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Asymmetries in Globalisation: a Gender – Sensitive Approach

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Abstract

It is necessary to exclude any kind of narrow mono-disciplinary approach from the analytical tools that should be used by scholars in characterising contemporary global/glocal phenomena. Political philosopher and social scientists have the task of investigating with renewed conceptual tools the old and new asymmetries, charging the economical and social life of the citizens in our democracies. In this regard, a *Gender-Sensitive Approach* could be of use.

Key words

■ **Symbolic and Material Asymmetries in global/glocal processes** ■ **Identities as sets of played games** ■ **Gender - Sensitivity**

1. *For a slight change in global studies terminology*

We need nowadays a difference way of configuring the interwoven relation between local and global¹. A visual attempt: if we apply the volumetric dimension to the diffraction, we transform into a three dimensional and not univocally luminous vision the phenomenon of decomposition of the light originating from the impact of the flow with external obstacles. What results is a composite and striated flow of bands of energy oriented in different directions, potentially reactive to the obstacles, but with unpredictable effects, and without a precise plan or a predetermined focus. As a crucial exemplum, the prognosis about the *End of the Nation-State* can be seriously addressed only by adopting a multi-level and multidisciplinary analysis, by recurring to a syncretic and more flexible conceptual vocabulary..

We must take in account the numeric multiplication and the qualitative differentiation of agencies entitled, according to several sources of legitimating, of the faculty of producing enduring effects on the life-standards of the common people, living in western and even in non-western societies. In such a framework, nation-states are nowadays only *some* among *many* agencies which are relevant and influential on the global scale, even if such typical western modern polities are still very effective as so far military and strategic issues are concerned. This, just to remind that the domestic scope of politics is the same domain we are acquainted to call 'state'; this spatial unit has lost, fictionally speaking, his *exclusive* descriptive and constitutive role in establishing what politics is, and how policies must be drafted and implemented to be effective. According to different contexts and situations depending on the welfare system adopted, and the degree of shared sovereignty and supranational integration reached, states and non-state polities like the European Union are guardians, gate-keepers of access to social capital, donors of benefits and facilities. Often immigrants and, even more so, the new citizens, who can exhibit the

¹ We should rather resort to the notion of Glocalisation (Robertson 1992; Batini 2000) in all those situations where it is not exploited to the full. These include research contexts in the field in politology, in the analysis of conflicts between social actors and in international relations.

credentials of European citizenship throughout the territory of the Union, do not effectively enjoy the set of proclaimed rights (Henry Loretoni, 2004). How could the old problem of an insufficient integration politics towards minority identities be addressed in a unusual way ? By melting an identity - focused discourse with a gender- sensitive approach.

2. The metaphor of playing a game. Socio-political implications

‘New’ and ‘old’ ties between identities and places are born, proliferate and interact not only in a newly emerging economic framework but also in newly defined political and cultural contexts. On the one side, places are themselves core elements of identities and identity-shaping; on the other, identities, which we need to address for now on, for their part continuously shape places in term of contextual identity-building. Explicitly here the reflexive paradigm/pattern is adopted, against the ascriptive one, in order to define collective identities (Straub 2002); according to the first pattern, human groups are extremely relevant as active interpreters of their own practices in specific temporal-spacial frameworks. In many cases there exists a *we*, an aggregation of individuals that adopt the first person plural to define themselves, recognising themselves in a series of common features, but not without opacity and conflicts (Henry 2000; Friese 2002). From the other side *the identity of we*, is not a *substantial unity* of convictions, of rules, of objectivised rituals or materials, but it is rather a combination of *routines* and symbolic practices, a mobile background of reference for the actions of the subjects (men and women) involved in symbolic exchanges; such interactions are not alien at all from asymmetrical and conflictual confrontations among members.

3. For a gender-oriented renewal of social sciences

We assume that identities (cultural identities included) are routines, sets of played games, dynamic frameworks for culture-interchanging and even struggling subjects.

Therefore, we need to know how to play. Wittgenstein's language theory clearly exemplifies the relation among identity, belonging and culture that we have in mind: we have to take part in the game, to *be part of the game* itself, if we want to play (namely, to be inside the language, to be part of the elementary interchange practices). If we were born and brought up enmeshed in these practices, in this game, it would not be difficult to follow them. Equilibrium between strategic and creative action is needed in order not only to give birth to, but even to endorse and implement, the intercourse between each individual and his/her group. Given such highly specific conditions of being part of a so called culture-game, in order – to make the players' circle more inclusive along the way – we need to produce similar complex conditions and processes of primary and secondary socialisation in the polities we all live in. What is at stake is the success or the failure of policies of integration and inclusion of outsiders in our liberal-democratic states; namely migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers. This is not to say games are closed, impenetrable, to those who were not born within them, rather that in order to get a really generalised access to cultures we have to pay attention to the fulfilment of necessary conditions, constraints and paces of time. In such a framework, the process of consolidation and definition, of putting into effect already formally recognized rights makes the traditional approach to the subject of citizenship denser and specifically emancipates it from a mere reduction to the question of formal inclusion or exclusion, of being or not being endowed with rights. The question of the mere entitlement to rights should be retranslated into the rather more complex question of the quality and the relative importance of these rights with respect to the capacity to activate them on the part of the holders of rights. In other words of the question of real disparities, asymmetries, structural and potentially permanent inequalities. Therefore, we need to know how to play.. The metaphor of cultures as a set of played games shows in this respect its specific role. They result from – not least gender-related - disparities of conditions and power among the players. Interactions among individuals do not take place on an equal basis. It is therefore necessary to let subordinate people express themselves, as well as to offer

them the possibility of confronting their own preferences that often result from the interiorisation of power-related images of reality (*adaptive preferences*). In this respect the concept of gender-sensitivity is of primary importance; all the research activities -and the related policies- should be affected by it and become gender-sensitive.² Gender-based issues clarify what gender is and why it is necessary to adopt a gender-oriented perspective in social analysis: women and men react differently to the events and situations of daily life and to subsequent policies.

‘Gender’ as a criterion allows the decoding of other forms of difference and (on the negative side) exclusion - namely, anti-integration factors and behaviours which stigmatize the ‘different’ by regarding s/he as ‘inferior’ and ‘subaltern’. The point is: first of all we are women or men even if gender is a social construct as well; other social cleavages are added to this basic distinction (class, social role, culture, religion). More than this, the gender dimension is a contextual and asymmetric feature; it can be easily grasped by considering spatial metaphors and spatial experiences. Inside, outside, within, without are examples. The *topography of the self* (Taylor 1988) can be therefore considered firstly as a gendered one. Liberty of movement must be considered under a gender-sensitive perspective, in order to prevent self-subjugation of women and girls to paternalistic stereotypes about the proper behaviour in private/public spaces, not less to avoid systematically the outburst of urban micro-violence against the ‘female’ who dare to move everywhere without concern about their safety. These are fundamental elements in opposing discrimination in the real contexts of life (cities, public spaces and private places). All the questions associated with stereotypes are relevant with regard to the policies of integration that are aimed at prognosticating, preventing, if not also mitigating, the more violent and pathological aspects of social/intercultural conflicts.

² Scholars and politicians need to adopt a *still not clear - cut definable* perspective, such as *Gender sensitivity* (an operational specification of *Gender Mainstream*). As in the case of prices sensitivity in matter of economic equilibrium, all social variables must *be observed as dependent* from changes occurring in the conditions of women.

To resume, it should not be forgotten that stigmatisation is not only a matter of symbolic use of words and negative stereotypes. It reflects or represents forms of *material and symbolic* subalternity, which become plastically visible through the urban shifting of the minority groups (slums, *banlieue*). Where one is allowed to settle and to be housed is, first of all, a complex matter of public choices, welfare, patterns of social justice, and not only of expected neutral urban planning. Several issues concerning cultures and identities are in fact matters of social discrimination. A target group is a group defined by negative stereotypes with a high grade of permanence at the social level which creates or stabilises banishment and movement to areas outside of social control (i.e. interpreted as potentially dangerous and commonly represented as unsafe). This is the case of vulnerable groups as they are identified in urban and metropolitan studies (Certomà 2008).

Conclusions

What discussed above does not exclude but rather emphasises the disenchanting awareness of the distribution of power inside each single community, which is not a monolithic fragment contributing to the society as a whole, but a pluralistic, asymmetric assembly of levels and thicknesses. The lack of attention towards the vocabulary of gender-oriented deconstructionism weakens all intents to emancipate and recognize the several vulnerable identities, producing ever more serious and lacerating social pathologies.

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