

Political anthropology and social order

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Abstract

In this article the author discusses the role of democracy in the post-global context. By “post-global” he intends that the *grands récits* (systems of thought and ideologies) which according to Lyotard were doomed to disappear in the post-modern era are still present and active but that they are not obvious anymore: they work underground within the processes of economic, social, political production. The author proceeds by examining the three principles on which societies order themselves: the sharing and establishment of blood ties – or time ties –, the sharing and establishment of space ties – or territorial ties – and, finally, the sharing of common action such as planning actions for the future. The author argues that democracy is the only form of political organization which is able to guarantee the possibility to these three principles of ordering the world to co-exist in such a way that none of the three principles can survive or prosper at the expense of the other two.

But today this balance is threatened by a new element which sprouts from the third principle – the sharing of common action – in this case, the order of the market: a new transnational order which is also juridical, the order produced by the relations between economic actors becomes juridical.

The State, intended here as expression of the territorial principle of organization of a society, is contractually weak in this new context which the author calls the post-global context, and transnational holdings easily colonize the *Lebenswelt*.

According to the author, it is not possible to practice democracy, to have strength as territorial unit, without the public and visible discussion of other ties, which are not territorial. The practice of assembly dialogue is therefore essential. He further states that democracy is a tension and not a guaranteed condition or state that one can keep to oneself.

The question of peace and conflict could substantially be formulated as follows: What is order and how can it be established?

Philosophers and anthropologists have tried to answer the question of the principles on which societies constitute themselves through continuous and careful analysis.¹ We can finally say, after deep and considered researches, that up to now, social order is based on very few principles.² We should nevertheless keep in mind that everything concerning the human experience is transitory, especially the configurations assumed by the social structures in their temporal and spatial change

¹ I will now present my vision concerning peace building and conflict resolution processes, after many years spent on the field, in different areas of the world, in the Horn of Africa and Central Asia and in the most troublesome areas of Latino America. This is the revised text of the Conference with the title “Political anthropology and its role in the process of peace keeping (Horn of Africa, Central Asia and Latino America)”, held the 26.04.2010 at the King Faisal Centre for Research and Islamic Studies, King Faisal Foundation Building, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

² Cf. Morgan L.H., 1877; Mühlmann W.E., 1968 (1948).

that is in their evolution – not in the Darwinian sense of the term. The shapes taken by social order are therefore potentially infinite, but it is nevertheless possible to identify – at least for political anthropology, according to my experience and in my perspective – three fundamental principles that intervene in the process of the structuration of society:³ blood, space, action.

I. The past and the back

The first principle is constituted by *blood*: the sharing and the establishment of blood ties, namely time ties. This “blood relationship” – father, mother, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, lineages, *gens-gentes*, clan and tribes and, finally, ethnic groups – transcends the principles of biology and genetics, independently from possibly considering these sciences as sound and useful. The social actor is not interested to know whether these blood ties are “real” or fictitious:

“Successive hearsay does the same work as actual seeing and exercises the same authority. Thus, you were born of your father and mother; you have been told that you were born of them; you have not seen with your own eyes that you were born of them, but by being repeated so often it comes to be accepted by you as the truth, so that if you were now told that you were not born of them you would not listen”.⁴

To be the “real” mother or father of a child is rather a social, cultural, political and psychological performance; it is a *factum*.⁵ It is difficult and meaningless to be a mother or a father for “real”: it is surely important to feel so. And both parties – this is the teaching of Jalal ad Din ar Rumi – should feel so: father/mother and son, that is the family. In the parents and children relationship it is crucial to feel so at least in two. The genetic or biological track can only be a problem for forensic medicine, for the so called scientific discourse. Otherwise society is not interested to the question. The son and the mother feel to be a son and a mother, and not for genetic reasons. The mother feels to be a mother for emotional reasons. The son feels to be a son ... for sentimental reasons. And these emotional and sentimental reasons become juridical reasons. Affection and emotions found society, even in the case concerning the principle of ordering society that we call sharing blood ties. This is the basic principle according to which even ethnic groups have constituted themselves. Ethnic groups, by the way, should never be confused with nations which do not configure themselves on the basis of blood ties sharing.

³ For a more critical analysis of the three principles, see my studies in Palmisano A.L., 2006b, pp. 191-198.

⁴ Cf. Jalal ad Din ar Rumi, Discourse LXI, *Fihi ma fihi* (1198 ca.); see also Ibn al Arabi Muhyi al Din *Fusus al-hikam*, 1946; *Al-Futuh al-makkiyya*, 1911.

⁵ Cf. Gian Battista Vico: “Verum et factum convertuntur seu reciprocantur”, in Vico G., 1744.

II. The present and the around

The second principle is constituted by *space* (territoriality): the sharing and the establishment of a territory is the sharing and the establishment of space ties. Territory has often oriented us toward an attempt to constitute order actually around its conformation and its interiorisation. It is a principle which has an extraordinary range of interpretations and applications; entire civilizations have configured themselves according to this principle. In this case an analytical differentiation and specification is also possible and required. Recent studies let us sense that the “territory is not there”.⁶ The territory does not exist unless it is created, stated, instituted by a group; the territory is therefore created by those who live on it and it is at this moment that both, territory and the group, reciprocally define themselves as such. At this point we define and constitute a territory – the territory – through the secondary and complementary creation of borders: natural borders do not exist.⁷ This concept may be a little hard to grasp or to accept and will require some elaboration and reflections.

The social actors who are present on the space we call earth actually constitute places and territories and therefore also name those places. In other terms, the sharing of a territory is not something “objective”, that is simply “there”. Space does not indeed exist in the social and psychological world, i.e. in the world of experience until we define and conventionalise it, all of us together, as a determinate place and therefore as a territory.⁸ According to Heinz von Foerster: “When we perceive our environment, it is we who invent it.”⁹ For instance, we constitute the room in which we find ourselves or the city in which we live, and so on. It is not true that the room exists independently from our presence, independently from the fact that we acknowledge it as such.

Therefore, to share a territory means to create this territory and to share this creation. It is according to this principle that we successively founded what we call the “State”, a form of organization that has been prevalent for the last 4000 years with a certain success. It has also certainly produced disasters, above all in its Hegelian version of the XIX century.¹⁰ During the past two centuries where and when territory was perceived and interpreted as an amalgam of the two concepts of nation and State together with territory, it produced all the terrible consequences ensuing from the concept of the “purity of a group” (population, people, nation, *Volk*, race etc.) up to the revitalized notion of “elected race”.

This could create the conditions for ethnic cleansing, as one of the by-products of the principle of order based on territory when the ideology of the identity between State and people, namely “local group-descent group-political program”, has

⁶ Cf. Raffestin C., 1980; 1984; Raffestin C. et Bresso M., 1979.

⁷ Cf. Raffestin C., 1980; 1984; 1979.

⁸ “*Ana al haqq*”, “I am the reality” or “I am the world”, cf. Al Hallaj al Hussain ibn Mansur (922).

⁹ Von Foerster H., 1973:35-46.

¹⁰ Cf. Hegel, F. W. *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts; Phänomenologie des Geistes; Vorlesung über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte.*

imposed itself. Today we use the English term to indicate what has always been known as “genocide”: elimination of the Other, of the different, in ethnic terms, in blood terms. And consequently and congruently in these circumstances blood must flow... Under this perspective a group is considered according to its identity of co-sharer of blood ties and is therefore not considered adequate to form a group (a nation in the case of political expression of this kind of group) based on the sharing of territorial ties.

III. The future and the front

The third principle is constituted by *common action*: sharing and making projects, any kind of projects.

Nietzsche observed that man is “*das Tier, das versprechen darf*”.¹¹

The entire modern cosmology could in fact be reduced to the image of a man who lives, today, “a future to reach”.¹² The “work of man” has been and is to create “a future to reach” for himself. For Nietzsche, man is “the animal that may promise”... or promises himself something.¹³ It is, as if thanks to his erected posture he said: “I am here and I see there, I want to be there...”. “Wanting to be” is proposed as “must be”, and the collective expectation is the common participation to this “must be”, to this project that wants to be common, to this promise: society as a project. This cosmology, with all the resources of the dogma, contrasts uncertainty, ambiguity and relativity: qualified attributes which are not reducible and define the human condition. They are at the basis of this cosmology, the cosmology of “a future to reach”. This cosmology has been founded to reduce uncertainty but not complexity and to reduce the ambiguity of human condition which feeds on itself. Society finds its meaning in this cosmology: it looks like a Sisyphus enterprise.¹⁴ In order to be able to continue to be what it is – and it couldn’t be otherwise – society is in search of a “future to reach”, involved in the “must be”. This “must be” offers cohesion and allows the reduction of the Other, of the difference, that is of the non-being: so that this non-being is also instrumental to its own being. But how much of this cosmology can be attributed to the “philosophical discourse”, that is to the Western philosophy of Aristotelian logic and to the discourse which legitimizes “culture” in the moment of its self-discovery in the *polis*? The shock of heterogeneity has led the Western world to this interpretation of man as “*das Tier, das versprechen darf*”.¹⁵ The fear of heterogeneity, and the consequent founding of a project aiming at the canceling of Otherness in order to allow an easy synergy, i.e. the founding of a project which has

¹¹ Cf. Nietzsche F., 1887.

¹² For some reflections and considerations, cf. Palmisano A.L., 2006b:147-148.

¹³ Nietzsche F., 1887.

¹⁴ Goddess Persephone punished Sisyphus for his tricky behaviour. He had to roll a huge boulder uphill, but the stone would always roll back and he had to begin all over again. This terrible punishment was due to his arrogant belief that he was cleverer than Zeus himself; therefore Zeus condemned him to this useless and endless effort.

¹⁵ Nietzsche F., 1887.

always then looked for heterogeneity to be able to continue to offer itself as up-to-date, is the obstacle to interaction.

Man is the animal which, standing on his own legs, is able to perceive that there are other places, different from the one in which he finds himself at that precise moment with his own body: he looks elsewhere and promises himself to reach this “elsewhere”. It is certainly an “elsewhere” that man can see with his own eyes: we are then speaking of visions. And we all know the strength of vision, even of the visions induced by the tales told by others. We also know how important these visions are for the social actors: visions of different lives; above all visions of another possible life.¹⁶

Nietzsche asked himself: actually, who is man? And he answered: man is the animal which may promise. But what does man promise himself? Man stands on his own legs and observes with his binocular vision what is in front of him. He may watch far, consider his being in one place and his observing other places. He sees these places *in fieri*; he sees beyond: these places are elsewhere but already manifest themselves as future, potential places. Man says: “I am here but I want to be there”, and he therefore promises himself to be there, later, in the future. The displacement in space, this being elsewhere, is consequently planned. One finds oneself then, possibly in another place but with different plans to which one can participate; and finally one can also find oneself extraneous to one’s own body.¹⁷ For which reason does man make this promise to himself?¹⁸

Any form of association is, in itself, a project with its horizons: it establishes scopes or goals. This principle of sharing action – and religion can also be seen in this sense, as a project that orders the world – boldly orders the world, especially during this post-global era.¹⁹

According to Jean François Lyotard, the *grands récits*²⁰ would have disappeared in the post-modern era.²¹ But we observe today – Lyotard wrote in fact during the 70’s of the last century – that this is not so: the *grands récits* – systems of

¹⁶ Cf. Palmisano A.L., 2001.

¹⁷ In fact, before the beginning of the migratory movement, the migrants are only simple expressions of space and are not yet places.

¹⁸ About man as “animal” but also “angel” continuously attracted by these two poles of being-there, cf. again Jalal ad Din ar Rumi.

¹⁹ On the concept of “post-global era”, cf. Palmisano A.L., 2006a, pp. 107-114; 2006b, pp. 40-41; 2006c, pp. 113-130; 2007, pp. 71-78.

²⁰ Cf. Lyotard J.F., 1979. The *grands récits* are, for instance, science which has its own rules of the game – consensus above all – and must legitimate them through external references, such as philosophy for instance. Therefore philosophy is a *metarécit*. And this, just as the other *metarécits*, must necessarily resort to other *grands récits* and cosmologies. The *grands récits* are punctual performative statements whose effects coincide with their enunciation: dialectic of the spirit, emancipation of the rational subject, technological development, true/false dyad and so on. Have the *grands récits* disappeared? Or are they more simply hidden? Here is the post-global era, the time of hiding and camouflage.

²¹ Cf. Lyotard J.F., 1979.

thought and ideologies – are present and active just as in the past, if not more so: this is the post-global era. The difference is that they are hidden and not evident. The old ideologies such as racism, evolutionism and social Darwinism, “natural selection” and corporative super-individualism as well as the equivalence “economic development = development” that becomes an identity, are all ideologies which are *de facto* applied politically in the daily practice at world level even in the international organizations. They are still there, within the processes of economic, social, political production and even in the juridical production of international law, to divulge a message, a pre-packed solution to the many contingent problems and to make sure that the message will be accepted: in a world which is now *tekhne* and market of the *tekhne* “to work means to be protagonist and being protagonist is not a right but a privilege: only the best will be selected”. There is always someone who is convinced or acts as if he were convinced, to have the mission, the “duty” – “the white man’s burden” –²²... A “duty” is, today for instance, represented by the “mission of human rights”. And the schools in which this mission is taught and “preached” in the shape of M.A. programs are proliferating. These Masters degrees which certify that one is qualified to treat such arguments are obviously not free of charge, and the bill is usually in pounds or dollars. We are learning a new language and we are sharing it and rather involuntarily supporting it economically. We co-participate to this language at our own expenses while we are learning it. Some of these ideologies are actually alive and very well hidden. They are inscribed in a certain social and political practice, in the world of everyday life which is thus finally colonized.²³ They act powerfully, in depth and have a capillary action: they act at world level.

What is the prevailing social order today? Today, in the post-global era we do not find an intertwinement of orders but a new order: the post-global order.

Modern societies in their self-representations constantly refer to the model of self-regulating market. This self-representation should offer, in the perspective of these societies, a guarantee of the legitimacy of the social and political action of a State, which, by definition does not invade the everyday life of its citizens and which does not impair individual rights. The social structure itself is in fact often represented in terms of market. The modern Western world – but nowadays not only the Western world – represents the whole world like a market. Fortunately it still represents it – although partially – as a market of exchange (commercial) and not as financial market, keeping thus – maybe for a short time – the valency of social and political exchange which is implied in the concept of exchange market, but not in the concept of financial market.

We are facing *oborto collo* a new juridical order – and therefore a new legitimacy – which is transnational: the order of the market. The order produced by the relations between economic actors becomes a juridical order. National law has anyway over-proliferated: this context sees the triumph – even over the national

²² Cf. Kipling’s poem *The white man’s burden*, 1899.

²³ Cf. Habermas J., 1981.

Constitutions – of the law imposed by the financial market – a simplifying law – and of the super national law – the law with implicit ethical ambitions –, although it remains in a subaltern position with respect to the law imposed by the financial market.

The State is contractually weak in the post-global world, and both the multinational corporations and the transnational holdings easily colonize the *Lebenswelt*.²⁴ The state is in debit and not level, as according to the *de jure* imperative (that is for the “social contract” and principle of democracy); while the multinational corporations and the transnational holdings are in credit and not level, as according to the logic of the free market: the balance is brought level by persons who are transformed in goods. And in this market of blue chips and stock options, they – brokers and entrepreneurs – buy and sell work like any other kind of goods, determining thus the flux of these goods on the market and therefore also its production and distribution.

The quality of the projects in question will be determined by history: who comes next will be able to assess whether they have been good or bad projects – at least in relation to his own projects. The question is about planning at all levels: human beings, social actors, i.e. political subjects unite on the basis of some plan, of some vision of a final scope, of a so called goal, of a specific intent.

I consider the European Union, for instance, as a germination of this principle of order: it is based more on the principle of sharing a project than on the sharing of a territory – a territory that we are *de facto* constituting today. The “project Europe”, that is Europe with its law, with its rules and so on, can be shared.²⁵

Projects can be shared by who is not necessarily physically close to me, by someone with whom I can travel in the “world of life”.²⁶ I can be physically close to someone and very far, at the same time when we do not share the same dreams and visions: my next door neighbour is far away from me when our plans, our emotions, our sharing blood ties are completely different. But I can feel very close to someone with whom I share a project, a dream, an idea even if we live far apart and we do not share kinship ties. And I will call him “brother” and he will become my true brother. Common planning can allow different places – even if they are caught in apparently unresolvable historical antagonisms – to share a common path.²⁷

All societies witness the co-existence of these three principles; sometimes major relevance is given to one of them, for instance to kinship ties, sometimes to another, for instance to territory, and so to intents, namely to the third principle concerned with the sharing of common plans or projects.

²⁴ Cf. Schütz A., 1981 (1932).

²⁵ The Democratic Republic of Congo is legitimated in applying to adhere to the European Union: I agree with the requests of countries who do not have a geographical contiguity to Europe.

²⁶ Cf. Schütz A., 1981 (1932); 1981; 1982.

²⁷ Cf. Palestinians and Israelis.

But the three of them are always co-active: it is unthinkable to deal with only one of the principles and eliminate the other two. Human beings do not only create, establish and maintain ties among themselves but also divide themselves on the basis of these three principles, and still – on the basis of these three principles – they manage to, or at least try to reach a harmony: any kind of harmony. This means that cultural differences arise actually in the management of these three principles. When I speak of cultural differences I mean exactly this: a different management of the three principles. When I speak of different cultures, I mean, above all, the different emphasis given to one of these principles. The experience of cultural diversity that we call historical, social, economic, political today, is actually given by the different emphasis we give to these principles.²⁸ And it is beneficial that this diversity, these differences continue to be. Cultural differences are challenging; cultural difference is a chance for societies: it is an asset, a benefit, a treasure for all. The problem lies in how to let differences act in synergy, how to allow them some kind of complementarity, some form of synchrony.

Antique news

Since we are speaking of antique news – yes, it is not recent but it is still breaking news –, we cannot avoid observing that we are here, among us, because we find ourselves in a situation that we call *democracy*. It is maybe the case to formulate some reflections about this term, in the context of what we have said up to now about the three principles according to which we order the world.

Democracy should guarantee the possibility to the three principles of order to co-exist, none of these principles should survive or prosper at the expense of the others. If I find myself in a tribe in some “other country”, the principle of sharing the territory will not be guaranteed: who does not belong in terms of blood ties to this community is not accepted on this territory. Vice versa, in a dictatorial state, cohesive groups based on blood ties, that is groups of descent, can be excluded in various manners: through “racial laws”, for instance, or through more or less elaborated means to prevent full citizenship and civil rights. Whereas if I work in a multinational corporation, and multinational corporations are a form of association based on the sharing of common action, that is sharing of the scope – for instance profit, exclusively profit – I risk severe exclusion if I do not fully share its scopes even if my country, the country to which I belong (a country, for example, stricken by multinational corporations) is full of debts and on the verge of social and political collapse.²⁹

²⁸ The peculiar historical and administrative experience of the last 50 years – we don’t need to go further back – is more than enough to institute cultural differences in Europe, differences which are linguistic too.

²⁹ The striking difference between a multinational corporation and a religious corporation, is that the latter can make money but doesn’t make its God out of money.

This is why democracy is a situation that guarantees the co-existence of the three principles of ordering society. Democracy is therefore very important although it is often taken for granted and even more often manipulated and deformed in its definition.

Allow me now to make some reflections on this topic.

Demos is an administrative unit, an administrative unit on a territorial basis. That the *demos* is an administrative unit in relation to a territory, namely to a set of *finēs*, “limits and boundaries” according to the ancient Roman juridical terminology, is a paradoxically recent re-discovery.³⁰ This term, *demos*, has in fact nothing to do with “people”. The *demos* is composed by those who live in a territory and belong to different tribes which are immediately re-configured in *phylai*, a kind of territorial tribe³¹ – following complex processes of migration and territorialisation – and successively sub-divided in *trittiai*, that is districts, or territorial units in a specific sense.³² This is the 2500 years old innovation of Ancient Greece: managing to put together in the same area members of different descent groups and consider these persons as a unit, an administrative unit, and let them to live in peace. It means that men who belonged to different groups of descent could become a constitutive part of the *demos*, and, as such, could vote; and their vote determined the possibility to change their world in a co-participated manner – the world was from now on conceived in terms of territoriality and not of simple family. For this reason I consider the possibility that the decisions concerning a new entry can be reached and legitimated through vote: to share a territory is the duty of a *demos*, and this is the democratic system, with its project, which is to administrate the territory properly even among groups of different descent origins and with different dreams, that is different plans and projects.

In order to share a project it is necessary to share much, “to consume at least one ton of salt together” as our forefathers used to say, and to meet a lot, to lead a community life, that is to develop an assembly society. It is obvious that in society today there is a tendency to escape from this political involvement, from this involvement in the *polis*; the *polis* is the expression of the sharing of a new territorial structure, within which people that come from the most disparate places mix; people who speak different languages but respect the basic rules, which are the rules of the *demos*. This does not mean that they are fixed rules: they are rules in evolution, i.e. social norms, but always defined on the principle of the vote, a very clear principle.

And what about *kratia*? It has little to do with “power”. Especially when we accurately intend power as a “chance to impose one’s own will within a social relation even when facing a strong opposition, independently from the origin of this

³⁰ During the last election processes, in Italy and in many other countries, the parties that have been successful are the one that had re-discovered this ancient principle.

³¹ For “multiculturalism”, which is called so in relation to the wide migration processes of the post-global era, processes of interaction in a new local and socio-cultural context, cf. Palmisano A.L., 2008, pp. 29-36.

³² On the notions of *phylai*, *trittiai* and *demos*, cf. Palmisano A.L., 2001, pp. 153-157.

chance”.³³ *krateo* rather means “to have strength”, namely *regere*, according to the ancient Roman juridical terminology. Therefore, democracy indicates “the strength that lies within the *demos*”, the strength that lies in this kind of organization, a territorial organisation, an organisation that has anyway a project to share, a project that still has to be written. The project is outlined by the *demos*, which, thanks to this strength, is able to approve and to manage it.

We can thus understand how the situation that we call *conflict* can be resolved and transformed in a situation that we call *peace* only and exclusively when we have a minimal approval, just to begin with, of a common project which concerns the immediate future, or the long distance future, by a group of people who do not approve it on the basis of a cohesion and a solidarity obtained through the sharing of blood ties. It is therefore impossible to practice democracy, to have strength as territorial unit, i.e. *regere fines*, without the public and visible discussion of other ties, ties that are not territorial, through the practice of assembly dialogue. Democracy is a tension and not a guaranteed state that one can keep to oneself. Democracy is a continuous tension and it is kept alive only thanks to dialogue, the activity of the words,³⁴ assembly activity. We guarantee democracy through a continuous involvement. Democracy is therefore a situation, a situation of continuous tension; and the situation that constitutes peace is also a situation of tension. Peace is a far-ranging and complex process which must foresee the involvement of all those we call citizens.

In his book, *Traktat über die Gewalt*, Wolfgang Sofsky wrote: “Violence generates chaos”. And we all agree on this. But on the same line he proceeds: “Order generates violence”.³⁵ And this is striking.

But what is violence? “Violence is the only experience that unifies men”.³⁶ And more: “Birth and death are the alpha and omega of violence”.³⁷ Birth is to over cross the body’s boundaries, vs. the Other, in direction of the Other, towards the Other, at the expenses of the Other.

So: “Violence generates chaos, order generates violence”. And this is impressive and important.

An excess of order generates violence, the same violence that leads then to chaos. Why?

Because order cannot be *cum*-participated and cannot take place without the interaction of the three principles we have been discussing.

³³ Cf. Weber M., 1922, p. 27.

³⁴ Cf. Wittgenstein L., 1922; 1969.

³⁵ Cf. Sofsky W., 1996, p. 10 f.

³⁶ Cf. Sofsky W., 1996, p. 10 f.

³⁷ Cf. Sofsky W., 1996, p. 10 f.

Because order cannot be *cum*-participated and cannot take place without the interaction of those who feel themselves represented in each of these principles, the three principles we have been discussing.

Those “who feel themselves represented in each of these principles that we have been discussing” are what we call “parties”. And we know that in order to solve a conflict, in order to settle a dispute, both parties, all parties, have to win; and to be convinced to have won.

In fact, “The situation is “real”, when the consequences are real”. Defeats or victories are “real” as far as the consequences are perceived as “real”.³⁸

But how can we perform it and realize it?

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³⁸ Cf. Watzlawick P.; Beavin J. H.; Jackson D. D., 1967.

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