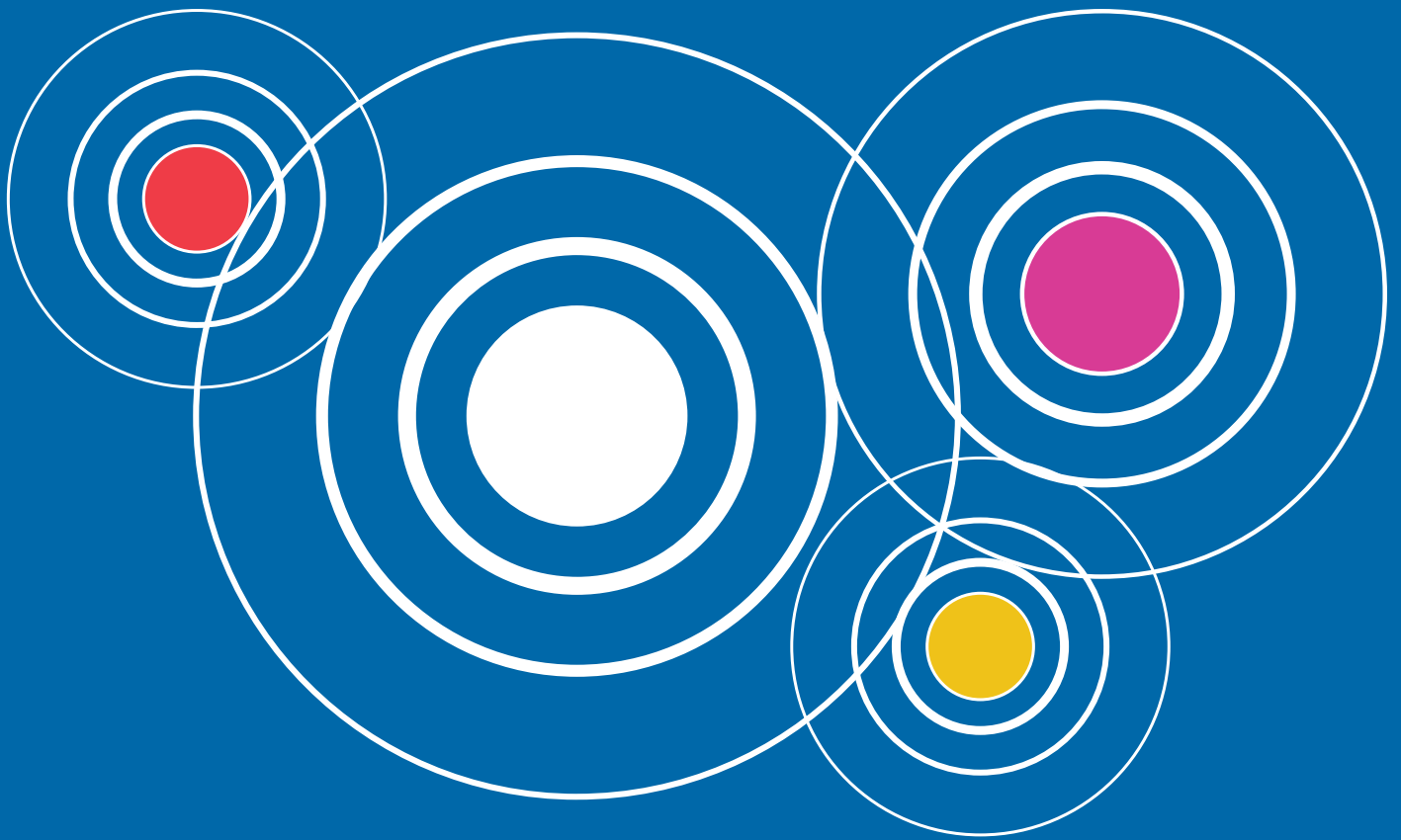




DIVE-IN

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
ON **DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

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Diversity and Inclusion.
Overcoming Fragmentation

DIVE-IN – An International Journal on Diversity and Inclusion is a scholarly journal that takes a comparative and multidisciplinary approach to cultural, literary, linguistic, and social issues connected with diversity and inclusion.

The journal welcomes the submission of interdisciplinary contributions representative of various interests and methodologies, particularly linguistics, literature, philology, history, social sciences and economics.

DIVE-IN is a multilingual online publication with contributions in English, Italian, and the main languages of academic research. The targeted audience is specialists, as well as all those interested in the current epistemological debate on identity and environmental, cultural and linguistic challenges.



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Foreword · Prefazione

Maurizio Ascari & Monica Turci
Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna

We are proud and delighted to present the first issue of *DIVE-IN An International Journal on Diversity and Inclusion*, the publication of which has been made possible thanks to a national award to fund innovative projects by Italian university departments with recognised standards of excellence. This journal is based on two related core ideas – the phenomenon of linguistic, literary and cultural diversity as a condition that is intrinsic to civilisation on the one hand, and our aim to create an inclusive debate on that diversity on the other. In order to achieve such a goal, this journal aspires to forge a dialogue that crosses borders of various kinds, combining respect for otherness with an attempt to build conceptual and interdisciplinary bridges, while exploring connections between linguistics, philology, literature, cultural and media studies. Far from being an academic gesture, this interdisciplinary approach is of central importance to our present, for it paves the way to an inclusive access and a critical interpretation of cultural phenomena, encouraging forms of informed participation in social and political life. Coherently with this agenda, *DIVE-IN* aims to reflect both the complexity of the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the University of Bologna, which is behind its creation, and that of the contemporary world – a planetary ecumene in which sophisticated conceptual and investigative tools are needed to make sense of an increasingly multifaceted reality.

*

Siamo lieti e orgogliosi di presentare il primo numero di *DIVE-IN An International Journal on Diversity and Inclusion*, la cui pubblicazione è stata resa possibile grazie a un finanziamento nazionale a progetti innovativi espressi da Dipartimenti di università italiane con un riconosciuto standard di eccellenza. Questa rivista si fonda su due idee correlate – il fenomeno della diversità linguistica, letteraria e culturale come condizione intrinseca alla civiltà da un lato, e il nostro intento di creare un dibattito inclusivo sulla diversità stessa. Per raggiungere questo obiettivo, la rivista aspira ad avviare un dialogo che attraversi confini di varia natura, combinando il rispetto per l'altro con il tentativo di costruire ponti concettuali e interdisciplinari, esplorando al contempo le relazioni tra linguistica, filologia, letteratura, studi culturali e dei media. Lungi dall'essere un gesto accademico, questo approccio interdisciplinare è di importanza centrale per il nostro presente, poiché apre la strada a un accesso inclusivo ai fenomeni culturali, incoraggiandone un'interpretazione critica finalizzata a forme di partecipazione consapevole alla vita sociale e politica. Coerentemente con questo progetto, *DIVE-IN* ambisce a riflettere sia la complessità del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne dell'Università di Bologna, luogo della sua creazione, sia quella del mondo contemporaneo: un'ecumene planetaria in cui strumenti sofisticati di natura concettuale e investigativa sono necessari per restituire un senso a una realtà sempre più sfaccettata.

Diversità e inclusione: per una *fissità distratta*

Paola Puccini & Alessandro Zironi

Alma Mater Studiorum Università di Bologna

[...] il leur <aux plus grands écrivains> faut d'énergie, d'inertie, de désœuvrement, d'attention, de distraction pour aller jusqu'au bout de ce qui se propose à eux (Blanchot 1959: 37).

Nel mondo dell'arte degli anni Trenta del XX secolo Salvador Dalí ha evocato e formulato il concetto di *facoltà paranoica*. Per il pittore surrealista “un individuo dotato in grado sufficiente della detta facoltà potrebbe, secondo il suo desiderio, vedere cambiare successivamente forma a un oggetto preso nella realtà” (Dalí 1980a, in Tura 2020: 13-14). Lo storico dell'arte Adolfo Tura (2020: 12) ne parla in termini di predilezione a scorgere figure e volti nelle nuvole, nelle radici degli alberi, nelle conformazioni rocciose, producendo così una sorta di magia: il superamento del principio di identità. Quella che Dalí designa come facoltà paranoica è dunque la propensione a vedere nelle cose altro da ciò che sono. Tale condizione, secondo Tura (2020: 12) si realizza in due modi:

vedendo come immagine qualcosa che non è un'immagine (per esempio un volto nelle venature di un marmo, o un cranio in un sasso), oppure vedendo in un'immagine altro da quello che vi si potrebbe a pari titolo vedere come accade con le figure doppie (dette anche ambigue, o reversibili, o multistabili).

In un altro testo, Dalí indica il metodo di osservazione per leggere correttamente la sua opera intitolata *La metamorfosi di Narciso*, dipinta nel 1937. Tale metodo suggerisce un movimento e delinea un processo interpretativo:

MODO DI OSSERVARE VISIVAMENTE IL CORSO DELLA METAMORFOSI DI NARCISO RAPPRESENTATA NEL MIO QUADRO: se si guarda per un certo tempo, arretrando un poco e con una specie di “fissità distratta”, la figura ipnoticamente immobile di Narciso, questa scompare progressivamente fino a diventare assolutamente invisibile. La metamorfosi del mito ha luogo in quel preciso momento, poiché l'immagine di Narciso è trasformata improvvisamente nell'immagine di una mano che sorge dal proprio riflesso (Dalí 1980b, in Tura 2020: 13-14).

Affinché la percezione porti alla trasformazione e alla nascita di una nuova e diversa immagine, occorre soddisfare due condizioni legate al tempo e allo spazio. Al tempo, in quanto l'osservazione richiede una certa continuità: perché la magia si realizzi occorre, infatti, attendere che si produca. Allo spazio, poiché esiste una distanza da creare tra l'osservatore e l'osservato affinché l'immagine produca un'altra immagine diversa dall'originale, una sorta di libera traduzione. Il pittore sembra dunque suggerire che per ottenere

quello che potremmo chiamare il ‘salto di identità’ occorre arretrare un poco, creando così uno spazio intermedio che crei le condizioni per la nascita di qualcosa di diverso, e guardare il dipinto con una certa *fissità distratta*.

Attraverso questo ossimoro il pittore surrealista indica la predisposizione migliore dell’osservatore che è chiamato a manifestare contemporaneamente attenzione e distrazione. Solo essendo capace di tale azione antinomica (se sono attento, *non* sono distratto e se sono distratto *non* sono attento) avviene il miracolo della scomparsa del visibile e l’apparizione dell’invisibile (Tura 2020: 13).

La trasformazione rende possibile il superamento dell’identità per antinomia: l’immagine di Narciso è dunque diversa da sé stessa, ma uguale alla sua differenza, la mano *A* (immagine di Narciso) diversa da *A*, ma uguale a *non A*.

L’immagine ‘altra’, quella che non ti aspetti (la mano), sorge, nella percezione, accanto e in contemporanea alla prima (l’immagine di Narciso); il superamento di identità che si produce in questo modo è apertura alla differenza e premessa per l’inclusione (nel quadro il pittore rappresenta contemporaneamente l’immagine di Narciso e l’immagine di una mano, l’una diversa, ma uguale all’altra). Tura (2020: 16-17) afferma che non riuscire ad andare al di là del principio di identità è una forma di cecità; al contrario, riuscire a farlo è una forma di veggenza. Il metodo paranoico di Dalì parte, dunque, dal presupposto che il principio di identità debba essere superato affinché questa forma di veggenza renda possibile la percezione di altro da quello che è e, potremmo noi aggiungere, l’inclusione di quello che non è.

Il superamento dell’identità verso un processo di inclusione è quanto avviene anche alla piccola e bigotta comunità norvegese tratteggiata da Karen Blixen nel suo racconto *Il pranzo di Babette*. In quel racconto, la piccola comunità di rigida disciplina religiosa, osteggia i piaceri della gola, che sono aprioristicamente rifiutati perché metterebbero in discussione e violerebbero la percezione stessa della propria identità. Al contrario, il piacere derivante dal cibo è invece lo strumento attraverso cui si realizza quell’opera d’arte (il pranzo ammannito da Babette) che, attraverso la sua fruizione, scavalca i confini precostituiti dell’identità individuale, provocando così la messa in discussione dell’individualità (personale e di gruppo). Grazie a questo episodio, il piccolo gruppo ne esce trasformato attraverso l’azione artistica, qui messa in scena dalla cuoca Babette, ovvero altro e diverso rispetto al punto di partenza, aperto all’accettazione di nuove esperienze che sono perciò incluse nella propria esperienza esistenziale.

Rimanendo sul tema dell’identità, va richiamata la voce di Amos Oz, fra le più importanti della letteratura mondiale. Oz racconta la genesi di una storia che nasce, nel suo caso, dall’osservazione della gente “immaginando, inventando, a tratti captando brandelli di conversazione per poi ricomporli e [...] ricavare da trascurabili frammenti di informazioni una storia intrigante” (Oz 2015: 10-11). In questo caso siamo dinnanzi al *salto di identità*, che riguarda gli individui e non più le immagini che Dalì aveva ritratto sulla tela.

Lo scrittore israeliano tratteggia la nascita dell’invisibile a partire dall’osservazione del visibile; anche questa volta la sua *attività paranoica*, a dirla come Dalì, e la *magia* si applicano all’osservazione delle persone:

Accadono davvero tante cose, a ogni angolo di strada, in ogni coda in attesa dell’autobus, in qualunque sala d’aspetto di un ambulatorio, o in un caffè...Tanta di quella umanità attraversa ogni giorno il nostro campo visivo, mentre per gran parte del tempo noi restiamo indifferenti, non ce ne accorgiamo neppure, vediamo ombre invece di persone in carne e ossa (Oz 2015: 11).

L'umanità che Oz ama osservare, per trarre ispirazione per la sua arte, è immersa in quella che lui chiama "atmosfera di ambivalenza" (Oz 2015: 19) che ricorda le figure ambigue di certi pittori del Novecento, come Jean Dubuffet o come certi artisti degli anni Cinquanta come Karl Dallenbach, famosi per la loro fotografia enigmatica. Lo scrittore israeliano si domanda sovente, nella sua opera, quali siano le differenze e le somiglianze tra un ebreo israeliano ed un arabo palestinese. Lo scrittore è, a suo parere, "equipaggiato un po' meglio degli altri per capire, con il suo punto di vista ebraico-israeliano, come ci si sente a essere un palestinese sradicato, come ci si sente a essere un arabo palestinese cui degli 'alieni di un altro pianeta' hanno portato via la terra natale" (Oz 2015: 23).

Le figure ambigue dei pittori surrealisti sono immagine di quell'atmosfera di ambivalenza di cui parla Oz nel suo saggio intitolato *Contro il fanatismo*. Contemporaneamente uguali e diverse, consentono il *salto di identità*, che, nel caso dello scrittore israeliano, permette di assumersi conflitti e sentimenti contraddittori che portano ad immedesimarsi nell'altro. Solo così, insegna Oz, siamo in grado di scorgere somiglianze e differenze tra noi e gli altri: "Sì, talvolta mi infilo nei panni di quella gente oltranzista, o quanto meno ci provo. [...] Era forse la mia abitudine 'professionale' a mettermi nei panni degli altri. Il che non significa ch'io giustifichi sempre gli altri, piuttosto che riesco a vedere i punti di vista del prossimo" (Oz 2015: 24).

Questa capacità di visione è ciò che trasforma il contatto tra noi e gli altri in una relazione di apertura e di accoglienza che comporta l'impegno in un processo che Tzvetan Todorov (1986: 17) definisce *transvaluation*, secondo il quale lo sguardo del sé sull'altro è arricchito dal contatto generato dallo sguardo dell'altro sul sé.

Dal canto suo, l'antropologo Francesco Remotti decreta la morte dell'identità al singolare; a suo vedere il superamento della logica identitaria è ormai condizione preliminare per riflettere oggi su una società in costruzione, per studiarne, senza cecità, la sua relazione alla diversità, alla somiglianza e alla convivenza. Alla logica stringente dell'identità, occorre contrapporre una logica diversa e contraria. Remotti (2019: 8-9) ricorda infatti che, "anche se non può essere eliminata, l'identità può e deve essere ridotta da un'altra logica, quella dell'alterità e dell'alterazione".

Per liberarsi da quella logica identitaria occorre allora domandarsi quali siano le motivazioni più profonde che ci impediscono di uscirne, ma è anche necessario studiare come, nell'arco dei secoli, si è proceduto a distinguere l'identità dall'alterità, oppure analizzare in quali forme essa si manifesta nelle società contemporanee.

Solo l'apporto di più discipline e di più sguardi può operare attorno ai concetti di diversità e inclusione quello *sfocamento produttivo* caro ai surrealisti, e i saggi qui raccolti si pongono proprio nell'ottica di approfondire i concetti di diversità e inclusione. La storia, l'antropologia, i *cultural studies*, la sociolinguistica, la linguistica, la letteratura e la filologia sono discipline in dialogo tra loro, che offrono al lettore un panorama teorico vasto e originale sul pensiero della diversità, dell'inclusione e del loro intrinseco rapporto.

Lo storico François Hartog introduce la riflessione con una serie di interrogativi su come i gruppi umani abbiano operato, da sempre, la distinzione tra noi e gli altri. Adottando una prospettiva storica concettuale, lo studioso francese presenta una serie di concetti apparsi in momenti diversi della storia occidentale e tra loro collegati. Per esempio, tra il VI e il V secolo a.C., la nozione di 'barbaro', nel senso di 'non-Greco', forma un concetto antonimico e asimmetrico inaugurando una polarità che, per lungo tempo, ha costituito la lente attraverso cui osservare l'alterità. Con la conquista del Nuovo Mondo è il termine 'selvaggio' che si impone sulla scena e con esso l'alterità acquisisce un orizzonte temporale e cristiano. Da 'selvaggio' a 'primitivo', l'altro si trasforma per parlare del 'noi'; esso è avo capace di darci informazioni sulle nostre origini e sul tempo per sempre trascorso e smarrito.

L'antropologia offre invece una visione teorica e fenomenologica al tempo stesso. Sul piano teorico le riflessioni di Francesco Remotti si articolano sui concetti di diversità e differenza e sul bivio davanti al quale ci si trova nell'affrontarli. La prima strada che l'antropologo presenta nel suo contributo è quella della sostanza, con il suo correlato dell'identità, l'altra è la via della somiglianza. Questo secondo percorso, o via delle reti, vede il 'noi' partecipare all'intrico delle somiglianze e delle differenze. Per Remotti, non c'è luogo o strato del noi che non sia coinvolto in ciò che egli chiama *SoDif*, una formula il cui significato è quello di affermare l'unione indissolubile di So/miglianze e Dif/ferenze. Sul piano fenomenologico, egli invita poi a compiere un esercizio, scrutando, nei paesaggi in cui si svolge la nostra vita quotidiana, l'impronta sia dell'identità sia delle somiglianze. Queste ultime, insopprimibili e dotate di resilienza, possono essere riconosciute, curate, esaltate, ma anche trascurate, negate e recise.

Lo sguardo di Koichi Iwabuchi, specialista di *Media e Cultural Studies*, si applica ugualmente alla contemporaneità. Egli approfondisce il tema della diversità e dell'inclusione rispetto al ruolo che è riconosciuto loro nelle istituzioni, nelle aziende e nelle amministrazioni di tutto il mondo. Malgrado la loro valorizzazione, Iwabuchi sottolinea quanto, in questi ambiti specifici, la promozione reale della diversità non necessariamente favorisca l'inclusione delle categorie sociali più fragili ed emarginate. Attraverso una valutazione critica del discorso e della pratica della promozione della diversità, sono presentati i diversi modi in cui l'apparente accettazione della diversità scoraggia l'avanzamento della lotta contro la persistente disuguaglianza e l'emarginazione con una particolare attenzione alla situazione giapponese. In questo contesto, lo studioso denuncia il fatto che la distanza tra l'enunciazione del discorso sociale, che valorizza la diversità, e la realtà è derivata dalla mancanza di iniziative politiche volte ad affrontare, tra le altre, la questione dell'immigrazione e delle minoranze etniche. Al di là dello studio di caso, l'analisi di Iwabuchi contribuisce ampiamente al dibattito, a livello teorico, sulla distinzione tra diversità e differenza. La prima concepita positivamente e associata a un beneficio, a un'armonia e al benessere, la seconda, di contro, negativamente, e percepita come minacciosa, divisiva, dannosa e conflittuale.

Chiudono questo numero della rivista i contributi di due linguisti: Jack Sidnell e Mauro Tosco. Il primo si concentra sui diversi modi in cui i parlanti pensano, parlano e tentano di riformare le pratiche di riferimento dell'interlocutore che sono considerate normative per le loro comunità linguistiche in un momento dato. I due casi di studio che il linguista presenta nella sua analisi sono esemplificativi dei modi in cui i diversi progetti di riforma concettualizzano la natura della diversità e il tipo di problema che essa costituisce. Prende quindi in esame per primo il caso dei quaccheri del XVII secolo per i quali la diversità, sotto forma di differenziazione sociale, è giudicata contraria ad una visione spirituale della vita in quanto potenzialmente generatrice di orgoglio. Da qui la decisione di operare una riforma linguistica capace di scongiurare il pericolo della vanità. Successivamente, nel caso di Phan Khôi, il sociolinguista studia la riforma della lingua vietnamita per osservare che la diversità sociale non era negata e oggetto di rimozione, ma non doveva costituire un ostacolo alla comunicazione tra gli individui. Il contributo di Sidnell suscita vari interrogativi teorici. Quale il rapporto tra immaginario sociale e la diversità? Nell'ideologia del pluralismo democratico, come articolare inclusione e diversità? Mauro Tosco, dal canto suo, confuta criticamente le definizioni di 'linguaggio' da un lato e di 'dialetto' dall'altro, concentrandosi sulla diversità delle lingue con la conseguente possibilità di essere misurate indipendentemente dalle ideologie e credenze dei parlanti. Partendo dal presupposto che un gruppo può identificare una forma di comunicazione come linguaggio, l'autore si interroga anche sulla definizione stessa di gruppo che si identificherebbe in una comunità che condivide qualcosa (anche se soltanto a livello maggioritario e non unanime). Da qui discende la questione della condivisione della lingua e, soprattutto, cosa una determinata comunità intende per lingua. In tutto ciò si innesta la questione della mutua intellegibilità fra le lingue o fra i dialetti,

con tutte le considerazioni legate alle problematiche sociolinguistiche connesse al tema del bilinguismo imperfetto che porta al riconoscimento delle distanze linguistiche e, dunque al riconoscimento dell'esistenza di una lingua.

Nel loro insieme questi sguardi contribuiscono ad una messa a fuoco concettuale sulla diversità e sull'inclusione partendo dai rispettivi e diversi approcci, cercando di renderne nitidi i contorni, ma anche, e volutamente, di sfocarne i confini.

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Altérité, Diversité, Différence: Quelques jalons

François Hartog

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Abstract (Français) L'énoncé du projet de recherche (*Diversité et inclusion, vaincre la fragmentation*) part d'une situation présente: comment allier diversité et inclusion, et comment, de ce fait, prévenir la fragmentation? Si les questions ont une dimension immédiatement pratique (comment faire?) et locale, elles renvoient aussi à tout un arrière-plan historique, philosophique, religieux, politique qui vient de loin dans l'histoire de l'Europe ou de ce qui est devenu l'Europe. C'est cet arrière-plan que je souhaiterais convoquer, en m'arrêtant sur quelques moments (par exemple, le lancement du couple Grecs/Barbares), sur la mise en place d'opérateurs à la fois conceptuels et politiques (par exemple, le sauvage du XVI^e siècle devenant un primitif au XIX^e siècle et, au XX^e siècle, un habitant du monde sous-développé, puis en développement), en relevant certaines évolutions sémantiques (altérité, différence, diversité, racisé, sur fonds d'individualisme croissant), ainsi que l'apparition de nouveaux concepts ou, au moins, de nouveaux usages de ces concepts: tel l'identité, qui peut faire alliance avec la différence (le droit à la différence), avec le développement (dès lors qu'il est conçu dans les anciennes colonies comme 'endogène') et avec le patrimoine (en allant du plus local à l'universel). Bref, marquer quelques repères et poser quelques jalons pour une histoire conceptuelle de longue durée des modalités du rapport de l'autre et du même.

Abstract (English) The statement of the research project (*Diversity and inclusion, overcoming fragmentation*) stems from a current situation: how to combine diversity and inclusion, and how, therefore, to prevent fragmentation? If the questions have an immediately practical (how to?) and local dimension, they also refer to a whole historical, philosophical, religious, political background which comes from far in the history of Europe or of what Europe has become. It is this background that I would like to summon up, focusing on a few moments (for example, the introduction of the Greeks/Barbarians couple), on the setting up of both conceptual and political operators (for example, the 16th century savage becoming a primitive in the 19th century and, in the 20th century, an inhabitant of the underdeveloped, then developing world), by noting certain semantic evolutions (otherness, difference, diversity, racialized, against a background of increasing individualism), as well as the appearance of new concepts or, at least, new uses of these concepts, such as identity, which can form an alliance with difference (the right to be different), with development (since it is conceived in the former colonies as 'endogenous') and with heritage (from the most local to the universal). In short, marking some benchmarks and lay some groundwork for a long-lasting conceptual history of the modalities of the relationship between the other and the same.

Keywords barbarian; savage; diversity; difference; identity.

Dans la très longue histoire des façons dont les groupes humains ont opéré les partages entre nous et eux, les autres. Comment les autres ont-ils été appréhendés? Avec quels instruments pour penser, ordonner, réduire, conjurer, valoriser les écarts? Quelles circulations se sont instituées entre l'autre et le même? Il ne peut s'agir ici que d'un repérage et de la reconnaissance d'une série de concepts, apparus à des moments différents et reliés entre eux. Ma perspective est celle d'une histoire conceptuelle. Sans faire le tour du

monde, cette citation de Claude Lévi-Strauss suffira à lancer l'enquête: "La plupart des peuples que nous appelons primitifs se désignent eux-mêmes d'un nom qui signifie 'les vrais', 'les bons', [...] 'les hommes' et ils appliquent aux autres des qualificatifs qui leur dénie la condition humaine" (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 26; Lévi-Strauss 1973b: 384).

1. Le Barbare

Pour en venir tout de suite aux manières occidentales de faire, partons de cette observation de Thucydide: "Homère n'a pas non plus mentionné les Barbares, parce qu'à mon avis les Grecs n'en étaient pas encore séparés sous un nom unique qui s'y opposait" (Thucydide I, 3, 3, in Hartog 2018: 115-137). Sans Grec, pas de Barbare. A cet égard, le geste fondateur pour toute l'histoire ultérieure est celui accompli par les Grecs quand ils lancent le couple des Grecs et des Barbares. Selon l'étymologie, le barbare est celui qui a des difficultés d'élocution, qui, pour ainsi dire, ne sait pas parler: il bafouille ou bégaye.

C'est entre le VI^e et le V^e siècle avant J.-C. que 'Barbare', dans le sens de non-Grec, vient former, associé avec 'Grec', un concept antonyme et asymétrique, accouplant un nom propre *Hellènes* et une désignation générique *Barbaroi* (Koselleck 2006: 233-244). Les guerres médiques jouèrent assurément le rôle de catalyseur. Le champ de l'altérité s'est trouvé redistribué et fixé pour longtemps autour de cette polarité nouvelle. Les Grecs d'un côté, face aux autres, à *tous* les autres, réunis par le seul fait de n'être pas Grecs. Il va de soi que cette classification binaire et fortement asymétrique, conçue par les Grecs et pour eux, n'est maniable que par eux et n'est opératoire que pour eux. Mais, avant de devenir ultérieurement une expression toute faite, où les Romains auront d'abord des difficultés à trouver place, il n'est pas douteux que les guerres médiques lui donnèrent une signification précise, en dotant l'antonyme d'un visage: celui du Perse. Le Barbare, c'est avant tout, plus que tous et pour longtemps le Perse.

Les guerres contre les Perses vont, en outre, conduire à une territorialisation du Barbare: avec pour domaine l'Asie, qu'il revendique ou qu'on dit qu'il revendique comme sienne. L'opposition de l'Europe et de l'Asie, figurée par l'image des deux sœurs ennemies, va se superposer presque exactement à celle du Grec et du Barbare. Au point que cette nouvelle vision sera projetée rétroactivement sur la guerre de Troie, en faisant apparaître les Troyens comme des Asiatiques et des Barbares. Preuve supplémentaire et a contrario qu'ils ne l'étaient pas (encore) chez Homère. Cette vision aura une longue vie, puisque Hegel estimera encore que les victoires grecques "ont sauvé la civilisation et ôté toute vigueur au principe asiatique"!

Par cet acte de nomination, le divers des autres est proprement canalisé vers une figure de l'altérité comme autre de deux. Jusqu'au singulier, le Barbare, avec B majuscule, qui, pour tout Grec de l'époque classique, désigne le Grand Roi. Celui qui nomme est bien le seul qui parle: il est le seul énonciateur. La troisième personne, comme nous l'a appris Emile Benveniste, est une non-personne. C'est moi qui l'assigne à son nom, qui parle pour lui, l'enferme dans l'être que je lui confère et trace la frontière (franchissable ou pas, frontière de la race, de la langue, de la religion, de la culture). Désormais l'appareil de l'altérité est en place et va rester longtemps opératoire.

Le cas de Rome mérite qu'on s'y arrête. Que devient, en effet, le couple quand surgit un tiers et, si j'ose dire, pas n'importe quel tiers: les Romains? Avec Rome, c'est-à-dire les victoires de Rome, le grand partage entre les Grecs et les Barbares pour désigner l'humanité a définitivement cessé d'être tenable. Avec la conquête romaine, des questions et des remises en question deviennent inéluctables. Où placer les Romains? Faut-il distinguer les Grecs, les Barbares et un tiers romain? Ou bien garder le couple antonyme, mais en faisant 'passer' les Romains du côté des Grecs? Cette dernière solution a eu les faveurs de certains

intellectuels romains — au moins pendant un temps — et, bien entendu, des Grecs. Les Romains ne sont évidemment pas des Barbares, mais il n'y a pas non plus de *tiers* romain, puisqu'à l'origine les futurs Romains étaient, en fait, déjà des Grecs. C'est là affaire de généalogies. Mais, au même moment, l'affirmation de l'origine troyenne de Rome, magnifiée par Virgile, vient rompre avec cette vision, en posant justement les Romains en *tiers* depuis 'l'origine'. S'ils ne sont pas des Grecs, les Troyens n'étaient pas non plus des Barbares: ils viennent d'un temps d'avant le partage, et les futurs Romains portent la revanche des anciens vaincus.

Face au vis-à-vis Grec qu'ils ne pouvaient éluder, mais qu'ils ont choisi aussi, les Romains ont su transformer leur position seconde initiale en atout pour élaborer peu à peu ce qui est devenu la culture romaine. On peut estimer que cet écart de départ a été moteur. Il leur a donné les ressources, le désir, le dynamisme pour venir se glisser entre les Grecs et les Barbares, avant de s'imposer comme le terme dominant et dominateur, mais sans faire disparaître les deux autres, ni le Grec ni le Barbare. Simplement, le jeu se jouerait désormais à trois. Non plus un couple seulement, mais un trio. Le cas romain est un cas d'école pour réfléchir sur la complexité des jeux du même et de l'autre.

Quant aux Barbares, en gros tous les autres peuples, ils n'avaient pas voix au chapitre, mais ils étaient toujours là, et le seraient même de plus en plus jusqu'à la chute de l'empire d'Occident en 476. Il revenait aux Romains d'abord de les conquérir, puis de les contenir au-delà du *limes*.¹ On sait ce qu'il en advint finalement. Le Barbare avait, en tout cas, une longue vie devant lui. Toujours disponible, il a fait l'objet de réactivations et de réinvestissement jusqu'à aujourd'hui où il a pris le visage du terroriste islamiste.

Au couple Grecs Barbares, qui a permis aux Grecs de fixer et de diffuser leur représentation du monde, puis aux Romains de venir y jouer les premiers rôles, s'en est ajouté un deuxième, de grande conséquence lui aussi. Celui formé par les Chrétiens et les Païens, qui est monté en puissance au cours des IV^e et V^e siècles, redistribuant le champ de l'altérité, mais, point à noter, sans faire disparaître pour autant le couple initial. Simplement, on pourra désormais être chrétien et barbare, mais aussi Grec, païen, bien sûr, et barbare. Un troisième couple, dont la portée et l'usage sont différents viendra marquer un peu plus tard une autre division, celle-là temporalisée, l'ancien et le moderne.

De ce premier temps de notre parcours, il ressort que la pensée par couples est une structure conceptuelle de longue durée de l'Europe et que la pensée de l'altérité passe par le jeu de ces couples successifs qui se suivent et se superposent, mais sans se recouvrir exactement (Hartog 2018: 19-22; 42-43).

2. Le Sauvage

Avec la conquête du Nouveau Monde, s'impose une figure nouvelle, celle du Sauvage. Pour être pensée, elle va mobiliser tous les opérateurs disponibles de l'altérité. Jusqu'à faire du Sauvage l'autre par excellence, l'autre absolu. Au moyen d'une triple opération: l'altérité va être naturalisée, christianisée, temporalisée.

L'altérité naturalisée. L'école de Salamanque produit, entre 1520 et 1530, une nouvelle catégorisation acceptable par la Couronne hispanique et ses agents, mais aussi par les théologiens et les missionnaires. A partir d'une exégèse du *jus naturae* de saint Thomas, on va passer pour catégoriser l'Indien de la théorie de l'esclavage par nature, reprise d'Aristote, à celle de l'enfance: les Indiens ont une nature d'enfant. Telle est la conclusion du *De Indis* de Francisco de Vitoria (1557). Les Indiens ne sont

¹ Même s'il faut être attentif à l'écart existant entre l'idéologie du *limes* et la réalité stratégique des frontières, voir le livre éclairant de Whittaker (1989).

ni *irracionales* ni *amentes*, mais, ainsi que le démontrent leurs pratiques franchement monstrueuses (cannibalisme, sacrifices humains, sodomie etc.) ou déviantes, ils ne sont pas toujours capables d'interpréter le monde naturel correctement. Ils sont des êtres rationnels qui, à certains moments, se conduisent comme s'ils ne l'étaient pas ou pas encore. Conclusion, toujours avec Aristote: leur rationalité est non pas en acte, mais en puissance. Faisons un pas de plus: "Je crois", écrit Vitoria, "que s'ils paraissent si insensés, cela provient, pour l'essentiel, de leur éducation pauvre et barbare." (Pagden 1982: 97, notre traduction). D'ailleurs, "même chez nous, nous pouvons voir beaucoup de paysans qui diffèrent peu des bêtes brutes" (Pagden 1982: 97, notre traduction). L'Indien est donc assurément un homme, inférieur certes, mais, tout comme l'enfant, susceptible de progresser sur la voie de la raison et capable d'interpréter, un jour, correctement le droit naturel. C'est affaire d'éducation, donc de temps, et relève de la responsabilité du conquérant.

S'introduit donc le temps qui, certes, marque une distance entre les Sauvages et nous, mais qui les inscrit aussi dans un même horizon temporel, ouvert sur un futur où ils ont une place. Les enfants deviendront un jour, sans doute encore lointain, adultes. Grâce à la médiation d'Aristote, relu par Vitoria, l'Indien n'est plus un "homme naturel", un *outsider*, mais, même si c'est au plus bas, il fait pleinement partie de l'humanité. Le *dominium* est justifié, mais seulement aussi longtemps que les Indiens sont des enfants, et à condition qu'il s'exerce dans leur intérêt (Pagden 1982: 105). Il est un devoir et une responsabilité qui nous incombe (*accipere curam illorum*). En expliquant ce que signifiait être un enfant, Vitoria a ouvert une perspective, non pas évolutionniste sur le monde amérindien, mais où il y a place pour une maturation. Se glisse-là une première temporalisation de l'altérité, elle-même naturalisée.

Quant au 'barbare', il peut être remobilisé, en le mettant au service d'une altérité christianisée. Le sauvage est à coup sûr un païen. On peut s'interroger sur les raisons pour lesquelles il a été tenu en dehors de la Révélation, il n'en reste pas moins qu'il a vocation à participer aussi au mystère du Christ. La mission de l'Église est sans nul doute de le convertir. S'est vite posée la question du comment, puisque tous ne partagent pas le même genre de vie? Il est instructif de voir comment le père jésuite José de Acosta, missionnaire pendant quinze ans au Pérou, remobilise l'ancienne catégorie du barbare. Dans son *De procuranda Indorum salute*, qui est un traité sur l'évangélisation des Indiens, publié en 1588, le barbare lui sert justement à spécifier le païen. Des Indes occidentales aux Indes orientales, ce sont tous des païens, mais il ne faut pas procéder de la même façon avec eux tous, car ils ne sont pas tous également barbares. José de Acosta distingue alors trois grandes catégories de barbares. Les moins barbares sont ceux qui sont les moins éloignés de la 'droite raison' (*recta ratio*). Sans surprise, ce sont les Chinois, alors que, sans surprise non plus, les plus barbares sont les Caraïbes; les Indiens du Pérou et du Mexique occupent une position intermédiaire (Acosta 1984: 60-71). On a là un bon exemple d'une remobilisation de la catégorie antique du barbare, mais en la sortant d'un usage strictement binaire (telle qu'elle fonctionnait dans le couple Grec-Barbare). Certes, il y a bien nous, les chrétiens et eux, les païens, mais le barbare ou, mieux, le degré de barbarie est justement ce qui permet de discriminer, de mesurer des écarts, en vue d'en tirer des règles d'action pour, par une juste appréciation de leur barbarie, les sortir au mieux du paganisme. Ainsi graduée, pluralisée, mondialisée, la catégorie de barbare peut devenir un instrument comparatif.

Il vaudrait aussi la peine de s'arrêter sur la façon dont ces catégories ont été déstabilisées par Montaigne dans les chapitres fameux des *Essais* sur les Cannibales et sur les Coches (Hartog 2006: 49-51).

3. Le Primitif

Rousseau rêvait encore de voyage lointains et d'échanges avec des représentants du genre humain qui étaient envisagés comme vivant dans le même temps que les voyageurs eux-mêmes. Mais bientôt la

temporalisation accélérée de l'altérité, dont l'évolutionnisme sera l'expression la plus aboutie, va transformer le sauvage en primitif. Avec du point de vue de son inscription temporelle une position paradoxale: il devient un ancêtre, contemporain du mammoth, susceptible de nous renseigner sur nos origines, tout en demeurant un enfant (depuis la tradition missionnaire). Certes, le primitif est dans le temps, mais dans un temps depuis longtemps révolu pour nous. Il est un anachronisme vivant ou une butte-témoin: temporalisé et rejeté au loin, il nous renseigne sur nos origines. Ainsi, pour Edward Tylor, avec la rencontre des derniers Tasmans, "l'homme du paléolithique cesse d'être une inférence philosophique pour devenir une réalité tangible" (Tylor, in Stocking 1987: 283). Les fondateurs de l'ethnologie fixent, en effet, un cadre général, et déterminent des stades dans le développement de l'humanité: sauvages, barbares, civilisés. Pour cela, ils mobilisent les catégories de l'altérité en les ordonnant selon un axe temporel. Dans son *Ancient Society*, publié en 1877, Lewis Morgan raffine le découpage: le stade sauvage se divise en inférieur, moyen et supérieur; il en va de même pour la barbarie; l'état civilisé, enfin, se séquence en ancien et moderne (Morgan 1971: 45). Cet écart temporel (l'altérité pleinement temporalisée), que l'anthropologue Johannes Fabian a nommé "le déni de contemporanéité" (Fabian 2006: 42), a alimenté et justifié la colonisation. Il a servi tout un temps de présupposé aux travaux des ethnologues, et il a donné des assurances aux études sur les races ou au racisme simplement ordinaire, qui mêle plus ou moins confusément temporalisation de l'altérité (retard, enfance) et essentialisation de l'altérité (ils sont comme ça). On parle alors de races inférieures, on bâtit des empires et on règne sur des sujets coloniaux. La perspective est celle d'une altérité foncière (eux/nous), connaissant des stades et des degrés. En outre, plus on s'éloigne dans l'espace, plus on recule dans le temps.

4. La Diversité

Après les deux guerres mondiales, l'Europe a définitivement perdu sa position centrale. La décolonisation, la formation rapide de nouveaux Etats, les grandes institutions internationales issues de la guerre - l'ONU, l'UNESCO - contraignent à renoncer à l'altérité au profit d'un nouveau modèle centré sur la diversité. La problématique antérieure de l'altérité (comme autre de deux) n'est désormais plus tenable. Il y a les autres, dans leur diversité et bientôt dans leur singularité. Limpide à cet égard est la *Déclaration* lors du Congrès fondateur de l'Unesco en novembre 1945: la guerre qui venait de se terminer avait "été rendu possible par le reniement de l'idéal démocratique de dignité, d'égalité et de respect de la personne humaine et par la volonté de lui substituer, en exploitant l'ignorance et le préjugé, le dogme de l'inégalité des races et des hommes" (UNESCO 2020: 5). La *Déclaration universelle des droits de l'homme* de 1948 ne fera qu'entériner solennellement cette inspiration humaniste. Le programme d'action de l'UNESCO découle de cette prémisse: éduquer et lutter contre les préjugés par l'éducation. Dans cette ligne, Claude Lévi-Strauss, pour sa part, distingue trois humanismes: celui de la Renaissance, celui déjà élargi du XVIII^e siècle, et celui qu'il fait sien, "l'humanisme démocratique", selon lequel rien d'humain ne saurait être étranger (Lévi-Strauss 1973a: 319-322). Si bien que le sauvage, qu'il visite et interroge, proche de celui de Rousseau, est un sauvage 'bon à penser' qui vient nous questionner. Ni ancêtre ni enfant, il nous aide, en apprenant à le connaître, à penser ce que nous sommes dans la distance qui nous sépare.

Race et histoire: ce court ouvrage, rédigé par Lévi-Strauss en 1952 à la demande de l'UNESCO, dans le cadre de travaux contre le préjugé raciste, est un excellent point de repère pour mon propos. En effet, la diversité est non seulement reconnue mais elle est tenue pour une valeur à promouvoir et à défendre, alors même que se profile une "civilisation mondiale" (1973b: 416). "La diversité des cultures humaines est derrière nous, autour de nous et devant nous", conclut Lévi-Strauss (1973b: 422). De même qu'il n'y a pas de différences ontologiques entre les humains, il n'y en a pas entre les cultures. Les différences

résultent d'accidents de l'histoire. Contre l'ethnocentrisme, contre l'Occident et son étalon unique du progrès, il fait valoir que, sur le grand échiquier des cultures, une culture ne progresse jamais seule. On parle de collaboration, de coalition des cultures, et le métissage est valorisé (au Brésil), dans la mesure où l'autre et le même se mêlent. Là où l'évolutionnisme faisait du temps le facteur discriminant (le progrès est comme un escalier qu'on gravit et gagne celui qui le monte le plus vite), Lévi-Strauss insiste sur l'espace. Aussi à une vision verticale et hiérarchique des cultures échelonnées dans le temps, il est plus exact de substituer une représentation des formes de civilisation comme étalées dans l'espace, car, encore une fois, jamais aucune culture n'est seule (Lévi-Strauss 1973b: 393).

Ce tableau du monde et des cultures, dont le principe organisateur est la diversité s'achève sur une crainte ou une mise en garde. Alors que l'horizon est celui d'une civilisation mondiale (définie alors comme concept limite par l'anthropologue), ce qui doit être préservé, dit-il, c'est 'l'écart différentiel' entre les cultures. Car en cet écart même réside la possibilité de la contribution de chacune. Si bien que "la civilisation mondiale ne saurait être autre chose que la coalition à l'échelle mondiale, de cultures préservant chacune son originalité" (Lévi-Strauss 1973b: 417). On est là, peut-on penser, dans le *wishful thinking*! Mais pour préserver la diversité des cultures, il ne suffira pas "de choyer des traditions locales et d'accorder du répit aux temps révolus. C'est le fait de la diversité qui doit être sauvé, non le contenu historique que chaque époque lui a donné et qu'aucune ne saurait perpétuer au-delà d'elle-même" (Lévi-Strauss 1973b: 421). Dès lors qu'on met au centre la diversité, le fait de la diversité, il faut admettre son corollaire le relativisme ou, mieux, la relativité des cultures, puisque tout est toujours affaire de position et de point de vue. Cette intervention donne un fondement théorique au monde d'après 1945, en prenant la diversité au sérieux jusqu'au bout, avec ses risques ou ses impasses, et ses espérances aussi.

Sur la diversité, la réflexion de Lévi-Strauss est, intellectuellement, la plus élaborée et la plus conséquente, mais elle n'est bien sûr pas la seule. Tout en critiquant l'ancien schéma de l'altérité, deux autres positions n'y renoncent pas vraiment. La première est celle portée par ceux qui procèdent par simple retournement du schéma occidental. Le locuteur n'est plus le dominant, tandis que l'ancien dominé prend la parole et, reprenant à son propre compte des termes jusque-là stigmatisant, les retourne contre le colonisateur, en gardant ainsi la structure duelle. Il en va ainsi de 'nègre' et de la 'négritude', conçue par Aimé Césaire, son promoteur avec Léopold Sedar Senghor, comme une "révolte contre le réductionnisme européen", contre son "pseudo-humanisme" et, pour tout dire, contre le "racisme" de l'Europe (Césaire 2004: 14, 72). Césaire cite aussi Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et Culture* (1955), un "livre", dit-il, "qui comptera dans le réveil de l'Afrique" (Césaire 2004: 41). Pour Anta Diop, l'Égypte ancienne qui était, en réalité, noire, doit être un des vecteurs du panafricanisme (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2020). Au total "qu'a fait l'Europe bourgeoise?", se demande encore Césaire. Elle a sapé les civilisations, détruit les patries, ruiné les nationalités, extirpé "la racine de diversité". Si bien que "l'heure est arrivée du Barbare, moderne, l'heure américaine". A la fin des années 1980, à l'occasion d'un congrès organisé à Miami en son honneur, il définira la négritude moins comme *ethnicity* que comme identité (Césaire 2004: 89).

La seconde est liée à la conception du développement qui a été le principal mot d'ordre des organisations internationales après les années 1950. Si le progrès est pour l'Occident, le développement est l'horizon du monde qu'on commence à appeler sous-développé, puis, un peu plus tard, en voie de développement. Traiter du développement, sujet immense s'il en est, excède de beaucoup mon propos. Aussi ma seule question sera: quel rapport existe-t-il entre le développement, la reconnaissance de la diversité et le cadre antérieur de l'altérité? Etabli par l'Ouest, le modèle du développement obéit au partage nous/eux, mais on ne tarde pas à se rendre compte qu'il y a lieu de l'adapter à la diversité des situations (état des sociétés, stades de développement, rythme des transformations). Ce sont là autant de façons de

temporaliser la diversité, tout en se gardant (officiellement) de faire simplement rejouer l'ancienne échelle chronologique de l'altérité, qui reviendrait à dire à eux d'accélérer, de s'adapter et de rattraper! Si le directeur général de l'UNESCO, René Maheu, annonce fièrement, dans une formule qui fleure encore son Hegel, que le "Développement, est l'esprit en marche dans l'Histoire", sur le terrain on promeut un "développement endogène" (Mastronardi 2019). On parle aussi de 'rapatrier le progrès'. Comment mieux donner corps à ces infléchissements ou à ces objectifs qu'en faisant appel à l'histoire, au patrimoine et donc à l'identité des populations concernées? Ainsi quand, pour prendre un exemple, l'UNESCO lance la rédaction d'une *Histoire de l'Afrique*, c'est, comme le dit l'historien Burkinabé Ki-Zerbo, "pour ne plus vivre avec la mémoire d'autrui". On donne ainsi une profondeur historique à la diversité des nouveaux Etats, tout en mobilisant dans ces ex-colonies 'l'identité' au service du développement.

5. Différence et identité

S'étant substituée à l'ancien schéma de l'altérité, la diversité s'est-elle imposée durablement comme la bonne façon de réguler les rapports interhumains à grande comme à petite échelle? Une réponse un peu précise engagerait de longues recherches. Je ne m'attacherai ici qu'à une seule question. Celle de l'émergence, au sein même du champ de la diversité, d'un nouveau concept, celui de différence. En quoi la montée de la différence, dans le cours des années 1970, vient-elle modifier le terrain conquis par la diversité? La diversité se veut neutre. Elle n'implique, en principe, ni inclusion ni exclusion. A chacun sa diversité, méritant une égale reconnaissance. On est dans la coexistence, la cohabitation, voire la collaboration: le multiculturalisme en a été le programme, l'éloge du métissage une traduction: la 'Nation arc-en-ciel' comme projection d'une Afrique du Sud débarrassée de l'apartheid. Mais nous savons bien que dans le concret du fonctionnement des sociétés, où s'affrontent de multiples rapports de force, l'arc-en-ciel ne scintille que quelques instants.

Or, au cours des quarante dernières années, a émergé d'abord aux USA, puis un peu partout une thématique nouvelle qui n'a pas fait disparaître celle de la diversité, mais l'a, pour ainsi dire, polarisée ou cristallisée sur la différence. Comment passe-t-on de l'une à l'autre et quelle en est la portée par rapport à la problématique de l'inclusion ou de la fragmentation? Si la question est complexe et dépasse de beaucoup mes compétences, elle est incontournable. Son émergence n'est, en effet, pas séparable de la grande mutation des années 1970 marquée par la montée de l'individualisme et l'extension des droits d'un individu se voulant de plus en plus autonome (qui est à l'arrière-plan, par exemple, des mouvements féministes), par la place croissante de la figure de la victime dans l'espace public, par les luttes des minorités pour leur reconnaissance, et par les avancées de la globalisation (cette civilisation mondiale qui, pour Lévi-Strauss, n'était qu'un concept limite).

Mais, en 1971, vingt ans après *Race et histoire*, dans *Race et culture*, à nouveau rédigé à la demande de l'UNESCO, Lévi-Strauss (1983: 47) exprime de sérieux doutes sur la politique de l'agence, alors même que progressait justement la civilisation mondiale:

Sans doute, écrit-il, nous berçons nous du rêve que l'égalité et la fraternité régneront entre les hommes, sans que soit compromise leur diversité. Mais si l'humanité ne se résigne pas à devenir la consommatrice stérile des seules valeurs qu'elle a su créer dans le passé [...], elle devra réapprendre que toute création véritable implique une certaine surdité à l'appel d'autres valeurs, pouvant aller jusqu'à leur refus sinon même leur négation.

Cette conclusion, qui ne faisait en réalité que développer sa mise en garde de 1952, en se concentrant sur la création artistique, fit alors polémique. Lévi-Strauss semblait tourner le dos aux idéaux de l'UNESCO,

alors même que commençait à se faire entendre, en Europe, les mouvements d'extrême droite prospérant sur la dénonciation de l'immigration. Pourtant, promouvoir la diversité et le multiculturalisme était-ce encore un programme suffisant ou cela n'allait-il pas sans un part d'illusion?

Pour en revenir à la différence, mettre l'accent sur elle, c'est creuser à l'intérieur même de la diversité, c'est la démultiplier en la segmentant. Le collectif ne disparaît pas, mais il se divise et se subdivise en catégories de plus en plus spécifiques: les femmes, les jeunes, les Noirs, bientôt les gays, les lesbiennes, jusqu'aux LGBTQIA+ (I pour intersexuels, A pour asexuels) d'aujourd'hui. Selon le philosophe Marcel Gauchet, la logique générale du mouvement est celle d'une individualisation qui mène à "l'émergence des premiers individus privés de l'histoire, des individus fondés, dans le tréfonds de leur être, à disposer d'eux-mêmes hors de toute inscription commune et publique" (Gauchet 2017: 199). Ce second moment des droits de l'homme (le premier étant celui de la Révolution française), en mettant en avant "la priorité du rapport à soi sur le rapport à l'extérieur" (Gauchet 2017: 620), fait de l'identité une pierre de touche. Et qui dit identité, dit respect de la dignité et demande de reconnaissance. Est à l'œuvre, précise encore Gauchet, une "dynamique de privatisation" qui "pousse les acteurs à se bâtir une petite société à l'écart de la grande où ils pourront trouver ce que le système collectif leur refuse" (Gauchet 2017: 625). Cet "individu extra-social dans le social, en droit de vivre dans l'inconscience d'être en société", n'en est pas moins "lié par toutes les fibres de son être à la société dont il est membre" (Gauchet 2017: 623).

Un des laboratoires de ces transformations, directement en prise avec la problématique de la diversité, ont été les *Cultural*, les *Postcolonial*, les *Gender studies* dans les années 1980-1990 qui ont déplacé, déconstruit la question du même et de l'autre.² Le concept d'identité est bien le concept-pivot, d'autant plus qu'il est n'est, lui-même, pas univoque (identité ouverte ou fermée, individuelle ou collective). Mais, par lui, on glisse de la diversité à la différence. Si la diversité, telle qu'envisagée par l'UNESCO et Lévi-Strauss dans les années 1950 était portée par l'idée (illusoire peut-être) de la collaboration entre les cultures, la revendication de la différence, de *ma* différence crée un autre espace: morcelé, guère coopératif, sauf sur le mode de la solidarité victimaire (qui peut se muer en concurrence), et se légitimant d'une mémoire des torts subis (le racisme aux Etats-Unis, l'exploitation féminine séculaire, l'exploitation coloniale et ses séquelles). Mon identité, c'est ma différence: elle me constitue dans ma singularité et doit être reconnue comme telle. La différence, qui est un droit, doit donc aussi relever du droit, au sens juridique. De fait, les demandes de "droits à" se sont multipliées au cours des dernières décennies (Wolff 2017: 17-24).

Poussée à ses limites, la différence pourrait, peut déboucher sur l'exclusion de celui ou de celle qui n'a pas part à cette différence. C'est ce qu'on voit avec la politique d'identité (*Identity Politics*) qui a pris de l'ampleur aux Etats-Unis en ces espaces si particuliers que sont les espaces académiques (à la fois hors-sol, formant les élites et trouvant de puissants échos dans les médias), et aussi au-delà par le relais instantané des réseaux sociaux. La politique de l'identité part de la structure cachée de la société et entend la corriger, en faisant jouer le paradigme victimaire. Réclamer réparation au nom de la reconnaissance de souffrances passées, présentes et peut-être ineffaçables. La taxinomie des identités étant toujours susceptible de s'allonger, la politique de l'identité s'étend elle aussi, comme par scissiparité, jusqu'à cette limite asymptotique que serait une identité complètement singulière. Qui suis-je? Je suis ce que je décide que je suis, sans aucune assignation de sexe, de genre ou de durée. On est alors entré dans une fragmentation qui se relance sans cesse, transformant toute tentative d'inclusion en violence inacceptable.

Le patrimoine, qui est l'alter ego de la mémoire, n'échappe pas à la politique de l'identité, qui a mis au point l'arme redoutable de 'l'appropriation culturelle'. Dans la mesure où "les identités culturelles

² Le livre de Dipesh Chakrabarty, publié en 2000, *Provincialiser l'Europe* a pour sous-titre, *La pensée postcoloniale et la différence historique*.

s'héritent, elles s'incarnent dans des individus qui sont les garants de leur authenticité et de leur respect" (Dubreuil 2018: 141). Aussi n'ai-je pas le droit de mimer, c'est-à-dire d'usurper, fût-ce au théâtre ou lors d'une fête entre amis, une identité qui n'est pas la mienne. Une pièce sur les premières nations du Canada se doit ainsi d'inclure des acteurs, des auteurs, des techniciens amérindiens.³ Quand l'identité devient la politique ou quand la politique se confond avec l'identité, on est conduit vers des pratiques d'exclusion qui substitue à l'espace de la diversité des micro-altérités (nous/eux), dont le nombre ne cesse d'augmenter. Le champ de la diversité s'en trouve transformé, c'est-à-dire miné et finalement nié. Cette politique de l'identité différentialiste débouche sur la réactivation d'une forme d'altérité naturalisée ou re-naturalisée.

Ce n'est pas tout encore. Aux antipodes des campus américains et des variations parfois ridicules sur l'identité et les micro-différences, l'extrême droite et les mouvements populistes font entendre, un peu partout, une tout autre chanson, à la fois ancienne et nouvelle, et autrement sommaire et brutale. Sur cette voie, la France avec le Front national avait une longueur d'avance, mais elle a été rattrapée et même dépassée. La cible, ce sont les musulmans et ceux qu'on ne nomme plus que les migrants. Un tel refus passe par la réactivation de l'ancien schème de l'altérité (eux/nous), avec tous les préjugés racistes qui allaient avec, encore renforcé aujourd'hui par la peur du terrorisme et alimenté par la menace du déclassement et de la pauvreté. Tout se passe comme si un demi-siècle de travaux de l'UNESCO sur le racisme n'avait jamais eu lieu. *Race et histoire* ou même *Race et Culture* semblent venir d'un monde entièrement disparu!

Pour les populistes aussi, l'identité est le concept central, mais elle est ce qui doit être défendu contre des envahisseurs. Il n'est évidemment plus question d'inclusion, pas même d'hospitalité; quant au multiculturalisme, il est au mieux moqué comme naïf. Mais face à ce 'eux' fantasmé, qui est le 'nous', quelle est son identité, non moins fantasmé? En France, nous avons eu le fameux 'Français de souche'. Ces extrémistes se revendiquent volontiers comme 'identitaires', comme si leur identité, exclusive de toutes les autres, était menacée: d'autant plus exclusive qu'elle se perçoit comme menacée. Ces 'identitaires' se réclament, eux aussi, du paradigme victimaire: nous aussi, nous sommes une minorité menacée. C'est bien ainsi que les électeurs blancs de Trump avaient compris son message de 2016 (*Make America Great Again*). En France, sous le prétexte de dénoncer 'les prières de rue' des musulmans, les identitaires ont riposté en organisant des 'apéros saucisson-vin rouge'. Les autres, non conviés à ces banquets de rue, sont, bien sûr, les musulmans, mais, en réalité, aussi les juifs. Comme si le saucisson-vin rouge suffisait à définir une identité chrétienne, évidemment pas religieuse, mais culturelle et caricaturale (gauloise!) (Roy 2019: 192). Avec cette autre politique de l'identité, active et puissante, l'identité-forteresse, arc-boutée à nouveau sur la nation, on achève de liquider le monde d'après-1945, celui qui avait voulu et cru laisser derrière lui le vieux schème de l'altérité pour lui substituer la diversité et le multilatéralisme.

Au terme de ce parcours, trop vaste peut-être, trop schématique sûrement, ce qui frappe, c'est l'endurance et la plasticité du schéma de l'altérité, depuis le lancement du couple fondateur des Grecs et des Barbares. La très longue séquence des formes de temporalisation de l'altérité a accompagné et servi la colonisation du monde par l'Europe. Son rejet au profit de la diversité découle directement de la perte de centralité de l'Europe à la suite des deux guerres mondiales. Dans un monde qui, depuis les années 1970, est de moins en moins celui de l'après-guerre, les mises en cause de la diversité, à la fois interne (au nom

³ Le théâtre du Soleil d'Ariane Mnouchkine et la troupe du metteur en scène québécois, Robert Lepage, avaient choisi d'évoquer l'histoire des Amérindiens du Canada, *Kanata*. En mars 2019, la représentation des *Suppliantes* d'Eschyle, mise en scène par Philippe Brunet, a été empêchée à la Sorbonne au prétexte que les acteurs portaient des masques 'noirs'. Cela relevait du 'blackface', et donc d'une appropriation culturelle indue.

de la différence) et externe (par refus de la différence), ouvrent un espace pour une réactivation des schémas de l'altérité. Ce qui n'est pas une bonne nouvelle.

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Per un'ecologia delle somiglianze e delle diversità

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Abstract (Italiano) Secondo i contesti in cui la 'diversità' viene collocata, essa assume ruoli e significati differenti: un conto è una diversità di 'sostanze', che non hanno nulla in comune (tante sfere incommunicabili), e un altro conto è una diversità di 'somiglianze', dove ogni cosa è simile e diversa rispetto a ogni altra cosa (reti di connessioni). Un boschetto in mezzo a palazzi di un quartiere semiperiferico di Torino viene assunto come esemplificazione di un intrico di somiglianze e differenze, il quale sopravvive in mezzo a forme geometriche coesistenti nella loro staticità. Resilienza del divenire rispetto all'essere, delle somiglianze-differenze (SoDif) rispetto all'identità, è il tema su cui l'autore invita a riflettere.

Abstract (English) According to the contexts in which 'diversity' is placed, it acquires different roles and meanings. One thing is a diversity of 'substances', which have nothing in common (many incommunicable spheres), and another is a diversity of 'similarities', where everything is similar and different to everything else (networks of connections). A grove in the midst of buildings in a semi-peripheral district of Turin is taken as an example of a tangle of similarities and differences, which survives in the midst of geometric shapes coexisting in their static nature. The resilience of becoming instead of being, of similarities-differences (SoDif) with respect to identity, is the theme upon which the author invites readers to reflect.

Keywords diversity; similarity; substance; coexistence.

Che cos'è diversità? Come sosteneva David Hume, la diversità è una negazione; infatti è esprimibile con un 'non'. Essa si riferisce sempre a qualcosa, a un A , rispetto a cui diremo che B è diverso, e B è diverso se e nella misura in cui non possiede i tratti x, y o z che invece si trovano in A . Beninteso, B può anche essere diverso non in senso diminutivo, bensì in senso aggiuntivo, come quando B possiede i tratti l, m, n che non si trovano in A . Le due situazioni sono perfettamente speculari e così la definizione della diversità come relazione negativa viene ulteriormente convalidata.

Proprio in quanto negativa, la diversità – o differenza – rinvia inevitabilmente a un concetto positivo, a cui si appoggia, rispetto a cui acquista senso. Noi usiamo infatti il termine diversità, o differenza, in quanto abbiamo in mente qualcosa che non è diversità: se tutto fosse diversità, se tutte le cose fossero soltanto differenti, finiremmo in una sorta di buco nero. Che cosa c'è allora di positivo oltre, prima o insieme alla differenza?

Ci troviamo di fronte a un bivio teorico, a due strade che partono da presupposti e che conducono a esiti molto diversi: una strada (I) è quella della *sostanza*, con il suo correlato dell'identità, e l'altra (II) è l'opposto della sostanza, in quanto è una relazione, e si chiama *somiglianza*. Un conto è appoggiare la diversità al concetto di sostanza, e ritenere che le diversità di cui dobbiamo occuparci sono diversità di sostanze e 'tra' sostanze. Un altro conto è invece collegare le diversità, e farle interagire, 'con' le somiglianze. Gli scenari che vengono fuori sono assai differenti (nonostante alcune somiglianze, ovviamente).

I) Come si accoppia la diversità con il concetto di sostanza? Semplicemente asserendo che tutto ciò che costituisce la sostanza di una cosa, e quindi la sua identità, non è condivisibile con altre sostanze. La sostanza di A fonda la sua identità, il suo essere sé stesso ($A = A$); a sua volta, l'identità garantisce che nulla di ciò che è essenziale per A sia condiviso con B . Dentro A tutto è compatto, identico: non c'è diversità all'interno. La diversità affiora soltanto quando si comincia a guardare fuori di A . Tale diversità viene normalmente chiamata 'alterità': essa infatti segnala la presenza dell'«altro», ovvero di tutto ciò che si colloca nello spazio esterno ad A . E l'altro (B , C ecc.) è 'altro', proprio perché non condivide nulla di sostanziale con A .

Com'è noto, queste idee appartengono all'ontologia che ha contraddistinto profondamente il pensiero occidentale. Esse però sono state trasposte dal piano ontologico a quello sociologico, allorché l'identità è stata adottata come principio fondante e irrinunciabile di vari tipi di 'noi'. Lo Stato-nazione, concepito come una sostanza di natura storica e/o bio-culturale, è tuttora la forma di identitarismo più conclamata e consapevole. Lo Stato-nazione afferma il proprio 'essere' e la propria identità nei confronti degli Altri, intesi non solo come radicalmente diversi, ma anche come potenzialmente o addirittura inevitabilmente nemici (Carl Schmitt). In questa prospettiva, la diversità è ciò che separa la sostanza A dalle altre sostanze, le quali sono appunto *non A* ($A \neq \text{non-}A$). Così facendo, essa svolge una duplice funzione: in quanto diversità di A rispetto a B , funge da barriera protettiva di A , allontanando ogni minaccia di 'alterazione' che proviene dall'esterno; in quanto diversità di B rispetto ad A , offre il modo di attribuire un'identità anche all'Altro (B).

Eredi del pensiero ontologico della sostanza, che ci ha consegnato il principio dell'identità da applicare non solo sul piano metafisico, ma anche alle persone e alle società, stentiamo molto a concepire i 'noi' se non mediante varie forme di 'noi-centrismo'. Per scorgere altre possibilità di concezione del 'noi' occorre in effetti nuotare contro corrente, così da riguadagnare il punto d'inizio, quello da cui si dipartono le due vie. Avremo quindi modo di gettare uno sguardo sulla seconda possibilità, la quale consiste – come abbiamo visto – nell'accoppiare la diversità non già con la sostanza, bensì con la somiglianza.

II) Prendendo la seconda via si apre un paesaggio di altra natura: non più tante sfere di 'noi', collocati con la loro identità esclusiva in uno spazio dove si oppongono e si alternano identità e alterità, dove ogni sfera è 'sé stessa' e nello stesso tempo del tutto 'altra' rispetto alle sfere compresenti. Ciò che appare sono invece reti di connessioni, di cui i 'noi' sono i nodi, mentre le somiglianze e differenze sono le relazioni che li uniscono. Qui i noi non sono identici a sé e diversi nei confronti degli altri: sono invece *diversi* e nello stesso tempo *simili* sia a sé sia agli altri. Con una precisazione importante, forse difficile da acquisire, ma assolutamente decisiva: i 'noi' non dispongono di un nucleo sostanziale interno, sottostante (secondo il significato di *substantia*) alle apparenze, dunque prioritario e più fondamentale rispetto all'intrico delle somiglianze e delle differenze. Tutto il 'noi' fa parte dell'intrico. Non c'è luogo o strato del noi che non sia coinvolto in ciò che abbiamo chiamato SoDif – una formula il cui significato è quello di affermare l'unione indissolubile di So/miglianze e Dif/ferenze (Remotti 2019).

Nel SoDif le differenze sono gli aspetti negativi, mentre le somiglianze sono gli elementi positivi: sono ciò che vi è in comune tra A , B , C ecc. Le somiglianze non sono altro che condivisioni e partecipazioni. Come si è già detto, le differenze (i tratti che non sono in comune) sono di due tipi: diminutive, se A non possiede certi tratti di B ; aggiuntive, se A possiede tratti in più, che non si trovano in B . Tenendo conto di questa doppia faccia delle differenze, possiamo comprendere come esse *a)* salvaguardino la struttura delle somiglianze (le somiglianze sono tali, in quanto si combinano con le differenze); *b)* interrompano le somiglianze, rendendole discontinue, parziali e temporanee, impedendo loro di trasformarsi in fagocitanti fattori di unificazione e di fusione tra i vari noi; *c)* si configurino come risorse che i noi, grazie al ponte delle somiglianze, immettono nel circuito degli scambi e delle condivisioni. Se collegate alle somiglianze, le

differenze non sottraggono affatto i noi alle connessioni. Anche questo è un punto decisivo. Per le sostanze della via *I* le differenze sono esterne: si riducono ad essere minacce di alterazione per un verso e barriere protettive per l'altro; sono un no alla comunicazione. Al contrario, nel SoDif della via *II* le differenze, elementi intrinseci e fondamentali delle somiglianze, sono risorse che alimentano scambi e interazioni: sono un sì alla comunicazione.

Tutto questo è teoria. Se ora guardiamo il mondo così come si presenta ai nostri occhi, che cosa vediamo: un mondo di noi identitari, di sfere contrapposte, o una rete di somiglianze-differenze dialoganti? Un po' l'uno e un po' l'altro. Torniamo al punto di partenza. Il bivio originario (*I/II*) non è perfettamente simmetrico: non vi è un terreno sgombro, dove i sostenitori dell'una e dell'altra opzione potrebbero costruire a piacere le *sfere* delle sostanze e delle identità (*I*) o, al contrario, le *reti* delle partecipazioni (*II*). Come ci insegna qualsivoglia teoria della complessità, il punto d'inizio è già di per sé un intrico SoDif. Per darsi una forma, ogni noi ha bisogno di sfrondare, dunque di tagliare. Ma un conto (via *I*) è tentare di tagliare *tutte* le somiglianze tra noi *A* e i *non-A*, e un altro conto (via *II*) è tagliare *alcune* somiglianze, trasformando l'intrico in un intreccio un po' più ordinato, per consentire ai noi di uscire dal caos e di entrare in reti di scambi, di partecipazioni, di forme di convivenza.

Il fatto è, però, che nessuno dei due programmi (la via *I* delle sfere o la via *II* delle reti) darà mai luogo a una situazione perfetta, perfettamente rispondente agli obiettivi che si prefiggono. In nessuna parte del mondo vedremo convivenze tra simili del tutto prive di pregiudizi, di preclusioni, di esclusioni, di ostacoli, di conflitti, di sopraffazioni. Né d'altro lato i noi identitari sono in grado di eliminare del tutto le somiglianze con gli 'altri', da cui vorrebbero tenersi separati. Se però i protagonisti delle reti non possono non accettare che le reti si strappino o non funzionino del tutto, succede davvero che per sradicare del tutto le somiglianze con gli altri i noi identitari procedano a 'fare fuori' letteralmente gli altri. Come la storia ci ha fatto vedere più volte, ambire alla perfezione è la follia tipica delle soluzioni finali intraprese dai noi identitari.

Mettiamo per ora da parte soluzioni finali, paesaggi storici e ontologici. Proviamo invece a fare un più modesto esercizio di ordine fenomenologico, scrutando nei paesaggi in cui si svolge la nostra vita quotidiana l'impronta sia dell'identità sia delle somiglianze. Il tono del nostro discorso sarà inevitabilmente più colloquiale.

Tutti sanno che una passeggiata nel verde – in campagna, in un bosco – è rigenerante per chi abita in città (per riferimenti colti: Rousseau, Beethoven... e non erano certo le nostre città). Io abito al quinto piano in un quartiere semiperiferico di Torino. Dal mio balcone vedo palazzi tutt'attorno. Nello spazio in mezzo ai palazzi c'è però un boschetto in miniatura: alberi abbandonati a sé stessi, una strana macchia di verde lasciata lì, una vera e propria 'sopravvivenza'. Che ci fanno quegli alberi rinselvatichiti, abitati dagli uccelli e senza dubbio da qualche altro animaletto, in mezzo ai condominî che si ergono ai lati? Accanto al boschetto c'è anche una curiosa villetta stile liberty, tipica di questa zona di Torino anni '30 del Novecento. Da quando abito in questa casa – ormai da quasi cinquant'anni – ho sempre sperato che a nessuno venisse in mente di fare fuori il 'mio' boschetto. Tutte le volte che vado sul balcone il mio sguardo è infatti attratto da quel groviglio di alberi: prima dirigo il mio sguardo al boschetto, assicurandomi che sia ancora lì, poi ai condominî, di cui non ho dubbi che siano rimasti intatti (o quasi).

È senza dubbio una questione di colore: la macchia 'verde' attrae molto di più dei colori smorti e uniformi delle facciate dei palazzi. Sia a pure a distanza, si vedono in quella macchia tante sfumature di verde. È pure una questione di forme: alberi diversi tra loro, con i loro rami, il loro fogliame, nessuno di essi uguale agli altri. In un minuscolo spazio si riesce a cogliere una gioiosa foresta di diversità: tante forme di vita che vivono insieme, pur in parziale conflitto tra loro. Al contrario, i condominî attorno sono parallelepipedi di cemento, che non confliggono tra loro, ma stanno lì, gli uni separati dagli altri. Quanto a

forme, essi sono assai più riconoscibili: sono forme geometriche elementari, che rasentano la perfezione; forme rigide, uniformi, statiche. Nel boschetto c'è vita. Sappiamo che c'è vita anche negli scatoloni attorno: nelle loro divisioni interne essi custodiscono, trattengono, comprimono, nascondono la vita delle persone. All'esterno essi manifestano però una staticità perfetta. Ogni volta che mi sporgo dal balcone, li vedo sempre uguali a sé stessi, a differenza del boschetto in continua trasformazione.

Ho svolto questi pensieri la stessa sera in cui ho ripreso in mano *Vita e destino* di Vasilij Grossman. Questo libro inizia descrivendo l'avvicinamento notturno a un lager nazista. Il lager appariva come:

[U]no spazio riempito di linee rette, uno spazio di rettangoli e parallelogrammi che fendevano la terra
[...] Una dietro l'altra le baracche formavano strade ampie e diritte. La ferocia disumana dell'enorme lager si esprimeva in quella regolarità perfetta (Grossman 2013: 13).

Alla squadratura perfetta e regolare del lager, alle baracche tutte uguali le une alle altre, Grossman oppone i milioni di izbe russe, tra cui “non ce ne sono due perfettamente identiche” (2013: 13). E aggiunge: “[C]iò che è vivo non ha copie. Due persone, due arbusti di rosa canina, non possono essere uguali, è impensabile... E dove la violenza cerca di cancellare varietà e differenze, la vita si spegne” (2013: 13).

Ho vissuto qualcosa di analogo tra i BaNande del Nord Kivu (Repubblica Democratica del Congo): ai villaggi tradizionali con le loro capanne circolari, fatte rigorosamente di materiali vegetali, immersi nel verde del bananeto pulsante di vita, si oppongono le città di derivazione coloniale, con i loro quartieri squadrati, con le case di fango essiccato o di mattoni, a pianta quadrangolare, con le loro strade ortogonali. Girando per quelle strade tutte uguali, mi veniva talvolta da pensare a René Descartes, al *Discorso sul metodo* (1637), là dove egli descrive il disordine delle vecchie città medievali, con le loro strade tortuose, le case tutte diverse le une dalle altre, e alle quali oppone l'immagine di città nuove, ordinate, razionali, fatte di “spazi regolari che un ingegnere traccia a suo piacimento in una pianura” (Descartes 1954: 48-49).

I quartieri delle città coloniali africane, i condomini che vedo dal balcone, la perfetta regolarità spaziale dei lager descritta da Grossman hanno in comune l'abolizione (o meglio, il tentativo di abolizione) del disordine e, al suo posto, la ripetizione dell'uniforme, l'imposizione dell'uguaglianza: strade uguali, case uguali... E Grossman aggiungeva: “I lager erano le nuove città della Nuova Europa”, dove alla varietà, all'irripetibilità, all'apparente disordine di forme della “vita” si impone con “violenza” e “ferocia” l'uniformità di un “medesimo destino” di morte (2013: 16, 13-15).

Questa tendenza all'uniformità, così evidente nei regimi totalitari del Novecento (uniformazione di pensieri e di comportamenti), affiora – come sottolineava Lewis Mumford – nella formazione degli eserciti moderni con “la produzione in serie di soldati”, la cui “uniforme li faceva apparire tutti uguali” (1964: 109-110). Del resto, la nostra vita, individuale e collettiva, si svolge interamente in ambienti in cui l'uniformità degli oggetti è prevalente. Le nostre case e le nostre esistenze sono strapiene di una molteplicità impressionante e indescrivibile di oggetti. Quasi tutti questi oggetti sono però prodotti in serie: ciascuno di essi è, anzi deve essere, perfettamente uguale a tutti gli altri oggetti della serie, pena il suo divenire scarto, rifiuto. Max Horkheimer e Theodor W. Adorno definivano la produzione in serie come la “riproduzione del sempre uguale” (2010: 142). Aggiungiamo queste ulteriori precisazioni: *a*) “l'obiettivo da perseguire” nella produzione in serie “è la perfetta uguaglianza dei prodotti (prova tecnica di perfezione del processo lavorativo), non la loro maggiore o minore somiglianza (segno di approssimazione e di difettosità)” (Remotti 2019: 68); *b*) sotto il profilo antropologico, questa modalità di produzione è tipica della civiltà occidentale e di un suo periodo recente, quello inaugurato dalla rivoluzione industriale. In maniera concisa Carmela Pignato ha sostenuto che “solo la produzione industriale, molto recentemente nella storia dell'umanità, ha riempito il pianeta di un numero teoricamente infinito di oggetti identici” (1987: 4).

Anche François Jullien (2010: 16-17) descrive il mondo globalizzato come il “dominio dell’uniforme”, dove cioè l’uniformazione è spinta all’estremo: “in tutti gli angoli del mondo ritroveremo immancabilmente le stesse vetrine, gli stessi alberghi, le stesse chiavi, gli stessi stereotipi, le stesse insegne”; è dunque per Jullien “un mondo dominato dalla Somiglianza (e dalla piattezza).”

Ho già avuto modo di esprimere il mio dissenso dalla tesi di Jullien, sostenendo che essa vale per la piattezza, non per la somiglianza (Remotti 2019: 68, n. 2). In questo breve scritto intendo ribadire i seguenti punti. 1) Le somiglianze sono ovunque: sono tra loro simili gli alberi arruffati del boschetto di fronte al mio balcone e sono simili tra loro i parallelepipedi condominiali tutt’attorno. 2) Le somiglianze sono ovunque, perché sono insopprimibili: sono dotate di resilienza. 3) Le somiglianze però possono essere trattate in tanti modi diversi: riconosciute, curate, esaltate, tanto quanto trascurate, negate, recise. 4) Noi ci muoviamo sempre in un mondo di somiglianze, le quali costituiscono una ‘selva oscura e intricata’: le culture che gli esseri umani producono sono tentativi per orientarsi nella “selva delle somiglianze” (Viano 1985). Che differenza c’è allora tra le somiglianze presenti nel boschetto e le somiglianze che intercorrono tra gli scatoloni condominiali? Propongo una tipologia. Potremmo dire che le prime sono somiglianze ricche, molteplici, variegate, intrecciate a una molteplicità di differenze, mentre le seconde sono povere, misere, piatte, tendenti all’uguaglianza. Le prime sono somiglianze tra forme di vita e, come le forme di vita, oltre che intrecciate alle differenze, sono in continuo ‘divenire’, trascinate in un flusso vitale in cui di volta in volta scompaiono e da cui emergono; le seconde invece sono poche, statiche, inerti, proprio come i blocchi di cemento, che ‘stanno’ lì, separati, sempre uguali a sé stessi.

Nel mio libro *Somiglianze* ho proposto la formula SoDif per sottolineare l’inscindibilità di somiglianza e differenza: se due cose sono simili, è perché sono anche differenti (altrimenti coinciderebbero, sarebbero un’unica cosa) e se giudichiamo due cose differenti, è perché hanno qualcosa in comune, che le rende comparabili (anche la differenza presuppone una relazione). Ma ci sono tanti tipi di SoDif: SoDif in cui predominano le somiglianze, SoDif in cui predominano le differenze; inoltre SoDif fatti di poche somiglianze-differenze e SoDif in cui proliferano tanto le somiglianze quanto le differenze; infine SoDif statici (quelli dell’essere, dello stare) e SoDif dinamici (quelli del vivere e del divenire).

In queste pagine ci siamo concentrati su un boschetto-sopravvivenza: un intrico di molteplici somiglianze e differenze in continuo divenire (come in effetti è la vita), che ostinatamente sopravvive in mezzo a somiglianze e differenze statiche e separate. Due ambienti simili, ma anche molto diversi. Noi dove viviamo? Prevalentemente in scatole di cemento fatte di SoDif statici, in agglomerati di asfalto che hanno fatto fuori – in gran parte – il pulsare della vita biologica, in Stati che per loro natura privilegiano la staticità, l’essere e l’ordine rispetto al disordine della vita e del divenire, in società che capiscono e praticano assai di più il co-esistere (stare con, accanto a) rispetto al con-vivere, in tradizioni di pensiero che hanno formulato, insieme all’essere, le idee dell’identità e dell’individuo, anziché le idee delle somiglianze e del condivido (Remotti 2019: cap. VII). Ambienti diversi, ma nonostante tutto anche simili: la loro relativa somiglianza dipende dal fatto che l’ambiente dell’essere, dell’identità, dell’individuo non riesce a soppiantare del tutto il divenire, la somiglianza, il condivido (neppure a seguito delle soluzioni finali). Sul piano ideologico i primi termini sono una negazione dei secondi, ma sul piano della realtà – dei comportamenti, dell’esperienza vissuta e osservata – essi sono veri e propri miti (illusioni, aspirazioni) che pretendono e si sforzano di abolire i secondi. Sul piano ideologico si presentano come forme geometriche perfette; sul piano reale sono invece SoDif calpestati, malconci, impoveriti, devitalizzati: forme depotenziate e quasi irriconoscibili di quei grumi di somiglianze e differenze che, pur sfigurate, faticosamente sopravvivono. Esattamente come l’identità, l’essere non si è mai visto da nessuna parte: non esiste in natura. Immaginato e teorizzato dai nostri maggiori filosofi, l’essere in pratica è soltanto un rallentamento più o meno vistoso

del divenire. L'identità a sua volta finisce con l'essere soltanto un malaccorto stravolgimento e impoverimento del SoDif che, nonostante tutto, continua a legarci agli altri e a noi stessi.

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Dialoguing with Diversity: Towards an inclusive and egalitarian society

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Abstract ‘Diversity and inclusion’ has been widely recognized as a key principle to be promoted by institutions, corporations and administrations across the world. Yet actual promotion of diversity does not necessarily enhance egalitarian inclusion of marginalized people. It might operate to manage and/or tame differences in society and foster particular kinds of diversity—business-centered, expedient and pleasurable ones—while suppressing others. Through critical appraisal of the discourse and practice of the promotion of diversity, this paper will discuss several ways in which the apparent embracement of diversity deters the advancement of the tackling of lingering inequality and marginalization with some attention to the Japanese situation. Such critique does not negate the significance of diversity and inclusion, but on-going critical dialogue with diversity is indispensable to positively and productively advance and implement the inclusion of diversity towards the construction of egalitarian inclusive society.

Keywords critical dialogue; diversity and difference; diversity and inclusion; marginalization and inequality; intersectionality; public pedagogy.

‘Diversity and inclusion’ has been widely recognized as a key principle to be promoted by institutions, corporations and administrations across the world. Yet it is easier claimed than realized. Actual promotion of diversity does not necessarily enhance egalitarian inclusion of marginalized people. It might operate to manage and/or tame differences in society and foster particular kinds of diversity—business-centered, expedient and pleasurable ones—while suppressing others. Through critical appraisal of the discourse and practice of the promotion of diversity, this paper will discuss several ways in which the apparent embracement of diversity deters the advancement of the tackling of lingering inequality and marginalization with some attention to the Japanese situation. Such critique does not negate the significance of diversity and inclusion. On the contrary, advancement of diversity and inclusion has become even more an imperative issue. We have observed the rise of antipathy against growing diversity and migration in many parts of the world and various social actors strive to counter such reactionary movements by engaging with the promotion of diversity in inclusive manners. In such emerging socio-historical contexts, the critical consideration of diversity and inclusion is indispensable to positively and productively implement the inclusion of diversity. In the following, I will first discuss key critiques of the globally popularized discourses and practices of ‘diversity’, then moving to critical appraisal of the Japanese situation and discussing the fundamental issues to be tackled. Finally, I will conclude by suggesting how to keep critical dialogue with diversity towards the construction of egalitarian inclusive society.

1. Confusion of BLM and Diversity & Inclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has been making considerable influences on our lives—ecologically, politically economically, socially and culturally. Covid-19's impacts on the embracing of diversity and inclusion has been ambivalent. 'Stay at home' nationalism, xenophobia and racism against 'Asians' and 'China', and socio-economic disparity have been newly engendered. At the same time, the necessity of fostering altruism has been much advocated and collective engagement with social justice, inclusive togetherness and mutual care has been enhanced. The rise and diffusion of BLM (Black Lives Matter) movement across the world including Japan can be understood as a symptom of how Covid-19 encourages some people to be more caring and sensitive to the suffering of other people. Many people who have been hitherto inattentive to BLM has come to take it as 'our' problem and become more willing to combat racism, directly or indirectly participating and supporting the movement. Their eventual consequences are yet to be known. It can be said that the movement has been dying down in many parts of the world. Yet, we should not easily dismiss how the pandemic crisis at least brings about an opportunity to encourage people to realize, if faintly, that our action, imagination and solidarity create our destiny and future.

BLM also induces no small number of corporations to engage with the fight against racism. A global HR director of British publicity company detected the upswing of engagement with tackling racism and constructing "actively anti-racist workplaces" (Folarin 2020). She contends that BLM offers a great chance to make a "deeper structural change" to break racism as "businesses' last taboo" (Folarin 2020) but such serious engagement has been softened as BLM is confused with diversity and inclusion (D&I):

Businesses are starting to talk less in terms of Black Lives Matter and more in terms of diversity and inclusion, as if retreating to a safe space where the subject of racism is more palatable somehow. D&I cannot become a hiding place for BLM (or any movement that deals with issues of race). Racism needs to be called out. If we mask it as another D&I initiative, we excuse ourselves from doing the hard work that's needed; BLM gets diluted into something we're comfortable with and we put our commitment to change at risk. (Folarin 2020)

Her point is suggestive of the pitfall of globally popularized discourses and practices of diversity and inclusion. Much has been said that we are living in the age of diversity. Needless to say, all societies are full of diversity in terms of gender, LGBT/SOGI, race/ethnicity, nationality, age, class, dis/abilities, religion. This is never new but the intensifying flows of people crossing borders, diversification of people's lifestyles and value-orientations as well as social movements to make cultural differences fairly treated have been making diversity in society deepened and more visible. Accompanied with the change is the perception that fostering diversity is vital to enrich corporations, institutions and society as it promotes innovation and creativity. However, it cannot be stressed too much that various differences that make up of diversity in society have been much associated with exclusion, inequality and discrimination under colonialism and modern construction of the nation. To fight against such marginalization, many social movements have been actively formed and enacted such as civil right movement, human rights protection, equal opportunity, anti-racial discrimination and identity politics to make suppressed differences socially recognized and demand just redistribution. The realization of inclusive society that equally treat differences is still far from being a reality. The key question is not how to make use of diversity but whether and how the current prominence of diversity and inclusion sincerely attends to structured inequality and discrimination and strives to eliminate it. Folarin's warning shows how the promotion of diversity and inclusion is apt to be disconnected from such engagement.

2. Critiques of “Diversity”

The rise of “diversity” discourse has been criticized for obscuring structured inequality and discrimination against migrants and long-standing ethnic and racialized minorities. Let me take up three critical approaches to examining how the promotion of diversity is deployed to control and contain differences. The first one is related to the critique of multiculturalism that superficially celebrates diversity. As Hage (1998) argued in the Australian context, ‘ethnic’ culture such as food, music, costume and dance is put onto display to be consumed and approved of in society. While being favorably considered to enrich society, diversity is eventually a matter of being acceptable or tolerable by the majority group. It is “multiculturalism of having,” in which the dominant group can claim the power to control, tolerate, and consume cultural diversity in society in disguise of benevolence without fundamentally changing the social structure. Hage argues that this is opposite to “multiculturalism of being” in which everyone fully recognizes cultural diversity as fundamentally constitutive of society and is responsible for self-reflexively changing their own view of self/other relations and transforming society in an inclusive manner. In the context of the United States, Brown (2008) also argues that multiculturalism is built on majority’s tolerance of differences, which easily turns into rejection and antipathy. This is apt to happen when ethnic and racial minorities challenge the status quo by claiming the elimination of structured inequality and marginalization. This is also related to the rise of modern racism under neoliberalism, which urges the ethnic majority people who experience socio-economic distress to consider that multiculturalism is unfair as it offers material benefits only to the minority, not taking care of ‘us.’

Multiculturalism-related diversity has been perceived more and more un-tolerable as multiculturalism has been severely criticized for being divisive by embracing differences too much in society especially since 9/11. In this situation, the discourse of celebrating diversity has not died out but has been promoted in neoliberal terms in association with the innovation and productivity. Immigration policy has been turning to integration and selection of useful migrants who agree to comply the key socio-cultural norms and values of host society. Accordingly, as Eriksen (2006: 15) points out in North European contexts, the rising attention to diversity takes place with the negative evaluation of differences—“diversity is seen as a good thing, while difference is not.” Difference has come to be considered unwanted collective qualities that is detrimental to social integration and cohesion, while diversity is positively associated with individual’s productive capabilities that enrich society. As Eriksen argues, “there is considerable support for diversity in the public sphere, while difference is increasingly seen as a main cause of social problems associated with immigrants and their descendants” (2006: 14) and it is considered that “diversity is economically profitable and morally harmless...while difference threatens the individualism underpinning and justifying neo-liberalism” (2006: 24). The promotion of diversity and inclusion is in line with this thinking, which tends to obscure lasting structural inequality and discrimination of culturally different others recognized as such, while individualized capabilities of people with diverse backgrounds is considered innovative and productive human resources to economy and society.

Diversity has also been widely deployed as branding strategy of corporations and institutions. Ahmed’s study of diversity campaign in British universities also shows how the promotion of diversity is made at the expense of disengagement with the tackling of ethnic and racial inequality. “The term ‘diversity’ has been understood as a replacement term, taking the place of earlier terms such as ‘equal opportunities’ or ‘antiracism’” (Ahmed 2012: 52) whereby “replacement” functions “as a way of forgetting the histories of struggle that surround these terms” (2012: 201, n.2). Diversity is a positive term and its positivity works to obscure inequality and racism within institutions and society. Unlike “equal opportunities” or “antiracism” that connotes more challenging, confrontational and uncomfortable,

diversity promises the enrichment of institutions, thus encouraging members to affirmatively engage with it and make practitioners use it as action tool to get members to the table of engaging the issue. However, as diversity is expressed as ‘happy talk’ that all differences matter, it also limits the engagement with lingering inequality. As Ahmed (2012: 71) argues, “the very talk about diversity allows individuals to feel good, creating the impression that we have ‘solved it.’ Diversity thus participates in the creation of an illusion of equality”, which operates to obscure and disengage with the issues of lingering inequality and marginalization.

In sum, diversity is actively deployed as it signifies beneficial, productive, harmonious, digestive, feel-good and positive in contrast to difference, which is considered threatening, divisive, damaging, indigestive, confrontational and negative. Diversity is to be promoted as it enriches economy and society in terms of three Ms (merit, market, management) while the issues of structured inequality, gap, discrimination are put into the backstage. The sense of frustration the above HR director expressed about the confusion of BLM and D&I indicates this problematic.

3. Diversity in Japan: slogan without policy engagement

In Japan too, the promotion of ‘diversity’ has been positively taken by many corporations as well as the government and institutions as it is assumed to enhance business innovation and enrich economy and society. Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry publicly announced the “Code of Conduct of Diversity 2.0” (2017) proposing that corporations actively employ more capable women and foreigners to produce added values. Many companies adopt the principle of diversity and inclusion to employ and make use of more diverse human resources in terms of gender, sexuality and nation of origin. The positive image of diversity has urged local governments and related NGOs/NPOs to adopt the slogan of ‘the promotion of diversity’ to replace the former terms such as multicultural co-living and human rights protection. We are required to make case by case investigations to judge whether and how the above critique of diversity could be applied in a specific socio-historical context. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Japan is no exception to widely observed trend that the promotion of diversity is separated from the engagement with inequality and marginalization of differences. Eventually, to put it bluntly, a call for promoting diversity is more of an empty catchphrase in Japan, which does not yet accompany serious reality check to advance diversity and inclusion. For example, the former director of the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic committee, who was a former prime minister, resigned in February 2020 for he made a sexist remark that female members tend to talk too much at the meeting and should have good manners of being reserved. Not just self-claimed feminists but many citizens and some corporations strongly criticized his sexist remark so much so that the director was pushed to resign. This shows the rising concern with such issue in Japan and what drove people into action is the deep sense of frustration with the huge gap between official slogans such as “Creation of a society where women actively work and shine” and “Unity in Diversity” and the reality. Japan’s performance of global gender gap index reported by World Economic Forum (2021) has not been improved but even declining from 110th out of 149 countries in 2019 to 120th out of 156 countries in 2021.

The ample gap between slogan and reality has much to do with the lack of policy initiative to deal with diversity, which is an extra matter to be taken into consideration in the Japanese cases. Most apparent in this regard is the treatment of immigrants and ethnic minorities. There has been no policy initiative in the post-war Japan to handle immigration and multicultural situations. While Japan has been eventually receiving migrants, mostly from Asian regions and Latin American countries especially since late 1980s, the Japanese government officially has neither acknowledged the acceptance of migrants (avoiding using a term *imin* in Japanese) nor developed related policy of social integration. In 2006, the “Committee for

the development of multicultural co-living (*tabunka kyōsei*)” that was established by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications submitted a report “Towards the local development of multicultural co-living” (hereafter the MC report). This was the first initiative of the governmental involvement with immigration and multicultural situations in Japan. In the report, foreign nationals living in Japan was recognized as ‘residents’ of local communities instead of the hitherto notion of ‘foreigners’ living in Japan, implying that they participate and constitute in the local community together with Japanese residents.

The MC report’s highlighting of localities reflects the history of the advancement of *tabunka kyōsei* in Japan where NGOs, NPOs, citizen groups and local governments have been initially engaging to support and care for migrants and ethnic/racial minorities. Actually, the term *kyōsei* has been embraced and evolved through grassroots social movements such as feminism, Minamata disease, indigenous Ainu people since 1970s. The term has been adopted in the late 1980s by some local governments and NGOs and citizens’ groups have worked together to deal with the predicament which ethnic minorities such as resident Koreans and foreign national residents faced who did not enjoy fundamental citizen’s rights. This attests to the significance of grassroots movements and collaboration for the fostering of diversity in Japan where citizenship is fundamentally equated with nationality, based on *jus sanguinis*, and these grass-roots activities in localities have played an important role in the expansion of some citizenship rights for foreign residents. However, this local engagement is an imposed one, it should be emphasized, in the absence of national policy. The MC report has not accompanied any proposal of related national policy to deal with intensifying multicultural situations of Japan. Rather than proposing to advance policy initiative by the government, the report aims to encourage local governments and NGO/NPOs to take the initiative to offer appropriate services for foreign residents. And this situation has not fundamentally changed since then.

It can be called “multicultural co-living without multiculturalism” (Iwabuchi 2010), which encourages the local initiative to handle ethnic diversity without engaging with the development of related national policy. It is rather problematic not least because such local initiatives’ efficacy is limited as local governments and NGOs/NPOs do not have an institutional authority, capability and budget, as the state administers key areas of education, employment, health care and social welfare.¹ Furthermore, the Japanese government actually avoids acknowledging Japan as a multicultural nation and eschews making the multicultural question a national issue. In so doing, a slogan of multicultural co-living plays down the fundamental question of who the members of the nation are and what is diversity in the nation that needs to be taken care of. Adopting the term ‘local residents,’ the MC reports appears to be willing to assist local actors in creating a better social environment where foreign residents can live smoothly and nonthreateningly, but a new category of local residents neither attests to the inclusion of those with cultural differences as members of the national society nor discards the rigidly polarized definition of ‘Japanese’ and ‘foreigners.’ As will be discussed shortly, its usage of ‘foreigners’ also testifies that multicultural co-living policy discussion tends to be forgetful of long-standing ethnic and racial diversity.

¹ A similar situation is seen in the case of the same-sex couples. Japan does not officially approve of the use of different surnames by a married couple, not to mention same-sex marriage. Seventy-four local municipal corporations have adopted same-sex partnership, which is considered a significant development of official recognition of the same-sex couples in the local. Yet, such local initiative is a necessitated one due to the absence of policy initiative and the partnership has no lawful effect in terms of de facto status and inheritance (see Niji Bridge Website n.d.).

4. Critique of the promotion of diversity in Japan

Let us consider how the three critiques of diversity and inclusion as mentioned earlier are applicable to the Japanese situation in which diversity is promoted without any policy initiative. The MC report of multicultural co-living states that people of various nationalities and ethnicities live as members of local communities by striving to mutually recognize differences and construct equal relationships. Like the critique of tolerance for multicultural inclusion as discussed above, the multicultural co-living policy has been much criticized for this advocacy masks structured discrimination and exploitation against migrants while superficially emphasizing ‘multi-culture’ and harmonious co-living among groups of different cultures. It celebrates cultural diversity only for the majority by the majority, which makes no fundamental change to inequality and marginalization migrants and ethnic minorities confront (Hatano 2006). Some rejects multicultural co-living policy discussion for it is too culture-centered to deal with more urgent social and economic predicaments (Kajita et al. 2005). However, the point is that there has been no policy initiative regarding fair recognition of and respect for cultural diversity either such as multicultural education curriculum, anti-racism legalization, and media services that reflect cultural diversity. Thus, the issue at stake in the Japanese situation is not the balance or tension of recognition and redistribution but the lack of engagement with both on the national level. Moreover, a cheerful stress on harmonious co-living among groups of different cultures is rather cosmetic not just because of the posturing celebration of multicultural situations but, more fundamentally, because it keeps the rigidly exclusive assumptions of national membership, which easily turns tolerance of cultural diversity into jingoism and hate against “non-Japanese” (Morris-Suzuki 2003).

Neoliberalist promotion of diversity has become apparent in Japan too. Great performance of Japanese national team in Rugby World Cup 2019 that much excited people in Japan is considered a good example of the productive power of diversity as the national team was made up by the mixture of players of diverse nationalities. Yet this echoes an above-mentioned trend of diversity and inclusion, which stresses beneficial kinds of diversity for the nation to be praised and promoted. Talented foreign workers and graduates are sought after and the government introduced a visa category that enables them to much quickly and easily get permanent residency in Japan. At the same time, the Japanese government revised Immigration Control Act to get more temporary labor migrants under the name of technical intern trainees. They are eventually temporary cheap labor who are not allowed to get permanent residency. Their working conditions are infamously bad and getting even more serious under the Covid-19 crisis. In 2020, Multicultural Co-living has been updated for the first time since 2006. It now includes the catchy words of diversity and inclusion. However, it does not show any sign of developing substantial social integration policy. It does not attend to socio-economic sufferings that many migrant workers confront under the Covid-19 crisis either. Rather the tone has been changing to be more selective of useful migrant workers and stress the self-responsibility of foreign residents to adjust themselves to Japanese society, which implies the eviction of those who are considered hazardous to social cohesion and highly burdensome to social welfare (Shiobara 2019). Japan is also notorious for not accepting refugees and asylum seekers. The Japanese government even tried to revise the Immigration and Refugees Act to make it possible to expel the seekers who make applications more than two times back to their ‘home’. Neoliberalism turn of multicultural co-living discourse thus superficially adopts the global trend of diversity and inclusion while even fortifying the exclusive boundary of Japanese citizen to be embraced.

The promotion of diversity is also positively advocated in ways to mask inequality and racism in Japan. A posed question of how Japan should promote and achieve diversity renders the issue of diversity a future-oriented problem, as if diversity had not been part of Japan so far. Long-standing existence of many ethnic minorities and recent migrants and people of mixed heritages and backgrounds and their

lingering experiences of marginalization tend to be neglected in the discussion of promoting diversity. This point is clearly discerned in the multicultural co-living discourse too. While referring to “people of various nationalities and ethnicities”, it eventually focuses on the recent migrants and disregards long-standing ethnic minorities and those who have Japanese nationalities by birth or by naturalization. This has also much to do with the fact that there is only one single category of ‘Japanese’ vis-à-vis ‘foreigners’ in the national census data. It only shows the number of Japanese nationals and foreign nationals, not showing the details of diverse ethnic/racial background identified as such by those who have been naturalized into Japanese nationals or were born as Japanese nationals while having various ethno-cultural backgrounds. Officially speaking, the number of foreigners living in Japan is 2.8 millions, about two per cent of the whole population. Yet this figure only presents a limited picture of diversity in Japan as it does not include ethnic minorities, Ainu, ‘mixed race’ who have Japanese nationality. If we include those people with diverse ethnic and “racialized” backgrounds, the proportion of ethnic/racial minorities in Japan will be about seven to eight per cent (Mochizuki 2019). The dichotomy of ‘Japanese’ and ‘foreigners’ obscures a real picture of ethnic and racial diversity among Japanese citizens, facilitating a lingering conception of Japan as a racially and ethnically homogeneous nation.

Bipolarized understanding of diversity discourages people from recognizing lingering ethnic and racial discrimination in Japan, which has been eventually on the rise as most clearly shown by hate speech movements against resident Koreans (Iwabuchi 2017). What has been also noticeable is the stubborn rejection of any claim of racism in Japan. BLM movement also captured many people’s concern in Japan and no small number of people, especially younger generation, joined the street demonstration by taking the issue of racism as their own and proposing the elimination of racial discrimination and racist hate speech in Japan as well as in the US and the world. However, even stronger backlash was also observed with remarks that there is no such racism in Japan as in the US and racism has thus little or nothing to do with ‘us’ despite mundane existence of racism and hate speech in Japan (“Hate lurking” 2021). Same reaction was also noted when Nike made a branding advertisement that depicts three young women athletes overcoming the suffering of social bullying and discrimination by sports, two of whose parent(s) seem to be from Korea and Africa. Japanese media rarely deal with racialized discrimination and thus the advertisement attract much praise for confronting it. But even stronger is negative reactions, which propose to boycott Nike products by claiming that Nike depresses Japan without any evidence as Japan has no such discrimination. It should also be noted that most corporations keep silent with the issue of racism and BLM, much less actively involved with the issues compared to Euro-American counterparts (“How corporations” 2020). In this sense, the fundamental problem in Japan is not the confusion of BLM and D&I as pointed out by Florina in the UK. Rather it is the absence of publicly shared awareness of the mundane existence of racism and discrimination and how it is a serious social issue that needs to be tackled. Japan has not just developed substantial policy of immigration and social integration but also shown no willingness to develop comprehensive anti-discrimination laws despite the warning of UN council about lingering and even amplifying racial discrimination and hate speech in Japan. Japanese government’s disinclination to tackle lingering and even deteriorating ethnic and racial discrimination has much to do with the widespread disinterest in the issue and bipolarized understanding of diversity in terms of ‘Japanese’ and ‘foreigners’ among the populace.

5. Critically Dialoguing with Diversity

The critique of the promotion of diversity does not mean to reject the uses of ‘diversity’ or deny it altogether. Rejecting the promotion of diversity is not constructive, especially now that antipathy against multiculturalism, migration and diversity has been capturing the support of ethnically majority people

who nevertheless feel socio-economically marginalized or not fairly attended to. The positive tone of diversity might be tactically helpful to create a chance to involve hitherto unconcerned people (see Ahmed 2012). In Japan, the promotion of diversity at the least makes the marginalized and suppressed differences more visible and some activists and groups take it a good opportunity to progress social movement to eliminate inequality and marginalization in association with difference. Some corporations have organized seminars and symposiums to relate the issue of diversity to that of historically constituted inequality and marginalization and discuss the corporations' social responsibility to engage with their elimination.² Critique is neither indiscriminate rejection nor incompatible with positive affirmation. As Ahmed (2012: 17) discusses, diversity is problematic as it is presented "as a solution". Rather, "we need to keep asking what we are doing with diversity." I would like to conclude this paper by proposing to keep on dialoguing with diversity, not to discard it, so that various kinds of differences are mutually recognized and equally included.

First and foremost, we need to make critical reviews of the discourse of diversity to tackle inequality and marginalization in relation to differences as I have done so far. Key questions are what kinds of diversity is promoted, what are missing and suppressed, which issues are obscured and whether and how the promotion of diversity is dissociated with historically structured marginalization and inequality and it newly induces exclusionary power dynamics. In the Japanese context in which policy engagement with immigration and multicultural issues has been decidedly under-developing, these critiques are indispensable to advance an urgent task to make the government officially acknowledge Japan as a nation of immigrants and with substantial ethnic and racial diversity and develop related policy and laws to prevent discrimination and marginalization with penalty. Towards this to happen, critical appraisal of the promotion of diversity needs to be widely shared in society and the grass-roots critical engagement with diversity should be further fostered. And this point is related to other three suggestions.

Second, attending to and understanding of various kinds of discrimination and marginalization across various subjects as structurally interconnected. The promotion of diversity obviously gives the priority to some kinds of differences while neglecting others. Gender, LGBT and disabilities might be attracting more public attention than migrants and ethnic minorities. Others such as those who have difficulties to live in society due to poverty, bullying and adjustment disorder are not included in the discussion of diversity. The new female director of Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic promised to seriously engage the promotion of diversity and raised the ratio of female committee members up to 40%. However, nothing has been mentioned or done regarding ethnic and racialized diversity within Japan though it is also a key constituent of the slogan of "unity in diversity". The development of local approval of same-sex partnership is also criticized that some local governments use the partnership for the purpose of local branding while suppressing other kinds of diversity such as poverty and homeless people in the local (Shimizu 2017). The promotion of diversity thus does not just conceal lingering inequality and discrimination but also creates a hierarchy of acceptance and hinders the facilitation of solidarity among marginalized people, based on the principle of divide and rule. How to foster empathy, dialogue and collaboration among diverse marginalized people is not an easy task as the experience of marginalization rather varies and becomes more and more individualized. And most of them are desperately overcoming one's own dire straits so much so that they do not afford to attend to others' suffering. However, if the ultimate aim of promoting diversity is making everyone with diverse socio-cultural backgrounds enjoy their lives without suffering from inequality, discrimination and exclusion, the fostering of the manners of mutual listening to and understanding of diverse kinds of difficulties to live would be desirable to enhance solidarity and collaboration by encouraging people relate one's own difficulties to others. And

² See, e.g., "Diversity ABC to learn from scratch" (2017).

this is crucial especially in Japan where no substantial policy to protect human rights from anti-action against people with differences.

The second point also suggests that to fully tackle the issues of diversity-related inequality and marginalization requires the solving all issues at once as they are structurally related to each other. In this respect, the idea of intersectionality is helpful to promote complicated understanding of diversity, encouraging people to nurture social imagination of others' sufferings, and foster collaboration and solidarity across differences. Intersectionality problematizes assumed homogeneity of category of gender, LGBT, race, ethnicity, class and attends to how various kinds of inequality and marginalization are not separated from each other but intersect to exert actual inequality and marginalization on particular subjects.³ The experience of Black men or white women is not same as that of Black women in which at least two related issues of race and gender intersect. It looks into unnoticeable power relations within a particular category, which actually operate across sections and categories. Such understanding illuminates the necessity to tackle all kinds of inequality and marginalization at once, as they are mutually constitutive. It also fosters intersectional imagination of other kinds of inequality and marginalization, to which one appears not to be related, as being different but fundamentally associated. As Shimizu (2021) argues with reference to Ahmed's "an affinity of hammers" (2016), simultaneously destroying adjoining walls, which is structurally connected to and sustain other walls, would open up the radical possibility of intersectional solidarity. Shimizu's point is made regarding feminist critique of transphobia, but it has wider implications for other subjects, issues and categories.

Last but not the least, how to put above critical insights into mundane praxis is crucial so as to involve as many citizens as possible in active engagement with diversity. While people in the center tend to be unconscious of the privileges they enjoy, widespread socio-economic distress under neoliberalism has made no small number of ethnic majority people feel that they are deprived and become frustrated with welfare benefit the ethnic minority and migrants claim and enjoy. The idea of intersectionality has been adopted in educational practices that encourage people to realize the complexity of when and how they hold privilege (Case 2013). It is also necessary to let people realize that anyone can be put in some position of marginalization and caring for others' suffering ultimately benefits themselves as the idea of altruism contends. In any case, it is crucial to develop public pedagogy so that people with diverse backgrounds and social locations nurture the sense of "our" problems to be tackled in society for lingering inequality and marginalization others experience. Many social actors other than schoolteachers such as museum, artists, media practitioners, NGOs/NPOs, citizen networks and local governments have been already engaging with and advancing pedagogical practices across sections and borders. University researchers and teachers should more actively collaborate with them to further advance public pedagogy across sections and borders (see Iwabuchi 2018).

Diversity enriches society and institutions. It is not just because the use of diverse human resources will enhance innovation but, more significantly, because the tackling with inequality and marginalization related to diversity will make everyone enjoy life and work without being marginalized and deprived. Such societal situation would be the very foundation that creative vigor and innovation of society is generated in the long run. The current situation is far from the ideal. Yet Covid-19 has not just illuminated widening gaps of haves and have-nots but also encouraged many people to be more caring for others' suffering by considering them as 'our' problem. Critical dialogue with diversity will further foster such a sign into a radical hope and into actual social changes.

³ As for the definition of intersectionality, see Collins & Chepp (2013). As for original key works that conceptualize intersectionality, see Crenshaw (1988) and Collins (1990).

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Language reform, social imaginaries, interlocutor reference*

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Abstract Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote that “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.” Here I suggest that the inverse is also true: to imagine a form of life involves imagining a language, or at least, a way of speaking. More specifically, I argue that those who imagine an alternative way life very often target the practices of interlocutor reference (reference to speaker and addressee of an utterance) for reform, apparently seeing such practices as in various ways constitutive of their social existence, including their relations with others. I discuss some of the ways in which thinking about language is constrained and shaped by the very character of language itself. I then turn to consider two cases in which advocates for social change sought to bring about a hoped-for future through reform of the practices of interlocutor reference.

Keywords interlocutor reference; linguistic anthropology; language reform; Quakers; Vietnamese.

1. Introduction

Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009 [1953]: 11) suggested that “to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.” By “a language” Wittgenstein apparently meant a finite set of practices – e.g., asking and answering questions, giving orders etc. – such as he had discussed in the immediately preceding sections of the *Philosophical Investigations*. While what he meant by “a form of life” is less obvious (see Hacker 2015), it is nevertheless clear that Wittgenstein was concerned primarily, here as elsewhere, with what are commonly termed ‘thought experiments’, exercises of the imagination as a method of philosophical elucidation. Approaching things from a quite different direction, Benedict Anderson (1983) described the way in which, during the 17th and 18th centuries, Europeans came to imagine the nation as a bounded, sovereign and fraternal community composed of persons who understand themselves to be related to one another not through occasions of interpersonal contact but rather by virtue of their common participation in print capitalism. Likewise, with his notion of social imaginary, philosopher Charles Taylor (2002: 106) points to the ways in which ordinary people (i.e., not philosophers doing philosophy) think about “their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met”, all this being most often expressed not in theoretical terms, but “in images, stories, and legends.” What Taylor and Anderson have in common, and what distinguishes their interest from that of Wittgenstein, then, is a concern with the social functions of imagination, the uses to which it is put.

Now, although Taylor (2002: 107) notes that the understandings which make up the social imaginary are both “factual” and “normative”, his emphasis is squarely on “the background”: “that largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world become evident.” This, according to Taylor (2002: 107), “can never be adequately expressed in the form of explicit doctrines because of its very unlimited and indefinite nature.” My focus in what

follows, in contrast, is on more explicitly articulated projects which seek to close the gap between the way things are now and the way they might be in some hoped-for future alternative. These collective acts of imagination are, in other words, attempts to bring about a way of life, they are ethical projects in the broadest sense. Moreover, I aim to show that, to paraphrase and invert Wittgenstein, imagining a form of social life very often involves imagining a language (or at least a way of speaking), and for good reason.

Language mediates much of our experience (if not our perceptions, then certainly our *conceptions*), and all of our social relations (though perhaps not in their entirety). Our social relations with others are mediated by language in at least two ways. First, when we encounter others, we engage with them primarily through language and our relations are, in large part at least, constituted by the way we talk (etc.) to them and what we say (etc.) to them (see, *inter alia*, Rosaldo 1982, Agha 2007). Adopting the otherwise problematic practice of glossing action for purposes of exposition we can ask, for any encounter, do we confide in the other or confront them? Do we comfort the other or complain to them? Do we praise the other or placate them? Or, to take an example from Taylor (2002: 109), do we meet them with humble supplication, forceful protest or the threat of armed insurrection?¹ While the details are complex, the general outline is clear: our ways of speaking, to various degrees formalized (Bloch 1975), are largely constitutive of our relations with others. Second, language mediates social relations in so far as it provides a means by which to classify, to group, and thus also to typify the others that make up the social world (see Rumsey 2014). Some are ‘brothers’, others are ‘sisters.’ Some are ‘siblings’, others are ‘cousins.’ Some are ‘well-meaning neighbors’, others are ‘nosy parkers’ (see Kockelman 2013). These two ways in which language mediates our social relations – through modes of engagement and through forms of typification – converge in the practices of speaker and addressee reference, or, interlocutor reference which form the focus of my discussion here.² Not surprisingly such practices often bear much of the weight of a social imaginary and, as I discuss below, they are a frequent target of reform in efforts to bring about a hoped-for way of life.

2. (Meta)-semiotic constraints on the linguistic imagination, or, why interlocutor reference?

To imagine a language is to engage in metasemiotic reflection, that is, to use signs to think and talk about other signs, and such discourse about language is universally subject to various kinds of systematic distortion. For instance, as Michael Silverstein (1979) noted a referential bias is apparent in that, when we think and talk about what someone did in saying something, we draw upon a vocabulary of ‘speech act’ verbs to do so. Just as speakers project onto ‘time’ the referential structure of a maximally expanded noun phrase (e.g., “500 days of summer”, “just a moment of your time” etc.) so they project onto ‘action’ the

¹ Two problems with such glosses can be mentioned. First, there’s no reason to believe that we in any way rely on such terms (e.g., confide and complain) in producing the action that might (adequately and accurately but not uniquely) be described by them. And, when so describing them, we are inevitably doing something in addition to simply ‘describing action’ (e.g., we are assigning blame or holding someone accountable for telling our secret). Second, as I discuss in the next section, the range of things we can accomplish through talking and the range of ways in which we can accomplish them always exceeds by a wide margin the limited vocabulary we have available for describing what we do. This introduces various kinds of systematic distortion which shapes reanalysis through reflexive semiotic processes.

² The two modes of mediation converge here in so far as ways of speaking are often, perhaps always, conceptually tied to typified roles, thus, “don’t talk to your father like that!”, or the as the title of one popular book has it, *How to Talk So Teens Will Listen and Listen So Teens Will Talk*.

referential structure of speech reporting (e.g., “He {said to/ordered me to/asked me to/requested that I, etc.} go.”). It is, however, not only the semiotic properties of the instrument of representation that exert a distorting effect, but also the semiotic properties of the represented object itself (i.e., particular modes of language function). Thus, in a related discussion from the same period, Silverstein (1981: 2) suggests that, “(f)or the native speaker, the ease or difficulty of accurate metapragmatic characterization of the use of the forms of his or her own language seems to depend on certain general semiotic properties of the use in question.” He goes on to identify five factors that appear to shape and partially constrain metasemiotic (and specifically, metapragmatic) reflection. Simplifying a complex argument in a few sentences, Silverstein proposed that native speakers exhibit greater awareness of language functions that (1) can be identified with continuously segmentable elements of speech (e.g., words and continuous phrases rather than discontinuous grammatical constructions such as English progressive or passive), that (2) unavoidably refer (e.g., *formal* vs. *familiar* pronouns rather than phonetic markers of region or socio-economic class), and that (3) are relatively presupposing by virtue of being linked to some “independently verifiable contextual factor” (e.g., English demonstratives such as ‘this’ or ‘that’ rather than markers of politeness or deference).³ In the present context, all these factors converge to make the practices of interlocutor reference available for native speaker reflection and comment and, by extension, a target for reform.⁴

This brings us to what is, perhaps, the central insight of contemporary linguistic anthropology: language use involves a complex relationship between object signs through which interaction appears, to users, to be conducted, and metasigns by which the significance of such object signs is construed. In the most obvious case, metasigns take the form of explicit metapragmatic discourse that glosses in so many words the object signs. This includes everything from in-situ responses such as, “So you’re saying that it’s okay to skip to the front of the line?”, “How dare you!”, “That’s not what I meant”, “I’m not asking you to come down” to more distal and generic discourse such as “You should always say please and thank you”, “Never use the passive where you can use the active”, even, “Just be yourself”. In the more common and more complex case, a textual configuration of co-occurring object signs implicitly and metasemiotically construes the very object signs of which it is composed. For instance, when, at the beginning of a phone call to a friend, the speaker says, “we do sign painting, antiquing...” she thereby casts the talk of the moment as a part of a commercial exchange or service call.⁵

³ The other two factors Silverstein identifies are: (4) *decontextualized deducibility* (e.g., “my brother” entails, “I have a brother”), and (5) *metapragmatic transparency* (i.e., “the degree to which the same form is used both to produce some pragmatic effect and to describe it, e.g., “I promise to stop talking soon” vs. “just a few more minutes” as a commitment to conclude an academic presentation). It must be admitted that there’s some wooliness to all of this and not much empirical evidence, either in Silverstein’s original discussion or in the subsequent literature, to support the argument. The notion of *relatively presupposing* is particularly mercurial – deference, for instance, is given as an example of a relatively presupposing indexical function in 1979 and as a relatively creative one in 1981. This apparent inconsistency can, no doubt, be fudged by reference to the “relatively” qualifier, but it nevertheless points to the fact that these ideas are better thought of as suggestions for further investigation than as research findings *per se*.

⁴ Although it is worth noting that, in some languages, interlocutor reference is achieved by elements that are discontinuous (e.g., marked both by an independent pronoun and verbal agreement) and in which such functions are fused with others (e.g., marked only by verbal agreement which simultaneously conveys tense or mood).

⁵ More subtle still are practices which involve recognizable avoidance of a form (e.g., a tabooed name, a word referring to a sacred or profane object, a term considered vulgar etc.) thereby drawing attention to, and contextualizing, what is said.

A crucial point here is that while there are indefinitely many ways to perform action and to convey social alignments in talk, the means for describing or typifying such actions and alignments is always limited. In the case of lexicalized speech act verbs and social role designators the means are strictly finite and while combinatorial possibilities allow for more complex and more nuanced descriptions, practically speaking, this can be taken only so far (see Agha 2007: 97).

In relation to the focus of the current discussion, we can note that while speakers exhibit a high degree of awareness of the practices of interlocutor reference and thus frequently make them the target of reform, their reflective understanding of the way these forms function is always limited in various ways. Two such kinds of limitation can be very briefly pointed to here. First, as Silverstein (2003) insisted, for interlocutor reference forms such as the “familiar” T and “formal” V pronouns of many European languages, the proper unit of analysis is not the individual occurrence of one or the other pronoun but a minimal two turn sequence of symmetrical or asymmetrical exchange. That is, the significance of French *tu* is, at least in part, determined by the form used, by the one referred to, in return. Simplifying somewhat, if *tu* is reciprocated this casts the original usage as “familiar” whereas if it is not, and the speaker responds instead with *vous*, this casts the first form as “condescending” or “superior” etc. Second, an interlocutor reference form always occurs along with other co-occurring signs which serve to contextualize it.⁶ For instance, when then President Nicolas Sarkozy responded to a man who refused to shake his hand during an annual agricultural fair with, “Casse-toi pauvre con!”, it was, in part, the configuration of co-textual and contextual signs that gave his use of *toi* its deeply insulting significance.⁷

3. “The pronouns of power and solidarity”, revisited

In their classic work of sociolinguistic analysis, “Pronouns of power and solidarity” (1960), Roger Brown and Albert Gilman considered the use of T and V forms (from Latin *tu* and *vos*, e.g. French *tu* and *vous*) in a number of European languages including French, German and Italian, describing an historical shift from what they called a “power semantic” in which the default was for asymmetrical usage indicating a difference of status (based on age, social station etc.) to a “solidarity semantic” in which the default pattern is for symmetrical usage with reciprocal T indicating familiarity (or solidarity) and reciprocal V indicating distance. And they further suggested that, from an historical perspective, “the nonreciprocal power

⁶ As Agha (2007: 307) puts it: “Honorific lexemes (...) are neither deployed nor encountered as isolated signs in events of interaction. They are relevant to social interaction only under conditions of textuality or co-occurrence with other signs. The range of effects – and social relations – that are enactable under these conditions is much larger than the range of functions reportable by language users in explicit stereotypes of use. In every language the actual use of honorific lexemes serves many interactional agendas such as control and domination, irony, innuendo, masked aggression, and other types of socially meaningful behaviors that ideologies of honor and respect do not describe. Yet the common-sense stereotype that these forms are ‘honorific’ in value nonetheless shapes default perceptions of their social relevance.”

⁷ With respect to the first point that the unit of analysis minimally comprises a two-part exchange, it may be noted that Sarkozy’s insult was produced as the fourth turn in the following dialogue:

Sarkozy: ((reaches out to touch the man’s arm))

Farmer: Ah non, touche-moi pas.

Sarkozy: Casse-toi alors.

Farmer: Tu me salis.

Sarkozy: Casse-toi alors pauvre con.

It is, then, the farmer who uses the T form first, conjugating the verb as *touche* rather than *touchez*.

semantic” is associated with a “relatively static society in which power is distributed by birthright and is not subject to much redistribution” (Brown & Gilman 1960: 264). The “reciprocal solidarity semantic”, on the other hand, emerged in the context of greater social mobility and the development of an egalitarian ideology. And in some cases, such as France, there were attempts to bring about more abrupt changes. Brown and Gilman (1960: 264) write:

In France the nonreciprocal power semantic was dominant until the Revolution when the Committee for the Public Safety condemned the use of *V* as a feudal remnant and ordered a universal reciprocal *T*. On October 31, 1793, Malbec made a Parliamentary speech against *V*: “Nous distinguons trois personnes pour le singulier et trois pour le pluriel, et, au mépris de cette regie, l’esprit de fanatisme, d’orgueil et de feodalité, nous a fait contracter l’habitude de nous servir de la seconde personne du pluriel lorsque nous parlons à un seul”.⁸ For a time revolutionary “fraternité” transformed all address into the mutual *Citoyen* and the mutual *tu*. Robespierre even addressed the president of the Assembly as *tu*. In later years solidarity declined and the differences of power which always exist everywhere were expressed once more.

In their attempts to bring about the new form of life which they imagined, Malbec and Robespierre sought to change the way in which reference to the addressee was accomplished. As Brown and Gilman note, this proposed reform was not maintained for long, even if it did take hold initially, and “differences of power” continued to be expressed through pronoun selection. And there have been many such attempts to institute reform since. For instance, Robert Lacoste, who, in 1958, was the French Minister Residing in Algeria, was concerned to safeguard “the self-respect and dignity of that territory’s Moslem population” (Gilman & Brown 1958: 169). As a first step, he urged Frenchmen to address Muslims with the pronoun *vous* rather than with *tu* as was customary.⁹ And similarly, in an essay from 1932 titled *Politique d’égards* (‘The politics of respect’), writer, translator and editor Phạm Quỳnh suggested that the common practice of French colonists using *tu* (*tutoiement*) in addressing indigenous colonial subjects revealed an underlying ideology of Vietnamese inferiority (see Vu 2020). These examples involve the imagination of possible futures; one in which all address one another with *tu* (Malbec, Robespierre), one in which colonists address colonial subjects as *vous* (Lacoste, Phạm Quỳnh). As Morford (1997) shows, in contemporary France, such future-oriented thinking often gives way to nostalgia, with speakers imagining a time in the past when the pronouns were used differently and, to their minds, more judiciously. One way this is expressed is in complaints about current patterns of usage which, in their simplest form, amount to the assertion that, “now everyone says *tu*”.

In the European context, English is, of course, something of an outlier in the sense that the contemporary language has essentially lost the honorific distinction and also in the sense that the bimodal system eventually (sometime in the 17th century) resolved to the *V* rather than the *T* form. In his classic historical ethnography of Quaker language use in the 17th century, Richard Bauman (1983) situates their practices of addressee reference in relation to a broader set of linguistic reforms that they instituted under the banner of ‘plain speech’. Bauman’s focus is on those aspects of verbal style which challenged the “very fabric of social relations and social interaction” (1983: 43). This includes Quaker rejection of all honorific titles, their refusal to participate in mundane rituals of greeting and leave-taking and their insistence on

⁸ “We distinguish three persons for the singular and three for the plural, and, in defiance of this rule, the spirit of fanaticism, pride and feudalism, has led us to the use of the second person plural when we speak to a single person”.

⁹ Gilman and Brown (1958: 169) write: “The French, in all their African colonies, have been accustomed to say *tu* to the native population and to receive *vous* from them. This is a galling custom for those who receive the *tu* -so galling that a law has been passed against it”.

addressing everyone with *thou*. For the Quakers, in other words, the form of life they imagined was to be brought about, in part, through adjustments to otherwise ordinary and customary ways of speaking.

Bauman shows that these proposals for reform were supported by two kinds of rationale. On the one hand, the Quakers suggested that to address someone as ‘master’ who was not, in fact, one’s master amounted to a lie. Similarly, to refer to oneself as alter’s ‘humble servant’ was contrary to truth and therefore an affront to God. In 1663, Benjamin Furly wrote (cited in Bauman 1983: 57) of titles that are “flattering and blasphemous, in which the honour of God is attributed to man whose breath is in his nostrils”. These, Furly goes on to say, “we own not, and do trample upon that deceitful mind from whence they came” (qtd. in Bauman 1983: 57). Again, to wish someone who was not a Quaker and therefor living a less than completely spiritual life, ‘Good day’ or ‘God speed’ was tantamount to lying. And, of course, by the same logic, to refer to a single addressee as ‘you’ rather than ‘thou’ was to engage in falsity – ‘you’ should be used only when speaking to more than one person. George Fox (1831: 181), one of the founders of the Religious Society of Friends, remarked, in his epistle 191:

All Friends every where, that are convinced with truth, and profess it, and own it; keep to the single language, (...), if man or woman seek to get gain by speaking the improper, untrue language, and flattering language of the world, which is in confusion, the Lord may take that gain away from them. For plural and singular was the language of God, and Christ, and all good men, and of the prophets and apostles; (...). And so all Friends, train up your children in the same singular and plural language; all masters, mistresses, and dames, or whatsoever ye are called, that do take Friends’ children, that are in the singular and plural language, it is not fit for you to bring them out of it, neither to force nor command them otherwise, to please your customers, nor to please men.

Here Fox makes it clear that the use of ‘you’ in referring to a singular addressee is contrary to truth and thus an affront to God (“For plural and singular was the language of God, and Christ...”). But Fox also brings in the other argument which Quakers drew upon in justifying their proposed linguistic reforms. Specifically, the use of ‘you’ is cast as “flattering language” employed so as at effect “gain” by “pleasing” the one so addressed. Such ways of speaking were thus seen to build up earthly pride, lust and self-will in those to whom they were directed and, so, by refusing to engage in such practices, Quakers understood themselves to be performing a service to others. As Ellwood wrote in 1676, in defense of plain speech, “Let the ax therefore be laid to the root of this custom, which is, pride, ambition, haughtiness, flattery; and no further controversy will ever sprout from it” (cited in Bauman 1983: 55).

Unfortunately, those others rarely saw the Quakers’ – for the time – bizarre conduct in this light.¹⁰ Rather, they were described as rude, discourteous, disrespectful and so on (Bauman 1983: 55). As such, adopting the practices of plain speech came to be seen as a burden, as a “cross to bear”. But far from discourage adherents from so speaking, the resistance they met only reinforced their resolve – this struggle was accommodated to the more general idea that salvation would necessarily require sacrifice and even mortification, “flesh must be brought low so that the spirit might prevail” (Bauman 1983: 55). Looking back later in life, George Fox recalled that the Quakers were “in danger many times of our lives, and often beaten, for using those words to some proud men, who would say, ‘Thou’st “thou” me, thou ill-bred clown,’ as though their breeding lay in saying ‘you’ to a singular” (cited in Bauman 1983: 50).

The historical irony in this is that while the Quaker way of addressing did not spread beyond their own community (and in fact was eventually abandoned even by the Quakers themselves) it nevertheless triggered other highly consequential changes. Specifically, the use of *thou* came to serve as an indexical

¹⁰ Bauman (1983) makes the point that, in the 17th century, social interaction, at least among higher social classes, was governed by an elaborate and strict sense of etiquette.

marker of the speaker's Quaker identity thus motivating others to avoid it, "lest they be mistaken for members of the sect" (Silverstein 1985: 251). The result, as they say, 'is history' – a language in which, unlike its closest relatives, there is no honorific marking in pronominal reference to the addressee.

4. Phan Khôi's arguments for language reform in 1930s Vietnam

In June 1930, a prominent Vietnamese man of letters, editor, and translator named Phan Khôi initiated what was to become a series of essays addressed to matters of language and language reform. Across them, Phan Khôi discussed what he saw as serious problems in the structure and use of Vietnamese that had emerged as obstacles to the modernizing social reform for which he, along with many of his contemporaries, advocated.

The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of quickened change and profound social transformation in Vietnam, especially within intellectual circles. Before the 1900s both education and advanced literacy were elite pursuits available only to a small number of Vietnamese people. Mandarins, trained in the classics of high Chinese civilization, monopolized intellectual life and wielded considerable influence as administrators at all levels of the colonial government. Then, in an effort to undermine the power and prestige of the Mandarins along with the practices of literacy upon which it was largely predicated, the French colonial government introduced local schools and, eventually, the Romanized Vietnamese script that came to be known as *quốc ngữ* 'National Script'. Within twenty years, *quốc ngữ* had all but completely replaced the old system for writing Vietnamese which involved using Chinese characters in somewhat idiosyncratic and often cryptic ways to represent Vietnamese words. The emergence of *quốc ngữ* (which had been invented some 250 years earlier by Jesuit missionaries Alexandre de Rhodes and Francisco de Pina) coincided with the availability of modern printing technology and the result was an explosion of literacy. In 1918, Emperor Khải Định issued a declaration abolishing the traditional writing system based on Chinese characters.¹¹ And in 1919, the colonial government suppressed the Confucian examination system, thereby forcing Vietnamese elites to educate their children either in French, Vietnamese or some combination of the two.

It was in this context, that Phan Khôi launched a series of arguments for language rationalization and reform. In 'The doctrine of correct names, rectifying name usage among the Vietnamese' (*Theo thuyết chánh danh, đính chánh lại cách xưng tên của người Việt Nam*), published in 1930, he drew upon Confucian ideas about name rectification to shore up his proposal for what he saw as the correct use of nouns and names for persons in particular, advancing a series of proposals such as: "One person should have only one name" (*Một người nên chỉ có một tên mà thôi*) and "A name should be used to refer to its bearer" (*Tên, phải kêu theo chủ nó*), in both cases challenging long standing practices within the linguistic community.

The following year, Phan Khôi addressed the problem more directly in an article titled, "A custom which, if not abandoned, becomes inconvenient: The custom of name taboo" (*Một cái tục, nếu không bỏ đi thì bất tiện: Tục kiêng tên*). Here he reiterated many of the more general concerns he had articulated in 1930. He also suggested that Vietnamese society was in a "transition period": people had been introduced to some innovations and new ways but, at the same time, still held onto many old practices. Some of these enduring traditions were inconsequential, according to Phan Khôi, but others, such as the name taboo, were a matter of extreme inconvenience.

Across these essays, along with others which I have not discussed, Phan Khôi argued for a largely pragmatic approach to modernizing reform, the goal of which was the enhancement and development of

¹¹ On literacy and rates of publication see Marr (1981) and McHale (2004).

a language that would meet the demands of science, literature, politics as well as public discussion and debate. Along with many of his contemporaries, Phan Khôi clearly saw in Vietnamese and *quốc ngữ* potentially potent symbols of nationalism but his primary interest was in language not as symbol but as instrument, as a means to rational, public deliberation and debate (see Cody 2011). And in this respect, nowhere was the need for reform more apparent than in the terms used to refer to participants in communication.

Before turning to consider Phan Khôi's suggestions in this domain, we must first briefly sketch some important characteristics of Vietnamese. In English, a speaker refers to him or herself, almost always, using the first person singular pronoun in the nominative, *I*, accusative, *me*, or genitive, *my*. The addressee is referred to by means of the second person singular pronoun *you*. As discussed above, the national languages of Europe mostly follow this pattern although some allow for alternation between a so-called T and a so-called V variant in the second person (e.g., French *tu* and *vous*).

In Vietnamese the situation is quite radically different. In most situations, speakers avoid using pronouns altogether preferring instead various common nouns, most prominently kin terms. So rather than, “*I* see *you* are already quite old” a Vietnamese speaker might say, “Younger sibling (*em*) sees elder brother (*anh*) is already quite old”. Kinterms such as *em* ‘younger sibling’ and *anh* ‘elder brother’ (along with those which denote ‘elder sister’, ‘mother’s brother’, ‘father’s sister’ and so on) are used across a wide range of contexts and with persons who are not genealogically related to the speaker (see Luong 1990 for the definitive account).

Consequently, it's all but impossible to say anything in Vietnamese without simultaneously, and quite explicitly, positioning oneself in relation to the addressee. Moreover, as Luong (1990: 5) pointed out, “In the metalinguistic awareness of virtually all native speakers, person reference constitutes the most salient domain through which interactional contexts are structured and partly in terms of which the native sociocultural universe is reproduced and transformed.” In other words, this is a highly significant and highly fraught domain of social and interactional life, one that is subject to near constant scrutiny through various kinds of reflexive meta-semiotic discourse. And, as Luong (1990: 5) goes on to note, “this metalinguistic awareness is considerably heightened in the modern era” and with the rise of various forms of mediated communication since in this situation speakers must choose “among alternative person-referring forms without being able to ascertain the contextual features which the choice of any of the alternative forms entails, presupposes, and implies.”

Thus, one obvious and common complaint about the Vietnamese system is that it forces interactants to constantly signal their hierarchical relation to one another. Such complaints cast Vietnamese as serving the interests of power and social control by forcing some to make explicit and thereby ratify their own subordinate position. When the Việt Minh came to power in the 1940s they focused on precisely this aspect of the system and sought to reform the language in such a way as to level out social relations and minimize differentiation (see Luong 1988). Interestingly, Phan Khôi, ever the moderate, focused attention elsewhere.

For Phan Khôi, the Vietnamese system of person-reference was in need of reform not because it reinforced relations of power but rather because it was inconvenient, and created serious obstacles to public, and especially, written discourse. Phan Khôi was so concerned with this issue that he made his argument for reform twice, once in 1930 in the pages of the periodical *Women's News* and then again 25 years later in a book on the Vietnamese language.

The discussion from 1930, titled “Ways of using pronouns” and appearing as one entry in a series titled *Rules of Writing*, begins with Phan Khôi asserting “Pronouns are used to replace nouns” (1930: 13) and then going on to suggest that in written communication, it is inconvenient to use a noun repeatedly thus making pronouns necessary. But, he continues, what's more convenient still is to have pronouns that

are both “unanimously agreed upon” and “universally used” (1930: 13). French provides an example of such a pronominal system according to Phan Khôi. “[...] the three singular persons are *je, tu, il*; and the plural forms are *nous, vous, ils*. Anyone may use these forms to refer to himself, and to refer to all others. There is no other special way” (1930: 13).

And, although in classical Chinese pronouns were “very troublesome” (1930: 13), in the contemporary language modelled after Mandarin, the custom is to use pronouns that are “unanimous, universal and also convenient” in Phan Khôi’s estimation (1930: 13). Vietnamese on the other hand “is still at the troublesome stage of Classical Chinese” (1930: 13). It is worth reproducing Phan Khôi’s diagnosis of the problem in full:

While especially true of the second person, the third person and all the singular and the plural forms are like this, it depends on the person addressed (*kêu* ‘call’). A worthy gentleman is *ông* (lit. ‘grandfather’), a worthy lady is *bà* (lit. ‘grandmother’), a worthy elder man is *anh* (lit. ‘elder brother’) [...], it is all very troublesome. While this causes few difficulties in speaking, in writing it is inconvenient in every way. Our language is like that. We are accustomed to it. It does not strike us as strange. But people from other countries, they must find it very odd indeed (1930: 13).

Phan Khôi’s critique thus revolves around the notions of “convenience” and “inconvenience” particularly in relation to writing and written communication and his argument for language reform is not framed in terms of social and political issues, at least not in the usual sense.¹² In other words, Phan Khôi does not criticize the Vietnamese system of person reference because it highlights, legitimizes and serves to reproduce differences of status and social hierarchy. And the changes he proposes, unlike those introduced by the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam some twenty years later (see Luong 1988, Keane 2016), are not meant to minimize such differences and so encourage more egalitarian social relations. Rather, his concern is with what he sees as the communicative inconvenience of the present system. And Phan Khôi locates this system in an historical chronology when he suggests that Vietnamese “is still at the troublesome stage of Classical Chinese”.

Both these aspects of Phan Khôi’s argument are elaborated in his later discussion. There, Phan Khôi suggests that at some time in the distant past, kings and commoners addressed each other using plain pronouns that conveyed nothing about the differences between them in terms of status and station. Phan Khôi then goes on to suggest that his goal is to discover the “the original, primitive (*nguyên thủy*) language of the Vietnamese people” (1955). He identifies this, in the first place, with “proverbs and folk songs” proposing that in those forms of verbal art we might find “some trace of the ancient pronouns”. After giving some examples to suggest that, in such verbal genres plain pronouns are commonly used, he goes on to “boldly put forth the hypothesis” that ancient Vietnamese, “from the time of the Hồng Bàng dynasty for example”, had neutral pronouns (1955).¹³ The Hồng Bàng dynasty is a semi-mythical period in Vietnamese historiography, spanning more than 2500 years from the beginning of the rule of Kinh Dương Vương over the state of Văn Lang in 2879 BC until the conquest of the state by An Dương Vương in 258 BC. According to Phan Khôi during this time, reference to speaker and hearer was always

¹² The words used here are *bất tiện* which I gloss as ‘inconvenient’ and *lỗi thời* which I gloss as ‘troublesome’. The words Phan Khôi uses to characterize the ideal system for which he advocates, and which is at least approximated by French and Modern Chinese, are *nhất trí* (spelled, *nhất trí* in contemporary Vietnamese) meaning something like ‘unanimous’ and *phổ thông*, ‘common, general, universal’. Both are Sino-Vietnamese words.

¹³ It goes without saying that the people of Hồng Bàng dynasty were no more Vietnamese than the Gauls of 2000 years ago were ‘French’ or the Britons were ‘English’. This, in other words, is appeal not to history but to mythology.

accomplished by means of the two pronouns: *tao* and *mày* (*mày* in contemporary Vietnamese). Reference to third party, non-participants was with *nó* or *hắn*. So, reasons Phan Khôi (1955):

[A] daughter of the Hung Kings would call her father *mày*, refer to herself as *tao*, call her husband the prime minister (Lạc Hầu) *nó*. And the peasants of Lạc Điền referred to the Mandarins as *chúng nó* and not only behind their backs but right to their faces and also referred to them as *bay* while referring to themselves as *ta*.

At the time Phan Khôi was writing such uses would be considered beyond rude, they would be considered traitorous (even in the shadow of a decisive victory by Communist forces in the 1945). No daughter would address her father as *mày*, particularly not if one's father was a king! Peasants referring to themselves as *ta* in speaking to a group of Mandarins would have likely been understood as the harbinger of riot or rebellion. And yet, according to Phan Khôi (1955), in ancient times, "everyone saw it as natural, there was no sense of rudeness or insolence, because the pronoun was neutral and universal."

Two points here are clear: first, Phan Khôi is not arguing against social differentiation and hierarchy. He accepts, without question, that some people are kings and Mandarins while others are peasants. Second, he situates these different pronominal systems in relation to a horseshoe-shaped chronology. The "Ancient system" is ideal and does not code differences of status. On the other side, the modern languages of French and Chinese also have a neutral and universal system. Vietnamese is still there at the bottom of the horseshoe, still stuck in a stage of development through which other languages have passed.

According to the argument, then, the original universal system of Vietnamese pronouns was fundamentally altered by the introduction of a humiliative first person pronoun - *tôi* - derived from a word meaning "subject of the king/servant". This had the effect of reconfiguring the system such that the formerly neutral pronoun *tao* came to convey arrogance (by virtue of not being *tôi*). Pronouns in general, according to Phan Khôi's argument, became inextricably tied to the expression of interpersonal deference in such a way as to severely constrain the range of contexts within which they could be appropriately used. And, with the pronoun system now freighted with social meaning, Vietnamese speakers had no other option than to employ nouns, especially kin terms. This introduced further complications, most importantly the ever-present possibility of using the wrong term and thus of giving offense. But the larger issue always, for Phan Khôi, is the inefficiency of the system and its promotion of widespread confusion. The solution, according to Phan Khôi, was to promote the use of *tôi* as a *neutral* first person singular pronoun to be used in writing. This, it is implicitly suggested, would allow for the kind of self-abstraction and neutralization of differentiating features of persons that public discourse, of the kind he imagined, demanded.

While much more could be said about Phan Khôi's proposed reforms, this should be sufficient to convey the general point. Looking both backwards in time at the distant, mythological past and, comparatively at French and Chinese, Phan Khôi identified practices of interlocutor reference as key, constitutive elements of a way of life. And, like the Quakers and French Revolutionaries, Phan Khôi saw the reform of such practices as an important step toward bringing about a hoped-for alternative to the present condition. In this case, however, the imagined form of life was not one devoid of differentiation but, rather, one in which a person might speak or write without having to situate him or herself within a pre-existing set of social relations, one in which, in other words, "inequalities of status" could be bracketed (Fraser 1990). This is an imaginary premised on the possibility of a radical disarticulation of discourse from its contexts of occurrence. In the essays considered here, then, Phan Khôi expounded a liberal vision

of public life in which the relevance of status difference would be suspended in communication, while the social world would otherwise remain unchanged.

5. Conclusion

In other work I, along with Luke Fleming, have sought to describe some aspects of the diversity in practices of interlocutor reference considered cross-linguistically (Sidnell 2019, Fleming & Sidnell 2020). Here I have focused on another dimension of diversity – the diverse ways in which speakers think about, talk about and attempt to reform the practices of interlocutor reference that are treated as normative for their language communities at a given point in time. I have also, by implication, pointed to some of the diverse considerations which motivate such proposed reforms. And, perhaps most importantly, the cases that I have discussed here reveal, to some extent at least, the various ways in which different reform projects conceptualize the nature of diversity and the kind of problem it constitutes. For 17th century Quakers, diversity in the form of social differentiation (of status, for instance) encouraged vanity and worldly pride and was thus seen as an impediment to a properly spiritual life. The solution was to eradicate the linguistic practices that were seen to support such ‘diversity’. In the Vietnamese case, Phan Khôi was not opposed to social differentiation per se. Rather, his concern was with practices of interlocutor reference which, by virtue of presupposing and obligatorily marking such social differentiation, constituted an obstacle to the establishment of a particular form of public discourse. His solution was not to do away with social diversity but, instead to eliminate the linguistic practices that served to mark it and so to bring it into any communicative context.

The larger argument here is that imagining a way of life often involves imagining a way of using language and that advocates for language reform are also advocates for social reform. One aspect of language which, for various reasons, attracts special attention from such reformers is interlocutor reference. Underlying this special attention is perhaps the belief that a new way of life might be built up one interaction at a time, from the very materials of social encounter and engagement. But this pervasive concern with ways of referring to speaker and addressee is also a consequence of apparently universal constraints on native speaker awareness which guide the form that such metasemiotic discourse takes.

Any social imaginary must, at some level come to terms, with diversity. In the ideology of democratic pluralism, where the focus is set squarely on social identity, the problem becomes one of inclusion while simultaneously allowing for the maintenance of distinctiveness. How, that is, might a diverse group of persons, subdivided by communal bonds of various kinds, be included in such a way as to avoid both fragmentation and the erasure of identity? The nation is perhaps the most obvious example of such an imagined community but, as I hope to have shown here, other possibilities are set against quite other dangers and conceive of quite other futures. In their advocacy for plain speaking, Quakers rejected what they saw as false claims to distinction based in social position and, in a sense, the very notion of social diversity itself. Indeed, at a deeper level, in their insistence on individual sincerity on the one hand and on the spiritual unity of mankind on the other, Quakers came close to casting the social as little more than a false and vain pretense of human manufacture. In the case of Vietnamese language reform, the form of life that Phan Khôi imagined was one in which social diversity persisted but did not obstruct the free flow of public discourse between individuals. In sum, we should, perhaps, not allow current conceptions of diversity to prevent us from seeing the very diverse ways in which, at one time or another, the future has been imagined.

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Measuring languageness: Fact-checking and debunking a few common myths

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Abstract The article critically discusses a few common objections to an intrinsic, language-internal definition of what constitutes a ‘language’ (and, conversely, a ‘dialect’). It argues that, contra postmodernism (1.), languages do exist, they can be counted and languageness can be measured independently and even notwithstanding the speakers’ beliefs and ideologies (2.). It further refutes as unsound all the common criticisms to intelligibility as a tool in assessing languageness: while deviations from common-sense assessments may be expected but are not really of concern to science (3.1.), intelligibility asymmetries (3.2.), apparent infinite graduality (3.3.) and dialect chains (3.4.) are only partial problems to be solved empirically. On the contrary, intelligibility can and is routinely measured in different sciences, and, when applied to language, it tends to dovetail with other criteria, such as dialectometry and the counting of isoglosses (4.).

Keywords languageness; measurability; dialects; postmodernism; intelligibility.

1. There are no languages (and nothing to be measured)

Postmodernism has had its sway in many areas of science, especially soft ones. Whole new fields have been born out of it. Its antipositivist philosophy goes hand in hand with its radical relativism and its dangerous antiscientific bias has been remarked many times. In a postmodernist perspective, languages are either a figment of imagination (Makoni 2005) or merely the result of political acts (Pennycook 2007). Language names are at best tags, and only endless variation and change is real. Language becomes a ‘narrative’, and narratives are a special target of postmodernism. Even if, as a postmodernist, you are not particularly keen on logical reasoning, once you get rid of the “pernicious myth” (Pennycook 2006: 67) of languages, you can’t really delve too much into language rights and policy or, simply, language studies.

Not based upon any empirical evidence (empiricism being ‘the’ bogeyman), there is not really any myth to debunk here. You simply buy it or not.

It looks more interesting and maybe promising to take a closer look at linguistics’ own problems with the very notion of ‘language’ (and related ‘dialect’), and to discover that postmodernism has fed upon fertile grounds in language matters: stripped of its radical overtones, the notion that ‘languages’ and ‘dialects’ are basically social constructs and therefore can only be defined in terms of socio-political status and breadth of use, is so common currency in textbooks to be almost a platitude, almost on a par with the old jokes on languages with navies and dialects without them. This is the view qualified of *Ausbau*-centrism in Tamburelli and Tosco (2021): out of the two poles of Kloss’ (1967) dichotomy *Ausbau* vs. *Abstand*, mainstream general linguistics has chosen to define languages alongside the dimension of *Ausbau*, i.e., their role as a “standardised tool of literary expression” (Kloss 1967: 69), and irrespective of their linguistic distance (i.e., *Abstand*). Exit *Abstand*: after *Ausbau*’s landslide victory, what remains is a

discipline refusing to define the very entity from which it takes its name. But, as aptly remarked by Nunberg (1997: 675), if defining languages is not our pigeon, whose is it?

The alleged, generally unsound, reasons of such an attitude are discussed in the remainder of this article.

2. Linguageness and self-identification

How can we define what is a language and what is not? Self-identification is an apparently good (and easy) solution; it runs roughly like this: “[I]f there is a social group that believes and acts as if a linguistic system is a language then it is one” (Fasold 2005: 698). In such a solution the burden of establishing languageness is placed squarely upon the speakers, and the linguists’ role is to register their verdict.

Essentially, this is the same sociolinguistic definition of languageness based upon navies and armies and mentioned above. But with a convenient democratic twist: majority rule (: a social group’s belief) takes the place of power (: navies, i.e., brute strength) in the establishment of truth.

But what is a ‘group’ or a ‘community’? It seems to be, circularly, ‘a group of people who holds the same opinion on X and acts accordingly’. As any ‘community’ (at least of humans; other species may behave differently but the question is immaterial here) is rarely (if ever) unanimous in perceptions and judgments, any reference to a community’s beliefs is at most statistically true. As one cannot imagine why problems pertaining to language would be any different than any other venue of human experience, a community’s judgment on languages is therefore a statistical truth, too.

Interestingly, the above does not change even when such beliefs and judgments are cloaked in terms of ‘democracy’ (which is supposedly based upon the decisions of a majority of the group’s members).

This would further imply that languages are social constructs (‘what is perceived by a community to be a language’): we are back to square one and postmodernism. Now, the study of social construct is certainly an interesting and useful enterprise and may even be scientific under a fairly liberal understanding of what constitutes ‘science’. What is not and cannot be is equivalent to the study of taxonomically independently identifiable entities. Nor are the two mutually exclusive. Just as the evidence gathered from the study of folk taxonomies does not impinge on the validity of Linnean classification, the study of what community *a* thinks of language X does not make X a language (nor it makes *a* right).

Ironically, Pennycook (2007: 91) himself comes in support here: “majority belief doesn’t tell us anything about the existence of what is believed in”.

There seems to be no way out than to firmly reject the speakers’ attitudes, ideologies and beliefs, and to place the burden of establishing languageness squarely on the shoulders of the linguists’ community, however weak and unprepared to the task they may be.

3. Intelligibility and its enemies: debunking a few myths

If to understand and make oneself understood is pivotal to the layman’s definition of what it means ‘to speak a language’ and be part of a language group, it is paradoxical that so much effort has been spent on the part of so many linguists in order to show that intelligibility cannot be proven – nor therefore measured. As such, we are told, it is not even a linguistic problem. Period.

Many a claim that intelligibility cannot be measured has been debunked by Tamburelli (2014) and the interested reader is referred to his work for more details. Here I will briefly review and expand on a few points.

3.1 “Too many languages”

Discussing the very definition of language, Comrie (1987: 2) observes:

[I]f two speech varieties are mutually intelligible, they are different dialects of the same language, but if they are mutually unintelligible, they are different languages. But if applied to the languages of Europe, this criterion would radically alter our assessment of what the different languages of Europe are: the most northern dialects and the most southern dialects (in the traditional sense) of German are mutually unintelligible, while dialects of German spoken close to the Dutch border are mutually intelligible with dialects of Dutch spoken just across the border. In fact, our criterion for whether a dialect is Dutch or German relates in large measure to social factors – is the dialect spoken in an area where Dutch is the standard language or where German is the standard language? By the same criterion, the three nuclear Scandinavian languages (in the traditional sense), Danish, Norwegian and Swedish, would turn out to be dialects of one language, given their mutual intelligibility. While this criterion is often applied to non-European languages (so that nowadays linguists talk of the Chinese languages rather than the Chinese dialects, given the mutual unintelligibility of, for instance, Mandarin and Cantonese), it seems unfair that it should not be applied consistently to European languages as well.

Comrie’s analysis intersects here with the problem of dialect continua to be discussed in 3.4. Let us discuss instead his conclusion that “this criterion would radically alter our assessment of what the different languages of Europe are”; it tallies neatly with Trudgill’s (2000: 4):

[W]e could say that if two speakers cannot understand one another, then they are speaking different languages. Similarly, if they can understand each other, we could say that they are speaking dialects of the same language. Clearly, however, this would lead to some rather strange results in the case of Dutch and German, and indeed in many other cases.

Practicality and, strangely enough, ‘fairness’ and ‘strangeness’ have here the upper hand. As such, there is no real answer and, with nothing to be proven, nothing can be *dis*proven: maybe our assessments would change and maybe not (probably not much, as our discussion is bound to show); it remains instead true that many would think of this as ‘unfair’ and ‘strange’ (after all, Italian undergraduates are often shocked when learning that, according to the most reliable estimates, more than 30 indigenous languages are spoken in a country that fought and is still fighting so hard to become monoglottic).

Maybe, in the end we will indeed come up with “too many languages” and “strange, unfair results”. So what?

3.2 “Intelligibility may be asymmetric”

That intelligibility may be asymmetric (at a social level, of course) is an oft-repeated argument against its possible use in measuring languageness and the distance between dialects and languages in particular. Differences in reciprocal intelligibility between speakers of Spanish and Portuguese, or of different Arabic dialects, are often invoked. There is striking lack of factual data offered to back such assertions: once again, anecdotal evidence takes the place of carefully designed research, scientific hypotheses, experiments, and figures.

But, again, so what? Intelligibility is often asymmetric specifically in the case of minority languages, where all the speakers of the minor group are bilingual in the bigger group’s idiom. Quite often, minority

language speakers are willy-nilly adopting the language of the majority and often get even more conversant in the majority language than in their ancestral idiom. It is just the – often not so long – road to language shift and language death. In all these cases the majority language speakers can forgo the pain to learn the other language, and in all these cases intelligibility is indeed asymmetric. The oft-mentioned instances of asymmetric intelligibility are not that different in kind and essence from the common, everyday experience of second language speakers and learners of language A vs. A's monolingual speakers and, as Wolff (1959) pointed out, they often often boil down to the (passive) acquired knowledge of a variety, or longer exposure to it – usually, a byproduct of specific sociopolitical conditions. In other words, it is worth reiterating the platitude that communication may well be hindered notwithstanding language similarity: even speakers of the same variety can have trouble communicating information in a specific register not common to all of them,¹ while, notes Wolff (1959: 35):

[I]n some areas there is a very low correlation between lexico-structural comparability on the one hand and intelligibility, claimed or proven, on the other. In other words, two dialects might prove to be extremely close when subjected to comparative linguistic analysis, while, at the same time, speakers of these dialects would claim that they could not understand each other.

On the other hand, intelligibility travels across language barriers, so that:

linguistic (phonemic, morphemic, lexical) similarity between two dialects does not seem to guarantee the possibility of interlingual communication; similarly, the existence of interlingual communication is not necessarily an indication of the linguistic similarity between two such dialects (Wolff 1959: 36).

All of which is very interesting and certainly a nuisance if the task is to measure languageness, but does not preclude it, either logically or empirically.

3.3 “A matter of degree”

In a rather long discussion of intelligibility (many authors are much more dismissive), Hudson (1996: 35), after having mentioned that the criterion of mutual intelligibility “cannot be taken seriously because there are such serious problems in its application”, and, repeating the point made in 3.1. above, that “even *popular usage* does not correspond consistently” (emphasis in the original) to it, he goes on:

Mutual intelligibility is a matter of degree, ranging from total intelligibility down to total unintelligibility. How high up this scale do two varieties need to be in order to count as members of the same language? This is clearly a question which is best avoided, rather than answered, since any answer must be arbitrary.

[...]

Mutual intelligibility is not really a relation between varieties, but between people, since it is they, and not the varieties, that understand one another. This being so, the degree of mutual intelligibility depends not just on the amount of overlap between the items in the two varieties, but on qualities of the people concerned. One highly relevant quality is *motivation* [...] Another relevant quality of the hearer is *experience* (Hudson 1996: 35-36; emphasis in the original)

¹ I thank Ilaria Micheli (University of Trieste) for her suggestions on this point.

Intelligibility is certainly a matter of degree (with 100% mutual intelligibility plausibly impossible to reach – if one has to believe Oscar Wilde when he complained being so clever that sometimes could not understand himself). And speakers' motivations, past experiences and interests (not to mention sheer linguistic abilities) do exist. But they are empirical issues, to be solved empirically.

Intelligibility may not be a problem for many linguists but it turns out to be a big issue in other fields, ranging from communication technology to medicine; and quite a problem in assessing the accuracy of radio transmission systems and in the definition of hearing impairments.

For a certain sociolinguistic approach to languageness it may be all so sad, but intelligibility *has* been tested and measured, and intelligibility tests have been proposed, discarded, amended; in the end, thresholds have been discussed and agreements have even often been reached.

3.4 The (partially) false problem of dialect chains

In some cases, the intelligibility criterion actually leads to contradictory results, namely when we have a dialect chain, i.e. a string of dialects such that adjacent dialects are readily mutually intelligible, but dialects from the far ends of the chain are not mutually intelligible. A good illustration of this is the Dutch–German dialect complex. One could start from the far south of the German-speaking area and move to the far west of the Dutch-speaking area without encountering any sharp boundary across which mutual intelligibility is broken; but the two end points of this chain are speech varieties so different from one another that there is no mutual intelligibility possible. If one takes a simplified dialect chain $A - B - C$, where A and B are mutually intelligible, as are B and C , but A and C are mutually unintelligible, then one arrives at the contradictory result that A and B are dialects of the same language, B and C are dialects of the same language, but A and C are different languages. There is in fact no way of resolving this contradiction if we maintain the traditional strict difference between language and dialects, and what such examples show is that this is not an all-or-nothing distinction, but rather a continuum. In this sense, it is not just difficult, but in principle impossible to answer the question how many languages are spoken in the world (Comrie 1987: 2-3).

In short, the problem is:

- if: A & B , B & C , ... are mutually intelligible and A & C are not;
- then: (A & B) and (B & C) would be dialects of α ;
- this would imply that C is at the same time a dialect of α (as it is intelligible with B) and **not** a dialect of α (as it is not intelligible with A).

Actually, to know how many languages are there in a dialect chain is mathematically easy, as convincingly shown by Hammarström (2008). Without repeating his demonstration, it may suffice here to say that:

The number of languages in X is the least k such that one can partition X into k blocks such that all members within a block understand each other (Hammarström 2008: 4).

This means that, in a group X composed of just three members $\{A, B, C\}$, one can have a single block (i.e., $X = k$): $\{A, B, C\}$. This implies that there is mutual intelligibility among all the members of X , which is of course definitionally impossible.

Another theoretical possibility is $\{A\}, \{B\}, \{C\}$: here, each member of X is a block and there is no intelligibility between the members of X . Again, this is definitionally impossible.

More interestingly, one of the three following partitions may arise:

1. $\{A, B\}, \{C\}$

2. {A}, {B, C}
3. {A, C}, {B}

Partition 3. is definitionally impossible (we know that A and B are intelligible). This leaves us with two possible partitions.

The number of languages in a chain is therefore unique (here it is two), but there may be several satisfying partitions into k blocks; moreover, calculating the total number of k blocks increases exponentially with any additional member in the chain.

Summing up:

- if two varieties are the same language, then they are mutually intelligible; but
- if two varieties are mutually intelligible, they are not necessarily varieties of the same language.

Is the problem solved? Not really: we can know the total number of languages, but we do not know the correct partition of their dialects: in our example, is it {A, B}, {C} or {A}, {B, C} correct? Where to put the boundary?

We may know how many languages are there, but not what they are. But, at the very least, we have debunked the myth of dialect continua.

4. Rescuing *Abstand*

There is not much of a *pars construens* in this article: I won't compare, discuss and evaluate different approaches to measuring languageness, and I will restrict myself to mentioning a few recent results and on-going work for what concerns the "contested languages" (Tamburelli & Tosco 2021) of Italy.

Following Gooskens (2007), Tamburelli and Brasca (2017) have recently shown that a dialectometric approach to the varieties traditionally spoken in the northern part of Italy dovetails nicely with traditional subgroupings. Interestingly, the more traditional classifications are marred by purely sociolinguistic analyses – and quite often their accompanying political and ideological underpinnings – the more they are proven wrong when dialectometry is applied. Thus, while the Gallo-Italic grouping in the North of Italy is confirmed, Italo-Romance as an over-arching 'Italian' group is not (Tamburelli & Brasca 2017: 10): as long suspected, Italo-Romance is not a valid genetic grouping – but it can be so in a sociolinguistic sense (: all the languages spoken in a certain area and subject to Italian as a roof language; cf. also Regis 2020). The history of the very concept of Italo-Romance (basically only found in Italian works) exposes its political and ideological biases (unsurprisingly, it is found in De Mauro's 1963 influential *Storia linguistica dell'Italia unita*). Quite to the contrary, Gallo-Italic is revealed to be part of Gallo-Romance, and closer to Occitan than to Italian, while Occitan is actually closer to French than Gallo-Italic is to Italian.

In the meantime, and following Tang and van Heuven (2009) for Chinese 'dialects', Tamburelli (2014) has definitely demonstrated the languageness of, e.g., Lombard by using the SPIN test first proposed by Kalikow et al. (1977). Monolingual Italian speakers with no previous exposure to Lombard were given a selection (18 sentences) of the 'high predictability' sentences of the SPIN test, such as the Lombard translation of *the candle flame melted the wax* or *the workers are digging a ditch*. They were asked to write down the Italian equivalent of the final word only for each stimulus sentence. The results were appalling, with mean intelligibility down at 44.3%, much below the standard threshold for minimal acceptable communication of 75%. Brasca's ongoing work has confirmed Tamburelli's (2014) results, with the intelligibility of the Gallo-Italic speech of the Emilian town of Pavullo down at 38% in the Tuscan

town of Piteglio, which lies to the south across the Appennines but only 68 kms (slightly more than 40 miles) by road, and 34 kms as the crow flies.

Much remains to be done, and many important problems have not even been properly addressed, let alone solved: rampant examples are how to calculate the intelligibility in cases of general mutual bilingualism, and how to deal with the aforementioned (3.2.) question of how to deal with asymmetrical intelligibility: how to measure intelligibility between varieties when speakers are all at least bilingual in a national and related language? This is the case of many minority languages of Italy and other European countries, from Germany to Spain. The answer seems to be that asymmetrical intelligibility is fine: in Pavullo they are likely to perfectly understand the Tuscan variety of Piteglio (very similar to Standard Italian), but the very fact that only 38% of their speech is understood in Piteglio is enough to prove that we are dealing here with separate languages.

Gallo-Italic is not a single language: dovetailing with popular beliefs on differences, Brasca's ongoing research also shows that the intelligibility between single Gallo-Italic varieties falls under the threshold for successful communication, especially when peripheral varieties are considered. Thus, while for speakers of Piedmontese 85% of Lombard is intelligible, for speakers of Lombard the intelligibility of Piedmontese goes down to 70% (Lissander Brasca, p.c., February 21, 2019).

In all these cases (and, we can surmise, countless others across the globe) the lowest figure is all that is needed in order to assess languageness (the highest one has certainly its uses, e.g., in the assessment of bilingualism).

5. Envoi (instead of a conclusion)

Just as measuring the intelligibility between, say, English and Mandarin makes little sense, also a dialectometric approach to these languages will be a colossal waste of time, because zero or a figure close to it is the result. Crucially, dialectometry, as its very name implies, is a tool to measure dialectal difference: it is feasible up to a certain limit, but when whole phonemes (and all the phonemes in a string) are different it becomes impracticable. This does not detract from its usefulness: it is exactly the intricacy of multilingual situations across the globe among a multiplicity of minorities (their 'messiness', for the unfortunate monolinguals of many Western countries who since generations have been the victims of the aggressive linguistic policies of the modern state) that calls for painstaking measurement.

Is this "superdiversity" (Blommaert & Rampton 2012)? Maybe. Certainly, it is the only sensible approach to an assessment of language diversity, which, in its turn, is a prerequisite to salvaging what of it is salvageable (Tosco 2017).

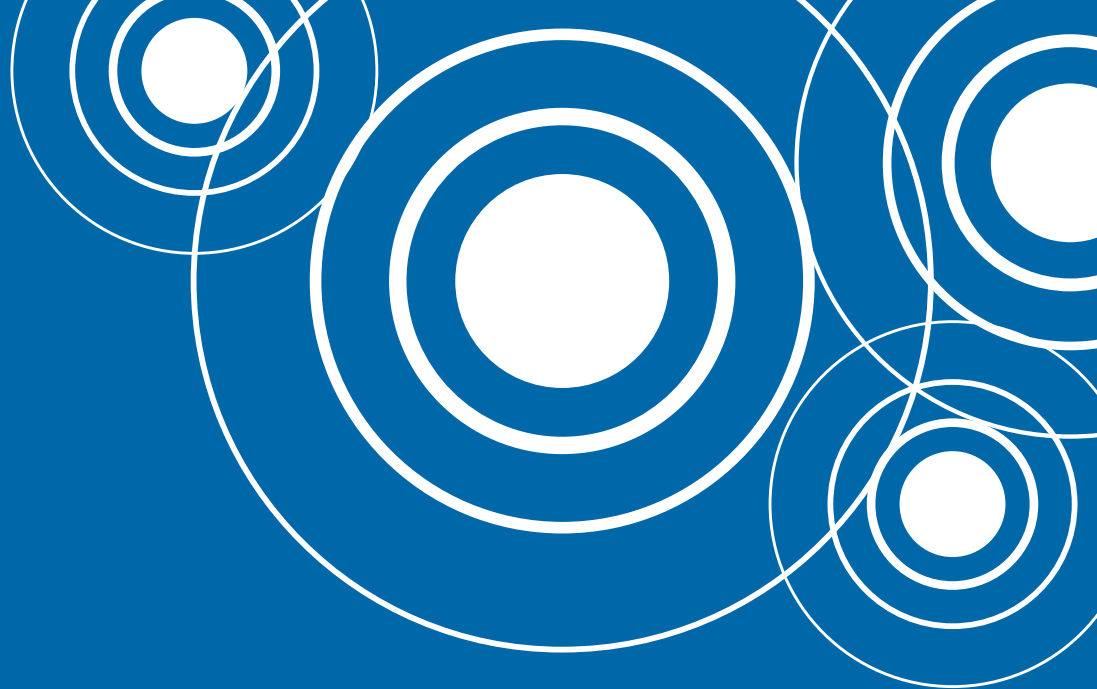
For the time being, we can be content with reiterating that:

- languages do exist. Beyond the veil of political and ideological narratives, languages exist because communication exists; different languages are the result of different and mutually unintelligible solutions to the communication problem.
- languageness is measurable because intelligibility is measurable.
- while *Ausbau*-ization (Tosco 2008) involves the use of linguistic tools with a view to increase the distance of a language (its *Abstand* level) vis-à-vis its neighboring competitors, in the end it is *Abstand* languages that general linguistics deals with.

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