

IDEOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND SOCIOLOGICAL (MIS)UNDERSTANDINGS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS. THE CASE OF 'TRANSATLANTIC COMMUNITY'

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2017.3.11

Published Online: 2017-09-30

Published Print: 2017-09-30

Abstract

The article investigates the various formulas and constructions expressing and contributing to the evolution of 'Transatlantic community' as regional transcontinental set of relationships; political and discursive construction of shared principles, values, and strategies; and social/sociological reality. The suggested analysis provides a critical reappraisal of some of its fundamental elements of definition, ideology, political structure and social-historical complexity, while attempting to contrast between the systemic and intrasystemic views of community. The interpretation reveals the necessity to ask ourselves whether there exist something like a 'Transatlantic community' that can be defined in sociological sense, and, secondly, to question the uses and limits of a sociology of international relations as sociology of transatlantic community. The article concludes on some mutations at the level of sociological epistemology, that would ultimately reposition a legitimate focus on Transatlantic community, beyond its critical histories, supra-political reality, restrictive policies, and Manichaeian ideology.

Keywords: Transatlantic community, Sociology of International Relations, community, ideology, Transatlanticism, political discourse

1. Preamble

At the end of a seminar in Regional Communities, held within the Transatlantic Studies MA Program at Babeș-Bolyai University, some years ago, one of my students asked why Africa was not regarded as part of the

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Transatlantic geopolitical area, and why the focus of those Transatlantic studies was, after all, on North America and Western Europe, while disproportionately neglecting the other Atlantic regions such as Africa, but also South and Central America.

Surely, *Transatlantic* is not a geographical concept; it is a political geographical reality defined (primarily) politically, not (mainly) geographically. It refers to specific historical-political relationships, socio-political ideals and ideologies which can be clearly (re)contextualized within a restrictive series of connections linking only two selected regions on the both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. It implies the idea of a shared set of geopolitical principles and geostrategic and economic interests, expressed at the level of such organizations as NATO (signed in 1949) or the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership) proposed agreement, within which such recognized values as democracy, security, freedom, individual rights, free trade are presupposed, and repeatedly invoked in referring to a transcontinental region structured on the North American and Western European pillars¹.

But, in a more profound sense, any interpretation has, nevertheless, to consider (or reconsider) Africa and Latin America as part of the same Transatlantic background, ethos, political economy, set of international relations and legal history. And this reappraisal is a direct suggestion towards reviewing the idea of Atlantic (or Transatlantic) region in a more critical sense². Let's think only about such historical evolutions with

¹ One of the first versions of a 'Trans/Atlantic World' as political-historical concept in this sense was set forth by Walter Lippman in 1917. Surely, its roots can be identified in the historical relations between the British/United Kingdom and North America.

² This was seen, for example, as an 'incongruity' between the politically-ideologically defined *Atlantic community* and the geographically-culturally defined *Atlantic world*. This discordance is not innocent, it is suggested by some authors, since it hides some critical histories of the region: "I want to broaden our transatlantic scope by including Africa. Very briefly, I want to suggest that the 'Atlantic community', a phrase derived from political studies that assumes common interests, needs to be embedded in the 'Atlantic world', which has been explored in cultural studies to evoke a shared history – although shared differently – in transatlantic relations of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism." (David Chidester, "Atlantic Community, Atlantic World: Anti-Americanism between Europe and Africa", in *The Journal of American History*, no. 2(93), 2006, pp. 432-433). This idea is expressed, for example, in the African diasporic, 'alternative' transatlantic community (see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Verso, 1993).

enduring impacts as the Transatlantic slave trade and their economic rationale and involvement in the constitution of Western capitalism; or the African American contribution to American civil rights, that shaped the American principles of freedom and democracy, promoted thereafter in the entire world etc. All such examples suggest that the non-Western *African* component of the notion of "Transatlantic" is not only legitimate and, historically speaking, easy to be demonstrated as rightfully integrated within, but also that we cannot talk, in this case, about an immutable, unquestionable, "essential" concept of *Transatlantic*, out of any relativization and criticism.

The Transatlantic region – be it taken in the narrow (but typical) sense of North American-West European transcontinental region, or in the less usual (and critical) acceptance of the entire geohistorical and geopolitical Atlantic region, Africa and Latin America included – is usually referred to as *community*. I think that exploring especially this last, less frequently questioned term, i.e. „community“, one would better understand not only the concept of Atlantic or Transatlantic community, with its critical histories, but also the contours of *a critical sociology of international relations* in/of this transcontinental geopolitical region, and subsequently the critique of its ideology.

2. Towards a socio-anthropological perspective of international communities

Theoretically and methodologically, such social disciplines as sociology and socio-cultural anthropology founded themselves as the research of typical objects of study, among which, community. Let me refer further in this article to this defining aspect of social epistemology as a *reappraisal in the sociology of international relations*, through critically reassessing the notion of *Transatlantic community*. I reasonably consider that only after clarifying the issues of such a community one may properly talk about its sociology.

The first level of this clarification would probably have to address *the scope* of such a sociology. Even if one may accept the rationale of rejecting the micro-geographical and local socio-anthropological perspectives when interpreting *global* politics, it is expected that the social and sociological perspectives on *local* events would always return to inform

(politically, ideologically, methodologically, theoretically, and not lastly conceptually-terminologically) topics of international relations. As Anthony Giddens has already noticed: “while international relations specializes in the study of the ‘outside’ context of states, sociologists have failed to come to terms conceptually with fundamental factors which make the societies they analyze ‘societies’ at all”³, suggesting that the focus on *social local dimension* of international relations is imperative for understanding backgrounds, interests and processes, otherwise very difficult to be formulated as sociological concepts.

A second level of this reassessment would have to address, then, the *historical and chronological dimensions* of ‘international relations’ as historical sociology. As George Lawson noticed, it is indispensable to adopt a historical perspective on international evolutions, if we want to understand “the importance of time and place variation – the idea that development has both temporal and spatial dimensions that need to be both theoretically and empirically problematized.”⁴ In this sense, historical sociology “can add value to the study of International Relations”⁵ having the “capacity to debunk taken-for-granted assumptions about central concepts”⁶.

Finally, a third level of analysis would need to interrogate the concepts themselves, more exactly *what social realities* do ‘Atlantic/transatlantic’ and ‘community’ cover when they are utilized in this expression.

Obviously, I cannot address extensively, within the limits of this article, all these important reevaluative points, but I will thoroughly take into consideration these critical perspectives, while emphasizing mostly this third level of reappraisal, as focusing on the notions of ‘Transatlantic’ and ‘community’.

I started the discussion by questioning the term Transatlantic but let’s take a step further and see what realities are determined by this adjectival concept: area, region, countries, hemisphere (i.e. local-geographical terms), on one hand, and community (i.e. a fundamental

³ Anthony Giddens, *Social Theory and Modern Sociology*, Stanford University Press, 1987, p. 33.

⁴ George Lawson, “The Promise of Historical Sociology in International Relations”, in *International Studies Review*, no. 8(3), 2006, p. 37.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 35.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 38.

socio-anthropological term), on the other hand. Following the abovementioned observations, let's admit, primarily, that we cannot repudiate the *local and historical* perspectives when talking about Transatlantic realities; and then, that our *sociological* perspective, will need to take into consideration more nuanced and complex social-local realities.

Thus, it may be suggested, ultimately, that if we do talk about a Transatlantic *community*, then probably we need to talk about a *sociology* of the Transatlantic community; and subsequently, that this sociology (a sociology of international relations, after all) is/should be inherently *critical*. In the next sections I critically investigate the theoretical and ideological senses of „Transatlantic community“ as relevant expression in scholarly and political major discourses, and then, in the conclusive part, I briefly discuss the current crisis of Transatlantic relations from the perspective of these reconsiderations and the recent political evolutions.

3. 'Transatlantic community' reconsidered

Community is a broad topic in sociology. It “involves a number of different elements: for example, shared values, participation in a shared way of life, identification with the group and mutual recognition”⁷. This participation is typically viewed as occurring within a delimited microgeographical territory, such as a neighborhood or a city, where the sociological group can be identified. The sense of ‘Transatlantic community’ would suggest, thus, either a (i) *metaphorical* sociological reality⁸, since we cannot identify a “shared way of life” at the level of such an immense geographical area, or would refer to something closer to the meaning of a (ii) *cosmopolitan community*, focusing its definition on ‘common values’ shared by distant and heterogeneous groups of people or nations. Gerard Delanty perceives this second meaning as being “produced in the mixing of the local and global, the chief characteristic of which is a form of community that is not limited by space or by time”⁹. Relevantly, then, Delanty sees this community “beyond society”, suggesting somehow

⁷ Andrew Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging: Levels of Community and their Normative Significance*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 19.

⁸ Michael Vlahos, “The Atlantic Community: A Grand Illusion”, in *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science*, no. 1(38), 1991, pp. 187-201.

⁹ Gerard Delanty, *Community* (2nd ed.), New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 119.

that it shouldn't be treated as a 'classical' subject of sociology, but rather as a topic of a-territorial, non-local, transnational, global reality. The fundamental principle of cohesion that would keep alive such a community would be, then, a 'global consciousness' that "empowers the local, opening it up to new dimensions"¹⁰. In another sense, 'Transatlantic community' is then, probably, closer to the meaning of (iii) *international community*, that would be constituted by elements of cohesion that are ideologically and strategically driven¹¹, by principles of unity that are repeatedly reaffirmed¹², in an *institutional sense*, as norms or rules of a *regional political/economic/military organization* (such, as, typically for this case, NATO).

In a collection of studies edited by Marco Mariano under the title *Defining the Atlantic Community. Culture, Intellectuals, and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, the editor provides in the Introduction some definitory aspects of the Transatlantic community as academic and political notion: its political and cultural construct, overlapping with "the West"; its „convenient narrative device"; the negative ways (in opposition to the Soviet, or communist world) and the positive ways (around some common grounds, shared by North America and Western Europe) of defining and constructing it; and the "rhetorical device aimed at legitimizing [the] interests and policies" of a geopolitical region conceptualized in the 'naturally' cohesive sense of community¹³.

Relevantly, Mariano notices, in the end, how "[t]he protean character and vague contours of this idea account for both its ubiquity in public discourse and the relative lack of scholarly interest in its definition"¹⁴. With this, it turns out the necessity (a) to ask ourselves whether there exist something like a Transatlantic community that can be defined in sociological sense, and, secondly, (b) to question the premises, utility, limits and perils of a sociology of international relations as sociology of transatlantic community.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 132-133.

¹¹ Otto Hieronymi, Chiara Jasson, "The Foundations of the Expanding Atlantic Community", in *Foresight*, no. 4(6), 2004, pp. 232-236.

¹² Kurt Volker, "Reaffirming Transatlantic Unity", in *Policy Review*, April-May 2012, 109-118.

¹³ Marco Mariano, ed., *Defining the Atlantic Community. Culture, Intellectuals, and Policies in the Mid-Twentieth Century*, Routledge, 2010, pp. 1-2.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 1.

For that matter let me suggest the following *method*: searching for and typologizing the uses of the notion of 'Transatlantic/Atlantic community' in scholar articles and media-political discourses, since the end of World War Two and, then, focusing on its uses on the past decades, in the idea of investigating their socio-political contexts, references and events for a further qualitative analysis on the meanings involved and realities invoked.

4. Political-ideological constructions

The expression is firstly conceptualized as a theme of concerted analysis in academic journals in early 1960s. The prestigious journal *International Organization* dedicates its volume 17 (number 3 in 1963) to the topic of "The Atlantic Community: Progress and Prospects". The ten articles – collected and edited by Francisc Wilcox, official in the United States Department of State¹⁵ and Henry Field Haviland Jr., foreign policy expert, – clearly let us see how political concepts and strategies mature into discursive and ideological formulas, that eventually end up to describe geopolitical realities:

*"Although the United States has explored many avenues to peace since the Second World War, including the United Nations and various other international organizations, it continues to regard cooperation among the Atlantic states as the core of democratic strength in the world. President Kennedy, in his July 4, 1962, address, called the Atlantic group 'a nucleus for the eventual union of all free men'. Today voices are raised to argue that there is greater need and greater opportunity than ever before to build a stronger 'Atlantic Community', not only as a bulwark against aggression but as an aid to positive development and progress."*¹⁶

In the journal issue, the role played by major Western states implied within (France, Germany, Great Britain, the US), but also the position taken

¹⁵ Francisc Wilcox was chief of staff of the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations from 1947 to 1951; during these years the Committee contributed to United States' involvement in the creation of NATO and the Marshall Plan.

¹⁶ Francisc Wilcox, Henry Field Haviland Jr., "Foreword", in *International Organization*, no.3 (17), (The Atlantic Community: Progress and Prospects), 1963, p.v.

by neutral and the communist states in relation to the existence and functioning of such a community are analyzed, together with the evaluation of some military, economic, political and legal aspects, viewed in the perspective of such geopolitical processes as integration, partnership or conflict. Overall, the idea of “building a political community”¹⁷ is repeatedly invoked, in a form of a “concert of free nations”¹⁸, “strategic Atlantic alliance”¹⁹ or the preoccupation with the “future of the Atlantic community”²⁰.

Certainly, the political foundational role of the Trans/Atlantic community is echoed in the more recent decades, with the concerns of an era dominated not by Cold War fears anymore, but by terrorist threats and by preoccupations with expanding the influence of this community beyond its original boundaries. In the speech given by the United States Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on April 23, 1997, titled “The Transatlantic Community: Peaceful, Democratic, and Undivided”, focusing on the goals of the US’s policy and their plan for the enlargement of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) it is highlighted that

*“NATO defines a community of interest that both preceded and outlasted the Cold War. That is why the United States, a united Germany, and our other allies decided to preserve the alliance after the Berlin Wall fell”, and that „the fundamental goal of our policy [...] is to build – for the very first time – a peaceful, democratic, and undivided transatlantic community, [and] to extend eastward the peace and prosperity that western Europe has enjoyed for the last 50 years.”*²¹

In the same vein, the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Günter Verheugen (between 1999 and 2004) commented that

¹⁷ Henry Field Haviland Jr., “Building a Political Community”, in *International Organization*, pp. 733-752.

¹⁸ J.W. Fulbright, “A Concert of Free Nations”, in *International Organization*, pp. 787-803.

¹⁹ Robert Bowie, “Strategy and the Atlantic Alliance”, in *International Organization*, pp. 709-732.

²⁰ Lauris Norstad, “The Future of the Atlantic Community”, in *International Organization*, pp. 804-812.

²¹ Madeleine Albright, “The Transatlantic Community: Peaceful, Democratic, and Undivided”, U.S. Department of State Dispatch, March-April 1997, Issue 3(8), pp. 1-2.

*"[t]he overall political benefits from an enlarged EU will be enormous. First and foremost, the enlargement process is vital for securing political stability, democracy, and respect of human rights on the European continent as a whole. We are creating a transatlantic community of democratic nations - defending our common values on a global scale"*²²

acknowledging the global significance and impact of a political community constructed with these goals.

George Robertson, the tenth Secretary General of the NATO (between 1999 and 2004), talks, in this sense, about "NATO and the Transatlantic community" as about a "continuous creation":

*"The Atlantic Community that was born in these crucial years after World War Two more than survived the end of the Cold War. It prospers. Its features are firmly entrenched in today's Europe (...) It has been said that two revolutions were necessary to make the Atlantic Community possible. For the United States, one revolution lay in abandoning the tradition of isolationism. For Western Europe, its revolution meant burying the divisions of the past and creating a new association of nations. But completion of this community required a third revolution. This was the 'velvet revolution' in Central and Eastern Europe, which swept away the Cold War dividing lines and which since then has led several countries from Central and Europe into NATO. Extending the Atlantic Community throughout all of Europe, while simultaneously preparing this Community to face new security challenges comprises 'the Second Act' of the Atlantic Community. And although the completion of this project will fall to future generations, it is clear that NATO will play a central role in this Second Act, just as it did in the First. The Alliance remains the cornerstone of the Atlantic Community."*²³

²² Günter Verheugen, "A Bigger EU Will Be Good For America, Too", in *European Affairs*, no. 4(1), 2000.

²³ George (Lord) Robertson, "NATO and the Transatlantic Community: The 'Continuous Creation'", in *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, no. S1(1), 2003, p. 7.

These ideas were already summarized in a joint statement by U. S. President George W. Bush and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on a 'Transatlantic vision for the 21st century' in 2001:

*"At the beginning of the 21st century, we reaffirm our common commitment to the lasting principles which are at the basis of the Transatlantic community of values - freedom, democracy and human rights. On this basis, we are resolved to strengthen and further develop the partnership between the United States of America and Europe. In the age of globalization we want to give it a new quality. We agree that our cooperation within the Atlantic Alliance continues to be of decisive importance for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region and that this includes an adequate military presence of the United States in Europe."*²⁴

These references to both officially established organizations illustrating at institutional level the idea of 'Transatlantic community', such as NATO, and the principles driving the political and strategic relations between USA and Europe, as 'community relationships', can be systematized, with their main formulas, as follows:

Figure 1. Political constructions of Transatlantic Community²⁵

year	title/formula	purpose/rationale
1941	<i>Atlantic Charter</i>	defined the Allied goals for the post-war world
1947	<i>European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan)</i>	an American initiative to help rebuild Western European economies after the end of World War II
1949	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)</i>	a system of collective defense whereby its member states agree to mutual defense in response to an attack by any external party

²⁴ George Bush, Gerhard Schroeder, "Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder on a Transatlantic Vision for the 21st Century", Office of the White Press Secretary, 29 March 2001.

²⁵ This is a selection of some of the most relevant evolutions or representative formulas in the political-institutional maturation of Transatlantic community (brief informative notes based on encyclopedia entries).

year	title/formula	purpose/rationale
1949-1989	<i>Western World</i> (<i>Cold World</i> <i>context expression</i>)	during the Cold War, the West ('The First World'), was composed of NATO members and other countries aligned with the United States
1961	<i>Atlantic Council</i>	a think tank providing a forum for international political, business, and intellectual leaders, managing programs related to international security and global economic prosperity in the Transatlantic region
1972	<i>German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)</i>	a nonpartisan American public policy think tank and grantmaking institution dedicated to promoting greater cooperation and understanding between North America and Europe
1991	<i>North Atlantic Cooperation Council</i>	a post-Cold War NATO institution created to improve relations between NATO and non-NATO countries in Europe and those parts of Asia on the European periphery
1997	<i>Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council</i>	successor of the <i>North Atlantic Cooperation Council</i>
2007	<i>Transatlantic Economic Council</i>	a council based on an agreement set up between the United States and European Union to direct economic cooperation between the two economies
2007	<i>Atlantic Community</i> (<i>think tank</i>)	a German-American project to apply Internet communicated ideas to Transatlantic foreign policy strategy
pro-posed	<i>Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership</i>	a proposed free trade agreement between the European Union and the United States, with the aim of promoting multilateral economic growth

Even if the references are dominated by NATO, which is evidently the most important catalyst of this community, the other formulas are still invoked and some, although old, are still regarded as having an enduring technical relevance, as in the case of *The Atlantic Charter*, or cultural significance, as in the case of the *Western World*. Nevertheless, as the *discursive content* of the abovementioned statements clearly shows, the strategic and ideological backgrounds of these messages are equally

important in maintaining the community relationships alive and in building further strategies and relations.

The discourse analysis of these statements reveals a set of principles that can be easily summarized, since they are repeatedly mentioned in the majority of political speeches and official positions, expressing the grounds of commitment to and cooperation in (principally) NATO, and, by extension, the Transatlantic community. These messages are either received by general public as 'strategic', 'technical' speech, or as a discourse that cannot communicate something new beyond the already-established frameworks and terminology. From a political perspective this may generate disinterest (amplifying the already noticed general political apathy in the West) and, as interpretation, it may reveal the artificiality or at least the crisis of a political construction defined as community, that would probably need some references to the social aspects of the presupposed communal values and bonds.

Figure 2. Strategic and ideological principles of the Transatlantic Community²⁶

statement/expression	principle invoked
<i>'union of all free men'</i> (Wilcox and Haviland, 1963); <i>'the lasting principles which are at the basis of the Transatlantic community of values – freedom (...)'</i> (Bush and Schroeder, 2001)	freedom
<i>'bulwark against aggression'</i> (Wilcox and Haviland, 1963); <i>'to face new security challenges'</i> (Robertson, 2003); <i>importance for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region</i> (Bush and Schroeder, 2001);	security
<i>'vital for securing political stability (...)'</i> (Verheugen, 2000)	stability
<i>'aid to positive development and progress'</i> (Wilcox and Haviland, 1963)	development, economic support
<i>'to extend eastward the peace and prosperity'; 'extending the Atlantic Community throughout all of Europe'</i> (Albright, 1997)	expansion

²⁶ These entries summarize ideas from the statements cited above (Wilcox and Haviland, 1963; Albright, 1997; Verheugen, 2000; Bush and Schroeder, 2001; and Robertson, 2003). These principles can be found in many other similar discourses, official statements or positions explaining the rationales and characteristics of Transatlantic community.

statement/expression	principle invoked
<i>'to extend eastward the peace and prosperity', 'a peaceful ... transatlantic community'</i> (Albright, 1997)	peace
<i>'core of democratic strength in the world</i> (Wilcox and Haviland, 1963); <i>'a (...) democratic (...) transatlantic community'</i> (Albright, 1997); <i>'the lasting principles which are at the basis of the Transatlantic community of values – (...) democracy...'</i> (Bush and Schroeder, 2001); <i>'vital for securing (...) democracy (...)'</i> (Verheugen, 2000)	democracy
<i>'vital for securing (...) respect of human rights'</i> (Verheugen, 2000); <i>'the lasting principles which are at the basis of the Transatlantic community of values – (...) human rights'</i> (Bush and Schroeder, 2001)	human rights
<i>'a (...) undivided transatlantic community'</i> (Albright, 1997)	unity
<i>'a new association of nations'</i> (Robertson, 2003); <i>to strengthen and further develop the partnership between the United States of America and Europe</i> (Bush & Schroeder, 2001)	collaboration, partnership

Beyond these political principles and constructions, in recent scholar articles relating to the topic of 'Transatlantic community' one may find some more complex ideas, adopting a more profound perspective on these concepts, integrating critical views, and tending to be more sophisticated, as type of analysis, than the plain political messages.

5. Scholarly critical analyses

Daniel T. Rodgers describes the "North Atlantic economy" "in which similar developments typical of modern industrial societies and the exchange of goods, capital, management, and production techniques provided several common links between the US and Europe"²⁷ as follows: "Late-nineteenth-century Essen, Manchester, Lille and Pittsburgh were not merely similar phenomena, not merely parallel independent developments. They were all part of the furiously expanding world market... What struck those who traversed the industrial regions of the Old and the New Worlds was not their difference but their extraordinary sameness"²⁸. This historical

²⁷ Quoted in Mariano, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

²⁸ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998, p. 44.

reference opens a paradigm of shared or common *social* and *social-economic* characteristics of the Transatlantic community before its political conceptualization and strategic foundation. The 'Atlantic system'²⁹ is expressed in its basic contours in this retrospective social histories of industrialism, capitalism, urbanization, modernization, within which one may recognize the Transatlantic ecumene and ties already in the 19th century.

What is overlooked in this general perspective on the North American-Western European socio-economic region as a system, is its actual social interaction at the level of intrasystemic communities. The Atlantic world is frequently regarded, in this view, as a functional capitalist system (like a century before, when it could be conceived as a functional colonial system or a functional slave trade system), which generated progress and prosperity at the level of nations and states, but neglecting the actual social lives of those who contributed to the functioning of these systems. Nevertheless, these neglected actors are the historical, *basic* Transatlantic communities: mostly European immigrants to North America (but also Africans to both Americas) which were gradually overshadowed, as the perspective deliberately shifted from social problems to economic and political success, and from social diversity of the Transatlantic world to the homogeneous principles of Transatlantic suprapolitical community.

In this sense, in the same collective book, David Ellwood "situates the conceptualization of the Atlantic community within the context of American geopolitical *grand narratives* and compares its effectiveness with that of the Marshall Plan as a vehicle of US 'soft power' in Europe throughout the postwar years"³⁰. This is only a continuation of other grand narratives that dominated the American history and the American political mindset, suggests Ellwood: from *Manifest Destiny* to George W. Bush's post-September 11 denunciation of the "axis of evil"³¹. This interpretation is relevant, since it evokes, primarily, how American foreign relations developed strategies of continuing expansion, influence and preeminence

²⁹ Hans-Jürgen Puhle, "Trajectories of Western Modernization Around the Atlantic," in Horst Pietschmann, ed., *Atlantic History: History of the Atlantic System 1580–1830*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002, pp. 545-556.

³⁰ Mariano, *op. cit.*, p. 8, italics mine.

³¹ David Ellwood, "What Winning Stories Teach: The Marshall Plan and Atlanticism as Enduring Narratives", in Mariano, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

at the global level (which, over the entire twentieth century also implied the role played by popular culture), and, secondly, how the magnificence in scale and importance of these international and global involvements overshadowed the local national problems at the level of society and communities, conferring them secondary significance in comparison with the 'all important' 'global' 'Transatlantic' community, rhetorically presented as an American success.

This critical evaluation is appropriately mastered in Ronald Steel's contribution "How Europe Became Atlantic. Walter Lippmann and the New Geography of the Atlantic Community" to Mariano's collection. Reviewing what Lippmann had defined in 1917 as the "Atlantic world", Steel points out "the very vagueness of the concept – an artificial 'community' divided by thousands of miles; split into a congeries of different tongues, customs, and identities; and stitched together over decades of changing political and military circumstances"³². "For its advocates", continues Steel, "'community' is the description of a common civilization with ancient roots, loyalties, traditions, tongues, and faiths – an entity both natural and inevitable. For its critics, however, the concept is largely rhetoric: a mask for American hegemony over Europe and a cold war cliché that conceals political realities. The concept, however it is approached, is one based not only on ideas and cultures, but also on power and interests"³³. Ronald Steel further accuses the incongruent abundance of discursive elements called in its ideological construction, as hegemonic unit, that somehow attempted to compensate the abovementioned vagueness of its socio-political reality: "the 'Atlantic world' became the amorphous, multiethnic, multicultural, territorially unlimited Free World. Although this concept was geographically delineated, it was defined in cultural-ideological terms that ignored traditional boundaries and blurred its political identity. During the Cold War, the self-defined and geographically flexible Free World ultimately became the American imperial terrain following the demise of Europe as a major global actor"³⁴.

³² Ronald Steel, "How Europe Became Atlantic: Walter Lippmann and the New Geography of the Atlantic Community", in Mariano, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

³³ *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 18.

In an article written back in 1991 Michael Vlahos emphasized and argued the notion of Transatlantic community as a grand illusion. In the logic of deconstructing American grand narratives, illustrated by Ellwood above, Vlahos puts forward the argument of “two separate culture areas”, North America and Europe that cannot constitute themselves an actual community. The political intentions are not enough, subsequently suggests Vlahos, for setting up a transcontinental union defined as community. There was needed another element for staging a technical relationship as fraternal community, and this was the *common* enemy or threat: “The Atlantic Community as myth drew its power from three premises: United States leadership, the Soviet threat, and mutuality of European and American interests. It has been argued here that a fourth premise – cultural fraternity – was inspired propaganda, a way of weaving the three core assumptions into a single popular image that was, essentially, politically inarguable. That embracing image of cultural fraternity has been hard put to persevere without the Soviet threat. Ultimately, the Manichaeic Soviet premise inspired the assumption both of inevitable United States leadership and of an indivisible transatlantic ‘interest’.”³⁵ Interestingly, this interpretation was confirmed by the political evolutions after the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, when the Soviet enemy was discursively replaced by the terrorist threat.

The tragical events offered new impetus for not only involving in political-military typical actions, but also for reaffirming the belonging to the same community, as socio-metaphorical expression of a set of values or principles among which peace, freedom, democracy and stability. In the following fragment, one may replace ‘Soviet’ with ‘terrorist’ without changing essentially too much: “The Soviet threat, however, created a sense of even deeper, submagma fusing of European and American interests. The Soviet threat, and its barbarian mask shaped from European ideas, gave force to the belief that the preservation of civilization itself was America's fundamental mutual interest. From this premise it was but a step to the erection above ground of a great, colorful proscenium of cultural fraternity. This transformed the urgent need of the historical moment (which, after all,

³⁵ Vlahos, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

lasted forty years) into an instant legacy of shared values, habits, and goals.”³⁶

For that matter many authors, over the last decades, asked themselves whether the Transatlantic community shouldn't had been conceptualized as a community of interests rather than a community of values. The first issue of March 2010 of the renowned scholarly periodical *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* collects several articles emerging from a series of international conferences dedicated to this subject. Barbara Zanchetta, in the summarizing Introduction to the journal issue asks directly this question, while indicating even a potential conflict behind a relationship otherwise internationally presented as collaborative and fraternal: “are the United States and Europe inherently related and linked by a stable and enduring sense of community, or is there, notwithstanding their close historical and cultural ties, an inevitable conflict between the interests of these two important poles of the international system?”³⁷ Her conclusion, nevertheless, acknowledges an inevitably enduring relationship, while suggesting a relativization of the very notions of conflict and community: “But, if the Transatlantic relationship is founded more on values and shared principles than on contingent interests, then the Old and New Worlds will remain intrinsically linked to each other. Conflict and community may, therefore, simply be different faces of the same coin”³⁸.

All these critical reevaluations of ‘Transatlantic community’ are synthesized in the next table.

Figure 3. Scholarly critical analyses of Transatlantic Community³⁹

critical idea on Transatlantic community	interpretation: Transatlantic community playing a role in, or influencing...
expanding world market	capitalist expansion
form of soft power	geopolitical grand narratives

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Barbara Zanchetta, „Introduction: Community of Values or Conflict of Interests? Transatlantic Relations in Perspective”, in *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, no. 1(8), 2010, p. 1.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 4

³⁹ These entries summarize ideas from analyses cited above (Vlahos, 1991; Ellwood, 1998; Rodgers, 1998; Steel, 1998; Puhle, 2002; Zanchetta, 2010). These interpretations can be found in many other similar analyses, over the last decades.

critical idea on Transatlantic community	<i>interpretation: Transatlantic community playing a role in, or influencing...</i>
vagueness of the concept	American hegemony
artificial community	continuing some Cold War clichés
amorphous, multiethnic, multicultural territory	ignoring traditional boundaries; blurring political identities
demise of Europe as a major global actor	the American imperial terrain
Transatlantic community as myth	the very semantism of 'community'
a community built despite incompatible cultural backgrounds	the political interests behind a relationship presented as fraternal community
an oppositional community built against some enemies or threats	the presentation of external threats as menaces to the pre-defined community's principles play an important cohesive role, in the absence of actual forms of community cohesion
the civilization itself	the arguments for political and military interventions in the name of preserving the civilization
community of values or community of interests	in presenting the (national, political) interests as emerging from common (international, supra-political) values
community hiding an inherent or potential conflict	in emphasizing the collaborative, fraternal aspects of community over the conflictual nature of some relations of community members
community and conflict – different faces of the same coin	in maintaining an ambiguous relations between what bonds and what separates, and an ambiguous position on conflict, which manipulates the sense of community

Each of these critical aspects, indicated by various theorists, can be further analyzed in terms of their social-historical reality. And this is necessary, because the same Transatlantic community and its geopolitical model (the West), as center of 'capitalist expansion', can be seen as center of slavery, colonialism, exploitation, and injustice. And furthermore, because 'exploitation' or 'injustice' are, unfortunately, not limited to 'historical times', but are practices that continued in the postcolonial periphery of the

West or in the lower-class neighborhoods of the Western cities throughout the whole 20th century.

Similarly, and taking now another entry of the table above, what can be viewed as 'blurring political identities' is an aspect that long time constituted an impediment for former slaves, immigrant minorities or subaltern groups to forge an identity with political relevance, beyond the national state or other hegemonic systems (of class, race or gender). Since in the midst of a multicultural society, as the American society is, officially driven by multiculturalist ideologies and affirmative action policies, racial minorities still struggle for equal rights, respect and honest recognition of slavery and segregation⁴⁰, then we have to ask ourselves whether the whole suprapolitical reality can be so easily conceptualized as community... And this is not only about the ongoing discrimination of minorities or the still vivid legacy of slavery and colonialism in the US and Western Europe, but also about the way in which new ideas or new members (such as alternative economic or social systems, alternative political forces or recent immigrants) are restricted or rejected their possible contribution or participation to this community of values and citizens⁴¹.

In the vein of this kind of critical analysis, the notions and interpretations summarized in the last table may further constitute the conceptual terminology for developing a direct criticism to not only the construction of 'Transatlantic community' (i.e. as deconstruction), but also to its evolution and recent crises (i.e. as changing viewpoints on a concept that can be reconceptualized from a renewed sociological perspective).

⁴⁰ It was noticed that racial hatred, violence in big cities, police brutality and gun massacres driven by hostility against minority groups has increased in America over the past years (see, for example, Henry A. Giroux, *America at War with Itself*, City Lights Publishers, 2016) and has escalated in the context of the nationalist and xenophobic messages delivered during the presidential campaign and after the election of the new American president.

⁴¹ The Syrian crisis demonstrated how exclusivist is the idea of 'European values', since the majority of European states and Europeans manifested hostility against receiving refugees.

6. *Addendum* after Brexit and the election of Donald Trump: Transatlanticism and globalization (including some new sociological perspectives)

The ideology behind the construction and affirmation of Transatlantic Community (which can be labeled, for simplification, Transatlanticism) is not a simple one, and is not unquestionable, for sure, as we have already seen. It is composed by a corpus of multi-layered discourses and political-historical evolutions spanning more than one century, and impacting the entire world and international politics. I attempted to cover the relevant political statements and the critical reconsiderations that addressed the evolution of Transatlantic community as (purported) ideological construct and (more often, unquestioned and misunderstood) sociological reality. Beyond any criticism, which, as I attempted to suggest, ranges from exclusivism to expansionism, passing through centuries of social discrimination and economic exploitation (despite the affirmative geopolitical values stated in the contemporary official discourses about 'democracy', 'freedom', 'fraternity' or 'peace'), the limits of this ideology can be probably, better perceived in the context of post-Cold War globalization.

Globalization was one of the major frameworks and, to some extent, goals, which shaped the evolution of Transatlantic community over the past decades. In fact, the transatlantic economic area was the main agent (and, in retrospective, main beneficiary) of globalization. Nevertheless the political and cultural elites, the national security agencies and economic companies in the West realized recently that, in some way, globalization "has gone too far"⁴². This was a moment when a new generation of politicians opposed globalization, after decades of praise in favor of it, and a new electorate began asking more and more seriously about the benefits that globalization bring for them, as individuals, families and communities.

⁴² Dani Rodrik, *Has Globalization Gone Too Far?*, Institutue for International Economics, 1997. This idea is not only about the economic and social aspects of globalization (as in Rodrik's focus), but also, as a range of various analyses indicated since, about security concerns, immigration issues, the crisis of global institutions, the emergence of non-Western/alternative economies and financial bodies, and the enduring local insurgent communities that resist globalization and the paths that the West configured for it.

In this context, USA voted for Donald Trump and UK decided to leave EU, and these elections were immediately regarded as symptoms of national and international crises. In both countries, these popular decisions also exposed the generalized indifference to (and some explicit reactions against) international alliances and supranational organizations, the idea of 'Transatlantic community' included.

Surely, European Union and the United States began a process of detachment some years before the election of Donald Trump and the Britons' decision to exit from the EU⁴³. In fact, concerns (and analyses) about US's military and economic disengagement from Europe were expressed already during the Obama presidency and before the Brexit referendum⁴⁴. Thus, these two symbolic moments (Brexit and the election of Donald Trump) can be regarded as symptoms of a diagnosis which can be, largely, characterized as a process already occurring at the level of both political elites' and general public's awareness, and that can be described with such terms as: mistrust, apathy, or negative perception of an international collaboration seen too bureaucratic, or technical, or strategic, or artificial etc., i.e. not really evolving from or impacting the real life of citizens.

This last idea is relevant in the context of this analysis, since this public reaction is also one of the major form of resistance against and criticism brought to globalization. But let's do not confuse between the two, because globalization was never described as community in political sense, but the Transatlantic area was. And this is, as I suggest in this article, one of its major critical aspect.

A recent 'turning point' in Transatlantic relations was occasioned by two major political events occurring in May 2017: the NATO summit in Brussels and the G-7 meeting in Italy. Both events gave opportunity to

⁴³ For example, TTIP was suspended in 2016 (partially due to public reactions), before the American presidential elections.

⁴⁴ See for example: "U.S. Disengagement from Europe Would Be a Major Setback", written by (that time) German president Joachim Gauck for *Washington Post* (October 6, 2015). As for Brexit, it can be seen not only as a one state withdrawal from the EU, but also as an expression of lack of interest of an important 'member of community' for common organization. This propension toward 'autonomy' may be recently noticed in the case of EU and other individual European states, in relation with NATO but also with other American and even EU partnerships.

media, general public and political leaders to find more exactly and know better the new American president's position on a series of topics on which he was mostly ambiguous or controversial before. With these occasions, European leaders, more notably Angela Merkel, reacted in ways that, according to many analysts, confirmed the cooling of relations between Europe and the US that were revealed during Donald Trump's presidential campaign. At the end of the G-7 summit, *New York Times* summarized this rupture as follows: "Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, Europe's most influential leader, has concluded, after three days of trans-Atlantic meetings, that the United States of President Trump is not the reliable partner her country and the Continent have automatically depended on in the past. Clearly disappointed with Mr. Trump's positions on NATO, Russia, climate change and trade, Ms. Merkel said in Munich on Sunday that traditional alliances were no longer as steadfast as they once were and that Europe should pay more attention to its own interests 'and really take our fate into our own hands'."⁴⁵ In the same press article the American newspaper connects this Transatlantic crisis to Brexit, by noticing: "Ms. Merkel, also spoke of Britain's decision to leave the European Union, which means the bloc will lose its second-largest economy and one of its two nuclear powers. Britain's departure will also weaken trans-Atlantic ties and leave the Continent more exposed than before"⁴⁶. This kind of media commentaries dominated the international news over the past year and expressed a political crisis which epitomized longer and more profound *social* crises, in both Europe and America (from the effects of austerity measures to racial riots, and from immigrant issues to the rise of nationalism), which couldn't be addressed by the simple and triumphant notions of military collaboration or community.

In this sense, analysts noticed that the controversy regarding the future of NATO and European Defense⁴⁷ is not the only problematic aspect, but the other issues should also constitute equally important problems to

⁴⁵ Alison Smale, Steven Erlanger, "Merkel, After Discordant G-7 Meeting, Is Looking Past Trump", in *New York Times*, May 28, 2017, [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/28/world/europe/angela-merkel-trump-alliances-g7-leaders.html?_r=1], accessed September 2017.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ European Commission, Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence, June 7, 2017, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/reflection-paper-defence_en.pdf].

be approached and attempted to be solved. As one analysis written on the Transatlantic relations after Brexit concludes: "in order to reinvigorate the Western Alliance, it is essential for the US and the EU to find new ways of enhancing their collaboration on *all* issues"⁴⁸, social issues included. In this context, Transatlanticism in the 21st century would most likely redefine itself towards reconsidering its societal background, recognizing thus that what is labeled 'Western principles' or 'cooperation', or what is instrumentalized as a desire to 'help' others and 'implement' good values and practices abroad (i.e. common notions of Western foreign affairs and NATO ideology) has to return to its social reality (i.e. to something which is built, at least to an equal extent, on social bases, as it is on military-strategic ones). In other words, the crisis of Transatlanticism is probably equally due to political events, decisions or evolutions in Europe and America, as it is due to a crisis of its very social reality and evolution, which is complex and increasingly shaped by global (i.e. not only Western) connections and influences. Therefore, I wouldn't equate the *crisis* of Transatlanticism with the *crisis* of globalization, either. As I implied in the article, the global developments and tendencies, on the contrary, may help a geopolitical project reposition itself towards capturing suggestions arriving from below (i.e. reactions of actual communities living within the geopolitical territory⁴⁹) and from abroad (i.e. non-Western socio-political models that may help understand better the functioning and survival of such a suprapolitical community).

In this sense I conclude by suggesting the critical role that a renewed social/sociological perspective on 'Transatlantic community' may have, beyond the limitations, exclusions and misunderstandings on which it was constructed before. With this new approach, both political leaders and general public would more likely understand better why and how, for example, the condition of immigrants or urban minorities, the Muslim or Latino cultures, or the criticism of neoliberal or expansionist policies may

⁴⁸ Arnault Barichella, "Transatlantic Relations after Brexit", in *European Issues*, no. 409, October 31, 2016, [<https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0409-transatlantic-relations-after-brexit>], italics mine, accessed September 2017.

⁴⁹ For this demonstration, see my article "Global Development and Local Communities: Toward a Post-Developmental Paradigm of Transatlantic Studies", in *Modelling the New Europe*, vol. 11, 2014, pp. 138-157.

contribute to a renewal of something that can still be called 'Transatlantic community'.

From a theoretical point of view (and returning now to our initial observation about the deliberate rejection of African and Latin American participation to the 'Transatlantic ethos'), the contribution of non-Western scholars and paradigms may be equally relevant. The critical suggestions put forward by Latin American or African authors, who conceptualized differently the historical evolution, socio-political history and political epistemology of the Transatlantic area, assuming non-Western and non-hegemonic perspectives of alterity, postcoloniality, postslavery and minority identity etc., have to be revalued (and not only for the sake of multiculturalism)⁵⁰. These fresh perspectives not only may reanimate the discussion about and re-question the political reality and effectiveness of 'Transatlantic community', but also can refocus the social reality of what rather emphatically was named 'community'.

One basic suggestion of these writings is that the critical historical legacies and moral problems of the relationship between the hegemonic West and the rest of the world are increasingly more visible and problematic. And one basic lesson is that we cannot talk about these problems without inquiring the real people who were caught in and recreate the political relations and projects. We can understand now that any approach of the crisis should probably return to the historical and social reality, meaning the social basis, the social structures and the social relations on which the West did and does function. And this is sociology (in a broader sense: critical history, political economy and cultural anthropology included). Even if not strictly a sociology of international relations, for sure, but a sociology (which is possible and necessary) of *real communities* (i.e. not 'artificial', as the Transatlantic community is increasingly more often perceived by both political and intellectual leaders and average citizens), with their actual problems. A sociology that may contribute to better understanding not only unexpected political evolutions

⁵⁰ These studies proposed and imposed new critical terminology including such notions as subalternity, decoloniality, postdevelopment, afrodiasporic imagination, pluritopic hermeneutics or epistemic disobedience, in writings by such authors as Gayatri Spivak, Paul Gilroy, Arturo Escobar, Walter D. Mignolo or Sylvia Marcos.

and contemporary crises, but also to approach more suitably what is still called 'Transatlantic community'.

Even if the crisis of Transatlantic community was already largely documented and researched⁵¹, the common current position regarding the crisis is seemingly still dominated by uncertainty and hesitation. There are still voices who deny any crisis, and others who only start to recognize it; then, there are voices who still believe that things would return somehow, untroubled into their old shapes, and voices who continue to talk about Transatlantic community with the triumphant words of the 1990s.

Apart from these general considerations, with the help of these last authors, both Western and non-Western, I would lastly return to what I argued throughout the article: the crisis of the transatlantic community may be insightfully revealed and understood (in the idea of its future reconsideration and salvation) through its discursive circulation and insistence on *community* in the case of a suprapolitical organization (with a military-strategic core), which has very *little connections and actual references to society*, to how people live and how they can be part of something too generously called 'community'. The electoral preference for populist, nationalist and isolationist politics can be seen as a reaction to this missed political project, that can be more suitably reconsidered, I ultimately point out, by insisting more on a micro-political sociological (not international supra-political) perspective, as already some postcolonial authors and social researchers suggested.

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⁵¹ Works preoccupied by this crisis and the rupture between North America and Western Europe began to be published a decade ago (i.e. after the financial crisis and the implementation of austerity measures, and the reconfiguration of security concerns as reaction to the continuous terrorist threats). See for example, Sven Steinmo, Jeffrey Kopstein, eds., *Growing Apart?: America and Europe in the 21st Century*, Cambridge University Press, 2007; Jeffrey J. Anderson, G. John Ikenberry, Thomas Risse, eds. *The End of the West?: Crisis and Change in the Atlantic Order*, Cornell University Press, 2008, or, more recently, Serena Simoni, *Understanding Transatlantic Relations: Whither the West?*, Routledge, 2015.

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