

Introduction

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This volume brings together a large choice of essays in representation of some of the most significant research lines developed by the international project “EUO-European Culture and the Understanding of Otherness: Historiography, Politics and the Sciences of Man in the Birth of the Modern World (Sixteenth-Nineteenth Centuries)”. Funded by the Italian Ministry of Education University and Research in the context of the Interlink program for 2006-2008, the project linked five Italian universities (Firenze, Pisa, Piemonte Orientale, Napoli “L’Orientale” and Trieste) and six European institutions (Central European University, Budapest, University of Paris 8 Vincennes-Saint Denis, University of Zaragoza, University of Saarland at Saarbrücken, London School of Economics and Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan) over a three years period, providing both organizing and financial support as acknowledged below. The project was directed by the author of the present lines and had its coordinating and administrative seat at the University of Trieste, Department of History and Art History. These essays were first delivered as papers at the final project conference, held in Trieste in October 2008. Discussions during the three-days conference and subsequent re-elaboration over the next year and a half have produced the results which we offer to specialists and fellow researchers in the disciplines of cultural history, social history of ideas and intellectual history. We think nevertheless that the interest of these contributions lies not only in what they offer to academic

scholars for the novelty of the research topics and the originality in method and conceptualization, but also in their capacity to suggest perspectives and disclose the complexity of a research field to younger scholars and students. Although they form part of wider individual researches, dealing with themes which each author has been elaborating for some time, and pursuing objectives well beyond the limits of this volume, all of these essays are published here for the first time.

It would not be entirely correct to talk of a set of shared principles consciously posited at the outset of this project, as if we had actually moved from clearly formulated common assumptions in accurately planned directions. Such may be the modality of a research project in the natural sciences, involving collaborative procedures, a succession of strictly pre-ordained steps and a division of the experimental tasks leading to common general conclusions. Research methodologies in the human sciences are inevitably less strictly defined and expressed by protocols; above all, they are less conducive to step-by-step or final 'deliverables' (I am afraid that such a label risks overrating the practical applicability of this volume). Nonetheless, while respecting the autonomy of inspiration of each partner, some methodological considerations emerged during the course of our project and were refined during our discussions: I would like to recall them very briefly from my personal viewpoint.

The first consideration concerns the concept of 'diversity', of which our researches tried to explore several expressions and implications. We assumed that 'diversity' denotes a perpetual problematic dimension of human collective existence. In any human agglomerate the intellectual apprehension of diversities, or of the self and the 'other', is the necessary cultural passage for producing an orderly coexistence at the level of a single society or of groups of societies or nations, where the centrifugal forces and the defense of the particular and the specific tend continually to resurface and check the potential for integration. It has been clearly said by ethnologists and anthropologists that such realities we describe as 'ethnic groups', 'tribes', 'peoples', 'nations', but also 'class', 'orders', 'ranks', 'estates' or just "the circle of the 'we'" and the 'others', are all based on forms of identity which are not laid down in nature once and forever. They are not 'natural', 'objective' facts which the scientist's eye 'discovers', 'describes' and catalogues in an archive. There is no such thing as an 'archive' of diversities and differences, because it is precisely part of the latter's nature to be modified by historical circumstances and contexts and by human (not necessarily rational or willing) agency. Such identities and such ethnic groups, tribes, peoples, nations, 'we' and 'they', and so on, are cultural artifacts, crafted through complex processes depending on all those factors which affect and mould perception. The way in which 'identity' and 'diversity' are perceived and conceptualized in historical societies is a dramatic and highly unstable intellectual and political enterprise. It belongs to those founding acts and performatory discourses recognizable in any social construct at different moments of their historical life. The work of historians and social scientists consists in identifying, interpreting

and explaining these founding acts and discourses, their genesis and the way they circulate through languages, discursive acts, symbols, signs and rites. If then 'diversity' and 'identity' are inherently dependent upon 'perception' and upon the tools perception makes use of in giving expression to its findings, then what has to be taken into consideration are precisely the historical processes, the forms and the multiple factors which combine in generating and affecting perception (and description and expression) of 'diversity' or 'identity' and how such perception is related to other socio-cultural factors of an intellectual or practical nature, first of all 'power' and those activities which derive from the possession of power, that is to say, the exercise of authority, the agency of government, the control of access to material resources. The character and the content of such perceptions and conceptualizations of 'diversity', their complexity or restrictive outlook, are of crucial importance for understanding if and to what extent a given society is affected by the so-called "cultural poverty", with its unfailing consequences, namely, a militant sense of identity and a corresponding, strongly exclusive idea of 'otherness'.

Following on from the perception of the multiple forms of historical and cultural diversities, our second consideration concerns the problem of handling diversities in a variety of contexts involving single individual biographies and the life of communities and groups. Confronting human diversities concerns not just anthropological or ethnological diversities, but also political, cultural, religious, economic, social, institutional and juridical differences. These are the deep, sometimes radical differences which oppose groups, peoples or nations when encountering each other, together perhaps with lesser differences which persist within the same social or political and institutional structures. This is not just an epistemological problem for ethno-anthropologists. It is also, and perhaps quintessentially, a practical, political problem for agents involved in devising the way of securing an orderly coexistence for human societies. Dealing with diversities occurs not only in overseas experiences when travelers, explorers, colonizers, conquerors, missionaries, scientists, merchants, officials, ethnologists and anthropologists are involved in 'encounters' with alien and exotic peoples which they want to visit, submit, study, convert, rule, trade with or understand. Differences are also continually faced within fully developed modern Western European states and societies by politicians, rulers, administrators, reformers, diplomats, traders, priests, teachers, whose task should be to find out a common language and a shared systems of ideas and symbols for communicating with and harmonizing human differences of interests, outlooks, stands, beliefs, opinions, wills, languages, customs: all together these latter define historical contexts in which they represent complex legacies and directly condition human agency. All human societies at any stage of their historical existence have to face the challenge of coping with difference. At the level of political institutions, of social intercourse, of cultural and intellectual life, what is needed is a way of turning 'difference' from

a cause of disintegration into a resource for integration; and consequently to make of it a condition for survival and continuity, not of permanent conflict and trauma leading to collapse. The possible reaction to this challenge can be seen as located between the two opposite extremes of what might be called the 'identity spectrum': at one end we find assimilation, when the perception of difference is intellectually elaborated in such a way as to result in complete identification; at the opposite end, we find the perception of an irreducible reality confined in the field of 'otherness' or what is also called an 'othering' process; and otherness, for its own part, can either be admitted and tolerated in forms of co-existence or refused altogether when deemed irreconcilable and just deserving submission, discrimination or utter extinction. The choice of the first, second or third strategy – assimilation, toleration or partial or total suppression – depends on how great the rate of difference is perceived to be and on the cultural and political cost of bridging the gap between competing identities.

These reflections have led to the third consideration, on the basis of which we decided to foster variety in methods, explore multiplicity, and leave thematic freedom rather than favoring one exclusive approach, such as anthropological rather than political, and religious rather than historiographical or sociological, in any particular historical epoch. This decision seemed to us the most compatible with the long chronological span we intended to cover, from the early modern age to well into the nineteenth century. The three and a half centuries of the early modern age clearly presented themselves as one of the historical periods when the process of discovery and encounters with diversities and of societal development had greatly increased Europe's opportunities to confront itself with realities outside its traditional experience, both in a material and in an intellectual sense. Still, it proved possible to divide up the general issues into some very general areas, and this division has given the volume its final tripartite structure. In the first section we grouped analysis concerning the early phase of modern European confrontation with 'otherness', in the so-called age of discovery and encounters. Anthropology, ethnology and religion represent the main aspects and standpoints which suggested the inclusion of the essays by Rubiés, Felici and by myself, illustrating how European secular and religious cultures faced those kinds of 'otherness' and elaborated intellectual frameworks, practices and conceptual strategies for making them recognizable and acceptable. The second section focuses mainly on the eighteenth century and faces the problem of what has been called 'governmentality'. This Foucaultian category – originally framed in an analysis devoted specifically to eighteenth-century political and administrative culture in Europe – may be conveniently recalled when dealing with problems both of domestic (identity, administrative and economic) policy and of colonial and imperial policy, that is to say of relationships with subject non-European peoples in America, Africa and Asia. We sensed that in both areas, that is to say both in European countries and in overseas imperial or colonial contexts, the working out of governing and

reforming schemes, models and instruments for the exercise of power, authority and dominance, was characterized by the prior imperative to describe, interpret and handle diversity, or 'otherness', and accordingly to contrive a rationality and a series of practical and realistic solutions, exploring all possibilities, from assimilation/imitation (of models, paradigms, languages, cultures) to rejection/subjugation. The intellectual debate on European and non-European economies is a particularly interesting case in point. Such a debate, as the essays by Astigarraga, Usoz-Zabalza and Millar show, involved the diagnosis – sometimes highly problematic, as in the case of Qing China – of given economic realities in the light of theoretically alternative or reforming models, and the exploration of the conditions under which the latter might have led to desirable outcomes. The other essays in the section (by Cohen, Lüsebrink, Thomson, Platania and Guasti) mainly move in or relate to colonial contexts and explore different ways of European representation of and relationship to 'otherness' in view of the building of Western domination, intellectual apprehension, religious hegemony or intercultural coexistence. Kontler analyzes the construction of historical images of primordial peoples in the context of elaborated philosophical-historical views of contemporary identity, showing with particular emphasis the nature of the 'othering' process at the foundation of modernity. Török investigates the role of the sciences of government and administration as technical and statistical tools for handling differences by means of mapping, surveying and reducing them to comprehensible quantified entities.

Finally the third section comprises essays on the nineteenth century, mostly regarding the relationship of its intellectual history with one of the most important historical factors in that century, namely nationalism and the nation-building. These essays tackle, first, the conceptual basis of nation-building in some paradigmatic, differently 'peripheral' cases (Hungary, Mexico, respectively dealt with by Trencsényi and Wehrheim), and the way in which visions of ethnic origins and of the history of the civilization process accompanied the emergence of new ideas of nation; secondly (Hary) how domestic and international politics directly affected scientific paradigms and discourses regarding the description of historical and political realities within an imperial framework and involved in the latter's political evolution in a highly conflictual international context; and lastly, Gaddo examines how an intellectual, artistic profile belonging to an imperialist and nationalist country like England in the Victorian age was led to elaborate by different means the perception of 'otherness' or, vice versa, how the experience of 'otherness' affected the construction of an intellectual biography and sensibility.

Each single theme is original and derives from the individual research line of each contributor, mirroring his/her understanding and way of coping with the problem of 'otherness'. If I am allowed a final reflection on the basis of our cooperative research experience, I would say that our notion of 'Europe' and of 'European culture' in the early modern age is strictly related to and influenced by this approach. It is impossible to define a 'European identity' in the early modern

age without a perception of its mobile boundaries, and such boundaries are not physical or geographical, but cultural and intellectual; not settled and definite, but evolving and continuously modified by cultural experiences and intellectual processes revolving around the notion of 'otherness'. This outlook, among other consequences, has had that of positing a close relationship between the experience of otherness and the weakening, rather than the reinforcing of identities of any kind; and therefore to suggest a strict link between the perception of 'otherness' and the development of skeptical cultural attitudes. Some recent publications of a different nature and origins, but devoted to the same set of problems – *Facing Each Other. The World's Perception of Europe and Europe's Perception of the World*, edited by Anthony Pagden (Ashgate Variorum, 2000, 2 vols.), *Europe and the Other and Europe As the Other*, edited by Bo Strath (Brussels: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2000) and *The Anthropology of the Enlightenment*, edited by Larry Wolff and Marco Cipolloni (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007) – have reinforced our ideas and helped in better defining our attitudes.

On the whole, we are certainly more convinced by the heuristic value of a bit-by-bit approach than by the pursuit of an implausible completeness, by multiple than by single-dimensioned analysis, by multiplicity of methods and standpoints than by an accurately balanced and homogeneous structure, by experiments more than by incautious theorizing. Our ambition is to offer a richer and more problematic point of view on the possible, often unexpected directions taken by the unending challenge of facing 'otherness' which modern European culture had to manage in an age of discoveries of and encounters with not only outside, faraway, alien, but also proximate, next-door and apparently more familiar realities or even with forms of historical difference rooted in and rescued from the past but still contributing to identity through memory and tradition.

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If I am permitted to conclude with a dedication, even if unusual in a collective research volume of this kind, I would like to inscribe this work to our colleagues junior researchers from several countries, who joined the project and gave it the support of their intelligence, energy and brightness, with my best wishes that they may deservedly find the right opportunities to continue their respective academic careers under the only auspices of their scientific merits.

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