

How to Act and Think from the Local to the Global Level: an Ethnosociological Approach to Identities and Culture

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Abstract

The globalization of markets and economies, technical change and technological innovation, migrations and international trade: everything seems to be calling for the encounter and exchange among cultures, and at the same time, the reinvention of local territories and “singular” identities. It seems that this movement is continuing, and even accelerating, resulting in contrasting trends, and a variety of transformations and changes... How are we to find a new form of social ties that would take into account the evolution of business practices and regional identities? Thus, the purpose of this communication is to investigate not only the “globalization” of world politics, but also the functioning of this so-called European “Community” as an economic, political and cultural institution having multiple effects on all citizens, located and professionally organized in micro-territories.

Key words: Migrations and International Trade, Local Territories and Globalization of World, Cultural Institutions, European Community, Identity and Habitus

1. Focus of the Colloquium and Research Topic: from “Local” to “Global”

The globalization of markets and economies, technical change and technological innovation, migrations and international trade, etc.; everything seems to be calling for the encounter and exchange among cultures, and at the same time, the reinvention of local territories and “singular” identities. It seems that this movement is continuing, and even accelerating, resulting in contrasting trends, and a variety of transformations and changes... How are we to find a new form of social ties that would take into account the evolution of business practices and regional identities?

Thus, the purpose of this Colloquium is to investigate not only the “globalization” of world politics, but also the functioning of this so-called European “Community” as an economic, political and cultural institution having multiple effects on all citizens, located and professionally organized in micro-territories. These new spaces of solidarity and conflicts have emerged as an increasingly important part of the social fabric, interacting with regions and nation states. We assume that modernization has also opened a rift between social actors and their local

environment. Citizens organize themselves with actors located outside of their profession so that it is not dismantled. Thus, as shown in previous studies, the discussion on professions and territories is both ancient and recent (A. Aït Abdelmalek: Dissertation, E.H.E.S.S., 1993 and Thesis for the H.D.R, Rennes, 2005, LESTAMP Colloquium, dir. : J. Réault and J. Deniot, 2009). It coincides with the birth of sociology as a field of study: the intensification of the division of labor, specialization processes in plants and bureaucratic structures, shifts in social relations and the principles underpinning this new (capitalist, industrial and modern) society are central to the theory of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, widely considered the founding figures of sociology (R. Aron, 1967, G. Ferréol, 1992). Their ideas are at the basis for most of the subject areas and fields of study covered in sociology: Marx condemns the exploitation and alienation of the working-class by analyzing the relations between Capital and Labor as “new forms of social relations” ; Weber observes the disenchantment of the world linked with an increasing degree of rationalization that resulted in capitalism and bureaucratic organizations; lastly, Durkheim, concerned with “social cohesion”, views the interdependencies arisen from specialization as a new form of the division of labor substituting “organic solidarity” for “mechanical solidarity”. These reflections also focused on the development of the state, increasingly involved in the regulation of social relations. Both the spearhead and Achilles heel of European construction, the common

agricultural policy (PAC) that reveals, among other things, the insurmountable contradictions within the current rules of the economic game, is heavily imposed on farmers and deepens the rifts between different groups of producers. As they were not modernized, many farms soon disappeared.

Thus, according to Edgar Morin, Europe is “our community of destiny”; it is, anyway, an identity still to be defined: “Europe certainly does not emerge from a past that belies it. It emerges timidly from our present because it is our future that requires it” [E. Morin, 1987, pp. 168-169]. Further to that, a conclusion can be drawn: the past refers to identities that were constructed and developed during the formation process of nation-states (D. Schnapper, 1994). Hence, countless debates and issues regarding what we called “national ideology” on the one hand, and on the other, a European identity based on a “Community Utopia” (A. Aït Abdelmalek, 1996). Therefore, how can this national ideology be combined with the identification of a European political culture? In fact, raising questions about a new political space leads us to reflect on the formation of a new social model. For a long time, national and international organizations were assigned a mere role as a relay or executor, and they were studied separately in a juxtaposed or compartmentalized manner. There has been little work (with the exception of J.-P. Darré’s in 1985) attempting to understand the complex interaction between the different actors (citizens, politicians and technicians) and the complexity of territorial strategies.

In short, what is the significance for agricultural producers – and for local political authorities – of the emergence of a European “society” before our eyes? What is at stake and what prospects for territorial planning, including regional development (regionalization)? These issues will be debated at the Colloquium. The presentations will be organized in two sections: relocation and so-called “local” territories on the one hand, Europeanization and globalization on the other.

We can start by saying that a territory – a regional territory for instance – is the place where individuals’ social identity is constructed. In this respect, it is important to remind ourselves that individual identity is always connected to broader and more or less deep collective representations, such as an “ethno-territorial” feeling of belonging. We should also recall one of the key concepts in Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, the notion of “habitus”, defined as “a system of durable and transposable dispositions” and “principles of generation and structuring of practices and representations” (P. Bourdieu, 1980, pp. 80-81). This formulation refers, in part, to M. Weber’s words (“religious habitus”). However, the notion of “habitus” had long been discussed. In Pascal’s philosophy, the habit becomes a second nature, and long before St Thomas Aquinas’ writings, Aristotle and even Plato’s works (*Lois*, VII; *République*, VII) considered that one’s disposition and moral virtues are the product of good habits. The Greek terms stand for “custom”, “usage”, or “habit” (*ethos*), or “character”, “way of life”, and

“morals” (êthos). Thus, questions are being raised about the relations of human groups with one another, and, further, the interactions between individuals. The sense of belonging is reflected through collective or individual practices. Human groups are distinct, but they don't have complete autonomy. Individuals act in various social contexts; they experience the social world in different ways. The culture of individuals – that, in fact, helps define them – refers to a set of beliefs and representations enabling them to situate themselves and to interpret their environment. Human groups have particularities, but they are also dependent: the individual and the group are interrelated through a very great many institutional and organizational mediations (A. Aït Abdelmalek, 1993). We must therefore emphasize the contribution of the social environment to the interaction between the group and the individual. We agree with A. Touraine's “identity, opposition and totality” framework in “worker consciousness” [6], and we suggest that citizens' identification to a territory sometimes associates with conflicting types of relations and situations.

2. From “Local” to “Global”: Crossed-Regulations

In order to describe confrontational bargaining at all levels – that provides social actors with a real yet relative autonomy – and to better define the focus of this Colloquium, a distinction

shall be made between three different yet interdependent systems: the « professional » system, following up on Claude Dubar's analysis (and that will not be the main focus of this seminar), the political and national system, and finally, the supranational system (that of European and global institutions). For instance, it is clear that "Europe", in its concrete reality, seems to be, rather than a regular and harmonious pyramid, a complex set of crossed-checks [8] – whose results are difficult to predict in the long term – that ensure a relative stability by limiting the explosion of a system that exists and works, despite his complexity. Indeed, each level, including the global level, - the European Union is only a "macro-region" among others – is both regulated and a regulator and finds itself, in reality, simultaneously engaged in relations with "partners". A series of relationships, which could be symbolized with arrows, shows that territories interlock, and are unequal.

We will now focus on how, in this context, connections are established between citizens and territory. We will probably verify that, even though the homologies between cities and villages are many, these similarities take on a different significance for villages, because of the specific nature of farming: the place where transformation occurs, modifying the bond with nature and positioning itself from the outset within a perspective of an enlarged economic reproduction (and therefore of a growing-sum game); in villages, agricultural activities play a less and less central role. Furthermore, while the

city is a key driver for the creation of social networks and the plurality of territories through the exchanges that it generates, countryside's economy is one of foresight, intended to secure locally stable consumption over time, and with this in mind, building up some reserves to better prevent and anticipate risks. Thus, this tension between cities (an urban and global space) and villages (an agricultural and local space) is constant, and appears to be necessary for territorial dynamics. By emphasizing the functional difference between "localists" and "pluri-territorialists", we would like to put the importance of socio-democratic profiles (volume, density) into perspective: the expanding role of cities is based more on the increasing number of the fields they have to coordinate and on the development of exchanges than on population increase. As Raymond Ledrut expressed it, there is a specific mode of spatialization for social life, connected to the way travels are integrated in everyday life and in exceptional moments life is interspersed with [14]. Through the analysis of the effects of agricultural modernization and the urbanization of the countryside, we will show what their influence is on workers (farmers or not) who not only use, but also valorize or criticize the new territorial context. Thus, it seems possible to draw a contrast between the rural pole, where relations between people are of key importance, and the urban pole where relations between groups and individuals are limited and fragmented (only if we accept the idea that there is an influence between the type of space and the mode of social

relations).

In fact, even if Europe is imposing itself on the member states, the supranational level seems to be a projection of the nation-state. Furthermore, while at the same time questioning the nation-state, Europe strengthens the role of the state. This is one of the paradoxes of European construction, which leads to think that we still have to consider the state as the structural force of Europe, and the nation as the space for citizenship, even today.

3. Individual and Collective Identity: Territory and Profession

We attempted to demonstrate that seemingly disconnected regulations constitute a coherent system based on the desire to rationalize and modernize society. However, the flipside of this system is the marginalization and exclusion of some citizens, even when they are modernized! The presentations will have to focus on the growing complexity in working out and managing the agricultural policy at four different levels, a) local, departmental and regional, b) national, c) European and d) global. As we discussed earlier, identity is informed by a double rationale: one involving the management of professional identity and the other, horizontal and territorial management. It should be noted that international organizations are not mere relays but a player in a game of increasing complexity. In order to address the paradox of identity directly – i.e. the role played by the

political and professional elite in the shifts of identities – it should be recalled that recognized, wage-earning, professional activities play an active part in the creation of individual and collective identities. Finally, labor can be defined as the sum of all professional activities that participate in the socialization of individuals. However, are we not just pretending to be (re)discovering the division of labor and its possible conflict with territories (especially rural ones) inherited from history? Twenty years ago, Placide Rambaud, Henri Mendras, Marcel Jollivet, as well as other managers and researchers from the Rural Sociology Group and the Rural Sociology Centre, along with Bertrand Hervieu and Rose-Marie Lagrave (among others), asked scientists to look into urbanization and the mobility of rural populations. At that time, it was not the main focus of public policies yet. In 1980, we probably were not ready to admit the enormous scope of studies connecting territorial changes to mobility flows driven by modernization, professionalization and also the globalization of trade, politics and culture. Similarly, thirty years ago, were we ready to imagine a city with no limit, with networks, and very urbanized? At the same time, the world kept going faster: the upward trend in “urbanization” and “rurbanization” was sustained, the tertiary sector continued to expand, unemployment gained a lot of ground in French society, and lifestyles have changed as the population is growing older. Today, despite all of these changes, the works of researchers have not been contradicted, on the contrary. For the last thirty

years, studies on cities and rural territories, the transformation of institutions governing them, and population movements, have answered some major questions.

For instance, while the quest for identity, a concept that is of relevance to Claude Dubar, is one of today's key preoccupations, places of interest have now become commonplace, territories are diluted and the "local" level is dissolving into a disconcerting "globalization". We can ask ourselves whether movement, mobility and professionalization participate uniquely in this global dilution (i.e. "deterritorialization"; see works of: LADEC-LAS, 1998-2011) or if they also play a part, in their own way, in the reconstruction of a new identity for countries, places and various territories? Ideas relevant to this topic might come along during this Colloquium, through its comparative approach (C.R. 20 "Comparaisons internationales", A.I.S.L.F.), which we will probably have to follow upon. In fact, this analysis is driven by the desire to connect a sociology of labor, a sociology of territories (including the global space), and a sociology of socialization. It is also guided by the desire to better understand how our society creates active subjects and individuals (territorialized citizens) through organized professional activity. Therefore, the focus is not to describe these individuals' experience in context, but rather to try to understand how they build their experience, and how they prioritize their orientations and their choices.

Ultimately – and on that note – for Durkheim, as "the logics

proper to a complex society” (to quote the ethnosociologist Dominique Schnapper – E.H.E.S.S.) develops, and as the division of social labor increases, the role of territories and tradition (i.e. rural territories, in particular, are the indicator of tradition) keeps weakening. Thus, through professionalization and globalization, society becomes less and less dependent on territory. From this point of view, the transition to a modern society is a process of emancipation of the individual from specific forms of solidarity, the attachment to the land and the constraints of nature.

It is this conception of modernity that we will try to analyze through a sociological, multidisciplinary, but primarily “comparative” approach, bearing in mind that all that seemed obvious to E. Durkheim or T. Parsons is now uncertain and problematic for us. Therefore, we will have to stop looking for answers about the “end of territories” (B. Badie) in our reflections and analyses. This AISLF and LAS-CIAPHS Colloquium is, indeed, driven by a central hypothesis: the growing role of transnational flows, the expansion of international networks, as well as the failure of citizen relations almost everywhere, unavoidably weakens the territory of the nation-state, which is no longer empowered to claim the continued allegiance of individuals. In this respect, Bertrand Badie notes that: “a trend is arising, where the ‘multiple’ (concerning allegiances) seems to be triumphing over the ‘one’” (1990). Hence we can perceive new divisions of labor and new ways to think of the multiplicity

of functions through the plurality of spaces and allegiances.

Following the high degree of enthusiasm for anything “local” in the 1970’s, the concept of “territory” (including global territory) progressively entered the scientific and technical vocabulary in the 1990’s, to the point that it is now given much emphasis in most “public management” lexicons on modernity. As it is the case for such magic words as “governance”, “sustainable development” or “citizen”, the enchantment emanates from a confluence of meanings: the territory is in focus in the debates on collective action in order to discuss, all at the same time, issues related to borders, power, values, and customs. Recent works on “globalization” or “the revival of the local” illustrate this semantic ambivalence: analysts have read them from various angles, going from grass-roots democracy to automobile use, but also family, friendly or professional networking, the taxation of social benefits and the evolution of law. Each author reveals one side of the problem, and diagnoses radically and oddly heterogeneous facts and evolutions. And yet, these analyses might have the same goal: to try to enunciate the “return to the territory”, linked to the intricate workings of contemporary public action. It is with this perspective of a “reterritorialization” in mind that we wish to approach this discussion, and by testing the idea that the combination of all our works will enable us to raise relatively new territory-related issues.

Ultimately, a lot of studies in sociology, geography or political

science show that globalization, financial capitalism, and the growing role of networking unavoidably weaken the territory of the nation-state: in the end, it would not be the first time that the state relies on the “local” level and on local authorities to modernize the territory in its whole! It had already been the case for the electrification of rural areas, the water distribution system, etc.

A Few Reflections to Avoid Concluding...

In the European Union, one can feel, as Max Weber did in the past century, some resentment against the bureaucratic system. What this great German sociologist can teach us, is that any dream of Community return standing instead of “sociation”, is ambiguous. The oscillation of the “Gemeinschaft” (community) concept between the two poles that are order and disorder is, on this point, characteristic and requires, at the very least, the fullest vigilance, particularly facing the dominant ideology, in this era of capitalism: the market and commodity fetishism. Liberal capitalism had generated dreams of communism, but the communist regimes have generated nightmares (E. Morin). The downfall of these regimes, their almost complete failure, has in fact changed the course of history; the world is not peaceful for all that but this is another issue. As far as ideology is concerned, the conclusion can only be temporary: liberalism is still

triumphant. Milton Friedman's monetarist theories and Gary Becker's "human capital" were vulgarized in the seventies under the banner of "neoliberalism". This school of thought had only restored, we think, a two-century old conception of economy based on the utilitarian principle. But, as it is well known today, this liberalism is not only the produce of a school; it has been erected as an official doctrine by some governments. The main result of this liberal policy is to wipe out what seemed to be a well-established nineteenth century-acquired principle: the simultaneous taking into consideration of both the production and the producers, and both the economic and the social; for the liberal school, the economic prevails over the political and the social; the requirements of management, productivity and competitiveness, take precedence of any other consideration; thenceforth, unemployment is considered natural! This liberal "revival" is, nevertheless, not limited to economy. It tends to invade the whole way of thinking in the political and social grounds, and it is dogmatically applied to all macro or micro-social institutions in terms, sometimes, completely ridiculous: for example, a married couple is considered a unit of production, a firm, with transaction expenses, ingoing money from husband and wife, and household expenses... One cannot appreciate such language that is spreading anyhow, everywhere, through the media and regretfully, in social sciences as well. Speaking of "democratic deficit", of "human resources management", and using, in all grounds, the language of an accountant is never

innocent. To consider persons as “resources” among others that have to be “managed” is of no use to knowledge and does not benefit to thoughts in any way. This triumph of utilitarianism does not constitute a success for Europe and for humanity considered in its whole. The unification of the world into a huge market left to a pitiless competition between the powerful, contributes to increase and worsen the inequalities to their profit. Europe has taken part and even exacerbated this taste for conquest, competition, appropriation, a temptation that other cultures have rather tried to restrain as Edgar Morin noted, as well as other intellectuals (economists, sociologists, geographers, politists, philosophers...). Thus, for the Greeks, the barbarian was the one who could not speak the language of the city; in our modern societies, the barbarian is, undoubtedly, the one who, acting from selfish motives, has lost the very sense of general interest, of community, with what it implies in terms of solidarity and sharing (A. Prigent, CR20, AISLF). Tocqueville had sensed it: individualism is “the rust of societies”; after contributing to the fall of other civilizations, Europe (the western civilization) might well become a threat for itself if the corrosive individualism happened to surpass all the other values which are also borne by the community utopia (A. Aït Abdelmalek, 1996). Therefore, it is not humanism, strictly speaking, which is in question, but the identification of humanism with individualism understood as the idolization of the exclusive quest for individual profit, against the others, first seen as competitors instead of partners!

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