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Notes for the German-Italian Meeting of scholars of international relations

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Introduction

I shall divide the points I want to make into two categories. On one hand are some remarks on the kind of "international relations" we study in our situation; that is, our basic theoretical and value assumptions, the literature we refer to, our main fields of inquiry, etc.

On the other hand I want to put forth a few remarks on the cultural environment we work in our area and in Italy, and the limitations this sets on our work; it is of course a much less informed perspective than the one much more experienced and more strategically located scholars like professor Gori might have.

First part: International Sociology in Gorizia, Italy1. Sociology, non politology, of "international relations".

Although some members are of different academic background (political science, economics, law), our basic disciplinary perspective is sociology. But it is, quite frankly, an "imperialistic" sociology, trying to comprehend the whole field of the social sciences and especially sociology proper, economics and political science; which is also the "classic" concept of sociology, starting with Comte and Spencer, re-activated again in the forties and fifties by Parsons, and in our own times by systems-thinkers as Buckley and Kuhn.

The consequences of this basic orientation are manifold. The most important, I believe, is that we are not concerned exclusively, or even primarily, with the "political system" proper, the state, as traditional students of international relations, of juridical and political origin, might do. We are interested in all sorts of "forces", relationships, transactions, communications, issuing from all sorts of decision makers, that cross the boundaries of societies, that influence the behavior of macro social systems. We are interested not only in states but also in nations, nationalities, ethnic communities etc.

Another consequence of importance is methodological. The methods - their virtues and limitations - we tend to use are those originally developed by sociologists, and we are rather of the empiricist persuasion with due corrections.

The intrusion of sociologists in the field of international relations, once "horrid conclusion" of lawyers and diplomatic historians, then of politologists, has met considerable difficulties, witness the lingering uncertainty on the proper name of this subfield (International sociology? sociology of international relations? Global sociology? World sociology? etc.) (International Sociology in the World Congress of Sociology)

But this intrusion seems, on the whole, beneficial: some of the most creative thinking in international relations can be imputed to social scientists who really know no disciplinary boundary, like Galtung, Etzioni, Singer, Burton; and it seems clear nowadays that most students of international relations, even if sticking to their old disciplinary label, widely employ that framework the theories, the concepts and the methods originally developed by sociologists.

2. Global sociology, not sociology of interstate relations.

In our view, the most significant intellectual development in the field is the passage from the inter-state (or billiard ball) to world (or global) perspective. The phenomenon is so widespread and well known that it hardly needs elaboration here. I only need to refer you to such books as John Burton's "World Society" to explain what I mean. I could add also that one of the most famous defenders of the "state- and international system" dichotomy, J. David Singer, has recently spent a few words in favor of the "world society approach". I might also point out that

- a) the world-society approach is the most radical departure from the juridical, traditional, strategical "power" approach;
- b) it integrates into the "bourgeois" thinking, in international relations, based on the concept of nation state, the "marxist" insights on the transnational forces (classes) interdependence, and interpenetration (imperialism)
- c) it requires and promotes a systems approach
- d) it is based on the emergent phenomena of global communications and transactions, on interdependence, on the planetary scale of critical environmental problems like famine, pollution and depletion.
- e) it overcomes the traditional view (held e.g. by Aron), that the sociological framework is not applicable to the study of international relations because sociology studies societies which are to some extent integrated, consensual and controlled while the actors in the international system, the states, are isolated, hostile and anarchical.

f) it promotes a world view, literally a "Weltanschauung", quite different from the traditional one that we learn in schools watching maps that emphasize the division of the earth into different States. This view of States as separate entities promotes hostility and conflict, divides our world in "we" and "them foreigners", etc. The "cobweb", or functional, behavioral, transactional approach supplies quite different world views, emphasizing the unity of mankind, interdependence, integration, and helps feelings of "we" and sympathy. We are aware of the risks of this approach, that could end up in utter confusion, amateurism, fanaticism, hallucinations. But think that its promises, its boundless potentialities are worth the risks.

3. Systems approach.

All modern trends to the unification of social, and not only social, sciences and towards interdisciplinarity are based on the Systems approach. Most efforts to the practical solution of particular problems are based on the systems approach. Most efforts to understand and comprehend the social problems of our age and planet, are based on the systems approach, philosophy, theory and concepts. We are aware of the critiques leveled at the systems approach, and might share some of them; but the magnitude of this intellectual development is such, its fascination so strong, its promises so high that we cannot but work in their perspective.

4. Focus on the Region, not on the Nation.

We agree with most students of International Relations that the Nation States are presently the most important actors in the world arena, that they are the most efficient machines yet devised to "get things done", mobilize people and resources, achieve development, etc.; we admit that the national frontier is second only to our skin as the main boundaries in which we are limited (Wickers); and concede that States have the most power to control our daily lives and our deaths. We also are aware that States will retain this dominant position for some time, especially in some places. But we salute with enthusiasm the forces that are eroding state sovereignty and promoting interdependence. These forces are of several type-technological, economic, cultural, etc.; they are complex and there is a lot of inertia and friction; but we believe that the Nation-State model, which was brought into being by peculiar historical circumstances, shall be made obsolete and "vither away". This long-range view is based, admittedly, only on scant evidence in the present. One is the trend toward "regionalism": ^{supra}na-

tional regionalism, which brings together and integrates the states in a certain area; and intranational regionalism, which seeks to decentralize the power of the nation state and distribute it among its regional components. Regionalism is a new name for the old federalism; the latter refers to formal agreements between political authorities, the former refers to the objective operation of geographical, ecological, economic, sociological and cultural forces. But they both refer to the same phenomenon, the redistribution of power: from the national to transnational centers upward, from the national to the regional centers downward. These trends are based on important sociological principles, like the efficiency and participation, and on systemic principles, like the twin forces of integration ^{and} the segregation of subsystems.

This bias for regionalism has a respectable tradition both in the conservative (provincialism) and in the anarchic (Proudhon's federalism) thought. More recently, it has found support in the trends toward increasing rationalization of the societal guidance processes through planning (regional planning). It is possible to develop a systematic comparison between nation and region, nationalism and regionalism, and emphasize the need to pass from the second to the latter. If the XIX century was the age of nationalism, the XX might well be the age of regionalism - at least in the advanced countries. It is doubtful whether the new states in Asia and Africa can skip the nationalistic stage, and go directly from tribe to region.

5. Power, a central concept.

Power is a central concept in our framework. We are aware of the endless discussion it has elicited since Machiavelli, of its elusiveness and the difficulty to operationalize and measure it; however we find it extremely useful as a heuristic concept around which it is possible to organize parsimonious framework tying together the concepts of values, authority, resources, violence, persuasion, influence, control, sanction, force, dissuasion, dominance, dependence etc. The very comprehensiveness of the concept makes it almost useless in the strictly sociological discourse, but makes it very useful in relating the sociological discourse to the physical, natural disciplines, stressing the links between power and energy (parallel to structure and matter). In the field of international relations, this might throw some light into the problem of violence, deterrence, etc.

determinants of the behavior and structure of political and societal systems. Lack of appreciation for the autonomous role of the international, strategic, military factors (and of national, ethnic, cultural, psychological etc.) seems one of the main shortcomings of the Marxian framework and an explanation of why things have not worked out according to his expectations.

But this contempt for the State as an important system, and the stress on economic and social factors transcending boundaries has a great philosophical, ideological value. It has promoted at least in theory, 1) the idea of "withering away", 2) the value of internationalism, and the overcoming of nationalism, 3) the feeling of solidarity for people in the same class, although not in the same nation 4) the extension of the exploitation schema from the societal to the international, and then to the world level; the schema might be crude, but it was the first sociological framework to consider all mankind as a single social system. Marxism has pioneered the concept of world society, in contradiction to the traditional scholars of international relations, that, sticking closer to empirical facts, were, and still are, centering their work on the concept of the Nation State, thus hindering the creation spread of alternative, more desirable models. It must be said however that most Vulgar-Marxist strands tend to forget the conceptual internationalism, and fall back again in the phallacy of misplaced concreteness, treating Nation-States as solid actors, and arranging the 140 of them in a "class structure". This involutive approach leads to a lot of confusion ("Does Saudi Arabia belong to the Third World of oppressed States? Does it belong to the international exploited, proletarian class?") and discussion among modern marxists.

In general we think that the effort to pour the data from contemporary international politics into the mould of Marxist categories is not very fruitful. Marxian "factors" (basically economic) do not seem to explain satisfactorily much the "variance" of the world system. Of course it is only possible to put forth "ad hoc" and "post hoc" explanation in Marxist terms of events, and to say that this or that " Marxist factor" is "basic", "essential" and "most important", while the others, not belonging to the marxist framework, are "secondary", "accidental" etc. But ~~any~~ such way of thinking has little scientific rigor and predictive power. So we think it better to leave our theoretical framework quite open, and not to pretend to arrive at grandiose statements about the inevitable development of world situation, which are characteristic of ideological speculation.

9. Shortcomings of the "traditional" and "behavioral" approaches to international relations.

In our view, whatever their defects, the "bourgeois" approaches to international relations have the merit of being open to challenge and change; they are not so rigidly codified as the Marxist approach. They are often naive, partial, fragmentary, trivial, and whatever; but they are generally more sensitive to empirical tests, because they are less charged with the emotional overtones of deeply felt ideologies and religions. We share the succeeding critiques of idealists by realists, of realists by behaviorist, of behaviorists by post behaviorist; but think that each of these "schools" has built and added on the preceding one, so there is a real scientific progress and accumulation; which can hardly be said of the Marxist school, where most discussion still are of the interpretation type, and of endless repetition and recombination of the basic assumptions.

Of course this evolution has its blind alleys and its costs. It is well possible that most of the large resources spent on empirical research projects in international relations, specially in the U.S., (Rommel, Singer, McClelland, Russett etc.) have been wasted on trivialities and dead ends; but so are most resources in medical sciences, I am afraid. Nevertheless, big science is here to stay, and we generally think that it is better than quack doctors.

10. Action orientation and commitment to values.

A critique often levelled to "bourgeois" sociology of international relations regards a) its alleged "neutrality" and "non commitment", which is often said to be b) a mere ideological cover to mask a conservative and establishmentarian ideology. The second part of the charge might be true in some cases; in most of the scholars of international relations we know it is definitely unjust; the first part is basically unjust. The case for basic research, for pure science, has been often made, and convincingly so; it does not seem necessary to review it here, to emphasize the need that some people specialize in taking the longer, loftier view, away from the contingent preoccupations, etc. etc.

But while defending the rights and functions of basic, "objective", pure science, we do not confuse objectivity with neutrality: one can describe and explain objectively a phenomenon, and yet hate it. Commitment to values is

starting not from their centers but from their periphery. If it is true that the most general activity of systems is to adapt to their environment, then what happens at the interface between system and environment is indeed of basic interest. Sociologically, suffice it to remind that some societies could survive only as long as they had to fight their neighbours and expand their frontiers; deprived of enemies and brought to a standstill, they collapsed like bicycles. With some caution we can also remind the importance of boundary-maintaining skirmishes in many territorial animal societies (Ardrey).

Finally the problematization of the boundary makes us particularly aware to the fact that all modern states are the result of historical accidents, they have evolved by random epigenesis, there exist no such things as given, "natural frontiers", the shape of the states we see on the map is absolutely arbitrary and casual, often completely disregarding the cultural, economic, social patterns. The boundaries of European and Latin American countries are no less arbitrary than those of the new nations, carved out by the administrative, military and economic reasons of the former colonisers. This awareness is a powerful tool against any pretension of Nation State to body a mystical union of one people, one language, one culture, one economy, one territory etc., and any pretension to "natural rights" to sovereignty. If one looks closely to the real boundaries of systems, one sees that the national frontiers are just as crazy (deprived of inner rationality) as everything else, so why should they be more respectable? If enough people were aware of this, they would be much less prone to go to war to defend the sacred frontier and soil of their motherland. Of course there is in today's world a general and complete taboo on the modification of boundaries; one reason of this is the perhaps unconscious awareness that if one begins to claim some boundary modifications, almost everybody else will, starting a chain reaction resulting in complete chaos. Somewhere some boundary must be drawn; so let's freeze them all, and try to solve problems working not on the location, but on the structure and functions of boundaries. This means, generally, to defunctionalize them, open them. This means also, generally, interpenetration, higher entropy, substitution for functional to territorial boundary-maintaining devices, interdependence, integration.

There is one of the lines of thought prompted by the study of boundaries. Another line of thought might start from the fact that border areas usually are marginal, peripheral areas, whose interests might show some degree of conflict with the interest of core areas. Marginality and periphericity are a result of the closure of the system; so border areas usually have a stake in the opening

up of systems. This is one of the main ideas behind our work on European frontier regions, as a potential spearhead in the development of the "Europe of the Regions", as an agent of transnational integration everywhere, once they are given some power.

12. Our Intellectual Father Figures

As might by now be apparent, the authors we follow more closely are those generally belonging to the behavioral, systemic, and post behavioral persuasion: in alphabetical order, Boulding, Burton, Deutsch, Etzioni, Falk, Galtung, Kaplan, Krigsberg, Landheer, McClelland, Rapoport, Rosenau, Russett, Singer, Young. One of latest publications succinctly expanding an approach to "international relations" which we feel we can wholly share is "Worldsociety", by John V. Burton. We are aware that there might be significant differences between them, but their values, their perspective, and their professional competence exert the highest appeal to us.

Second Part: The environment of the Institute of International Sociology

As professor Gori shall undoubtedly better explain to you, the social-scientific study of international relations has barely begun in Italy. The Italian representatives ^{work} were almost exiguous the number of people who read and write on such matters in our country. We have to fight the almost absolute dominance of the juridical-historical approach, centered on diplomatic history and of inter-state relations, which monopolized the thinking in this area. In the universities, only "international law" "history of treaties and of international relations" and a heavily juridical "international organization" are taught, with the exception of Papisca's course in Catania and Gori's in Florence.

The university of Trieste, with which we are in closest contact, shows exactly this pattern. The interest of the Gorizia Institute meets with a patronizing attitude in the Department of International Law. They consider us as an honest and perhaps bright, but unruly and messy lot. They have no doubts that our interest in international relations is just an aspect of the enthusiastic imperialism of that most undisciplined of disciplines, sociology; but that the only and proper way to study the matter is to roam archives and analyse official papers, collections of diplomatic documents, etc. So the perspective for the establishment at the university of Trieste of a sociology (or politology) of international relations is, as far as we can see, almost nil.

At the national level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also been dominated, until recent times, by the dictature of international lawyers and diplomatic historians. Only recently it has begun thanks to professor Gori's efforts and prestige, to listen to social scientists. At any rate the perspectives for such a peripheral Institute as ours in Gorizia to receive support from and give influence to the Ministry in Rome are nil.

This exclusion from two powerful state organizations - the University System and Foreign Ministry, together with our location in a town with strong central-European reminiscences and ties, might explain our value option against the State and our preference for the regional entities - local and continental. It is at these levels that we have received most recognition. The Autonomous Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia, which is one of our main funding sources, is trying to develop ties both with neighbouring Austria and Yugoslavia and with the CEE. The establishment of the Institute itself is part of this strategy toward the development of a regional "foreign policy" (which is, by the way, wholly outside the formal power the Region has been given by the State) and the regional government pays attention to our studies, assigns us special studies, and even employs us as speechwriters in occasion of international meetings on problems on which we have some competence (ethnic relations, frontier regions, military servitudes, etc.).

At the European level, we have managed to receive from the Council of Europe a research contract on the problems of cooperation among all European frontier regions.

But against these success stands the general lack of response of the environment to our studies and ideas. Our geographical marginality, our being outside the university system, our interest for problems of which the general Italian cultural milieu is only dimly aware (international politics, military problems, ethnic problems, etc.) makes it difficult for us to gather and audience.

We have to publish ourselves our books because no commercial publisher can find a market for them, and our independence from the "baronial clans" has so far barred us the access to learned journals, each of which is controlled by a tightly closed clan. We have managed some breakthrough in this paper wall, and have occasionally been quoted, reviewed or criticised by national magazines and newspapers; but we have still a long way to go in order to be heard by the learned and general public, in Italy outside our home region.

The will to work our way in that direction is here; but there are some symptoms of a degeneration of the situation, connected with the general crisis of Italian

economy and society. In face of growing unemployment, inflation etc. expenses for cultural and educational purposes are the first to fall under the ax; so in order to survive we are increasingly compelled to look for research contracts on immediate, "concrete" local problems, because it is almost impossible in these times to find agencies interested in sponsoring research on the apparently "abstract" and "idealistic" problems of international sociology. So in the last few years the portion of our resources spent on international sociology has been decreasing, in favour of other research endeavors. Of an original team of eight, which in 1969 set out to study peace research and international sociology, two have concentrated on inter-ethnic problems, which find a more immediate response locally but are somewhat marginal in the total field of international relations; four have been partially absorbed by the University of Trieste, and have to devote part of their time to other social science subjects, like comparative politics, social ecology, or methodology. One has been wholly absorbed by the University of Trento. So presently only Gianni Kaufman works full time on international relations, with myself on duty only half time.

We are aware of the dangers of this trend, so are strongly committed to redress this imbalance as soon as the immediate financial crisis is bypassed. We have asked professor Gori to assist us with his prestige, and take care of the training of a fresh little group of young people interested in international relations and peace research. We are looking for international contacts and solidarity, which seem essential in face of the dim prospects of the Italian situation.