Your Christ is Jewish; your car, Japanese; your pizza, Italian; your democracy, Greek; your coffee, Brazilian; your holiday, Turkish; your digital numbers, Arabic; and your letters, Roman. Only your neighbour is a foreigner (Poster on the Streets of Berlin, 1990s).

Building up diversity

"I is another", wrote Arthur Rimbaud, by forcing not just the syntax, but the unity and the integrity of the person – of the *I* –too.An *I* who assists at his shell crumbling, this shell on which we build up our identity, our uniqueness and that emerge from a continuous braiding starting in the past and going on in the present.

Rimbaud's subject was an *I*, but we should say the same about the plural *us* and find out that this same *us*, that we use to think as a natural subject, is actually more the product of history than the product of nature: a result of the stories, the ideologies and the identity politics we construct. An history made with our feet: it could sound like a joke, but the paleontologist and anthropologist André Leroi-Gourhan actually affirmed, about humanity, that « we were prepared to accept anything except to learn that it all began with the feet! » (Leroi-Gourhan, 1977: 65). While walking, our ancestors the Sapiens left the Afar Valley in Ethiopia for colonizing the whole earth. While walking they found on the way those new environments, climates and conditions that needed new responses: so cultural differences were born.

Walking human beings used to meet, to struggle, to exchange ideas and genes, such that scientists can today state the inconsistency of the idea of race when applied to human beings. As we all have an extremely diverse gene pool, so we can affirm that any culture reveals a certain variety of signs coming from some *others*. No *us* is defined by nature, nor *other* exists. Just our constructions of the *us*and the *other* exist. Often, what we consider our natural community is actually the result of an untrue story. In many cases, it is what Jean Pouillon calls «camouflaged retro-projections», for assessing that «those societies which call themselves modern are not forgetting their past, but handling it according to their present needs» (Pouillon, 1975: 160). By these stories, you can even theorize a people, even a nation – as medievalist Walter Pohl says, «nothing changing in language, in culture, nor in the seed

and line of the men and the women. Just something has changed: the history, or, more precisely, the image people have of their history» (Pohl, 2000: 2). As in Orwell's 1984, the past is manipulated according to the present.

Ancient Greeks used to call *barbarians* those who were not able to speak their language in a proper way; in Uganda, lugbara people call the strangers "reversed people". The most of the ethnonyms, the names every people use for defining themselves, mean "the men", "the warriors", "the best ones": that shows the ethnocentric tendency of any society in thinking themselves as the best ones and in considering the others as less brave, less valuable, less human, if not… not human.

As Benedict Anderson showed, every human group going further the restraint community where relationships are "face to face" is an imagined community (see Anderson, 2006). "Imaged" means that the common feeling of belonging we experience about either our people, our country, or any other group, no mind on what it is founded, is not actually produced by the direct connection with every member of the group itself, but by the idea they share with us some common and unique characters, instead. Hence, the idea of *us*, that springs out from an hypothetic peculiarity distinguishing us from the others, for some reasons different, or considered as different.

As Ernest Renan says about the nation, for creating an identity you need a good dose of memory as much as a good dose of oblivion: «Oblivion, and even historical mistake, are an essential component for building a nation […]. The essence of a country is not just that all its members share a common heritage, but also that they forgot the same things. No French citizen knows about his or her possible Burgund, Alan or Visigoth origin; anyone has forgotten Saint Barthelemy's night as well as the Southern massacres of the XIII century» (Renan 1993: 7-8). We should minimize, and even forget, what united us and emphasize what divided us in the past. Or then accept, with Julian S. Huxley e Alfred C. Haddon, that «a country is a society united by a common mistake about its origins and a common aversion towards its neighbors» (Huxley-Haddon, 2002: 15). Are those neighbors always *others*? Are *the others* always and fully different from *us*?

Other, French *autre,* Italian *altro,* Spanish *otro*, German *ander* always indicates an unusual dimension and often blurs with *strange*, uncommon, not standard, not normal.

The Latin word *alter* generates the Italian verb *alterare*, French *altérer*, Spanish *alteràr*, the English one *to alter*, meaning to change, to modify, also used in its intransitive form for a change of mood. In almost all these cases, the meaning is pejorative: it marks the deviation from the routine, from the dangerous custom we use to think as natural, pointed by Michel de Montaigne as «a violent and treacherous schoolmistress. (…) She soon uncovers to us a furious and tyrannical face against which we no longer have the liberty of even raising our eyes. We see her at every turn forcing the rules of nature» (Montaigne 1965: 77).

We find the same etym in the Latin particle *ultra* (beyond) and in the Italian *altrove* (elsewhere), a spatial application of the concept. But the Latin root *al-* generates also the word *alias*, that is, standing for. We are our *alias* when we want to appear as someone else: we change our name, without changing our essence. We should maybe admit, in a whisper, that Rimbaud was right.

Dividing for gathering

«All societies produce strangers; but each kind of society produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way». We could think this is a paraphrase of Tolstoj's incipit of Anna Karenina, but these words of Zygmunt Bauman's show us the production process of the stranger as an individual bypassing the borders we have created and we often hardly bear. «Strangers», according to Bauman, are the people who do not fit the cognitive, moral or aesthetic map of the world (…) and, by their sheer presence, make obscure what ought to be transparent (see Bauman, 1995).

Producing the other, the stranger, is an essential step in the definition of ourselves, at least in the definition of what we would like to be or to look like. Any process of construction of a collective identity rests on two basic and complementary operations: in order to define, to "enclose" our collective *us*, we need to mark a close line, including those we think part of our community and excluding someone else. In drawing this line, we cut out the border that divide us from the other. Therefore, identity is not an ascribed fact, as supporters of the "roots" affirm, but the result of a relational work: in order to be someone, or something, I need the other. No definition exist without an other.

This is what Kostantin Kavafis masterfully says in verse: its poem *Waiting for the Barbarians* describes a whole city where the *souverains,* the nobles and the dignitaries of the courts wear their best clothes for welcoming the sensed upcoming barbarians. All of them prepared their best talks, but the strangers do not arrive. The poem ends with a desperate call:

Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians?

Those people were a kind of solution.

Barbarians are a kind of solution for giving us a measure of our advancement: without them it's hard to us to say we are civilized people. That is why we mark borders and frontiers, for defining *ourselves*. For thinking us better than the others, we need some worse *other*. This mechanism produced, for example, the accusation of sorcery: while identifying an enemy, a responsible for what goes wrong, we expel from our community any guilt, any threat that could disgregate the group. So we can finally think us as the good, the best ones.

In a recent volume, Umberto Eco tells us of an odd episode: travelling around the US, he got on a cab driven by a Pakistani guy. During the conversation, the driver asks Eco where he came from, then where Italy is and finally which kind of adversary Italians have got. The philosopher was surprised by such a question and spent some time asking himself who Italians consider as an enemy. But the same surprise affected the driver in learning that countries can exist without an historical adversary. Maybe because – Eco suggests – we have so many conflicts among ourselves, «but rethinking about that fact, I was persuaded that the worst disgrace of our country, for the last sixty years, had been the lack of a common and real enemy». Eco's essay goes on from a quote to another for showing us, through literature and history, the many different ways we can produce an adversary. For example, in exploiting and emphasizing strangers' differences: «having an enemy is important not just for defining our identity, but also for providing us an obstacle which is useful for testing our values, our system and our virtue» (Eco, 2011: 10).

In fact, for increasing the cohesion of our community, we have to put in light the shared characters as well as to stress the differences from the others. These others are created and fashioned in the more functional shape for our project. A well-shaped other is essential for

strengthening the community and defining the limits of *us*.

In many cases, the image we have of the others is not just based on the effective knowledge, but on stereotype. Stereotype is the rhetorical declination of caricature: as the cartoonist grabs a marking feature of someone for emphasizing it and reducing the individual to this trait (a huge nose, oversized breasts…), so the stereotype reduces a person, or a society, to its supposed characteristic signs.

Each stereotype entails a distortion, which is often, but not always pejorative. Travelling means meeting people, but in a faulty way: the lack of time and pre-existing opinions we all bring with us often generate misunderstandings. Together with clothes, medicines and guidebooks we carry with us our perspective on the place and the people we are going to meet (Aime, 2005). These perspectives are often shaped by exoticism: another less bloody way for stating differences.

The act of drawing borders for producing different identities leads at considering any society and any culture as closed entities, pure and uncontaminated objects which inextricably evolved from their own specific and peculiar origins. Better would be to think at cultures as moving beings, mutually and constantly affecting themselves. If we want to speak about divisions, we ought to do that in terms of *frontier* more than of *borders*. Common language seldom distinguishes the difference between these words, used as synonyms, while the first actually means a limit not to be bypassed, and the second is an area instead: not a line, but a strip of earth where two different entities stand the one in front of the other, and meet. A border is strict, a frontier is floating. As Franco La Cecla says: «Frontiers are the "face to face" of two teams, two cultures, two countries (…). Frontiers should be the place where the meeting replaces the struggle, where a relationship can be realized either through indifference in no man's land or through the difference of the demarcations, which our strangers stay beyond» (La Cecla, 2003: 133-34).

It happens, nonetheless, that these different cultural identities, in spite of their historical and multi-perspective origin, are thought to be *natural*. One of the most important warning in anthropology is about naturalness: what we often suppose to be natural is indeed the product of the habits along the time.

Mistaking habits for nature can drive us to think that everything different is not natural. This idea is typical of ethnocentrism and can lead us to find in the others an inferior condition, a barbarian one. Montaigne argued that when he wrote: «I think there is nothing barbarous and savage in that nation, from what I have been told, except that each man calls barbarism whatever is not his own practice» (Montaigne, 1965: 152).

Two centuries later, Montesquieu designed some Persians travelling to Paris for triggering the development of a feeling of confusion and of a gaze on the other free from the conditioning of habits. This perspective only could replace the habits of a community into the larger map of several communities. Those Persians looked at us with stranger eyes, they were surprised, amazed and disgusted: they admired the Western world as much as they criticized it. Montesquieu uses their disillusioned and astonished eyes for addressing with an ironic and sarcastic voice his critics to our society. So one of them writes: «The King of France is the most powerful of European potentates. He has no mines of gold like his neighbor, the King of Spain; but he is much wealthier than that prince is, because his riches are drawn from a more inexhaustible source, the vanity of his subjects. (…) Then again, the king is a great magician, for his dominion extends to the minds of his subjects; he makes them think what he wishes. If he has only a million crowns in his exchequer, and has need of two millions, he has only to persuade them that one crown is worth two, and they believe it. (…) What I have told you of this prince need not astonish you: there is another magician more powerful still, who is master of the king's mind, as absolutely as the king is master of the minds of his subjects. This magician is called the Pope. Sometimes he makes the king believe that three are no more than one; that the bread which he eats is not bread; the wine which he drinks not wine; and a thousand things of a like nature» (Montesquieu, 2008: 31).

This is the witness of Montesquieu and his Eastern characters, ironic but never insolent. «I think, Usbek, that we never judge of things otherwise than by a secret reference to ourselves. I am not surprised that the Negroes paint the Devil in shining white color and their Gods as black as coal (…). It has been well said that if the triangles made themselves a God, they would give him three sides» (Montesquieu, 2008: 79). As Claude Lévi-Strauss says, «the barbarian is, first and foremost, the man who believes in barbarism» (Lévi-Strauss, 1967: 106).

Culture as fundamentalism

Identities, says Zygmunt Bauman, are more a bunch of problems than a single question: «Identity is revealed to us only as something to be invented rather than discovered; as a target of an effort, 'an objective'; as something one still needs to build from scratch or to choose from alternative offers and then to struggle for and then to protect through yet more struggle» (Bauman, 2003: 13). Albeit the most of social scientist agree in considering identities as a cultural product, we are witnessing wars, battles, political fights struggled in the name of these identities. However fake and invented they are, identities are practically operating on our world. Not enough to call them «cultural constructions, never settled, never absolute, never determinate» and to look at them from outside. Out of university classrooms practice and theory are running on parallel rails.

Whilst we can say there is no essence in identities, we cannot deny the existence of a practice of identities, whether for attacking or defending themselves. This practice is based on what Verena Stolcke brilliantly defined «cultural fundamentalism» in her essay on borders and rhetoric of exclusion in contemporary Europe. The process of unification of the old continent is simultaneously at work on two sides: on the first one, internal borders are becoming the more and the more permeable, on the second one, external borders are becoming the more and the more rigid and exclusive of *the others*: extra-communitarian people.

Besides any political and moral consideration, we cannot pretend to be blind face of a growing mass feeling of hate towards immigrants, nourished by the simplification (not to say the falsehood) according to which each evil comes with strangers, bringing difference and menace with them. This assumption is also combined with an emphatic presentation of the problem, described as larger than it is in real. This strategy allows several European leaders to hide beside cultural incompatibility some socio-economic problems arisen from recession and the more extreme capitalistic adjustments. «*We* are the measure of the good life which *they* are threatening to undermine, and this is so because *they* are foreigners and culturally different» (Stolcke, 1995: 3).

According to this perspective, people would prefer to live among their own kind rather than in a multi-cultural society, and this inclination would be *natural*. Although no theorist of

xenophobia can explain its reasons, we take for granted that people are naturally scared by strangers and inclined to refuse them, because they are different. This explanation is however quite functional in hiding the socio-economic reasons that often generate tensions.

There are several ways of thinking *the other*, but just one line essentially dividing the two possible construction of diversity. This line draws the border – now clear – between revocability and irrevocability of its condition. We told that ancient Greeks used to distinguish themselves from Barbarians, but if a Barbarian managed to learn Greek language and the customs of the polis, he could become to all effects a full-fledged Greek. Romans also had this rule: more than one emperor were actually foreigners, Adrian from Spain to mention just one. Both for Greek and for Romans you could emancipate not just from your condition of extraneousness, but even from your condition of inferiority. Division was actually established on a cultural level, and everything is cultural let us the chance of choosing, and changing things.

Much different is the case of the natural level, where any choice is impossible: in nature things are determined and predictable. This is the way leading to racism, prelude to the worst solutions.

Anyway, the reason of incompatibility in modern politics of exclusion is apparently no more the race, but culture – as in a throwback. In ancient times indeed, exclusion from Europe was due to religion, rather than to race: miscreants could threaten Christian hegemony. Scientific racism in XIX century tried to legitimate differences based on biologic nature. Nowadays the problem of scaring strangers away from our societies is solved by shifting from the unacceptable level of the genetic race to the one of culture, which allows xenophobic right parties to restore their politic respectability. Will of purge remains, but now we have racism without race. This new form has been defined by Paul Mercier «supertribalization» (Mercier, 1962: 64), a very suitable expression for representing the ethnic and cultural stretch adopted by many political élites and contemporary movements. Contamination threatening is no more referred to the bloodline: according to the fundamentalist rhetoric, culture instead becomes stronger, more tangible and homogeneous.

Ethnicity, identity and culture has become slogans used by politicians in look for

preferences, betting on the local dimension as a last rampart against foreign invasion. A supposed cultural purity is then fashionable again, and delicate enough to need protection from foreigners' contamination (in all its depreciative semantic charge, immediately associated to medical domain). This image would presuppose a sort of zero degree where to place the objective limits of any culture, considered as an indivisible unit, impermeable to external contributions and therefore opposed to any kind of other. Such cultures are cages where individuals would have been imprisoned since they were born and impossible to escape from.

This perspective is synthesized by the expression of the «clash of cultures» and by its symmetric counterpart, the «cultural encounter»: those mottoes are the more common and suitable for any situation. In fact, nobody ever saw any cultures either meeting or struggling: men instead, women and children rather than cultures do, and each one has many options among which choosing how to realize their life. Why then should we put the others in cages through identity labels we invented ourselves? As Eric Wolf affirms, «It is an error to envisage the migrant as the protagonist of a homogeneously integrated culture that he either retains or yields up as a whole (…). It is not harder for a Zulu or a Hawaiian to learn or forget a culture that for a Pomeranian or Chinese» (Wolf, 1990: 502).

Cultural fundamentalism tends instead to present as natural the reasons of deficit and socio-economic inequalities among individuals. If we consider these unbalances as natural ones, we can also easier accept their insolvable character: we cannot defy nature! Naturalizing the cultural forms we consider being the most far from us means anyway dehumanizing them, as says Pierre-André Taguieff (Taguieff, 1999: 11).

Fixing Movement

«At my age, and with so much mixing of bloodlines, I am no longer certain where I come from» said Delaura. «Or who I am». «No one knows in these kingdoms» said Abrenuncio. «And I believe it will be centuries before they find out» (Garcia Marquez, 1994: 154). This gloomy exchange between two Gabriel Garcìa Marquez's characters intensely and evocatively summarizes the tension between the search of a precise origin, that is the zero-

point of cultures we often call «identity», and the historical, social and cultural thicket we experiment everyday in real. As for containing the supposed fear of being dissolved in an undefined magma or being contaminated by the foreigner, we create frames, borders and limits.

Reality, today as in the past, is not built upon well-defined opposites, easy-to-counterpose especially for those who try to take advantage of such conflicts. We are watching, instead, the screening of Arjun Appadurai's «moving images that meet deterritorialized viewers» (Appadurai, 2012). The ambiguity of his title, *Modernity at large*, stays in the fact that «at large» means at the same time «as a whole» but «on the lam», too. Why should modernity go into hiding? Because the frontiers that previously established territories, cultures and societies are no more as meaningful as in the past. Because today we can find Turkish immigrant employees sitting on their German sofas in their German living rooms while watching their Turkish movies; as well as Filipinos singing old-style American songs much better than original ones, even if their lives are not synchronized at all with United States' present. Because, following Appadurai, globalization opened a rift between the place of production of a culture and its place(s) of use. Thanks to the growing speed and presence of the mass media, imagination became something collective and evolved into an organized field of social practices. As a consequence, the fragmented multiplicity of cultural worlds threaten any traditional paradigm in social sciences. Social, ethnic, cultural, political and economical landscapes are the more and the more confused, and mutually superposed, divided by broken and irregular lines. Moreover, these landscapes are crossed by constant and global cultural streams, and are reflected the one into the other until shaping a complicated and always renewing kaleidoscope.

Appadurai quotes the image drawn by Benedict Anderson. According to him, thanks firstly to «print capitalism» (that is the spreading of publishing business at the industrial scale) and to following mass literacy, and secondly to «electronic capitalism», imaged communities could appear – that is, groups of people who never interact in real, but share a same and common idea as, for example, thinking themselves as Indonesian, while living far from Indonesia (see Anderson, 2006).

Deterritorialization is a feature of modern world that, together with an increasing circulation of information, creates the more and the more complex images, ideologies and

universal usages, being appropriated by local communities and transformed into something that is often quite far from its starting point. A good example can be, as Appadurai shows, the case of cricket, imported in colonial India by aristocrats and now, also by the action of the media, transformed into a very popular sport for Indian middle and lower-class. The sport that the ex-sons of the Empire now play is not just an imported product, but is inserted into its very Indian moral system as a whole.

This reflection highlights how, besides the three spatial dimensions and the fourth one of the time, there is also a fifth one – the one of imagination – that shapes humanity. This constructive (*poietic*) «fiction», in Francesco Remotti's words, is the foundation of human building (Remotti, 1996: 23). Humanity arises more often from a common project than from an objective reality, and its foundations are neither always recognizable and measurable nor coherent with the history of the community who believes to be grounded on. The unease of traditional space matches with a new concept of the time, sprung out from consumption, that in spite of its organic practices is now placed into a sort of global bath, which needs a referral. Any object (either shaped for consumption or not) has its own cultural story, meaningful for the culture that produced it; nonetheless, when this same object falls into the hands of new players, its story does not match with their one anymore, and is often written again at their own sake (see Appadurai, 1986).

From being a place of action for memory, furthermore, our past has become a synchronic deposit for cultural scenarios, says Appadurai. It is a kind of cultural archive of time that we can use, as we need and like. This global diaspora generates new markets which, themselves, generate new needs and preferences, emerged from outsiders' urge of maintaining a contact with their – often invented – motherland. So-called globalization does not realizes itself through an indiscriminate invasion of common elements driving to homogenization. Its process is much more articulated, but this kind of assumptions is presented in every discourse assessing local and national supremacy.

We live «in a world of OPEC, ASEAN *Things Fall Apart*, and Tongan running backs with the Washington Redskins», says Clifford Geertz, a world that «has its compartments still, but the passages between them are much more numerous and much less well secured» (Geertz, 1990: 142-43). Fluidity of everyday life is opposed to the stabilizing nature of establishment. Almost all around the world governments hate nomads and implement sedentarization (and

even elimination) policies; almost all around the world governments hate and are wary of «cultural nomads», people who do not fix themselves in a clear and easily-classifiable position.

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