

## On Indistinction

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The history of the last two millennia bears witness to a slow rise of indistinction — which began with monotheism. Indeed, the assertion of the existence of one single God implies the unity of the human family, not only at the level of biological species, but also from the viewpoint of spirituality. To argue that there is only one God means to assert at the same time that all men are part of only one family and that all other gods need to be discarded. This boils down to the instauration of a new regime of truth in which otherness becomes a source of falsehood or error. “*The One* was first the specificity of the Judeo-Christian culture” and later of modern culture, writes [Michel Maffesoli](#). The One excludes the Other which threatens its exclusivity. The Other must be therefore rightly annihilated. Throughout the history of the West, the obsession with Oneness has never ceased to operate as the guiding principle. Historically, it has been the motor of intolerance, of exclusion and of separation, and later of fragmentation that gave birth to all kinds of inquisitions and justified all efforts to remove otherness.

In the modern age, Christianity itself transcends all cultural and ethnic differences: it does not deny them, yet it regards them as inessential. In God’s eyes, there is neither “Jew nor Greek,” neither man nor woman (Gal. 3: 28). God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17: 26). At the same time, just as the separation of the spiritual and temporal power had introduced a fateful division in the notion of sovereignty, the new religion began to separate the city of God from the city of Man, the generic man vs. the citizen, the universal religion vs. the local beliefs. It promotes humanity at the expense of patriotism. “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” (Matt. 28: 19). This was the first directive that dismissed all borders.

### **THE IDEOLOGY OF PROGRESS**

This idea has not ceased to expand, that is, the idea that what makes individuals and peoples distinct must be therefore incidental, accidental, contingent, and in the last analysis negligible or harmful. In the modern age, transposed into the secular realm, it takes on the form of an assertion of the immediate (but not mediate) belonging of man to humanity. Accordingly, we are human beings before belonging to a specific people, or

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to a specific culture. In reality though, the very opposite is true: we are human beings insofar as we belong to a specific people or to a specific culture. It is by means of our specificity that we have access to the universality.

The ideology of progress claims that all peoples are called to achieve the same kind of society by following the same stages. As St. Augustine already argued, they must progress in a unitary manner (“Human reason is conducive to unity”). In the same vein the Enlightenment declared the futility of any heritage, which it conflated with a mishmash of superstitious customs and habits. In order to become “free” the past is depicted as a hurdle that needs to be rejected. The only choices admitted are those which are made downstream from One’s Self (“it is *my* choice”) whilst the choices conditioned by what is upstream from One’s Self are disqualified as illusory. From this derives the ideal of “autonomy,” patterned after the model of independence, the questioning of every status and of each authority experienced now as a humiliating deprivation of unrestricted freedom. This is the modern myth of the creation of the Self by means of the Self alone (and from scratch), which implies the rejection of both “nature” and of all inherited traits. Such a liberty conceived as an absolute commencement and not determined by anything, bestows upon man a prerogative that was once attributed to God.

The drive towards indistinction is based on reducing equality to *Sameness*; there is no way of being equal unless becoming identical; one can have the same value only when adopting the same roles. By contrast, any acknowledgment of differences, even the most glaring ones, would perpetuate inequality and oppression. This aspiration to Sameness (Auguste Comte rightly spoke of *reductio ad unum*)—also fueled by a mimetic desire—is a major characteristic of modern society. Man is supposed to be the same everywhere. What is good for one (for us) must be also good for all (the rest of mankind), regardless of whether this takes place in the political, economic, or social realm. Tocqueville had keenly identified this modern desire for *resemblance*; not empirical resemblance, nor similarity, which is at the basis of sociability, but a resemblance based on the idea of equal dignity of all human beings, and equally distributed to each human being, in a manner of an attribute of human nature, that is to say, prior to any political or social life.

Equality of conditions, a great theme of modernity, cannot be understood unless one takes into account economic transformation which has turned the mercantile exchange into the basic human bond. “Similar human beings”, of which Tocqueville wrote, are unable to connect to each other except by means of work and trade. Money appears as the general equivalent whereas utility becomes a corollary of equality. The labor force is not conducive to the homogenization in the amount of the wages; instead, it brings about the homogenization of humans by setting up the reign of *homo economicus* — a species exclusively focused on his immediate material gratification. As Christian Laval has noted, “Equality of conditions is the equivalence of the same individuals in a society fueled by economic and mercantile issues, i.e. a society in which the only legitimate differences are those that relate to the measure of their utility.”

Universalism and individualism march hand in hand. In the postmodern era indistinction has become widespread just as narcissistic individualism and the metaphysics of subjectivity have become major features of the dominant ideology. Everything becomes fluctuating, short-lived, transitory and “liquid”. The loss of reference points leads to social anomie, the widespread uncertainty of concepts (“*anything goes*”), the effort to erect each singular desire into a general law of “equality” with everybody else. Made up of individuals with *no location*, of single atoms from everywhere and therefore from nowhere, society turns into a semi-chaotic structure, a caravanserai deprived of any conscience of the common good. The more people separate from each other, the more mass conformism sets in. Individuals become slaves without masters, uprooted and without culture, interchangeable and vulnerable, as well as targeted preys of the double grip of the market and the state within a system that claims to be all the more tolerant in general as it is intolerant in particular.

### **WITHOUT BELONGING, WITHOUT IDENTITY**

Any belonging or any collective specificity is described as incarceration, a misleading fiction, or as an illusory “construction.” Any concern to a sense of belonging is labeled “fanaticism” or “fundamentalism.” “In order to establish ‘real freedom of choice,’ one must therefore liberate students from any determination, be it family, ethnic, social, or intellectual,” declared Vincent Peillon, the new minister of education. Simultaneously, a catch-all concept of ‘discrimination’ is invading the judiciary and the penal language. While this word described originally a treatment unfairly applied to such and such individual (or a category of individuals), it has now begun to stigmatize all kinds of distinction among people. Tocqueville, again, notes that “in the age of equality nothing revolts humans so much as the idea of being subjected to the forms.” The forms are perceived as limitations and constraints. Contemporary art has already abolished aesthetic categories. The ultimate “deconstruction” is the deconstruction of elementary sexual differences, implemented by the “gender” ideology and gender studies. The reign of the “no-form” has set in.

Indistinction means also the negation of all frontiers and of all limitations. The bottom line is how to get rid of a *measure*. The One goes hand in hand with excess (*hybris*), just as the logic of over-accumulation of capital is itself a form of limitlessness which has turned into its own “raison d’être.” At all times cosmopolitanism has strived toward the erasure of borders. Today it has taken on the form of nomadic behavior. The leftist ideology of no-borders converges with the rightwing ideology of free trade, with both interpreting globalization as across-the-board social hybridization. The ideology of “no borders” is jointly espoused by the financiers, the smugglers and the mob. “No borders” and “the undocumented” — that is to say, no adherence and no identity.

Yet, borders are not barriers, but only locks in a waterway. In the era of globalization, they are primarily intended to regulate trade and protect the most threatened ones. (Régis Debray: “The poor has only his own pasture left to himself”). This is the reason why the Capital International — the only one that thrives — requires the removal of all borders.

The only thing remaining is what Freud called “the narcissism of petty differences” — differences that are unessential and that are being projected on the system of objects (one has the “choice” between Shell and Chevron, Windows or Apple, Renault and Peugeot, Coke or Pepsi). This is a fake diversity, based only on differential purchasing power. “Diversity,” as a form of euphemism, is in reality just another word for indistinctive mixture. The ideology of miscegenation, which has become widespread today, must be understood as going well beyond the mixing of bodies and cultures only. One could use the word “in-mixture” (*mélangisme*), in the promotion of general indistinctiveness as a moral imperative and as a normative project that must be achieved. Although “miscegenation” of any kind (be it cultural, ethnic, artistic, linguistic, and so on) and “diversity” completely contradict each other, the “miscegenation” is hailed as a method of salvation, lending itself thus to the redemptive fusion on its path toward the undifferentiated.

The apology of nomadic life everywhere, the deterritorialization of all problems, the dream of “world governance,” a systematic removal of all roots, the encouragement to all kinds of hybridization — the fantasy of the One who has finally landed in the field of mandatory in-mixing — becomes the rule. “The global hybridization, writes Pierre-André Taguieff, resembles the steamroller which brings about the homogenization, levels all cultures and finally abolishes every cultural diversity.” Shuffling and blending everybody with everybody and everything with anything — this is the final and ultimate form of indistinction today.

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