

Democracy, Power, and Territories

A cura di Flaminia Saccà



Sociologia

FrancoAngeli



Sociotechnics,
Sociological Practice

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Preface

by Flaminia Sacca*

This book is the outcome of a scientific collaboration between the International Sociological Association, Sociotechnics – Sociological Practice Research Committee (ISA RC26) and the Italian Political Sociological Association and its contributions have been peer reviewed by members of the two scientific societies. Through the years, the two associations have organized joint summer schools -mainly aimed at young scholars from all over the world - and joint conferences organized at an interdisciplinary level in order to give both senior and junior colleagues the opportunity to exchange experiences, ideas and findings from their different research fields.

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From different perspectives, focusing on different sectors of society and by using an interdisciplinary approach, it addresses one of the main topics of our times: how democratic politics and policies are changing with the advancing of the New Millennium.

In a historic phase of liquid modernity as Bauman poignantly defined it, societies undergo through fast and continuous changes. Established ways of life, thinking, acting, are undermined by a fast-moving process of globalized transformations forcing us to face new problems and, as it usually happens during historical phases of transition, the new coagulation of social, political, economic and democratic forms that will overcome the old ones, seems yet unclear. The economic crisis biting the average family as well as small and medium enterprises goes along with a crisis of the political and institutional authority in many Countries. Creating a climate of uncertainty and distrust that appears to represent a threat for the democratic fiber of these nations. Changing social, economic and productive structures entails a change in the

* Tuscia University, Viterbo, Italy.

political sphere too. Social and political scientists are registering a shift in the role of political parties, and new actors and "milieus" appear on the decision-making scene on one hand while on the other, new political cultures, leaders and styles arise in response to a new quest for reassurance from the challenges brought by globalization, economic crisis and the liquidity of the modern condition.

Worldwide the very pillars of democracies, as we have known them throughout the Twentieth Century seem at stake in a process of distortion that is feared to undermine democratic values and practices. But if traditional nation-state politics seem to lose power and decision-making capacity, at a local level, policies based on municipal or communitarian grounds experiment counterreaction forms of resilience. Not that these forms counterbalance the globalized political, economic and social trend¹ but as social scientists we have learnt the importance of analyzing both levels since Zygmunt Bauman² and Joshua Meyrowitz³, amongst others, introduced the term "glocality" in the social sciences back at the turn of the Millennium.

Along these lines, this volume is divided in two parts. The first, *Changing Democracies and Powers in Contemporary Societies*, analyses different challenges to modern democracies. From the manipulation of institutional processes that lead to the distortion and weakening of legality itself to the rise of religion in Russia turned into the cultural grounds for political normative intervention; from globalized neo-liberalism threatening basic social institutions to the traditional reframing of gender issues from a populist perspective, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of democratic traditions and values that - despite left wing populist experiences' attempt to re-discuss democracy from a more participatory perspective- lays on uncertain, quicksand, premises.

In the first chapter Antonio Costabile and Antonella Coco focus on the power relationships and social practices within contemporary democracies highlighting the risks deriving from the manipulation of institutional-normative processes that entail a distortion of the legal rationality and institutional scopes bringing to a weakening of the belief in legality.

¹ Quite the contrary in fact. As Bauman has already evidenced, geopolitical fragmentation makes globalized power even more powerful, for small, local organizations give more room for manoeuvre to those in power. See: Bauman, Z., On Glocalization: or Globalization for some, Localization for some Others, Thesis Eleven, Sage Journals, Vol. 54, Volume: 54 issue: 1, page(s): 37-49, August 1, 1998.

² *Ib.*

³ Meyrowitz, J., "The Rise of Glocality: New Senses of Place and Identity in the Global Village," In: K. Nyíri (ed.), *The global and the local in mobile communication*, Passagen Verlag, Vienna, 2005.

In the second chapter, Flaminia Saccà and Luca Massidda analyse how the latest Italian election campaign, dominated by two populist parties, has framed gender discourse. How feminist values and culture seem distant from all parties - except for a marginal (in terms of percentages of votes), extreme-leftist one - whereas traditional values that see women mainly as mothers have made their reappearance.

Tradition is also at the centre of *Religion in Public Discourse of Modern Russia*, Nataliya Velikaya's essay, where the author argues how the rise of religious feelings and beliefs is actually linked to political discourse and action. It is the new basis for political identification, subjection and intervention. Supplying the government with the "right" to assert which are the "traditional values of the Russian people" in contradiction to others, supposedly distant from the traditional worldview and therefore considered dangerous for the public *morale*.

In the fourth chapter of the volume's first section, Marco Damiani explores the possibility that not all populisms entail an anti-democratic, conservative nature based on supposedly traditionalist norms and ideals. While analyzing the *Phenomenology of Left-Wing Populism* the author focuses on the Spanish *Podemos* movement as an example of untraditional left-wing experiment that is capable of keeping together different social backgrounds and political cultures, hypothesizing this as one of the reasons for its solitary success within the European left-wing scene. Nonetheless, as a movement with locally rooted leaders it will probably have to face new organizational choices in the future -such as deciding on whether to become a party instead of remaining a movement for example- and only then analysts will be able to seize its actual innovative, lengthy impact and (possibly) exportable capacity. For at present the various leftist movements worldwide (populists and no) have not proven successful even in rising a critical supranational conscience capable of effectively tackling *Globalization and the Neo-Liberal Trend* that are *Jeopardizing Basic Social Institutions*, as analysed by Tatiana Sidorina in the last chapter of the first part of this volume.

The second part, *Territories, Politics and Policies*, deals with different forms of local, territorial or community resilience. In *Withstanding the Populist Siege. New Leaders and the Political Bias of the Metropolis*, Luca Massidda analyses the connection between territories and populism, highlighting how cities (as opposed to rural areas) could play a significant role in contrasting the populist wave. Through the analysis of the recent voting behaviour in three global cities (London, New York and Paris) his essay investigates in depth "the reasons that seem to allow the metropolis's political bias to withstand the siege of contemporary populism".

This sociological emphasis on the city is not new. Cities have historically been considered by social scientists, as pillars of modernity and of emancipation as well as one of the two sides of the recent cleavages in contemporary times. Jan Marie Fritz in her *Cities for CEDAW Movement*, offers a vivid example of how, even in one of the world's oldest and strongest democracies, such as the United States, cities can play a crucial role as garrisons of democratic and civil rights, working on a local level in order to support national and international initiatives towards the reduction of the gender gap.

The relationship -and the tension- between the local and the national level is analysed by Antonietta Cammarota and Valentina Raffa in their *Globalization, Policy, Territory. A postcolonial Analysis*, through a case study on Mexican local communities and their communitarian, participatory procedures, which, if included in the territorial policies at various levels could become a tool to regain sovereignty and exercise resistance to post-colonial powers. But cooperation within local communities, although has the potentiality to enrich local territories through alternative paths to that of the economic growth model - that has left many communities impoverished - may not be enough if grass roots or even individual initiatives are not mediated, supported and implemented by local authorities, as George Tsobanoglou's chapter *Sustainable Local Cooperative Development in Greece* demonstrates.

Globalization, world disorder and the many critical elements of the contemporary world do not only generate phenomena of uncertainty and weakness. In the context of specific policies, as well as in local territorial frameworks, authoritative, competent and effective answers emerge too. In his essay, for example, Michele Negri analyzes the Western Armed Forces in the post-Cold War era, especially in relation to two cases, the Italian and the US one, that have been converging towards a similar organizational and cultural model in the last decade. The first phase of the organizational learning process was uncertain, liquid and experimental whereas the past decade can be described as a fundamental step in the consolidation, formalization and "relative standardization" of what had been formerly learned, both in the national and in the Western military system. The Armed Forces, solid by definition, after having lived a short liquid phase, managed to activate effective mechanisms of adaptation and learning, of diffusion and of imitation, which within a couple of decades or so have brought them back, in a resilient way, to the original condition of "solidity".

A process that might give us an insight of future political dynamics as well.

Part I
Changing Democracies and Powers
in Contemporary Societies

1. Power Relationships and Social Practices Within Contemporary Democracies. The Manipulation of Institutional-Normative Processes

by Antonio Costabile, Antonella Coco*

1. Introduction

This essay focuses on the phenomena regarding the struggling for power, which can be observed within the transformations of the contemporary democracies and that lie on the boundary between what is considered legal or illegal. In details, we take social practices and power relationships into consideration, that can be defined and interpreted by employing the category of manipulation, and we try to investigate the extent of its heuristic capacity in comprehending certain social phenomena. We believe that exploring manipulative phenomena also allows us to grasp and interpret social change. In fact, the study of manipulation and of its social legitimacy fully lies within the analysis of modernity and, specifically, in relation to its processes of democracy and citizenship. In this regard, we tend to interpret manipulation in relation to social change, focusing on the transformative capacity inherent to manipulation; that is, the ability to modify relationships, attitudes and social norms. In institutional contexts of advanced modernity, manipulation can, in fact, be a contributory factor of social change. It evolves into a strategic capability which allows an adaptation to the change and simultaneously nourish it. In social contexts where the different types of relationships are plastic and extremely varied, manipulation highlights the ability of individuals to use the resources which they possess, both legally or not, in order to pursue their goals and achieve positions of power.

The category of manipulation is widespread and extensively employed in social sciences and in various field of knowledge, such as: legal studies, power studies, psychology, in communication studies, as well as in anthropological and sociological studies, in accordance to their different meanings and uses. In fact, there is a juridical interpretation of manipulation conceived as a form of deviance (explicit or hidden) from the law. There is also an

* University of Calabria, Arcavacata, Rende (CS), Italy.

interpretation of manipulation as a power strategy throughout mechanisms of allurements - (such as corruption, exchange, co-optation) - or influence. Furthermore, there is also a psychological interpretation where manipulation is defined as a form of subordination of the interlocutor by producing specific techniques. In addition, there is the socio-anthropological approach that studies manipulation as a specific adaptive model of the construction of societies which face exogenous transformations. In this essay we mainly focus on this approach in order to analyze the manipulation of normative-institutional processes which determine a distortion of the legal rationality and institutional scopes in addition to weakening of the belief in legality.

We note that within sociological literature, the concept of manipulation is used in two different approaches and is therefore defined as a relationship of power - (we can make reference to situations where someone makes someone else do something for them, according to his or her individual goals while utilizing particular forms of influence, allurements and seduction) - or as a social practice (according to the theory of action). Furthermore, in relation to social stratification, we can observe that forms of manipulation arise from the top of the social scale to the bottom, thus from those who hold more power resources towards the ones who possess less or few resources, and also from those who lie at the bottom of the social scale, therefore from the need of the ones who occupy disadvantaged social positions. For this reason, we try to demonstrate how manipulation becomes a widespread and pervasive social practice within contemporary democratic States. In particular, we will refer to the Italian State, to its historical evolution and thus to the processes of State building and Nation building during the XIX century, and to the characteristics of its process of modernization, during the XX century.

Thus, in this work, first, we will present the evolution of the concept throughout the different fields of knowledge and then we will focus on manipulation of normative-institutional processes within contemporary democracies. We observe manipulating phenomena within contrasting trends: on the one hand, due to the continual changes of institutions, the need for ulterior regulation of social life emerges, thus adjusting to the new situations which are generated. This leads to the tendency of “incessant regulation” thus to the increasing number of laws (Cassese, 2013; 2018). On the other hand, this trend contradicts the idea of individual freedom and it expresses the will to increasingly blind social action. Therefore, two opposing tendencies emerge: one exalts individual rights and freedoms, while within the other emerges the need to progressively regulate the new situations, which may arise socially. We can express these two trends with several opposing conceptual pairs: the huge surge to de-regulate (Rangone, 2015) opposes the tendency to “ceaseless regulation”; the indeterminacy of every society due

to the complexity is opposed to the normative-symbolic determinacy and to the tendency to “determine” the new or emerging situations (Crespi, 2006); informality contrasts with the tendency to formalize what was once considered informal, up to that point. In this way, the social spaces that were not regulated beforehand, and were considered indeterminate and informal, tend to become regulated, determined and formalized. The manipulation, as we will try to explain, lies at the confines between: determined and undetermined, formality and informality, and regulation and de-regulation.

2. The evolution of the concept of manipulation. Its uses and definitions in social sciences

How has sociology approached the concept of manipulation? To answer this question, let's examine the evolution of this concept in the various social sciences and according to the different uses of the category of manipulation.

First of all, it must be said that manipulation is attributable to the crime of plagiarism. Thus, it pertains to the legal field. In this sense, manipulation is a form of deviance (explicit or hidden), punished by the law. The idea is that, with respect to individual freedom, manipulative techniques cannot be used in order to make others become submissive, or plagiarize against their will, or interfere with personal choices. Positive law intervenes on behalf of behaviours which were not regulated by the law previously and were considered to be “cunning behaviours” or rather “sly” abilities of a particular subject that applied them within a certain relationship. For example, in Italian criminal law, up until 1981, plagiarism was defined as the subordination of a person against their own will, in order to reduce them to a state of subjection. Plagiarism is therefore the capacity attributed by a subject to condition another subject and consequently subjugate them. The concept of crime emerges in positive law and becomes a criminal offence. This assumes a significant relevance from a sociological point of view, since positive law is one of the fundamental elements within the process of modernization. Modernity, in fact, assumes also the meaning of affirmation of liberty and rights with the progressive formation of modern democracies (Habermas 1987 in Martinelli, 1998). Along with the assertion of civil right and freedom, the division of powers within the modern State, the organization of the structures of political representation, the “due process of law” in the administration of justice is one of the main features of the democratization of Western countries. Therefore, discussing plagiarism means analyzing modernity, since, thanks to the affirmation of modern rights and freedoms, it is not permissible to neither

subjugate other people, nor plagiarize them against their own will, or intervene in their choices.

The sociological observation surpasses the dimension of the crime, since it also analyses different forms of social relationships and social actions that are not part of the definition of the crime as stated by law. Political scientists and sociologists define manipulation as a social relationship, specifically as a power relationship, within the studies regarding power. In comparison to the legal approach, the studies on power highlight different forms of manipulation, which not only are crimes, but which lie on the boundary between being considered legal or illegal. There could be forms of power that are apparently legal and consist in conditioning and influencing the choices and the will of other, implemented by those holding higher positions towards those who hold lower ones. Stoppino (1983, p. 624, engl. transl.) defines manipulation as a power relationship in which «A determine a given conduct of B, and at the same time, on the one hand, A does not openly request such conduct from B, but rather hides its true intentions from B in order to obtain it - (or the nature of the intervention to obtain it) -, and on the other hand, B, does not realize that the conduct is desired by A - (that is, the manner which caused A's intervention) -, but rather one believes to have chosen freely - (or knowingly)». According to Stoppino's definition, the two main requirements of social manipulation are the hidden or invisible characteristics and the intentional nature of the manipulation. In fact, «the manipulated subject does not know that he is being manipulated and believe that he freely decides, while his/her behaviour is actually conditioned by the manipulator. Furthermore, «not only does the manipulator intentionally provoke the desired outcome of the manipulation; but also tries, in the same intentional way, to hide the existence or nature of his intervention which causes the behaviour of the manipulated» (*Ibidem*). The hidden characteristic of manipulation allows it to be distinguished from persuasion: «when a person tries to persuade another to embrace a certain belief or to behave in a certain way, he explicitly and openly discloses that belief or behaviour, and formulates the reason for acting in favour of that belief or behaviour, in the same explicit and open way. In this manner, the persuasion is contrary to the manipulation, which seeks to obtain voluntary and conscious consent of the subject to who it is being presented» (*Ibidem*). The occult persuasion, on the other hand, is a form of manipulation. In this case the messages are intended to deceive the recipients, and to plagiarize their choice, without knowing them, through the use of instrument that remain anonymous. Manipulation also differs from coercion: «although this destroys the freedom of the subject, it is not without brutal frankness: it is open and explicit, and seeks to obtain its goal by threatening what is still a voluntary and conscious behaviour. Manipulation, on the

other hand, is subtle and hidden, and treats man like an object: it shapes the behaviour by bypassing one's conscious will. It not only denies freedom, by the same capacity for man's choice» (Stoppino, 1983, p. 625, engl. transl.). Furthermore, the author explains and distinguishes three forms of manipulation: informational manipulation, which adopts different techniques such as: distortion, suppression, or the propaganda; the psychological manipulation, or rather, the activation of unconscious dynamics by means of symbolic instruments; the physical manipulation, or rather, the activation of impulses and various states of mind by means of physical instruments.

Within the studies on power, manipulation as a power relationship has been addressed by other authors such as: Foucault (1993) through the idea of oppressive control, by Bachrach and Baratz (1986) through the idea of non-decisions, and by Lukes (1996; 2007), who defines manipulation as an impediment of free individual choices. In particular, Foucault (1993), through the analysis on total institutions, pays attention to the concealment of power throughout devices and techniques which hide the sources of power, assuming the characteristic of an automatic machine and inducing the act of auto-constraining, while conforming to the power prescriptions automatically. In this manner the system of social control does not need to employ means of force in order to constraint subjects to respect prescriptions. The opposition to the power is de-legitimized and residual, consisting of practices and behaviours which aren't considered normal and treated by prisons and psychiatric institutions. Bachrach and Baratz (1986) highlight a specific dimension of power which consist of the possibility, on behalf of political leaders, to define the political agenda, excluding instances, demands and protests which might arouse social conflicts, from the political arena and from the decisional processes. The non-decision is not a fraud or an illegal procedure, but it consists of the capacity of the political power to exclude problems and issues from the decisional process leaving them at a latent state, employing cultural, procedural and repressive resources. Lukes (1996, p. 725) defines manipulation as the ability that we have on others to conform them to our will through the strategic use of an art or a skill. He then distinguished two types of manipulation: 1) The first one corresponds to allurement or seduction that manifests itself in «the ability to attain one's goals or to ensure the advantages through bids, bribing, subjugation or co-opting another or others» (*Ibidem*); 2) the second one is the influence, or the «possibility of arranging or conditioning the will of the subjects or their desires, preferences and beliefs» (*Ivi*, p. 726). In short, Lukes emphasizes that manipulation is a form of power that works especially in the area of latent and unexpressed conflicts, through a series of mechanisms often prevent the explication of conflicts even in the eyes of the subject who should support them. This is due to a sequence

of impediments that work in the field of thought and communication, inducing a sort of pseudo-voluntary subjection. The Lukes's radical conception of power is based on the idea that the aspect of the power that is more difficult to control is the capacity to influence and to manipulate the scale of values and the order of choices attributed to those subjects which are in a inferior position and are unaware about it. In this manner, the conflict is repressed and occulted to the eyes of the same antagonist subjects (Costabile, 2002). According to Lukes, the highest and most insidious power is the one that structures perceptions, cognitions and preferences of individuals, so that they do not experiment reasons of discontents and they accept the established order, since they do not see or imagine alternative possibilities and since they consider the existing order as natural and not modifiable. Asserting that the absence of discontent is equivalent to spontaneous consensus means rejecting the possibility that a false and manipulated consensus exists (Lukes, 1974, p. 24).

Cavalli (1965) discusses the relationship between democracy and forms of manipulation by taking the role of national political élites into consideration and defining the concept of «manipulated democracy». In fact, within democracies, the risks is that the organized minorities can exercise their domain through out forms of manipulation, in a dissimulated manner. The concept of manipulation is defined as the secret or impersonal exercise of power; he who is influenced does not receive explicit dispositions about what he must do, however, he is subjected to the will of who holds the power (Cavalli, 1965, p. 51, in Bettin Lattes, 2008, p. 271). The manipulative dimension of democracy is produced by the dynamics of the organized minorities animated by their interest to maintain their supra-ordinated condition of élite and their need of domain. In this sense, manipulation is functional to the maintenance of a system of domain, and it is associate to the necessity of the dominant élite to exercise its power in a invisible manner in the eyes of the dominated. In order to establish and maintain the condition of domain by a minority upon the majority, mainly two processes are employed: socialization and the social control by maneuvering some important institutions such as family, school, religions, art, mass media. The practices of manipulation weaken and deprive the institutions of their meaning, thus transforming and manipulating democracy (Bettin Lattes, 2008, pp. 270-271).

The studies focusing on the psychological elements of the political power analysis take manipulation as a specific ability into consideration, which, in addition to the need of deference, produces, as result, an efficient political man able to transfer his private motivations to public objects, in the name of public interest. In other words, he uses public objects - (elements of the secondary environment) - to alleviate his private tensions (Lasswell, 1975).

A further employment of the concept of manipulation comes from the authors of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse), in their “critical theory” of the societies, specifically, in the studies concerning the integration of the working class in capitalism, German Nazism as well as in the analyses of the consumption society. They discuss the concealment of power and the weakening of the critical capacities. The central interest for the “cultural industry” highlights the mechanism of manipulation within the logic of the mass communication, since its message are unidirectional and push subjects to conform to the existing social order (Horkheimer e Adorno, 1947 in Jedlowski, p.1998, p. 198).

The studies on communication related to political power tend to interpret it as a persuasive - (clear or concealed) - manipulator or a selective power. After the Second world war, several theories on communication (Losito, 1995), in the United States. focused more on commercial advertisement than on political communication. They highlight the unlimited power of media, the danger of information, the opinion manipulation, and the fact that idea and meanings can be introduced in the minds of individuals who are exposed to media influence. In this sense, Packard (1958), in “*The Hidden Persuaders*” discusses that, within capitalism, technological means, in addition to the contents techniques of psychiatry and psychology, are employed in order to activate the process of unconscious induction to consume. In other words, the advertising industry employs methods which are licit but also hidden, thanks to the scientific research and technological discoveries. Packard (1958, p. 11) affirms that many of us are influenced much more than we suspect and that our daily experience is subjected to continuous manipulations since our preferences in terms of consumption and our mental mechanisms are influences by some forces which employs hidden mechanisms of persuasions. This occurs in order to advertise several goods, such as objects, ideas, candidates or mental attitudes. Luhmann (2000, p. 63) also discusses the issue of manipulation. He asserts that the advertising tries to manipulate and that it works in a insincere manner, supposing that this is known. Moreover, the author, discussing the “reality of mass media” - (intended both as the operations performed by mass media and as the reality constructed by the mass media as a system which observes throughout a sequence of observations) - highlights how the possibility and the suspicious of manipulation are an internal problematic of mass media as a system, since manipulation can be understood and discussed only within the system by producing further information, and by rendering said information object of further communication. Therefore, although manipulation produces relevant effects in the environment, the most important issue concerns how the system of mass media reacts and coexists with the suspicious that all information can be doubtful.