

The National Basis of a Sociology Without Borders

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This paper discusses a recent trend in contemporary sociology based on the idea that new global problems, such as ecological crises and immigration flows, need a global view and global institutions. The need to deal with these new challenges, which have nurtured global uncertainty, has impelled many sociologists from several countries in the world – especially Europe and United States – to broaden their cultural vision and discover new paths for sociology. These efforts have led to use of the phrase *sociology without borders*. Indeed, if we consider globalization as a relatively new phenomenon affecting the world as a whole, we are compelled to find new methodological instruments to tackle our realization of this transitional period.

Sociology without borders advances a cosmopolitan sociology and vision. At its center are human rights and collective goods. Human rights include the right to decent employment; social security; education; housing; food; security; health care; cultural, racial, religious, and ethnic identity; and sexual preference. Human rights also include gender equality and the principle that vulnerable groups need special protection. Enabling these human rights are the advance and protection of collective goods, including a sustainable environment, transparent laws and government, public control of natural resources, community-based information grids, fair trade, food sovereignty, and participatory democracy. Indeed, a just society and human rights are themselves collective goods because they are indivisible and inclusive (Blau and Moncada 2006).

Such considerations suggest the necessity of redefining some values beyond the territorial scale and national belonging. Sociologists without borders claim that we are

witnessing growing interdependencies and solidarities around the world and that these do not emanate from nation-states, but from the enormous capabilities and resourcefulness of ordinary people.

Epistemological Premises

It is important to underline the epistemological premises of this cultural stance, which is the focus of this paper. Sociology without borders implies leaving out the epistemology of state centrism or, as European sociologist Ulrich Beck said, moving away from methodological nationalism to methodological cosmopolitanism.

By *methodological nationalism*, Beck means a social vision that studies cultural, social and political dimensions through alternative and opposite categories such as *either...or*. In Beck's opinion this tradition comes from sociology's tendency to study society in relation to the nation-state to which it belongs. Nation-states create and contain society and, therefore, they also define the frontiers of sociology.

Beck contrasts this version with methodological cosmopolitanism. Like other authors who espouse this new vision of sociology, Beck shares a similar reading of sociology's history, emphasizing an approach based on the inclusive comparisons of *and...and*. In Beck's opinion the same reality is ongoing at a cosmopolitan level. For instance, he refers to public demonstrations around the world against the Iraq war in 2003. We thus need a new cosmopolitan vision, centered on a borderless world. We need to challenge the iron grip of the nation-state on the social imagination (Beck 2003).

Indeed, as Bryan S. Turner (2006) asserts, classical sociology

involved the systematic study of the social, not society and hence this tradition is not negated by the current interest in sociological accounts of globality, network and flows. Sociology has a direct purchase on the contemporary debate on

globalization because it was not a science of (national) society but the study of the social. In addition, because the social was always a moral field, sociology can contribute directly to the study and promotion of cosmopolitanism, which must also reflect on the ethical dimension of the social, especially in developing a hermeneutics of Otherness (2006: 140-41).

Turner also tells us that Weber's study of the social meanings of action and interaction and his methodology are compatible with a cosmopolitan ethic of care. In addition, Durkheim's idea of true patriotism revealed a cosmopolitan view: "In a global social world the hermeneutics of social action forces us ever to engage with other cultures in an context of growing hybridity and culture interpenetration" (Turner 2006: 141).

This epistemological challenge posed by a sociology without borders is the most problematic aspect. To give up an epistemology of state centrism is not straightforward because the state surrounds us, it is inside of us, and it can condition public and private identity significantly. For many centuries, the nation-state has represented the natural framework for society, and individuals have grown and found security and wellbeing within it. Hobbes eloquently captures this reality:

Out of it [the State], we are protected by our own forces, in it by the power of all. Out of it no man is sure of the fruit of his labours; in it, all men are. Finally, out of it, there is a Dominion of Passion, war, fear, poverty, solitude, barbarisme, ignorance, cruelty. In it the Dominion of peace, security, riches, decency, society, elegancy, sciences and benevolence (Hobbes, 2000:130).

This paper holds that the persistence of the nation-state is due to its symbolic value, and the strong ties that it keeps with the private and public collective. We are not yet in an era characterized by the end of the state, but in an era in which this political form is undergoing transformation.

Glocalism and Governance: Some Critical Aspects

Some examples are useful at this point, beginning with the concept of *glocal*. The term, coined by Roland Robertson (1995), clarifies better than the term globalization the need to group global and local. As George Ritzer says,

Glocalization can be defined as the interpenetration of the global and the local, resulting in unique outcomes in different geographic areas. This view emphasizes global heterogeneity and tends to reject the idea that forces emanating from the West in general and United States in particular are leading to economic, political, institutional and – most importantly - cultural homogeneity (2003: 193-194).

This term contrasts the thesis of the hard version of cosmopolitanism that sees the world as a whole. The cultural, political, and economic glocal interactions, (for instance between cities or regions), intersect the space and the territory of the nation-state. This is not to say that the state is at an end, because it reacts to this new situation. Here it is the *glocal state*, the *network state*:

...still plays a critical role in shaping markets by mediating these connections between the local and the global and by influencing how local specific assets are mobilized within the range of opportunities available in the global economy. [...] State is increasingly moving toward a position as a network state, embedded in a variety of levels and types of governance institution (Riain 2000:203).

The re-scaling of the state is not only a defensive response to intensified global economic competition, but a concerted strategy to create new scales of state regulation to facilitate and coordinate the globalization process. On one scale, states have promoted economic globalization with the formation of supranational economic blocs - EU, NAFTA, ASEAN; on sub-state scales, meanwhile, states have devolved substantial aspects of their governance capacities to regional and local institutions, which are better positioned to restructure major urban regions (Brenner 1999).

The organizational structure and strategy of these glocal states are only now beginning to be explored. The state that connects a wide range of local networks to

a diverse set of global actors and networks must itself be more decentralised and flexible than states that presided over a centrally negotiated national development coalition (Riain 2000: 203).

Italian author Antonio Cassese (2002) also stresses the capacity of the state to penetrate global institutions, becoming market builders in new sectors; or by the strategy of *infranationalism*, that enables the state to keep the EU under control through middle range officials that establish a meso-level of governance.

The second example concerns the idea of *governance*. The theory of the new institutional perspective of governance addresses the problem of a lack of authority to coordinate decisions among the number of actors participating in this strategy. The problem is similar at local, national, supranational and global levels. In relation to multilevel governance, for instance, Gary Marks and Liesbet Hooghe (2003) remark that the reallocation of authority away from the central state is an ongoing process but it poses a *coordination dilemma*. As the number of actors rises, it becomes more difficult to punish defectors. Free riding is the dominant strategy for large groups in the absence of a leviathan or countervailing norms that can induce actors to monitor and punish defection.

The same problem is evident at a global level. Governance appears to be a useful instrument only if it is applied in a milieu ranging from the local to the international level, where actors involved share the same reference points and communication codes. Since at a global level all the actors do not share the same values, governance naturally lacks that centrality and coherence of action. Conversely, the more that globalization advances, the more that individuals will organize action according to their own particular characteristics.

Problems regarding issues such as order, accountability, legitimacy, democracy, security and transparency of procedure appear even more serious at a global level. The

success of global governance must necessarily lie in the sharing of a collective identity or solidarity that is still out of reach. At present, it is extremely difficult to reconcile the hierarchical dimension of power with the cooperative dimension, because of the difficulty of identifying institutions that can assume the important role of coordinating decisions, and especially, the difficulty of identifying apparatuses to control law and order within a complex intertwining of powers and functions generated by such an institutional strategy. It is practically impossible to outline a precise identity, neat boundaries and clearly assigned rights and duties. The powers of non-state actors are therefore endangered by their lack of accountability, sovereignty and democratic structures (Borghini 2004: 52).

The examples mentioned above show that the State persists in relation to its symbolic importance and values. This is the starting point of new reflections about the need to investigate some aspects of the State's formation and the reallocation of power in the global era. The State is an actor capable of shaping globalization and conditioning the private and collective identity of citizens. This is possible because the State is a rational-irrational admixture that adapts itself readily to the political-social nature of human beings (Smith 1991).

The Nation-State: Symbolic Aspects

What emerges from these examples is therefore an aspect which does not seem to have been thoroughly investigated — and which was hinted at in the introduction to this paper: the mythological-symbolic motivational nucleus, which perhaps sustains the institutional apparatuses that we observe and know. Here, literature and philosophy can come to our aid: Friedrich Nietzsche (*State is the name of the coldest of all cold monsters*), Martin

Van Creveld (*the State is an abstract entity that corresponds neither to those who make the rules nor to those who submit to them*) and so on.

These are but a few examples that point us to the idea of the State as a social construction (society, therefore!) deeply rooted within individual consciousness and in governed communities, and which therefore culminates in the State as a socially created image. In this context, the suggestions taken from the works of Pierre Bourdieu on the *Pensée d'Etat* (the State's Thought) seem particularly intriguing.

The *Pensée d'Etat* is a concept elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu (1993), who took his lead from the tradition that predated him (Cassirer and Foucault, specifically). Bourdieu blends within his concept the idea of the State that “thinks for itself” and produces the categories with which anything else can be thought—society, for example: “One of the powers of the State is that of producing (particularly through schools) the categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to everything around us, beginning with the State itself” (Bourdieu 1993: 49). What is interesting to underscore in this connection is that, in Bourdieu's analysis, the State proceeds not solely with respect to its legal-normative guise as the origin of externally imposed order, but rather on a more internal, molecular level of institutions positioned to transform, constitute, and condition the mental structures of individuals by means of socialization channels already established to accomplish such tasks: the school and family. Borrowing from Weber, Bourdieu states that the “State is an X that successfully claims the right to a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical and symbolic violence against a particular territory and against the entire population that belongs to it” (1993: 51). The examples that Bourdieu adumbrates in support of his thesis are numerous: Spelling reform, for example, a

decision originally made centuries before in the form of a state decree and which remains as a decree of the same organism in a different form, provokes

strident protest by a large percentage of those who are in some way connected to writing, whether those who live by writing or those who use writing [...] all of these defenders of spelling orthodoxy are mobilized in the name of the fact that the existing system of spelling is natural, in name of the satisfaction [...] that a perfect accord between mental and objective structures provides (Bourdieu 1993: 49).

Other examples include those related to changes of any kind proposed in the regulations governing school subject matter, which always encounter intense resistance that is not only tied to corporate interests, but also to something that runs much more deeply, in other words to “cultural phenomena, with their connected hierarchies, [that] are elevated to the rank of the natural by the action of the State which, introducing such hierarchies into cultural objects as well as into our brains, confers upon cultural authority all the illusions of naturalness” (Bourdieu 1993: 50).

Endeavoring to explain such a phenomenology, Bourdieu resorts to a distinction among various forms of capital: physical, economic, informational, and symbolic, positing the State as the holder of metacapital. The State, as it developed across the centuries, is accepted from people as a natural phenomenon without the need for it, in most cases, to resort to force in order to obtain obedience to its norms. In fact, it relies upon the *ritual subjugation to established order* (*soumission doxique à l'ordre établi*). The State provides us with our social identities, modelling them for us, and it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to escape because both formal and cognitive levels refer to one another continuously and adherence seems both immediate and impulsive because subjects consider it to be consonant with the actual structures of daily life.

In conclusion, we must point to the importance of the symbolic nature of the State and the State as a social image. The latter is a dimension to develop in order not to

confute sociology without borders, but rather to highlight an ongoing social, piecemeal engineering in building it. It is important to give centrality to government factors in all their complexity, in order to give some durable foundation to the development of this new sociological perspective, and some new perspectives of certainty in an increasingly uncertain world.

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