Everyone who deals with the issue of polarization cannot but study the rhetorical tools available to politicians, theorists, political philosophers, journalists and media experts to construct the "Us vs. Them" dichotomy and apply it to public and everyday discourse.

The present issue hosts a number of papers on this topic that scholars from different countries discussed in a research meeting at the University of Genova – Italy last November. The field of polarization, political rhetoric and discourse analysis had a long tradition of studies, from the classical Aristotelian *Rhetoric* to the rise of the *New Rhetoric* approach developed by Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca in the late '50s, until the significant recent multidisciplinary researches.

In fact, a great number of works have been published in order to enlighten the evolution of democratic societies and the recent escalation of violence, focusing on the rhetoric as the art of influencing the thought and conduct of an audience and the ability to use language effectively.

Furthermore, in the last years, we have witnessed the rise of xenophobic political discourses, populist rhetoric and hate speech in European public space, and some scholars have lately focused their research on these themes. Ruth Wodak in *The Politics of Fear. What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* has paved the way for other studies that emphasize the degeneration of language and its socio-political impact, such as Mark Thompson's *Enough Said: What's Gone Wrong with the Language of Politics?* and Benjamin Moffitt's *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. However, it should be mentioned that social media offer to haters an invaluable tool, the consequences of which for democratic discourse have been highlighted in Cass Sunstein's *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media.*

The European research team that has long devoted itself to the study of political feelings, as well as ideas, and of social cohesion in democratic societies has chosen to start discussing works and ideas of the Italian moral and political philosopher Flavio Baroncelli (1944-2007). Michael Karlsson gives an affectionate philosophical and personal portrait of him, deep and passionate. The portrait is completed by the witty *philosophical dictionary* à la Baroncelli reconstructed by Giorgio Baruchello.

Baroncelli in his most relevant book, *Il razzismo è una gaffe* (*Racism is a blunder*, 1996), analysed the possible social effects of the use and the misuse of political correctness, focusing on its performative efficiency. Today, after more than 20 years, a lot of individuals, though scholars or not, believe that p.c. is a falsification of reality; that is necessary to use a simple, truthful and raw language since each correctness would be a limitation of free speech.

Moreover, in a global, hyper-connected society, everybody can insult and offend her/his political adversary or simple neighbours, more than ever when relying on social networks, without any visible responsibility.

Hate speech, divisive rhetoric, damnation of the Other, populism, friend-enemy distinction: those patterns, and many more, are the issues discussed in these papers according to different points of view: philosophical, political, sociological and anthropological dealing and, what is more, with both synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

The starting point is the process of the construction of the Othering, a typical issue of Anthropology. Marco Aime (*The Other*) tells us that 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. Having an enemy is important for defining our identity. Besides, discrimination cannot be disabled if we replace racial differences with a sort of "naturalized" cultural difference and we consider culture as an essential entity. In order to overcome discrimination we have to accept that cultures and identities are mobile and changeable.

Changing and the psychological reactions to metamorphoses are the issues of Pascal Nouvel (*The changing feeling of Otherness*). In his paper, he choose to express the nature and challenge of the change examining the feelings we prove during the process we are involved into.

The question is particularly significant if the changes are involving our identities. Indeed, the plasticity of identities is at the core of any change and especially of those which involve mixing people of various origins. Nouvel face this task by examining Frank Westerman's book *El negro and me, "*because it describes very vividly a large array of feelings that

persons can experience from each other when a change in their vicinity occurs".

A particular divisive polarization concerns the theme of religious faith, of churches and their believers. Philosophers and theologians has often found the theoretical solution to conflicts in the concept and practice of tolerance. Daniele Rolando (*Conversion and Inclusiveness*) compares the current notion of religious freedom or freedom of conscience with the current notion of tolerance. His aim is to prove that this connection is far from being plain and easy-to-use. By an accurate analysis of the different answers offered in contemporary moral and political philosophy to the tolerance question, Rolando concludes that the setting given by F. Baroncelli, and namely his idea of an "indifferent" tolerance, is the best way to set it correctly.

In counterpoint, Paola de Cuzzani *(Political cohesion, Friendship and Hostility*) discusses the return to friendship in current political thinking, communitarian as well as liberal: can friendship be the emotional foundation of social-political cohesion in a modern state? From the radical normative approach to civil friendship proposed by Saint Just to the Carl Schmitt's emphasis on the friend/enemy divide, rather than proposing other emotional relationships for uniting and directing a political community, de Cuzzani proposes a "Spinozian turn" to fight back the "sad political passions".

Certainly opposed to the dichotomous vision friend-enemy is the perspective taken into account by Franco Manti (*Diversity, Otherness and the Politics of Recognition*) from F. Baroncelli's essay on "Recognition and its sophistry": the focus is the reflection about otherness, the incommensurability of cultures, their translatability and their being open systems. In fact, we read a critique of communitarian positions based on the idea of plural and mobile individual and cultural identities. The recognition should primarily concern what unites us, just like our belonging to the same species and being inhabitants of the Planet, and, at the same time, in taking on the challenge of cultural otherness. Manti deduces the need for a planetary ethics, founded the non-reducibility of the part to the whole and of the individual to the community.

Polarization in political thinking and attitudes is discussed by Alberto Giordano *in Us and Them the Logic of Othering from Pink Floyd to Populist.* Giordano offers, at first, a concise sketch of the development of the us/them divide in the realm of political theory since the

18th century to the first half of the 20th. He goes on, then, in highlighting the changes undergone by the same dichotomy within populist ideology and discourse, focusing on three discursive patterns which marks contemporary political communication.

In turn, a brief speech by Marianna Mancini compares the intellectual and communicative tools shared by different blends of populism in the cultural and political area of the French-speaking world. In particular, the comparison between *La France Insoumise* and the *Front National* helps us in the understanding the plural nature of polarization and its likely fashions.

Throughout the debate, the important role of the media and in particular of social media in the construction of the us / them divide was not neglected. Micol Burighel tries to discuss the idea that group polarization is a dangerous phenomenon developing in democratic societies. This mechanism leads to strong fragmentation on political and social issues and, in certain cases, to extremism and fanaticism. Nevertheless, how much did Internet and social media shape group polarization? The answer is based on a review of the current state of the art, referring particularly to Cass Sunstein's works.

At last, Mirella Pasini questions the possibility of a non-exclusive us / them divide, discussing the Reports of the American Immigration Commission (Washington 1911).

The us/them polarization in public discourse is not really a contemporary phenomenon: just think of Aristotle and *oi barbaroi (the barbarians)*. Today, however, it is close to racist approach, as van Dijk says, like never before. His ideological discourse analysis is useful to clarify the connection between polarization and racism, through the analysis of a particular case-study, i.e. the construction of prejudice and stereotype about the Southern Italian "race" at the beginning of the 20th century in the USA. This past case is set by Pasini as a model to analyse the political and ordinary language of our time, in order to define a non-discriminatory approach to differences.