From the respect of different cultures to the value of cultural difference[*]

Culture and values

Most debates on the governance of multicultural societies seem to assume a notion of culture that anthropologists would consider 'outdated'.[1] That is, they seem to view culture as a static, constant, unchanging entity (see Becker 1950, 251; Devlin1965, 10), a locked and sealed box, "a set of beliefs that is being imposed unchanged upon individuals generation after generation" (Sunder 2001, 511), shaping "distinctive goals that need not be shared by other kinds of society" (Benedict 1934, 46-7). Culture is considered as the distinctive element of a given society, an element that defines the values directing actions and the ultimate goals they are supposed to pursue (Sewell 1999, 39).

From my point of view, such a conception of culture has been successful because of its intimate connection with the solution to the problem of order proposed by liberal thought—a solution based on an individualist conception of action. Such a conception analyzes collective action in terms of individual choice, and conceives of the political and social order as a by-product of the sharing of the same values and the pursuit of the same ends by the individuals making up a society.[2] The theories of the social and political order that characterized the last half century-- from neo-contractarian ones to those focusing on the governance of multicultural societies-- all assume that ends determine individuals' actions. Discussion mainly concerns whether, and how far, different kinds of ends appear as suitable foundations for social order: do we need 'values', hence

[1] The most striking exception to this tendency is surely Seyla Benhabib's work, that explicitly refers to Clifford Geertz's notion of culture and James Clifford's views in order to emphasize the dynamic and 'hybridizing' dimension of cultures. See also Phillips 2007. Critical considerations on the essentialist notion of culture can also be found in Parekh 2000.

[2] This paradigm has proven capable to resist contrary evidence for over one century. Even today, when citizens of Western democracies want to get something done, they are likely to create voluntarist social movements. The conviction that social groups – indeed society itself – are constituted by the voluntary choices of individuals is so deeply rooted in Western liberal democratic culture that it obscures the fact that our institutional life is dominated by bureaucratic states, large corporations, and by an impersonal market running many spheres of life without voluntary individual cooperation.

shared ends? Or can order be based also on 'interests', hence on rationally arguable ends?[3] Can order be based on tastes (or preferences), i.e. on idiosyncratic ends?[4]

The idea that culture-- conceived of as the set of values of a given group-- can solve the problem of the political order was proposed in the middle of the twentieth century by Talcott Parsons.[5] According to Parsons, a non-deviant group member is an individual capable of internalizing the ultimate ends and values ('culture', in the classical approach) that enable him or her to fulfill the other members' expectations about her behavior. In Parsons' theory, values --which explain why different people make the same choices[6]-- are abstract, general and immanent to the social system. They do not have a complex history shaped by interests, political or religious vicissitudes, practical needs, etc.; at least in the medium term, they are the unmoved mover (Aristotle) of social action. In the following decades, such a conception became connected with the notion of citizenship that T.H. Marshall (1963) defined, in his groundbreaking work, as "a kind of basic human equality associated with the concept of full membership of a community". Since the 1980s,[7] "full membership of a community" became translated as "full mastery of a culture", with culture being understood as a set of values that characterizes a given (national) group and originates from a pre-political bond shared by its members.

It is worth emphasizing that the classical notion of culture as the matrix of ultimate ends and values towards which individual actions should be directed if they are to ground the political order, remains stuck within a tendency, highlighted by Isaiah Berlin (1969), to see the values of the liberal tradition as perfectly compatible and non-conflicting.[8] It should be added that, as argued by Harold Garfinkel (1967; see also Wrong 1961) in his critique of Parsons' views, this conception of culture, in spite of its link with the liberal individualist conception but always in its desperate attempt to provide order with a solid ground, ends up drawing a picture of the individual as a passive "cultural dope".

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[3] Cf. e.g. John Rawls's account in *Political Liberalism* that defines an interest-based order as a *modus vivendi* and considers it less stable than a value-based order.

[4] See Hirschman's famous *The passions and the interests*, in which he describes how private vices become legitimated as the basis of the new market-based economic order and Vilfredo Pareto's theory of equilibrium. On the difficulties raised by the use of such literature to provide for a foundation of the political order, see Sen 1977; Arrow 1963; Runciman – Sen 1965.

[5] It is worth mentioning that Talcott Parsons explicitly proposes his theory as a synthesis of the various Western theories that refuse to accept Hobbes's solution of the problem of order, and as the only way of escaping a foundation of order based on its imposition through the Leviathan.

[6] Parsons (1951, 11-2) explicitly states, right at the beginning of *The Social System*, that cultures orient people's action towards certain ends rather than others by defining their values. For he holds that a cultural tradition provides people with "values orientations", and defines "value" as "an element of a shared symbolic system which serves as a criterion or standard for selection among the alternatives of orientation which are intrinsically open in a situation".

[7] I am referring of course to communitarians' positions; seeWalzer (1983, chap. 2) and Sandel (1992, 12-28).

[8] In the twentieth century Marxist views of Gramscian origin on cultural hegemony, too, contributed to such perceptions.

Garfinkel and ethnomethodologists can by no means be charged with overestimating the capacities of social actors. They did not work out a social theory that sees the social actor as a "strong evaluator", unlike, e.g., Charles Taylor (1976). Their theory makes little room for the individual, as shows their use of the expression 'competent member', instead of 'actor'. Such a phrasing does not emphasize the subjectivity of a 'person', so much as her 'mastery of the language', her communicative competence and her membership: her possessing cognitive procedures shared by all members of the community. The "competent member" is a colorless figure totally constrained by the context of his forms of life, but at the same time active. Basically, she is "somebody who interprets his practices as rational with reference to assumed rules and cultures: a craftsman of social work who is cleverly and skillfully reconstructing his acting in the social world for his particular practical reasons" (Giglioli - Dal Lago 1983, 48).[9]

Even though this notion of culture fits well with the Western, liberal and modern, *Weltanschauung*, it has been effectively criticized in the anthropological debates of the last fifty years. In my view, it is chiefly flawed because it confuses discussions about order in multicultural societies. Being more concerned with the liberal tradition than with the conceptual tools with which people describe the local orders characterizing their own lives, it led to the elaboration of theories that make it quite hard to propose a solution of the problem of governing multicultural societies. On the one hand, the classical conception of culture has led to naturalize and neutralize the colonialist approach according to which any local or ethnic community has a corresponding specific culture. Hence, it also consolidated the reification of the notion of culture and, following Parsons' teaching, its conceptualization as a sort of monad impervious to external influences and, ultimately, immutable. On the other hand, the classical conception led to conceptualize all differences between people from different environments as being conflicts of values, hence of cultures, and to the view that an orderly peaceful coexistence requires shared values,[10] hence a shared culture as their receptacle.

Following this approach, recent theoretical-political debates have point to the clash between conflicting values –that is, between different cultures—as the main problem of the contemporary world. As a consequence, theorizing has focused on how to harmonize several different values, both

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[9] Giglioli and Dal Lago (1983, 24) stress that it is hard "to imagine a more bloodless social world, in which the concepts of goal and project are missing and individuals are so fully immersed in trivial repetitive routines, than the world described by ethnomethodologists".

[10] In fact, Parsons sees conflicts between members of the same social group, who share the same values by his definition, as resulting themselves from failed socialization and a source of deviance. A similar view about the basic values of social coexistence is argued by Rawls in *Political Liberalism*. See Santoro 2003, 242-253.

worldwide and within individual states. The reasoning goes roughly as follows: in order to make our societies and our rights more stable, we should make every possible effort to build a consensus of all citizens (either of the whole world or of a specific state, depending on the case at hand) on a set of basic liberal values. This approach characterizes Charles Taylor's and Jürgen Habermas's dialogical theories, as well as John Rawls's theory of overlapping consensus and Will Kymlicka's (1995) theory of multicultural citizenship[11].

Yet, despite the popularity of the binomial made of this notion of culture and the theory of individual action among philosophers and political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists have stressed for many years that what individuals want is of very little help in explaining their actions. People may share ends and values and nonetheless keep behaving in radically different ways, for they use different 'cultural' tools that produce different configurations of the objects and actions that make up their social world. What allows us to understand people's actions is not their values, which are often too general and inconsistent to justify a host of contradictory actions, so much as their habits, their conceptual tools and their behavioral styles. In other words, actions are not determined by values; they depend on the cognitive competences made available by a culture. More precisely, the adoption of a given course of action is normally premised on two elements: an idea of the world in which one is going to act and a feeling-- mostly dependent on others' reaction-- that one can trust her perception of her own behavior as appropriate. If this feeling is lacking, people experience a 'cultural shock'; they sense that they are interacting with an environment different from their own culture.

Since Clifford Geertz's groundbreaking work on *The Interpretation of Culture*, most anthropologists have argued that the reassuring view that culture includes shared ends that enable one to behave as a 'competent' member of society should be abandoned and replaced by a conception of culture as a set of symbolic resources through which people experience the world and give it a meaning (Keesing, 1974). Culture influences and directs people's actions, making them predictable and acceptable; but it does so by providing the cognitive -- more than evaluative-- resources through which individuals organize their own 'strategies'[12] and at the same time bring about shared social processes

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[11] According to Kymlicka's theory, 'cultural' minorities are entitled to retain their traditions in order to live autonomously as far as they do not cause any restrictions for the rights of their members—namely, to the extent that the values directing their actions are compatible with the cultural values of the (western) society as a whole.

[12] I bracket 'strategies' because the word might suggest a planning of individually considered actions, whereas I rather want to point to ways of organizing action that are often dependent, among other things, on cognitive tools, customs, habits, and past experience. The cognitive tools that make up cultures often synthetic, rather than analytic, tools that do not give meaning to each individual element of the surrounding world but to complex pieces of it. In other words, the strategic action I am referring to is not the one tackled by theories of rational action, but rather the one that has been

(Hannertz, 1969, 184). In this conception, culture provides a 'toolkit' of resources from which people can construct diverse strategies of action. To construct such a strategy means selecting certain cultural elements (both tacit, such as attitudes and styles, and explicit, such as rituals and beliefs), and investing concrete life circumstances with their particular meanings. If we follow this argument, culture is not confined to orienting individuals' actions through the cognitive tools and the action strategies it makes available; it triggers, causes these actions, and cognitive and strategic tools--more than values-- emerge as the actual engines of actions. There are no individuals who want to pursue an end and look for the cultural tools to achieve it; there are individuals who choose available categorizations and action strategies and, by choosing them, implicitly choose the values that may be seen as underlying them.

This is not to say that in such a conception values disappear or, by overcoming Hume's law, are seen as following from ways of knowing the world we live in. But it allows to emphasize that, *pace* neo-positivists, the ways of 'seeing' facts, things, actions, and the language used to describe them always embody value orientations.[13] Values determine action by being implicit in interpretive and cognitive schemes, much more than because they would be ultimate ends to pursue. In other words, values as such hardly ever influence everyday actions: it is quite unusual for us to raise the problem whether, by acting in a certain manner, we harm a certain value or uphold another. Values determine our actions because they are part of our cognitive tools, of our ways of conceptualizing in which context we happen to act and which strategic resources are available to us. People do not build lines of action from scratch, choosing actions one at a time as efficient means to ends subjectively (tastes, idiosyncratic interests) or culturally (values, objective interests) given. Instead, they construct chains of action beginning with at least some ready built links. Culture influences action through the shape and organization of those links, not by determining the ends to which they are put. Indeed, if culture would influence action through end values, people in changing circumstances would hold on to their preferred ends while altering their strategies for attaining them. But if culture provides the tools with which persons construct lines of action, then styles or strategies of action will be more

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analyzed by Erving Goffman in his *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. According to Goffman, the actor is able to choose his stage and his 'straight man' (in the theatrical jargon), just like he is free to choose the most suitable costume. The actor's main goal is to preserve expressive coherence, adapting to the various stages that are proposed to him. Goffman insists on the importance of a shared definition of interaction to preserve the latter's coherence. In interaction—staging-- participants can be at the same time actors and audiences. Actors usually try to establish the most favorable images of themselves and encourage other people in a variety of ways to accept their preferred definition of the situation. Goffman acknowledges that – when the accepted definition of the situation has lost credibility – some or all actors may pretend that nothing has happened, if they find such a strategy useful or wish to keep peace. For instance, when a lady attending a formal dinner – who is certainly striving to appear favorably - stumbles, bystanders may pretend they did not see her clumsy behavior: they support her attempt to 'save face'. Goffman insists that this kind of deliberate fictitious gullibility appears at all levels of social organization, from the empire to the ghetto.

[13] For instance, to speak of the euthanasia of a terminally ill person-- that is, of a compassionate act respecting her dignity-- or of her homicide, are two ways of describing the same situation which entail a different value judgment.

persistent than the ends people seek to attain: people will come to value ends for which their cultural equipment is well suited (Mancini, 1980).

Culture affects individuals' actions by shaping a common 'language' that enables "speaker and listeners [...] to feel and somehow to attest the objective production and deployment of common sense knowledge, of practical actions and their circumstances" (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970, 342)[14]. Thus, culture is a toolkit containing symbols, rituals, and worldviews, with their associated user's manuals[15], that people use to figure out and solve the problems they encounter in their lives. It may be taken to be an explanatory element of action not because it defines people's ends, but because it provides the elements through which people build up their 'strategies' of actions, often in a thoughtless and automatic way disconnected from the explicit pursuit of some end. And, most importantly, we can speak of culture if the same elements, on which action is built, enable us to make sense of the strategies of people inhabiting the actor's environment.

Culture understood as a 'toolkit' is very similar to what Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 82-3) defined as 'habitus', i.e. "a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diverse field tasks, thank to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems". While this notion of culture views it as strongly conditioning its users' chances of action, it nonetheless makes room for conceptualizing individuals as its active--sometimes skilled—users, and minimizes the problem of values' and ends' homogeneity. Contemporary debate on the notion of culture is premised on the assumption that human beings are not mindless cultural automatons and that cultures are not unified systems which push action in a consistent direction. Together with ethnomethodologists, we acknowledge that the social actor is a 'competent member' who cannot free himself of his language but at the same time controls it by using it in many different ways and contexts to pursue very different ends: as it is well known to the theologians, every reader of the Bible can find a passage to justify almost any act (Swidler 1986, 277).

This conception of culture allows us to see how cultural experience may reinforce or refine the skills, habits, and attitudes important for common strategies of action. But established ways of acting

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[14] I emphasize that the development of this language does not require linguistic unity. Linguistic unity surely favors its spread but, as shown by the example of Switzerland, it can also spread without it. On the other hand, a shared natural language does not guarantee the establishment of a common 'language'. On the fact that "language invites unity, without, however, compelling it" cf. E. Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*

[15] It might be more correct to say that cultures provide a reference to some indicators on the appropriateness of each tool to circumstances. However, any definition of circumstances depends on cultural tools themselves.

do not depend upon such immediate cultural support. As Ulf Hannertz (1969, 186) stressed in his important study on ghetto culture, "when people develop a cultural repertoire by being at the receiving end of cultural transmission, this certainly does mean that they will put very part of it to use. Rather, the repertoire to measure constitutes adaptive potential. While some of cultural goods received may be situationally irrelevant, such as most of that picked up at the movies, much of that derived from school, and even some of that encountered within the ghetto community, other components of an individual's repertoire may come in more useful".

The problem of inconsistency--or even inner contradiction-- of cultures hardly ever arises in practice, for individuals at any given time choose the strategies of action that they think more appropriate and have a minimum of assertability conditions guaranteed by the people they interact with, because they are part of the kit of shared cognitive tools and strategies. Still, Hannertz's quotation tells us something more: once culture is seen as a toolkit, its original unity looses much relevance. Individuals always have different cognitive tools to give meaning to situations and different behavioral strategies available; whether these come from the same 'culture' or from different cultures is not very important, and is often just a matter of historical account. What matters is the degree of assertability supporting this toolkit-- in Nelson Goodman's metaphor, its level of 'entrenchment'.[16]

Culture and social complexity

A notion of culture as a repertoire of cognitive and strategic resources seems to me fruitful for approaching the problem of governing multicultural societies in an age in which, owing to the vast possibilities of communicating discourses, life styles and world views, and the relative ease for people to move, the coexistence and contact between different 'cultures'[17] is part of everyday life.

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[16] For Goodman (1983) a predicate is 'entrenched'" when its usage (its 'projection') appears natural. Similarly, a way of categorizing a situation, a strategy of action, may be said to be 'entrenched' when it appears natural to the other actors that are interacting in the same situations, or are called upon to evaluate it. Of course, alternative categorizations and strategies may be equally entrenched and therefore appear equally 'natural' in a given situation, whereas at times some appear less 'natural' than others, even if they have a certain degree of legitimacy and entrenchment,. How much each element of the equipment of cultural tools is entrenched is a historical and sociological problem, to be assessed in every contingent situation.

[17] Almost a century ago, in his groundbreaking discussion of cultural conflicts, Sellin (1938a, 63) defined as "primary" the conflicts that arise from these contacts. In his view they happen: 1) when different codes collide on the frontier between contiguous cultural areas; 2) when the laws of a group are imposed upon another group as a consequence of operations of conquest of the latter's territory; 3) when members of a group emigrate to another with totally different cultural codes. I will not dwell here on his sophisticated analysis (still very useful) of the third case. I will confine myself to stressing that Sellin considered conflicts of the second type, which happen "when East meets West", especially relevant. I am indebted to the reading of Paola Parolari's insightful doctoral dissertation for the discovery that Sellin's views were actually part of a broader debate. American anthropologists between the two World Wars studied these cultural exchanges under the label – in truth not very fitting – of "acculturation". See the American

We need not endorse Zygmunt Bauman's view of liquid modernity, nor to naively emphasize the static character of ancient and classic modern societies to accept that dialogue between 'cultures' is a distinctive feature of our societies. While such a dialogue has always been changing cultures themselves, today it no longer takes place between a few cultures, through a slow (earlier centuries long, later decades long) process of change, but continuously, with high-intensity contacts between many different 'cultures'. This requires a very quick adaptation that makes it quite difficult to keep thinking of cultures as static elements, even in the short term.

Besides this continuous contact among cultures, there is another phenomenon that is often seen as different and neglected by debates on governing multicultural societies—a phenomenon that has the same origin and a quite similar impact: the continuous impetus to use traditional conceptual tools and action strategies in an unusual way, namely, to apply them to events and circumstances for which they would not have been seen as relevant before. While this phenomenon has always existed,[18] today it is heightened by the so-called 'cultural industry' (that feeds on this stimulation) and by the speed of technological progress (that creates quite new situations in different domains, from medicine to the ways we relate to each other, situations that lack consolidated routines for their description and handling).

Let us think for example of the bio-ethical issues raised by the development of science and bio-technologies: when does life begin? When does life end? What is an embryo? People responsible for deciding problems concerning euthanasia, predictive medicine, genetic information and manipulation, are faced with questions that not only have no legal solution, but also, no shared moral answer. In Parsons' language, there are no shared values directing action so that they do not appear deviant to substantial sectors of social group members. This is because in this sector the speed of the evolution of medical technology often prevents the consolidation of a language that allows us to base decisions on "the objective production and deployment of common sense knowledge, of practical actions and their circumstances" (Garfinkel & Sack 1970, 342). Hence, there is today in Italy a heated debate on the patient's right (established by article 32 of the constitution) to refuse medical treatment and on whether government can impose a given treatment while respecting a person's dignity. Of course, the question particularly concerns the cases in which a

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Anthropologist Memorandum, R. Redfield , R. Linton, M.J. Herkovits, *Memorandum for the Study of Acculuratio*n, in "American Anthropologist", 38 (1936), n. 1, pp. 193-205.

[18] Thorsten Sellin (1938a; 1938b) already distinguished between two kinds of cultural conflicts: 'primary' conflicts, that emerge between two different cultures, and 'secondary' conflicts develop within the same culture. According to Sellin, the latter take place with the society's passage from being a simple one to being a complex one, i.e., when social differentiation increases and subcultures multiply.

refusal of treatment turns into a form of suicide. But a careful analysis shows that, contrary to common opinion, the debate does not rise from differences about values and value systems, so much as from divergences in the connotation and denotation with which people invest such situations. This is because values become relevant in that they are embodied in the reconstruction of circumstances.[19] Similarly, most debates on abortion that are normally described as stemming from value differences between those upholding the priority of life and those upholding women's self-determination, in fact seem to derive from the lack of a common language that would account for the status of the fetus: the clash seems to be one between those conceiving of the fetus as a beholder of rights, on the one hand, and those considering it an object 'owned' by the mother, on the other one. In fact, the problem is that it is very difficult for a language to emerge that does not conceive of the fetus as either a person or an appendix of the mother, but as a *sui generis* entity-- as a fetus (Wolgast, 1987).

I think these phenomena are *the* problems that our societies face today: problems that are continuously raised (by the scientific-technological system, cultural industry, different cultural equipments), are formulated in specific languages, and about which group members often feel they do not have a shared language available that can play the role that shared culture has always been supposed to play—namely, "to attest the objective production and deployment of common sense knowledge, of practical actions and their circumstances" (Garfinkel & Sacks 1970, 342). However, I think that we should look at them as the starting point from which to work out possible solutions to the problem of social order; the conception of culture highlighted by anthropological (and sociological) debates in recent years can help us very much in this operation.

Actually, recent anthropological and sociological debates on the notion of 'culture' seem to me very helpful in dealing with new political challenges. The conception of culture that emerges surely is less reassuring than the classical one, if one thinks of the automatic perpetuation of the order we are used to live in, but it is much more reassuring if we are looking for a chance of building an order in multicultural societies. For if we approach the issue of governing these societies on the basis of the classical notion of 'culture', we need to think in terms of socially shared values and principles that, *pace* Parsons and Rawls, have always been and today are increasingly perceived as incompatible and incommensurable. Hence, if we keep thinking of culture as an axiological monad, to accept a behavior that breaks one's values and principles appears as a sacrifice of the 'culture' itself, and its

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[19] Besides the above-mentioned distinction between those seeing a suicide and those seeing a euthanasia, we should remember the attempt, currently made by the Italian parliament, to pass a law that would redefine the concept of 'medical treatment' by establishing that force-feeding of comatose people should be seen as a 'treatment' and therefore can be adopted by physicians if a fully aware person expressly refuse it, without considering a possible previous will.

occurrence cannot but be thought of and lived by those who do not share it as an act of violence that damages the environment that nurture their personality. If we rather think of the problem not as one of compatibility between values and principles but as one of dialogue between individuals having different symbolic toolkits, then the issue is completely different. For people are not one-dimensional, nor are they coherent, as far as theoretically incommensurable arguments intersect in their lives. When people tackle their problems and look for solutions, different (religious, political, economic, moral, legal) principles are normally displaced in different times and domains of their lives, so that individuals often manage to heed incompatible principles; or, on the contrary, principles are placed on the same level as affections, idiosyncrasies and personal tastes and interact with them.[20] In the latter case, a solution is often found by means of a trade off between theoretically incommensurable goods, a trade off that only subjective temporary sensitivity may deem acceptable or not.

The trap of unsettled societies

Ann Swidler's distinction between 'settled' and 'unsettled' lives seems to me to shed light on the prospects that a conception of culture as a toolkit opens for an analysis of our societies. For Swidler, the distinction between 'settled' and 'unsettled' lives depends upon culture's role in sustaining existing strategies of action and in constructing new ones. She defines 'settled' lives lived within a social environment in which "culture is intimately integrated with action" and "it is most difficult to disentangle what is uniquely 'cultural', since culture and structural circumstance seem to reinforce each other". In these societies-- those masterly studied by Clifford Geertz (1973, 87-125)-- "culture is a model of and a model for experience; and cultural symbols reinforce an ethos, making plausible a world-view which in turn justifies the ethos" (Swidler 1978, 278). We could say, metaphorically, that 'settled lives' are lives lived in 'settled societies', or, as Swidler herself mentions in a passage, in 'settled periods'. But what makes a society or a period 'settled'? It is the fact that the toolkit of cognitive and strategic resources available to actors is consolidated and firmly entrenched, so that the ways in which individuals categorize events and work out their strategies are obvious to their interlocutors: they take them for granted, hence surely acceptable. As Swidler writes,

> within established modes of life, culture provides a repertoire of capacities from which
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> varying strategies of action may be constructed. Thus culture appears to shape action

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[20] On this point see James March (1978, 596) who, in his critique of the theory of rational choice, emphasized that "choices are often made without respect to tastes. Human decision makers routinely ignore their own, fully conscious, preferences in making decisions. They follow rules, traditions, hunches, and the advice or actions of others. Tastes change over time in such a way that predicting future tastes is often difficult. Tastes are inconsistent. Individuals and organizations are aware of the extent to which some of their preferences conflict with other of their preferences; yet they do nothing to resolve those inconsistencies. [...] While tastes are used to choose among actions, it is often also true that actions and experiences with their consequences affect tastes".

> only in that the cultural repertoire limits the available range of strategies of action. […] Although internally diverse and often contradictory, they provide the ritual traditions that regulate ordinary patterns of authority and cooperation, and they so define common sense that alternative ways of organizing action seem unimaginable, or at least implausible (Swidler 1986, 284).

Thus, in 'settled societies' it is normal to see values as organizing and anchoring patterns of action, in the same way, e.g., that one can expect to see the sun going round the earth every day. This does not mean, though, that no culture or, better, no cultural tradition imposes a single, unified pattern on action, in the sense of imposing norms, styles, values, or ends on individual actors: traditional adages usually come in pairs counseling opposite behaviors.

Once we give up the reassuring traditional approach (formalized by Parsons' theory) that culture is a coherent whole that influences how groups organize action via enduring psychological proclivities implanted in individuals by their socialization, traditional or national culture becomes less important in securing the social order. True, culture provides the materials from which individuals and groups construct strategies of action, and it is clear that publicly available meanings facilitate certain patterns of action-- making them readily available-- while discouraging others. Nevertheless, in every society cultural resources are diverse, and usually, groups and individuals call upon these resources selectively, having different styles and habits of action apply in different situations. The fact that strategies and the very connotations of situations may diverge does not mean that culture does not direct and determine action. In these societies, individuals do active cultural work to maintain or refine their cultural capacities; however, these capacities do not make up a set of values guaranteeing agreement but rather represent a toolkit enabling people to articulate how they are to consider, and behave in, a variety of situations. To use a metaphor by Michel Polanyi (1966), we can say that in settled societies cognitive and strategic tools become part of a culture when they are a 'tacit dimension' of action, that is, when they become ways of acting and seeing that, being shared by a whole group, are considered obvious and therefore not needing a systematic articulation. It is precisely their immunity from the requirement of strict in-depth analysis that allows them to coexist, however inconsistent and contradictory they may be.

Societies and periods cease to be 'settled' when the repertoire of traditional cognitive and strategic resources is called into question. Swidler (1986, 278) associates this phenomenon with the emergence of new ideologies: 'unsettled periods' are described as those in which "ideologies – explicit, articulated, highly organized meaning systems (both political and religious) – *establish* new styles or strategies of action". New ideologies challenge the entrenchment of existing cultural

practices and try to create the conditions for becoming entrenched in their place. It is not enough that somebody puts forward some alternative definition of the situation or some unusual strategy of action to turn a 'settled' society into an 'unsettled' one. All societies, even the most traditional, must cope with the sporadic emergence of these phenomena, that usually are considered deviant (and in Parsons' approach are constructed as such even at the theoretical level). What makes a society 'unsettled' is that alternative ways of representing situations and alternative strategies of action can credibly lay claim to the same status, the same assertability conditions, the same degree of entrenchment as those considered as consolidated.

The most interesting point of Swidler's theorization seems to me to be the contradistinction she makes between culture's features in 'settled' and 'unsettled' periods. In settled periods, culture is made up of 'traditions', i.e. articulated beliefs and practices that are varied rather than uniform, not comprehensive but partial, do not command an enthusiastic consensus, and do not become flags to fight for, but are taken for granted. As we have said, they seem to be an unavoidable part of our lives. As Swidler (1986, 279) writes,

> traditions, whether the routine ones of daily life of the extraordinary ones of communal ceremony, nonetheless seem ordained in the order of things, so that people may rest in the certainty that they exist, without necessarily participating in them.

A culture's presenting itself as 'settled' often obscures the fact that its origins are likely varied and fragmented, and that only adjustment over time, if not violence and indoctrination, made it 'settled'-- which, as I have already stressed, does not mean coherent and systematic, but only taken for granted and obvious.

As mentioned above, acceptance of emerging new ideologies is much more conscious. Precisely because they feel they are engaged in the struggle to establish a new way of seeing things and therefore of living, people who are learning new ways of organizing individual and collective action and practicing customs that are not yet familiar to them pay attention to the shaping of their actions by the new doctrine, symbols and rituals they want to establish. Most importantly, they feel committed to represent their behavior to third parties as shaped by the new reference system they are struggling for. Swidler (1986, 279) characterizes ideologies as 'explicit cultures' that, although they are themselves imperfectly coherent and definitely non-comprehensive systems,[21] "aspire to

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[21] Swidler (1986, 279) emphasizes how ideologies by their very nature cannot provide "the underlying assumptions of an entire way of life, they make explicit demands in a contested cultural arena. Their independent causal influence is limited first because at least at their origins, such ideological movements are not complete cultures, in the sense that much of their taken-for-granted understanding of the world and many of their daily practices still depend on traditional

offer [...] one unified answer to the question of how human beings should live". In other words, they aspire to present themselves as coherent and comprehensive because otherwise they could not struggle for prevailing over the worldviews, assumptions, attitudes proposed by rival models that have the advantage of a consolidated entrenchment.

I wish to stress how ideologies' way of presenting themselves makes them very similar to culture in Parsons' meaning, namely, as an axiological monad configuring individuals' actions. Individuals acting on behalf of an ideology see themselves as "cultural dopes", as instruments of the ideology itself, and want other members of society to take the same attitude. The other important point I wish to emphasize is that, as Swidler (1986, 279) argues, "the same belief system – a religion, for example – may be held by some people as an ideology and by others as tradition; and what has been tradition may under certain historical circumstances become ideology".[22]

This conceptual framework enables us to see that we have fallen into a trap and the more we move, following the old roads to escape, the more the trap tightens around us and takes away all hope of escaping it. According to the conception of order based on the sharing of values, hence of cultures, the very idea of an 'unsettled society' is almost an oxymoron. A society in which the settlement of cultural devices is problematic and conflict-ridden because individuals, groups or whole societies are divided, adopt different resources to categorize the situations and decide strategies for action and "are involved in constructing new strategies of action" (Swidler 1986, 278),[23] is not a society. It is a conflicting conglomerate of individuals without any order. It is a temporary situation bound to turn into an order.

As we have said, even if one does not accept uncritically Bauman's view, one cannot deny that modernity has been characterized by an ever faster movement of ideas, capitals and people, and that during the last thirty years-- in the period that we call the age of globalization-- this speed has become dizzy[24]. This fact, together with the development of the cultural industry that in the West has become a driving force and often spreads the paradigms of meaning and the imagery that later make the development of material production possible, has led to a widespread perception of living what I would name 'unsettled lives'. We are often anguished by a feeling of having to deal with situations in which

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patterns." "Even the most fanatical ideological movement, which seeks to remake completely the cultural capacities of its members, will inevitably draw on many tacit assumptions from the existing culture" (Swidler 1986, 278).

[22] Geertz stresses that this phenomenon is characterizing part of contemporary Islam, where religion no longer rests upon individual belief but is becoming its cause.

[23] Swidler emphasizes that it is in the analysis of these periods that the traditional notion of culture appears inadequate.

[24] On this we cannot but refer to the theories, however questioned and questionable, by Paul Virilio. See in particular his *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*. New York. Semiotext(e), 1977.

we cannot rely on our traditional routines and, even worse, of the ineffectiveness of our efforts to cope with these new situations, to find ways of adjusting to them. Any adjustment, as soon as it begins to take shape and however quickly it takes shape, is already outdated because we have to cope with many other new ways of seeing things and situations, many other strategies of behavior. Subjectively we have the feeling to be overwhelmed by an epochal change; we think that our lives are no longer normally 'settled lives' lived in 'settled societies'. In other words, we feel that we are living in 'unsettled' societies, and that the chance to live in a 'settled period' is a lucky favorable circumstance (somebody may consider it the unlucky circumstance of living in an enclave isolated from the rest of the world, it all depends on temporary subjective perception). Turning Swidler's approach upside down, we could say that today we have a sense of living rare 'settled periods' – when the ways of action seem obvious to us and to our interlocutors – that emerge in the middle of a situation that is generally 'unsettled' – when we have to deal with people who seem willing to impose alien ways of seeing and behaving upon us. The problem of governing multicultural societies is ultimately how to allow individuals to live a 'settled life' in societies that, according to our usual standards, are 'unsettled'.

All strategies for governing multicultural societies have implicitly assumed that individuals can only live in an environment characterized by cognitive and strategic repertoires that look natural to them, and that are deeply entrenched. This assumption may be acceptable; our psychological, anthropological and sociological knowledge tells us that the very idea of individual identity is troublesome without such an environment. What appears tragically wrong in the light of Swidler's account is the strategy followed to achieve this goal. For seeing order and stability as the product of shared values -- that is, thinking of culture *à la* Parsons in terms of an axiological monad-- it assumes that only a long homogenization of cognitive and strategic repertoires guaranteed by old national cultures allows for the development of a 'settled' society.[25] That is, it assumes that only a consolidation of these repertoires into a national or ethnic culture allows for a 'settled' society and, therefore, for the development of 'settled lives'.[26]

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[25] This thesis is the premise of Bouchard's view on the fundamental importance of national identity for the existence of a state (see Bouchard 2011). But it also explains why national identities were built at the cost of massacres and deportations, creating institutions for mass disciplining and the myths of ethnic identities. Over half a century ago, the need to protect the prevalent culture, understood traditionally as a set of values, to avoid the breakdown of society, was the topic of the well known controversy between Lord Devlin and Herbert Hart.

[26] See Kymlicka (1995, 18): "I am using 'a culture' as synonymous with 'a nation' or 'a people' – that is, as an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history. And a state is multicultural if its members either belong to different nations (a multination state), or have emigrated from different nations (a polyethnic state), and if this fact is an important aspect of personal identity and political life".

This strategy appears flawed because it is ground in the idea that different cultures correspond to different value systems, basically consistent and non-contradictory internally, rather than different conceptual and strategic tools that are in any event plural, rival and often conflicting. Most importantly, it ignores that 'settled cultures' support varied and often even conflicting patterns of action, and hence, appears to be inconsistent and self-defeating: its core is the transformation of cultural traditions-- i.e. unspoken, non-thematized, flexible and ever imperceptibly evolving equipments that can account for opposing and contradictory actions and situations-- into ideologies. It involves a widespread belief that, in order to regain the feeling of relative safety guaranteed by routine, individuals must re-establish their culture in everyday life, must struggle for it, and that states must do the same using laws. This strategy is paradoxical because, as we have seen, the attempt to establish a culture as an ideology creates 'unsettled' societies: the chosen means move the pursued end away and make it unattainable.

What counts for the possibility to live a 'settled life' is that the cognitive and strategic resources available to actors are entrenched, allowing them to behave in ways that they consider --and others perceive as-- natural. In other words, it is crucial that individuals do not think they are acting in some free-floating heritage of ideas, myths, or symbols, but that they have a wide range of consolidated and accepted possibilities of action. The building of this range of consolidated possibilities, however, does not require, unlike what has often been the case in the past, that qualitatively and quantitatively relevant novelties introduced from time to time pass through a long settlement period that produces the ethnicization or nationalization of the various resources by merging them into what is considered *one* culture. It is worth emphasizing that such a mistake is shared by both assimilationist and multiculturalist policies, the only difference being that for the latter it is crucial to turn the traditions of ethnic minorities and not only those of majorities into ideologies.

The idea that cultures, either majorities' or minorities', need protection (like pandas) reifies cultures and turns them into coherent static entities with defined boundaries. By advocating the struggle for their protection, this reification turns cultural traditions into ideologies and establishes the idea that the winners are those who sharpen differences and their intangibility. This approach betrays the historical development of cultural traditions that have always been mixing and transforming; sometimes they have vanquished and disappeared, sometimes they have merged and given rise to different formations. Often these changes have not even been perceived and thematised, or they have been so only in historical perspective, long after their occurrence. As we have seen, cultures have always been entities with uncertain borders and steadily moving in an often imperceptible

way. Their continuity has always been decided, in an apodictic and unavoidably arbitrary manner, by their members.

Cultural difference as strategic value for constructing settled societies

The debate between assimilationism, even in its mild and dialogic form, and multiculturalism is a dangerous 'intellectualist' game that in fact gives rise to destructive power clashes. For it is clear that in our societies cultures blend without too many problems when their members come in touch in relatively frivolous areas (music, food, travel, exchanges, etc.[27]) and when they interact on a relatively equal footing. The problems of cultural bewilderment and the destruction of cultural identities arise abruptly when we have to deal with problems concerning trickier and more vital sectors: work, socio-economic conditions, relations of power and domination.

Yet, the safe road to 'liberal' equality does not depend upon its ideologization but rather on a cultural repertoire that allows for making sense of actions and situations even if they do not appear shareable. We will not escape this trap if we look for a close-ended dialogue that will eventually lead, through overlapping consensus or communicative or empathic action, to a common 'liberal' agreement on, and view of, the problems we face. The only way out that seems viable to me is to prone the widespread adoption of a toolkit plural enough to allow for more than one correct solution to these problems, to make each chosen solution appear reasonable (at least to the extent that it meets the needs of people actually involved). We should therefore adopt a strategy that continues what has always happened in the cases of cultural encounters: the formation of toolkits that make many contradictories actions and diverse strategies seem normal, in order to cope with a variety of problems. I think the acceleration of intercultural encounters (as well as of intracultural problems without solutions guaranteed by shared assertability conditions) only requires an awareness that we need to favor the rapid production of what has always been produced gradually and tacitly. The first move this awareness should lead us to make, the first move to govern societies that seem to be irreducibly multicultural, is to make the largest possible number of conflicts local rather than vital. This can be done by shifting decision making from the level of general rules to that of resolving specific conflicts-- a strategy very different from—indeed, opposed to-- the ideologization of cultures.

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[27] It is telling that when culture is ideologized, even these areas become objects of confrontation: some Italian mayors have prohibited the specialized sale of ethnic food.

The life of multicultural societies shows that new elements in the repertoire of cognitive and strategic resources can become more easily and quickly entrenched if they are thought of as relating to particular sectors of life (familiar, professional, financial, recreational, etc.) and to certain relations with particular people or between particular people (family members, foreigners, sick persons, women, children, etc.). This channel of entrenching or naturalizing ways of seeing and behaving seems able to bring many other ways of cataloguing things or acting in the toolkit of solutions perceived, at least locally, as legitimately available, without going through their slow ethnicization. One of the most striking cases is polygamy. While in Italy polygamy is not legally recognized, and is indeed a criminal offence, it has become part of the social world through the protection of children's right to grow up assisted by both parents. This right allows the parent who had remained abroad to enter and stay in the national territory even if the parent who is already resident in Italy with the minor is married and lives with another spouse.

Thus, to build a set of legitimately available cultural resources it is not important that they are thought of as 'common'. Nationals, too, have a perception that they live in a multicultural society and share the idea that, within borders to be drawn from time to time, everyone may behave as he or she thinks natural. In many situations in which they do not feel directly involved in a conflict, they are ready to accept that others may use toolkits that appear to them weird or unconceivable. This readiness and the resulting use of these cultural toolkits makes them more and more familiar and less weird and inconceivable, and therefore more and more part of the cognitive and strategic tools the agent himself or his interlocutors may legitimately resort to. In other words, the integration of cultural tools, like the integration of people, need not proceed through their assimilation but may also happen through the recognition and acceptance of their differences.

In my view, the most important pragmatic suggestion of the new conceptualization of culture and in particular of Swidler's account is this. If a society is characterized by the presence of minorities that explicitly take different cognitive and strategic toolkits as schemes in which to ground their actions, and if we are to manage such a society without taking an authoritarian stance, we need to avoid reifying 'cultures', turning them into ideologies by essentializing or nationalizing or ethnicizing them. Any 'cultural tradition' is by its very nature hybrid and 'contaminated', always contradictory, and changes through the actual experiences of its 'holders'. Anthropologists emphasize that cultures are entities that change imperceptibly but continuously through the everyday interactions of their members (or holders). Most changes are silent, not thematized; the

problem of their adaptation to contingent situations is not tackled. When this problem is raised, normally adaptation is justified through a variety of ad hoc clauses.

The reification of cultures, their ideologization, makes any reasonable compromise impossible. As Swidler correctly saw, it forces us to live in unsettled societies. The majority's requesting migrants to give up their own identities, for which they have only hostility, often hinders the possibility for them to build a new identity. Old identities become havens, and tend to become sclerosed in forms more traditionalist and conservative than those they take in the countries of origin. Perceived hostility prevents interaction and with it, the hybridization of cultures. As soon as we come to discuss the constitutive core elements of a culture, if we take the point of view of the culture itself and its stubborn preservation, all kind of compromise appears unacceptable, for it transforms it, turns it into a different culture.

We should begin with observing that cultures do not talk with each other, do not debate, do not conflict. It is people that do. To speak of conflicting or incompatible cultures is, on the one hand, to reify cultures, to sclerose them and deprive them of their natural continuous modifiability (Dal Lago 2006). On the other hand, it is to repeat Parsons' mistake and to force people to see themselves as mere holders of a culture, as robots that follow a planned scheme. Discussing of 'cultures' rather than individuals denies people's dignity; it is a theoretical move that, as I have said, silently turns individuals into 'cultural dopes', into mere reproducers of dominant cultural rules (taken as unified and coherent), by denying their identities as active subjects and skilled users of the horizons of meaning they live in. Normally, (migrant) men and women are first of all people busy surviving and not (or only incidentally) making their culture survive. The interactions in which individuals are involved continuously redefine the language game and unnoticeably modify the cultural tools of all interlocutors.

Even if 'culture' is conceived of as a cognitive and strategic repertoire, it can be understood at best as a Weberian ideal type, i.e., as an analytical tool that in a given situation allows the interpreter-- the social scientist-- to make sense of a person's action in this way. If a person were a culturally determined machine, she would act like this. Examining how she actually acted and the difference between the actual and the expected action helps us reconstruct the actor's motivations and the influences that shaped them: ultimately, the cultural tradition itself.[28] To reduce culture to

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[28] It is worth emphasizing that a possible outcome of Weber's account is to realize that the ideal type of culture has been built mistakenly, i.e. associated more with reference texts than the actions of a community's members. It is not coincidental that Weber emphasizes the difficulties with building ideal types that can be safely used to analyze actions.

an ideal type, as mentioned above, does not mean that 'culture' is not a social force, a social fact, but only that its boundaries are elusive by the very definition of culture. There is no such thing as an object that can be defined a culture with exact boundaries. There are many versions of every culture, perhaps as many as the individuals referring to it and the interactions in which they are involved: individuals, though different from each other, interact with each other building a recognizable and recognized space, a horizon of meaning through which members of the same community speak not only to each other but to the 'others'. This horizon is not finite or definite: meaning changes continuously with the changing of the discourses that reproduce and are produced by it.

If we drop the idea that we should look for a compromise between cultures, and try and solve just the problems of individual people-- that is, individuals having personalities that are normally formed within a culture-- then the enterprise is made easier. The first element that should be stressed is the strong conditioning power of the language game and its assertability conditions. Sociologists studying the techniques of neutralization have shown that, when choosing an argumentative strategy to justify actions perceived by other players of the language game as blameworthy or views perceived as untenable, people usually tend to refer to reasons shared by those who are supposed to accept the justification.

Studies of accountability (Garfinkel 1967) were mostly developed in the fields of the sociology of deviance and social psychology with a view to describing the cognitive processes through which individuals build the reports of their actions when requested to account for them in terms of personal responsibility. This phenomenon occurs whenever an individual has to reconstruct his or her action and give a public justification of it. Then there emerges the actors' tendency to build or preserve a positive image of themselves through techniques allowing them to displace, or in any event to weaken, responsibility for breaking some rule of the normative system under which they feel judged. Different authors that have treated this subject have worked out various typologies of neutralization techniques, excuses, defenses, concessions and denials (Matza 1969). According to a well known study by Donald Cressey (1954), when charged with theft the rich tend to allege kleptomania as a defense, the poor the state of necessity.[29] Similarly, it is normal that in liberal societies, characterized by the protection of religious differences and religious freedom, people

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[29] According to Cressey the mystery can be explained by the hypothesis that people of higher culture had a chance to know about this disease (for this reason he considers this as an example of the relevance of differential association for deviance) and use this knowledge to make their behavior more acceptable in their own and others' eyes.

think, sometimes mistakenly, that religion is itself an acceptable justification.[30] Such a justification could not be alleged and is not put forward in a theocratic society, or a religion-centered society. A striking example is progressive Islam arguing for what seem to us classical liberal rights on the basis of arguments that appeal to Islam itself rather than the liberal tradition.

It is important to stress that, as Wright Mills (1963) argued, these defenses are not mere ad hoc 'excuses'. They are not attempts to rationalize ex post what we did, but conceptual schemes widespread in certain contexts (in particular, multicultural contexts[31]) that direct individuals' actions by making behaviors, that without a neutralizing language would be viewed as unviable options, appear justified. Their widespread use creates the outline of a plural—multicultural--language game. To use a reificationist language, it creates a pluricultural or pluriethnic toolkit that is considered acceptable and is likely in the medium term to be used thoughtlessly, that is, without being perceived as originally pluriethnic.

As mentioned above, today's societies have been made highly complex by migrations, as well as technology and the speed of information transmission. Most importantly, and this makes the problem trickier, they become every day more articulated and multiform. In these circumstances bewilderment often results from the lack of cognitive and strategic means to cope with situations that appear totally new, or at any rate such that we realize that we have no toolkit enabling us to respond in a quick, automatic and safe way. The plurality of toolkits and their dialogue seem to be fundamental cognitive and strategic resources to cope with the steady increase of social complexity. In other words, if this plurality is managed without reifying (that is, ideologizing) cultures it does not appear as a factor of cultural shock but as a means through which we can, painstakingly, try and reduce the bewilderment caused by social complexity.

During the last years the reification of cultures and the emphasis on ethnic pluralism have concealed the fact that 'cultural shock' does not result only from exogenous causes, the encounter with other cultures, but also, and to a relevant degree, from endogenous causes. They have moved to the background the fact that it is changes in technologies and the circulation of information that made our equipment of cognitive and strategic resources appear inadequate in many situations.

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[30] For instance, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that the individual right to freedom o religion and conscience allows Sikhs to carry *kirpan* -- a sort of ritual knife-- in schools, in schools. We could cite dozens of judicial rulings that allow abstractly forbidden behaviors in the name of religious freedom and its corollary of tolerance.

[31] After all focus on and study of techniques of neutralization stem from Edwin Sutherland's and Donald Cressey's (1960) well known analysis of differential association.

Moreover, by representing cultures as black boxes characterized by ultimate values and ends, they made their plurality seem only a cause of the problem and not a key resource for its solution.

It is essential not to value each individual culture as an individual good, a conception implied by such approaches as Taylor's and Kymlicka's, which consider culture an "irreducibly social good" or a "primary good", but rather to value cultures' plurality and dialogue as a collective good. For, in contemporary complex societies, a subjectivity developed within a single culture, a black box of practices pointing to a specific set of ultimate values, is inevitably bound to live an 'unsettled life'. It is bound to deal with continuous bewilderment resulting from encounters with situations for which it lacks the appropriate cognitive and strategic tools. In settled periods, that is, in periods without contact between competing cultural repertoires and without deep and abrupt social change, people naturally 'know' how to act because their toolkit constrains action by providing a limited set of resources out of which individuals and groups construct strategies of action. Therefore, when social situation changes continuously and deeply the perception of living 'settled lives' cannot be saved by ideologizing existing cultural bonds. They would not provide us with the cognitive and strategic resources needed to cope with the different situations facing us, since the stimulus of the contact between different toolkits is lacking.

In this context, I think we should recover the spirit of John Stuart Mill's view that pluralism is a fundamental value because it makes the enrichment of personalities possible through dialogue. This unending enrichment is crucial to living settled lives in complex societies steadily and quickly changing. Mill emphasizes that freedom of speech is necessary to guarantee the self-realization of all members of the community, not just of those expressing minority opinions. The stimulus of dissenters is fundamental for the critical development of orthodox individuals' personality, for it helps prevent them from sinking into conformist positions:

> those in whose eyes this reticence on the part of heretics is no evil, should consider in the first place, that in consequence of it there is never any fair and thorough discussion of heretical opinions; and that such of them as could not stand such a discussion, though they may be prevented from spreading, do not disappear. But it is not the minds of heretics that are deteriorated most, by the ban placed on all inquiry which does not end in the orthodox conclusions. The greatest harm done is to those who are not heretics, and whose whole mental development is cramped, and their reason cowed, by the fear of heresy (Mill 2001a, 32).

Mill's thesis, of course, should be transposed into the current context. Mill had in mind a traditional notion of culture as characterized by a set of ultimate ends and values. In his view, the individual

involved in the dialogue with other cultures is revisiting his values, and this makes him appear almost as an existentialist hero or a Nietzschean superman. Mill's individual 'of character' is an individual reflecting on his worldviews, dialoguing with different points of view and distinguishing the suggestions he identifies with from those he perceives as the mere product of external influences, and refusing on reasoned grounds those that go against his opinions. Today's unsettled societies seem only to require the craftsman of social practices theorized by ethnomethodologists, who moves cautiously but unbiased among the different cultural and strategic tools that he finds in the social texture, to deal with often new situations and the often unprecedented tasks he has to perform.

Moreover, Mill's views remind us that often people do not readily take advantage of new structural opportunities which would require them to abandon established ways of life. This is not because they cling to cultural values, but more trivially because they are reluctant to abandon familiar strategies of action for which they have the cultural 'equipment'. When cultures seem to give unequivocal directions, when they seem to constrain action over time, this happens mainly because of the high costs of cultural retooling to adopt new patterns of action. To the extent that in today's societies the chance of living a settled life is tied chiefly to the availability of cognitive and strategic tools to manage complexity, it is crucial to preserve the plurality of available toolkits and the ensuing dialogue, and to overcome our natural preferred tie with one of them,[32] because we are likely to pay for this reticence and will end up feeling inadequate to our very societies. In other words, it is fundamental to remember that, as Mill wrote,

> capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed,
> not only by hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority
> of young persons it speedily dies away if the occupations to which their position in
> life has devoted them, and the society into which it has thrown them, are not
> favorable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise (Mill 2001b, 13).[33]

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[32] Mill is very severe with those who yield to this sluggishness: "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides" (Mill, 2001b). Because of this position Mill is strongly hostile to any form of traditionalist culture which tends to isolate individuals from dialoguing with others and is intolerant of dissenters. Of course he is, on the one hand, a son of his own time and, on the other, a human being, hence inconsistent and capable of endorsing contradictory principles at the same time. Therefore we should not be surprised that in other writings he proves to be all but open to understanding the culture of 'others'. For instance, he considered the Indian culture as expressing a humanity not yet civilized, whose members could and should be treated as children.

[33] Of course, otherness is a reciprocal concept: to members of the host society the cultures of 'others' are those of migrants, but for migrants the culture of 'others' are those of the host society and other migrant communities. Natives and migrants are mutually dissenters and their dialogue allows the development of the personality not only of members of the host society but of migrants as well.

Some debates on multiculturalism in Tuscany: the emerging value of difference

In Tuscany, an approach of this kind has stimulated a debate on teaching in schools with a high number of children from migrant families. In the city of Prato, where there is a high concentration of Chinese, Chinese children make up half of the students in some classes. Italian families experience this situation as a serious problem. They often angrily remark that their children are forced to learn more slowly because teachers have to take care of Chinese children's ability to follow their lessons. People have been discussing for two years on the opportunity to tackle the problem in a totally different way. Given the importance taken by Chinese language and culture, and the impressive economic growth that made China the second economic power worldwide, some are proposing to attach the same importance to Chinese children learning Italian and to Italian children learning Chinese culture and language. In other words, the idea is that in the complex society that is going to develop in the next twenty years, mastery of the Chinese cognitive and strategic toolkit will be a fundamental resource, and nothing favors the acquisition of this toolkit more than attending the whole school cycle, from nursery to high school, with a Chinese schoolmate. Thus, school boards are planning an experiment with mixed classes where two languages and two cultures, Italian and Chinese, are taught since the nursery and children socialized in one culture by their families can help to teach their culture to their class mates from families with a different culture. By the time of parents' choice the didactic program of these classes present a slower learning of Italian language and culture not as an annoyance that will emerge during the school year but as a choice rewarded by the gradual learning of Chinese culture and language. A similar debate is developing, though more slowly, mostly because of the minor appeal of this language and culture, about the opportunity to start a similar experiment with Arabic.

Another important evidence of the advantages of complementing different toolkits in the management of complex problems was given by a debate on female genital mutilations in Italy. Some years ago the Florence Bioethics Committee noticed that many little girls, mostly but not solely from the Horn of Africa, continued to suffer genital mutilations, either clandestinely in Italy or, much more frequently, when coming back for holidays to their original countries. The Committee proposed to replace female circumcision with a symbolic needle prick, performed in medical facilities and accompanied by all social rituals and celebrations demanded by families. Behind this proposal there was a long work of colloquia with families from the Horn of Africa that had shown how the social pressure for the infibulation of little girls was unsustainable for mothers,

especially when returning to their country of origin.[34] They had also shown that the needle prick, together with the ceremony, was considered a ritual suitable to mark the passage from a little girl to a woman, hence sufficient to convince the community that infibulation was no longer necessary. During the same period a member of the Committee had been addressed by an adult Somali girl who had asked Florence medical services to be infibulated. She suffered terribly for the fact that all boys of her community refused her because she was not infibulated, and she did not want an Italian partner.

The Committee's proposal met with very angry reactions that blocked its implementation. However, after the scandal had abated, the region of Tuscany, that had been requested to prohibit the practice strictly as illegal, after wide discussion and consultation found it totally legitimate. While this advice did not lead to the adoption of the symbolic gesture, it allowed an extensive debate in which the new perspective held by women from the Horn of Africa began to be used to discuss many practices that, though lawful, in the political-cultural arena seem to lack assertability conditions unanimously considered entrenched (that is, obvious). A reflection has started on some facts that I quickly enumerate. In Italy 1) it is women's right to their psychic health that justifies legal abortion; 2) it is accepted that an individual's right to his or her psychic health justifies surgical modification of his or her genitalia, even though epidemiologic studies have shown the relevant problems of psychic equilibrium that people who underwent this surgery may run into; 3) similarly it is accepted that people, including minors, may undergo surgery for purely aesthetic reasons. At this point it has been asked what prevented this very same right to psychic health from being accepted as a justification to allow the more or less serious genital mutilation known as infibulation, when requested by an adult woman alleging the psychic sufferance caused by being seen as different within her community, or arguing that an infibulated vagina is part of her concept of beauty. This new approach to the problem led to thematize that, regardless of surgery or harm to personal physical integrity, a range of bodily manipulations are recognized as having an emancipating value and expressing personal autonomy, whereas the practice of infibulation is considered a cultural imposition and a sexist vexation of women. This is the reason why even a needle prick has been perceived as illegitimate, because it conveyed the message of women's condition of inferiority. This of course has led to a debate on whether aesthetic surgery is itself something women resort to in order to pursue a male-imposed or commercial model of beauty.

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[34] It is not unusual for mothers and fathers to report that infibulation had been performed by grandparents, who found the practice normal and natural, when children were with them and parents in Italy.

As I said, this discussion did not have any practical impact, but I think it produced, at least in some environments, a great result in terms of awareness, critical capacity and recognition of the importance of others' points of view, possibly when we are harshly faced with them, for shedding light on the limitations of our practices and objective catalogues. In other words, it helped show how cultures are not black boxes set up around different values but, on the contrary, tools for the management of occurrences, often in the name of the same values.

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