

Between “us” and “others”: From identity traps to mobilization

Entre “nós” e os “outros”: das armadilhas identitárias à mobilização

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Resumo

Muitos acadêmicos e analistas afirmaram que o multiculturalismo falhou e o culparam por promover a radicalização nas sociedades pluralistas. Tais análises parecem, no entanto, simplistas. Outras dinâmicas, como a aceleração social e a erosão das garantias sociais, estão por trás dos fatos em questão. O artigo discute o significado da radicalização e o processo de “ideologização das culturas”, destacando que uma “armadilha identitária” pode ser encontrada nas versões simplificadas do multiculturalismo e até no interculturalismo e nas novas ideologias nacionalistas. Em seguida, discute a ideia de localizar e proceduralizar conflitos, combinando uma abordagem jurídica do pluralismo com um necessário enfoque político. O valor do pluralismo só pode ser afirmado por mediação e “levando a sério” as demandas dos atores sociais. Articular essas afirmações em termos de “política da diferença” é uma jogada perdida. Ao mesmo tempo, essa abordagem conseguiu revelar os limites do universalismo moderno. No nível teórico, nossos esforços devem basear-se no trabalho de longa data realizado por teorias críticas na teoria geral e feminista em particular, buscando tornar o universalismo mais inclusivo. De fato, tal concepção de universalismo, que toma forma e conteúdo da multiplicidade de lutas e é concebida como algo em constantemente formação, pode inspirar não apenas a luta por direitos, mas também a ação política que, em vez de se dividir em múltiplas demandas baseadas em identidade, identifica os objetivos comuns a serem perseguidos.

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² I would like to thank Rosaria Piroso and Emilio Santoro for reading and commenting on this text. I am also grateful to Ginevra Cerrina Feroni who, as the principal investigator of the University of Florence strategic project “Tools, paths and integration strategies in multicultural societies”, gave me the opportunity to participate in research and in so doing to reflect on the issues addressed in this paper. In fact, this article re-engages and develops some of the considerations raised in my essay entitled “Integrazione e società multiculturali: le sfide” (Re, 2018, p. 117-127).

³ This first reference is obviously to Hobbes’ Leviathan, understood as a response to the English civil war.

Palavras-chave: Multiculturalismo, Radicalismo, Populismo, Supremacia do Direito.

Abstract

Many scholars and analysts stated that multiculturalism failed and blamed it for fostering radicalization in pluralist societies. Such analyses seem however to be simplistic. Other dynamics, such as social acceleration and the erosion of social securities are in fact at work. The article discusses the meaning of radicalization and the process of the “ideologization of cultures”, highlighting that an “identity trap” can be found in both simplified versions of multiculturalism and even interculturalism and in new nationalist ideologies. It then discusses the idea of localizing and proceduralizing conflicts, matching such a legal approach to pluralism with a necessary political one. The value of pluralism can in fact only be affirmed by mediating and ‘taking seriously’ the demands of social actors. To articulate such claims in terms of “politics of difference” is a losing move. At the same time, this approach has succeeded in revealing the limits of modern universalism. On the theoretical level, our efforts should build on the longstanding work carried out by critical theories in general and feminist theory in particular to seek to render universalism more inclusive. Indeed, such a conception of universalism, which takes shape and content from the multiplicity of struggles and is conceived as constantly forming can inspire not only the struggle for rights but also political action which, instead of breaking apart into multiple identity-based demands, identifies the common objectives to be pursued.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, Radicalization, Populism, Rule of Law.

Introduction: The ‘other’ that is not us²

European societies have always been plural. As is well known, the very construction of the modern European state can be seen as a response to the problem of the relationship between minorities and ‘indigenous’ majorities.³ A long, conflict-ridden process led to the invention of national communities. (See Gellner, 1983) In many cases, the “image” of the nation (See Anderson, 1991) has been forged over the centuries and partly in opposition to an equally fictitiously ‘elsewhere’ conceived as a cohesive unit: the “East.” (See Said, 1978) Britishness cannot be understood without referring to the English colonial Empire, nor can we

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comprehend the grandeur of the *République* without recalling the ethnocentric logic of French liberal universalism that accompanied colonial expansion from the outset, attributing a special kind of *humanité* to the *citoyen*. (See Todorov, 1993)⁴ ‘Elsewhere’ evokes not only the ‘other’, the ‘Oriental’(Said, 1978) or ‘Negro’ (See for example Mbembe, 2018) born to be dominated in the colony, but also the ‘internal enemy’: the ‘Oriental’ living within the territory of the state but outside the ‘national culture’ - the ‘gypsy’ or ‘Jew’ - or the ‘Negro’ working in plantations or houses, born ‘here’ but hailing from another world. In fact, this opposition between ‘us’ and ‘others’ can be found in European nationalisms but also in the construction of the American nation, founded on the myth of the frontier and precise lines dividing up the citizenry on the basis of ‘color.’⁵ Finally, the same opposition appears in the history of many Central and South American states whose political, legal and social systems have been formed by distinguishing between natives and citizens of European origins.⁶ As postcolonial studies scholars have made clear, the consequences of these historical processes did not fade out in late modernity. In reality, they have left a legacy that is still fully operative in both contemporary democracies and geopolitical relations between the global North and South.

Liberal democracy has a “solar body” and a “nocturnal body,” (Mbembe, 2018, p. 22) remnants of a violent genesis disguised by the original myths of isonomy and self-government. The colonial system, slavery and patriarchy have contributed decisively to the development of modern capitalist societies, leaving in their wake this “bitter sediment.” (Mbembe, 2018, p. 20) Liberal democracies, born as “communities of separation” (Mbembe, 2018, p. 17), were based on the distinction between those who were included within the “sacred space” delimiting the chosen people making up the “community of the free” (See Losurdo, 2005, p. 264-274 and ch. 8), and those destined to remain outside: the ‘non-free’, i.e. slaves, women, the poor, prisoners, the mentally ill, the disabled, etc., populations living within the territory of the state but excluded from the social pact, and the ‘barbarians’, i.e. the colonized, kept outside the confines of the metropolis and relegated to the status of subjects. Although the political and social conflicts characterizing modernity have gradually admitted new social categories to the “sacred space,” the separation has never entirely disappeared. It is a division that conditions the mechanism of democratic citizenship (Zolo, 1999; and also the classic Marshall, 1950) and has enabled “institutionalizing a regime of inequality on a planetary scale.” (Mbembe, 2018, p. 20)⁷

The Multiculturalism of “others”

At the end of the twentieth century, globalization and the fact that many European countries opened their doors to immigration fed the pluralism of national societies, altering some balances that had appeared to be stable. After an initial phase in which the northern European states encouraged immigration from the continent’s southern countries (Italy, Spain, Portugal), the focus shifted to attracting labor from northern Africa, Turkey or, in the

⁴ I have tried to highlight the “ethnocentric universalism” of a current of French liberal thought by analyzing the colonial writings of Alexis de Tocqueville (see Re, 2012).

⁵ The theme was brought to light by Critical Race Theory. See for example: Crenshaw *et al.* (1995). For an anthology in Italian by a number of authors working in this field, see Thomas, Zanetti (2005). See also the numerous works of W.E.B. Du Bois. Read today, some analyses of the plantation system cannot help but bring to mind European and, in particular, Italian cases as well, namely the systematic exploitation of foreigners in agricultural production. See for instance ADIR. *L’altro diritto* (2019). Other sources include Prandi (2018) and Sciarba (2015).

⁶ Regarding this point, see for instance Clavero (2007, p. 443-466).

⁷ Once again, Mbembe’s analysis must be supplemented with the point that this inequality also includes institutionalized gender inequality within a heteronormative system.

case of England, the former Asian colonies. The initial project of welcoming foreigners only for short periods thanks to “guest- worker” policies – laboring bodies borrowed temporarily to be sent home as soon as the work was finished – eventually failed. At that point the major European States had to manage the domestic presence of the former subjects of their colonial possessions, that is, the subjects-objects⁸ that centuries of culture and colonial law, supported by widely shared racist ideologies, had constructed as inferiors.⁹ Migration and the processes of building the new post-colonial order thus intertwined, giving rise to a complex debate about the legal status and ‘integration’ of these ‘newcomers’. Even in countries in which immigration is a more recent phenomenon, racialization and ethnicization have played a significant role in both public debate and the direction of migration and ‘integration’ policies. (See Rattansi, 2011)¹⁰ It is in this framework that we find the European discussion on multiculturalism and the move to import the dispute between liberals and communitarians (Ferrara, 1992) (a debate which has been running through North American philosophical and political discussion since the 1980s and throughout the 90s) to this side of the Atlantic.

As scholars have recognized, multiculturalism was developed in Canada with the initial aim of establishing a pact of coexistence that was respectful of the linguistic and religious differences characterizing the country’s two main communities: French Canadians and the English-speaking majority. Only later was it formalized in legal-institutional terms as a model for recognizing the linguistic, religious and cultural identities of minority groups, before then being extended to the minority populations that had formed as a result of immigration. In Europe, on the other hand, multiculturalism was immediately linked to the problem of ‘integrating’ immigrants and in particular immigrants considered ‘non-white’ and Muslim and, by virtue of this status, perceived as a threat.

The various European countries adopted different policies to ‘integrate’ foreigners. Some such as the United Kingdom, Sweden and the Netherlands followed models more closely resembling North American-derived multiculturalism, at least until the 2000s and each with its own trajectory. Others instead opted for assimilation policies,¹¹ while still others chose hybrid forms granting the partial recognition of cultural rights.¹² Importing the North American debate on multiculturalism into Europe in both its academic and mass mediatic versions does not seem to have favored harmonization among the various European policies for the ‘integration’ of immigrants.¹³ Rather, at the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s, the opposition between liberals and communitarians was reproduced in the European debate, both to criticize the systems inspired by multiculturalism, which ended up being progressively undermined (See Rattansi, 2018), and to entirely reject this approach, casting it as incompatible with the liberal tradition of European constitutional states. However, it seems that this discussion, in particular the simplified version used to translate it in the political debate, was mainly aimed at shifting public attention, away from the problems of social justice exacerbated by the neoliberal policies adopted in many European countries and towards the problem of managing ‘ethnic’ and ‘cultural’ diversity. In only a few cases, in fact, was the discussion triggered by specific requests for recognition put forward by minorities.¹⁴ In the

⁸ In relation to the construction of the “Negro” as a “thing” in modern Western humanist culture, see Mbembe (2018, p. 140-141).

⁹ See, for instance, Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison’s (2010) essay about French colonial law and the construction of the category of “indigène”.

¹⁰ In relation to Italy, see for instance Giuliani (2015) and Marchetti (2011).

¹¹ Beginning from the historic assimilationist paradigm in France.

¹² For an analysis of the various European models, see Cerrina Feroni, Federico (2018).

¹³ Regarding the difficulty in identifying in Europe a super-national strategy for the ‘integration’ of foreigners, see Piergigli (2018, p. 209-241).

¹⁴ For instance, in the Netherlands and the U.K., for a certain period of time.

majority of European countries, it seems that the debate on the 'integration' of foreigners instead revolved around a series of conflict points artfully fueled by the political and media system, partly so as to distract citizens from economic and social problems. I am thinking, for example, of the controversy over veil wearing in France, a debate that almost completely obscured the issue of the abandonment of *banlieues* and discrimination against French citizens with foreign backgrounds.¹⁵ In 2004, the law prohibiting the wearing of veils at school was adopted.¹⁶ In 2005, the law establishing that school programs should celebrate the French colonial past took effect.¹⁷ Between these two events the “Indigènes de la République” launched their appeal, with young people from the suburbs speaking out about their conditions of inferiority within French society and calling for the “decolonization of the Republic”.¹⁸ In the 2000s, this kind of controversy divided the country while the suburbs were abandoned to their own fate, welfare state services were cut and the *chômage* system was reformed to reduce subsidies.¹⁹

Paradoxically, therefore, the demand for real reparations for the damage caused by disregard for non-Western cultural traditions was relegated to a secondary position in the European public debate or even neglected altogether. It was this demand that animated most of the communitarian (and more generally multiculturalist) claims being made in North America. (See Taylor, 1992) The problem was mainly formulated in the opposite direction: how to maintain the hegemony of the dominant group? Or, more explicitly in some cases, how to 'defend' the 'national culture' from the 'assault' by immigrants' social, religious and cultural models? In Europe, discussions about 'integration' and related policies were mostly guided by a top-down orientation, reflecting an approach that appeared to be the opposite of the one that had inspired the construction of the multicultural paradigm in countries such as Canada.²⁰ This tendency gained ground during the 2000s, reinforced in part by the emergence of the terrorist threat. In fact, in recent years the focus has been on the risk of radicalization among foreign-born citizens and young people in particular, a radicalization that in many places is associated with the 'failure' of multiculturalism.

Social acceleration and radicalization

What does “radicalization” mean? The Oxford dictionaries (2019) defines it as “the action or process of making somebody more extreme or radical in their opinions on political or social issues”. Today, however, scientific literature and institutional agencies use this term to indicate a process that begins with adopting such stances but then leads to serious forms of deviance, first and foremost the decision to enter into terrorist groups and networks. Often, the term used is “violent radicalization”. The European Commission (2008, p. 5), for example, identifies this phenomenon with the adoption of opinions, visions and ideas that may lead to terrorism. The reference, at both the European and national levels, is primarily to Islamic

¹⁵ In relation to the *banlieues* see for instance Fassin (2011) and Bonelli (2008).

¹⁶ Loi 228 of 15 March 2004 about the prohibition to wear religious symbols in public schools. Regarding the *affaire du voile*, see for instance Pepicelli (2012).

¹⁷ Loi 158 of 23 February 2005, of which Art. 4 provided for school programs acknowledging the positive role of French colonization (and successively abrogated due to the criticism it raised, especially in the former colonies).

¹⁸ Appel des indigènes de la République (2005).

¹⁹ Regarding the dismantling of the welfare state, see, for instance, Bonelli, Pelletier (2010) and Supiot (2015).

²⁰ Jurgen Habermas had already moved in this direction in the conclusive part of his essay dedicated to Charles Taylor's critique of communitarianism. See Habermas, Taylor (1996).

terrorism.²¹ This is the case even in countries that do not suffer from a shortage of radical right-wing or left-wing groups.²² There have been multiple incidents suggesting that radicalization is a complex phenomenon which also involves citizens perceived as autochthonous, however: examples include the 3 February 2018 attack in Macerata, Italy in which a neo-fascist militant opened fire on several immigrants, but also more serious cases in Europe such as the 2011 massacres committed by an extreme right-wing sympathizer in Norway that killed 70 people. Even as I write, the media are reporting on the police seizure of an arsenal in Turin owned by an Italian right-wing extremist group whose members fought in Ukraine, with contents including an air-to-air missile. (La Repubblica, 2019a)²³ Radicalization can also refer to typically local phenomena such as the socialization of young people into the mafia subculture.²⁴ If attention to Islamic terrorism is justified by the fact that the majority of recent terrorist attacks in Europe were committed by people who claimed to act in the name of a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and often identified themselves with the ISIS project,²⁵ a more complex approach to the theme of radicalization, in particular that of young people, may help to identify some social and educational strategies for preventing it in different contexts.²⁶

In a recent essay titled *La trappola dell'identità culturale: dal multiculturalismo alla radicalizzazione*, Emilio Santoro (2018, p. 87-115) critiques social integration policies that focus on a concept of culture as clearly identifiable and substantially static, a concept vigorously refuted by contemporary anthropology. The author takes issue in particular with Charles Taylor who, as is well known, defended the Canadian multicultural model by raising the issue of acknowledging collective cultural rights in order to ensure the survival of minority cultures. (See Taylor, 1992) According to Santoro, by basing the solution to problems of coexistence on a conception of cultures as the wellsprings of the ultimate goals and values to which individuals conform, there is a tendency to nourish opposing ideologies and thereby exacerbate conflicts. Based on the studies of ethnomethodologists (Garfinkel, 1967), he argues that individual actions are not determined by values, but rather depend on the cognitive skills of individuals. Culture can therefore be reconceptualized as a set of cognitive resources, a "toolbox" that helps social actors to identify their own strategies of action.

Today's societies require rapid adaptation not only and, perhaps, not so much because they encompass people of different origins, but also and above all because technological evolution and information bombardment require the continuous updating of individual skills,

²¹ This definition is included in a 2005 Communication by the European Commission regarding “Terrorist Recruitment: addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalisation”.

²² See the analysis carried out as part of the Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project funded by the European Union (Gavravrieldes, 2018).

²³ In relation to the danger of radical right-wing terrorism in the United States and Western Europe, see Institute for Economics and Peace (2018, p. 47).

²⁴ Regarding this issue, see Rando, Giovetti (2018, p. 53-57).

²⁵ See Institute for Economics and Peace (2018, p. 46).

²⁶ This is the direction that the already cited Youth Empowerment and Innovation Project funded by the European Union identifies. The Report of the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalization underlines that the trajectories leading to getting involved in different forms of terrorism have common elements and recommends both specifically studying the dynamics relative to the different terrorist groups, and analysing the common structural features: “radicalisation leading to acts of terrorism is context-specific. Past and present waves of violent radicalisation which lead to terrorism among mainly young people share certain structural features. Firstly, radicalisation thrives in an enabling environment that is characterized by a more widely shared sense of injustice, exclusion and humiliation (real or perceived) among the constituencies the terrorists claim to represent. Secondly, radicalisation always takes place at the intersection of that enabling social environment and individual trajectories towards greater militancy. Thirdly, terrorist violence (and in particular suicide bombing) stands only at the far end of a wide repertoire of possible radical expressions and only a small number of radicals become terrorist extremists” (European Commission Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, 2008, p. 17-18). Diverse counter-terrorism strategies are outlined also in the above cited Institute for Economics and Peace (2018, p. 64-78).

a constant cognitive effort. As Hartmut Rosa has made clear, we live under the yoke of social acceleration and this climate has taken on a totalitarian character, swallowing up the logics of recognition and communication typical of early modernity. In a world in which the past ‘goes by faster and faster’ while the future is no longer conceived in terms of progress, experiences and expectations prove less and less reliable. While modernity signaled the shift from an inter-generational to a generational pace of social change, our historical moment seems to be characterized by intra-generational social changes. (Rosa, 2013, in particular ch. 1) Locking oneself up in a ‘culture’ conceptualized as clearly identifiable and fixed may thus represent a defensive reaction (See Rosa, 2013, in particular ch. 2) in that it gives the illusion of ‘stopping time’. This illusion allows us to regard ourselves as sheltered from the principle of competition underlying social acceleration and gives us the opportunity to believe we might ‘finally’ obtain a stable form of recognition.

It is not only those who identify with minority communities who feel the need for ideological and often radical oppositional deceleration (See Rosa, 2013, ch. 3); this same need is experienced by those who consider themselves part of the majority – in numerical terms – and yet do not belong to that elite that enjoys the benefits of globalization or, if they are part of it, fear they might lose their social position. Whether pursuing a simplified version of multiculturalism or seeking to assimilate foreigners into a presumed ‘national culture’, when public policies contribute to the “ideologization” of “cultures” (Santoro, 2018, p. 107) they actually strengthen this process, generating a two-fold radicalization: both minorities and members of the majority. As Marco Revelli (2019, p. IX, English translation mine) has written, these forms of identity closure do indeed exist in the contemporary world and they form:

the raw material of which every nationalism is made, every ethnocentric conception seeking to oppose the tough matter of the body to the dissipating fury of an accelerated temporality, the physiological irreducibility of the blood to the abstract undifferentiation of flows, the static slowness of tradition to the dizzying speed of bits. And from the qualifying specification of “us” (constituted at the level of community through opposition to some “others”) to the depersonalizing generic character of “all” (dissolved in the anonymous seriality of atomized individuals).

The “identity trap” thus refers to both simplified versions of multiculturalism and even interculturalism²⁷ and to new nationalisms. I believe it can be argued that the “identity trap” and the risk of radicalization are not necessarily found in all forms of multiculturalism. Rather frequently, however, multiculturalism has also been conceived as an attempt to stem the radicalization of minorities while preserving the liberal model.²⁸ Moreover, it was not considered an alternative to the political models supporting neoliberal globalization. On the contrary, in many cases it has helped to convey the idea that globalization is a plural process in which everyone can participate. It is precisely this image that a Justin Trudeau-led Canada projects into the world, that is, the image of a country in which multiculturalism has taken on a “holistic” character²⁹ as it became more and more open to embracing the claims of different social groups (from linguistic minorities to sexual minorities) and to a conception of personal ‘identities’ as intersectional constructs.³⁰ Along the same lines, another example I could cite in

²⁷ For a radical and yet very keen critique of “intercultural” practices and pedagogy specifically referencing Italy, see Baroni (2013).

²⁸ Will Kymlicka’s (1995) theory of multiculturalism unfolds in the same direction.

²⁹ Regarding this point see Ceccherini (2018, p. 345-383).

³⁰ Regarding the notion of intersectionality, see the by-now classic Crenshaw (1991, p. 1241-1299).

the European area is the “London is open!”³¹ campaign that London’s Muslim mayor Sadiq Khan, of Pakistani origins, created to oppose terrorism but also Brexit; this campaign assumes linguistic, cultural and even ‘ethnic’ ‘diversity’ as the hallmark of the city, casting London as global and open to the world in contrast to both the reactionary radicalization of terrorists and the nationalistic retreat of the English countryside.

It can therefore be argued that there is no direct link between multiculturalism and radicalization. Moreover, radicalization processes, for example involving young Muslims, are occurring in the United Kingdom and Netherlands but also in France, where the state has always opposed multiculturalism. Instead, there is a link between radicalization and the dynamics of social exclusion³² exacerbated by neoliberal policies that erode welfare and promote inequality (see Oxfam, 2018; Id., 2019), both in countries that have chosen a multicultural approach and in those that have rejected it. As mentioned above, these dynamics also involve both subjects who perceive themselves as belonging to minorities and those who identify as an ‘autochthonous majority group’. Making this claim is not tantamount to arguing that radicalization is caused by social marginality or poverty,³³ but it does mean that the frustration produced by some dynamics of exclusion or inferiorization, especially if experienced by people suffering from real psychic pathologies,³⁴ may find an outlet in political radicalization and in the choice to carry out terrorist acts. A more attentive reading shows, moreover, that such individual pathologies are part of a more general social pathology associated with the problems of integrating individuals into contemporary societies.³⁵ Indeed, fanatical followers of global Islam and ISIS, just like extremists promoting new nationalisms and supporters of racist theories, find meaning in ‘faith’ or in the ‘ideal’, a kind of meaning that seems to be lacking from their lives. Radicalization is the means to a life (and sometimes a death) as protagonists, as heroes. They look to this “narrative of eternity” (Snyder, 2018) to protect them from the rapid passage of time characterizing global societies and to shelter them from fierce competition, erasing the abyss of social failure that constantly yawns before them³⁶ in today’s “performance society”. (Chicchi, Simone, 2017)

Those who radicalize on each of the two fronts often feel betrayed by neoliberal globalization³⁷ and are driven by the desire for revenge. The chance to build an enemy on which to pour out their anger plays a central role in people’s embracing fundamentalist beliefs. It is often individuals who have no ties to a specific community who approach recruiters, either in person or on the web. Examining recent essays by Renzo Guolo (2018),

³¹ See, for instance, the video circulated on Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2204693939746176> (last accessed July 5th 2019).

³² See, for instance, Institute for Economics and Peace (2018).

³³ A number of authors who have studied the radicalization of young Muslims in Europe have also rejected this thesis, see for example Guolo (2018) and Roy (2016).

³⁴ See the analysis of the profile of the perpetrators responsible for the recent attacks in Europe as outlined in Olivia, Gabrieli, Gabrieli (2018, p. 27-45). Beyond the report’s lexicon and criminological approach, it is useful for pointing out the features some attackers share.

³⁵ The same interpretation is accepted in the above-mentioned Report of the European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (European Commission Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, 2008, p. 17-18).

³⁶ This dynamic is very effectively described in Mohsin Hamid’s *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007), a novel in which the protagonist, looking back, tells us the story of his transformation from a young Pakistani admitted to Princeton to a ‘wolf’ of global finance, ready to apply its cruel logic in ‘developing’ countries, to a teacher who has returned home and is accused of fomenting anti-American terrorism. In fact, after 9/11 the sense of rejection of the competition and cynicism typical of global finance makes its way into the soul of the protagonist. Heeding the call of his own roots and the need to be in solidarity with the Muslims persecuted by the policies of the new War on Terror, he abandons the typical American yuppie style to grow a long beard. His origin is thus perceived as dangerous and he realizes that he will never feel definitively ‘included’, discovering both that his identity as a successful young man is unstable and that American imperialism has traumatized him and his people.

³⁷In many cases, as Marco Revelli (2019, specifically part 3) has pointed out, they feel betrayed as a result of real impoverishment.

Olivier Roy (2016), Vidino, Marone and Entenmann (2017) and research published by Milan-based ISPI on jihadism in the West, Tommaso Sarti (2018, p. 69-78) points out that:

The protagonists of the new global jihad are young or very young, mainly belong to the second generation (often re-converted) or are autochthonous converts to Sunni Islam; they speak English, French, Italian, dress in a Western style and follow haram lifestyles (that is, transgressing a series of prohibitions), while they do not speak Arabic, they have little knowledge of Islam (...) and surf the Internet where even subjects who live in contexts characterized by weak social ties can feel part of a community offering a strong sense of belonging (Sarti, 2018, p. 73, English translation mine).

Such recruits are thus usually individuals who did not grow up adhering to a particular Islamic tradition but approached the uprooted, simplified and, in fact, fundamentalist version of “global Islam” directly as young adults. (See Roy, 2002) As they ignore the complexity of religious belief and the plurality of its interpretations, they embrace a dogmatic vision which they assume to be the authentic and indisputable ‘truth’.

Similarly, young Europeans who rediscover nationalist ideologies, becoming involved with extreme right-wing groups, cultivate a myth of the nation that is quite distinct from their perspective on life. They lack any experience in the military ethics based on love of the homeland that they claim to want to take as a guide for their action. Christian Raimo's recent investigation into Roman adolescents who belong to neo-fascist groups shows, for example, that they mostly think of Fascism as a “fashion”, especially appreciating its rejection of immigration, and believe that the “sense of sacrifice” – a stance that supposedly characterizes their militancy – is forged by handing out “leaflets at seven in the morning” (Raimo, 2018).³⁸ Even the indoctrination they undergo and the cultural references they adopt are rather simplified.³⁹ They often have very little knowledge of history and, when they invoke their own Christian roots, they usually do so without actually complying with the dictates of religious doctrine. This is the case, in fact, not only of people embracing the extremism of radical groups, but also of the many who join right-wing parties that call for “sovereignism”, present themselves as the defenders of Christian values,⁴⁰ and base their political action on hostility towards immigrants.⁴¹ Their involvement is often based on explicit social envy, an ambivalent feeling that favors their transition “almost seamlessly from competitive emulation to destructive hostility” (Revelli, 2019, p. 214, English translation mine),⁴² a widespread feeling

³⁸ The expression in brackets were used by young neo-fascist militants or group leaders the author interviewed (English translation mine).

³⁹ In addition to Raimo, see for instance Cammelli (2015).

⁴⁰ Although the Catholic pontiff himself contradicted them. See for example Pope Francis' message in the hearing with the participants to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences of May 2nd 2019 in which he recalled that: “the Church has always exhorted the love of one's own people, homeland, to respect the treasure of the various cultural expressions”, and yet has always “warned people and governments about the deviations of this attachment” when it turns into exclusion and hatred, when “it becomes conflictual nationalism that raises walls, or even racism or anti-Semitism” (English translation mine). (La Repubblica, 2019b). Protestant religious authorities took on similar positions. See, for example, on this subject, the episode of the TV programme on Protestant culture and faith in Italy and throughout the world, by the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy in partnership with RAI (2019), “Protestantesimo”, broadcasted on RAI 2 on July 14th 2019, entitled “Sovereignism and Christianity”.

⁴¹ Regarding the relationships between fascists and sovereignists in Italy, see Berizzi (2018).

⁴² Obviously, I do not wish to argue that citizens who identify with sovereigntist parties are radicalized to the same degree as those supporting terrorist groups or extreme right-wing groups. Nor do I believe that adhering to terrorism can be considered equivalent to certain young people becoming involved in extreme right-wing political groups which are considered legal. My analysis does, however, aim to highlight some significant elements of continuity in the psychological and social resources of mobilization and radicalization.

in the “society of enmity” (Mbembe, 2018, ch. 2) in which the social bond is reconstructed as a hostility bond. (Mbembe, 2018, ch. 2) For this reason, scholarly analyses contesting the indiscriminate use of the “populism” label for radical European right-wing formations, including the Italian ones, are convincing in their argument that these new nationalisms would be more effectively framed as “functional substitutes for fascism”. Such a labeling change captures the fact that their atomistic and almost nihilistic drive, mainly aimed at constructing the enemy as the ‘ethnically different’ ‘other’ who is defended by the privileged ‘caste’, actually prevails over the idea of a common belonging to the ‘people’.⁴³ For these citizens, as for fundamentalists who embrace radical Islam, the main function of the community is to provide immunization (See Pulcini, 2013), that is, it must prevent the possibility of being infected by ‘others’, of having one’s own life perspective questioned. It is above all a virtual community, the simulacrum of a form of belonging that people are no longer able to experience in the substance of social relations.

The new, unstable “us”

In the essay cited above, Santoro (2008) echoes the argument in *Diritto, diritti. Lo Stato di diritto nell’era della globalizzazione* to suggest that, in order to overcome our contemporary impasse, it is necessary to abandon the ambition of building collective political subjectivities based on the identification of an ‘us’. In his opinion, we must instead defend and consolidate the liberal model of the rule of law – with its individualistic background – founded on pluralism,⁴⁴ mainly understood as a cognitive resource that helps individuals lead a “stable life” in a society that is necessarily “unstable”. The first step in this direction would be to make conflicts local, seeking to solve the problems that individuals face while abandoning any thinking focused on protecting “cultures” but also the idea of promoting dialogue between “cultures”. The more productive perspective to adopt, he suggests, is one in which dialogue is always conceived as a practice enacted by people. The author therefore takes a stand against a “politics of identities” (See Young, 1990) that exacerbates social division.

While it does not seem fair to hold multiculturalism as a legal and political model responsible for promoting radicalization, it cannot be denied that, today, the move to recognize minority rights is increasingly perceived as an erosion of the power of the majorities defining themselves as autochthonous and, in the case of sexual minorities, as granting forms of freedom that are destabilizing for the heteronormative system. Thinking of these claims as demands for recognizing and protecting the fundamental rights to which individuals are entitled rather than as collective claims raised by specifically defined communities may thus be an effective strategy in that it frames political conflict in legal terms, thereby mitigating the clash. At the same time, consolidating people’s cognitive resources and focusing on the dissemination of knowledge in an era of widespread functional illiteracy might help them resist the aesthetic turn (Rosa, 2013) in politics, in which emotions and images prevail over reasoning (and programs), and make it possible to relaunch the idea that the topics in public debate must be thoroughly pondered.

The possibility of comparing different positions within a communicative horizon that is as free as possible from distorting power relations is a fundamental element of many liberal

⁴³ See Germani (1978). For an interpretation of Italian right-wing parties informed by Germani’s lesson see Serra (2019, p. 55-66).

⁴⁴ This thesis thus appears similar to Habermas’ position.

theories of democracy.⁴⁵ As scholars have repeatedly argued, democracy has never actually been a realm of reason in which, as the philosophical ideal would have it, more weight is given to “the view that gets all the details worked out coherently and clearly, rather than the view whose proponents shout the loudest”. (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 300) In democracy, certain dominant groups have always prevailed. The self-government of citizens based on the possibility of across-the-board participation in political life thanks in part to the construction of a public space that protects people’s right to free expression and access to information has always been an ideal. As Wendy Brown has pointed out, this ideal, along with the values of political equality and freedom, are nevertheless indispensable aspirations. The language of democracy provides tools that have so far proved irreplaceable in the fight against heterodetermination. While we can certainly consider the disconnection between formally proclaimed principles and actual political, social and juridical conditions to be a fundamental vice of liberal democracies, it is nonetheless the liberal-democratic lexicon that has provided so many women and men with the words to denounce this disconnection and expand the “sacred space” of citizenship:

Women, racial and religious minorities, slave descendants, new immigrants, queers, not to mention the poor and working classes, have seized on the universalism and abstraction of liberal democratic personhood to insist on belonging to the category of “man” (when they did not), to stretch liberal meanings of equality (to make them substantive, not only formal), and to press outward on freedom as well (to make it bear on controlling conditions of existence, not mere choice within existing conditions). (Brown, 2015, pos. 3052-3056)

Constitutional states then explicitly rejected the project of a purely formal democracy by linking the effectiveness of rights to the substantial nature of democracy. (Ferrajoli, 2016)

Pluralism and fear of social disintegration have always coexisted in a state of tension; so far, the relative stability of institutions has resolved this tension in Western democracies. Beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, it was precisely the constitutional state that curbed this tension. And yet, the contemporary dynamics surrounding the evolution of turbo-capitalism as well as its associated hyper-acceleration and, more generally, the consolidation and spread of neoliberal rationality have profoundly shaken the foundations of this juridical, political and cultural construction. The social and political crisis is linked to an ‘anthropological crisis’ and leads to a “undoing of democracy” (Brown, 2015) by promoting a “deconstituent process.” (Ferrajoli, 2016, p. 76, English translation mine) It therefore becomes much more difficult to localize and proceduralize conflicts if the ‘material foundation’ of the constitutional state is undermined (See Preterossi, 2015, ch. 2) and “neoliberal rationality” transforms “the character, the meaning and the operation of democracy’s constituent elements”, converting them from “distinctly *political*” into “*economic*”. (Brown, 2015, pos. 122)

Conflicts can be proceduralized through the constant work carried out by certain state, supranational and international institutions, beginning with jurisdictional courts (Santoro, 2008) and the people and groups which enact a claiming process⁴⁶ to present these

⁴⁵ See in particular, Habermas (1981, vol. 1 and 2). However, Santoro does not identify with this position; he simply points out that the channels of democratic political conflict are not suitable for dealing with “identity-based differences” and therefore argues that this type of conflict can best be dealt with through the channels of legal conflict.

⁴⁶ Regarding the importance of claiming, beginning from Feinberg’s perspective (1970), see also Baccelli (2009).

institutions with requests for “justice”, thereby activating the protection of fundamental rights. This work often takes place *ex post*, however; it remains limited to certain areas and is constantly at risk. Moreover, while judges often take a stand as the defenders of fundamental rights, it cannot be argued that this attitude is adopted everywhere⁴⁷ or definitively. In analyzing some important US rulings and the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* case in particular, Wendy Brown (2015, ch. 5) clearly shows that jurisprudence may also participate in the “undoing of democracy” and the disintegration of its political, legal and social fabric by adopting a neoliberal rationality. Changes occurring at the social, economic, cultural and political levels affect the “legal consciousness” (Ross, 1958); indeed, this consciousness is forged within ongoing conflicts.

(Inter)national constitutionalism⁴⁸ is rooted in a series of values which, although reinterpreted from time to time, are the fruit of a political-constitutional design. They impose a programmatic vision that is increasingly difficult to implement in an atomized society and in the absence of the kind of political mediation previously provided by great mass parties, parties in which the citizens identified in the service of an ideology.⁴⁹ More and more people, even in Western democracies, feel the need to pass on to others the hyper-responsibility instilled by the neoliberal anthropological model and to find more stable bases of identification. In some cases, as mentioned above, they seek a form of recognition for which they are even willing to abandon claims of social justice that seem more difficult to achieve. In other cases, however, the construction of a collective political subjectivity serves to activate mobilization, so as to act out the conflict.

In this context, the suggestion of abandoning any reference to “cultures”, understood in essentialist terms, appears very useful for guiding public policy. Policy makers looking to make administrative choices that are mindful of social complexity (e.g. in the fields of education, health, labor policies, etc.) in particular would be advised to adopt this approach. This shift is also highly important for academic discussion and efforts to more generally channel public decision-making processes,⁵⁰ jurisprudential interpretation and the formulation of political objectives on the part of civil society movements. Such work has the potential to generate valuable effects in the long run, although it must be admitted that it requires the involvement of ‘enlightened’ and motivated *élites* and social groups. These groups are not created *a priori*; rather they are formed in part through political and social activism and consolidated through (often temporary and unstable) alliances which enable the forging of collective actions and allow their voices to be heard on the political and mediatic scene. I am thinking, for example, of the transnational feminist movement *Ni Una Menos* or of the environmental movements that have surfaced once again in the face of the climate change emergency.⁵¹ In particular, from a contemporary perspective the work of preserving the founding values of the constitutional state does not seem so distinct from the fight against the degeneration of financial capitalism that threatens not only democracy and fundamental rights,⁵² but also the very existence of the human species on Earth. (See Klein, 2014) This

⁴⁷ Think, for example, of the different fate of asylum seekers in the United States depending on the state in which they apply. See Lanard (2019).

⁴⁸ Borrowing here Tecla Mazzaresse’s expression (2018, p. 63-85).

⁴⁹ See the interesting analysis on the relationship between populism and law developed in the monographic issue no.1, 2019 of the journal “Questione Giustizia. Trimestrale promosso da Magistratura Democratica”.

⁵⁰ Regarding the importance of philosophy for public decision-making see Nussbaum (2000).

⁵¹ See, for instance, the monographic issue of the journal “Jura gentium” focusing on *La crisi dei paradigmi e il cambiamento climatico*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2019.

⁵² Here it is important to remember the battle Luigi Ferrajoli has been carrying out for years with extraordinary lucidity and tenacity, defending social rights as the basis of democracy and equality as the cardinal principle of the constitutional state.

work cannot avoid engaging in confrontation with the existing political, social, economic, environmental and gender conflicts and with the awareness that the value of pluralism can only be affirmed by mediating and ‘taking seriously’ the demands of social actors. To articulate such claims in terms of “politics of difference” is, as Santoro has argued, a losing move. At the same time, this approach has succeeded in revealing the limits of modern universalism. On the theoretical level, our efforts should build on the longstanding work carried out by critical theories in general and feminist theory in particular to seek to render universalism more inclusive, that is, to redefine it from the bottom up as a “universalism of multiplicities”. (Pitch, 2004, p. 114, English translation mine) This theoretical work does have a political impact, however.⁵³ Indeed, such a conception of universalism, which takes shape and content from the multiplicity of struggles and is conceived as constantly forming, constantly open to challenge, constantly capable of renewal thanks to solidarity (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, Fraser, 2019), can inspire not only the struggle for rights but also political action which, instead of breaking apart into multiple identity-based demands, identifies the common objectives to be pursued. It could weave broad alliances, even temporary ones, because, as Martha Fineman (2008, p. 17) has argued: “it is not multiple identities that intersect to produce compounded inequalities (...), but rather systems of power and privilege that interact to produce webs of advantages and disadvantages.”

Conclusions

I close this short essay written mainly in the summer 2019 by looking out over the sea. A few days ago the world's largest sailing ship appeared on the horizon: built at a cost of 460 million dollars, is 143 metres long and has 8 bridges connected by lifts, a helicopter landing strip, a gymnasium, a spa, a swimming pool and a glass room for underwater observation. It belongs to a person about my age, the Russian billionaire Andrei Melnichenko. He has appeared on Forbes’ list of the world’s 100 richest men thanks to his 13 billion dollars in assets accumulated through investments first in the fertilizer sector and later in the coal industry. The beachgoers look on this sea monster in admiration, while they express anger at the ‘unacceptable challenge’ that German activist Carola Rackete, captain of the ship Sea Watch, posed to the Italian Minister of the Interior when she landed in Lampedusa to disembark a few dozen migrants saved from the waters of this same Mediterranean Sea. Social envy is directed downwards and strikes desperate people. Those who still have the ability to raise their gaze also have the duty to strive to transform this envy by relaunching the values of equality and solidarity. And not only in words, but also through practices of “care” acted out in daily life,⁵⁴ without which there can be neither liberal democracy nor the rule of law.

⁵³ In keeping with the approach at the heart of critical theories, specifically feminist theory. Regarding critical legal theories, see Bernardini, Giolo (2018).

⁵⁴ Recently, in a series of conferences held in Italy, Joan Tronto (2013) argued that the popularity of neopopulism – and we could add, the widespread support for new nationalisms – can be interpreted as a request for “care”, in the sense theorized by the author of *Caring Democracy* (2013) that takes on a defensive twist. The antidote to these stances should therefore be sought in “care” policies and practices effective in combatting impoverishment and social disintegration, encouraging participation in democracy as a common good. These are not only welfare policies but also daily actions such as cultural and social activities, even small ones, organized with the aim of overcoming atomization and identity closure (see <http://www.iaphitalia.org/caring-democratically-a-response-to-neopopulism-joan-tronto/>, last accessed 3 August 2019)

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