our concerns with cultural identity and move on to a preoccupation with cultural reciprocity and receptiveness, as a way out of the imposition of the binary choice between either the assimilation of modernity or the fake reenactment of origins. However, if we choose to leave one in detriment of the other, we will be still acting in the same binary mode. Therefore, I believe Ishiguro's narratives approach how difficult it is to rule out questions concerning identity, as they are elements involved in reciprocity and receptiveness as much as in difference and individuality.

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■ **RESUMO:** *O presente artigo é uma leitura das forças de tensão entre as lógicas modernas e as chamadas por alguns críticos de "pós-modernas" em constante disputa, com foco na narrativa do detetive Christopher Banks, no quinto romance de Kazuo Ishiguro, When We Were Orphans (2000). As lógicas binárias positivistas dessa narrativa se deparam com um mundo onde a racionalidade simplista de resolução de*

quebra-cabeças não pode auxiliar na significação do novo contexto político-social, agora sob mudanças extremas. Assim, essa análise discute junto a estudos culturais as implicações de novas teorias a respeito dos conceitos de identidade e memória, em suas inter-relações com os aspectos discursivos históricos e sociológicos das memórias coletivas na narrativa.

■ **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** When We Were Orphans. Kazuo Ishiguro. *Identidade. Memória.*

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