

A NEW KIND OF NATIONALISM. THE IMMIGRANT AS AN ANOMALY IN THE WORLD OF NATION-STATES

ANTONIO MANCINI^{*}

Abstract: if capitalism is one of Europe's greatest legacies to the world, another legacy is the nation-state, i.e. national realities that could be defined as nations at a given historical moment as the vast majority of their population essentially belonged to historically defined and homogeneous ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups. However, the surge in migratory flows that characterises the second modernity has added a new hallmark to nationalism: in the era of globalisation, migratory phenomena are inscribed within the framework of nation-states and are affected by the political-legal constraints of the territories that make immigrants appear as an anomaly in the world of nationstates.

Keywords: nationalism – nation building – territories – migratory phenomena – established/outsiders

1. The role of nationalism as a social and political force

The continued recognition of states as separate entities, largely carried out over the last two centuries, has been an important part in the shaping of national identities. If capitalism is one of Europe's greatest legacies to the world, a another legacy is the nation-state, i.e. national realities that could be defined as nations at a given historical moment as the vast majority of their population essentially belonged to historically defined and homogeneous ethnic, cultural and linguistic groups.

A strong sense of national identity clearly played an important, if not decisive, role in the establishment of many of the states of modern Europe. In the Old Continent, the year of revolutions (1848) firmly demonstrated the concept that the nation was the most appropriate basis for the state, according to the principle of national self-determination masterfully summarised in Matteucci's words. «It is the nation – or rather the nation-

^{*} Antonio Mancini, Docente a contratto di Sociologia delle relazioni etniche SPS/11, Università degli Studi del Molise. Email: antoniom@unimol.it



people – that expresses itself, through the regained sovereignty of the state, which gives it unity and the capacity to act: the protagonists of history are no longer kings, but nations, or rather the nation-state»¹.

Many have sought unity through ideologies (Socialism, Marxism, Conservatism, etc.), but the most powerful ideology has always been nationalism: claiming one's existence as a nation and identifying the interests of the state with those of the nation². Specifically, this is the «great paradox» of the left-wing parties, which today frequently chase nationalists in their closure and identity defence policies, Crouch warns³. While historically the left wing has almost always had an internationalist perspective (in its codes, theories and language), its welfare policies have consistently been based on a sense of community, almost always national⁴.

For example, the role of nationalism as a social and political force – as a unifying energy towards a neighbouring state that creates an identity outside the state, but not necessarily a national identity within the state – has been underestimated in Marxian analysis, to say the least. The nation, always considered with suspicion by Marx and Engels and Marxist scholars, was mostly understood as a transitory phenomenon linked to the ephemeral fate of the bourgeois class, until the prefigured establishment of a world order without homelands by the proletariat as a general class. The «national issue» has therefore been a stumbling block to Marxism from the beginning. Indeed, the real Achilles' heel of Marxism and nationalism, because, to be blunt, the relationship between class and nation recalls the unresolved issue that in the orthodox Engelsian vulgate was called the vexed relations between structure and superstructures⁵.

¹ N. Matteucci, 1997, 55.

² See M. Rush, 2014.

³ «If there had been no globalisation – if we had remained in national fortress economies, with carefully controlled walls and tariff barriers, severe restrictions on foreign travel and even more severe restrictions on immigration – most of the world would be far poorer today; illegal immigration, with all its consequences of increased crime, would be greater; relations between states would be more hostile» (Crouch, 2019, 55). See also: Y. Tamir, 2019.

⁴ M. Bracconi, 2019.

⁵ M. d'Eramo, 2018, XIV. In this regard, Marco d'Eramo deliberately recalls the words of Franz Borkenau and Tom Nairn when they refer respectively to how, in their opinion, «nationalism is the fact against which Marxist theory breaks down» and «the theory of nationalism represents the great historical failure of Marxism» (*ibidem*). On the other hand, post-Marxists will have a different perspective of analysis. In particular, Immanuel Wallerstein believes that nations «are not short – or medium-term realities» (1995, 110). In Wallerstein's perspective, «the halfway house of citizenship – the inclusion of some and the exclusion of others – served precisely to appease the most dangerous strata of the countries of the core zones, the working classes, while still excluding from the division of the surplus value and political decision making the vast majority of the world's population» (Wallerstein, 2003, 32-33). This core conviction will lead the world-systems sociologist to take part in the process of renewing critical theories of the nation which would lead Anderson in 1982 to argue that «the "end of the age of nationalism", so long prophesied, is far from being seen» (2006, 3).«Indeed, "nation-ness" [he would add elsewhere] is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time» (Anderson, 2018, 8).



However, although political sociology reveals that there are three main key steps at the basis of the development of the modern state (the birth of capitalism, the advent of the industrial revolution and the development of the nation-state), to which we owe the structuring of the world – indeed – into states, and beyond the intuition, correct or not, of Marxist theory, according to which today's states are nothing but the inevitable product of processes, it can be agreed that the economy and nationalism are the parallel forces whose product is precisely the modern concept of the state⁶.

Unlike legal scholars⁷, sociologists argue that «territory is never simply a spatial concept; rather, it is always a complex set of heterogeneous social, political, institutional and juridical elements»⁸. According to this constructivist or socio-political interpretation, the territory is entirely, or rather integrally a socio-political and legal construct: it is an organisational resource of society and the result of a political project whose ultimate aim is the creation and management of «forms of collective identity, in the face of a plurality of dispersed and contradictory solidarities pre-existing on the earth»⁹, intended as the space of the biosphere.

Contrary to the naturalistic conception, the socio-political approach traces a continuity and a bi-directionality between man and territory. Territorial organisation produces a dynamic restructuring and a change in relations: populations undergo a deterritorialisation and a reterritorialisation, they break free from old spaces and enter the constitution of new territories. This is a perspective that is more topical than ever and fits in with the times, in this era characterised by high human mobility, which is usually followed by a legal regulation that is «increasingly delocalised from physical territories and increasingly focused on bodies, i.e. bodies are increasingly deterritorialised»¹⁰.

The «state» is therefore the most characteristic socio-political territorial structure of modernity; and «the nation-state» represents the hegemonic territorial paradigm of modernity¹¹. The concept of the nation-state has in that sense become the model for the

⁶ M. Rush, 2014; S. Rokkan, 2002.

⁷ Many areas of the social sciences – including the legal sciences – regard the territory as an objective, natural, physical reality, a fact (of which we must take note): it is a natural entity, pre-existing and independent of action. This is the so-called «naturalistic» conception of the territory, as opposed to the «constructivist» conception, which interprets the territory as an act or event (product of a construction), a repetition of certain features defined by a rhythm (the result of a «refrain», as Deleuze and Guattari put it, 2010).

⁸ A. Brighenti, 2009, 34.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹ The relationship between state and territory is twofold. It is arguable, in the first perspective, that the modern state creates its own territory, selecting certain lines of cut and organising its resources according to the mobilisation for the defence of those lines. However, in a second perspective, the ideological construction of a territory precedes the realisation of the state structure. In this regard, see Brighenti (2009).



modern state; consequently, where there is no national identity it is necessary to create it, heading in the direction that has been defined as *the process of nation-building*¹².

2. Anderson and the nation-building process

Anderson argued that for a nation to be established, a community or a sense of national community *must be imagined first*¹³. «The fact is that communities cannot be imagined freely, without restraints; instead, these collective imaginations are the result of material dynamics and economic conditions»¹⁴.

For «if nation-states are widely conceded to be "new" and "historical", the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, more importantly, glide into a limitless future (...); [therefore,] nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as against which – it came into being»¹⁵.

In his analysis on «origins and spread of nationalism», Benedict Anderson demonstrates that *imagination* constitutes the *community* in space as well as in time: everyone's life finds its own meaning within the imagined ethnic community. According to Anderson, nations are nothing more than *imagined communities*, meaning that the image of their being communities without necessarily knowing each other exists in everyone's mind¹⁶. In Anderson's words, they are communities that are socially constructed by those who see themselves as part of them («imagined»).

Consequently, national identity is not an objective characteristic, it is neither immutable nor predetermined, but it is a political construction and, in that sense, it can be mixed with other identities, sometimes even apparently antithetical¹⁷.

It is imagined, then, but far from being imaginary. An imagination that is not detached from reality, but a natural symbolic vocation of individuals to *imagine*

¹⁷ V. Roudometof, 2012.

¹² The *melting pot* paradigm applied in the United States of America is emblematic. Basically, it is a model that the «new nations» of the post-colonial era have tried to assume, in the well-known contrast between «old European nationalism» («a nation seeking borders») and «new Third World nationalism» («borders seeking a nation»). See: A. Wimmer, 2018.

¹³ B. Anderson, 2018. See also: M. Bergholz, 2018.

¹⁴ M. d'Eramo, 2018, XVI.

¹⁵ B. Anderson, 2018, 15-16. For their part, nationalists, in order to make the «imagination» become «natural», i.e. common sense, adopt a «constant flagging of national identity»: whoever opposes its appeal – individual or a minority – is a «foreigner» and often the object of hostility (Billig, 2018 [1995]). Hence the constant debate of today's (but also past) international migrants with established national identities, which leads them, each time, to be more or less receptive in adopting a new national identity, depending on the cultural contexts of arrival and origin and weighing up their migration projects.

¹⁶ For example, for international migrants, many of those who belong to a country may have no direct contact with their homeland or those who live there.



themselves as members of a community that transcends them¹⁸. It is the community itself that acquires its identity and dignity in relation to other communities, establishing relationships of solidarity but also of differentiation¹⁹.

If what Anderson states about the role of imagination in the constitution of communities is true, if particular communities were imagined on the basis of the information and experiences possible to men and women in pre-modern and modern societies, why should it not be possible to «imagine» a human community when the globe has become a «single place», as theories of globalisation claim? In other words, if the Sino-Irish scholar's thesis on the constitutive function of *imagined communities* is true, nothing prevents people from living in the perspective of a «global societal community» or working towards its construction and affirmation²⁰.

Along these lines, Ulrich Beck believes that what Anderson theorised about the construction of nation-states and the formation of national identities can equally apply to those (cosmopolitan) communities that nowadays cross and go beyond national borders²¹. It is the cosmopolitanisation of societies that denationalises national societies from within: «the old logic whereby one could deduce an individual's place of birth, nationality, mother tongue and passport at a glance is no longer valid»²².

For Colin Crouch, too, globalisation has produced a dynamism that has manifested itself in the «positive impact of innovation, increasing wealth and cultural diversity in other locations and sectors. These are generally cosmopolitan places that have attracted immigrants from all over the world, who have contributed to innovation and diversity»²³. This is even more true today in the sociological analysis of migratory movements and models of interaction between migrants and the host society, when the ambivalence that arises between the desire to include newcomers and the need to exclude them and reaffirm one's own identity is perhaps the greatest limitation of the nation state, which,

¹⁸ F. Mangiapane, 2019.

¹⁹ In particular, we are referring to the «natural» community, that of the «mutual understanding» of its members (Tönnies, 2011), and not to the «artificial» community of the digital communication era, that community which is «talked about», where, in order to divide and separate, it is necessary to invent the category of identity as a surrogate for community (Bauman, 2001). However imagined, symbolic boundaries produce significant social consequences that can vary in time and space and, not rarely, are the target of contestation and re-construction in political and social practices (Cella, 2006). However, we are well aware that in Anderson's imagined community, socio-political identity is presented as the cause, origin and motive of the territory, rather than as an effect of the territorial construct, whereas, Balibar (2004) argues that the nation form cannot be compared to a community, but to the concept of a structure capable of producing determined «community effects».

²⁰ V. Cotesta, 2009.

²¹ U. Beck, 2011.

²² U. Beck, 2001, 28.

²³ C. Crouch, 2019, 47. Colin Crouch believes that one can have «some control over a world of everincreasing interdependence only through the development of democratic identities and institutions of governance capable of reaching beyond the dimension of the nation-state» (2019, 5). But it is precisely the absence of institutions with effective decision-making power operating at the global level that would be «the main obstacle on the impervious path towards a "cosmopolitan consciousness" appropriate to humanity's new condition of global interdependence», Bauman argues (2019, 10).



in order to exist, has created national borders and provided itself with demarcation lines to discriminate nationals («us», «the citizens») from non-nationals («the others», «the foreigners»)²⁴.

At the same time, a new subject appears in today's scenario, «the *denizen*, the simple "resident", more linked to being in a place than to the formal quality of belonging»²⁵. A dimension of citizenship that cannot be reduced to its rigid state perimeter emerges, a reality defined by Mezzadra as the «double consciousness» or the political and cultural «double space» in which migrants live as *citizens of the border*²⁶.

Today it is still evident that nationalism is «an organic ideology that corresponds to national institutions, and these institutions rest upon the formulation of a rule of exclusion, of *visible or invisible "borders*", materialised in laws and practices. Exclusion – or at least unequal ("preferential") access to particular goods and rights depending on whether one is a national or a foreigner, or belongs to the community or not – is thus the very essence of the nation-form»²⁷.

Citizenship itself, which appears as a concept identified by a term with a non-univocal meaning - i.e. referring to two different notions of belonging («formal» and «substantial»)²⁸ since its Marshallian formulation²⁹ – is also a specific form of social exclusion³⁰. In such sense, the historical process of building citizenship has been characterised as a single, complex project of exclusion (juridical and/or spatial) with individuals within the perimeter of the community or with a status as subjects outside it. «In conclusion, the inclusion of some took place through the constant exclusion of others»³¹, citizenship was given the meaning of an instrument for handling conflict and

²⁴ See V. Cesareo, 2021; M. Ambrosini, M. Cinalli, D. Jacobson (eds.), 2020; L. Zanfrini, 2007; 2019; A. Geniola, I.D. Mortellaro, D. Petrosino (eds.), 2018.

²⁵ S. Rodotà, 2004, 201.

²⁶ Mezzadra adopts the concept of *frontier* from a perspective that emphasises its different meaning from that of the contiguous border. While the border establishes a dividing line to protect constituted and consolidated political, social and symbolic spaces, the frontier refers to a space of transition, in which different forces and objects come into relation, putting their own identities at stake. «It is thus the sign of the logic of domination inherent to the dimension of statehood that the border imprints on the experience of migrants, over determining and dryly reducing their status as "citizens of the border"» (Mezzadra, 2006, 72-73). See also: Y. Harpaz, P. Mateos, 2019.

²⁷ E. Balibar, 2004, 56.

²⁸ The term «belonging» takes on a different meaning when referring to citizens – in which case it refers to a legally sanctioned and regulated recognition and expresses a feeling of loyalty and attachment to one's community – or to non-citizens, for whom, belonging is not comparable to the legal status of the former, characterised by an «objective» belonging regardless of their «subjective» belonging (loyalty to the community). In other words, for citizens the link between belonging and citizenship rights is very tangible (Gargiulo, 2011). See also: K.P. Kallio, B.E. Wood, J. Häkli, 2020; R. Bauböck, 2020; D. Trucco, 2020; I. Bloemraad, 2018.

²⁹ T.H. Marshall, 2002 [1950].

³⁰ S. Mezzadra, 2006.

³¹ E. Gargiulo, 2011, 199. On this issue, see also: E. Gargiulo, 2008; M. Di Meglio, E. Gargiulo, 2009.



capable of regulating processes of exclusive inclusion oriented towards a specific distribution of power at the same time³².

Ultimately, the dynamics of exclusion have also taken place across the spaces delimited by the perimeter of individual states and not only within them, and different ways of delimiting space have led to different models of citizenship. «In other words, citizenship has given rise to a form of inclusion that is intrinsically inclined to exclusion, in both a *static* and *dynamic* sense: in the former sense, it has given rise to a form of *exclusive* inclusion, i.e. restricted, elitist, reserved inclusion for the few; in the latter sense, it has given rise to a form of *exclusionary* inclusion, i.e. an inclusion that tends to instrumentally and systematically exclude certain categories of subjects *to the benefit* of other categories already included»³³.

Thus, the function of exclusion, or rather the function of *differential inclusion* manifested in the creation and maintenance of status differentiations³⁴, seems to be inherent in the modern territorial model of the nation-state which increasingly appears as a space of conflict³⁵.

3. Today's migrations at the heart of globalisation processes

In the current *age of migration*, the idea that the nation-state is losing influence due to globalisation and broad global processes has taken on a strong relevance³⁶. Market economy has colonised all spheres of social life. As early as the 1940s, Karl Polanyi³⁷ warned that building an economy «on the stimulation of personal convenience, competition and possession tends to lead to destructive effects on sociality and community. The market bends to commercial logic our togetherness, the political system, the territory, information, community ties, the way we use our time (...)»³⁸, so that social cohesion would seem to conflict with wealth creation and the prevailing developmentalist vision would not guarantee widespread well-being³⁹.

Similar to what happened in the 18th century but with the addition of an unprecedented cancellation of space-time distances, what is happening today is yet another *great wave of marketisation* eroding social infrastructures essential for social

³² N. Elias, 2010.

³³ F. Amoretti, E. Gargiulo, 2010, 356.

³⁴ S. Mezzadra, 2006.

³⁵ However, in this writer's opinion, to quote Bonomi (2020), the achievement of a «community of existential destiny» must «go beyond the solitudes of I and We» and focus on the quality of social relations to build a cohesive society, rather than a «community of fear as an involution of resentment». Dahrendorf (1996) states, our societies need to try to square the circle – so to speak – between wealth creation, social cohesion and political freedom.

³⁶ S. Castles, H. de Haas, M.J. Miller, 2014; S. Cassese, 2020.

³⁷ K. Polanyi, 2010.

³⁸ S. Bartolini, 2016.

³⁹ R. Darhendorf, 2009.



compromise (trust, morality, labour regulation, ...), resulting in unprecedented levels of uncertainty and reducing working people to goods like any other⁴⁰, according to a *logic of expulsion*⁴¹. Today, as in the past, «national borders have become the fence within which to protect oneself from the storms of global capitalism»⁴². In our opinion, it is the contemporary migrant who, more than any other, personifies globalisation. «He is the living proof that we cannot escape it in our daily lives. For many people, this perception prevails over the idea that migrants are actually the first victims of globalisation»⁴³. Today, more than ever before, globalisation is increasingly characterised by large multidirectional flows of information, ideas, goods and people: migration within countries and from one country to another has also become more frequent⁴⁴.

Today's migrations are *at the heart* of globalisation processes. Castles and Miller⁴⁵ consider migration as «a form of "collective action" that is both the expression and cause of profound social transformations in both the countries of origin and the countries where migrants settle. (...) Even though migrants suffer particularly violent forms of "spoliation" of rights, discrimination and exploitation, (...) migration is (...) one of the essential forces that are actively reshaping the social, political, economic and cultural landscape of the contemporary world»⁴⁶.

However, all too often studies on migration employ a lexicon of globalisation that leads to a trivialisation of analyses (often limited to undefensible slogans: «overcome all forms of closure!», «liberate the flows of modernity!», ...), while scientific debate rarely adds substantial interpretative theses that go beyond mere historical reading. As Brighenti points out, «a large part of literature on globalisation has cultivated a certain simplifying discourse on the "world in a state of flux", on the detachment or disconnection of social processes from places, on the progressive disappearance of territories and borders»⁴⁷. «The main mistake of such conceptions is to establish an equivalence between deterritorialisation and flux, two concepts that it would be misleading to consider synonymous. Contrary to the flow, deterritorialisation is not a process of de-structuring or of pure and simple loss of a defined form by a social process, but rather *a specific form of social change*»⁴⁸.

In the case of transnational migration, it is well known that migrants develop social networks that span multiple nations and places, often far apart. The re-territorialisation

⁴⁰ C. Crouch, 2013.

⁴¹ S. Sassen, 2015.

⁴² S. Bartolini, 2016.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ See G. Ritzer, 2013. On the profound alterations produced by the globalisation of the economy in relation to the social, economic and political fabric of the nation-states and on how the process of denationalisation is distorting the traditional concepts of territory, authority and rights, see the further works of S. Sassen, 2010; Z. Bauman, 2000; U. Beck, 1999.

⁴⁵ S. Castles, M.J. Miller, 1993.

⁴⁶ S. Mezzadra, 2012.

⁴⁷ A. Brighenti, 2009, 27.

⁴⁸ lvi, 28.



of transnational communities does not correspond to the territory of the destination state, in other words to its socio-political construction. Instead, these human groups selectively deterritorialise from certain features of their context of origin, followed by a reterritorialisation that leads to the establishment of an original settlement territory, composed of the convergence and reinvention of the peculiarities of the different contexts involved⁴⁹. This type of human mobility produces transnational social spaces that can only be conceived within the framework of a relational conception of the territory, unbroken chains of social relations mediated by images and goods moving on a global scale on the one hand, and fundamentally local societal cultures on the other⁵⁰. In this sense, individual biographies and social events traceable to the systemic turbulence⁵¹ and unpredictability of migration at the time of globalisation can only be understood within a relationship that characterises not two, but several places: space delocalises places, but places return to relocalise space. Every territory «is always made up of the actors and subjects that coexist and interact there, so that every change in subjects is in fact a change in the territory (...) [which] reflects the relationship of forces between these relations, but does not exist regardless of them. Even where the territory appears homogeneous, it is as heterogeneous as the set of subjects that form it »⁵².

In turn, the spatial nature of migration leads back to the issue of mapping social spaces. That is, the analysis of the structure of territories and social places so important to Simmel⁵³, who was the first to understand how *the type of community* is closely linked to the type of geographical dispersion of the same.

In Simmel's reflection, «the ambivalence that ties the foreigner and the social context in which he or she is inserted is the special expression of those relations of antinomy, of attraction and repulsion that, in his/her opinion, govern any type of human relationship (...): just as in relations between individuals there are feelings of harmony and disharmony, of association and competition (...), so in the relationship between foreigners and members of the host society there is an ambivalent interaction, fluctuating between perception of threat and attraction, fear and involvement, social distance and curiosity»⁵⁴.

Therefore, the foreigner-migrant represents a form of distance – not only from a symbolic point of view – greater than an unknown but physically and culturally related

⁴⁹ See G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, 2010; A. Brighenti, 2006.

⁵⁰ Cfr. R. Robertson, 1995; R. Waldinger, 2017.

⁵¹ N. Papastergiadis, 2000. According to Papastergiadis, turbulence is the element that most characterises today's migratory movements. Unlike in the past when it was possible to determine the geography of migratory flows quite easily, with areas of departure and destination all considered well defined, today the flows go everywhere, with the consequence that it is much more complex to determine precise migratory systems.

⁵² A. Brighenti, 2009, 14.

⁵³ G. Simmel, 1989.

⁵⁴ R. Cipollini, M.G. Battisti, 2018, 45, italics are ours.



person⁵⁵. The «outside» is «observed» not so much because it is not part of our history, culture or society in abstract terms, but because, while possessing these requisites, it is at the same time spatially close to the «rooted», it is part of the same territory, in other words it shares the spatial proximity necessary for interaction, while being sociologically invisible⁵⁶! *Non-people* «are ontologically out of place, and not only because they may remain; above all because they exercise – consciously or not – the claim *not to live in the territorial or cultural space that fate has assigned to them, but in another space*»⁵⁷.

4. Individuals-guests and citizens-hosts: a new kind of nationalism

Migratory phenomena are inscribed within the framework of nation-states in the era of globalisation as well, and they are conditioned by the political-legal delimitations of territories, which make the citizen/foreigner dichotomy coincide with the internal/external one⁵⁸. Even today, the immigrant appears as an anomaly in the world of nation-states: while goods and objects become globalised, human beings become tribalised⁵⁹. As in the past, migrations induce the need to identify a multiplicity of spaces still today: «they transform "labour markets", public discourse, legal and social norms, systems of belonging, identities, forms of class domination, gender relations – and migrations are profoundly conditioned by them in turn»⁶⁰.

However, unlike in the past, the *condicio humana* has to deal with new contingencies and uncertainties arising from a new kind of economy, laws, society and personal life in the Second Modernity, which need to be understood in the light of new paradigms⁶¹. A new anthropological dimension, a different construction of the historical discourse, different social relations and a renewed political legitimisation – which according to Anderson are at the basis of the construction of the complex phenomenon of national belonging – are now working to fuel the proliferation and continuous decomposition of multiple «public spheres in diaspora», real «crucibles of a post-national political order»⁶².

⁵⁵ See, also, S. Tabboni, 1993 (in particular, chapter «G. Simmel: Lo straniero come forma sociale»).

⁵⁶ A. Valzania, 2012.

⁵⁷ A. Dal Lago, 2006, 77, italics are ours.

⁵⁸ See E. Traverso, 2009.

⁵⁹ See A. Prosperi, 2016.

⁶⁰ S. Mezzadra, 2006, 196.

⁶¹ Cfr. U. Beck, 2003.

⁶² A. Appadurai, 2001. In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai was convinced that the nation-state as a modern political form is now in its twilight years, and therefore argued that nation-states only make sense as parts of a system, but this system is poorly equipped to deal with the double diaspora of *people* and *images*. The way in which we look at social phenomena, on the other hand, makes a difference: «the more complex they are, the more the direction and depth of our gaze are decisive, to the point of producing completely different images of the same phenomenon. After all, social facts are elusive by definition, and processes of construction play a decisive role in their reality, constantly altering and challenging their "objectivity". Conflicts that also have to do with the type of representation – with the image, precisely – that is affirmed as hegemonic are determined and reflected in these processes» (Mezzadra, 2006, 196).



Therefore, the challenge for the sociologist lies in understanding these transformations by making national societies the unit of analysis, instead of the usual nation state. No longer national states, but «historical systems» characterised by multiple layers of temporality, some of which must be described in terms that are not only nonlinear, but unequivocally cyclical, in accordance with a multidimensional reading of history⁶³. New points of view are needed to understand in which political and social realities we live and operate. It is necessary to educate ourselves to a perspective that is able to reconcile universalism and particularism, inclusion and exclusion, overcoming all methodological nationalism⁶⁴. All too often, taking into account a deep-rooted Comtian attitude⁶⁵ in which sociology was invested with a sort of civilising mission, this discipline engages in the analysis of societies that are distinct according to the nation-state to which they refer, as if there were a system of nations and as many sociologies that define the society they deal with by using concepts linked to the nation-state. The mistake of this national-state paradigm lies in the observation, measurement and sociological understanding of phenomena within a purely national context, rather than in that of world society. It is well known that borders make it possible for people «to perceive themselves as equal to/different from, to recognise and identify themselves with a community bounded by some difference regarded as socially relevant»⁶⁶; individuals, then, can imagine themselves as members of a nation «because a line has been drawn between them and because it is displayed and emphasised in everyday relationships»⁶⁷. But in the age of globalisation, where space seems to be increasingly shrinking to the point of becoming a global village, while time horizons are shortening to the point where the present is all there is⁶⁸, national boundaries are irrelevant for an increasing number of social processes because, particularly in relation to their empirical effects, they appear as interconnections between societies of multiple states.

It is therefore necessary to deconstruct a *sociology of migration* that has often portrayed itself as «state thinking»⁶⁹ (that of an ethnocentric society that separates

⁶³ See I. Wallerstein, 2004.

⁶⁴ See D. Chernilo, 2006.

⁶⁵ This attitude also inspired Auguste Comte, when he stated that «the human presidency has been irrevocably conferred on the West», in deference to a universalist perspective according to which a particular content can be elevated to a parameter of universal judgement. With reference to the universalist perspective and the attitude to be taken towards cultures that are also very distant from each other, this theoretical position is based on the assumption that there is a universal parameter (a parameter that is usually drawn from the cultural universe to which the observer belongs) by which to judge and classify «other» cultures in relation to a culture that is deemed «superior» (cf. V. Di Nuoscio, 2011). Claude Lévi-Strauss warns that this is a wrong way to understand the «submerged worlds», since it leads to «suppressing the diversity of cultures by pretending to recognise it in full» (2002, 59); indeed, the universalist attitude, when it becomes absolute and uncritical, prevents a real understanding of differences. ⁶⁶ S. Guglielmi, 2020, 233.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ See D. Harvey, 1990.

⁶⁹ See P. Bourdieu, 2012; G. Avallone, 2018.



nationals from non-nationals) around «a universal human issue»⁷⁰ and which, by ignoring the migrant's point of view, offers a partial – if not completely distorted – view of a multidimensional fact that primarily concerns *human beings*⁷¹. We are aware of the problematic nature of a complex phenomenon such as migration⁷², yet try to take suggestions from other disciplinary fields, in order to better highlight different aspects of the issue, while being conscious of the inevitable partiality of the observer's view. «It is certain that the present – the transnational nature of migratory processes and the contradictory nature of the cultural horizons of multi-ethnic societies, a global market in which the current economic crisis calls into question the capitalist development model – reshuffles the cards and blurs the boundaries between us and them, natives and foreigners, friends and enemies, equal and different»⁷³.

The increase in migration flows that characterises the second modernity adds a new distinctive sign to nationalism. Anderson argues that mass migration «has acquired a new nature in modern times because it has been caused less by disasters and war than by the capitalist development of increasingly rapid long-distance transport»⁷⁴. The market, «which modern history proves to be the most subversive institution we know of» is a force that «draws» (*attraction*) many to migrate, while those who are «driven» (*expulsion*) by the repression of their homelands seem increasingly residual⁷⁵. As people, Anderson argues, «drawn into the vortex of the market, are not simply another form of merchandise (...) they bring with them memories and habits, beliefs and culinary customs, music and sexual desires. And these characteristics, which in the countries of origin are carried lightly and almost unconsciously, acquire a drastically different prominence in the diasporas of modern life»⁷⁶, to the point of making all the traditional forms of gradual assimilation of immigrants within the host context difficult, due to the dimensions of the migratory phenomenon⁷⁷.

⁷⁰ N. Elias, J.L. Scotson, 2004.

⁷¹ See S. Palidda, 2008.

⁷² As Vittorio Cotesta (2009) reminds us, «a total social fact».

⁷³ A.R. Calabrò, 2013, 55.

⁷⁴ B. Anderson, 2018, 200.

⁷⁵ The current political confrontation in Western countries and, in particular, in Italy, has seen the contrast of two worldviews, which are difficult to mediate, centred on values in opposition to each other, and which can be exemplified and exaggerated, at the level of political strategies, with the terms «reception» and «rejection». See, in this regard, A. Mancini and A. Tarozzi, 2020.

⁷⁶ B. Anderson, 2018, 201.

⁷⁷ See P.D. Romano, 2018. In fact, the logics of interaction with migrants that have inspired the major European countries have failed, just as the *assimilationist* and restrictive policies experimented in the United States, taken as a model to be imitated in terms of integration of ethnically and culturally different groups (think of French *assimilationism*, British multiculturalism, the *US melting pot* and *salad-bowl*; and, more recently, segmented *assimilationism* and anticipatory *assimilationism* as a result of *transnationalism* as an interpretative model of the links maintained by migrants with their societies of origin, and as a set of links themselves).



As Calabrò argues⁷⁸, today, as in the past, those who leave their own country are subject to a «catastrophic change»: they are emigrants (those who leave) and foreigners (those who arrive), i.e. they bear two opposing roles, which are interdependent and equally binding for the social actor who is influenced by them. Today as in the past, «the foreigner represents our critical conscience because he forces us to reflect on ourselves and imposes change. Considering the now transnational nature of migration, it is clear that the ambivalent challenge does not only concern the migrant who arrives in another country with another culture, but also those who have remained in their homeland and those of us who were born in the country of arrival»⁷⁹, each with the personal and social resources he or she can activate. In other words, to quote Simmel, it concerns the system of relations between the self and the other, between the foreigner-migrant and the integrated group, between *established* natives and foreign immigrant *outsiders*, between *civilians* and *barbarians* – and how they reciprocally influence each other – that provide for the change and transformation of the context within which this relationship takes place⁸⁰.

Thus, migratory processes represent a peculiar sociological category, since they enable us to analyse the changes that occur as a result of the new relationship with carriers of different cultures, between human groups characterised by an asymmetrical distribution of power resources⁸¹. The conflicts that emerge between the natives and the «outsiderness of foreigners»⁸² show how nationalism as an exclusive cultural category is used to justify and strengthen the arguments of opposing groups. This gives rise to a new kind of nationalism, practised by host-individuals living and working in another country, identifiably attached to their homeland and to the defence of their valuable heritage, in perpetual conflict with host-citizens and in a repeated attempt to integrate themselves in the country of arrival⁸³. Confirming Anderson's prediction, nationalism – understood in this case as the relationship that binds not only the current migrant, but also the more or less integrated or assimilated immigrant of first or second generation – is a dimension of

⁷⁸ See A.R. Calabrò, 2013.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁸⁰ In George Simmel's *Excursus on the Stranger* – as Cipollini and Battisti recall – the social figure of the stranger is delineated precisely from the interaction that he establishes in social space with the society in which he is inserted and with its members, within which his social representation is also constructed. Moreover, this aspect will constitute the central focus of Norbert Elias' *Sociology of the Stranger*. For the German sociologist, the community or the system of belonging to a group represents a cohesive structure, capable of providing identification and meaning to social relations, a point of reference for focusing on the characteristics of those who are outside the context to which they belong, of the foreigner and, at the same time, conditioning the system of social relations established with them. See R. Cipollini, M.G. Battisti, 2018. ⁸¹ See A. Sayad, 2002; R. Cipollini, M.G. Battisti, 2018.

⁸² U. Beck, 1996.

⁸³ On the issue of cultural ambivalence and its outcomes in migration processes, see S. Tabboni, 2006; A.R. Calabrò, 1997.



human culture and it is a feeling that is difficult to remove, which can suddenly re-emerge for inscrutable reasons⁸⁴.

Following Foucault's⁸⁵ interpretation of the specificity of modern politics and the transformative possibilities it promises to individual or collective action, the immigrant is still today a «savage» or «barbarian»: an individual to be civilised and incorporated into the national community, or an enemy threatening the integrity of the national body, to be kept at a distance or expelled⁸⁶. Anderson warns that from this «uneasy closeness»⁸⁷, from this «estrangement», from these «profound changes of consciousness» comes a sense of the person that needs to be narrated: just as modern people need a *narrative of identity*, so do nations⁸⁸. «The arrival of a foreigner – regardless of from where and when and where he arrives – determines *specific modalities of reaction and relation* both on the part of the group which redefines its own common identity in recognising the diversity of the newcomer, and of the foreigner with regard to the group to which he only partially belongs and with regard to which he stands in a position of proximity/distancing»⁸⁹.

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⁸⁷ A. De Simone, 2016.

⁸⁴ See G. Sabattini, 2018.

⁸⁵ See M. Foucault, 1998.

⁸⁶ We refer to Gérard Noriel's acute observations in his *Immigration, antisémitisme et racisme en France,* a work that is the focus of an in-depth reflection by E. Traverso, 2009.

⁸⁸ B. Anderson, 2018, 188.

⁸⁹ A.R. Calabrò, 2017, 267, italics are ours.



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