

My Mobility

Students from Ca' Foscari Recount their Learning Experiences Abroad

In the bottom of the bag

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Virginia Lo Vullo finds that wearing a Japanese yukata is 'easier said done'.

When someone ask me if I found what I expected in my year in Japan I usually say no, I did not. What I found there and I brought back with me is completely different from what it was supposed to be. This is because when you began to study something that everyone describes as completely different and far from your reality as night and day are, you can only try to image what you will find. But if you think very closely about it, you will understand that the reason is simple: you do not know what you really want from this kind of experience until it appears before your eyes. And sometimes you have to wait until it seems that nothing can change, that one year abroad did not do anything for you. But, eventually, I found 'it' during a humid day in the end of the summer, in the very moment I felt like that year has just passed without giving me any useful answer.

A music band I usually listen to organized an event in Tōkyō, in which fans have to wear a *yukata*, a light cotton garment, similar in shape to a *kimono*, but thinner, meant to be worn in summer. But wearing this sort of garment is easier said than done.

It is the same when you try to fit in a society that you are not used to, and, moreover, a society that is not used to you, at all. In these times we fear 'diversity'; in the midst of a delicate international situation sometimes we cannot see the humanity that lies behind numbers without names, children, women and men who strive desperately not for the last smartphone model, but to survive far away from home. Sometimes we forget how it feels like to be the stranger, the other one, and for this reason becoming that one is a useful reminder. And so, you have to go abroad, to study and to learn everything about it, and in the end, with the all you have prepared, you try to go out from your comfort zone and find a balance, a compromise with the new reality you have to confront. It is a challenge.

Moreover, as if this situation would not have been hard enough, I lived quite far from the capital and for arriving there on time I should take the bus with *yukata* already on. It seemed to be difficult, but I decided that I

should at least give it a try. And so, I spent four hours wearing my *yukata*, doing the make-up and so forth, without any help.

It was the same with everything that has happened there: you have a vague idea of what is like, of what you must and must not do, of what the others told you to do, to say, but you are alone when you finally do it. You can spend all your life studying something, but, in the end, there is no better book than the life itself. You have to find your way alone. And so I tried my best to fit in something that I was not familiar with, but still, I tried because I wanted to be not one of them but one that can understand them and be richer out of it, who can be appreciated even if I appear different, because my diversity is a richness, and not something to fear.

That day the air was thick, a little rain fell scattered from the iron sky. I tried my best with the *yukata* and I felt like somehow ridiculous, with everyone glaring at me with strange eyes. But it was not only *yukata*'s fault. I was the 'other one' and I was wearing a symbol of their tradition. And so, with nothing but a paper bag and a tiny umbrella I reached the bus terminal. In only one hour the main string that should block my *yukata* from the inside untied.

It was just like when you start something and time by time the enthusiastic will of doing it fades away. There no dream-like place in the world, nor in Japan, nor in Italy, and so what was I looking for there? I felt like my dream was like that string untied.

This unsatisfactory emotion that accompany us is rooted inside us, it does not depend from the place we are.

And then, in that very moment an old lady came to me and begun to fix all the strings, chattering with a clear voice, saying that nowadays even Japanese young girls do not know how to wear a *yukata* and beside that string I had done a good job. And then my mind just flew at home, where my grandmother used to speak in that way. I felt at home. We talk about the past, or present and the very near future. 'I will finish my studies, I will take care of my family, I will come back here, in Japan.' I told her. It was so astonishingly simple that I never realized what I was searching for, until I just said it. And I just realized that I was not searching a place, but my place in the world. In the end, she looked at my paper bag, destroyed from the rain and laugh merrily; she took everything out of it and put my things in a finely embroidered white bag. She told me that it was a present for not forgetting my year there.

That present reminds me, even now, what I should not forget, what that difficult year taught me.

The aim of going one year abroad is not to forget your identity, not to become another one, but to find inside you what you really are and what you want to become.

And I can say that I found 'it' in the bottom of a white bag, in that rainy day of August.