



ROMULUS AND REMUS, OR THE SACRED IMPORTANCE OF THE BORDER

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Although with some differences of nuance, Titus Livy and Plutarch tell the fratricidal story of Romulus and Remus. The former, in the founding act of Rome, is in charge of tracing with the plow the furrow of the new city, following the Etruscan rite. Suitably attired for the sacred event, Romulus prepares the plow with a bronze ploughshare and attaches it to the yoke, joining it to a bull on the outside and a cow on the inside, both completely white. Holding tightly the rudder of the inclined implement, so that the excavated earth faces inwards, he skillfully traces the *sulcus primigenius* in a counterclockwise direction. The urbs is built on the basis of the sacred border, which perimeters its space, distinguishing it from the other part of itself.

Remus, who had emerged defeated from the augural dispute, tries to hinder the operations by mocking his brother: "Finally," Plutarch recounts, "he crossed the moat, but fell, struck down at that very point, according to some by Romulus himself, according to others by a companion of Romulus named Celere." Titus Livy also directly relates the words uttered by Romulus at the height of his anger, after having committed fratricide: "From now on, anyone who dares to climb over my walls shall so die."

The myth poses, in its own way, a possible solution *ante litteram* to Antigone's dilemma formulated by Hegel. For Romulus there is no doubt—the law of the urbs takes precedence over the family ethical bond, especially when the latter violates the just measure, instead of respecting it. But, above all, the mythological narrative speaks of the sacredness of the frontier as a limit that defines an identity—in this case, the political and cultural identity of Rome—delimiting it and differentiating it from what it is not. Without a border there can be no identity, which is the very basis of the existence of difference, which always presupposes the plurality of non-coincident identities and, therefore, separated from one another. In turn, without identity there can be no relation either, which is, by its essence, a relation between identities with precise limits. The latter mark the end of the one and the beginning of the other, as well as the possibility of a relational nexus, different from that derived from the abuse of the one to the detriment of the other that occurs when it perpetrates its invasion.

The civilization of markets without borders gives rise to a permanent invasion that is certainly not intended to favor the relationship between those who are different, not even in the form of dialogue. This, as the Greek word (διάλογος) unequivocally suggests, always implies a distance and, therefore, a clear threshold separating the dialoguers, who are nothing but different identities placed in a friendly relationship mediated by language. On the contrary, the invasion of the market, which is the imperialism of the undifferentiated neutral, aspires to produce the suppression of differences and identities, so that everything falls into the abyss of sameness and the globally homologated. Strictly speaking,

globalization itself could well be conceived as the neutralization of differences and identities, and as the transit of the whole planet towards the global neutral, without material or immaterial, national or identity borders. It is the post-mortem revenge of Remus and his drive for invasion, for the neutralization of the limits that make one identity different from another.

In this sense it is valid for the existing nexus between identities and differences, what we have explained on other occasions in relation to the connection between national states and internationalism. The friendly relationship of internationalism presupposes the existence of sovereign nation states, freed from their nationalist impulses in a regressive sense: the suppression of sovereign nation states does not lead to internationalism, but to the reified open space of market globalism, which is the unification of the world under the banner of the market economy, freed from the limits of sovereign politics.

Similarly, it is a pure non sequitur to think of being able to favor dialogue among the different by dissolving identities. Under this premise, only the monotony of the indistinct arises, which is given as a consumerist homologation of identities and, jointly, as a planetary triumph of the Unique Thought as the only admitted thought. The different that does not accept to disidentify and homogenize with the other of itself, is declared, *sic et simpliciter*, illegitimate and dangerous. And as such he is treated—he is neutralized and reeducated to the point of indifferentiation. Therefore, even in this case, this dialogue between the different ones, which always presupposes that the different ones are different and that they have their specific identity, does not prevail. On the other hand, the same thing triumphs on a global scale—the same language, the same thinking, the same way of being and producing, of living and relating to others.

On the level of identities, as in the case of nation-states, the identification of two abstractly opposed and concretely complementary poles is also valid. Regressive nationalism and market globalism are fulfilled in each other: regressive nationalism, which has within itself the drive to attack the other in the name of one's own, is realized in globalism. The latter is the final stage of nationalism, since it coincides with the subjugation of the entire planet under the domination of the one triumphant nation, whose currency is the dollar and whose language is Wall Street English. Nationalism is fulfilled in globalism, which presupposes it.

The link which can be established between regressive identitarianism and anti-identitarian cosmopolitanism is no different. The former aspires to deny the identity of others, and therefore difference, through the universal imposition of what is their own. The second coincides with the evil

universalization of an identity that in reality is not such because it does not admit difference and therefore, like Remus, does not respect the frontier that, separating from the other, defines what is its own. Regressive identitarianism is fulfilled in anti-identitarian cosmopolitanism, which presupposes it; and which has in common with the former the denial of the right to difference, suppressed in the name of the imperialism of particularity itself.

And this, as we know, is another name for ideology, which is the "abstract will of the universal" and the concrete triumph of the particular. But the universal, in its authentic sense, is never the part that imposes itself as universal—it is, instead, that which exists as a concrete universal, which does not annul the particularities but is realized in them and by them. This allows us to affirm, once again, that identity can only exist in the presence of difference and that, consequently, it is given by definition, declined in the plural, as a nexus between different identities.

The task of culture, which is undoubtedly also and not secondarily to educate in identity, can be said to be successfully accomplished only when it produces respect for differences and for the consequent connection that is generated between difference and identity. In short, nothing could be more sidereally distant from both the petty tribal identitarianism, which denies the other in the name of its own, and the "empty bottom line" of anti-identity cosmopolitanism, which sells the fantasy of favoring dialogue among the different while denying their identity and, therefore, the very premise of all dialogue. Culture is, in the proper sense, to educate in identity and, therefore, in self-consciousness—well understood that this is only possible if at the same time one educates in the recognition of difference.

The latter must be interpreted neither as an unwelcome survival of the foreign, which must be made identical and therefore neutralized, nor as a strange reality, with which any comparison is impossible *a priori*. Difference asks, *au contraire*, to be thought of Spinozianly, as one of the diverse attributes of the unique substance, differentiated in itself—an attribute which, therefore, must not be denied in the name of undifferentiated identity, but valued in its being as a different manifestation of the substance itself. From which must follow then the need for an education in polyphony and difference, which can only be recognized and appreciated if one possesses one's own identity.

In antithesis to the perspectives of regressive identitarianism and anti-identitarian cosmopolitanism, humanity exists as a singular collective; if one wishes, also as an articulated Unity and as a differentiated Totality, as a plurality of identities and differences, in which the unity of the human race is

expressed in multiple forms. To truly love humanity means, then, to love the differences and identities that compose it—above all from the love for one's own cultural identity, for one's own people, for one's own language, for one's own territory. It means respecting the border as a symbol of identity and of the right measure, and therefore as a barrier against invasion, against disidentification and against the unlimited.

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Featured: *Romulus marking the Limits of Rome*, fresco, Sala dei Horatii e Curatii, Rome; painted by Giuseppe Cesari, 1638-1639.
