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Beyond the Disciplinary Borders : A New Challenge

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Abstract

Present society needs a new approach to knowledge, mainly required by the fast succession of the transformation of society and by the multidimensionality of the daily life problems. It is necessary, therefore, a more and more transdisciplinary perspective, able to connect the efforts of all social sciences and humanities. Moreover, it is essential an approach to history which may create a sort of circle between knowledge of the past and attention to the present world. These considerations are particularly important about the Mediterranean, which today is affected by dramatic shifts and problems of historical significance.

Keywords: Civilization, History, Mediterranean, Social sciences, Transdisciplinarity.

The idea at the roots of this new Journal is to generate a “knowledge” through which society can observe the phenomena that it produces and become able to continuously improve itself. As Bourdieu had said in his acceptance speech of the CNRS Gold Medal, the task of human and social sciences is “the critical unhinging of the manoeuvring and manipulation of citizens and of consumers that rely on perverse usages of science” (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 12) going beyond the questions posed by common sense or by the media as they are often induced and not real.

In other words, the journal aims to produce a knowledge able to tie the understanding of the present to that of the past (Bloch, 1981, p. 50), avoiding both the idea that history is an antiquarian science (Bloch 1981, p. 38) and the opposition among those who remove the bandage of the “extinct gods” and sociologists, economists, journalists: the sole explorers of the present.

This choice is even more important if we think to the quote from Bernard of Clairvaux mentioned by Johan Huizinga at the beginning of his *La crisi della civiltà*: «Habet mundus iste noctes suas et non paucas» - aiming to “prophetically” indicate the obsessed world in which Europe was

struggling. Such an obsession raises doubts about the durability of the social system and anxiety about the decline of society (Huizinga 1978, p. 4).

Today, the multidimensional crisis of society (economic, social, cultural, etc.) and the attempts to define and implement new policies have avoided neither the decline of the juridical protection nor the deterioration of the social fabric, which needs to be re-built with new forms of solidarity (Zoll, 2000), in order to provide the citizens not only the "learning to be", but also the welfare. Social sciences and humanities find their place in this process of re-building. Knowledge must pay attention to all the aspects of the transformation of society, and not only to some specific areas, because the action of the research cannot be just technical – considering achieved the understanding of the society and exercising a mere control over it – but should include a reflection on his own activities. Social sciences and humanities can break the wall of the complexity of problems and situations of people's daily life, allowing a better conjunction of the objective and subjective dimension. If order characterized the traditional societies, disorder is the feature of the contemporary societies and, therefore, scholars are forced to re-define paradigms and methods in order to make knowledge an experience of interchange, coming from encounters and conflicts among disciplines, beyond any real or virtual border which limits their "rooms for manoeuvre".

On the basis of this assertion, the journal aims to discuss different topics with a transdisciplinary approach (Piaget 1972). It is more and more necessary, indeed, to build new synergies and new epistemological relations among different, but complementary, sciences. It is necessary that this process, begun in the first decades of the XX century, may continue through trans-disciplinary synthesis. The experience of the school of *Les Annales*, the awareness by the historians of the relativism of their science and of the need to deal with the assault of social sciences in which quantification is sovereign, constitute the highest expression of «total history» (Le Goff, 1980), which is one of the purposes of the Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge.

Transdisciplinarity, indeed, is not understood as a «superdiscipline», but as a new interdisciplinary approach that lead knowledge towards «qui ne se contenterait pas d'atteindre des interactions ou réciprocitys entre re-

cherches spécialisées, mais situerait ces liaisons à l'intérieur d'un système total sans frontières stables entre les disciplines» (Piaget, 1972, p. 170).

The Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge aims at proposing an interpretation of the present world able to deepen the knowledge of the past without alienating the researcher from the context in which he lives, but making it belong to his time and his country, so that the point of view that the historian draws from his time, may enable him to disclose hidden aspects of the past. An interpretation of the past as a process of continuous movement, which drags with him the historian (Carr, 1982, p. 142) and led to hate the indifference, «il peso morto della storia» (Gramsci, 1973, p. 97).

As for the present world, the multidimensionality of the daily life problems and the fast succession of transformation of society urge to re-compose the differences of points of view and perspectives of the disciplines, in order to concretize the cooperation among them. It is necessary, therefore, to open a dialogue which may overcome the “formal” disciplinary and terminological barriers. Only from the permeability and from the flexibility of the disciplinary borders, “beyond the disciplines” and acknowledging them as “different disciplines”, it is possible to open up to a knowledge free from positivism, which may try to give responses to the social problems

The work of researchers in social sciences and humanities, as well as the resulting knowledge produced, are to be intended, as Bourdieu stated over twenty years ago, as a “public service” and represented in a dual manner: on the one hand, they allow an “institutional support” that does not mean meeting all the needs of society, but giving scientific answers to actual problems, not with the “solution”, but by suggesting possible routes for the improvement of the need concerned. On the other hand, they allow the development of a “critical and active citizen” very close to the ideal type of Schütz's “well-informed citizen” (Schütz, 1946) which, revised according to the present society (Mangone, 2014), appears to be advocating the establishment of a modern citizenship revealed through social reflexivity (Donati, 2011), an aspect of individual reflexivity that is neither subjective nor structural but related to the reality of social relations.

It is desirable, therefore, that the tangible and intangible knowledge of the Mediterranean – not denying the autonomy of individual sciences, but abandoning the excessive self-centredness that confine them within their

frameworks and paradigms – may become a reflective knowledge, able to promote the building of relations among individuals and to ease the encounter with the Other. Aware that only dialogue can make the society open to a re-composition of the cultural differences, with due regard to the peculiarities of each culture.

These theoretical and methodological premises drive this new scientific journey since the first issue, whose keyword is *Borders*. Borders, because «the Mediterranean is not just a geographical concept. Its borders are not defined neither in terms of space nor in time. We do not know how and in what way to determine them: they cannot be defined according to their sovereignty or history and are neither state nor national: they resemble a chalk-drawn circle that continues to be delineated and erased, which the waves and the winds, businesses and inspirations expand or shrink» (Matvejevic, 2013, p. 18).

The elimination of borders which characterizes the global society should allow free movement of populations or part of populations, in a voluntary or involuntary manner, peacefully or non-peacefully – in this sense, think to the thousands of migrants abandoned on open sea by the traffickers in the Mediterranean, that from cradle of civilization has become an open-air cemetery. In truth, this does not happen (think to the wall on the borders between Hungary and Serbia), but anyway global society produces situations in which different cultures are “forced” to meet and to coexist, permeating the social and cultural processes of the host societies.

Indeed, the co-presence of different cultures encourages the construction of new, multivalent, trans-ethnic cultural identities within a multidimensional process of interaction between people of different cultural identities, who, through the encounter of cultures, live a deep and complex conflict/reception experience as a valuable opportunity for personal growth for everyone, in order to change everything representing an obstacle to the construction of a new civil society.

The thoughts expressed within the debate on interculturalism and multiculturalism are based on cultural and identity issues: the great challenge faced with difficulty by society and social systems (among which we can find the European Union), is whether they should be seen as closed systems (non-welcoming) or as open systems (welcoming) towards “other cultures”; what Baumann (1999) called “the multicultural enigma”. Culture is

not an absolute and the same goes for identity; both are dynamic: the benefits derived from culture depend on its very process of reconstruction, and the dominant discourse of culture as an immutable inheritance is just a subcomponent (often a conservative one) of a process.

In the light of these considerations, all contributions represent an attempt to rethinking the “boundaries” – in a very broad sense – and rethinking the boundaries means rethinking the current idea of Europe and the Mediterranean.

The monographic section opens with the article by Pierpaolo Donati *The Cultural Borders of Citizenship in a Multicultural Society* that discuss about “inclusion” as one of the basic problems confronting multicultural societies and he asks: What does it mean inclusion? And inclusion to what? The article contends that the political inclusion of minorities into a ‘universalistic culture’ can be wholly misleading if the concept of political inclusion is not well managed in terms of the articulation of the borders between different cultures. In order to manage borders without either denying the boundaries, or consider the boundaries as barriers that separate cultures, we need a new relational semantics of borders.

A specific perspective on Maghreb is presented by Louisa Dris-Aït Hamadouche with an article titled *Algeria post Arab Spring: The Forced Virtualisation of the Borders* because she reflects on land borders of Algeria. So, even if Algeria is considered a stable country, this stability is fragile and is likely to be more precarious if the country has to face simultaneously an economic crisis and delicate presidential succession. Domestic incertitude coupled to regional conflicts puts the Algerian borders under unprecedented pressure. Consequently, almost all the governmental declarations expressed worries about the vulnerability of the borders, and assurances about the security services determination to assure the state security.

On the area of the Maghreb also insists another article written by Emmanuel Cardona Gil, Hicham Jamid and Linda Gardelle (*The highly Skilled Maghrebians “on the move”: A Circular Cross-border Dynamic from the Mediterranean*) that aims at analyzing the migration process of Maghrebian engineers. It was observed that the migration of these highly skilled individuals is neither irrevocable nor unidirectional. They may be regarded as being permanently “on the move” between their home country, the country where they studied and other destinations. They develop new strategies

which symbolically question national borders and create multiple identities or hybrids of transcultural values.

The article written by Andrea Ciampani, *Social Europe as a Multilevel Governance: The Italian Perspective* closes the monographic section shifting the attention from Africa to Europe. To understand the situation of social dynamics and actors within the European process of integration the author wonders how much we learnt by the historical reflection, by now mature in Italy too, about existence and meaning of "Social Europe". Europe, indeed, is not only made by public authorities and agreements among governments, but also by social forces. Over the years, these forces met beyond the national borders, trying to give an European approach to the social problems, with the establishment of confederations of trade-unions. Much still to be done and today – mainly after the great recession began in 2007 – the construction of a real Social Europe is more and more needed.

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