

LIVING IN THE WORLD

by **Claudio Descalzi**

What connection is there between Eni workers on oil platforms, extraction facilities in the middle of the desert or along the African or South American coastline, and the foreigners, particularly those that have integration difficulties, that precariously inhabit the urban nooks and crannies of our cities? What are the problems that unite and differentiate situations so apparently distant on the level of living together and the relative government actions aimed at promoting acceptable levels of integration? And, again, coming to the subject of the exhibition, what is the experience of a complex subject such as Eni in terms of “living”?

To answer these questions it is important to begin with that which is common to both situations. In both cases, for both groups, it is necessary to develop relationships with the places, environments and cultures with which they are called upon to interact and live. In this regard, Eni is a big player that has, over many years, accumulated an organisational culture on the ways in which to build relations with the territories in which it operates. Obviously flows of migrants, as well as transmitting somewhat heterogeneous culture, certainly don't have a capacity to homogenise and direct of a large organisation, even if they often bring with them cultures that are thousand of years old. Given then, that a subject such as Eni has an evident ability to shape the environment in which it finds itself in a more decisive manner than the uneven movement of the foreigners who come to our cities in search of opportunity, this does not mean that, in both cases, the subjects of the relationship shouldn't adopt, more or less complex, strategies for mutual adaptation. In fact, if local cultural, social, economic and political characteristics are not adequately understood, different forms of rejection and resistance to inward flows will develop.

Another area in which there are significant similarities between Eni's experience and that of immigrants is in the existential scale of our contractors and expatriates (those who have settled in a foreign country) around the world and those who come to our country from abroad. Isolation, loneliness, otherness, the desire to socialise are feelings that are common to both of these groups, even if also in this case for Eni all should be seen in the context of an organisation that takes the form of an enterprise, while for the other group this is left to the spontaneity of relations (of cooperation and conflict) that can be created within informal circles in the territory of arrival. Obviously, our staff do not find themselves in the extreme precariousness of the immigrant: they have a job, a home, and, usually, a place that they can return to periodically. And this is their situation from the outset, the existential problems are essentially resolved and the solutions defined and organised, while for the migrant, it is a target to be pursued day-by-day, among the many obstacles and temptations to take illegal-criminal shortcuts, which then provoke radial reactions in the local population.

But the most interesting point seems to me to lie in the significance that we give to the issue of living. In Eni's genetic code and territorial strategy, starting from that introduced by the founder Enrico Mattei, living in the world essentially means creating the conditions to encourage dialogue with the other, even before becoming established. A home has no sense unless there is a family and the beginnings of a community. Living in the world for Eni means to integrate, to share; and sharing with host communities has been the engine that has made Eni's development in the world possible.

Sharing has allowed us to grow and to help our hosts to grow. Even the type of petroleum contracts we use; the so-called PSC (production sharing contract) are centred on the idea of sharing.

Sharing and an interest in others have been the fundamental characteristics that have allowed Enrico Mattei's "cat" to grow and to compete with the biggest of them.

The bricks of our symbolic homes have not been laid by us alone, but with the help of our hosts and our homes have never been segregated and, above all, closed. If there is one thing that distinguishes Eni from the other big oil companies, especially the Anglo-American variety, it is our approach to the territory. In fact, Eni has never adopted the reinforced compound model used by other companies, and we have never pursued, if not for contingent reasons, isolation strategies, not even in situations of local belligerence. In Angola, we lived for 28 years with a civil war, just as in Congo, albeit for a shorter period. Despite also the war in Biafra, where Eni lost 11 men in the dramatic events of 1969, the group continued to pursue dialogue, building its homes next door to those of the Nigerians.

Over the long term the strategy of exchange and cultural interchange with local populations (off shore platforms and desert facilities are another problem) increases the overall level of security of those involved in the extraction process. The strategy was created initially out of necessity, as the consequence of the poor level of political protection that our country enjoyed and the relative strength in terms of the initially available capital. For these reasons, and not from purely humanitarian considerations, Eni chose exchange and sharing, also in terms of energy resources. For example, in some contexts electricity is produced from associated gas, which Eni then supplies to the local grid. And if it is true, as some companies have ambiguously claimed, that this leads to the growth of artificial urban areas, and risks compromising the local system, it is also true that thanks to electricity social life derives huge benefits, both in terms of the multitude of small crafts activities that can exploit this low cost energy, and from the lengthening of the day beyond that of daylight. If to this we add the construction of schools and health facilities, it seems to me that we are doing something extremely positive for populations that often live in absolute poverty.

This practice of exchange, to the satisfaction of our competitors, have, at least in Nigeria, passed into law. Which to me indicates that great energy players can both contribute to the civilisation process and pursue their business interests, without being seen as plunderers of resources.

The success of this type of approach over time is a demonstration of something that could be transposed also to our cities with regard to the new population of foreigners. The point is that if we only look at the problems from a distance, or, rather, if we keep our distance from the other, sooner or later the situation will deteriorate. Whereas if we reach out it can be won. Eni wins by offering homes, jobs and opportunities as the product of a relationship that is built up between different subjects, Here in Italy, on the other hand, it should be the locals who develop a strategy to win (in line with the rules) by offering opportunities to establish and build constructive relationships. Experience, as well as evidence, tells us that the first step must be taken by he who has already

satisfied his primary needs, in other words, he who is able to imagine the future without being squashed by the demands of survival, what the exhibition calls “naked life”.

Eni’s experience offers another idea, which has to do with the construction of a “common home”. Take the example of the off shore platform, where tens of different nationalities live together in a very restricted space. One of the aspects on which corporate training protocols insist, apart from the purely technical side of the specific job, is precisely the sharing of rules for survival and living together, beyond the professional sphere. In such extreme situations, finding a common thread among Chinese, Indians, Pakistanis, Italians, etc. means also thinking about living quarters that allow for and encourage communication, because this is the fundamental difference between a home and a prison. Communication that derives from a mutual awareness that the survival of everyone, in a situation of possible risk such as an oil platform, depends on a shared view of reciprocal behaviour, of consideration and respect for things and people, in a relationship in which the constant protection of the other is the best protection for oneself.

Today having invested in local human resources means, as in the case of Libya, Nigeria, Congo and Egypt, managing activities with few expatriates, a few hundred contractors (both Italian and other nationalities) and thousands of local operators who learn to share common rules and, thanks to this, to become integrated. I realise that it may seem easier when applied to a microcosm, however articulated, a platform remains essentially a closed off world, while it is much more arduous to transfer this to our cities where communication codes are multiple and fluid. Nevertheless, the metaphor of the platform as a complex system that requires the cooperation of everyone to be able to work, or rather not to explode or sink, seems to me significant.