From Gottmann to Gottmann: Testing a geographical theory

"The concept of iconography raises two questions for me. If the use of iconographies has its fullest expression at the level of national States, what happens when an iconography can no longer count on the strength of national States to nurture it? This question also applies both at supranational levels, that is at levels that reach the dimensionality of world cultural areas, and at lower levels, that is at the scale of the smallest communities. How are iconographies induced and maintained at these other levels?"

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Introduction

I want to start from the conclusions of the eighth chapter with which Jean Gottmann ended his book on the relations between international policy and the geography of States. The great geographer wrote "geography's essence cannot be sought in scholastic materialism: then it is not at all a living and daily reality."[1] This is a radical conviction of his thought, which he came back to time after time, and which he also pointed to when he asserted that "the most important boundaries are in minds and it is in this sense that iconography is the Gordian knot of the national community."[2]

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• How are iconographies induced and maintained at these other levels?

Iconographies beyond and below the national state level

The present note is intended to clarify these features of Jean Gottmann's thought with the help of quotations from his writings, particularly his book of 1952.

Asking these questions today arises not by chance. The question of iconographies of areas larger than national States, for example, arises in one context because of the birth of a militant Islam claiming a larger territory than that of any one State that gave rise to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001 in the USA and continues to be evidenced today in the conflict in Iraq. Conflict over Islam's domain is also the order of the day in Iran and it has been at work for decades between Israel and a Palestinian State which, until a few years ago, did not even exist.

Samuel Huntington, as is well known, arrived at the conviction that the main clashes within world politics will be cultural. His work is thus entitled *The Clash of Civilizations* (HUNTINGTON, 1996). In the case of Europe the question arises also in the context of the recent draft of the European Constitution and from the impact of efforts to push towards a federal organization for the European Union. In fact the European Union has recently been faced with an expansion to include a significant number of new States.

This is part of the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the disintegration of Marshall Tito's Yugoslavia. Of course, all the existing members of the Union understood at once that they could not respond negatively to all of the applications of the various States in Central and Eastern Europe requesting entry to the EU. But the difficult economic consequences of the unification of the two Germanies could not be neglected during the accession process. Similarly, the major difficulties in creating a common European military and foreign policy and a Constitution that is not yet able at the time of writing to overcome the possible veto of any of the member States stand in the way of achieving anything like substantial unification. The preferred solution has been to space out entry into the Union in time and under certain clearly specified conditions. But this has been a provi-

sional, diplomatic approach that has slowed the process of integration as it has also slowed down expansion.

Regarding the problems of the levels below that of the national States, they are not particularly those of an accentuation of regionalism. In Europe regionalism is very important only where, like in France, the effort of centralization was very strong. It is also lively in the United Kingdom, in Belgium in the case of Flanders, in Spain in the case of the Basques, and in Northern Ireland. In Italy, where the effort of making a unitary national polity began only about a century and a half ago, the reputation of regionalism suffers from the problematic uses to which it was put under Fascism and by the negation of the meaning and value of the State's unitary form that accompanied the two ideologies which dominated Italy after the collapse of Fascism: the communist and the catholic (MUSCARÀ, 2001). At the subnational level elsewhere the problem is illustrated by the situation in the ex-Soviet Empire and in the ex-Yugoslavia where the recovery of political stability is pursued, even if not yet reached, through the reassertion of central governments.

Not by chance, Gottmann, in the first chapter of the previously quoted work, maintained that "Man adds to these differences (differences of a physical nature); more by reason of his instincts of social organization and of his need of logic, he tries constantly to rearrange the differentiation that nature left complex, with shades and transitions."[3]

Gottmann himself helps us understand the first case, that of a supranational Europe, when he goes back briefly over the history of medieval Europe and recalls the hypothesis of the geographer E.F. Gautier regarding the Mozabites of North Africa. We can examine these ideas before examining the situation regarding the relations between the West and Islam.

For Gottmann, iconographies of the State stand on symbols of three orders:
- the religious,
- the political coming from the history of each State and, finally,
- those connected to social organization.

"That modern national States," he writes, "are beyond doubt the purest type and the perfection of these divisions testifies to an evolution that seems to reach maturity."[4] And he also writes that the iconographies are endowed with a strong imprinting because "they pass on through families and schools" and " they impress strongly on the still malleable minds of children and adolescents."[5]

But if the national States are the point of arrival for the stabilizing game of iconographies (even if today they are put in doubt by the rise of so-called globalism, a theme to which I must return) national State iconographies do not always reflect symbols drawn from all of the three orders. In the case, for example, of the Mozabites, a people of a particular Islamic sect living in the oases of the Sahara Desert, the reference could be only to the distant political past. For the geographer E.F.Gauthier this Islamic sect that lives divided among the communities of the different oases of the Sahara "could be the remainder of the ancient Ibadite Empire that knew its hours of greatness and power in these regions. Many sects that divide the peoples of the East," continues Gottmann (and the discourse seems of extreme topicality with reference to the picture in present-day Iraq after the defeat of its dictator), "could reattach their origins to the pages of past political or military glory."[6]

In the case of medieval Europe, to Gottmann the iconography seems substantially religious, since the political authority of the Roman Empire was "scattered" in a myriad of authorities, "leaving each surviving carrefour [crossroads] and each city to its own devices, establishing its own rules."[7] The level at which this iconography operated was the one born at the borders between Christian Europe and Islam, where it reappears as a religious phenomenon. "In the medieval age the great freedom of political organization in the Christian space was the result of the unity of the faith, of a uniformity of civilization whose iconography was at this time practically entirely religious. To divide this space and arrive at a political division completely different needed the religious wars and victory of the maxim 'cuius regio eius religio'."[8]

Gottmann admits the existence, therefore, of iconographies at both a higher level and at a lower level than that of national States. So, it is necessary to ask about the iconography that today manifests itself and represents the East and, above all, if we can accept the thesis of Huntington that the future will be of clashes between discrete civilizations. For example, the contents of the section of this special issue of Ekistics devoted to the geopolitics of the great areas of civilization of the world today indicates that such an activity is very alive even if it is divided between elites pursuing different objectives. One interesting case emerging from this analysis is the example of Southeast Asia where a formal unity – originating in military worries by United States about the development of a "new" Vietnam and, more generally, the development of communism in the Pacific – aims at being transformed into a political entity without any relationship to these older origins, looking even towards the prospect of political independence (Dell'Agnese). The case of India also appears very interesting because according to Chaturvedi there we face two opposing lines of development. For the Indian "nationalists" the actual political entity of the South Asian subcontinent must forget the colonial experience in which it was born and focus instead on the iconography of a mythic unitary India. In the case also of black Africa, south of the Sahara, Alessia Turco points out the political alignment of recent elite with European education, aiming at an autonomous Africa. These leaders pursue neither a return to tribalism nor a development of what remains of colonialism, but aim at self-assertion, with a new identity renewed by their embrace of democracy.

A recent article by Amartya Sen shows that democracy should not be understood solely in the literal meaning of formal elections, which would apply only in the Western world. Democracy is more common than we think also in countries which have been outside Western influence and can be found in history whenever polities evince public discussion and make choices of a communitarian or collective character (SEN, 2003). Following the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, Huntington seemed to change his opinion as to the clash of civilizations he had predicted in the book that made him famous (HUNTINGTON, 2002). Not always need opposition between large areas of civilization give rise to a clash. People who aim at turning them into such clashes take advantage of the fact that conflict is inherent in cultural difference but needs invidious comparison to radicalize it. Shirin Ebadi, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, is the first Islamic and Iranian woman to serve as a judge since the Khomeini Revolution of 1979. The arrival of Khomeini to the leadership of Iran involved a return to a strict and puritanical Islamism: no woman could be sanctioned as a magistrate because "women are much too emotional." Ancient habits like that of the cutting-off of hands for theft or the stoning of adulterous women, etc. were reinstituted. Shirin Ebadi never left the country, changed her profession to that of lawyer, and became defense counsel in all the lawsuits in which the new Bench aimed at introducing an Islamism that was opposite to the civil laws prevalent in the modern world. The Nobel Peace Prize was given to Shirin Ebadi for the courage with which she has tried to make Islamism compatible with the rule of law. She lives in a country where the achievement of official Islam has coincided with a

collapse of civil law and an official enthusiasm for terrorism as a strategy against political enemies.

In a recent essay prepared for a meeting on the perception of the Mediterranean Sea, I had the possibility to ascertain, in the light of the studies of Bernard Lewis, that the roots of the difficulty of contemporary cohabitation between Islam and the West are profoundly contradictory (LEWIS, 2002; MUSCARÀ, 2003).

● On the one hand, the Islamic world emerged at the end of the 7th century, based on the deep-rooted conviction of the superiority of Islam either in comparison to the world at large or in relation to the other monotheistic religions of the Mediterranean Sea. This sense was both (not only?) of a religious nature, of course, for which the Islam of Allah and Mohammed was superior to either Judaism or the Christian faith: a perfect religion in relation to which non-Islamic peoples were considered unbelievers. And the unfaithful must be always defeated and always considered inferior and ignored.

● On the other hand, these convictions received an important confirmation in the history of Islam, after its rapid expansion around the Mediterranean Sea as far as the Pyrenees and to the gates of Vienna, as well as by the scientific, technical and cultural achievements of those important centuries. Put together, all this reinforced the tendency to take no interest in what happened outside the Islamic world. The voyage of Magellan and the circumnavigation of Africa or the European discovery of the New World happened without the interest of the Islamic world and without Islamic valuation of the capabilities these events indicated or the consequences for the rest of the world. Over the past two centuries Islam has emerged from this paradoxical situation of absence in relation to the rest of the world. But the contemporary context now feeds into either a radical tendency of terrorism and frontal opposition to Israel or a moderate tendency that aims at the rediscovery of reasons for a cohabitation in the world of today without demanding the destruction of different cultural, social and political realities or a return to an isolated reality that can no longer be reproduced. In the Middle East today a new iconographic reality is maturing that could lead to a reconciliation with the West rather than to a frontal clash but without the annulment of the differences that would undermine the convictions of Jean Gottmann and of Fernand Braudel of a still varied future world but with a prospective pacific cohabitation at a global scale (GOTTMANN, 1952; BRAUDEL, 1963).

Jean Gottmann also added many other forms of spatial compartmentalization to the division of the world along lines that coincide with the great civilizations and with national States. He not only wrote that "many other boundaries existed before the present day national ones: the Roman *limes* or the Great Wall of China for the empires, fortifications for the cities, boundaries of bishops' domains, of parishes, of feudal domains, of grounds where for grazing flocks, of zones of nomadism for primitive tribes, etc."[9] There also exist "compartmentalized systems that involve overlapping areas within the same territory and that do not necessarily coincide, but that are oriented to different objectives: administrative, economic, legal, university, etc."[10]

It is interesting to record that, in his lectures on human geography, Gottmann emphasized that the stabilization produced by iconographies operates on all levels and in various ways. But it is to the compartmentalization of accessible space that Gottmann gave most attention because it involves two different forms of division. To his way of thinking, *circulation*, i.e. the continuous flows of every type that animate the earth's surface along substantially stable itineraries or that change only slowly, is at the origin of both the continuous changes affecting everything, and of the general tendency to the articulation of ac-

cessible space. "This circulation," he writes, "depends very much on what happens at the crossing (*carrefour*): cities are born as a result of the *carrefour* and its role is to be a place of contact, of exchange and of transformation."[11] Since the localization of phenomena in space consists of putting them in juxtaposition to the systems of relationships that are brought to life by circulation, we can maintain that it is the circulation that permits the organization of space and that it is in this organizing process that space is differentiated.

It is now necessary to make a clear distinction between the transformation-differentiation-compartmentalization coming from *circulation* and that coming from iconographies. Because these are invariably political expressions presided over by systems of symbols, Gottmann saw iconographies as stabilizing the general tendency of *circulation* towards change. Otherwise, we would be in the continuing presence of the work of "Penelope" aimed at undoing continuously what was previously built with something new and different. For Gottmann, that is – if I understand what he is saying – this process is always one of compartmentalization. But, whereas the pressures coming from *circulation* are only the result of the human tendency to centralization, those coming from iconographies are more the result of the need of humanity to organize itself in communities, in groups. It is this type of compartmentalization that becomes the fundamental subject of political geography, resulting as it does, i.e. "from the constitution of humanity in individualized societies and communities" over which preside the iconographies. In the first case, *circulation*, the central event is the *carrefour;* in the second, that of the group, it is the iconography. The two modes of territorial division co-exist, but are of a very different nature.

Conclusion

This long and detailed analysis of Gottmann's writing is not exhaustive but is done with the aim of checking out its relevance to the different levels at which iconographies can operate. It is not entirely necessary to take into account the origins of compartmentalization around the *carrefour*. The advantage in doing so, however, is that it helps in understanding, for example, that the feared disarticulation of space produced by the dissolution of the Soviet Empire and of Tito's Yugoslavia, was countered by the newly created States rapidly coming into existence soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and did not give rise to a "Penelopian" situation of perpetual circulation. The political picture could instead have degenerated (and this happened in cases such as Chechnya, Kosovo and Bosnia) in a situation comparable to that of a "colloidal" Europe of feuding domains, held together perhaps only by a anti-communist iconography or a nostalgic communist one.

The final point in this discourse recalls the interesting essay of John Agnew, written a few years ago, regarding the neglect of geography as a key to political analysis (AGNEW, 1987). Although Agnew did not have recourse to the ideas of Jean Gottmann, it seems to me that his reflection on the relationship between geography and community and, above all, his sharing the point of view of certain sociologists on the dimension of place as a way of relating the sense of membership to that of the identity integrates nicely with Gottmann's theory of the compartmentalization of space and of the iconographies this produces. Agnew maintains that the diminished scientific interest in the geography of politics can be put down to the presumed disappearance of the communities that for many students of social sciences, especially sociologists, are connected to the end of rural society and the appearance of industrial society. Of course, this theme is not directly connected with the present paper about Gottmann's iconographies. But in the confutation of this thesis, Agnew deepens the concept of com-

munity and, with evidence from the work of other sociologists, proposes and supports a theory of politics very close to that of Gottmann regarding the "instincts" that push people in the direction of the compartmentalization of accessible space. Agnew emphasizes the thought of those sociologists convinced of the persistence of territorialized human communities into and beyond industrial society. In other words, the reasons that people group together do not simply characterize rural societies: in industrial society (and today in the tertiary of the developed countries) people still answer to the requests that are the outcome of the collaborative work of community. The concerns of Jean Gottmann directed to this purpose clearly offer reinforcement to the contribution of John Agnew. This is also a test, if we needed it, of the continuing fertility of the thought of Jean Gottmann, whose observations of the geographical world advanced results which are still being supported today by other geographers and by many students in the social sciences starting out from different points of theoretical departure than his.

Notes

1. "La géographie ne doit pas chercher à être matérialiste dans les écoles: elle ne l'est point dans la réalité vivante et quotidienne." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 224).
2. "Les cloisons les plus importantes sont dans les esprits. C'est pourquoi l'iconographie est le noeud gordien de la communauté nationale." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 220).
3. "L'homme vient ajouter à ces différences; bien plus, par ses instincts d'organisation sociale et son besoin de logique, il cherche constamment à mettre de l'ordre dans cette différenciacion que la nature avait laissée complexe, toute en nuances et en transitions." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 5).
4. "Les Etats nationaux modernes sont sans doute le type le plus net, le plus parfait de ces compartiments, témoignant d'une évolution qui semble arriver à maturité." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 5).
5. "Les iconographies se transmettent dans la famille et à l'école: elles s'impriment fortement sur les esprits encore malléables des enfants et des adolescents." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 221).
6. "E.F. Gautier signale que les Mozabites, secte islamique d'Afrique du Nord, isolés dans leurs oasis au Sahara, pourraient bien n'être qu'un résidu de l'ancien empire ibadite qui connut ses heures de grandeur et de puissance en ces régions. Beaucoup des sectes qui se partagent les populations du Levant peuvent ainsi rattacher leurs origines à des pages de gloire politique ou militaire révolue." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 220).
7. "Si la circulation avait été maîtresse sans partage de la scène politique, elle aurait sans doute abouti à un éparpillement de l'autorité presque à l'infini, chaque carrefour, chaque ville agissant à sa guise, établissant ses propres règlements." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 219).
8. "La grande liberté d'organisation politique dans l'espace chrétien était bien due en cette époque médiévale à l'unité de la foi, à une uniformisation de la civilisation dont toute l'iconographie à l'époque était pratiquement religieuse. Il fallut pour morceler l'espace et arriver à un cloisonnement politique tout différent les guerres de religion et la victoire de la maxime *Cujus regio, ejus religio.*" (Gottmann, 1952, pp. 219-220).
9. "Mais il a existé bien d'autres cloisons avant les frontières nationales d'aujourd'hui: *limes* romain ou grande muraille de Chine pour des empires, fortifications de villes, limites d'évêchés, de paroisses, de fiefs féodaux, de terrains de parcours pour les tropeaux, de zone de nomadisme pour les tribus primitives etc." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 5).
10. "On connaît des systèmes de compartiments qui se recouvrent, divisant en circonscriptions qui ne coïncident pas nécessairement le même territoire, mais à des fins différentes: découpages administratif, économique, judiciaire, universitaire, etc." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 5).
11. "Cette circulation dépend beaucoup de ce qui se fait au carrefour: les villes naissent d'un carrefour et ont pour fonction d'être des lieux de contacts, d'échanges et de transformation Gottmann." (Gottmann, 1952, p. 216).

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