



The Other

What is it about a human being that makes another human being so afraid of him ? Unless I'm mistaken, apart from a sometimes different skin tone, if we're lucky, we all have two arms to hug, two legs to dance, two eyes to admire and a mouth to kiss? We are all rushing more or less quickly towards the same destination and we all long for some form of happiness... So what are we so afraid of when we look in the mirror?

Some time ago, I watched a french movie called “Les Vieux Fourneaux 2”, a very charming comedy and lovely human plea on migrants cause. The next day, by chance (or not) of the calendar, I saw on the news that the mayor of a small town in Brittany had resigned from his duty because of recurring threats and the burning of his house and car by extreme activists due to his support to the building project of a shelter for migrants in his town.

Let's close our eyes for just a second and imagine ourselves in a country at war where, at every moment, we fear for our lives and those we love. Let's imagine the feeling of waking up every morning and praying that it won't be the last, that no one breaks into our house with a gun to kill our entire family, that no bomb comes to fall on our neighborhood... Or, let's imagine what it's like to have hunger rooted to our stomach since our earliest age, what it's like to have seen some of our brothers and sisters dying of hunger or disease and our mother crying more every day over her helplessness to protect her children... Or again, imagine what we would feel if we had left our wife and children in a refugee camp, alone, before giving all of our money to a smuggler and crossing half the planet on boats or trucks without water nor food in the hope of starting a new life in a country that is totally foreign to us and finally finding ourselves crammed on a tiny Italian island in the middle of the Mediterranean sea where other strangers will decide what happens next for us, or



living under a bridge in a foreign city experiencing hunger, cold and fright under the contemptuous or indifferent looks of the other human beings who populate this country...

Do we really want to be those human beings who find migrants disturbing, without really knowing how they disturb us? What really disturbs me is the absurdity of us being afraid of a terrified human being! How, in fact, can one not be terrified while living in the streets of an unknown country, where one barely speaks the language, after months of traveling in terrible conditions and with nothing in one's pocket that would simply allow one to eat.

In the movie I spoke about in the opening, a gala is organized under a false pretext to allow each of the refugees to tell his/her story and, by doing so, to regain their humanity in the eyes of the inhabitants of the village, the others. This reminds me of the method the police advises victims of assault or kidnapping to use: give your name, say that you have children or brothers and sisters, talk about your life, give details, to make yourself human in the eyes of your attacker and thus appeal to his own humanity. So what does it make us if we expect others to tell us about their lives so that it can restore their humanity for us? Are we all potential aggressors incapable of spontaneously remembering that the other is human, even if he does not speak our language or does not live like us? What does it say about us if, when we see a person in pain, whether they are a migrant or homeless, we need to apply a technique to remind us that they are, in fact, human beings and not street furniture?

Are we really capable of thinking that suffering is so contagious that we risk catching it if we get too close to it? Are we really capable of thinking that if we give this person a little comfort, his/her first idea will be to attack or rob us? If you lived on the street or if you arrived from a country at war in a completely unknown place and someone came to show an interest in you, to help you, with kindness, would you really want to harm this person? Therefore, why do we project this hypothesis of response, this fear of ours, into the other's behavior?

The real problem is that we already have difficulties to recognize ourselves as human beings when we see our reflection in the mirror, for we are so steeped in judgment towards ourselves or simply accustomed not to paying attention to what we see, what surrounds us, even when it comes to ourselves. So imagine when it's someone else looking at us in the mirror! The other is just our (non-evil) double with simply a different life story. And don't we love being told stories even if they make us cry? Wouldn't we like to be part of a story bigger than ours by positively touching as many lives as possible and not just the superficial ones on social medias?

I once heard someone say "anyone who says that money doesn't buy happiness hasn't given it enough" and I totally agree with this paradigm. The more we give of ourselves, and not just money, the more we receive because any act of generosity immediately gives us a positive image of ourselves and we share the other's happiness of not feeling alone and lost. I know that, in our hectic lives, we don't always have the time nor financial means to give away, but simply giving back his/her humanity to someone by showing empathy towards him/her is probably the most beautiful gift we can offer. Imagine the number of conflicts that could be avoided if we all perceived one



another as equals and if we integrated their suffering as if it were our own. We all have specificities, qualities that are our own, things to give to others just by being ourselves, by offering what we do best, even if it is simply a smile or a hug.

Of course, once again, this paradigm shift involves accepting ourselves as human beings without any form of judgment, accepting that we are perfect exactly as we are in each moment, and the kind gaze we lay upon ourselves in our everyday lives. If we are able to consider ourselves without judgment, with kindness and compassion, we will better be able to look at others in the same way and we most probably will become very curious about their differences which will enrich us a little more.

For example, for me, it's often my cooking that I enrich through contact with others because I love good food; each of my encounters enriches my recipe book and my taste buds but, of course, it is also my vision of the world and my humanity that I embellish with them.

Sometimes, I find myself dreaming of welcome cruise liners in each sea of the world which would allow people who flee their country to learn the language and the profession of their choice and then be welcomed wherever they wish to go in the best possible conditions. Understanding and accepting others as they are, with their differences but, above all, with their similarities, bringing their humanity back to our consciousness as a reflex, also means transmitting this vision of the world to our children to enable them to build a fairer and safer world. Isn't that what we all want for them?