La questione
Mediterraneo
Tradizione, cambiamenti, prospettive

a cura di
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The construction of Sicilian Cultural Identity, reflecting on the historical and political characteristics of the Mediterranean

In this paper, I explore cultural devices that contribute to the construction of Sicilian identity. It is a cultural-anthropological approach with forays into literature and cinematography. To this end, I am developing a model that allows us to reveal precisely those mechanisms that literature and cinema have produced over the last one hundred and twenty years, giving life to a Sicilian "identity", partly the result of local thought and needs, partly of the need to construct an external "other", particularly through the lens and prism of British culture.

The main objective of my investigation is to reveal the ideological implications embodied in the re-naming of the "Department of Cultural Heritage and Sicilian Identity" introduced in 2008 by the Sicilian government. In the first part of my work I gathered the opinions of regional political leaders and a sample of young Sicilian university students to evaluate the emotional, sentimental and

instrumental impact of concepts and mental structures that are part of what we could define as a "Sicilianist" idea of Sicily, an island in the centre of the Mediterranean, a meeting place between different cultures, a historically central territory in European and world affairs. This set of clichés is regularly ignored by the data regarding emigration, marginality and the economic under-development of the island.

The new "rebranding" of the Regional Department was intended to defend "Sicilian identity", an identity conceived of as certain, immutable and perennial. However, today this approach has been downsized and the politicians I interviewed have interpreted that denomination as representative of folklore and popular traditions; not of the inclusive identity of all the different social experiences, both traditional and contemporary. Another element that became evident is the inclusion of issues of identity in a pluricultural context, therefore not as exclusive, but inclusive of many different and complementary identities: Sicily as a nexus of cultures rather than a place of an exclusive form of cultural and social life.

These elements are part of an exploration undertaken with other scholars who reflected on specific aspects ranging from folkloric literature, organized crime, mental illness, industrialization, and the creation of archaeolgical parks. The first part of this reflection is published in the volume *Il mistero e l'inganno. Pensare, narrare e*

creare la Sicilia[1]. In my contribution[2] I sought to explore the mechanism behind the creation of stereotypes of Sicily and the strengthening and consolidaton in the dynamic between subjectivity and the gaze of the other, two sides of the same coin that contribute to a paradoxically shared narrative, even if composed of contrasting viewpoints held in tension.

Here, therefore, I consider it relevant to develop aspects relating to the implications that a historical, political and cultural critique of the changing and ambivalent phenomenon of cultural identity can have within the Mediterranean.

First of all, I would like to address the issue of the centrality of Sicily in the Mediterranean. It is clear that this definition also applies to other realities for geographical, historical and cultural reasons. However, in the political and intellectual imagination this definition applied to Sicily has taken hold in the collective imaginary. It derives from factors that I will summarize in a synthetic form: geographical reasons and colonial historical reasons. These two reasons, in fact, are solid foundations. The equidistance between east, west, north and south seems to be a convincing argument. Similarly, Greek and Phoenician colonization and Arab and Spanish occupation seem

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[1] M. Bolognari (a cura di), *Il mistero e l'inganno. Pensare, narrare e creare la Sicilia*, Navarra, Palermo 2021.
[2] F. Astone, *La commedia da recitare. Lo sguardo degli "altri" nella costruzione dell'identità siciliana. Narrazione letteraria e immaginario selvaggio*, in M. Bolognari (a cura di), cit., pp. 67-96

excellent arguments for conferring the status of the centre of the Mediterranean.

Sicily at the centre of the Mediterranean is, therefore, an image derived not only from geography, but also from history. A historic concept deriving and stemming from the colonization of the island by the Greeks, Arabs, Spanish, Normans, and North Europeans. Different military, economic, and socio-linguistic powers have occupied Sicily. This centrality, as a historical datum rather than a geographic one, has forged an aspiration on the part of Sicily and Sicilians to play an important role on the world stage, or at least in the Mediterranean basin, acting as a bridge between Europe and Africa, between the West and the East.

On the other hand, if it is true that many have jostled to occupy this strategic point – a military and economic platform – it is not to be taken for granted that Sicily has been considered the centre of the Mediterrean for any reason and at all times because, as mentioned, it derives from historical strata. Occupying a central place in the Mediterranean must be considered through the lens of history, as in antiquity the Mediterranean dominated countries extending to Northern European, with a shift in military and political power towards the North only between the 15th and 16th centuries, weakening the hegemonic strength of the Mediterranean through, for example, establishing banks and the foundations of capitalism. It is therefore a concept that seems immutable, because anchored to physical

geography, but on reflection it transpires that it is an extremely variable element and anything but immutable.

The concept of centrality becomes more complicated when applied to cultural and linguistic questions since the borders are more blurred. In fact, it is not enough to imagine a cultural centrality for the sole reason that numerous and various Mediterranean cultures have held sway over and have influenced the island. On the Mediterranean scene, the presence of cultures that are, on one hand, diverse but also close in terms of geography, history, trade relationships, and demographic mobility has produced the notion of the centrality of Sicily, as a crossroads or a meeting point. The Greek and Roman presence in antiquity, followed by the Arabs and Spaniards, who left significant traces, still evident today, on a linguistic, ritualistic, religious and architectural level, have, in various ways, made this centrality fascinating, but also rather illusory.

I believe that this so-called centrality is part of a narrative which, for political reasons and in order to maintain power in the hands of a few privileged classes, has tended and still tends to give the island a "special", unique connotation which serves to justify its political autonomy. It does not appear to be a coincidence that the name of the Department in 2008 was changed on the initiative of a political movement that was called, in fact, the Movement for Autonomies, whose leader was the Hon. Raffaele Lombardo, then president of the Sicilian Region.

Symbolically, in 2008, the president of the Region of Sicily Mr Lombardo, who had wanted to change the name of the Department, in disagreement with the Berlusconi government, declared: "Italy is divided into two, the European and the African, we would like a gòvernment that would take care of both Italies and make them become the same thing. This is the point". The definition "African Italy" was both a provocation but also a clear reference to the south, as if this referred to a cultural rather than a geographical identity in a pre-EU context. At that time anti-European feeling was strong and mainly concerned financial and economic policies.

From the end of the nineteenth century, the English have often associated Sicily with "oriental" African cultures. In literature, for example, we can see several examples of this "orientalism", to use Said's definition.

I recently analyzed and translated the 1905 English novel set in Sicily – Robert Hichens' *The Call of the Blood* – in which the author, despite his declared admiration for Sicily and the Mediterranean, explicitly associates Sicilians with Arabs and Greeks, at least those from antiquity; in short, the definition that is often reiterated by the travellers on the Grand Tour: a little Greek and a little Arab. In the Hichens' novel there is a thread that historically links Sicily both to classical antiquity and its Arab heritage. Thematically and in the nuance of the language employed it seems that the comparison to a certain Levantine attitude towards commercial interests in Sicilian

culture is to be attributed to a Mediterranean context that has oriental connotations (hence "orientalism").

In the novel there is one character in particular, who embodies the characteristics that, for convenience, I will define as Mediterranean. He is portrayed as being addicted to money and card games, even to the point that he is prepared to gamble on the sexual availability of his young daughter with the rich English guest. He is always more than ready to ask for money and material things: from the cigarettes and the donkey he asks for, to when he accepts, at the end of the novel, to leave for the United States in exchange for the money offered to him to keep quiet about a crime. What is problematic is not so much the characterization of this particular protagonist, but rather the fact that the author speaks of him as a "typical" representative of the Sicilians. He becomes the representation of Sicilian culture, evidently through the gaze of an English intellectual of the early twentieth century.

The point here is that Northern European cultures throughout the twentieth century encouraged Sicily and its elites to imagine and represent themselves as part of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Maghreb rather than as part of Italian areas of Veneto, Romagna or Liguria or, indeed, of France. As Lombardo said, an "African Italy" using a disconcerting oversimplification.

Sicilian identity framed in a broader context, that of the Mediterranean, better clarifies what we mean in an anthropological

sense by identity constructed by the subjects involved, the Sicilians themselves, and by external subjects, who we may term "others". For example, Sicily is not an island in its own right, because once the sea was the most expedient trade and transport route. Not only that, but Sicily was important because it connected the Middle East to the western part of the Mediterranean. When we talk about the construction of identity by the Sicilians themselves, be they intellectuals or ordinary people, who think they are in a certain way, obviously we are talking about an interesting device because in some regards truthful and important aspects are captured, in other regards, they are simple rhetorical constructions.

Self-definitions tend to create a positive imaginary, and even when not completely positive, to mask and conceal the less positive aspects of one's identity[3]. Then there is an identity, an attribution of characteristics that comes from the outside, from foreigners, intellectuals and non-intellectuals, who think that Sicilians are made in a certain way. How did they forge this perception? In their literature, in translated Sicilian literature, in cinema and photography.

Sicilian identity, understood as a blend of Sicilian politics and ideology, was nourished by this, as well by other narratives on intra-Mediterranean dominations, exchanges and mixes. Since I am

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[3] Vedi M. HERZFELD, *Intimità culturale. Antropologia e nazionalismo*, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, Napoli 2003

working on the construction of Sicilian cultural identity both as a product of local society and as a product of the gaze of the "other", I intend to analyse how Mediterranean themes intertwine with Sicilian culture in the contemporary age. In particular, the certain pride of belonging to southern Europe, with values and norms of social behavior unlike those of the European Union, counterbalanced by feelings of redemption with respect to the orientalist vision that the countries of northern Europe have towards an assimilation of Sicily into the Mediterranean world, understood as an exotic, different, substantially backward world.

At the same time, the policy proposal implied by the new name of the Department is one of redemption and habit. Redemption from a vision generated elsewhere, penalizing this strip of Europe called Sicily, the same that was engendered after the 1967 Six Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War: Sicily, the only Arab country not to have declared war on Israel. A remark that implied that Sicily belonged only formally and geographically to Europe whilst culturally being more akin to Arab countries. Leonardo Sciascia famously spoke of the "palm tree line". The writer from Racalmuto, in *The Day of the Owl*, wrote "Perhaps the whole of Italy is becoming a sort of Sicily ... I have a fantasy, reading the scandals of that regional government in the newspapers: scientists say that the palm tree line, that is, the climate that is favorable to palm vegetation, is moving five hundred metres towards the north, it seems to me, every year ... The palm line

... I call it the coffee line, the strong black coffee line ... And it is rising like mercury in a thermometer, this palm tree line, this strong coffee line, this scandal line, rising up through Italy and already beyond Rome ...".

There is no contradiction between redemption and addiction, however incomprehensible this may seem because – in this particular form of cultural exchange between colonial and assimilated realities and the processes of introjection and paradoxical representation of the prejudices of others – we can observe reflections, reversals and the shattering of unitary identities that surprise and pose new interpretative challenges.

The margins of ambiguity that this aspiration towards a double identity determines are present in the policies in support of projects based on European funds, in the migration strategies concerning flows from North Africa, in the investment choices by Italian and foreign companies.

Ambiguities that can be traced in a vast literature that tells of a Sicily, made up of many different Sicilies, a little Greek, a little Arab. Native literature, like that of Camilleri to be clear, but also foreign literature, as well as cinema and photography, thus end up presenting ways of understanding and interpreting Sicily and the Sicilians as pre-modern manifestations of continental Europe and, at the same time, a modernized representation of an exotic and backward Orient.

I intend here to briefly analyze the narrative strategies that are aimed at creating this ambivalent identity of Sicily, in part representative of the peasant and "Mediterranean" root of the culture of the past and present, in part representative of a modern push towards environmental compatibility and that post-modern vision of life, made of slowness, lightness, inclusiveness. Ultimately, Sicily is represented as a happy and balanced world halfway between Mediterranean stereotypes and Northern European efficiency. An ideal model, obviously unreal, but strongly supported by commercials, television series, films and novels that condition the same perception that is felt not only from the outside, but also by the Sicilians themselves.

We are referring to that world of men and women, children and families who are always at the table, where the elderly pronounce and express the joy of living, dancing, drinking or narrating their past. We refer to that world of women who wear contemporary clothes, but in rural contexts, where men wear flat caps, and to the world of the mafia. We are referring to those happy and serene towns and villages, where everyone knows each other, which welcome investigations into mysterious and impenetrable crimes, committed by the unsuspected and generated by the most hidden biographical frustrations. We refer, for example, to the stories of Mario Giordano, a German writer of Sicilian origins, who through the investigations of his protagonist Auntie Poldi reconstructs a cultural climate between

tradition and change, between adherence to *sicilianità* and the disenchanted gaze of those who "are gone". A world of continuity and a return to the past; not by chance was the first book of the series entitled "Sicilian Mystery", translated into seven languages and with 70,000 copies sold in Germany. This narrative is very successful, precisely because of its ambivalence, for its representation of the past and the present at the same time.

Now, if this cultural model achieves success in the field of literature and cinema, it must also be said that it can be useful to justify the politics of domination, corruption, exclusion or that it is simply economically advantageous.

Due to the strong significance that the concept of identity assumes in field research, in the history of anthropological studies there has often been the temptation to provide a basis and support for the reality of identity claims. On a theoretical level, however, "identity is not an object endowed with autonomy and reality"[4]. As Lévi-Strauss recalls, it is a virtual place that brings together a plurality of produced and reproduced phenomena, a sort of project that simultaneously involves the individual members of a society and social formations. "Within the cultural frameworks that shape habits and memories, social actors in fact make choices of identification, varying in intensity, nature and level, through which relationships

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[4] U. FABIETTI – F. REMOTTI (a cura di), *Dizionario di antropologia*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1997, p. 355.

with society and institutions as a whole are brought into play, on the one hand, and with local groups and communities, on the other"[5].

Cultural identity – which can be viewed through the prism of ethnic, parochial, regional, and national levels, according to the political and economic circumstances at play – is a set of values, symbols, and models that the members of a group believe to be distinctive to their existence, differentiating them from other groups, and this group undertake to "represent" this identity anchored in a common origin. Therefore, it is not a question of primordial ties, linked to the territory, blood, or language with which one is born, but a construction that is invoked according to the circumstances and with differing meanings. It can be made manifest or, vice versa, hidden to adapt to particular contexts. In this sense, it has to do with the politics of power and administrative institutions, regulating the positions of social actors and intermediary structures.

It is in this context that we should ground the definition of a regional Sicilian identity, within its political-administrative manifestations, as well as within its cultural and historical functions. The politics and rhetoric of the identity of a region that – since the unification of Italy until today – has always lived in ambivalent and contradictory terms in relation to the national and, more recently, European identity in a context of constitutionally and culturally

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[5] U. Fabietti – F. Remotti (a cura di), *Dizionario di antropologia*, Zanichelli, Bologna 1997, p. 355-356.

supported autonomy encouraged by ideological forms of national integration of fluctuating significance. Think, for example, of the post-war debate around regional autonomy also supported by the PCI of Togliatti in order to avert the threat of independence in connection with crime and banditry.

The Sicilian Region, with an autonomous statute, changed the name of its Department of Cultural Heritage in 2008, adding "and to the Sicilian identity", as if to underline the strong sense of belonging of the island population to a local tradition and to set boundaries with the national identity. It seems appropriate, therefore, to retrace the literature on the theme of cultural identity so that it is possible to establish guidelines on a scientific level to read and interpret facts, attitudes and behaviours in the field of different social actors, avoiding ideological and political approaches, which are themselves part of the construction of each identity profile.

Cultural identity depends on the interactions between different groups and its use is fluid and flexible. As Epstein states, a group's perception of itself takes shape in relation to others. In this sense, a French structuralist theorist casts further light. Two short paragraphs from the famous essay *Race and History* by Claude Lévi-Strauss contain some useful reflections on the theme of identity, although the latter is not explicitly mentioned. In the first, the French anthropologist addresses the issue of the diversity of cultures and warns us that "the concept of the diversity of human cultures should

not be understood in a static way. This diversity is not that of an inert sample collection or a sectioned catalogue. Of course, men have developed different cultures due to their geographical remoteness, the particular properties of the environment, and their ignorance of the rest of humanity; but this would be strictly true only if every culture and every society were born and developed in isolation from all the others. Well, that's never the case, except perhaps in exceptional cases" [6].

According to Lévi-Strauss, diversity is not only a function of isolation, but also of relationships, as in the frequent case of customs that are established due to the need to diversify from neighbouring contexts, on issues on which alone, according to internal dynamics, one would not be measured. "Consequently, the diversity of human cultures must not invite us to a fragmented or fragmented observation. It is a function not so much of the isolation of groups as of the relationships that unite them". [7]

These considerations lead one to believe that for Lévi-Strauss the borders between different cultures are more like zones of contact, as James Clifford [8] would say, and of negotiation, rather than lines of demarcation, which also makes what he says in the paragraph dedicated to ethnocentrism extremely interesting.

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[6] C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Razza e storia e altri studi di antropologia*, Einaudi, Torino 1967, p. 103.
[7] Ivi, p. 104.
[8] J. CLIFFORD, *Strade*, Bollati-Boringhieri, Torino 2008.

"It seems that the diversity of cultures has rarely appeared to men for what it is: a natural phenomenon, resulting from direct or indirect relations between societies; rather we saw in them a kind of monstrosity or scandal; in these matters, the progress of knowledge did not consist so much in dissipating this illusion for the benefit of a more exact vision, as in accepting it or finding a way to resign oneself to it" [9]. In other words, we could say that for Lévi-Strauss identities – which he never names – are consolidated mechanisms of human history that rest on comparisons that each social group makes with other groups, in order to distinguish themselves. He also criticizes the great declarations of human rights, which affirm a principle of equality between men, without taking into account the fact "that man does not realize his nature in an abstract humanity, but in traditional cultures, in which the most revolutionary changes leave entire areas to exist, and are explained in turn as a function of a strictly defined situation in time and space" [10].

In this defense of diversity by the French anthropologist we should consider both the date of his reflections (1952) and also the effect of the anti-Semitic persecutions in midst twentieth-century Europe and the need to safeguard and promote cultural diversity. At the same time, he refuses to relate diversity and inequality. Having

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[9] C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Razza e storia e altri studi di antropologia*, Einaudi, Torino 1967, p. 104.
[10] Ivi, p. 107.

made these clarifications, the French anthropologist denounces how "modern man has abandoned himself to a hundred philosophical and sociological speculations to establish vain compromises between these contradictory poles (condemning experiences that impact him on the affective level and to deny differences that he does not understand intellectually) and to account for the diversity of cultures while trying to suppress what this diversity retains for him that is scandalous and offensive" [11].

It should not be forgotten that in the relativist and relational vision of structuralism, "the object of the analysis are not the entities, but their interaction: identity, on the anthropological level, is relational ... the contribution of cultures does not consist in the list of inventions which they offered to humanity, rather, in their being different" [12].

This approach set out in his writings against racism a consistent thread throughout the French ethnologist's production. Man is characterized by the diversity of cultural realities that geographical distances and historical horizons have continually built up. And these diversities should not be seen and defended as an expression of a continuity with the past and as objects of history, but as diversity *per se*; that is diversification is valid and useful in itself. In this sense,

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[11] *Ibidem.*
[12] A. CASELLA PALTRINIERI, *Claude Lévi-Strauss, L'identità è relazione*, in "Popoli", gennaio 2010, p.47.

Lévi-Strauss suggests that we do not linger too long on the specific and contingent cultural identities of this or that people or historical era, but on the very principle of identity and its differentiation from the others, as a universal value. This is a singular position, if we think carefully. He argues concurrently the usefulness of diversity and its uselessness.

Extending his thinking further, we could say that the identity of a people is not fundamental either for a conservation policy or for a promotion policy, because, sooner or later, it will succumb and will inevitably be replaced by another. However, it is fundamental because it is the basis of humanity, of the belonging of each social group to the whole of humanity, since precisely this specificity characterizes man in every age and space.

In a certain sense, this approach prevents and heralds any subsequent reflection on identity. In fact, with different accents and with some discordant voices, in the scientific field the primary objective was to de-objectify the concept of identity, to make it a function of history and of political power struggles, making it a concept that is at once relative, liquid, and constructed. In the field of French ethnology, partly in continuity and partly delineating a different position, Amselle stands out in particular, a scholar who in 1985 published *Au coeur de l'ethnie* in collaboration with M'Bokolo. The text, translated into Italian only in 2008, becomes

even more explicit in the title in Italian: *L'invenzione dell'etnia (The invention of ethnicity)*.

Amselle and M'Bokolo study ethnic groups in their interrelationships, overlaps and intertwining, rather than as closed, discrete universes located next to each other. They comment: "The question of 'reappropriation' is linked to this constructivist problem of ethnicity, which can be defined as the 'feed back' phenomenon of 'ethical' statements on the social actors themselves. This question therefore concerns the production of local identities starting from what Mudimbe defined as a 'colonial library', which is aligned to the colonial character of the ethnic categories which, as we know, is one of the main ideas of this book. According to this perspective, the way in which the natives perceive themselves would be linked to the return effects on their self-awareness of both the stories of explorations and conquest and also of the colonial and postcolonial ethnological texts"[13].

In this passage the two authors introduce a new subject, that of the natives. As if to say that identity (in this case ethnic) is also built by the subjective participation of those to whom an identity is attributed, which, in other words, may mean that there may not be convergence between three different points of view: that of the social

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[13] J. AMSELLE – E. M'BOKOLO (a cura di), *L'invenzione dell'etnia*, Meltemi, Roma 2008, p. 28.

actors, that of the observers, and the objective view, if the researcher's gaze is ever conceivable as such.

Furthermore, the authors underline that every ethnic and linguistic group is Creole, that is to say that social identity, as well as individual identity, "is defined as much by turning in on oneself as by opening up to the other, in a word that identity is both singular and plural that it is possible to respect cultural differences and to merge them into a common humanity"[14]. In M'Bokolo's essay on Katanga's separatism[15] and Jean Bazin's on Bambara[16], it is clear how preponderant political motivation and constructivism are also in the ethno-anthropological sciences in determining the identity of social groups that historically define themselves as originating in a specific territory, descendants of strong traditions, belonging to homogeneous and defined cultural contexts.

Thus, in the same way, the dramatic story of the Hutus and Tutsis of Rwanda and Burundi is reconstructed, a sort of invention of the colonial era that resulted in one of the most brutal massacres that took place in the postcolonial era.

In a subsequent work Amselle returns to the question of identities, reflecting on their blurring and their hardening. Contrary to what has been asserted by various scholars, including Bauman, in

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[14] Ivi, p. 32.
[15] Ivi, p. 32.
[16] J. BAZIN, *A ciascuno il suo Bambara*, in J. AMSELLE – E. M'BOKOLO (a cura di), *L'invenzione dell'etnia*, Meltemi, Roma 2008, pp. 119-163.

contemporary globalization, identities have not become fluid, but rigid, to the point of taking the form of fundamentalism, be it ethnic, national or religious. "Overall, we are forced to observe, particularly in Western Europe, that it is increasingly difficult to negotiate any identity because of the trap that blocks individuals by forcing them to place themselves in the categories defined both by ethnic or religious fundamentalisms as well as by states and international organizations. Therefore, the implementation of policies of liberalization on a world scale does not translate at all ... into a triumph of individualism, but, on the contrary, into the proliferation of collective identities" [17]. Starting from these considerations on the collective nature of identities, Amselle asks himself some questions of a methodological nature. The first question is about the "retribalization" of contemporary societies, which, according to the French anthropologist, arises "in relation to globalization and the concomitant reduction of the sphere of state intervention" [18]. The communities of troubled and fractured neighbuorhoods, reminiscent of tribes, are the product of the recent history of Western societies and, in particular, of the disengagement of the state. "Anthropology is always listening to modernity, supermodernity or globalization and, in a certain sense, all the phenomena it studies are links in the

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[17] J. AMSELLE, *Connessioni. Antropologia dell'universalità delle culture*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2001, p. 43.
[18] Ivi, p. 44.

same chain. From this point of view, there is not even a break between the past object of anthropology and its current object. Globalization, which is just another name for universality, has always been the true object of anthropology, in the sense that it should always have devoted itself to mixed objects"[19]. According to Amselle, the "closed" conception of the research field, introduced by Malinovski, produced the erroneous idea that the field would disappear in the face of globalization. A conception that made the idea of the local population without history and without modernity artificial, almost as if conceived of in the laboratory. "The oblivion of the environment and of the relational is precisely what has allowed anthropology to define both its object and our identity as dominating Westerners. Indeed, since its origins, this discipline has defined itself as a knowledge-power device whose mission was to study the savage both at home and overseas. This project, the fruit of a technology of power capable of disciplining and excluding, has been applied simultaneously to the European working classes and to the exotic savages of the colonies. In this respect, the history of anthropology consists more in grasping the evolution of the theoretical and practical tools of control over domestic and exotic populations than that of the different doctrines that have characterized it. Rather than globalization, which would have radically transformed primitive societies by depriving

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[19] Ibidem.

anthropologists of their object, it is the look, or more exactly the questioning of the researcher's gaze on his or her terrain that would be fundamentally new" [20].

As can be seen, Amselle in part follows a line of thought common to several American and European anthropologists, but in part departs quite clearly from it. Modernity is made up of new tribalizations, of new self-acknowledgments of identity, as if the colonial era were revisited within the processes of globalization, which, rather than exalt homogenization, actually enhance an intertwining of recognition projected from the outside and produced from the inside, as poles of the relationship "we/others", of the relationship of power and control between "external/internal" or, if you like, "dominant/dominated".

"The historicization and politicization of the first exotic societies studied by anthropologists make it possible to renounce the illusion according to which the current situation of globalization would be totally unprecedented. The anthropology of globalization actually provides an erroneous solution to a misplaced question and thus reproduces the defects of the notions of acculturation and the colonial situation. By magnifying the current phenomena of transformation, it implicitly locates the very notion of primitive society within a golden age that never existed" [21]. Amselle is the

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[20] Ivi 44-45.
[21] Ivi, p. 45.

founder of a new anthropological strand which at the same time is in continuity with the history of studies. It focuses on the study of written documents and images, so that anthropology aligns itself to "disciplines such as literary criticism or semiology"[22].

The scientific objective of ethnoanthropological disciplines is to overcome the conflict between anthropologists who deal with the mobility of different cultures (anthropologists of globalization) and anthropologists who deal with national or indigenous cultures. The contrast, in fact, is the result of a misunderstanding that Amselle tries to unpick. Indeed, even from our perspective the controversy over an alleged conflict between high-profile scholars, as they deal with issues of global interconnection, and low-profile scholars, as they deal with territorially restricted and circumscribed areas, appears sterile. For example, in Sicily from time to time the polemical question of patronal feasts arises, considered low ground, and of interests in globalization phenomena. In reality, this dichotomy appears neither useful nor realistic, since it is quite evident that every localism interfaces with globalization, just as every phenomenon of globalization connects, influences, and shapes local phenomena of recognition and self-recognition.

Another question that is raised by Amselle is related to translation and therefore to language. Identity, he argues, first of all implies a

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[22] Ibidem.

translation and a conversion as "it is a being for others" [23]. A culture manages to make its voice heard and becomes the expression of an identity, if it translates or converts universal signs into its own language, or if it translates and converts its own signs into a universal language or in any case a larger, inclusive, transmissible one. This concerned languages, religions and every other element of cultures that give meaning to the identity they expressed.

This point of Amselle's thinking seems to be of notable importance, not only from our personal linguistic and literary perspective, but also because it addresses the theme of the narration of identity with great realism. In fact, posing the political problem of identity whilst not posing the communicative and narrative problem of it would be limiting, and perhaps even impossible. We can, for example, recall that any attempt to institutionalize the theme of local identities, such as happened, in Sicily, Veneto or Lombardy, also involved the attempt to introduce the teaching of the regional dialect and its use as a medium of instruction in classrooms; an attempt which was also introduced in other parts of Italy through the implementation of the 1999 Law 482 on the protection of historical linguistic minorities. These attempts, regardless of their success or not, were aimed at making the contents of identity transmissible, at making them narratable and communicable at a higher level, in a

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[23] Ivi, p. 55.

wider context, without which any identity effort would appear completely inconsistent, if not in vain.

The double meaning, from local narrative to national narrative and vice versa, not only involves the adoption of translatable linguistic registers, but also overturns the direction of narration and communication. In this sense, the researcher on the ground becomes an interceptor of two-way flows of the circulation of ideas and narratives. The double meaning is transformed into a negotiation between requests for reciprocal and reflective recognition. In the case of Sicily, for example, the narrative fiction authored by the recently deceased Andrea Camilleri, perhaps at the height of his literary success, garnered much popular attention. What made such a success possible is the translatability of terms and phrases in dialect that have become a cult of television fiction. At the same time, however, Camilleri also narrated in Italian, his texts being translated into many other languages, conveying local situations, typical characters and Sicilian behaviours that have become understandable and decodable to a very large audience.

It is worth noting, however, that I am carrying out an analysis of the rhetoric and cultural references that are usually neglected or underestimated by Sicilian intellectuals and political representatives. Indeed, the ambiguity that Sicily occupies as the extreme edge of Europe and as an integral part of the Mediterranean, is supported by intellectuals and politicians both on the right and on the left, as if it

were a given and proven fact and not, instead, a rhetorical fact to be examined and interpreted. For example, quite frequently Sicily is proudly proclaimed to be an integral part of the Maghreb or Middle Eastern cultures and that Sicily should and could play a diplomatic role in the relationship between Europe and other continents. At the same time, even the proclaimers of this "alternative" idea of Sicily themselves support the strategic role of the island within Europe, claiming support and development policies, precisely because of this role of "contact zone" or buffer area between two different worlds, worlds which necessarily must meet.

It is not our intention to contest this articulated intellectual and political approach; far from it. We only intend to highlight the elements of construction of a cultural identity of Sicily and the Sicilians based on two-way communication strategies, with the use of ambivalent, convergent and at the same time divergent arguments. In short, an analysis that makes clear the link with both the interests and aims of power. In this context of reference I am carrying out interviews with institutional figures who represent an interesting reflection of this approach, made up of revealing heterodirected and substantially rhetorical narratives, aimed at the construction of a desired identity.

In an interview with the current councilor for Cultural Heritage and Sicilian identity, Alberto Samonà, a member of the League Party, we can read:

The Europe of the Regions is strengthened in the respect and en-hancement of the differences of the individual territories. The added value of the E.U. is in the common cultural background that refers to the Roman Empire, to Christian culture, but also, and above all, in the sharing of the values of tolerance and coexistence among peo-ple. Obviously, the greater the capacity of the E.U. to ensure respect for differences, the greater the possibility of a common space that preserves the uniqueness of its components. The vocation of Europe to present itself as an intrinsically plural civilization, a place of a culture open to the peaceful coexistence of peoples, must today be able to face the uncertainties and fragility of a historical moment in which the need to build an authentic dialogue between cultures is recognized as an urgent problem which is not only political, but also ethical".

This declaration of principle, as it is easy to infer, holds two forces together: diversity and similarity. It seems that Sicily, to re-main faithful to itself, must stay in Europe, but with the margins of differentiation necessary to exercise an autonomous and original role, almost like an ambassador from another world compared to the European one.

We can hypothesize that this theme will become central in the scientific reflection of the coming years and in the political debate of the coming months. For example, the discussion on the substantial Recovery Fund or Next Generation EU programme cannot ignore an

evaluation of the position of Sicily in the Mediterranean context, both from the logistical point of view (for example the bridge over the Strait of Messina), and from the linguistic and cultural point of view (for example migratory flows, tourism and hospitality). Disciplines such as history and anthropology will have to provide interpretations and alternative points of view to address these discussions without prejudice and with a critical spirit.