THE VIRUS AND THE GLOCAL: TRACING SEMIOPOLITICAL INTERACTIONS

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Abstract: This work explores the reactions that the sudden appearance of COVID-19 has caused. More precisely, it is an attempt to grasp the re-articulation of the semio-political relations in the first two months of the spread of the virus (or at least of awareness of its circulation). At the heart of this process are the states. We will analyse how some of them managed the unpredictable and the risk represented by the virus. At the same time, we will see how this has brought into play not only the interactions between states, and the interaction between them and the planetary dimension, but also how it has redefined (within each individual state) the form of the collective, that is to say the relationship between rulers and governed, between central government and territories etc. What results is the need for abandoning static definitions of the local and the global in order to trace the multiple glocal relationships that constitute the fabric of our reality.

Keywords: pandemic, semiotics, politics, risk, glocalization.

INTRODUCTION

The virus and the glocal

COVID-19 has demonstrated the intimate glocality of our planetary experiences.

First of all, in fact, COVID-19 has put us once again, in an extreme way, in front of that deep relationship between rooting and interconnection that is so peculiar of our times. A complex game of local emergence, global diffusion, local re-percussions (and so forth) of specific phenomena. Think of the relationship between the identification of the virus with the city of Wuhan, the recognition of its immediate planetary

status due to its high transmissibility and mobility, the differentiation of effects and impacts (real and imaginary at the same time) not only on a territorial basis (continental, state, regional etc.) but also on the basis of generational, racial, class differences, just to mention a few.

Secondly, COVID-19 tells us about how the intimate glocal nature of phenomena is subjected, more or less consciously, to localization or globalization strategies. In fact, the social actors continually put in place, in words and in deeds, in the ways of treating identities, spatiality and temporality, a work of attributing a meaning of globality or locality to phenomena. To put it simply, think of the recognition of COVID-19 as a "pandemic" by the World Health Organization, or as "Chinese Flu" in the speeches of former US President Donald J. Trump; or the choice of different territories with different degrees of power to close the borders rather than leave them open at the moment of the first spread of the virus. The same planetary dimension of the virus, as we will see shortly in the next section, has made states appear as local actors, when they are generally perceived as "globalities" with respect to communities, minorities, neighborhoods that living within them are unreflectively associated with the category of "locality".

This clash of definitions finally refers to a deeper glocal device: that relating to the dynamics of incorporation, that is the struggle between something embedding and something embedded[1]. Who encompasses who or what? Who or what is being incorporated? And is this relationship of incorporation under the aegis of power, knowledge, will or duty? In other words, which power relations mark the glocal game? We will see better how different states, in the aftermath of the emergence of the crisis, have tried to modulate the relationship of incorporation with the virus. Here let us think of how discourses such as medical or ecological ones represent and live differently the field of interactions opened by COVID-19. From a medical point of view, the virus must be incorporated by individual bodies through a vaccine which, anticipating the presence of the virus in the right quantity, immunizes the entire system or which, by providing information about the virus to the system, activates a reaction that prepares the body for

its arrival. From an ecological point of view, the virus can even be thought of as a takeover of the environment, the planet, with respect to humankind: a warning message, in a benevolent form, or a real tug-of-war between two competing powers. Emphatically said: where humans seemed to have come to incorporate nature into their life project, nature responds by reaffirming its dominion over humankind through a checkmate that produces a dizzying fragmentation of our everyday experiences. The subjects and phenomena are therefore always glocal – even when we define them otherwise – because they are always in some relationship of incorporation with other subjects and phenomena. This process, this struggle for or against incorporation, can result in an isomorphism but more often in a tense non-conformity or overlapping of forms.

These general statements, certainly in need of deeper explanations and further study[2], are the background to the case study on which we will focus. The analysis that follows, in fact, aims to grasp the response of various states, as localized collective actors, in the face of an event of potentially global or immediately translocal significance. Even more in detail, it is a question of seeing which glocal effects, which reshaping of relations, are set in motion by an unforeseen event (although perhaps not entirely unpredictable) such as that represented by the spread of a new virus. Put in common terms: how was a global risk managed locally? Said more closely to our point of view: how a fact in itself glocal, like the virus, solicits old glocal structures, redefines their contours, generates new ones?

Semiopolitics of the virus

The coronavirus materialised in our lives as a real "accident", not only because we could not exactly plan its emergence but also because its effects are new for the vast majority of people living on the planet today: the last comparable pandemic was in fact the Spanish-flu of 1918-1920, known just by a few centenarians[3].

COVID-19 was immediately thought of as a global, planetary phenomenon, even though its development and the con-

crete geopolitical conditions of the modern world have fa-
voured a state-based response. The coordination and leading
role of transnational entities such as the World Health Organ-
ization did not prevent the immediate local response to the vi-
rus. This led to reconsider the solidity of supranational institu-
tions, such as the European Union, and the value of interna-
tional cooperation, stretched between impulses of solidarity
and more or less explicit forms of soft power.

Thus, we have a double scenario: the centrality of science
and medical research during the crisis has emphasised the
global and cooperative dimension of the response; at the same
time the concrete institutional choices against the COVID-19
threat has highlighted the world disunity, or at least its politi-
cal-institutional diversity and the different cultural relation-
ship of governments and society in front risk. In particular, an
unexpected, peculiar, invisible risk, such as that produced by
a virus that can spread asymptomatically.

Within a few weeks, the debate on COVID-19 has wel-
comed historical-anthropological reconstructions on how spe-
cific places and cultures have in the past responded to pan-
demics. Therefore, we thought of an in-depth semiotic analysis
on the subject. We will base our study on Eric Landowski's
model of sense regimes, developed in his book *Les interactions
risquées* and in other more recent developments on the subject
(Landowski 2005, 2019)[4]. We will use the analysis grid which
is based on the opposition between a planned and a random
interaction and which is developed by identifying the positions
of a manipulative interaction (non-random) and an adjustment
(non-planned) one. We will better explain concepts and terms
throughout the essay. However, while Landowski's approach
is based on a two-term interaction, our development on his
model involves at least three terms. Indeed, it calls into ques-
tion not only the action of the virus and the response of states,
but also the governed. The virus always forces us to redefine
the relationship between rulers and governed and therefore
the form of the collective. This is clear in the distinction be-
tween responses to the virus of a programmatic or random
type, on the one hand, and manipulative or adjustment re-
sponses, on the other. The first two, although opposite, in this

situation combine by the fact of treating the governed in an objectifying way: the state, in front of the virus, treats them in both cases as a passive object, a population on which to operate with programming or a collection of individuals and factions to leave in their own weakness condition and disorganisation in the aleatory case assumed as a mode of action. In the cases of manipulation and adjustment, instead, the virus is the time bomb for two other subjectivating modulations of the relationship between rulers and governed: with manipulation, the establishment of the collective as a people endowed with a will to be solicited or mobilised, in the adjustment's case of the establishment of a citizenship endowed with a shared and autonomous sensitivity.

Fig. 1 aims to summarise part of the results that will emerge from the analysis. However, some specifications must be made.

First, our work has an exploratory rather than a theoretical purpose. Therefore, it is aimed at making semiotic tools fruitful "on-the-spot" to capture aspects of the unexpected experience we are living. This also means allowing doubts and problems of a methodological and theoretical type to emerge, postponing the hinted and hypothesised solutions to another type of work.

Second, a more precise visualisation should be able to keep track of the dynamic and complex dimension of the political interactions at stake. From this point of view, the scheme is a "field" – filled with relationships, tensions, figures – within which positioning and movements are operated. We will also return on these issues in the last section.

All these remarks give us the chance to deepen some general theoretical questions. First, we should consider that the four regimes of randomness, adjustment, manipulation and programming – with their relative responses to risk (denial, coexistence, containment, elimination), modes of interaction (confusion, empowerment, motivation, control) and forms of collectives (individuality, citizenship, people, population) – concretely happen simultaneously and on different levels. We will see, for example, how the institution's choices call into question or entail as a background some assumptions about

the sensitivity, the habits, of their own rulers. It is also clear that the same methods of interaction between viruses, states and collectives are subject, as we have mentioned, to a processual dimension and therefore to the possibility of varying over time, based on situations and contingencies. This exposes, for example, to the gradual or sudden passage between different logics (from randomness to programming, from manipulation to adjustment, etc.), to the general feeling we are in an uncertain process of adjustment (not only between sensitivity but also between human or non-human wills, such as that represented by the virus), to the possibility that the very mutability of the institutional action choices can cause an overall effect of randomness which in fact replicates the logic of the accident that triggered them.

However, it seems clear to us that there are dominants, logics that from state to state impose themselves as guidelines in the response to the virus and in the relationship management between rulers and governed. These logics are at the same time languages, ways of shaping the response to risk, the way of interaction between rulers and the governed, the form of the collective, but also polarities, points that guide action, tendencies, and transformations. We will now look at these dominants in more detail. First, however, we want to underline that these local dominants appear has translocally comparable: they define global trends in states' behavior or help individuate them. Passing from one level to the other of our reality, we do not encounter a sharp distinction between "the local" and "the global" but glocal realities to be comprehended and articulated.

Finally, we want to underline once again that we will focus on the immediate reactions to the crisis implemented by the states: that is to say those in which exposure to the accident has made clear the cultural and political modalities – or as we prefer to say, semiopolitical modalities – to cope with it[5].
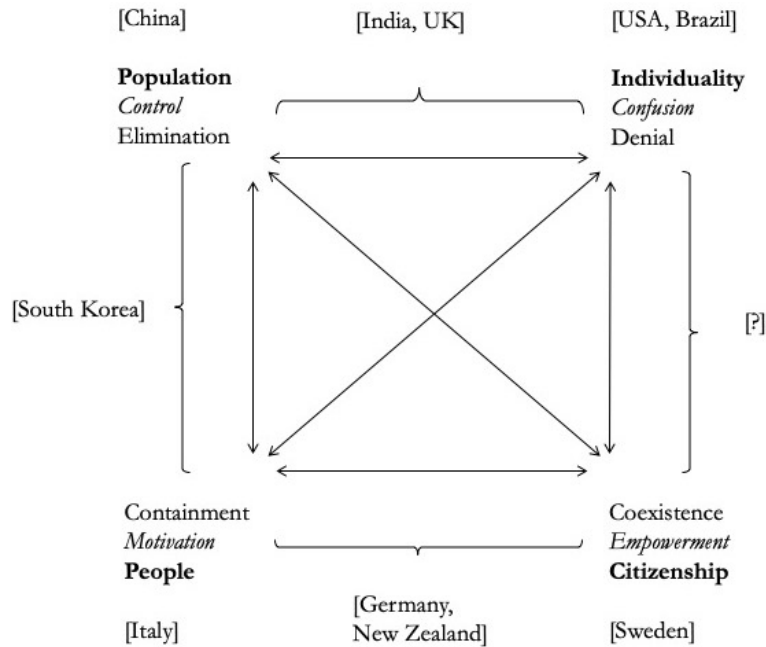
Fig. 1. *Diagram of the semiopolitical interactions between the virus, the States and the collectives.*

BETWEEN AUTHORITARIANISM AND TECHNOCRACY: THE PROGRAMS OF CHINA AND SOUTH KOREA

China and South Korea were the very first countries to face the coronavirus and appear to be the first to have contained its effects. Hence a heated discussion on the methods and meanings of their policies. In fact, both countries seem to behave according to a regime of programming, an action which, in order to counter the risk, treats the governed as an object on which to operate; however, these programs present differences whose analysis opens up to wider reflections on the subject of data control and corporeity, as well as security and freedom in an increasingly complex world.

China's authoritarian programming

As with South Korea also China has exploited the means of technology to cope with the virus. As with Italy and many other countries also China used confinement to manage the crisis. However, what struck the imagination the most is that this mode of action in China seemed to act more directly on bodies. The images of people who have been violently quarantined icastically and stereotypically confirm this tendency to act on the control of corporeity; an idea that is also reinforced by longer-term institutional actions in the People's Republic of China such as the "one-child policy".

The violent regimentation of the bodies finds support at the same time in the news relating to the treatment reserved by the state for doctors who first denounced the spread of the epidemic. This initial reaction, made up of discredit and censorship, reinforces an authoritarian response to the crisis. This form of authoritarian programming projects its light backwards, highlighting how its radicalism is also an attempt to remedy an initial condition of uncertainty, given not so much by the surprise effect of the virus as an unexpected event, but for the refusal to recognise the unexpected:

at first, his [Xi Jinping's] regime seemed to head towards a spiral of crisis, internal and international. The cover-up of the news on the contagion in Wuhan, the censorships and lies, the persecution of the heroic doctors who had raised the alarm: all this had resulted in a health and political catastrophe. Despite the power of the censorship media, discontent and protests over the poor management of the emergency spread rapidly also within China (Rampini 2020: 22).

Thus, Federico Rampini reconstructs the very first phase the subsequent programming action tried to overcome and hide, managing to some extent to make it forget and transforming the Chinese government, within the international public opinion, from guilty of the spread of the virus to a virtuous subject in addressing it and offering support to other countries.

South Korean technoprogramming

With South Korea the emphasis has fallen on the control of bodies through the mediation of contact tracing, an algorithmic tracing system that reconstructs the network of contacts of infected people both by interviewing them and by using images from security cameras of credit cards and smartphone data. All in order to intercept and isolate additional infected before they can further spread the virus.

It is, therefore, a technocratic programming, which raises dilemmas and expectations which Yuval Noah Harari well summarises in the different policies adopted in China and South Korea (but also Taiwan and Singapore). The Israeli intellectual sees the measures the Chinese government took on citizens, including the obligation to report body temperature, as an open-door towards the normalisation of the tracing of biometric data and therefore as a further step in the invasion of body and its privacy. This can lead to the traceability of moods and sensations and the predictability of preferences and behaviours.

The risk is that authoritarian and illiberal regimes or in the hands of far-right governments, where Harari also includes Netanyahu's Israel, can take for granted such forms of control, which we can define infra-corporeal, even once they have returned to normal, no longer for the health emergency but for the purpose of monitoring and manipulating consents and consumption.

So where is the peculiarity of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore? According to Harari, "while these countries have made some use of tracking applications, they have relied far more on extensive testing, on honest reporting, and on the willing co-operation of a well-informed public" (Harari 2020). This unlike China which would have focused on "generalised monitoring and severe punishment". Of course, even in this way the limit between authoritarian and technocratic programming appears blurred just as the possibility of actually practicing the corrective measure Harari suggested: access to data to allow a "motivated and aware" population to counter-control the rulers through the collected data.

Biopolitics and risk zeroing

We will return to some of these dilemmas at the end of this section. Despite the distinctions, and taking into account what others have defined the limits of the South Korean model (Won Sonn 2020), it seems to us, however, that both the Chinese and South Korean modes of action do not foresee, or do not put in the foreground, an intentionality, a sensitivity or a possibility of unexpected or inventive action by their governed. They are in fact established as a population, an indistinct and quantitative whole, function of a governmental action - a mixture of "police state" and "techno-bureaucracy" – which in exchange for this objectifying treatment guarantees health, life as well, to the collective. We are therefore in the field of bio-politics and before an attempt to eliminate the risk inherent not only the relationship between the virus and the collective, but also that inherent the interaction between rulers and ruled: for their safety in front of the virus, the latter partially or totally yield their capacity to act and feel autonomously.

Presumed or induced sensitivities

Of course, if this regime of action and interaction can be effective and one can think of putting it into action, it is also because it implies a sensitivity that conforms to it almost naturally, that establishes it a priori and makes it effective in action.

Consider all the discourses on the Chinese collective ethics nourished by the sense of Confucian harmony as an incorporated practice and dominant value, or the normalisation of algorithmic control in the South Korean society which has made the synthesis of experiences and technology a symbol of its emergence on the global scenario, so much that everybody speaks of the addiction to technology as a real national disease.

Programming and sensitivity therefore chase each other and try to found each other. The fact is that programming is the dominant one here, exploiting an implicit sensitivity or perhaps establishing it at the very moment in which it evokes it as a prerequisite for government choices.

Chauvinist contagion

Of further interest is how these Chinese and South Korean programmings, also for their time record in dealing with and containing the virus, immediately gave rise to debates and chain positioning in the rest of the world.

Some European political forces, although not openly aspiring to authoritarian scenarios, have looked at China as an example of a strong and secure state model, which has full powers to intervene in the lives of citizens and in the rigid closure of borders.

It should not be trivialised that those who can exploit the Chinese model of virus management are the same ones who have most likely pointed out China and the Chinese to public mockery in the early stages of the crisis, in order to arouse and capitalise in a nationalist sense the phobias for the "infected" outsider. The discursive mechanisms of xenophobic populism exploit just as well the conflict towards a decidedly mobile and situational otherness (think of the Northern League against the southerners, then secessionist against the Italians, then Christians against the Muslims, then Italian against migrants, then again Italian against the Chinese, etc.), and contagion from mutual chauvinism: that is the possibility of validating one's domestic success in the mirror of the successes of other xenophobic nationalisms, of validating one's political identity as the local-national case of a kind of successful political identity around the world, or in other local-national spheres.

Think of the effect the evocation of others successes had for the *Front National* of Le Pen, the *Lega* of Salvini, the altright of Trump, the extreme right of Bolsonaro, with Steve Bannon, up to a certain point, as an ambassador of this bizarre "international arena" based on the primacy of a nation over others. This is an example of the use of the simulacra of an ideological commonality, if not the direct contact between formations, for a semiotic contagion: the possibility of infusing positive moods and sensations on one's ideological position through the mobilization and exploitation of fitting images and stories of similar formations around the globe. It is also a

way to announce a self-fulfilling prophecy coming up beside others successes.

Discipline or protect: technological innovation and the globalist left

The role and meaning of the South Korean model is different. As already mentioned, it calls for reflection on the limits of the relationship between democracy and technology. If on the one hand, in fact, yet another front appears in which civil liberties and privacy seem to be able to succumb to, it nourishes the expectations of a democracy equal to the complexity of today's world. A democracy that finds in technological innovation the answer to the evils of contemporaneity, including those caused by technology itself.

In the West, this model could be associated with the so-called "globalist left" or perhaps, in a more neutral way, with that part of the ruling class which, moving across the different levels of territorial state or supranational governance, sees politics as a technical-administrative practice and finds in the IT-statistical tools (applied both to security and to the economy) a means to respond objectively and competently to the challenges posed by a world that is both heterogeneous and interconnected.

South Korea's technological response to the risk put us in front of an alternative that mixing Foucault and Harari could be summarized in the formula "discipline or protect". The complexity of our society nourishes the myth or the project of a technology under human and institutional control instead of a technology used to control and discipline individuals and collectives. A technology capable, both in emergency and daily situations, of implementing the possibilities of citizens and the government – for example by protecting the collective from viruses and aggressions or by streamlining bureaucracy and facilitating decision processes – rather than making them and their data prey to the appetites of corporations or political forces themselves.

Serendipity?

At the end of this digression on programming, we will return to the immediate reaction produced by the coronavirus accident. Far East countries put us before the uncertainty of this event in its purest form. We saw how China initially denied what was happening and how it then made a strict planning to recover both in terms of health and credibility (at least in terms of management crisis) before the international public opinion.

South Korea incident puts us before another situation that highlights the complex link and the uncertain limit between the predictability of crises and the randomness of events. South Korean prompt and effective response also depended on the entire state prevention system developed after the 2003 SARS and 2005 MERS crises and tested with a simulation in December 2019. The virus therefore found South Korea ready. Was it a stroke of luck or a demonstration that the scientific appeals, which for years had warned of preparing for a global pandemic, could prevent the risk? It is inevitable to see in this event in the event a certain serendipity, but also the secular confirmation of the motto "God helps those who help themselves".

EXPOSURE, CONFUSION, INDIFFERENCE: FORMS OF RANDOMNESS IN GREAT BRITAIN, THE USA AND BRAZIL

On the opposite side of the model and the ways of dealing with the unexpected, we have another answer to the virus incident. It supports, mimics or reproduces its logic. It is a mode of interaction, with the virus and with the rulers, often retracted but relevant precisely because it is located under the aegis of randomness.

However, there are partially different modes of action and signification. To grasp their weight, we must underline the difference between planned and unintended accidents. While the former follows the virus incidental logic, bending it towards an expected outcome, the latter seems to avoid assuming the

virus' mode of action as its own, even though it ends up by re-
producing its effects. In the first case, it takes into account the
risk inherent in the interaction between humans and viruses,
in the second it exposes oneself (and one's governed) to the
risk of the virus precisely because it is denied or underestimated.

The planned risk of Great Britain by Boris Johnson.

One form of planned risk is the one initially envisaged by
Great Britain. Boris Johnson, in order to achieve quickly the
widespread immunity, entered the collective jargon through
the image of herd immunity, gave free way to the coronavirus
at the cost of countless deaths. A risk openly taken in order to
guarantee the stability of the British socio-economic fabric.
We could trace back this interaction regime to that form of
randomness that Landowski calls "mathematical probability".
Boris Johnson's initial gamble was in fact based on a calcula-
tion. He took into account both the potential effects of the vi-
rus on the population and its evolutionary curve, and the re-
lated socio-economic consequences. It is therefore on betting
on one scenario rather than another, and therefore on the rela-
tive cost/benefit ratios, that the risk can be assumed and trans-
formed into programming.

However, this would not be possible without a mathemat-
ical modelling which, even starting from the course of previ-
ous epidemics, makes such bets thinkable and minimally cred-
ible. Bruno Latour (2020), writing in "Le Monde", empha-
sised the constitutive role of statistics in this crisis. With his
usual approach, in fact, he argued the virus is constituted as a
pandemic phenomenon precisely through the possibility, now
available, of globally and instantly measuring its trend. At the
same time, it becomes a unitary actor, socially identifiable even
outside the scientific circuits, thanks to the images of the de-
velopment curves and the diffusion graphs which, being re-
launched from media to media, make its existence and its ac-
tion perceptible at a popular level, so much on a global scale
and in a disaggregated way on another scale. We could com-
pare this mathematical modelling related to the virus to the

models used in the financial field to bet on the future. In fact, the financial market has been betting on risk for some time, as in the purchase's case of derivatives or investing in the possibility of occurring natural disasters of various kinds.

In this sense, it should not be surprising that such a bet, this economic-driven idea of managing the virus, this Darwinist logic applied to the coronavirus, is taken into consideration and perhaps even initially applied: in fact, it is part of the libertarian sensibility and conservative forces that most openly embody its spirit.

Unexpectedly, the assumption of this open sensitivity to risk materialised to the maximum degree when Boris Johnson was hospitalised in intensive care because of the coronavirus. In retrospect, this incorporation of risk is plain for all to see as a chain of cause and effect: the individual who had hypothesised collective exposure to the virus has contracted it. Obviously, this narrative reconstruction can result both as ironic retaliation and heroism that put the powerful in touch with ordinary people who fight the virus on the front line: doctors, nurses, volunteers, etc. The virus democratic nature, where we had an elitist if not cynical sensitivity, finds a clear narrative confirmation.

Actually, this single event hides the ambiguity inherent in the very democratising status of the virus. If we are all exposed to the virus, COVID-19 has caused planetary contradictions to explode and made it clear the present small and large social inequalities (Sedda 2020). Think of the studies that in the United States testify the greater incidence of the virus on the poorest African American and Latin minorities compared to the white population (Kendi 2020).

Chaos and chance: the spread of risk in Trump's U.S. and Bolsonaro's Brazil.

What we have called involuntary risks could include the attitudes of Donald Trump's US and Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil, as well as China's at the onset of the crisis. However, the statute of involuntary risk does not relieve governments of re-

sponsibility but if possible emphasises their role. Because some do not take the risk of the virus as real, it causes a condition of uncertainty and herald of further accidents. It could therefore be said that we are facing an involuntary but caused risk. Both Trump and Bolsonaro denying the virus danger, not having put in place a clear containment strategy, took responsibility of having favoured its spread. Let us reiterate it: it is the absence of a programmatic or strategic action, but we could also say a rational action, to make the difference and lead us into the field of the accident logic.

What we must focus on is that this condition of uncertainty does not refer to the spread of the virus among the population, but refers to a broader political-institutional condition. These political actors transfer the sense of uncertainty to which the virus exposes the population to the functioning of society: in doing so, their own conduct becomes "the virus" that causes new semiopolitical incidents.

In Trump's case, the criticism of this (in)action has led to a series of habitual twists, complete with self-congratulatory (and self-contradicting) tweets about his decision-making skills. As Ed Yong wrote:

persuading a country to stay voluntarily at home is difficult, and without clear guidelines from the White House, mayors, governors, and business owners have been forced to take their own steps. […]. In these moments, when the good of all hinges on the sacrifices of many, clear coordination matters […]. We must impress the importance of social distancing upon a public who must also be reassured and informed. Instead, Trump has repeatedly played down the problem, telling America that "we have it very well under control" when we do not, and that cases were "going to be down to close to zero" when they were rising. Sometimes, as with his claims about ubiquitous testing, his misleading gaffes have deepened the crisis. He has even touted unproven medications (Yong 2020).

Even with Bolsonaro we saw a series of cascading accidents. Therefore, not only those relating to the spread of the virus but also to institutional accidents caused by the (non)management of the ongoing pandemic. This multiple ac-

cident is represented icastically by the images of the Brazilian President shaking hands and taking selfies with his supporters under the government building, while several states of the Brazilian Federal Republic had already ordered the stay-at-home of their citizens. Something that has sparked the accusations of scientists ("It's madness. There is no justification for this behavior"; "He is making a dangerous venture…"; "Everything he says and does has an intense impact on people…"; "We need a unitary discourse"; "It's confusing people", in Phillips, Phillips 2020) and the related swarms of online controversy and loud protests from balconies to the sound of battered casseroles: the so-called *panelaços*.

The incident in these cases is presented as a personal action – in open contrast to the choices made by other institutional actors legitimated and determined to follow the directives of the WHO and by the scientific discourse – which generates uncertainty about the individual conduct to keep in front of the virus; or as a political action that generates contradictions between parts of the social body that find themselves deeply divided on the meaning of the virus and on how to deal with it. In both situations, what results is therefore a sense of chaos which re-exposes to chance.

Returning absolutism

If this chaos is politically sustainable, it is only thanks to two assumptions. The first is that the arbitrary changeability of the decisions of these leaders, so strong as to make their actions appear as deliberate provocations, is a fundamental part of that "out of the box" political aesthetic that has favoured their emergence and consensus (Sedda, Demuru 2018, 2019; Landowski 2019). This characterises this political regime, according to a Landowski's clever formula, as absolutism. Or even better, we would say, a "returning absolutism", in which some "princes", however democratically elected, raise the "caprice" to a style of government and as a cause and effect of their own consent. All this creating a continuous state of real or potential accident.

However, this would not have happened if there wasn't the transposition of religious expectation into the political field. Lotman (1980), studying the divine status and erratic behaviour of the tsars, opposed the "entrusting of themselves" to a power that thus gains a "divine" status, to the "contractual" model of the relationship between rulers and the governed that founds a "secular" idea of politics. We will not enter here into the complex hypotheses on the historical, cultural, psychological conditions that can favour the emergence of this relationship. However, it is interesting how the logic of fanatical followers to the point of becoming indistinguishable from bots re-proposes a one-sided devotion in the contemporary world, an almost blind reliance on the rotating "emperor". In Brazil, Marvel Pereira, columnist for the newspaper "O Globo", has even accused Bolsonaro of acting as "a mystical leader leading his followers to collective suicide" (in Phillips, Phillips 2020).

The COVID-19 crisis, as happens for most crises perceived as an "attack from the outside", can revive this dynamic of trust: the immediate consent for President Trump, engaged in an incessant job communication to brand COVID-19 as a "Chinese virus", is growing. This dynamic can easily extend to anyone in the position of guarantor of collective "salvation", as the unexpected forms of falling in love and social following that involved during the crisis the hitherto anodyne figure of the head of the Italian government, Giuseppe Conte, seem to testify.

However, the question remains whether we can envisage a positive political accident. Landowski's recent reflections (2019) seem to leave no room for this possibility. However, it is easy to think of figures of political leaders who have based their charismatic charge on inventiveness and on a style of political action unpredictable, capable of surprising and disconcerting both their adversaries and their followers. An emblematic case is that of Gandhi recalled as a counter-example by commentators on the strategies of Modi and his government before COVID-19 in India. We will return to this when talking about forms of sensitive adjustment before risk and the crisis.

Herds, factions, individuals: forms of chaos

Leaving the more general theoretical considerations open and returning to the semiopolitical management of the coronavirus, we could say that incompetence, indecision and inability to act can also generate the risk and the accident, as perhaps happened in Spain: in these cases, as we will see, we are still in an attempt at manipulation, or in a strategic action that fails. The cases of Great Britain, Brazil and the USA seem something more and different than a failed or ineffective manipulation. In fact, by exposing themselves to risk, they generate not only further semiopolitical incidents but also articulate a specific identity of their governed in a correlated way.

In Great Britain, the choice of action, which emerged while the other states involved in the fight against the virus opted for forms of programming or manipulation, seems to refer to an idea of exceptionality that has been highlighted and also driven by the recent conclusion of the Brexit process. Here too, therefore, a sensitivity – mood and mentality at the same time – seems to be a part in the choice of mode of interaction: however it seems even more deeply to refer to a positional and oppositional logic, to a search for distinction. We will reflect on the name for the resulting collective later. However, it must be said henceforth that in the accident's logic the figures that make the collective thinkable tend more easily to pluralise, coherently with its intimately elusive and polymorphic nature.

In Brazil, the generated chaos seems to treat the collective as a collection of what was defined *Um Paìs de Todos*, a country of all the parts that made it up, during Lula's presidency, became a polarized space, fragmented in a multiple forms and at multiple levels with Bolsonaro (Demuru 2019; Sedda, Demuru 2019). Bolsonaro's actions before the virus seem to confirm and reinforce this paradoxical modelling of the collective, united above all by its conflicting disunity. We cannot rule it out that Bolsonaro, at least initially, wanted to indulge that every day, widespread sensibility which makes contact and knowing how to get by in life a basic motif of the Brazilian way of life (Demuru 2014). A *savoir vivre* even in the most dif-

ficult conditions that generates a sense of excitement for free-
dom and aestheticisation of everyday life thus making it plau-
sible if not popular to let things go well by themselves, per-
haps under divine protection, as witnessed by the evangelical
gatherings that while they transgressed every distancing rule
made prayer an instrument of salvation from the virus.

In the United States, Trump's form of the collective seems
to refer, even more than to a social body fragmented accord-
ing to partisan logic, to an idea of society formed by a series of
individuals free to determine how to protect themselves. It is
too easy to corroborate this approach by recalling the images
of Americans lining up in front of arms sales, even more than
in front of supermarkets, as fear of the virus increases. Alt-
hough these Brazilian and American examples are partial and
trivial, they refer to a strength of stereotypes; to their ability to
condense widespread ideologies and lifestyles, which in crisis
conditions can be politically activated or can offer support to
certain lines of conduct. Relying on the divine or on the
strength of arms are related to the investment in risk. Or even
more precisely, if you pass the term, an involuntary incitement
to risk: taking risks believing you are protecting yourself.

The cases of Great Britain, Brazil and the USA show us
that where the logic of risk takes over, individuality becomes a
dominant feature. Except that when it is brought back to a
programmatic dimension, it takes on a totalising form while
where it supports the logic of risk it takes on a fragmenting
one. We could therefore say that with Great Britain we are
dealing with a holistic individualism, while with the United
States and Brazil we are before a partitive individualism. As
for the actors, in Great Britain, this dynamic results in the os-
cillation between the image of the empire, a figure nostalgical-
ly dusted off in the debate on British exceptionalism and its
planetary role, and the more prosaic and perhaps more correct
image of the herd, an indistinct mass ready to follow its shep-
herd, always according to stereotype, since those with an agro-
pastoral culture (or at least those who saw the British cartoon
Shaun the sheep) would disavow the idea. In the other two
cases, we face the Brazilian factions and US individuals: forms
of a party that exacerbating the social conflict, fearing a return

to the state of anarchy, makes the figure of a Leviathan leader even more indispensable.

This is not paradoxical given that if chaos has been semiotically associated with a tendentially amorphous mass, such as that of the flock, it has a lesser-noted counterpart in extreme, conflicting individualisation, non-communicating, as we have shown in our semiopolitical analysis of Primo Levi's description of the concentration camp (Sedda 2012).

Denial and vagueness

As already stated, "individualistic" figures dominate the logic of the accident. However, what seems most relevant is that their response in front of the virus caused the chaotic-incidental dimension, even more than the sudden entry of the virus into the various semiospheres: a response that when it was not absent, it was vague or wavering, anyway.

Last, think of Trump's recent intentions to reopen the US without even having respected a real lockdown and while the country had the highest number of infections in the world. The Trumpian attitude on COVID-19 rhymes in depth with what the US president held regarding the climate emergency: a substantial denial nurtured, at moments, by disorienting twists and turns that appeared to the most instrumental. The crisis induced by COVID-19 has also highlighted the choices made by Trump in health matters: his administration closed the pandemic preparedness office, which was part of the national security council in 2018.

When the virus arrived in the USA, the most surprising fact was not the pandemic itself, but the inability of the most advanced country in the world to implement the most basic answers: "that a biomedical powerhouse like the U.S. should so thoroughly fail to create a very simple diagnostic test was, literally, unimaginable" (Yong 2020: 20). Or, to quote Alexandra Phelan of Georgetown University: "I'm not aware of any simulations that I or others have run where we [considered] a failure of testing" (in Yong 2020: 20).

Hence that chain of errors, to say it with Yong, and therefore the cascading chaos, that caused the unpredictability, we mentioned earlier.

Was it therefore a negative serendipity, the reverse of the positive South Korean one? Or a chaos politically induced by the denier choices of Trump and his administration?

This is not the place to respond. Hypothesising or proving a correlation between Trump's choices and the coronavirus crisis in the USA – at the moment the place with the most infected in the world (451,491 as of April 10, compared to 152,446 in Spain and 143,446 in Italy) – does not imply, at least in the short term, a loss of credibility and consent of the current president in the eyes of his constituents, his "followers".

What seems useful here is to take advantage of this case to reflect even more in depth on the dynamics of unpredictability. This enables us to continue the analogy with climate change: in this latter case, in fact, what scares us is not so much that the weather changes or that atmospheric catastrophes can occur but more subtly the fact that there is no (more) a recognisable rhythm in its transformations. We hadn't had time to get used to the idea that "there are no middle seasons" that today in one day, every day, every season can happen. Is that so? Probably not, but the perception that events are lacking in predictability – that predictability that makes them manageable cognitively, emotionally, practically – gives us a sense of constant accident. The same is true of the turbulent instabilities of political (and geopolitical) spheres exploded since the end of the order created by the Cold War (Rosenau 1990). However, nothing if compared with the erratic attitudes of some major current leaders, such as Trump or Bolsonaro, made even more clear by the COVID-19 incident: the more their action and communication creates or transmits a feeling of underlying instability the more the unpredictability becomes a constant presence and a major player in the lives of their citizens and the planet.

THE PEOPLE TO MOTIVATE OR MOBILISE: THE MANIPULATIONS OF ITALY AND GERMANY

Another way of dealing with the virus is manipulation. Landowski explained it as a strategic action based on a comparison between subjectivities, both moved by an intentional-motivational dimension. This happens in most of the democratic states and to which the countries that initially had supported the logic of risk have aimed. Not being able or unwilling to implement pure repressive or technocratic measures, failing to sustain a situation of initial openness to the incident, these states rely on convincing people to respect a series of rules of self-segregation, distancing, cleanliness.

We have made Italy, now we must make Italians

The enormous amount of communicative and legislative action developed *ad hoc* in Italy to inculcate rules shows the importance of the ability of the state to convince its citizens to act. Moreover, it appears as a reply to everyday collective self-description: Italians are hostile to rules in general, and are not willing to renounce to their convivial lifestyle, neither in front of risk. One should remember that the Italian government during Easter alone imposed 13,000 sanctions for breaking the new rules, data reported by Sebastiano Messina in "La Repubblica" on April 14, while in New Zealand, on whose civility we will return, on April 8 only 45 people were fined (see Artiaco 2020). From this strain between manipulation and sensitivity results the slight entity of the penalties for offenders and the willingness to open up to a regime of adaptation (including regulatory) to the dominant habits: all these led to the bureaucratic chaos of the so-called "self-certifications" and therefore in the generation of new tensions, new uncertainties, new forms of randomness.

The manipulative strategy rather than addressing the virus is based here on a simulacra game between rulers and ruled: the latter in fact becomes the target of a communication, initially institutional and gradually more and more self-produced

by newspapers, companies, individuals, which aim to mobilise them. To do so, it puts them into a simulacral game as a subjectivity endowed with intentionality and unitary will. What results is an emphasis of the people, which can be charged with nationalistic values, as in the initial solicitation of the Italians against "the Chinese", and patriotic, as in the subsequent emphasis on the civic virtues of the Italians, from which the choral applause for the health personnel, the shared song from balcony to balcony, screen to screen, is the visible aspect.

The very recent tweet of one of the main signatures of the newspaper "La Repubblica", Luca Bottura, is a synthetic testimony of how much these logics have been pushed to excess: "Whoever broke his balls of motivational advertising on Italian pride, retweet or put a heart # COVID-19" (08/04/2020), which has got over 6000 likes in a few hours. Bottura's always ironic tone does not reduce the sensation of a strategy that has become blatant. Especially since Bottura himself, with all the other signatures of "La Repubblica", had taken part during the crisis in stimulating Italian patriotism, for example through the special *Now it's up to us – The moment of unity*.

We should not forget that within the same state the manipulative logic can be refracted at different levels and therefore can bring to evidence the internal tensions between those parts of the collective which, for ideological or territorial, historical or contingent reasons, feel themselves to be depositories of a will of their own and which therefore can establish themselves in interaction as a people within the people or as another people. The bitter conflict between the central state and the Lombardy Region (but also with the Veneto Region) is symptomatic in this sense. It is not just a question of gaze and analytical scale but of the fact that crises put to the test the "voluntary" ties that make up the Nation-State, even where the presence of a collective will may appear to be given and established.

A distributed will: Germany (and New Zealand)

In this sense, the case of Germany is interesting, since the state has recommended a series of restrictions which are the responsibility of the 16 different *Länder*, the states that make up the Federal Republic, with their 400 public health institutions. This gave rise to sometimes conflicting solutions, as that while in Berlin you could still buy a book in the bookstore, you could no longer have picnics in the parks, while in Baden-Württemberg the rule was exactly the opposite. Although initially stigmatised from the outside as pachydermic or anarchic, the German situation not only did not cause a proliferation of the pandemic incident but proved in the medium term to solicit a peculiar form of resilience in which the complexity caused by the incident was answered by setting in motion an equally complex and varied system of responses.

The German case is interesting for our discussion because it has a double soul. On the one hand, it solicits the imagination of a strongly organised body, precisely because it is decentralised, and disciplined, as it is moved by a will that, like a waterfall, becomes reality and effective. In this sense, it appears as the realisation of a civic idea of the people, in which this should not be produced by flattering it, offering it *ad hoc* a positive simulacrum to comply with, flanked by the opposite simulacrum of the sanctions that would otherwise ensue (the Italian nationalist dynamic "Stick and carrot"); rather it appears as a "people" precisely because a successful interaction between a collective will and a distributed will is valid, between a government that sovereignly recommends and the governed who freely assume and give substance to that will: a paradox work of mutual motivation that the emergency enhances but does not create. This places Germany in a strongly institutionalised model of reciprocal adjustment. Or if you prefer an adjustment model between institutional sensitivities.

In the wake of Germany we could usefully place the case of New Zealand, praised by the "Washington Post", which spoke of a success based on a strategy not of containment but of elimination of the virus allowed by combining science and leadership. The oceanic state led by the young leader Jacinda

Ardern has in fact exploited its condition of insularity to lock up the country and promptly impose the restrictive measures recommended by scientists. Widespread civility and bipartisan collaboration between the progressive majority and the conservative opposition made these measures effective. The example set by the ruling class has made the harsh measures taken even more credible. The same Minister of Health, David Clark, one of the few people caught violating the lockdown, immediately resigned and made a public amends by declaring he was "an idiot"; behaviour that earned him the rejection of the resignation.

The primacy of the state and that of citizenship

The manipulative regime reaffirms the primacy of statist politics, its ability to mobilise and guide the collectives by soliciting their nationalism or patriotism, making use of the institutional organisation of the will, enhancing the authority and consensus around a government or leadership. It is not always the same manipulation, but to some extent what is always at stake is a will in action of which the state is the decisive hub.

With adjustment, which we will analyse in conclusion, it is the citizenship's sensitivity, arisen in the cases just mentioned, to become even more central. As if in the transition from manipulation to adjustment, the centre of gravity shifts from the rulers to the ruled. However, a clear distinction is hard to draw. Perhaps what really distinguishes the two regimes is that in the second the relationship between rulers and governed appears more dialectical and based on the premise of a complex relationship of mutual trust. Despite a relationship of interdependence, the so-called civil society becomes an autonomous actor, endowed with a sensitivity that cannot only be stimulated, but itself acts as a stimulus to the state choices. It is also the controller of these choices, as Harari suggested.

We will now see how difficult this latter scenario is to achieve, especially in an unexpected crisis such as that induced by COVID-19, but also how necessary it is to think about it and perhaps even set it as a horizon to pursue.

Enhancing sensitivity: Greece, India, Sweden

Adjustment is an equal relationship, in which two sensitivities are realised by exploring each other's potentials together. Its transition from inter-bodily relationships such as dance, a classic example in Landowski's model, to politics risks to make it a "utopian" regime. How can we think of a government that changes and grows according to the transformation of its governed sensitivity? And how to think of such an adjustment before the accident, when a radical contingency stimulates the sensitivities? We saw how the theme of sensitivity gains gradual access into all other regimes. To get to the core of the matter, we will first consider the particular case of Greece, which also shows us the further complication of the interactions with the progress of the crisis. Finally, we will see two cases, that of India and of Sweden, which allow us to explore paradoxes and peculiarities of the adjustment.

Greece in the wake of Italy: adjustment as analog modelling?

The Italian incidents that we have previously analysed give us the opportunity to think about Greece, which, because of the connections it establishes, allows us to reflect on the link between contagion and adjustment while showing how the advance of the crisis further shifts the focus of relations: to the threesome between virus, state and collective we can add the interaction between states and collectives, both in the form of a gaze that a state turns to other states to decide what to do and for how a collective mirroring itself in other collectives shapes its moods, expectations and behaviour.

According to some analysts, the Greek manipulative policies, similar to those of Italy, were implemented according to a sensitive modelling. Filippos Filippidis, a researcher at Imperial College London, noted on the "Greek Reporter" website:

Greece was lucky because the Italian drama is taking place in a country which is close and familiar and feels quite similar to Greece. China suffered earlier, but few countries in Europe took it seriously,

maybe because China was "too far away" and "too different." When the outbreak started in Italy, Greek authorities understood the severity of the threat and were quick to act – in many aspects, faster than most European countries (Filippidis, in Kokkinidis 2020).

Greece, with its convivial lifestyle so similar to that of Italy, have found in the Italian events, in the "history in progress" in Italy, the element on which to model itself. Both countries, indeed, are used to bodies in contact, frequenting public spaces and this makes potentially difficult to manage with distancing. This example of modelling was effective not only for a cognitive understanding of its value but for a deeper consonance, a *con-sentiment* capable of generating *con-sensus* around otherwise unpopular measures.

The Greek manipulations were effective thanks to the possibility of exploiting the anticipation of the crisis: a random factor which raises in many scientists the search for causal factors currently unknown that determine the temporality, intensity and forms of circulation of the virus which, as the biologist Siddhartha Mukherjee (2020: 25) recalled, can only be obtained "by measuring the virus inside people". A fact that renews, albeit under the aegis of science, the tensions between the privacy of bodies and the need for their control. However, according to the reconstruction we have seen, the Greek manipulations find a trigger and legitimacy in the "natural" tuning of a collective to another experience.

This naturalness refers, on a superficial level, to the mechanism of the *narrative metaphor* that makes the history of some the effective parable for the others; in depth it instead calls into question a non-verbal, non-representational analogical reasoning (Fabbri 1998; Pezzini 2001; Marrone 2001), which allows us to grasp the structure that governs this (mediated) game between sensitivities: this analogy sounds as: "if we are similar and they have had to close everything then we should also close (despite this goes against our sensitivity and at the moment it does not seem necessary to do so)".

Greece reflecting in the experience of Italy therefore allows us to think how much and how in the moment of risk many choices regarding the mode of action (or a certain level of choice) occur through an analog modelling, which some

could also define unconscious: a social body adjusts itself to another, finding in the fabric of stereotypes, images, stories, experiences of others, in the profound correlation with them, the effective way to redefine its own sensitivity.

There is, however, one aspect to underline: Greece can change without this changing Italy. This therefore appears to be more one-way influence rather than a reciprocal adjustment: a contagion in the strict sense rather than a contagion in the semiotic sense. So, let us analyse other cases that can bring us closer to the semiotic idea of adjustment.

Adjustment as compassion: Modi's India in Gandhi's mirror

Adjustment in politics, or a basic dimension of it, might be glimpsed in a missed adjustment. This is the case of India where Modi government imposed a sweeping lockdown, giving Indians less than four hours' notice before the order took effect, thus triggering mass flight of commuter workers from the cities to the countryside and hurting millions of poor people who have been left jobless and hungry. What some observers have reproached the Hindu nationalist government was the lack of compassion, a moral, individual category which presupposes not only the ability to understand other people's feelings but also to expect their development because of one's actions:

India could learn well from countries like South Korea and Taiwan which combatted the virus without national lockdowns. We must consider a roll-back. The state is bereft of public compassion, the capacity and the will to stand equally with us all, rich and poor. There is no better time to recall the talisman Mahatma Gandhi left for us. When in doubt and confusion, he counselled, think of the most vulnerable person you know, and ask if the measures will improve her life and freedom (Mander 2020).

It is not a case that this concept of a state capable of moral feelings and to foresee, or rather to pre-feel, emerges so explicitly in the Indian context and in connection with the figure of Gandhi who attributed to the individuality of the state the

same moral characteristics as personal individuality. Within this context, a programming that exposes so brutally the images of fleeing or starving bodies, calls into question the (in)sensitivity of the state and its choices, grasping the possibility of a politics that must know how to change itself because of a popular feeling that is at the same time imagined, shared and ever changing.

It may be useful to note, extracting another fragment from the mass of positions triggered by the coronavirus crisis, that also Barack Obama called into question the category of compassion in a speech addressed to local US administrators. The phrase that went around the world – "Speak the truth. Speak it clearly. Speak it with compassion. Speak it with empathy for what folks are going through" – seems to underline an approach to the crisis in which the rulers must know how to change their attitude in relation to the feelings of the people in order to achieve shared goals. The political body and the body of citizenship would thus find themselves involved in a work of mutual adjustment.

This compassion is the cause and effect of a truthful, clear, undistorted speech ("the biggest mistake any of us can make in these situations is to misinform") on the crisis itself. If this statement plays to overturn the traits of Trump's false, vague, distorting position, at the same time it seems to point out that only entering an interaction of sensitive adjustment can open up to other regimes, such as the manipulative one.

As we will see shortly, the adjustment in politics seems to correlate within the political discourse not only with the theme of compassion but also with that of mutual trust. To understand this, let us go back once again to the actions of the Indian government in front of the virus and its own community. Arundhati Roy described its form and meaning: "Modi's methods definitely give the impression that India's prime minister thinks of citizens as a hostile force that needs to be ambushed, taken by surprise, but never trusted" (Roy 2020: 18).

Here, in negative, the qualities that make an adjustment. And we also see how political conduct unable to enter an adjustment regime seems to pay off with an investment in random interaction. This brings us back to Trump and Bolso-

naro's erratic behaviour, but it also opens up a theoretical question of no small importance.

Adjustment and randomness: difference or complementarity?

According to the Landowskian model, the adjustment and the risk are in a relationship of complementarity, while these reflections seem to place them in a relationship of contradiction.

A first explanation of this optical effect is that critics, such as Roy and Mander with India, often see this uncertainty as the result of programming. We will see it better at the end of this essay, when, coming to speak of the complex positions offered by the model, we will situate the Indian case (but it is also valid for Trump and Bolsonaro) in risk planning, of its calculated chaotic-incidental exploitation. From this point of view, the sensitive adjustment proposed by its critical observers appears as an attempt to contradict this logic which is superficially random but which would be programmed more deeply.

Second, we should note it that, under a certain aspect and albeit differently, the interactive regimes of empowerment and confusion reveal a space of complementarity given by osmosis, if not a certain reversibility, between rulers and governed. The logic of mutual trust, which we will see exalted in the following case, and that of confusing entrustment, although in our analysis they appear clearly disjointed from another point of view, and in other cases, could result to some extent in continuity. Of course, we can easily say that confusion is only a fiction of osmosis that reinforces the absolutist power of the leader, or that the mutual trust inherent in empowerment does not really close the gap between the ruled and the rulers. However, if we think how in the control forms power is given as a completely separate sphere or in the motivation the action starts resolutely from the rulers, then the approximation or overlapping between rulers and ruled - which from the dialogism of empowerment can go as far as to the mystical unity of confusion - can be more perceptible and plausible, at least as

an effect of meaning produced through the different discur-
sive practices.

Third, the theme of individuality, which in the cases ana-
lysed tends to forms of sclerotic and conflictual isolation, in
other respects and in other cases is instead at the basis of the
very idea of responsibility: the active citizen, as informed, au-
tonomous, responsible for his/her choices and for this reason
really the holder of some power and participant in the trans-
formative processes of the collective, is a classic that does not
need further study here.

As seen, therefore, even a quick examination shows how
the disjunctive space here between adjustment and random-
ness could be occupied conjunctively elsewhere.

Resuming positively the theme of adjustment, we will now
see an example that leads us to think of citizenship as a force
endowed with its own responsible, dialogical autonomy, capa-
ble of founding an adjustment regime with the government,
with those who temporarily occupy its position. Or, as we will
say, of co-citizenship.

Adjustment as a growth in shared responsibility: Sweden

One might think the only state actor who actually and
voluntarily made an adjustment when the virus arrived is Swe-
den: the state, in fact, intervened by leaving almost all social
activities open but recommending a certain prudential behav-
iour to people. What is interesting is that this choice was made
and confirmed not only based on a series of scientific opin-
ions: it stems from an anti-quarantine cultural tradition and a
shared social sensitivity, which informs the field of proxemics
between individuals, the normal management of public space,
intergenerational relations and between city and countryside,
as well as the different conception of the risk/benefit ratio that
underpins the common sense (secular, if not atheist) of most
of the Swedish population (see Modeo 2020). From here, from
this assumption of a sensitivity to which political-health choic-
es are to be conformed, a strategy is developed based on "pro-
gressive adjustments" between the needs of health and those

of the country's socio-economic stability, to be brought down once again from the situational reaction to contingencies.

Of course, a doubt could start and the objection could be that a pure reactive sensitivity is at stake here, and therefore that leveraging an attested collective sensitivity is nothing more than a more subtle form of programming. We cannot exclude it, and this brings us back to the fact that every regime of meaning is inhabited by contradictory tensions that push it towards other regimes.

It is therefore worth returning to the initial question: in what terms can one think of a government that changes and grows because of the transformation of the sensitivity of its governed? Some say that this utopia is exactly that which is condensed in the populist call to direct democracy, to the possibility that rulers and governed are in continuous transformative symbiosis. Landowski (2019) has rightly criticised the possibility that this is a true "adjustment", just as we had shown that the translation into practice of this model makes the decision-making process of politics impossible (Sedda 2014a). The populist adjustment therefore seems to be reduced either to a "rhetoric", an instrumental appeal to the feeling of the people who falls within the manipulative regimes, or to its programming, perhaps supported by the algorithmic reading of online trends and therefore by the possibility of "tuning in" on collective moods (Sedda, Demuru 2018, 2019, 2020).

Taking the reasoning to its extreme consequences, we should laically note that the interaction between rulers and ruled implemented by social networks allow a continuous adjustment of mutual sensitivity, in which the distinction between who influences and who is influenced is basically indiscernible. One can complain that today this new dynamic comes across as opaque in its profound modalities; that more than a relationship between sensibilities, it appears as a contagion between moods; and, above all, that the "potential" that this adjustment achieves is often "negative" and "destructive". Also, with COVID-19, for example, the relationship between networks and politics, between fake news, swarms of opinions, political actions, has favoured anti-Chinese prejudices or anti-solidarity and anti-European chauvinisms. Is there therefore

no room for a positive adjustment in the political field? The growth of collective responsibilities and capacities, connected to the capacity for political innovation and the turnover of the ruling class, could provide a positive counterbalance that, although it remains more theoretical than practical, still finds in the Scandinavian countries some possibilities of exemplification, also strengthened by the rate of individual happiness and appreciation for politics which is constantly measured in places like Sweden or Denmark.

All this considered – therefore without underestimating the imperfections and contradictions that also inhabit the Scandinavian context – Sweden can legitimately appear as a case of adjustment, nourished in particular by the mutual trust between rulers and the governed that establishes the possibility that the crisis leads to exalt civic and political potential, capacity for delegation and reciprocal innovation, increasingly developed forms of growth at the same time interdependent and autonomous between government and governed, rather than collapsing the country under the weight of the unexpected and the emergency.

ORIENT YOURSELF IN COMPLEXITY

Dynamics in progress and semiopolitical compasses

What we have just said does not, of course, exclude that Sweden can move from the field of adjustment to that of manipulation (but wouldn't this also be, in that context, a sign of adjustment?), just as in Italy the government is already thinking of an adjustment strategy to allow for a partial reopening of assets. Similarly, we have seen how certain countries can take advantage of the crisis to move from manipulative situations to programmatic ones, as with Hungary, raising the well-founded suspicion that such planning aims much more than health security at the full establishment of authoritarian policies *tout-court*. Finally, it is not unthinkable that certain states could fall back, by choice or by inability, into a chaotic situation, in which the logic of the accident takes over. The fear

that arises every time there is a suspect that reopening of the activities could trigger "second waves" of the virus refers to this unpredictability: that is the impossibility of predicting the recurrence or not of that unexpected situation that gave life to the crisis.

This allows us to reiterate that the four major modes we have used to describe the field of interactions triggered by the virus should not be understood as fixed identities but as relative positions, polarities that guide choices and movements, like cardinal points on a compass. However, these modalities not only follow one another but, as we have seen, they coexist and stratify, defining hierarchies, or local articulations, or composing an architecture in which one modality is used to support the others.

Risk responses

Having said this, let us try to draw a summary picture. Or rather, to give shape to our compass.

First, we saw how there are four ways of dealing with risk. Let us put them in line, starting from the attitude that maximises the risk.

The most risky choice is what we can define "denial" or "negation" and which with various degrees and forms we have seen in action in the choices of Bolsonaro and Trump: denying the risk, letting chance, the accident, represented by the virus, can cause further uncertainty, so much at the health level and at the social level.

The second choice is what we can define "coexistence": a regime that opens up to adjustment between the human actors and the non-human actor represented by the virus, which we have seen practiced in Sweden. The virus therefore appears as a force whose presence is not totally incompatible with that other force represented by the socio-economic life of the country. This second force must be able to modulate itself in correlation with the risky presence of the virus.

The third choice, practiced for example in Italy, overturns this set of forces. We could call it "containment". The virus is

a presence but the risk of its circulation must be contained by sacrificing the strength of socio-economic life, the so-called "normality". The blocking of most economic activities and the confinement of the bodies in their own homes become the way to minimise the risk without thinking of eliminating it, since the containment aims rather to "take time", as they say, mainly in view of the identification of a vaccine.

The fourth mode of action could be called "elimination". The attitude aims to eliminate completely the risk, even at the cost, as we have seen when talking about China, of sacrificing minimum and basic freedoms, such as the intangibility of one's body, the expression of dissent, the confidentiality of one's vital data. While this response method can under certain conditions maximise security regarding the risk represented by the virus, it puts at risk other values that in the democratic sphere are considered fundamental even during crisis.

Ways of interaction between rulers and governed

To these four forms of response to the risk represented by the virus correspond four ways of interaction between rulers and ruled.

With elimination, the form of interaction is "control", i.e. the treatment of the governed as an indistinct totality and a passive object on which to operate in order to better manage the risk, whatever the cost.

With containment we can speak of "motivation"[6]: the government and institutions produce a series of actions – legislative, communicative, etc. – to convince citizens to do something they would otherwise probably not do.

With coexistence, the mode of interaction can be defined as "empowerment": the rulers rely more on recommendations than on orders, they trust on the ability of the governed to act autonomously and responsibly, including those very particular governed who are the actors locally delegated to exercise power and take decisions (such as states within federal republics or regions or public health institutes etc.).

With denial, the form of the interaction is "confusion", a term that deserves a further explanation. On the one hand, it emphasises one effect that emerges from the negation of risk: the negationist positions are in fact vague and wavering positions, which contradict themselves, hence the confusing effect that they instil in people regarding the responses to be given to risk. A confusion that is also strengthened when, in a democratic and interconnected society, people through the channels of communication perceive credible alternatives of choice regarding those showed by the holders of power. However, more deeply, confusion seems to us to show the tendency of "denier" rulers to create a relationship of *con-fusion* between themselves and their governed (or at least a part of them). Generation of a trust that makes the leader – which not by chance here more than elsewhere are installed on the social scene as a proper name ("Trump's America", "Bolsonaro's Brazil" etc.) and as exposed corporality (Demuru, Sedda 2020) – the mirror of moods and collective expectations. Confusion is therefore as much a desired and sought-after modality of interaction as the paradoxical effect of this interaction which, by denying the risk, maximises it.

Figures of the collective

We now come to the figures of the collective that result from these different ways of responding to risk and building the relationship between rulers and ruled.

With elimination-control we are dealing with a collective treated as a "population". They are seen as a naked corporeality, an indistinct totality which therefore is treated "numerically", stripping the bodies of any individuality (think to the contrast regarding the anonymity of the dead, to their reduction to numbers, developed in the public opinion of democratic states).

With containment-motivation, the collective is established as a "people", or as a subject endowed with a unitary will to be activated, also through the seduction to correspond to a

positive self-image projected through institutional and non-institutional discursive practices.

With the coexistence-empowerment link we have "citizenship", on which it is necessary to spend a few more words. Through the distinction between people and citizenship, in fact, following Benveniste (1969: 258-259), we aim not only to underline the difference between *demos* and *civitas*, or rather between a totality that is compact (and therefore more static) and a widespread one (and therefore more dynamic), but above all to translate *civis* not as a "citizen" but more exactly as a "fellow citizen". This Benvenistian interpretation emphasises within the *civitas* the dimension of reciprocity, or rather of a collective fruit of a *joint participation* that is both empowering and emotionally marked (see Benveniste and the connection he establishes with the Sanskrit root *śeva-* and the Greek word *philos*, both linked to feeling and the ideal of friendship). For these reasons, citizenship – but it would be better to say co-citizenship – seems to refer to that sensitive dimension of the adjustment. It can therefore be said that if the *demos* is the bearer of a will, however passionate, the *civitas* is the bearer of a sensitivity, however consciously assumed.

With the denial-confusion connection, we can speak of the emergence of the figure of "individuality". This term, as we have already seen, refers in particular to the collective as a collection of elements in conflict, not communicating, separate, as such harbingers of an exponentially risky condition, both regarding the virus and the relationship of the governed with power, as well as still in the internal relations of the collective itself.

Complex issues

That the semiopolitical field can orient itself according to these polarities does not prevent winds from the south-east and passages to the north-west. Or that one can and must think of complex positions.

Let us concentrate on two areas and a few examples: the one that combines programming and accident, on the one

hand, and the one that mixes manipulation and adjustment, on the other.

Through the events of Great Britain we have seen how we can imagine a planned risk (which according to some recent revelations seems to be Trump's hypothesis too): to take a risk as the axis of its strategy, justifying it within a specific chain of actions/passions. To summarise in our own words, "many people will die, we will cry for our loved ones, but we will come out sooner and we will not sacrifice our society and our economy".

However, we could also talk about risk planning. This is a slippery position because it refers to all conspiracy narratives about some planning and targeted spread of the virus. However, hypotheses about the instrumental use that a government can make of the presence of the virus in the collective sense also fall into this field. Arundhati Roy (2020), for example, has openly denounced the government of Narendra Modi of having exploited the virus, including through media and foundations controlled by him, for enrichment, of strengthening one's narcissistic leadership, and to deepen anti-Muslims prejudices within India on whom he largely bases his consensus:

the economic crisis is here. The political crisis is ongoing. The mainstream media has incorporated the Covid story into its 24/7 toxic anti-Muslim campaign. An organisation called the Tablighi Jamaat, which held a meeting in Delhi before the lockdown was announced, has turned out to be a "super spreader". That is being used to stigmatise and demonise Muslims. The overall tone [of this narrative] suggests that Muslims invented the virus and have deliberately spread it as a form of jihad (Roy 2020: 20).

This, like many other examples, reminds us that the virus and the risk it represents can become a tool within an action planned for other purposes.

We have seen that there can be crossovers between programming (control) and manipulation (motivation), as with South Korea and other countries which, while operating a strong technological control, have informed and motivate their citizens. At this moment it is more difficult to find a position that assumes both adjustment and uncertainty, precisely be-

cause the analyses conducted so far have led us to associate
the former with a sense of responsibility and the latter with a
sense of confusion. However, models are also useful when
they leave empty positions, which can help us see in what
happens before us nuanced, ambiguous, paradoxical, original
phenomena that are less easy to grasp.

Finally, it seems useful to recall the complex position that
brings together motivation and adjustment. A good example
of this is the speech given on April 11 by German President
Frank-Walter Steinmeier, which was widely circulated for its
contrast to the abused metaphor of "being at war" and the
contextual appeal to European and international solidarity:

I ask you all [Germans] for your continued trust – because
those in government at Federal and *Länder* level are aware of their
tremendous responsibility. But what exactly lies ahead, or when and
how restrictions can be eased – these things are not up to politicians
and experts alone. Rather, this will be determined by us all, by our
patience and our discipline – especially now, when this is most chal-
lenging for us. The great feat that we are accomplishing these days is
succeeding not because we are being forced by an iron hand – but
because we are a thriving democracy, with responsible citizens. A
democracy in which we trust one another to listen to facts and ar-
guments, to be wise and do the right thing. A democracy in which
every life counts, and in which everyone is making a difference: as a
nurse or the Federal Chancellor, as a committee of scientists or a vis-
ible or invisible pillar of our society – sitting at a supermarket cash
register, or at the wheel of a bus or a lorry; working in a bakery, on a
farm, or in rubbish collection. So many of you are going above and
beyond – thank you for that. Of course, I know that we all yearn to
return to normality. But what exactly does that mean? Getting back
as soon as possible to our old routine and habits? No, the world that
lies ahead will be different. What will it look like? That is up to us.
Let us learn from everything – the good and the bad – that all of us
are experiencing day by day in this crisis.

In this long passage, an obvious strategy of motivation re-
turns but also the call to accountability, mutual trust and the
ability to change, rulers and governed, through the crisis, in
some way "thanks" to it.

It seems to us a good example, among many, of how a "motivated sensitivity" and a "sensitive motivation" can cross each other and the risk can become not only an enemy to be denied or defeated but a presence through which to rethink the many relationships that have marked the present and call everyone to produce new ones. A test bed for humanity.

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NOTES

[1] The meaning of the Italian word *inglobamento*, that easily convey the idea of a globality that becomes local in the moment it is encapsulated in another globality, is only partially rendered by words like incorporation, inclusion, embedding. The same apply to the related category *inglobante/inglobato*, that plays a key role in our argumentation.

[2] For our point of view on the matter see Sedda 2005, 2012, 2014b, 2015 where we defined and nurture our position on the matter through a comparison with Lotman, Robertson, Appadurai and Clifford among others.

[3] It is the case of the Slovenian writer Boris Pahor who is now 106 and who, when he was 5, lost his sister Mimica precisely because of the "Spanish" (Pahor 2020).

[4] On the foundations of the *semiotic square* as a tool to articulate meaning's relations, see Greimas 1987.

[5] The following analysis is based on multiple viewings and readings induced by the time of crisis. Only few of these will be overtly recalled in the text.

[6] In this case with could have also spoken of "mobilization". Yet the idea of "motivation" seems to us more coherent with the activation of the will necessary to convince people to stay at home.

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