DOES GLOCAL POLITICAL POWER ALREADY EXIST?

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Abstract: Large periods of history are usually characterized by equally important moments of change in scientific knowledge and, in particular, in the understanding of political power. We still need to study in depth whether the former provokes (almost of out necessity) the latter, or whether they are "great" because they are favored by the innovation of the paradigms of knowledge. The passage from medieval universalism to the particularism of the modern age represents an extremely interesting analogy when compared to the transformations that are now underway. The example of John of Salisbury's *Policratus,* the starting point of this article, is illuminating in our comprehension of the relevance of the interweaving between the persistence of the ancient forms of recognition of power and the search for new forms. The existence of *glocal* realities is already a fact. Even if it is relatively easy to recognize these realities (a business, a university, a humanitarian association, not a few of the same "parts" which constitute the traditional organization of the State), it is more difficult to define the specific characteristics of the power at their disposal. Moving from the widening gap between "actual" power and "potential" power, the article examines the motives for which the classical definitions of power are always becoming more insufficient in understanding the role now emerging from *glocal* realities. And, in particular, by looking at how the "command-obedience" relationship is changing also as a consequence of communication networks and information technology, the article analyzes that specific "contamination" within *global* elements and *local* elements, which seems to be the main base of *glocal* political power.

Keywords: global-local, power, command-obedience, legitimization, territoriality.

FROM ONE POLITICAL ORDER TO ANOTHER: ROLE AND TIME OF THE UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICS

The *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury's systematic work of political doctrine, came to light in 1159. The *Entheticus in Policraticum*, a composition of 306 verses in elegiac meter – namely, a list of recommendations addressed to government officials – serves as an introduction to the eight volumes of the work that the author dedicates to Thomas Becket. Interwoven with *exempla* and with abundant references to both historical and philosophical sources from antiquity (so as to incorporate – unique among medieval books – the pseudo-Plutarchian text *Institutio Traiani*), the *Policraticus* is an admirable model of political precepts. At the same time, it is also a solidly constructed body of thought, that without much hesitation could

be considered today to fully belong, if not to political "science" then at least to political "theory". Not by chance, its capacity to influence political concepts and convictions endures until the threshold of humanism.

The fortune of John of Salisbury's work (or the principle motive for it still being remembered not offhandedly in manuals of the history of political thought), however, owes itself above all to the particular "conjuncture" in which the work was completed and was to become known. Inasmuch a "system" of theory and political precepts, the *Policraticus* seems to place itself on the ridge between the medieval cosmos, which is more or less rapidly dissolving, and a "new" age that in a few centuries will start to refer to itself as "modern". About the medieval age, it describes, explains and justifies the constellation of ideas relative to "power", "government", "people" and "political body" – the "obedience" of many, the "command" of a few or of one only, the legitimacy of tyrannicide – almost as if the medieval political order still constituted of a logically coherent and essentially long lasting "system". About the modern era, it fails to or rather it cannot help forewarning – on the basis of various still unclear signals, of recently born experiences and practices and almost never illustratable without falling into approximation – the indistinct power with which "modernity" claims to be not only the transformation of a declining era, but rather a new age, an age already changed and renewed.

In *Policraticus* as well as in his other works – it is worthwhile to add – John of Salisbury anticipated the typically "modern" tendency to consider religious faith independently from rational or scientific foundations. Compared to the already announced "new" age, *Policraticus* seems therefore to be a surprising anachronism. It is, however, much less, or not at all, whenever difficulty is seen to surface from its pages (or perhaps even the impossibility) of "identifying" power and "defining" politics in terms equal or similar to those used in regards to the medieval "order". The anachronism is unexpectedly overturned in a demonstration of "contemporaneity". And it is a much more "current" contemporaneity, evident and vital, the more disenchanted arises the awareness that traditional "knowledge" is no longer able to entirely encompass in itself the persuasive explanation (or acceptable legitimization) of that which is happening to and transforming the old political order. While waiting for a different "system" of understanding to take shape and so that this can effectively

fulfill its direct and indirect practical functions, the precepts, directed at statesmen and founded on the monotonous repetition of human nature, remain the only or most important way to avoid risky "jumps", "fractures" or unquieting "discontinuity" between a political order which breaks down and a different order whose constitutive features are still unrecognizable. By subduing and dressing the *Policraticus* in almost humble clothes (a title that is now perhaps even more evocative for us), John of Salisbury is explicit: *sive de nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum*, "namely the vanities of the curia and the teachings of the philosophers".

The transformation and the progressive crushing of the Papacy and Empire's medieval universalism in the particularism of those ever increasingly self sufficient and independent territorial "political communities" – the *civitates* and the *regna* that immediately attract the attention of Thomas Aquinas and Marsilius of Padua, about one hundred years after the work of John of Salisbury – seem to find, at first glance, the conclusion of their historical parable precisely in our times. "Particular" political communities, that from a certain historical phase onwards were in all the world united under the name of "State", are in overwhelming majority always less independent, autonomous and "sovereign". And, although no political centre could at the moment claim a universalism equal or analogous to that asserted by the Papacy or the Empire, "particularism" of State in the modern age is experiencing the sun setting on it's long season. The State declines in this area – the "international system" – that was born as the twin of the State. It declines within the same "particular" international political-territorial community, from the moment in which the territory ceased to be not only the most efficient protective shield of sovereignty, but also the most solid guarantee of "unity" (and of harmony, or not too unbalanced, living together and cooperation) of the many "parts" of which every community is formed.

Certainly, one cannot not blame the historical analogies and symmetries between the initial ascendent phase and the subsequent descendant phase of the parabola of that creature of European modernity that is the State, that exclusive (basically or arrogantly) organization of power inside a clearly defined political-territorial community. The analogies or symmetries between vast historical processes, nevertheless, may reveal themselves as superficial and in some cases misleading, when such processes are not connected by more profound

"regularities" or "invariants". Exactly for this reason, taking note of the paradox embodied by *Policraticus* may now prove at least as interesting and useful to research than those elements which are "constants", if they exist, in the inversion of roles between particularism and universalism. With its anachronism in which shines the light of vital "contemporaneity", John of Salisbury's work impels the knowledge of politics to go above and beyond the "system" of medieval ideas, doctrines and conventions. More or less deliberately, *Policraticus* in fact signals one of the fundamental points of history in which the understanding of politics is again newly *forced* to reckon with "power". And, in order to make progress without having the preceding "theories" weigh and slow down the path, accounts must be made by looking first – as does John of Salisbury – at the real "experience" of the "curia" as well as the "teaching of the philosophers".

Realistically observing the power that persists and resists in the "curia" does not automatically help locate where and what are the "different" and perhaps "new" forms of political power. But it compels us to see how, and to search to understand why, we are widening the space between "actual" power and "potential" power. Above all, it allows us to record if political power, located for centuries in the "curia", continues to efficiently seal the "command-obedience" relationship, effectively controlling the production and distribution of *all* power.

"ACTUAL" POWER AND "POTENTIAL" POWER

The essential and stainless nature of an *authentic* political power cannot but be made up of – according to what almost all theories of political power teach us – an "action of conformity". Freed or liable, depending on if motivated by pressure or determined by duress, the action of a person conforms to what is indicated or desired by another person, in this way lending obedience to a command. And, if the "actual" power is to be considered as a relation between actions, the "potential" power extends itself to the *disposition* to act. Even when they are to be understood as two dimensions of one reality, their divergence – it is worth noting, widens the gap between the power in its factual "exercise" and the power in its "faculty" to keeping itself whole and (possibly) to increasing itself – is never a phenomenon to undervalue or ignore. In many ways, this divergence is worth provoking, widening the most

dangerous cracks with respect to not only the "possibility" that a command obtain compliant conduct, but also with respect to the "legitimatization" which necessitates, in politics, masking the will of a few in order to have the obedience or acquiescence of most.

The "command-obedience" relationship is so important that Julien Freund placed it almost on the same plane as the "enemy-friend" relationship (*Feind/Freund),* in order to be able to identify the essence of that which is, at any time in human history, properly and exclusively "political". On the other hand, although, every inconsistency that emerges and consolidates such a relationship, every flaw and weakness, is the most eloquent indication that the genuine quality of a power's politics are dissolving or deteriorating.

The complete correspondence of "command-obedience" is no longer one of the resources that State political power has at its disposal in a plentiful form and in a stable mode. Albert O. Hirschman understands the principle symptoms of this condition with a non-conformist analysis, when, observing certain types already existent in the *exit* regarding the "decline" of companies, parties, and the welfare State, he found himself reflecting on the growing individual and collective propensities, in the scope of political behavior, to this much drier and much less controllable alternative of the *voice.* In effect, the modalities and the results of political competition (or struggle) according to the rules of democracy – even of recent waves simply classified as "anti-political" or "populist" – has left the question of "legitimization" of political-state power in the shadow. And, with this, the problem of how solidly based the expectation of the political classes of government (expectation completely understandable, even if not necessarily "rational") that the actual mechanisms of correspondence between "command" and "obedience" can continue to function even in a defective way as they are today and go on in this way for an indefinite time.

The discrepancies and blocks in the "command-obedience" correspondence are easily explained by the transformations – some times interdependent, other times autonomous with respect to each other – of those always more complex realities which we identify with the traditional notions of "State" and "society". If the explanation of similar discrepancies and blocks is relatively easy, the detection of a large part of those discrepancies that are inconsistencies or virtual contrasts between "command" and "obedience" is hampered or

misguided by the conception of State as the holder of the
"monopoly on legitimate physical force". With this precise
and well known definition, Max Weber sculpts, already in the
first pages of *Politics as a Vocation*, the "specific" character of
the State. What is more, this definition is further clarified by
Weber, underlining that legitimate force inasmuch as it is
"considered legitimate", is that the State must require "with
success" its position of monopoly inside of a "determined ter-
ritory". If considered carefully, the two clarifications lessen
the oppressive weight of the idea of "monopoly of legitimate
physical force" which, like an unshakable burden, bears on
every attempt to map, today, political 'powers' different than
the State. At the same time, both clarifications seem to almost
anticipate the fields – the "consideration" of the legitimiza-
tion, and the "territoriality" – in which most was shocked,
above all in the last quarter century, the perfect "modern"
equating of political power with that of the State.

In fact, above all, the effects of what Giovanni Sartori
called "ubiquity" and the consequent "dilution" of politics
undermine the "consideration" of legitimacy (namely, the le-
gitimacy believed more or less extensively and sincerely by the
citizens). In turn, the territoriality – as a shell which encloses,
identifies and protects all living beings and resources on which
the State exercises its monopoly and from which it extracts
what is necessary to sustain itself – had to suffer the trespass-
ing from the external to the internal and vice versa by the ac-
tors and forces born or consolidated thanks to the movements
of interdependencies and to transnational processes of today's
"global system". Moreover, if the field of legitimization – with
modes never before seen in history – is seen to be "invaded"
by means of mass communication, the same field and that of
territoriality are always more radically "messy" and (not only
virtually) re-designated by *information technology* and by its
vast usage (overt or hidden, elite or popular).

Communication and technology – two themes of enor-
mous relevance that we can only allude to in passing – are in
fact among the "factors" capable of producing more than oth-
ers the "inclination" (positive or negative) of a single individu-
al, group or the masses to conform to a commanded action.
Analysis of the "political" consequences of both themes as
well as of their genuinely "political" elements (more present in
the second than in the first), appears to be decisive in order to
move from the current pilot books to less inaccurate and con-
fusing maps. Even at a time such as ours in which the "per-

sonalization" of power is thought to be necessary in obtaining, growing and conserving it, Carl Schmitt's warning is worthwhile: "power is stronger than any will of power, stronger than any human goodness and fortunately also any human evil". It is stronger exactly because, "the reality of power surpasses the reality of mankind".

Even with the awareness that the pilot books we are outlining are still rough, it becomes quite possible, at this point, to ask if there already exists within the present archipelago of political powers, the forms of power that observers now call *"glocal"*.

GLOCAL POLITICAL POWER AND ITS CHALLENGES TO THE CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF POLITICS

The existence of *glocal* realities is obvious to all. A company, a humanitarian association, a university or a center for scientific research, even the most traditional institutions that constitute the fundamental structure of the State's organization of power (for example, is it really possible to think of the government of the State or of a territorial macro-area inside of a national community as not being necessarily *glocal*?) can be relevant examples of a similar reality. Large "cities" and "megalopolis" are specifically *glocal* (in a special way, if we see in the probable future the historical types of living together stably organized on a portion of territory). The variety of forms in which *glocalism* manifests itself and, above all, the different levels of awareness with which each of these forms live their own reality, should not be surprising. The same happened in the handful of centuries during which modern "particularism" took over from medieval universalism – first in the experience and organization of daily practices, then in the "culture" of elites and in the transmission of the most common and "popular" beliefs and opinions. If anything, what is most interesting to detect is that in today's reality, the "commingling" of *globalism* and *localism*, is ever more widespread as well as "necessitated". Even when such a commingling is not already considered as a product of a choice, decision or conscious orientation, it is only temporary and perhaps a reversible effect of contingent circumstances.

At first glance, the common and unifying element of the different *glocal* realities seems to be that of the economic-material or simply symbolic-cultural "superiority" of *global*

over *local.* A superiority that, already effective or only trending, reinforces the idea whereby the *glocal* is especially identified with the "opening" of the *local* (by choice, and calculated as advantageous, by consent, or even only for "imitation") towards resources, people, flow of information, rules or practices, characteristic of the current phase of globalization. An "opening", ultimately, not too dissimilar to the serf's tribute that sealed the hierarchic movements of the medieval order.

Instead, on closer inspection, the "commingling" of *global* and *local* is authentically such. That is, a mix of *global* and *local* elements, in which – more than their *numerical* proportion, more than the *qualitative* superiority of the former over the latter (or vice versa, in some cases, the inclination of these to "use" the other for purposes of mere self-preservation or for competition among undeniably local powers) – counts the "contamination" with which the initial elements come together, until they are no longer recognizable, at least, not their specific initial characteristics. And it is exactly this "contamination" that, while it does not hinder (but in fact facilitates) the detection of the existence of *glocal* realities, rather makes it more difficult to recognize the fact that such realities often already possess their own power and exercise a genuinely *glocal* power.

The classic definitions of power are only partly adaptable to *glocal* power. In other words, "actual" power only in part and, above all, "potential" power of *glocal* realities only in part can be recognized as such, that is, real political powers, when for this purpose the traditional concepts and definition are employed in an absolute and tidily scholastic manner. In fact, despite every effort to "un-historicize" political power, freeing it from the organizing framework with which the "modern" State tried incorporating it definitively, the fictitious (and ideological) equivalence between State and political power endures. Such an equivalence is no longer as shining and almost perfect as it was in the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The fouling of the so-called "crisis of State" has been deposited on top of this. And now, the growing internal fragmentation of state communities (or, the apparent "re-feudalization" of society) criticizes and opposes every automatic and dogmatic application. Nevertheless, equating – the claim to equate – persists and endures. Primarily in the facts, at least as long as the legitimatization alleged by the majority of citizens, or innovations of today's technology not entirely imaginable or calculable with a sufficient degree of predicta-

bility, according the State a position of monopoly or near mo-
nopoly of physical force. Then and above all, in our ideas, ex-
planations, convictions which – almost bowing to the force of
inertia of the equivalence between State and political power,
or to those regressions that overcrowd the birth of a new era
of knowledge – more or less unknowingly search in the latter
that which was historically characteristic of the former.

The consequences provoked by the "conceptual" difficul-
ty of recognizing *glocal* power as a unprecedented form of po-
litical power are therefore numerous and very damaging. On
one hand, the *glocal* realities risk to be considered only and
simply as a superficial outgrowth produced by the interplay,
or more often by the friction and turbulence, between the
tendencies in play towards globalization and those opposing
or "defensive" towards localist fragmentation. On the other
hand, the political power at their disposal is understood, at
most, as a power that, having to only compensate or substitute
inefficiencies or modest failures in the political-state power,
manifests itself as fissures in a still strong and dominant state
organization of both "domestic" and "international" politics.
It all ends with closing an eye to the principal characteristics
which most probably yield a rapid growth (above all) of the
"virtuality" of political power in these new realities. Their dis-
position, firstly, to "mobilize" individual and collective
tendencies to a "compliant action", with intensity and proba-
ble success certainly not less than those that today accompany
the ordinary mechanisms of "command-obedience" of politi-
cal-state power. Secondly, the surplus possessed by similar re-
alities and determined by the fact that they – differently than
other actors, which the international organizations and re-
gimes, proven incapable to demonstrate and exercise a "new"
form of political power – dispose of a territorial "base", name-
ly that reduced crust of territory, historically proven to be es-
sential in promoting the temporal duration of organizational
models of any form of political power.

The "conceptual" difficulties of recognizing the new
forms of power and the attempts to bring them back into the
traditional realms of explanation (and of legitimization) of po-
litical power more consolidated up to that moment also ac-
company every historical age that is really experiencing pro-
found transformations with respect to the preceding age. The-
se same "conceptual" difficulties are also associated with our
current times. As most of the epistemologists would have sus-
tained a few years ago, they can only be dissolved by a "scien-

tific revolution" related to space and the practical purposes of politics, to its essence or its "what is this". Such conceptual difficulties could be surpassed – perhaps with more probability – even as the patient work with which knowledge increases, and searches to resolve its dilemmas, closely observing the "experiences" and "practices" that signify the life of organized human cohabitation and that, stratify and articulate the asymmetrical relationships between individuals, groups and large collectivities as well as institutions.

It is not unlikely, therefore, that as scholars we find ourselves today in the condition (and we face equally challenging research) of those ranks of "clerics" of the late medieval age and of the dawn of the modern age which enabled them to achieve extraordinary results in the increase and the "innovation" of knowledge not only of power but also of politics. Not many decades later than when John of Salisbury had handed to incipient "modernity" the fundamental work of medieval "political theory", the observation of experiences and praxis of political life made clear that from this point were being born new organizational power structures. The conceptual explanations around such experiences and practices destined to become more and more ordinary – from ideas already present in the womb of Franciscan theology, to the "logic" which interlocks in a sort of robust chain the technical inventions of the jurists, to the "doctrines" persistent or modified around what is *dominium* or *superioritas* or even *summa potestas* – lay the foundation of that which would become, despite its different canons and in the multiplicity of "schools" of thought, the understanding of power inside of the politics of the modern age. An understanding whose link with the "political order" of modernity that was so tightly bound and functional, to have lasted, without weakening, up to our present days.

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