



Luciana Castellina

Europe Must Become Conscious of its Own Culture

I would like to start my talk with a remark which has no direct connection to "culture", but I think we can't do without a somewhat dramatic observation: We are currently experiencing the decline of Europe and of the role of Europe. The dynamics is gone; the citizens don't understand the EU.

Two very different people told me quite memorable things recently. The first was one of our friends who works for the World Social Forum and organizes meetings all around the world, especially at the Social Forums in Africa and Latin America. He said: "You know what? Nobody wants to know anything about Europe anymore. Europe, what is Europe? What has Europe accomplished, anyway? We are much more interested in South-South relationships, like with Asia. But Europe...." The other is a completely different kind of person from my friends at the World Social Forum: it is my daughter. She is an economist and teaches at the London Business School, which has connections with the University in Dubai. By the way: students used to

go to London to study; now, the professors from London go to Dubai to teach. They "buy" the professors, so that they will come directly to them. So my daughter told me that the pupils from Dubai, the Arabian and Turkish elites, didn't even want to hear anything about Europe. They say: "Europe? What is Europe? Europe is dead!" and the Turks add: "Join the EU? No, they don't want us, and anyway, we don't care a bit whether we join or not! We are much more interested in Asia, China, the United States."

Even the "hated" USA has, with the election of Barack Obama, demonstrated a capacity for dynamics which we in Europe can no longer produce. We are certainly very conscious of the fact that Obama will face enormous difficulties implementing even a small portion of his programme that he will have to overcome powerful interests in his own country, and especially a deeply rooted culture of both "private" and "enterprise". We could have helped him by providing our model as an example: The "European Way" is based on intervention

by the state in the economy, on the modification of the rules of the market, and on the central role of the public service. A social Europe, a "welfare" Europe, could have provided Obama with support in the battle which he has to wage. But we have missed that opportunity, because Europe is itself busy dismantling its own model and adapting a little more every day to the global model, which corresponds to the traditional American model.

The conservatives have never believed in a "European way". The left itself, or at least a large part of the left – the part which is in government –, has also abandoned this model. And so here we are: Europe no longer really knows what it is. It is becoming ever more difficult to assign meaning to this project, to answer the question: "Why Europe? What does this European Community mean?"

When in 1957 we built the first segments of the European Union, the single domestic market was created. That was a good idea. It was an idea which aided the development of Europe. But today, there is a global market and everybody trades with everybody everywhere in the world. So what does the fact that we have a piece of that market still mean? Not much, anymore!

For that reason, I think that there is today a real demand for the essential, for meaning. What is Europe there for? What is it about Europe that is special? How is it different from the rest of the world, in a way which might justify the construction of this community?

It seems to me that the fact that this Europe was built up particularly with respect to economic issues, and on the basis of the market, and that issues connected with "culture" were pushed completely into the background, has caused the foundations of Europe to be very unstable.

As you know, the word "culture" wasn't even included in the foundation treaty of the European Community in 1957. It appeared only thirty-five years later, in the Treaty of Maastricht. But even that was not about culture as such, but rather about culture as a commodity. As a commercial good, as a commercial service, "culture" comes under the purview of the EU.

Jean Monet said during the last days of his life: "If I had to build Europe once again, I would start with its culture." He had discovered, learned and understood that Europe's weakness, its difficulties as a political subject, was due, amongst other factors, to the fact that no common culture, no common identity had been developed.

The lack of this common identity/culture is the reason why there is no real European "demos". The historian Eric Hobsbawm is right in saying that it is difficult, due to this weakness, to recognize the legitimacy of the decisions of European institutions: At the national level, he said, all of us are willing to recognize the legitimacy of a conservative government, even if we may belong to the left – and vice versa. At the European level however, if a decision is taken by a French commissioner,

the Italians won't consider it their decision, and the other way round.

It is true that it isn't easy to develop a common European cultural identity. Not a few attempts have been made in the past to build one; many prominent Europeans, such as the philosopher Edgar Morin or the sculptor Chabaud – have taken up the task; all European intellectuals have wondered: "What is this common cultural identity? What do we have in common?", yet none has been able to provide an answer. Some have suggested Christianity, but the history of Christianity in Europe is a history of religious wars, of conflicts; the French Revolution turned against it, as had the Renaissance. Some have noted that the cradle of democracy is here, yet that too is questionable, for so is the cradle of fascism. As for the Graeco-Judeo-Christian heritage, with its separation of church and state, its recognition of human rights, and its independence of science, the fact is that these are features of the entire western world, not specifically distinctive characteristics of Europe. In short, no one has ever been able to answer these questions.

So what do we have in common? The title of my recent book on this topic, *Eurollywood*,¹ is provocative, because I would like to express that what we have in common is not European culture, but globalized culture, which means American culture. Europeans communicate with each other via American culture, which is more familiar to each of us than that of our neighbouring country. Italians know more about what is happening in the USA than in France; the same is true of the Germans. I always choose the audio-visual area – the cinema and television – as an example, for it reveals so much, for it contributes more than anything else to the collective imagination. These are the most important means of cultural construction that we have. But the situation is that the European audio-visual media market is 70 or 75% dominated by Hollywood products. Films from my own country, Italy, account for only a small share; and those of other European countries for only 5.7% or 8% – it fluctuates from one year to the next.

Franco Moretti, a well known cultural sociologist and the brother of actor Nanni Moretti, has described it very clearly: "Europe has got stuck. There is much more exchange between the continents today than within Europe."

By the way, when we talk about culture in Europe, we always use the word in the plural, never in the singular, so that it is clear that no member country would accept having its own national culture mistaken for general European culture. But – to get back to the point – we must have something in common despite all of that, something which would justify the construction of this European community, and prove that we are not only a piece of a globalised world.

¹ Luciana Castellina, 2008: *Eurollywood. Il difficile ingresso della cultura nella costruzione dell'Europa*. Pisa: Edizioni ETS, ISBN: 978-884672112-9, 244 pages.



Certainly, there have been attempts on the part of the institutions to solve this problem; solemn explanations, passports of the same colour, a flag, even an anthem which nobody knows anyway. The first thing in the draft constitution that we got rid of was the flag and the anthem. Nobody cared about them.

There has even been an attempt to write a common book about European history; the project was entrusted to Prof. Duracell, but it went under in controversy. A German teacher, Susanne Poppe, suggested including 15 historical images in all European schoolbooks, with an explanation of the respective reasons for the topic to which the pictures referred. This too was abandoned.

Magnificent speeches have called for protecting the artistic and architectural cultural heritage of Europe. But an important issue is that monuments are the most contradictory and the most conflict-loaded parts of our cultural heritage. A monument in Berlin commemorates a French defeat and another one in Paris, a German one.

It is difficult to build up a European subject, a feeling of solidarity, a European citizenry. To date, there have been none of the instruments of democracy needed for communication between the institutions and civil society which might build up a common public opinion – common political parties, trade unions, newspapers, NGOs etc.

Due to the lack of these instruments, the German Federal Constitutional Court has expressed doubt about the legitimacy of the EU treaties. To some extent, rightly so, for these instruments exist only at the national level – or on paper: There is not even a common section in the biggest dailies. “La Repubblica” from Italy has a weekly supplement, which is not from *Süddeutsche Zeitung* or *Le Monde*, but from the *New*

York Times. In 50 years, we haven’t even managed to establish a common TV station, apart from the small broadcaster Euronews, in which however the majority of the member countries are not even involved – a majority which includes Germany. With respect to the image of Europe in the world, every member country has decided in favour of its own broadcaster – BBC World, Deutsche Welle, etc.

So everybody has his own sources of information and his own conclusions, his own assessments which end up being completely different, because we have never done anything at all together. This has caused a deficit of democracy in the EU, because every commissioner reacts to his own public opinion. A French commissioner reacts to public opinion in France; an Italian commissioner reacts to public opinion in Italy etc. If we don’t react to the same constituency, to the same public opinion, because that is fragmented, or to the same subject, it means that we aren’t reacting to anybody.

With one exception: It is true that the European institutions have fought for our cinema and our audio-visual media, and they have achieved a lot, particularly since the eighties. Once European filmmakers realised that European productions were disappearing from our TV screens and from our cinemas, the alarm bells rang, which resulted, starting in 1989, in the Declaration of Delphi, the Vasconcelos Report and conferences on audio-visual media. And finally, the first instruments for the promotion of cinema and audio-visual media in Europe were created: the EU Directive Television without Frontier”, the EU media programmes, etc.

These programmes have led to a confrontation with Hollywood which has been called “the undeclared war” – and rightly so, for it really is a war. When the Directive Television without Frontiers, which introduced quotas for European cinema for our TV channels, was de-

cided upon and approved, then-US Foreign Trade Secretary Clara Hills told European representatives directly, "You cannot do this, Europe will become a fortress." And this reaction came at a time when the American market share in the audio-visual area was 80%! After that, during the time of the Uruguay Round negotiations of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which called strongly for the decontrol of audio-visual services, the Europeans tried to defend themselves. Indeed, the decontrol would have illegalised all public support for cinema and TV productions as a violation of competition rights. On the other hand, without this public film support, which exists in all our countries, there would be no European films. And decontrol would have made this support illegal. That is how brutal the disputes with Hollywood have got.

The European Parliament and especially the filmmakers played a major role in this struggle. Everywhere, particularly in Paris, protests were organised to make the statement that culture is not a commodity, and that it can't be treated as such, that it shouldn't even have been allowed to be addressed in the context of trade

talks in the first place, and that, while one might consider decontrol of telecommunications markets, one would never do so for audio-visual services. After all, a film isn't like a fax or a phone call, it is not merely the bearer of economic value; rather, it is also the bearer of memories, imagination, traditions, and stories of a people. A refrigerator produced in Los Angeles is more or less the same as one produced in Brussels or Timbuktu, but a film is

not – just as a film shot in Timbuktu isn't like one shot in Lausanne. The rules of the market cannot be applied to such a special "product" – which of course isn't one – as culture or audio-visual productions.

The United States have a very great advantage: They have a huge monolingual domestic market in which Hollywood productions can already recoup their investment costs at the national level. That leaves a lot of leeway for export, including funds for advertising, marketing, sales etc., even if we disregard the advantage which stem from the political and economic power of the USA. Thomas Friedman, a columnist for the *New York Times*, made the witty remark that McDonald's – of course he chose that brand as the symbol of America's cultural invasion – wouldn't exist without McDonnell, which built the fighter plane F-15. In other words, the audio-visual media are also important to American exports in other areas.

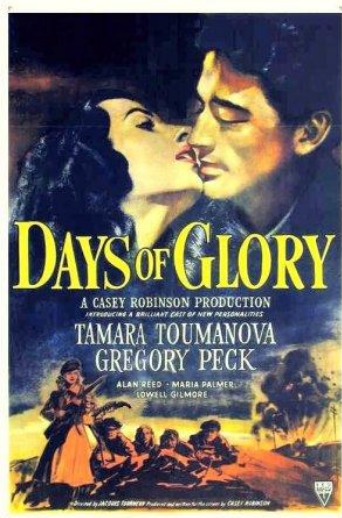
In Marrakesh, where the 1994 Uruguay Round ended, the Europeans attained what is called their "cultural exception". It was in fact not really a cultural exception,

since that would mean a permanent exception from the rules of decontrol. What they did achieve was merely the right not to open their audio-visual services markets to decontrol for the time being, as provided by the rules, that is, a simple delay, a stay – a temporary victory.

That was still enough to provoke an intense reaction from the USA. The American Board of Trade once again threatened retaliatory measures in other areas. The tone became harsher on both sides: then-French President François Mitterrand, in his answer to Hills, spoke of "genocide". "What is at stake," said the president, "is the cultural identity of our nations, the right of every people to its own culture." A society that leaves its self-portrayal to others is an oppressed society." That is true. My grandchildren know Texas considerably better than the Italian region of Calabria, because they have repeatedly seen Texas in westerns; but they don't know Calabria. Let alone Baden-Württemberg (Germany) or Picardie (France). And by the way, American children know the outside world hardly at all, since audio-visual products from Europe and the rest of the world account for only 2-3 % of the American market. The saddest thing I saw in connection with the Iraq War, which was of course generally sad for many other reasons, was the picture at the very beginning of the war, of a young American soldier in the desert with his gun who was looking around and hardly knew where he was. He had no idea about the whole history of Iraq, of Babylonia, of the Middle East. For the movies and television in his country show no pictures of any other cultures.

At the conclusion of the Uruguay Round, the fronts were so hardened that in the night of the signing of the agreement, Clinton reached for the phone and called Kohl and Balladour directly. He told them, "You can't insist on this. You must accept decontrol. Stop this." Jack Valenti, then president of Hollywood's Motion Picture Association, remarked contemptuously: "Why are they talking about culture? This has nothing to do with culture! This only has to do with the business of making money." And Samuel Goldwyn, the great MGM producer, said with even greater contempt: "It isn't called show art, it's called show business."

This confrontation with the USA is nothing new; it was already there in the 1920s. A very important German, Erich Pommer, was at that time boss of the famous UFA studios in Berlin. He founded a movement called "Film Europe". His opinion was that "Either the cinema will be European or it will succumb!" He was very probably conscious that the Europeans could have only face up to their American competitors if they were united. But ones the talkies appeared on the screen, Europe realised its own weakness: Everybody spoke a different language. Therefore, large-scale production was, even then, no longer possible. The Americans invented synchronisation to reach European audience even more effectively. But Europe has never been able to synchronize its own films so that they could be shown everywhere in Europe. By the way, the Americans have always refused to synchronize European films in their own country, because they claim to be too



demanding, and not able to accept synchronization, whereas Europeans, in their view, are ignorant enough to accept it. Obviously, this is a form of hidden protectionism.

In discussions with the Americans about cinema they constantly use the argument that we have to leave everything to the market, and that the state shouldn't intervene. But they don't exactly practice what they preach. The American government is intensively concerned about its own movie industry. After the Second World War, the US business delegation in Europe included a large number of representatives of Hollywood, who came to examine the condition of the film industry. The result was the Harmon Report, in which a strategy for the reconquest of the European silver screen was designed. Immediately thereafter, Undersecretary of State Adolph Berle sent an instruction to the embassies in which he ordered them to ensure the distribution of movies. I would like to stress that I would be willing to surrender the few cents which the Italian state gives us for the cinema, and the entire European MEDIA Programme along with it, in exchange for influence over the cinema by our embassies such as the American embassies have. Our embassies by contrast, generally don't care at all. It is clear that the Americans certainly are right, for it is not only a question of cultural hegemony, and of ideological and political influence, but also about economic influence. We all wear blue jeans and drink Coca-Cola, because we have all seen many American films, many westerns in which we have seen Coca-Cola and blue jeans.

In the Marshall Plan negotiated after the Second World War, there was a clause, a condition for the loans: American films were to be imported freely into our countries. The French, who are always more militant, resisted in 1947 and 1948, and marched in the streets of Paris. There are very beautiful documentary films showing workers and filmmakers marching on Paris' boulevards to protest this clause in the Marshall Plan. But ultimately, France had to cave in, and it too signed the Blum-Byrnes Agreement.

Even if the Americans always stress that only the market determines their movie industry, Washington plays a primary role. Suffice it to mention that the chairmen of the Motion Picture Association always resulted from the circle of the narrow employees of the American presidents. The first one, Willy Hays, was President Warren Harding's campaign manager. His successor, Eric Johnston was a White House envoy in the Middle East, Allan Dulles was boss of the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), and Jack Valenti was President Lyndon Johnson's right hand man. In the USA, Hollywood is even called the "Little State Department".

The results are clearly visible: a look at film production in Hollywood – independent productions are an exception – shows that the film industry strictly follows the line of American policy. When the United States was allied with the Soviet Union during the Second World War, and one felt constrained to disseminate a positive picture of that country, such films as *Days of Glory*

(1944, Jacques Tourneur), or *Mission to Moscow* (1943, Michael Curtiz) were shot. After that, the situation changed: with the Cold War came movies like *Red Nightmare* (1962, George Waggner), *Red Dawn* (1984, John Milius) and *Invasion U.S.A.* (1952, Alfred E. Green). And when German rearmament had to be made acceptable to the public, Nazi soldiers were re-evaluated, resulting in a number of films like *The Desert Fox: The story of Rommel* (1951, Henry Hathaway). I remember this film well; it was released at the beginning of the fifties. I was arrested when we tried in to prevent its screening in Rome.

And yet the American film industry is of course great cinema. This goes without saying. It is not by accident that Hollywood is called the home of cinema, as if this town had some kind of extraterritorial status. Hollywood, the "Detroit of the emotions," the "city of dreams". But Hollywood is also a symbol for the industrialization of culture, for a kind of standardized production which wrecks every other form of expression.

Nonetheless, we still face the question: what is the sense of talking about a European Community, a European identity, a European cinema, rather than an American or a Japanese cinema? What does it mean that in our world today there are transverse movements, not only between the classes, but also geographically? Since geography has lost its meaning, and nation-states are already threatened with extinction, why not replace them with a larger state, like the EU? Since the world has become a network, doesn't it make sense for all communities to disappear, including the European dimension, which would be superfluous, pure imagination? Is Europe a dimension without which we could do quite well in future? Bad luck for those whom we call, not without irony, "the sacred Europeanists".

I don't think that's true; I don't share that opinion. It frightens me. A world with no "identity community", split up, fragmented, without boundaries, could become a world full of metropolises of irresponsibility. There is a very beautiful American comic strip in which two dogs talk with each other. One dog says to the other: "Do you know what's good about the Internet? That nobody knows you're a dog." You can be anything! Man or woman. Beautiful or outrageous. Black or yellow or white. You can be old or young or anything. You're not only free of the compulsions of your family, your village, your country, but also of the compulsions of your body. This is freedom! Subject to no obligations. It's understandable that young people want that. But it leads to a world of "stowaways", with no "identity community", and hence no obligation to react to anybody. Because decency or the opposite, solidarity or selfishness necessarily means with respect to somebody, with respect to the values of a community.

I think we must fight against the anarchistic illusion which globalisation conveys. The older ones among us certainly remember the Port Huron Statement of 1962. It was the first statement of the American New Left, which anticipated Berkeley of '67 and our European movement of '68, a demand to liberate ourselves from

the bureaucracy of the state and of the corporations, from rigid hierarchies and institutional requirements. But there is a very interesting self-criticism by the American philosopher and sociologist Richard Sennett, one of the authors of the Statement. He says: "History has granted the New Left its wish in a perverse form," in which only individualism, precarization and egoism have triumphed. The former cultures, writes sociologist Arjun Appadurai, have been replaced by the culture of global broadcasting networks. That is the only culture which there still is; every other culture has disappeared.

I think that the French philosopher Jacques Rancière is right to say: "Democracy is a specific means for the symbolic structuring of community. There is no democracy without community."

If we speak of community, we of course mustn't think of a European state which resembles the old nation-states, only bigger, which will have swallowed all the previous states. That would, we should stress, bring with it all the terrible qualities of the nation-state, which were based on delimitation, ethnocentrism and "monoculture", the fear of the others. These forms of delimitation are multiplying in light of an ever less ethnically and religiously uniform population.

So we need a reinvention, as Jürgen Habermas says. We need a new concept of citizenship, what Étienne Balibar has called "a transnational citizenship", not one based on the equation "citizenship equals nationality".

But all this is still today being complicated by the phenomenon of a non-temporary immigration, for, as Stuart Hall, the founder of "cultural studies" writes, the diaspora is no longer a minority, "it is the anticipation of the modern age". The most frequent first name given to babies at the Brussels registry office is now Mohammed.

The phenomenon of migration is complicated yet further by the fact that, today, paradoxically, the integration process of immigrants no longer happens as fast as in the post-war period. At that time, immigrants came from colonies and spoke the language of the colonial powers; they knew their customs and habits. Today, they learn the language and customs of their own countries in school. Or they come from countries which had never had anything to do with the country to which they are immigrating; for example, there are many Filipinos in Italy and many Turks in Germany. Moreover, their contacts to their countries of origin have remained stronger than earlier, when immigrants returned home perhaps once in their lifetimes. Today, they travel home much more frequently, thanks to cut-rate airfares. There are mobile telephones and everybody has a grandmother with whom he would like to stay in touch, even if she lives in the desert. That wasn't the case 20 years ago. The grandmother was forgotten, there was only imaginary contact.

Moreover, there was only the single national television broadcaster, which was inevitably a means of integration. Today, with satellite television, Filipinos in Italy

can watch stations from their own country, and Arabs can watch Arabic channels. In Germany, there are twenty Turkish TV stations available via satellite. The Turks no longer watch German television. And of course, the Germans don't watch Turkish stations. Thus, cultural discrepancies are much greater than in the past.

The same is true of the working world! Once, there was the factory, the large factory, with its social integrative function. This is becoming ever rarer today, precarious work – the so-called "suitcase economy" – has become the norm: trade in typical local goods, and small-scale trade carried out in the street. This "global informality", this global precariate, is becoming predominant, and leading to an extremely high degree of mobility.

Even the old longing for the old country, which was at least something one knew and could understand, no longer exists. After all, the countries of origin are no longer the glorious lands of the independence struggle; they are now dominated by a "comprador bourgeoisie".² Rather, loyalty is now more likely to exist towards members of the family or of the clan, with whom living contact is maintained. This also explains the revival of religion, the only critical space confronting a modernity which crushes the immigrants.

All in all, different forms of socialization are emerging, which no longer coincide at all with the classic, traditional communities, with their secure, familiar boundaries. One could say that they are trans-cultures – "disembedded", not tied to the structures of established societal systems. Ties form and dissolve at short notice; traditional relationships between culture, region and "polity" are destroyed.

Due, too, to these new phenomena, it is no longer possible to talk about a clear European identity. European identity is only conceivable as a complex, ambiguous identity which doesn't extinguish the different national or local cultures, but incorporates them and integrates them into a new identity. For in spite of it all, we must have something in common, since we live in the same region as a collective, not as a fragmented subject. And that is exactly where it gets difficult, for a balance must be found between respect for the variety of cultural forms of expression – as demanded by the UNESCO Convention of 2005 – and the danger of getting lost in a kaleidoscope of micro-identities which no longer communicate with each other, and remain isolated.³

The Convention on Cultural Diversity, of which we are talking, is a good convention, but it can only appear simple if seen superficially, for it contains many contradictions and evokes tough conflicts – especially if "culture", as in UNESCO'S view, includes not only works of

² A bourgeois class in the countries of the Third World which mediates intercultural/ international trade.

³ The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was adopted in 2005 by the UNESCO General Conference and took effect in 2007.

art, but, anthropologically, the totality of behaviours, values and customs of a people.

Take for example the case of the "chador". Is this cultural diversity? If so, the Convention of course protects it as such, and France should be condemned for passing a law which prevents women from wearing a headscarf. That is a problem. Do we have to accept everything in the name of respect for cultural diversity, even female circumcision – in other words, move over to an extreme form of cultural relativism and dispense with building common values? Certainly not, but we must be aware of the fact that this issue is very tricky.

The question has been adequately discussed, even in the context of UN Development Programmes (UNDP), which determined that no country may enact laws which force people to engage in a certain type of behaviour, such as wearing a chador, for example, or not wearing one, but the state must also guarantee that democracy prevail within the communities, so that an individual is able to make a choice of his or her own.

I believe that we must maintain our striving for universality. We cannot say that everybody should do whatever he or she wishes, for we would then be living in a situation in which there would only be the diversity of cultural ghettos, with nothing in common between them. We must stick to the goal of building a society in which we share values and principles. But we must be conscious that the universalism of which we speak today has been established by the western world, and that the others played no part in its emergence. For the collective imagination is established by information and images of western hegemony. What does universalism mean? What does it consist of? First of all, of information. But 90% of the information is in the hands of the western world; the others are not present. And it is this information that creates images and values.

As children, we have all read Robinson Crusoe. When Robinson meets Friday, he speaks with him in English; he doesn't consider the fact that his language is not the universal language. This is exemplary for the way we think.

Real universalism can only be the result of a very complex, very long process of dialogue. This is generally accepted, but after that, things get fuzzy. Everybody talks about multiculturalism; the EU has even dedicated one of its topical "years" to it. But it is threatening to become a cage in which the different cultures don't communicate, and become rigid. Everybody gets their own little kitchen garden, where they can grow their own culture, designed for their personal use. The variety of the others is to be "tolerated". But tolerance is not a nice word, for it implies that there is one who tolerates and another who is tolerated – and there's a difference! The old and mistrustful Laokoon told the Greeks that there was a big difference between a dialogue among the different and one among the unequal, and the latter is the case in the intercultural dialogue being carried on in Europe – among unequal, not just different, people.

In Italy – and I think the same is true almost everywhere – the opinions of mayors and municipal officials (not the racist ones who want to expel immigrants, but the good one) are split into two different camps: one says: "You are like us, therefore you must be integrated into our culture, our society, and our customs"; the other says: "We respect your difference and will build you a mosque, so you can do your thing and live according to your traditions." Neither one is right; the task is more difficult. To create a new identity in which both the old Europeans, the natives, and also the new Europeans can see themselves, we, even we, have to question ourselves. And questioning oneself requires courage. How and how much are we willing to change, with regard to the others? This is very difficult! Are we, as Italians, able to call ourselves in question with regard to the Germans, who are different from us, or with regard to the Nigerians, who are even more different, and vice versa? It is difficult, but it is also necessary.

That is the problem of the other, which has been a central issue since Plato. One must keep one's own identity, for roots are necessary so as not to feel lost, but this identity necessarily impacts on "differentness" (*"altérité"*). As the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas wrote: "The faces of the others change my face, for they convert a single particularity into a social intersubjectivity, hence into responsibility." And Edward Saïd, the great Palestinian-American intellectual put it even more clearly: "The other is the critical resource of ourselves."

We have not been able to achieve that. For example, I was recently in Empoli, a town in Tuscany with 50,000 inhabitants, 10,000 of whom are Chinese. The mayor is a very good mayor and does his best to make sure that the Chinese feel comfortable in the society in Empoli. But I asked him: "Have you tried to explain to those born in Empoli what China is like? Have you taken the initiatives to give them a better understanding of that culture? It isn't enough to explain to the Chinese what Italy is like." For of course, it is not only the Chinese who must change, but also the old-established citizens of Empoli. Empoli cannot remain as it was, once so many Chinese have moved there. If cultures aren't dynamic, they are dying.

I also think that Europe may have an opportunity to become the community which can tackle this difficult task – and assure respect for the identity of the others without locking itself into its own cage in the process. The German philosopher Hans Georg Gadamer rightly noted that "Europe has a disadvantage which is also an advantage. It is the region with the most languages, the most differences, and the greatest diversity." Every morning when we get out of bed in Europe, we are already in another country and speaking another language. That has got us used to the existence of the other. And that is the big difference between us and the United States, which is so like a big island, surrounded by oceans. Certainly, there are many immigrants there, but they accept the hegemony of the first settlers, and keep their cultures for private use, in the family. Here, it's different. Perhaps Europe can dare to tackle this



very difficult task, the construction of a common identity based on the assistance of all, and on this exchange.

There is a statement by Gandhi which should in my opinion serve as an example for our attitude: "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any." That is, I think, the balance between respect for diversity and

construction of commonality which we must accomplish.

I think that this is a problem, because I think that it is our duty to prevent globalisation from splintering us completely, and also to avoid becoming prisoners in our own cultural cages as a reaction to it: democracy is what is at stake.

Ed. Birgit Daiber

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation Brussels Office

Ave. Michel-Ange 11, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 2 738 7660, Fax: +32 2 738 7669

Email: info@rosalux-europa.info

Web: www.rosalux-europa.info