SOCIOLOGIA

STUDIA
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI
SOCIOLOGIA

In Memoriam Raymond Boudon

1/2014
June

S T U D I A
UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ–BOLYAI
SOCIOLOGIA

1

Special Issue:

IN MEMORIAM RAYMOND BOUDON

CONTENTS

IN MEMORIAM RAYMOND BOUDON

*Photos courtesy to Rosemarie Riessner-Boudon,
wife of the late Raymond Boudon.*

SPEECH GIVEN ON THE 15TH OF JANUARY 1991 ON THE OCCASION OF BEING AWARDED THE DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA TITLE OF THE BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY CLUJ-NAPOCA

RAYMOND BOUDON[1]

ABSTRACT. The methodological conviction which I adopted ever since my studies of social mobility can be synthetically formulated as follows: it is not by denying, but, on the contrary, by affirming the autonomy of the agent that we can turn sociology into a fully-fledged science. The right way of conceiving the social subject's behaviour may not be, as economists want, to see him as ultra-rational and to confuse rationality with utilitarian motives. It is neither, as sociologists often want, to view him as irrational. In between the two, there is the possibility to analyse his behaviour and beliefs as "intelligible", as obeying reasons which, if not always objectively founded, nevertheless have the status of "reasons". There is no point in adding that these reasons are always partially dependent on the social context, so much this goes without saying.

Keywords: Raymond Boudon, sociology as science, Romanian sociology

Mister Rector, Mister Dean, my dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am both very touched and honoured by the doctoral title conferred on me today [15th of January 1991] by the University of Cluj.

Perhaps even more than the symbolic recognition in itself, the fact that it represents a manifestation of the revival of scientific exchanges between two countries connected through a long history moved me very deeply.

I do not, unfortunately, read Romanian. I can merely guess the meaning of words. However, in spite of this incompetence, I have always attentively skimmed through various texts, articles, books in sociology, social sciences, and also in the philosophy of science and the philosophy of the social sciences, which some colleagues, Romanian friends who were once my students at the Sorbonne University, have kindly sent me throughout the years. These packages have

---

[1] *Professor at the Sorbonne University, member of the Institute of France.*

always moved me deeply. Because of the linguistic barriers, I could not decipher the details, but it was easy for me not only to learn about the themes they addressed, but also to remark the seriousness with which they were dealt with.

Above all, upon receiving these works I have always experienced two powerful, yet conflicting feelings: sadness and joy.

I felt sadness, because these publications gave me the opportunity to recall the material and communication difficulties which our Romanian colleagues and friends had faced during the dark years of dictatorship. We knew that they were deprived of several things which in the West seemed natural: the free circulation of ideas, works, documents, without which there can be no production and progress of knowledge. This could not be otherwise than profoundly upsetting for us. For me, at least, it has always been so.

But on the other hand, we also perceived behind these works an attitude of resistance, a desire to maintain a high-quality intellectual and academic activity, to continue research, to preserve some fundamental intellectual and scientific values.

In short, when receiving these publications we also had the very strong impression of seeing in them the affirmation of will and a testimony of the commitment to important intellectual and moral values. At least that has been my experience on several occasions.

I experienced these feelings, perhaps stronger than ever, in the 1970s. During that time, Marxism, the main ideology of the century, began a new life in the countries of Western Europe. It was the second time that happened since the Second World War. Certain sociologists often played a significant part in this revival. All you could hear at the time, in Paris and elsewhere, was "dominant class" and "dominated class". The societies which are named, with a Marxist term, "capitalist" and which nevertheless should more appropriately be qualified as liberal and democratic, were being painted in the darkest colours. Presumably, they didn't have any other purpose than to subject the dominated class to the dominant class. The latter was described as being equipped with an invisible hand helping it realize its malevolent intentions without anyone noticing, except for the inspired sociologist. Only apparently free and democratic, under the surface, *in reality*, democratic societies were supposedly totalitarian and despotic.

These themes did not fail to leave a mark on the youth of the time.

I immediately felt a deep moral and intellectual disapproval toward these analyses, toward this subtle Marxism which, together with structuralism, pervaded the social sciences in the West during those years.[2] How was it possible not to see that totalitarianism and despotism do exist, but that it was elsewhere they needed to be looked for?

---

[2] It will suffice, for example, to refer to the very official *Enzyklopädie der Philosophie* which could be found abundantly on the otherwise desolate library shelves of Honecker's German Democratic Republic in 1988, in order to see that fashionable Parisian sociologists such as Pierre Bourdieu are credited with a Marxist orthodoxy barely moderated by some reservations of the type: "there is room for improvement".

Of course, nowadays these analyses are of only a historical interest and those who put them on the market are comfortably settled in what they then called the dominant class, using an imprecise and inadequate term which with a stroke of the pen erased the essential conceptual distinctions between the criteria of social differentiation and hierarchy introduced by someone called Max Weber.

Generally speaking, I think it is true, as is often affirmed nowadays, that the great ideologies are dead, at least for some time. But not the ones we might call the "little" ideologies, which can also have grave effects.

I will limit myself to one example in this respect. In many western countries we are witnessing a progressive deterioration of the educational system, at the level of the higher education, but also, and especially so for the time being, at that of the secondary school. It is a slow, but profound and disquieting trend.

Cries of alarm are regularly launched on this topic, in the United States as well as in the European countries, most notably in France.[3] All categories affected by the system, the students in secondary school, their parents, teachers, suffer because of this situation. One sign of this decay is certain: nowadays, when other opportunities are also available, young adults avoid the teaching profession. And those who take it up soon come to regret that. Of course, the community also has to suffer because of this deterioration: the transmission of knowledge and the formation of professional competencies are regarded by all interested parties as deplorable and becoming worse each year. To be secondary school teacher in France, but also in other countries, became by now a matter of vocation.

Why is this so? Is it fatality? One could hardly demonstrate the cause. Is it because of the incompetence of the Government? We would then have to suspect it to be incompetent everywhere and all the time, for this deterioration seems general and developing over a long period of time. Is it because some people have an interest for it to happen? Certainly not! No one desires such deterioration yet everyone painfully experiences its consequences.

Actually, it comes from the tyranny exerted by a few political, social and pedagogical ideas that have the status of "received ideas", as Flaubert put it. In other words, ideas that are very little objectively founded, but treated as evident in all kinds of milieus, and especially in the journalistic and intellectual milieus. Here are some of them: that the *main* function of the education system (I emphasize here the adjective *"main"*, because this word is the source of trouble) is to fight against the inequality of life chances which results from the inequality in families' social condition; that each and every school student has the same capacities as his fellow students and that it is enough to provide an adequate school environment and to employ the proper pedagogical methods for him to be able to develop; that it is preferable to eliminate exams or to hollow them out of any content, rather than allow too high rates of academic failure.

These "generous" ideas, and a few more, lead to the consequences which I evoked and which everyone disapproves of.

---

[3] See, for example, Bloom (1987) and Nemo (1991).

But the force of the principles that inspire them is so great, that they take on the authority of the tablets of law for political decision-makers, who can only escape them with difficulty, whatever their political orientation.

This is where, I think, the social sciences have an essential role to play. That of highlighting the undesirable effects generated by certain well-intentioned actions and, more generally, to track down received ideas, to rediscover the reality beyond illusions, and in so doing, to protect the citizen from the perverse effects of these ideas.

Unfortunately, we can see all too often that social sciences actually do the opposite. Unsure of their identity, they do not always set for themselves a scientific, or, more generally, a cognitive goal. On the contrary, they sometimes tend to reinforce that which Tocqueville called "the general, dominant passions", and the example about the role they played during the 1970s is not singular. Nowadays, any observer will admit, for example, that in American universities, some social sciences departments are centres for the diffusion of the egalitarian ideology at least as much as they are centres for the production of novel knowledge concerning social phenomena (Kimball, 1990; D'Souza, 1991).

I do not believe in any miracle-solution which could be applied against this trend. But there is nothing to lose by insisting that the main function of social sciences is to replace the illusions circulated through received ideas emerging from general and dominant passions with the true images of reality, which can be obtained with the help of neutral, objective observation and methodical analysis.

In any case, that has always been my conviction. If I am allowed to add a comment on this matter: ever since the beginning of my studies in sociology, I have been convinced that there is no reason why this discipline should not be able to follow the rules which contributed to the success of other disciplines. I have always been a bit shocked by the vague language, procedures, analyses, theories and concepts used by some sociologists.

That is why I began by searching, from inside mathematical and statistical language, for an instrument capable of giving sociological analysis the rigour which I very often found it was lacking. But it so happens that I was very soon confronted with problems which, while they could be addressed by means of modelling, seemed impossible to solve by mechanically applying this or that instrument of statistical analysis. It was, for instance, impossible to answer in this manner the question of why social mobility did not seem at all affected by the democratisation of education. In order to solve these problems, I employed a method of analysis which, to my great satisfaction, happens to have caught the attention of many people, among others that of Traian Rotariu in Romania.[4] These colleagues detected its weak points and, in this manner, contributed to its

---

[4] *L'inegalité des chances*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1973; the third edition, Hachette, Pluriel collection, 1985. It occasioned a symposium published by *Information sur les sciences sociales*, 1974, 1975, comprising contributions by S. Rokkan (Bergen), J. Elster (Oslo), H. Alker (MIT), R. Andorka (Budapest), N. Rogoff (Oslo), S. M. Miller (Boston), T. Fararo (Pittsburg).

improvement. Above all, however, the conclusion these studies of social mobility led me to is that, not only the statistical analysis of social phenomena, but sociological analysis in general should view the respective phenomena as effects of aggregation, in other words, as results of actions, attitudes and beliefs obeying intelligible reasons.

This idea has turned into a kind of obsession for me ever since and I looked at it from every perspective. Rightly or wrongly, I thought it was possible to detect its presence largely in the works of Tocqueville, Weber or even Durkheim. By looking at the classic sociologists from this point of view, I could interpret them a little differently than we generally understand them, erase to some degree the differences between them, and advance an interpretation of the profound reasons for their great importance and their status as "classics".

I then applied this methodology to different subjects. I used it to look critically at theories of social change.[5] And in my last two books[6] I applied it to a classic problem, the one which Pareto viewed in his *Treatise on general sociology* as the essential problem of sociology, that of explaining the beliefs in objectively unfounded ideas. I tried to demonstrate on a theoretical level that, with regard to this subject as well, we could make great progress by assuming that these collective beliefs which we often too hastily qualify as irrational are effects of aggregation, and that the social subject has good reasons to adopt the beliefs that easily give the observer a feeling of strangeness. In doing this, I do not believe to have done anything else, once more, but to clarify and update a methodology implicitly used by the great classic sociologists, especially Tocqueville, Weber and Pareto, in their works on the sociology of knowledge. Does not Durkheim himself show us in *The elementary forms of the religious life* that the sorcerer and his audience have good reasons, given their existential concerns and the knowledge available to them, to believe in the false causal relations which institute the magical rituals? Likewise, Tocqueville explained, for example, that in the 18th century there were good reasons for the French and the English to view the political and the economic variables, respectively, as the dominant variables of social life.

I do not know whether this methodology is called upon to spread and to be further disseminated. I am also aware of the resistance it has always encountered, even though it has something of Columbus' egg to it. My impression is that it has the advantage of presenting sociology with the common objective of all scientific disciplines: to explain the phenomena that fall under its jurisdiction, that is, to identify causes, at the same time avoiding the reductionist trap in which many schools of thought have fallen, which consists in forgetting that the social actor is endowed with the capacity to choose, to invent and to decide based on reasons.

---

[5] *La place du désordre. Critique des théories du changement social*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1984, 245 p.; second edition, 1985.

[6] *L'idéologie, ou l'origine des idées reçues*, Paris, Fayard, 1986 and Seuil, 1992. *L'art de se persuader*, Paris, Fayard, 1990 and Seuil, 1992.

The methodological conviction which I adopted ever since my studies of social mobility can be synthetically formulated as follows: as Weber, Pareto, Tocqueville and Durkheim himself show, if not in their theoretical works, at least in their empirical analyses, it is not by denying, but, on the contrary, by affirming the autonomy of the agent that we can turn sociology into a fully-fledged science.

Economists are often convinced of this. Sociologists are often convinced of the opposite. But it appears to me that we cannot do without affirming it. The right way of conceiving the social subject's behaviour may not be, as economists want, to see him as ultra-rational and to confuse rationality with utilitarian motives. It is neither, as sociologists often want, to view him as irrational. In between the two, there is the possibility to analyse his behaviour and beliefs as "intelligible", as obeying reasons which, if not always objectively founded, nevertheless have the status of "reasons". There is no point in adding that these reasons are always partially dependent on the social context, so much this goes without saying.

Is it because I have tried to operatively ask these questions, which I regard as being essential, that you decided to award me this doctorate? Allow me to think so. But above all, allow me to tell you once again how honoured and moved I am.

(*Translated from French by Gabriela Boldor*)

REFERENCES

Bloom, A. (1987). *The closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Boudon, R. (1973). *L'inegalité des chances*. Paris: Armand Colin.

------------ (1984). *La place du désordre. Critique des théories du changement social*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

------------ (1986). *L'idéologie, ou l'origine des idées recues*. Paris: Fayard.

------------ (1990). *L'art de se persuader*. Paris: Fayard.

D'Souza, D. (1991). *Illiberal education*. New York: Free Press.

Kimball, R. (1990). *Tenured radicals*. New York: Harper.

Nemo, P. (1991). *Pourquoi ont-ils tué Jules Ferry*. Paris: Grasset.

CONVERSATIONS WITH RAYMOND BOUDON

TRAIAN ROTARIU[1]

ABSTRACT. On the 15th of January 1991, Raymond Boudon was awarded *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca. His visit occasioned several formal and informal encounters with members of the newly revitalized Sociology Department led by Ioan Aluaş, opening up inspiring conversations which were published soon after as an imaginary dialogue between professor Boudon and his formal doctoral student, Traian Rotariu. The article aims to provide wider access to these conversations by translating them into English.

Keywords: Raymond Boudon, history of sociology, Romania

On the 15th of January 1991, Raymond Boudon was awarded *Doctor Honoris Causa* of the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca. His visit occasioned several formal and informal encounters with members of the newly revitalized Sociology Department led by Ioan Aluaş, opening up inspiring conversations which were published soon after as an imaginary dialogue[2] between professor Boudon and his formal doctoral student, Traian Rotariu. This article aims to provide wider access to these conversations by translating them into English.

Traian Rotariu (TR): You often use the term „intellectuals". How would you define this category of persons and why would they be of interest for sociologists?

Raymond Boudon (RB): The term "intellectual" is hard to define. Although the word as such is recent – it only dates back to the Dreyfus affair – it refers to a long-lasting social category that used to be called "humanists" in the 16th century, then „philosophers" in the 18th century. In this sense, the intellectuals are those

---

[1] Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, e-mail: trotariu@socasis.ubbcluj.ro.
[2] Traian Rotariu's reconstruction of these dialogues was published in Romanian as "De vorbă cu profesorul Raymond Boudon" [Conversations with professor Raymond Boudon] (1991), *Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai, Seria Sociologia-Politologia,* 36(1-2): 141-144.

who, employing their prestige and authority as producers of knowledge, engage into the critique of dominant values, the expression and promotion of new values, which may actually be not new at all, but rather a return to the dominant values of previous times. The most prominent examples of this sort of intellectuals are, probably, Erasmus, Voltaire and Zola. This definition can be extended, linking the notion of intellectuals to the idea of a critical stance towards all existing "institutions", understood in the broadest sense of the term as a multitude of forms of social organizations up to a global level. At the end, the term could gain an even larger sense, referring to all those who contribute, directly or indirectly, to the production, confirmation and diffusion of values, world-views, ideas, knowledge and other symbolic products, especially when these contain axiological or, more generally, philosophical consequences. That is why, at least in France, those who work in humanities and social sciences are more readily seen as intellectuals than those working in natural sciences, although there is no doubt that the latter too belong to the category of intellectuals, at least in the broadest sense of the term. For sociologists, this category is interesting from many points of view, but now I would like to discuss only one. Namely, the relations between intellectuals and their publics, in other words the problem of intellectual markets. Needless to say, these markets are domain-specific. The physicist, for example, addresses a rather narrow public of those who possess certain competences to understand experiments and tests' results, while the public of a writer is much wider, as the only skills needed are reading and a kind of sensibility to such artistic products. The evaluation criteria also differ: a theorem is evaluated in terms of "true" or "false", while a novel in terms of "good" or "bad". Nothing new with this distinction, yet it offers coordinates for a wide spectrum of intermediary sciences, which "behave" differently in relation to the cognitive and the aesthetic value-categories. It is the task of the sociology of science to explain how it is possible that representatives of these intermediary disciplines adopt divergent strategies towards these value-categories, and that within an auto-proclaimed scientific discipline we meet an aesthetic discourse. And it is also the task of sociology to explain why, in certain circumstances, intellectuals awarded with significant credit try to convince their publics about certain value-judgements or, the other way around, why the public so eagerly accepts well-known intellectuals' judgements in domains outside of their fields of expertise.

TR: There was lot of attention driven to the assumption that sociologists would have an ability to manipulate people. What do you think about that?

RB: I wouldn't use such a term, but rather *influence.* From the very beginning of the discipline, there were persons who explicitly tried to influence the society which they were living in. This is the case of August Comte. In other

words, there is a long history of all these. Looking at sociological studies, we can differentiate between at least four categories. There are studies that try to *explain* social phenomena, others are merely *descriptive* and materialize most often in research reports; some are *essayistic* and appeal to our sensibility, their authors trying to reach out to a larger public, with all the consequences of potential fame and market success; while others attempt explicitly to influence social change. In this latter category one may include the Frankfurt School, or those working within the frame of the *labelling theory* from the sociology of deviance in the US, or feminist research focusing on the status of women. Generally speaking, these studies do not provide novel information, or only very few. Nevertheless, laying the emphasis on certain problems or social categories, and insisting upon them, they manage to influence opinion.

TR: If I understand you correctly, only the first two types of products should be called "sociological". Then, what should be the role of sociology in nowadays societies?

RB: The response comes naturally, based on the previous classification. Essentially, the sociologist should be *a producer of knowledge* concerning various aspects and problems of social life. This knowledge may take a simpler, descriptive form, responding to questions such as *How many? How much? How?* or more complex questions, with an explanatory value, such as *Why?* Studies from the first category offer information well known by those living in those situations, but not by the society at large; for example, life in prisons or in shared accommodations. Moreover, for the functioning of modern societies, it is necessary to know certain facts that can be expressed quantitatively – statistically, which only sociologist may offer. Similarly to demographers and economists, it is the responsibility of sociologists to collect certain kinds of social data. Explanatory studies should answer legitimate questions about observations of social phenomena and processes that are not self-evident, easy to comprehend. For example, why suicide rates increases or decreases in a particular social category, or why the intensity of religious phenomena changes, or why a given ideology cannot penetrate certain societies. I consider important to bear in mind that, when trying to answer such questions, provided that they are clearly and precisely formulated, sociologists employ explanatory paradigms in an analogous manner as natural sciences do.

TR: Do you consider then that there are no differences between explanations provided by social sciences and natural sciences?

RB: Essentially there are no differences. The explanations of social phenomena follow the same scheme as explanations of natural phenomena; think, for example, about the refraction of light. The starting point consists of a set of

already accepted statements, and the conclusions derive from them. The only problem we encounter in social sciences is that we have actors who are consciously attempting to reach certain objectives. That is why, in order to provide a complete explanation, social sciences need to go down at the level of the individual and be comprehensive in the Weberian sense of the term. Nonetheless, this does not mean that one should abandon scientific objectivity.

TR: Turning to a different topic: you often write about a "crisis of education" or of educational institutions. Could you elaborate more on this?

RB: Indeed, this is a problem that had preoccupied me for a long time, given the important place of the school in nowadays societies, evident by simply looking at the high number of persons involved in educational activities (students and teachers) and the amount of expenditures on education. Despite the considerable effort of Western states, there were significant changes concerning students and teachers alike, which can be seen as effects of the crisis of the educational system. I have written extensively on this topic, thus I would only mention the most important things. The general crisis of secondary education can be detected across Europe, although some of its features differ from country to country. One of the causes resides in the fact that the increasing number of pupils entering secondary education was not met by expanded infrastructure and enlarged number of teachers. After 1955, France gradually turned away from an elitist model of secondary education towards mass-education, which meant not only a quantitative change, but also a change in the strategies of the involved actors. Notably, the number of pupils who failed exams and consequently repeated school years has been approaching zero, which indicates that average quality of training and evaluations decreased, and the value of high school diplomas eroded. Moreover, nowadays the compositions of classes are very heterogeneous from the point of view of competencies, motivation to study, students' expectations etc. All these generate great difficulties for the French educational system. As mentioned before, there are differences between countries, even between neighbouring countries such as France and Germany. In the latter country, secondary education is basically divided between theoretically-oriented and technical schools. While technical schools exist in France as well, its segment had been constantly eclipsed by theoretical schools. This difference largely explains why the transition towards mass secondary education occurred more smoothly in Germany.

Similar problems can be detected in the case of tertiary education. In the US, 70% of high school graduates enter tertiary education; in France this percentage is still lower, yet steadily increasing. However, in the US tertiary education is much more diverse with respect to the level of competences, ranging

from colleges that barely reach out at the level of the French Baccalaureate to highly competitive elite-universities. Thus in the UK anyone could find a college/university that meets her/his expectations, whereas in Romania this is hardly possible.

TR: By the end, I would like to ask you about your impressions in Romania during this very first visit.

RB: The visit was short, the days incredibly busy, therefore I couldn't see much. However, I was positively impressed by the teachers and the students whom I met, by the depth of their knowledge and horizons of preoccupations. Transylvanian cities are beautiful and I was glad to see that they have luckily escaped from the bulldozers that destroyed the historical centre of Bucharest. Needless to say, I have sensed the amount of deprivation, especially material deprivation: to be honest, I was horrified by the miserable conditions in trains. But I do hope that you will have the wisdom and determination to overpass all these difficulties and next time when I visit Romania I will encounter more smiling faces and more optimism.

(*editors' translation from Romanian*)
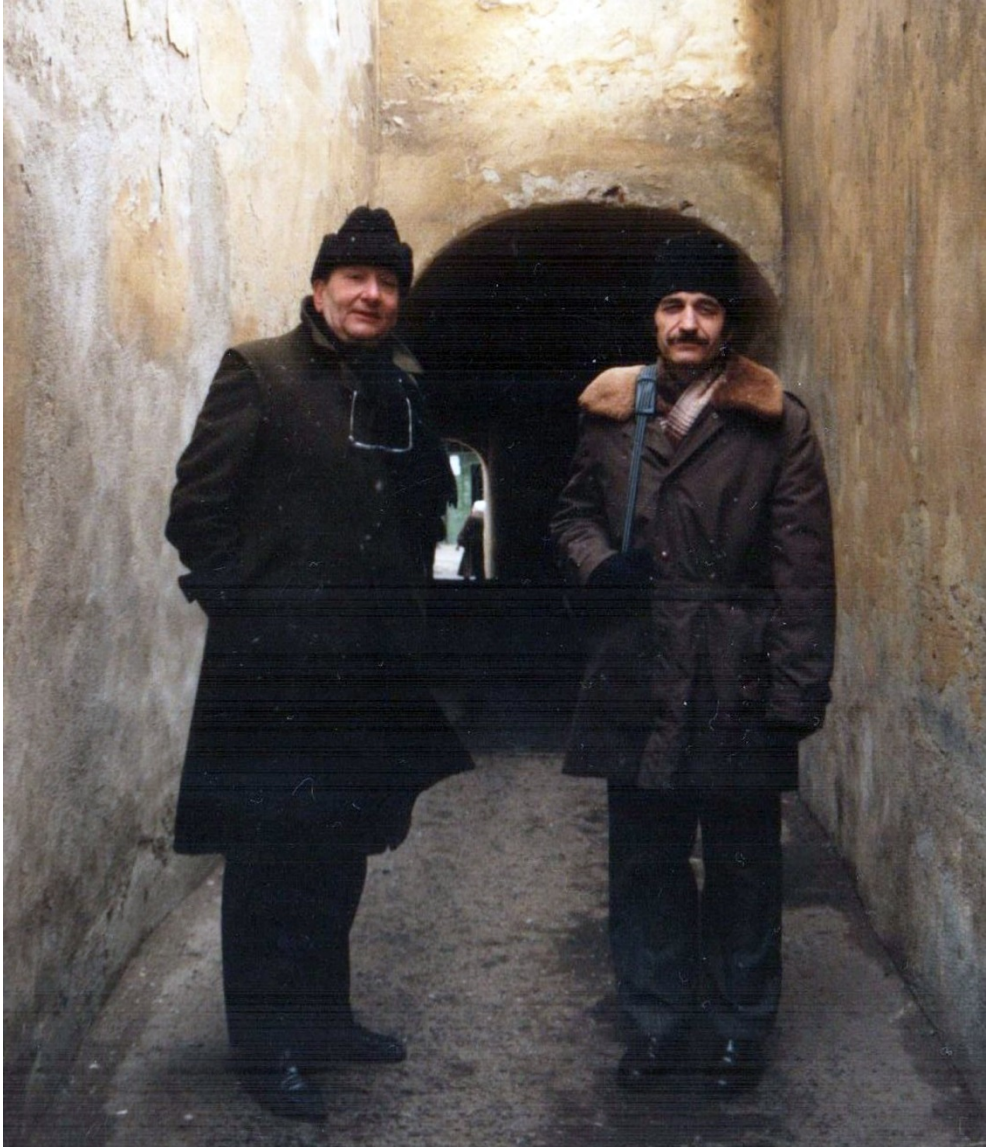
Photo of Raymond Boudon (left) and Traian Rotariu (right) near the wall of the Alba Iulia fortress, Romania, January 1991. Courtesy to Traian Rotariu.

THE LIFE AND THE THREE INTELLECTUAL BATTLES OF RAYMOND BOUDON

JACQUES LAUTMAN[1]

ABSTRACT. Raymond Boudon was among the handful of authors who would be recognized for having contributed to the advancement of sociological thought in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1967, at merely 33 years of age, he was one of the last to be elected by the professors' assembly at the Old Sorbonne and he entered the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques at age 55, already highly regarded professionally abroad, though for a long time disregarded or intentionally kept hidden by the French media of all kinds. Since a great deal of very good descriptions of his work has been published, I will focus more on Boudon, the man, and his intellectual battles for sociology as science.

Keywords: Raymond Boudon, history of sociology, sociology as science

A tall, well-built man, solid and calm, he could be commanding, but his often low tone of voice, his precise and elegant speech with its steady pace, and his naturally cheerful glance conferred confidence and reassurance. A fighter, he liked to win, but, self-confident, he knew how to wait. Suffering from one of the most painful forms of cancer, he would not admit defeat and he wrote until the very last week, not allowing his illness to take over his mind. During one of our last conversations he confessed to me his strong belief in the power of work to guard off the degradation of retirees.

He was among the handful of authors who would be recognized for having contributed to the advancement of sociological thought in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1967, at merely 33 years of age, he was one of the last to be elected by the professors' assembly at the Old Sorbonne and he entered the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques at age 55, already highly regarded professionally abroad, though for a long time disregarded or intentionally kept hidden by the French media of all kinds. Published in 1973, *L'Inégalité des chances* [*Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality*] was and remains a fundamental

---

[1] *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, e-mail: lautman@mmsh.univ-aix.fr.*

work, even if the simulations that were made without the aid of a computer appear today somewhat unrefined. He shows how, in societies where the general level of school attendance rises rapidly, the competition for degrees unavoidably heightens and how, consequently, upward social mobility tends to decrease. At the same time, he reminds that the correlation between social origin and educational achievement steadily diminishes beginning with the age of 12 - 13. There is no need then to resort to the hypothesis of an obscure interference by the dominant class in the educational system to ensure a rather strong rate of reproduction. Frédéric Gaussen, at that time chief editor of *Le Monde des livres*, published my book review but alongside it he published a Bourdieusian article denouncing the force of social reproduction found in the measurement of the *Intellectual Quotient*.

Since a great deal of very good descriptions of his work has been published, I will focus more on Boudon, the man. He was born in Paris; his father, having started off with little, managed to obtain a good position in a department store and was a good wind instrument player who passed on to his two sons, Raymond and Phillipe, the taste for music and certainly much more. Phillipe became a theoretician of architecture and a passionate flutist.

I met Boudon in 1954 as *khagneux[2]* at Louis-Le-Grand in that wonderful haven of grace, quiet and not too visited, that was the Mazarine library, where we could find works on history, literature and literary history which were not accessible at the Sorbonne or at Sainte-Geneviève. Clerks dressed in black vests, as stylish as the butlers of great houses, brought them to where we were seated. One day on our way out, in response to my worries, he told me: "If we do what is necessary, which is the case, there is no reason why we should a priori be doubtful of success."

He was admitted to the Ecole normale supérieur in 1954 to study philosophy, and I would rejoin him in 1955. He decided to spend the academic year 1956-1957 in Freibourg-im-Brisgau to attend lectures with Heidegger, at the time considered to be the most important philosopher of the century. He came back very disappointed by the wordplay, the fanciful etymologies, the calculated silences, all the "baubles of nothingness". To make up for all of that, he became so good at speaking German that Rosemarie Riessner, a student in Paris whom he will marry, at first mistook him for a fellow German countryman. The next year it became apparent that we were the only two *agrégatifs[3]* under the supervision of Althusser, who proved to be an efficient tutor, contrived and mysterious, whom we suspected to be paying too much respect to the rhetoric of the *agrégation*,

---

[2] High school graduate student attending the two-year preparatory programme in humanities for admission in one of the *Grandes Écoles*.

[3] College student preparing for the *agregation*.

despite expressing detachment through some of his remarks. At that time, he didn't talk about Marx, but Raymond had detected that his lectures owed much to the reading of Lukács, whom he did not cite. Much later, when we read in *L'avenir dure longtemps* [*The Future Lasts Forever*] the disquieting confession "I never really read Marx in a rigorous manner", we together reached the conclusion that part of his drama was to never have surpassed the stage of being a brilliant *khagneux* who passed the *agrégation*. We liked the director Jean Hyppolite a lot, a very open person. He made us understand Althusser's illness[4] and the fact that he protected him.

A few weeks before the 13th of May 1958, some of us were invited by Raymond Aron to pay him a visit one evening after dinner. He offered us cigarettes and turning the conversation to the subject of our future perspectives, he began to explain why doing philosophy without mastering a minimum of positive knowledge was no longer possible. We were all, I think, ready to agree with him.

In September 1959 we left together as midshipmen in the Marine, in very privileged conditions. These six months strengthened our friendship.

After an experiment in the field of economics which turned out brief because of a stormy encounter with François Perroux, a great figure from a bygone stage in economic science, having understood the necessity to escape French provincialism, Raymond would leave for a year to go to Columbia, New York, with the intention to learn from Paul Lazarsfeld, an amazing man who loved intellectual debates, but only after working hours and over a glass of whisky. Robert Merton, who first gave him the idea for what would become the "perverse effect" (Boudon, 1977), formed a most unexpected duo with Lazarsfeld.

As a young *chargé d'enseignement*[5] acting as a professor in Bordeaux in 1965, Boudon made friends with François Bourricaud, some 12 years older than him, and for 25 years until the death of François they would maintain a close dialogue that would have remained largely unknown, had they not successfully completed together the peculiar project of the *Dictionary of Sociology*, published in 1982 by PUF, which is not at all what one would expect when opening a dictionary. Only seventy entries and just as many larger or smaller essays that are evidently partisan without any cunning precautions. There is absolutely no concern for harmony. Each article exhibits the style and preferences of its author. The differences are visible, but the general agreement on the essential removes the spectre of dissonance.

---

[4] In 1980, one night, he killed his wife by strangulation. He was considered mentally ill and escaped any penal trial, but he never recovered from this tragedy.

[5] A non-tenured teaching position in French universities.

From those 1980s, the happy memory of our rather frequent party of three luncheons near the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme is still very lively. One of our recurrent conversation topics concerned the place of morals and values, especially in politics. Somewhat to my surprise, Bourricaud, a fascinated observer of political animals who had a little experience in a ministerial cabinet, defended the Kantian categorical imperative and did not hide his aversion for the generalization of the double-discourse, one for the initiated and one for the ignorant populace, in which he saw a serious threat to the legitimacy of democratic governments. One day, relying on a beautiful text by Claude Lefort, he clarified the discourse of Mussolini to us. Boudon, on the other hand, viewed the rise of relativism as a more likely cause of the proliferation of speeches for immediate consumption and of the tolerance with regard to them. A few years later, when talking about his work for *Le juste et le vrai* [*The origin of values*] which would appear in 1995, he told me that the first ideas for the book had taken shape during those discussions. It is a grand, militant, and optimistic book. The choice of values is founded on reasoning derived from lived experiences that citizens perceive as good and moral progress can be observed: the condemnation of torture, the road toward the elimination of the death sentence. The right is just as objectively analysable as the true.

In the 2000s he published a number of shorter, simpler books that touch on the essentials and which would make him finally attain certain fame in France and presented him with a well-deserved authority. In 2009, receiving the four volumes of tributes collected by Mohamed Cherkaoui, he replied that he never intended to create a school of thought, but that he was happy to see himself surrounded by an intellectual family, the shared convictions of which he presented.

Very well organized ever since his youth, he refused both to be overwhelmed by his work and to let the honours he was presented with go to his head. He knew how to organise his working time in advance, how to avoid pointless meetings and decline a great amount of invitations. He always set some time aside for music. He considered Messiaen and Chostakovitch the two greatest musicians of the 20th century. In literature, he liked to go back to the great authors: Montaigne, the writers of the Enlightenment, as well as Goethe and Chateaubriand. He had a particular preference for "Lucien Leuwen" which portrayed French society in the time of Tocqueville. While he was, of course, a sociologist, he nonetheless remained a philosopher, and the three intellectual battles he fought all have an epistemological, ethical and political dimension. The first of those battles was to affirm, contrary to the Marxist vulgate and the so-called "sociological" reductionism that is Bourdieu's notion of habitus, that social actors give meaning to their actions. Having read Soljenitzin, he liked to say: "they are not zeks". The second one, in counter-current to the entire tradition of *Geistwissenschaften* and to the supporters of a qualitative approach without rules

and boundaries, was to show that the good authors in social science have always maintained themselves within a canon outside of which there can be no science at all. The only difference between the social sciences and natural sciences that can be considered justified is that, according to the degree of difficulty in defining and collecting basic data, the demonstrative force of the argument will be more or less solid or constraining. The third is the hostility toward the climate of relativism, toward the "anything goes" trend, illegitimately promoted under the cover of respect for the diversity of religions and cultures.

Rosemarie Boudon, a jurist by formation who shared with him 50 years of his life, will forgive me for writing that, being a great consumer of the press in three languages, she frequently discovered examples or leads for Raymond to further develop on. Their only son Stephane, an *archicube*[6] (Sciences, class of 1984), very quickly gave up research for the global high-tech business. Could it be a sign of the times?

To me, Raymond will remain the one who let me partake of the joy of knowing oneself to be on the right path of a rich and fruitful intellectual life.

(translated from French by Gabriela Boldor)

REFERENCES

Boudon, R. (1973). *L'inégalité des chances*. Paris: Armand Colin.
------------ (1977). *Effets pervers et ordre social*. Paris: PUF.
------------(1995). *Le juste et le vrai; études sur l'objectivité des valeurs et de la connaissance*. Paris: Fayard.
Boudon, R. and Bourricaud, F. (1982). *Dictionnaire critique de la sociologie.* Paris: PUF.
Cherkaoui, M. and Hamilton, P. (2009). *Raymond Boudon, a life in sociology, essays in Honour of Raymond Boudon (4 volumes).* Oxford: The Bardwell Press.

---

[6] Graduate of the École Normale Supérieure.

RAYMOND BOUDON'S FORMAL MODELLING
AND ORDINARY RATIONALITY

MICHEL DUBOIS[1]

ABSTRACT. With the departure of Raymond Boudon on the 10th of April 2013, sociology lost an outstanding and unusual character. Explaining social phenomena entails understanding individual reasons; such is the main idea reintroduced in sociology by Boudon through the notion of *methodological individualism*. From his initial work on formal modelling of social phenomena to the theoretical elaboration of ordinary rationality, he kept on delivering a message of optimism tinged with voluntarism: sociology can under certain circumstances be a science like any other.

Keywords: Raymond Boudon, inequality, sociology as science, formal modelling, rationality

With the departure of Raymond Boudon on the 10th of April 2013, sociology lost an outstanding and unusual character. A theoretician of "intellectual markets" (Boudon, 1981), he was alert to the consequences of this diversity for sociological production. A fervent supporter of the conception of "sociology as science" (Boudon, 2010), Raymond Boudon would constantly privilege the academic community at the expense of the general public.

The recognition of his peers came with the debates sparked by the publication of *L'Inégalité des chances* [*Education, Opportunity and Social Inequality*] in 1973. At the time, the work was unanimously considered innovative, in particular for employing the method of formal modelling. The formulation and development of the theoretical framework underlying *L'inégalité des chances* would only serve to amplify this initial recognition. A member of numerous foreign Academies (American Academy of Arts and Science, British Academy, Société Royale du Canada, etc.) and prestigious editorial boards (*American Journal of Sociology*, *European Sociological Review*, *Revue Française de Sociologie*, *l'Année Sociologique*, etc.), Boudon was elected in March 1990 at the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, taking the seat left vacant with the death of his former mentor, Jean Stœtzel.

---

[1] *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, GEMASS-CNRS, Paris, e-mail: michel.dubois@cnrs.fr.*

To his "intellectual family", reunited for the presentation of the *Prix Tocqueville* in 2008 or, a year later, of the massive four-volume *Festschrift* coordinated by Mohamed Cherkaoui and Peter Hamilton, he delivered a single message of optimism tinged with voluntarism. Sociology, he affirmed, can under certain circumstances be a science like any other. The classic and contemporary authors on whom he liked to freely comment and whom he helped to make known in France have long ago demonstrated, according to him, the capacity that sociology has to generate solid knowledge comparable to that coming from natural sciences. And therefore it was left for the young generations of researchers to abandon the scepticism manifested by some of their elder colleagues. His reading of Henri Mendras' work *Comment devenir sociologue?* [*How to become a sociologist ?*], at once friendly and ironic, is illustrative. In order to convincingly answer this question, he remarked, it would be helpful if the author gave to his reader the impression of believing in the reality of sociology as a discipline: "Now, if the book does not answer the question it is because it is steeped in scepticism. (...) What is the use of explaining how to become a sociologist if sociology is such an elusive discipline?" (Boudon, 1996: 53).

This criticism of the ordinary scepticism of sociologists allows us to grasp Boudon's atypical dimension in relation to the French academic environment. This "empêcheur de penser en rond" [intellectual nonconformist] (to adopt the expression used by Jean Cazeneuve for his admission to the Institute) loved to swim against the tide. In 1964 he collaborated with André Davidovitch to continue the analysis of the criminal justice system initiated by Gabriel Tarde, the former magistrate from Sarlat eclipsed in France by the Durkheimian school at the end of the XIX-eth century. He laid the foundation for a simulation model meant to explain the rates of non-prosecution. A little later on, in 1968, at the moment of triumphant structuralism, he openly called into question the usefulness of the concept of structure. In his second thesis supervised by Raymond Aron, he asserted that the notion of structure only has a precise meaning in a few very strictly circumscribed areas of the humanities.

In the series of interviews given on the occasion of the creation of his archival fund, Boudon (2012) evokes how much Aron had influenced his career. It was through the *Centre de sociologie européenne*, directed by Aron, that he became initiated in field research, in particular during a survey on the miners in the North of France. It was again Aron that convinced the young *normalien*[2] to choose sociology, rather than economy: "I followed his advice, he remembered, and when it came to defining a subject for the thesis, I turned to Paul Lazarsfeld." It was once again Aron who obtained for him a scholarship to spend the academic year 1961-1962 at the Bureau of Applied Social Science at the University of Columbia.

---

[2] Student attending the *École Normale Supérieure.*

The time spent there will strongly influence his general conception of sociology, as well as, more generally, his scientific ethos. Sociological activity amounts to nothing, he would later persistently teach his students, unless it helps solve enigmas with regard to certain social phenomena. The force of the Paul Lazarsfeld - Robert King Merton duo, who animated the Bureau at Columbia, lies in focusing the methodological inspiration of the former and the theoretical inclination of the latter on social phenomena at once carefully circumscribed and little investigated so far, in order to unravel their mysteries. From Lazarsfeld he kept the idea that methodology, viewed as the thoughtful implementation of a critical mode of analysis, constitutes an essential task for the sociologist. The research group he created in 1971, once in the CNRS and before quickly leaving it for the University, is named precisely the *Groupe d'Etude des Méthodes de l'Analyse Sociologique*. From Merton he kept the notion of "middle range theory" developed to define the proper level of analysis for sociology. It appeared to him as an efficient remedy against the pitfalls of the great intellectual systems of the time, which by wanting to encompass too much ended up not explaining anything at all. In his intellectual autobiography, Boudon readily underlines a posteriori that "in effect, there is no difference between the *middle range theory* and the methodological individualism paradigm, in the non-utilitarian sense which I had to adopt" (2010: 13).

Methodological individualism... The unique situation of Boudon in French sociology has to do in part with the long-lasting ambiguities associated with this notion. Those who are developing today the fertile field of analytical sociology have with good reason learnt some lessons from this. However, they haven't forgotten what they owe to the man who from the beginning of the 70s suggested replacing the statistical study of relations between "variables" with the building of formal models which could explain such complex phenomena as the result of individuals' actions (Hedström, 2013).

The reflection on the sociological importance of formal models can be found in Raymond Boudon's work ever since 1964, with the occasion of his collaboration with Davidovitch, but also in the last chapter of his main thesis devoted to the *L'analyse mathématique des faits sociaux* [*Mathematical analysis of social facts*]; in the severe opinion of his advisor, Jean Stœtzel, this was the only chapter really worthy of any interest (Boudon, 2010, 2012). However, it only really reaches its full scope with *L'inégalité des chances*. As expected, the work begins by identifying a number of enigmas: Why is the inequality of educational chances so resistant to political treatment? Why does the reduction of the inequality of educational chances seem to have such a small impact on social mobility? Raymond Boudon admitted the plurality of factors that affect social mobility, but he emphasized the dominant influence of individual choices, and more specifically of the positional parameters connected to these choices.

If everyone is able to understand that a family of superior cadres and a family of manual workers do not conceive of social achievement in the same terms, the general consequences of the choices derived from these different conceptions of social achievement still need to be demonstrated. Drawing inspiration from the theory of reference groups, he elaborated a deductive model that allowed him not only to reconstruct a great amount of statistical data, but also to explain the inertia in the relationship between social origin, educational level and social status.

Explaining social phenomena entails understanding individual reasons; such is the main idea reintroduced in sociology by Boudon through the notion of *methodological individualism*. We cannot say anything about complex social phenomena without going back to the agency in human actions and we cannot say anything about these actions without inquiring into the reasons and parameters connected to them. For him, as Héran (2013) rightly emphasizes, "at the heart of behaviours there is always a reason, an interest, a conviction, a value system, the development of which needs to be grasped within the reach of man— exactly the opposite of an action of occult forces supposedly governing our destinies". Even forty years later it is easy to sense what could make this idea seem heterodox in the age when the different varieties of Marxism and structuralism still reigned over the social sciences.

Raymond Boudon would contribute both to the theoretical elaboration of methodological individualism and to its diffusion among the international community of sociologists and apprentice sociologists. This was achieved through the publication of *Effets pervers et ordre social* (1977) [The Unintended Consequences of Social Action. London, Macmillan, 1982], of *La logique du social* (1979) [The logic of social action, Londres/Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981], of the *Dictionnaire critique de sociologie* (1982, in collaboration with F.Bourricaud) [A critical dictionary of sociology, Chicago/Londres, The University of Chicago Press et Routledge, 1989], *La place du désordre* (1984) [Theories of social change : a critical appraisal, Londres, Basil Blackwell/Polity Press, 1986], the *Traité de sociologie* (1992), or *Les études sur les sociologues classiques* (1998). It was achieved again through his teaching and supervision activity as Professor of sociology, first at the René Descartes University (Paris V) and from 1978 at Paris IV Sorbonne, in the philosophy department. Finally, it was achieved through his involvement, with the profoundly liberal spirit that was his own, on the editorial boards of numerous national and international journals and in managing his collection at the Presses Universitaires de France (with François Bourricaud). Launched in 1977, the "blue" collection represents a significant part of the history of French publishing in the social sciences. His colleagues and students still remember the many books and covers exhibited in the hallway at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme that lead to his secretariat, overseen with firmness and graciousness by Jacqueline Lécuyer.

Claiming a form of "thematic nomadism" (Boudon, 1996), Raymond Boudon would put his general conception regarding sociology to the test by regularly confronting it with new objects of study. Among these "nomadic" works we should especially mention *L'idéologie ou l'origine des idées reçues (1986)* [The Analysis of ideology, Londres, Polity Press, 1989], *L'art de se persuader des idées douteuses fragiles ou fausses (1990)* [The art of self-persuasion, Londres, Polity Press, 1994]*, Le juste et le vrai: études sur l'objectivité des valeurs et de la connaissance (1995), Le sens moral (1999), Déclin de la morale, déclin des valeurs? (2002), Pourquoi les intellectuels n'aiment pas le libéralisme? (2004).* All of these works develop on the same interrogation with regard to the nature of the mechanisms at play in the individual and collective commitment to ideological, cognitive and moral beliefs. Their shared originality has to do with the fact that they imagine the process which gives rise to these beliefs as largely independent from their nature or content. Supporter of a symetrical approach to beliefs, Boudon calls upon the sociologist to investigate the reasons on which the support for valid beliefs is based, but also, and especially those reasons — "subjective or inter-subjective" — which lead individuals or social groups to adhere to non-valid or normative beliefs.

These sociological studies on ideological, cognitive and moral beliefs would constitute just as many occasions to enact the critical analysis of contemporary forms of relativism (in particular in the highly productive field, at that time, of sociology of science), but also and above all, just as many stages toward elaborating a general theory of rationality. It is to this theory that Raymond Boudon chose to devote his latter works, most notably *Raison, bonnes raisons* (2003), *Essais sur la théorie générale de la rationalité* (2007) or *La rationalité* (2009). Once again indifferent to a French intellectual tradition marked by the Bachelardien idea of a radical discontinuity between scientific thought and ordinary thought, he named his theory a *theory of ordinary rationality*. He did this to remind that both are part of the same finiteness, of the same general principle of humanity. Another way of pointing out how important it is, in order to be true to his scientific ethos, that the sociologist remain within the reach of man

(translated from French by Gabriela Boldor)

REFERENCES

Boudon R. (1981). L'intellectuel et ses publics: les singularités françaises. In Reynaud J., Grafmeyer Y. (eds): *Français qui êtes-vous? Des essais et des chiffres*. Paris: La documentation française, pp.465-580.

------------ (1996). Pourquoi devenir sociologue? Réflexions et evocations. *Revue française de science politique*, 46(1): 52-79.

----------- (2010). *La sociologie comme science*. Paris: La découverte.

------------ (2012). *Entretiens avec B.Mazon*, directrice des archives de l'EHESS, GEMASS site: http://gemass.fr/spip.php?article3740 (Accessed: 01.05.2014).

Cherkaoui M., Hamilton P. (eds) (2009). *Raymond Boudon. A Life in Sociology*. Oxford: Bardwell Press.

Hedström P. (2013). Raymond Boudon (1934-2013). *Revue française de sociologie*, 54(2): I-III.

Héran F. (2013). In memoriam Raymond Boudon (1934-2013). *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*, 51(2): 7-11.

ABOUT INDIVIDUALISM AND HOLISM:
NOTES ON THE INDIVIDUALIST CONCEPTION OF
RAYMOND BOUDON

TRAIAN ROTARIU[1]

ABSTRACT. The article addresses the long-lasting disputes between individualistic and holistic approaches in explanatory methodologies from social sciences, trying to grasp the main ideas underlying these two apparently contradicting views. The term *individualism* has different meanings in the fields of moral, descriptive, ontological and methodological discourses; so does its counter-term of *holism.* While the author shares the position of ontological holism, he calls for combining the two perspectives in the field of methodology, given that explanation in social sciences always contains, in different proportions, individualistic and holistic elements. The text discusses the relations between methodological individualism and other forms of individualisms, the explanatory power of individualistic approaches when it comes to macro-social phenomena, and the problem of rationality. Paying tribute to the wide-ranging intellectual heritage of Raymond Boudon, the author critically examines his contribution to the development of social science methodology.

Keywords: individualism, holism, Boudon, rationality, methodology

This article represents an attempt to set the necessary benchmarks of the debate between individualism and holism in the analysis of social phenomena. Although it focuses on the methodological dimension of the relationship between the two perspectives, one important part of the article deals with the confusion between different levels of abstraction involved in this conceptual pair. This confusion has been perpetuated by the scholarship dedicated to the topic, which sometimes simply cannot grasp the multivocal character of the two notions. For this reason, I found it necessary to begin the discussion of this dichotomy by referring to the multi-dimensional character of these concepts, or simply put, to the different meanings employed when they are used – separately or together, as opposite terms.

[1] *Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, e-mail: trotariu@socasis.ubbcluj.ro.*

The concept of "individualism" appears as such as a general expression of many different perspectives on social life. At the opposite pole we find not one but many terms alternatively used to denote the idea of wholeness, like "holism," "collectivism," "communitarianism," or "totalitarism." Therefore, I will start by reviewing several different meanings of "individualism", conducting a parallel search for corresponding forms that the concept of "holism" might take. Doing so, I try to delimitate methodological individualism from other forms of "individualism" and, consequently, methodological holism from other "holisms". In the end, we should be able to focus on methodological individualism and methodological holism without worrying about mixing the different senses in which the basic terms that are part of these collocations are employed.

As this article represents the outcome of a personal reading, selection, and perspective of the analytical issue at stake, it is clear that I choose to mobilize certain arguments and not others. My choices are determined by the limited character of my information sources and by a specific research experience that, although it allowed me to make use of a broad range of methods and offered me the possibility to assess their efficiency, did not exhaust the entire methodological realm. My mid-1970s training as a PhD student under the guidance of the great French sociologist Raymond Boudon also left its mark on my intellectual positioning, as it took place precisely at the time when my professor was moving from a variant of naturalist-positivist-holist thinking towards a form of moderate interpretative-individualism. Today, the French sociologist is recognized as one of the most important supporters of the methodological individualism in sociology in the world.

I confess that at the time I did not realize the paradigmatic shift undertaken by my supervisor, due to my own lack of experience and limited reading on the topic. The fact that I came to sociology from a "hard science" background led me – almost naturally – to imagine my dissertation[2] as an extension of the holist ideas from *L'inégalité des chances*[3]. As a consequence, my 1970s work brought me more praises from a different member of the committee[4] than from my own supervisor. Nevertheless, he appreciated my dissertation and we maintained cordial relations until his recent departure from the realm of the living. Boudon's later evolution is apparent in a long series of texts which starts with *Effets pervers et ordre social* (1977) and continues with many other books and articles in which he refines his

---

[2] Defended at the Sorbonne University in 1977 and published in Romanian in 1980, under the title *Şcoala şi mobilitatea socială în ţările capitaliste dezvoltate* [*School and Social Mobility in the Developed Capitalist Countries*], Bucharest: Editura ştiinţifică şi enciclopedică.

[3] The first edition was published in 1973 by Armand Collin and sent Boudon immediately in the elite of French sociology, being then translated in many languages and republished several times.

[4] I am referring to professor Jacques Lautman, today retired, the editor in chief of *Archives européennes de sociologie*, to whom I remain grateful for his positive appreciations for my thesis.

fundamental ideas. I followed these ideas and I presented them to a Romanian audience – despite inherent difficulties until 1989 – first in an article[5] and then in a volume edited together with Ion Aluaş and published by Editura Politică as part of their collection, "Contemporary ideas". At the beginning of the 1990s, this volume was one of the first books of the new publishing house Humanitas, which was able to present a new edition of the book to their readers, without any change in our introductory pages.[6]

It is certain that my personal relationship with such an accomplished supporter of methodological individualism and the contact with his work influenced my perspective on this topic. However, I like to think that this influence meant not a radical change of my intellectual perspective, but rather an extra impetus to objectively analyze the theses of methodological individualism, to accept its virtues where they are manifest, and to clarify to myself and to my readers the specificity of knowledge production involved in the exploration of social phenomena. Anyone who reads my research papers in sociology or demography can see that I tried to maintain a necessary balance between the two epistemological perspectives, choosing my methods in a non-dogmatic way, by trusting the fact that the respective choice offered me most explanatory power for a given research problem.

Thus, from my perspective, social sciences scholarship is organized around four axes or main dimensions, which define a specific content for the concept of "individualism". Starting from here, we can also find four opposite holistic perspectives – although not all of them are signified by the notion of "holism". These dimensions are:

a) a *factual* dimension – observational: it refers to the weakening of individual's dependency to the group, as a process;
b) a *moral* (or moral-political) dimension – evaluative: it positively assesses and even militates for individuals' emancipation and for her escape from the group's influence;
c) an *ontological* dimension – the relationship between individual and society: in its most extreme form, ontological "individualism" postulates the primacy of the individual in relation to society;
d) an *epistemological* dimension (methodological individualism) – it focuses on the explanation of social phenomena and it advocates the necessity to consider the individual as the starting point (or as the final one) of this explanation.

---

[5] Concepţia acţionalistă a lui Raymond Boudon [The Actionalist Conception of Raymond Boudon]. *Viitorul Social*, September- October, 1985.
[6] Boudon, Raymond (1990). *Texte sociologice alese* [*Selected Sociological Texts*]. Bucharest: Humanitas.

The first part of the article is dedicated to the first three meanings of the individualism-holism distinction. I will continue in the next section with the explanatory and methodological aspects of this conceptual pair, which constitute the focal point of this text.

The Non-Methodological Dimensions of "Individualism"

The factual dimension (positive, constative, descriptive)

The factual dimension refers to the actual situation of the individual in a given society, to her relationships with the groups she belongs to and with social institutions, and, broadly speaking, to everything that "constrains" the individual and determines her views and behaviour. On this dimension, the most appropriate opposite term to "individualism" would probably be "collectivism," not "holism." Generally, the two terms ("holism" and "collectivism") are frequently invoked as opposite terms to "individualism," but they are used indistinctly, without specifying the difference between them. The meaning of "collectivism" considered on the factual dimension could shed some light on the corresponding sense of "individualism."

From this perspective, the opposition between individualism and holism (collectivism) is not very significant. Of course, one can always think about individualistic societies when individuals have more autonomy[7] and about collectivist societies when they have less, but usually, the societal assessment comes in a gradual form. Thus, especially after the failure of the former socialist countries, it is talked about "more individualist" or "more collectivist" societies. In fact, it is claimed that a historical trend of rising individualism is manifest in Western societies in modernity, even since Renaissance, and that the transformation of the relationship between individuals and collectivity is gradually favouring the former.

The indicators for evaluating the degree of individualism in a society are of a very different nature as they come from different disciplines: sociology, economics, demography, or political science. Therefore, the terms attached to this notion are also different: sociological individualism, economic individualism, or political individualism. Anyone can imagine tens or hundreds of such indicators that express, more or less clearly, the direction of this historical trend, which is evident especially for Western societies in the last centuries. As Flahaut shows, these indicators refer to "the way of life and the social resources that allow human being to develop freely, to be fulfilled and emancipated" (Flahaut, 2003: 56-57).

---

[7] Boudon labelled this dimension as "sociological individualism," and stated that „sociologically, a society is individualist when the autonomy granted to individuals by laws, customs, and social constraints is very broad" (Boudon 1986: 45).

The French economist further emphasizes mentions some of these aspects: "freedom of marital choice, gender equality, human rights, education for tolerance, respect for privacy, the right to a room for oneself, the plurality of information sources" (Flahaut, 2003: 56-57), and obviously, many others can be added to the list. Many studies use this kind of indicators for country-by-country comparisons and for aligning these societies on an axis which ranges from extreme individualism to maximal collectivism.

It is clear that defining individualism and collectivism in these terms is a convention, which fully depends upon the chosen indicators. This conventional aspect needs to be kept in mind, since Western modern societies' individualist trend, even when magnified by postmodernity, is manifest only on certain coordinates of the relationship between individual and collectivity. On other dimensions of social life, the dependency of the individuals to social groups and to the collectivity where she lives is infinitely stronger than in the premodern era. For instance, it is important to remember the increasing complexity and interdependency of our activities at the workplace. More suggestively, let's imagine one person coming home: she deactivates the alarm, opens the garage door, enters the building and pushes a series of buttons for turning on the lights, the TV-set, and the appliances. She acts freely and with the appearance of full control, but a blackout or a technical problem offers her the opportunity to understand the extent of her reliance on others, on a whole system that cannot be even imagined - least controlled – in all its complexity. This image is quite different from the figure of the premodern peasant, who depended mainly on things she manufactured. Moreover, as Boudon remarked in the above-mentioned definition, the expansion of individuals' autonomy is a process that takes place *within* societies, being generated or at least favoured by institutional transformations, by modifications of the relations between various social categories, by alterations of governance forms, or by changes in customs and beliefs, thus being closely tied to the entire social organization. Therefore, individual autonomy cannot be imagined outside relational configurations, as it needs to be facilitated, followed, and guaranteed by social groups.

This is not the place to develop the issue of the relation between individuals and collectivity from the perspective of various social groups like nuclear or extended families, local community, and so on. I only wanted to show that this meaning of "individualism" is different from its other understandings and to highlight the necessity of taking into account the factual aspect of the notion when we problematize its other dimensions. Therefore, the reader should bear in mind that the factual dimension of individualism cannot be simply blended into the ones I will discuss further. More importantly, although its ending in "-ism" would suggest otherwise, in its constative sense, the notion of "individualism" hardly designates a particular view, an ideology, or a doctrine.

Nevertheless, due to the fact that this dimension is entangled with all the others, it often happens that a more individualistic society to be also characterized by ideologies that positively values these features. The reverse is also true, as the observation that the individuals' autonomy with regard to group norms, role prescriptions, customs, and collective beliefs is on the rise influences our explanation of social phenomena for a certain type of society. Thus, we tend to emphasize individual action and agency more and to retort to individualist explanatory models. At the limit, individualist explanations are appropriate only for modern social phenomena; for previous social forms, seen as collectivist, holistic instruments are considered to hold the most explanatory power.

The ethical dimension (normative, justificative, evaluative)

This dimension regards mainly the moral perspectives that value the individual in relation with the group, the collectivity, and the social.[8] As Jon Elster says, this dimension is about "the doctrine according to which the ethical evaluation of societies takes into account only happiness, rights, and autonomy of individuals" (Elster, 1986: 63). Simply put, to the constative aspect we add an evaluative dimension of our societies, which are positively assessed if – according to one or multiple aspects – individuals enjoy more autonomy in relation to the group. The opposite of "ethical individualism" is usually "collectivism," but the notion of "ethical holism" is also unproblematically and interchangeably used. As Birnbaum and Leca show, this form of individualism can be found within "the intentional process of more or less systematic ("doctrinal") legitimation of institutions, norms, and values, especially of the political ones" (Birnbaum and Leca, 1986: 13). Therefore, sometimes it appears under the more complex name of "ethical-political individualism."

It is clear that the link between the ethical form and the factual form is not a random one. The evolution of the relationship between the individual and collectivity is accompanied and potentiated (maybe even generated) by the change in the value system through which both the respective relationship and the role of various social institutions is assessed. It would be interesting to follow, for certain historical periods, this dialectical relationship. It would be even more fascinating if we could read on the ground the concrete influence of the factual dimension of these relationships on their ethical valuation. Nevertheless, we run into the general problem of the connection between the "objective" aspects of the social and the ideational constructions through which they are evaluated. It is

---

[8] We often find in the literature mentions of a vulgar form of ethical individualism, the one that in common language would be called "selfishness" and characterizes the thinking and the behaviour of those individuals who are interested only in themselves and insensitive to others' needs.

hard to see how one could cross the boundary between the speculative realm of philosophy of history and social sciences in this complex issue, even if the two terms and the context of their relationship are clearly circumscribed. In our case, it would probably be hard to go beyond a vague and circular statement like: increasing individualism on certain dimensions strengthens the position of those who argue for a certain evolutive trend of this historical process. At the same time, it is clear that the evolution itself is circular: the proliferation of individualist ideologies leads not only to the emergence of social and political initiatives which support the increase of individual autonomy, but also to changes in individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, which become more and more "individualistic."

Since this aspect is not the topic of this article, I will stop here, not before making note of two more issues. First, reasonably argued contemporary individualist ideologies had to accept the clear limits of individuals' autonomy in their relation with society. Moreover, there are many authors who confirm that collectivist societies have certain advantages, which explain the persistence of collectivist features in the contemporary world and the difficulty of Western culture to impose its individualistic ethos to many parts of the world. This difficulty concerns not only "backward" societies from the third world but also highly developed countries from East and South-East Asia like Japan or South Korea, where close relationships between individuals and groups (family, local community, enterprise, or company) are maintained and their collectivist nature must be addressed by any rigorous individualist interpretation. Second, while individuals' dependency on collectivity is even higher than in "traditional" societies, other aspects regarding individuals' emancipation are positively valued. Personally, I strongly believe in moral progress. I also believe that the most important or solid dimensions that offer support for this ethical choice are those related to the various forms taken by individual autonomy in thought and in action.

The ontological dimension

When we try to capture the nature of social reality – the object of social sciences – we always postulate a certain relationship between individuals and society or between individuals and various social groups to which they belong. Some of these perspectives can be placed on an individualism-holism axis, as they can be rethought symmetrically, as opposites or conceptual pairs; others can be considered individualistic or holistic without allowing for counter formulations.

Let us begin with the following assertion:

a) There is no society without human individuals, who represent the ontological elementary entities which constitute the foundation of any

social form. The realization (emergence, manifestation) of any social element depends on human action. Or, differently put, nothing in society exists unless there are people to "materialize" that phenomenon or process and nothing in society exists except as outcome of human action.

These ideas are commonsensical and are generally accepted by any scientist. They state that, on one hand, there is no society without people, and on the other hand, that nothing in social life is the result of some superior forces (divinity, absolute spirit). Even the most widely spread and solid institutions, rules, or customs are constituted and consolidated in history through human action and intervention. Although these ideas emphasize the human element as a *sine qua non* condition for social life, they cannot be put under the sign of individualism because they do not make any reference to the way in which society is constituted through peoples' existence and action.

Nonetheless, sometimes these theses are considered individualist perspectives. Laurent (1992) discusses Marx, whose works are analyzed by a majority of those commentators who place themselves in a holistic perspective. The French sociologist attempts to change this vision of Marx, invoking for this purpose some of the most well-known quotes from his works: "'history' is not, as it were, a person apart, using man as a means to achieve *its own* aims; history is *nothing but* the activity of man pursuing his aims" (*The Holy Family*), "society does not consist of individuals, but expresses the sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand" (*Grundrisse*), or "What is society, whatever its form may be? The product of men's reciprocal action (*Letter to Annenkov*) (quoted in Laurent 1992: 85). In my opinion, these are normal statements for anybody who knows the spirit of Marx's oeuvre. They do not represent positions that are specific to methodological individualism, but simply the reflections of the idea that society is nothing but the product of human beings, not a divine creation or anything of a metaphysical nature. Thus, it is an ontological reflection that can be adhered, without holding this particular epistemological approach. This is true also for Berger and Luckman's (1966) well-known thesis according to which society is a human product, without forgetting their clearly holistic addition, that people are the product of society as well. This coupling makes plain the fact that the first statement cannot be definitive for any kind of individualism.

If statement a) is irrelevant for our discussion, the next two assertions should be assessed from our perspective:

b) Society is the set of concrete individuals who exist at a given moment and nothing more.
c) Society is more than the sum of individuals who make up for it.

The first sentence is a radically individualist one because it recognizes the right of existence only to individuals, not to other supraindividual social elements. At the limit, for the supporters of this position, as Norbert Elias shows, "what we call society does not exist; in reality, there is only a multitude of isolated individuals" (Elias, 1991 [1939]: 46).

Nevertheless, as I will show, there are at least three types of supraindividual social elements whose existence cannot be denied – either simultaneously or separately. The first and the most basic supraindividual element is the group organization of society, the very existence of social groups in a different way than simply the union of the individuals who comprise them. The inconsistency of the idea that there are no social groups like families, tribes, village communities, organizations, or nations is obvious and needs no further comment. To quote Elias again, "to claim that 'in reality' society does not exist and the only thing that exist is a multitude of isolated individuals means approximately the same thing with saying that in reality the house does not exist, and there is only a number of bricks, a pile of bricks..." (Elias, 1991 [1939]: 47).

The second element is related to the most general concepts, those that are placed above classes of entities subsumed to a common content, and whose existence – in natural as well as in scientific language – is taken for granted. Thus, few people would doubt the existence of the "family" (not of the particular families), of the "state" (not of the particular states), of the "village" or of the "city" (not of the concrete localities that come under one category or another). This second case is a very heterogeneous one, given the diversity of the concepts as well as the differences in their degree of generality. The millenary debate between nominalists – who deny the reality of these entities – and realists is probably beyond solution and would probably not lead to an important progress in our knowledge of the social.

The third supraindividual element refers to the content of certain special concepts, those signifying social phenomena and processes that do not take individuals (persons) as their empirical referents, but focus on complex entities defined by features of the social groups or, at the limit, of society as a whole. Even if the concrete manifestation of social phenomena is not possible without individuals who embody them, these phenomena target characteristics of collectivities, these notions having no meaning at the individual level. As an example from demography shows, although mortality as a demographic phenomenon is defined with the help of individual events – deaths – it cannot make sense when applied to an individual. Suicide – as studied by Durkheim in his celebrated book – is seen as a social phenomenon and not as an individual act.[9]

---

[9] I believe many misunderstandings of Durkheim's ideas in *Suicide* come from the fact that the phenomenon and the event have the same name. Thus, many assertions that target the phenomenon seem to refer to the event, and become meaningless.

Other phenomena, like group cohesion or absolute and relative inequalities do not have any individual correspondent. Denying the existence of social phenomena and processes gets us only to eliminating from our perspective the most important topics of social sciences. This leads to the paradoxical repudiation outside the research realm of phenomena like poverty, economic inequality, gender/ethnic/racial discrimination, unequal educational opportunities, criminality, migration, unemployment, or suicide, and to the denial of those processes which determine the historical transformation of these phenomena.

The position adopted by those who would defend point b) is not necessarily a form of ontological individualism, and the one adopted by those would rally beyond point c) is not necessarily a form of ontological holism. This last point has become trivial after many paradigms like Marxism, organicism, structuralism, gestalt theory, or system theory brought solid arguments for the idea that society is an entity of a different nature from a collection of individuals. This idea is also accepted by most supporters of individualism but they deny the existence of a "substance" or of some "laws" that are specific to these supraindividual entities or phenomena, and see their manifestations as being reducible to individual actions and resulting from the clash of these actions, analogous to the resultant of an encounter between physical forces.

We now turn to other two statements proposing slightly different varieties of ontological individualism and then to two more claims endorsing distinct forms of holism.

e) Human individuals are autonomous beings possessing free will, and social constraints are the result of negotiations between individuals, accepted as the foundation of a good coexistence, in order to preclude the unintended consequences of "free" individual actions.

f) Individuals' behaviours, feelings, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations are the result of multiple social forces, which act during their whole life; individual freedom is an illusion, strengthen by the fact that these forces are non-material and invisible.

g) The individual is the prime element in relation to society, as the constitution of society starts from fully formed individuals who establish – in time and through various mechanisms – relationships objectified in institutions, customs, and behaviour rules.

h) Society is the prime element in relation to individuals, as the individuals do not become *human* individuals – holding the characteristics that differentiate them from other sentient beings – outside society, but with the help of various socialisation agents.

In the case of the first two statements, the emphasis falls upon the issue of individual autonomy, taking two extreme forms. Due to the categorical character of these positions, they are difficult to support. On one hand, although the institutions, the relations between people and all the other elements that support social order are human creations, at a given moment they appear to individuals in their objectified and constraining form. Or, as Elias says, every individual is caught in a chain of relationships with others, who are in turn links of other chains. However, "these chains are not as visible or tangible as the iron ones. They are more elastic, more variable, and more changing, but not less real and certainly not less solid" (Elias, 1991 [1939]: 52). On the other hand, because these links as well as social constraints are "elastic," there is always a margin, a possibility of choice, which is apparent in the fact that whenever social sciences try to predict the individuals' future behaviour – regardless its type: consumption, investment, voting, political options, career choices, or marital preferences – these predictions take a rudimentary form because the constraining elements are always insufficient to allow an accurate prediction of one's life trajectory.

In brief, we could say that a moderate individualism recognizes the constraining character of certain social factors, without denying individual's role as an *actor*, as an active and determining element of the society,[10] while a moderate holism allows some action margins for the individual, but she is regarded mainly as an *agent* (*pace* Bourdieu), an element who subjects herself to and embodies the action of these social forces. Therefore, these statements – d) and e) – cannot help sociologists distinguish ontological individualism from holism because of their exaggerated, almost caricatured form. They appear more as directions of influence over certain authors, who can be categorized as individualists or holists, according to the position adopted.

The distinction introduced by the statements f) and g) is one of a different nature than the previous one, although some fundamental aspects are common. The idea of an autonomous individual postulated at point d) is close to the one at point g), which supports the primordiality of the individual in relation to society. On one hand, probably the main difference between the two pairs of situations comes from the fact that the positions synthesized at points f) and g) do not leave space to a gradual approach but fully reifies the opposition between individualism and holism. On the other hand, the other statements – d) and e) – refer to a synchronic relationship between individual and society. Or, at least, they refer to a momentary, short-lived relationship between individual and society, while the last ones target a longer historical vision of this relationship.

---

[10] It is ironic that individualists often choose the term "actor" to refer to an autonomous individual, taking into account the fact that an actor speaks only the words written by an author and behaves as required by a director.

The last statements shape the contours of ontological individualism as the label of a conceptual family which postulates the ontological primacy of the individual in relation to society's constitution, functioning, or structuration. As Flahaut says, "this conception implies that the existence of the self is a given, a natural fact: first, the individual exists, confronted with things, and only then she establishes relationships with others" (Flahaut, 2003: 57). The opposite perspective – ontological holism – claims the primacy of the social in the sense that the individual gains her human being status only within society.

In this form, ontological individualism is not a recent modern or postmodern invention, although it got stronger in the last centuries, most clearly in contractualism and then – more or less explicitly – in liberal and neoliberal economic theory. Its (Western) roots are older and have Judeo-Christian filiations. Probably it is even more spread if, as Elias (1991[1939]: 56-57) claims, people always adhered, consciously or unconsciously, to the creation myth, imagining that the whole human adventure started with an adult individual (fully formed), whom others similar to him joined. The same idea is supported in Flahaut's more recent book: "in the Western tradition, our being (our soul, our self) is given to us at the same moment as our body. In the Christian version, we get it directly from God, from the prime Spirit. In its secularized version, we get it from nature: our self emerges from itself, within our body" (Flahaut, 2003: 32). Having the fully formed selves as its starting point, society cannot be anything but the result of their actions, a means to satisfy various individual needs: the supply of food, clothes, and other necessities; the defence against big predators – animals and other groups of people; the regulation of internal conflicts; or psychological and emotional support.

Flahaut claims that this conception became dominant (like geocentrism at the beginning of the 17th century) as it came to be supported by the broader movement for individual emancipation – so well illustrated by the myth of Prometheus – that crosses the antique philosophy, Christianity, and the Enlightenment. Alongside modern economic thinking, society comes to be conceived as an utilitarian organization founded on exchange economy. The author also observes the contemporary paradigmatic change towards the opposite idea that "life in society precedes the emergence of individuals, economy is not the only foundation of society, and individuals selves are not exterior to social life but constituted by and within it" (Flahaut, 2003: 15), an idea that goes on the line of ontological holism, as previously defined at point g).

In my opinion, Flahaut's work is a convincing plea for a different understanding of the relationship between individuals and society, with multiple consequences on the moral or the political dimension. This kind of individualist conception generates the idea that economic growth is an aim in itself and society is the means to achieve it, ignoring the fact that social life and culture are also aims in themselves. As the purpose of this article is different and Flahaut's

arguments are far from being very original, I will not offer more details on them, although they might seem shocking for an economist who spends her day designing models and theories based on individual utilities, preferences, or objectives. However, sociologists serve an academic discipline which belongs to a long tradition of ontological holism.

Anyone who will revisit Elias's pre-war text cited above will find approximately the same valid arguments as the ones from Flahaut's beautiful little book, but without many references to the economic dimension of social life. Take, for instance, two relevant quotes from Elias: "one of the fundamental conditions of humanity is the simultaneous existence of multiple human beings who are in relationships with each other" (Elias, 1991 [1939]: 57) and "only in relation with the others and through this relation, the disoriented and wild creature that is human being at her birth becomes psychically adult who possesses an individual personality and deserves to be called a person" (Elias, 1991 [1939]: 58).

Going back even further in time, we could remember Durkheim's ontological holist roots, especially the strongest logical argument that lays at the foundation of his contractualist thinking: society cannot be constituted on the basis of an agreement between autonomous individuals because nothing guarantees that these individuals, who are in their "natural state," will keep their word. Only within already constituted social life an agreement is possible, under the constraints of institutions, rules, and sanctions. There is a big difference between Durkheim's position and the classical contractualist one – supported among others by Rousseau – according to which social constraint are set and accepted by people in order to allow the realization of other relational forms, like cooperation for collection actions, for instance. Ontological holism – and by extension Durkheim's own holism – claims that social constraints determine not only *what we do*, but also *what we are*. This is because, as Peter Berger (1963) once said, while it is true that the individual lives in society, society also lives in the individual. The idea is also expressed by Marx, in an even more suggestive manner. In one of his posthumous manuscripts – *Grundrisse* – he criticizes the use of the "Robinsonian" models – like those of Smith and Ricardo – based on the idea that economic action is accomplished by isolated individuals, taken away from their social context. Consequently, he emphasizes the fact that human beings are social and political animals whose singularity is acquired only in society.

In brief, the genesis of human beings – both as ontogenesis (as individuals) and as filogenesis (as species) – is a social one. Social organization and the gradual constitution of coercive and punitive rules (and of the whole moral system) are the necessary conditions for the full emergence of the human being. Acknowledging this primacy of the social in relationship with the individual does not mean that people's fecund activity can be denied or that any supraindividual element within society would be the result of an exterior force

and not of previous generations' consequential or ordinary deeds. As Elias beautifully closing of his text says[11], the society emerged as the result of humanity's historical evolution is "born of multiple projects but without a project, animated by multiple ends but without an end" (Elias 1991 [1939]: 108).

The idea of individuals' ontological subordination to society does not deny or oppose moral progress, including individuals' emancipatory tendencies in the relation to their own social group as essential components of such a process. It is simply a claim that humans cannot emerge as humans outside a social environment and outside processes and relations of socialization. Nonetheless, this position is probably opposed to an excessive moral individualism as it reminds us that beyond any form of emancipation, we remain a social product, both as individuals and as species.

The Methodological Dimension

The methodological debate between individualism and holism is an old one, at least as an implicit accompaniment of the broader reflection about the nature and the constitution of social reality. As such, it seems derived from the disagreement regarding the ontological dimension of the social. It became more visible in the last century, when its objective was more clearly stated. Then, "methodological individualism" was coined as a term meant to specify the way to explain social reality beyond its ontological status.[12] In time, many arguments were gathered for or against each position and two lines of thinking developed in parallel and in dialog, sometimes slightly and other times radically different.

For me, the use of the term "methodological" is inappropriate or at least incomplete and limiting, simply because the content of the debate goes way beyond the strictly methodological field as it is understood and defined by sociologists. It would be more appropriate to use the notion of "explanatory individualism/holism." However, an entrenched expression is hard to dislodge even when completely wrong, which is not the case here as the notion of "methodology" and its related concepts can be taken in a broad or in a narrow, more technical sense. In this case, it is obviously a broader understanding of what the concept of "methodology" covers. In the following section I will present several attempts to define methodological individualism and I will try to make the distinctions between them clear.

---

[11] The idea that structure and change are the result of human action is obviously compatible with individualist assumptions. It is already present at Scottish Illuminists like Adam Ferguson, who, two centuries earlier than Elias, stated that social order is "[t]he result of human action but not of human design" (Dupuy, 2004: 318).

[12] Many sources mention the fact that the notion of "methodological individualism" was coined by the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter (see Boudon 2002; Elster 1986; Laurent 1994).

The notion of "methodological individualism"

I could start this section reproducing various definitions of methodological individualism, as they have been formulated by some of those who brought their contribution to the development of this concept. However, I will limit myself to one of the definitions proposed by Raymond Boudon:

> The principle of "methodological individualism" claims that for explaining a social phenomenon – from demography, political science, sociology, or any other social science – it is absolutely necessary to reconstruct the motivations of the individuals who experience that phenomenon and to conceive it as an outcome of the aggregation of individual behaviours dictated by these motivations. This statement is valid no matter the form of the phenomenon to be explained, be it a singularity or a statistical regularity, translated in qualitative or quantitative data (Boudon, 1986: 46).

What is common to all these attempts is that the explanation of social facts, phenomena, and processes is not complete until we do not comprehend the actions of those individuals who participate to their production. There are several notes that accompany, specify, complete, and add variation to the definitions of methodological individualism.

- The notion targets exclusively the explanatory (methodological) field, so adopting this position does not imply ontological, ethical, or political assumptions;
- The main target of individualist explanations is "social phenomena," understood as macrosocial entities (constructs) whose existence is at least implicitly recognized;
- Although complexity is explained by resorting to simple elements, this does not mean reducing sociology or other social sciences to psychology;
- The fundamental operation through which the observer relates to the actions of human individuals is "comprehension," the reconstruction of people's motivations and aims, or of their intelligibility and logic. This reconstruction is possible only in social sciences, as both the researcher and the researched are of the same "nature": they are both rational subjects belonging to the social world;
- This endeavour is not a recourse to "atomism" either, as individuals are not isolated but participate in social relations;
- Moreover, it is not a proposal to ignore social constraints in our explanations of social phenomena: individual decisions are made in a very concrete social environment, made of social institutions with rules and limitations

and of cultural influences in a broad sense, including customs, traditions, moral and religious values, and so on. It is in this social environment that individuals are positioned and need to conform to the roles attached to their positions;

- In order to be efficient as explanatory paradigm, methodological individualism adopts individual rationality as its fundamental principle.

I continue by analyzing some of these assumptions.

The relationship between methodological individualism and its other forms

Many scholars in the methodological individualism tradition claim that this form is sustainable without appealing to ontological individualism and without being ideologically connected to a conception which values individuals' autonomy. This is also my position, because my plea for a form of ontological holism does not deny the explanatory power of methodological individualism. Nevertheless, a correlation between various forms of individualism can be observed, as many of the champions of methodological individualism also support some forms of ontological individualism. In the political realm, one could rather find them at the right of the political realm, promoting (neo)liberal ideas. More often than not, the content of this concept is taken to have a meaning that goes not only beyond the methodological field, but also beyond the broader explanatory area in which I placed it so far, and assumes dimensions of other types of individualism. A telling example is Laurent's (1994) synthetic book, which continuously mixes different aspects of the debate and does not delineate methodological from other forms of individualism.

The truth is that no matter how much one claims – like Boudon does on many occasions – that methodological individualism does not need ontological assumptions, they are necessary if one wants to be able to develop individualist explanations. One of them is the idea that society in all its aspects – subjective or objectivated in rules and millenian institutions – is the result of human actions and not other forces. Or that only individuals and groups with a decisional organ can have and follow aims; this means that the idea of finality can be introduced in the researcher's explanation only if we relate it to their actions. In other words, supraindividual entities, with the exception of the above-mentioned ones, cannot have these properties and cannot have finalities in the social world. Beyond this kind of "impurities," when one uses the notion of methodological individualism it is necessary to stick to the meaning underlined by Schumpeter, that referring to its use in researching and explaining social phenomena.

Explaining (macro)social phenomena

Reading about the explanatory virtues of methodological individualism one can easily fall in the trap of everyday examples and believe that this explanatory mechanism can function only for interactions limited to two or few actors. The so often mentioned example of the prisoner dilemma illustrates the idea that in certain situations, the solution that appears optimal for each individual can be damaging for both. Since it describes the situation of only two actors, it can hardly be generalized. There are many other examples of this kind, meant to illustrate the difficulties of collective actions, which would be beneficial for all but are blocked by individual strategies which prevent cooperation. For most scholars coming from the methodological individualism tradition, understanding individual motivations and intentions does not aim to explaining individual situations but general phenomena, which are the object of social sciences. The trajectory of the paradigm is the following: a) a macrosocial phenomenon is seen as intriguing and worthy of an explanatory endeavour; b) the situation of the individuals involved in its production is analyzed by appealing to comprehension; c) the macrosocial phenomenon is reconstructed as a result of the aggregation of individual actions. In this way, we glide from macro to micro and back.

In his first major work, *Inequality of chances* (1973), Boudon offers a classical example for the individualist paradigm as modality of explanation. Inequality of educational chances is a very general phenomenon, being found in all modern societies with an intensity varying geographically and historically. Simply put, a smaller proportion of the descendents of those belonging to lower social classes get into higher educational levels – secondary and tertiary – compared to the descendents of those belonging to higher social classes. All sorts of explanatory models have been mobilized for this kind of phenomenon but they can be grouped in two basic categories: holist and individualist. While the former uses a series of social characteristics to imagine causal relations where the *explicandum* is the inequality of educational chances, the latter builds up from the micro level and explains the phenomenon as the result of a multitude of individual actions through which every actor attempts to attain certain aims, without anyone intending to produce a societal effect. As Boudon's book is well-known, I will not give more details on the matter. However, it is already clear that individualist explanations are robust and help us not fall in the trap of a macrosocial finalism. It prevents us from accepting the idea that any occult social force would follow to determine individual behaviours in such a way that educational inequality of chances would be (re)produced. This phenomenon is indeed the result of the intentional actions of individuals, and their behaviours can be understood if we take into account the concrete social conditions at a given moment.

Going back to the individual when trying to explain a macrosocial– or supraindividual – phenomenon is beneficial for our comprehension of things because it sheds light on the modality the *explicandum* is related to one or many supraindividual explanatory factors. Using a metaphor that is dear to those endorsing individualism, we can say that we open the "black box" containing the mechanism through which this link is realized. Without this operation, we can just observe the "entries" and the "exits" and to establish correlations between them. The causal relationship postulated on this foundation remains always hypothetical, always with a question mark.

Nonreductionism

This subsection develops the idea of autonomy of social sciences from psychology. This autonomy is partially supported precisely by the specificity of concept of "comprehension." Most supporters of individualism appeal to this concept from a Weberian perspective based on uncovering the final aims and intentionality of individual actors' actions by investigating not their deep psychological traits but their general motivations. The thing that qualifies the observer for comprehension is the fact that the actor and the researcher belong to the same world. Therefore, the researcher can place herself in the position of the actor and realize that in similar conditions she would act in the same way.

As Elster (1986) showed, since explaining through comprehension does not require a theoretical scheme for behaviours and emotions, methodological individualism does not step into the theoretical field of psychology either. On the contrary, Elster claims that "one of the first misunderstanding to be avoided is the idea that methodological individualism needs a theory of individual motivations" (Elster, 1986: 62). The only assumption adopted by most individualists is that individuals are rational. This assumption will be discussed later in this article.

Contexts and interactions

I answer here to another attack against methodological individualism, the idea that our paradigm is built around an abstract, singular individual, who acts only according to her own desires, without taking into account her relationships with others and forgetting that her whole personality is the result of social influences, starting from birth, going through primary socialization and ending with death. In other words, methodological individualism is accused on "atomism" and of considering individuals as being outside society, complete, and fully independent in their decisions. The supporters of methodological individualism reject the accusations of atomism using two arguments. On one hand, they emphasize the interdependency of social actors – the interaction process – and the fact that the result of interactions appears as a macrosocial phenomenon.

On the other hand, individual decisions are not the outcome of an abstract rationalization but of an evaluation of a concrete situation with all its constraints. All these constraints enter the cost/benefit calculation that constitutes the foundation of action.

To illustrate these aspects, I will go back to Boudon's texts. Starting from 1973 with *Inequality of chances* and continuing with his work on "perverse effects" (1977), the French sociologist insisted on the importance of composition effects, the higher level result of the autonomous individuals' actions. This macrosocial outcome is often not intended at the moment of its production. Sometimes, it can be even undesirable – this being the root of the notion of "perverse effects." In other words, people have certain aims and act accordingly, but from their interaction a phenomenon with opposite effects than each of them expects can emerge (see Boudon, 1973 and 1977).

There is one aspect that Boudon touches upon in the last chapter of his *Perverse Effects*, entitled "Social determinism and individual freedom," but hardly develops in his later works: the social context of individual decisions. I find this aspect central for understanding not only methodological individualism but also the social itself, regardless of the paradigm we adopt for explaining it. Boudon acknowledges three types of social constraints that influence humans' actions and need to be accounted for when we aim to explain them. These constraints are structural, functional, and cultural.

In simple terms, the firsts are caused by the totality of the social regulations existing the moment of action, including institutional regulations, juridical and moral rules, or social customs. The functional ones are simply role prescriptions targeting the persons placed in a particular social position, who are expected to think, feel, and act according to the expectations society has from the social category they belong to. The cultural ones can be more specific as they are generally articulated around the individual's background, knowledge, habits, education, tastes, or preferences.

From the perspective of methodological individualism, both in Boudon's variant and in the vision of other scholars who do not acknowledge the very existence of these constraints, the issue must be further specified. Ontologically, these factors do not fully determine individual behaviours. The most frequent comparison is with the iron fillings lying on magnetic field lines, although no force is as powerful as to determine this kind of occurrence. In social situations, examples abound: one can run a red light when driving, a chemistry teacher can talk about football in class, one can eat cabbage soup when invited to dinner even if she hates it. In brief, the freedom of choice is there even in the most constraining situations.

Methodologically, when trying to explain a social fact or phenomenon, Boudon warns us that sometimes we need to and sometimes we do not need to take into account these constraints. More concretely, we can ignore some of them

or all of them depending on the situation we need to explain and to what it is necessary and relevant for understanding individuals' behaviour. Theoretically, we could combine these situations in eight ways (no constraint, one constraint, two constraints, and three constraints at a time), but Boudon reduces this space to four important dimensions, each of them constituting an individualist explanatory (sub)paradigm. The first category – of a Marxist type – includes those explanations which do not need any appeal to these constraints when we try to understand individual preferences and the rationality of their actions. For instance, to find the standard solution to the prisoner's dilemma, the acknowledgment of their guilt, we do not need any information regarding the individuals' past, their social position, or the social rules they follow. A second category of paradigms – the Tocquevillian type – contains the explanations based on those individual preferences that can be understood in the actors' social context. Boudon takes from Tocqueville an example regarding the different behaviour of the French and English aristocracy. The third category – the Mertonian type – appeals to the individual's position, which in this case depends on others' positions, so the actor must consider the effect of her actions upon people around her: for instance, when the teacher must play her role in front of her students. The fourth category – the Weberian type – considers the whole system of preferences as the result of certain elements which are prior to the moment of action – everything that the actor acquired during her life, knowledge, habits, attachment to certain values – and determine action, regardless of other criteria.

Beyond the reader's own opinion with regard to Boudon's classification, it is clear that his aim is to convince us that methodological individualism does not imagine the individual isolated from her social context. On the contrary, he acknowledges the fact that a multitude of social factors influence actors' choices, without being able to fully determine human behaviour. Thus, his classification becomes a critique of determinist paradigms, of those visions that emphasize one or another type of constraint. Under the label of "determinism," Boudon rejected hyperfunctionalism (the idea that any freedom of interpretation of role prescriptions is negligible), hyperculturalism (the idea that action must be explained exclusively through prior elements like individual socialization), and totalitarian realism (the most usual form of sociologism, according to which the configuration of individual preferences wholly depends on social structure). Thus, methodological individualism acknowledges individual autonomy and not the independence of people's actions in relation with social factors. This autonomy is rooted in the fact that individuals are not seen as entities manipulated through the intervention of external factors, but as persons who act intentionally. In other words, in the explanation of social phenomena, macrosocial factors do not have to be regarded as material causes – which would move the individuals automatically or mechanically – but as a frame for the rationality of the individuals. When the explanation uses the language of causality, it can be stated that its building blocks are final causes.

Methodological individualism and rationality

Generally, when analyzing human action, the scholars who advocate the virtues of methodological individualism adopt the rationality axiom. This paradigm was revived last century, especially due to the influence of micro and macroeconomic models upon the methodological field of other social sciences and the attempt to imagine *homo sociologicus* around *homo economicus*. Thus, it is easy to see why the rationality principle can be found at the centre of the individualist model, even thought the assumption that human individuals think, act, plan, and anticipate does not mean that they (always) act rationally.

The issue of rationality is extremely complex and I will not follow through its complicated landscape. However, several things must be clarified. First, due to our inheritance from economy, rationality is most often seen as instrumental rationality. This means simply that the individual has the capacity to choose the optimal path and means for attaining his aims. The choice of these aims is generally not addressed, and for the economists the idea that individuals maximize their own utility on the expense of others' seems to be enough. We can see how *homo economicus* was imported in sociology and translated into a model of a selfish individual, who is not interested in the consequences of her actions upon others, follows her own interest, holds the complete necessary information on a given situation, and possesses perfect cognitive qualities. Therefore, this abstract individual is always able to manage this kind of information and to find the optimal solution to her problem. For sociology, this model is too neat and, as it goes too far from real ordinary people, it is not very useful for explaining human behaviour. Even in economics, which deals with simpler things, the model of rationality was "sweetened," most clearly in the notion of "bounded rationality" (Simon, 1991).

One way to move towards an acceptable form of sociological explanation was to relax the conditions required by the model of perfect instrumental rationality on at least three dimensions:

- The problem of the optimal – individuals do not attempt to acquire simply the most efficient means, but the ones that lead to a satisfying but at the same time acceptable attaining of their aims;
- The problem of information – individuals' information is not complete, but limited;
- The problem of solution – individuals do not always have the necessary cognitive capacities for finding the best path for attaining their goals.

While economists are somehow puzzled by these hypotheses because their models are founded on the vision of a calculating person (even in the most concrete sense of the word, as manipulator of numbers) for a sociologist these

weakening conditions are more acceptable because they do not try to quantify human behaviour to the same extent. For instance, the sociologists will not try to calculate the percentage of information needed by someone in order to make a rational decision.

Nevertheless, even when relaxing these conditions, humans as social beings cannot be captured by this model because they are not outside the social environment where they are formed and act. Human actions do not have an absolute meaning but acquire this meaning in a given social situation, which influences not only the calculation of utility, but also the first assumption of the model, i.e. the selfish individual. Therefore, even if we preserve the idea of selfishness, this requirement can be weakened, too, if we understand selfishness as a socially determined attitude. Furthermore, we can easily give up this requirement and acknowledge the fact that people do not always act in an interested way and sometimes they even act against their own interests.

This idea was developed especially by those who appeal to Max Weber's work and argue that the German sociologist supported the idea that people act by following not only an instrumental rationality [*Zweckrationalität*] but also an axiological one [*Wertrationalität*]. Most commonly, "an action would be axiologically rational if it appears to be in conformity with the subject's own values" (Boudon, 1999: 105). Introducing the notion of axiological rationality often appears as an artifice through which researchers come out of difficult situations, when "normal" rationality has no meaning. Consequently, this solution is problematic because it is difficult to test and it excessively dilutes the concept of rationality itself.

Most importantly, axiological rationality can be indirectly reduced to the instrumental one if the researcher takes into account the consequences of the individual's actions. For instance, the individual x, who strongly believes in the values of ecologism, participates at a demonstration against some policy that she believes to be harming to the environment.[13] Her behaviour can be interpreted as rational, as it is in conformity with the values she supports. But another reading of this action is possible: believing in the negative consequences of the policy, the actor feels directly affected by it and, by extension, she is interested in the success of the collective action. In this case, the axiological aspect simply hides a direct interest of the subject.[14] Another example is our negative evaluation of crime because we are afraid that the people close to us or ourselves can fall victims of a criminal act.

Max Weber foresaw this kind of interpretation and tried to prevent it by dissociating the two types of rationality as clearly as possible. Thus, he explicitly refers to this issue in *Economy and Society*, his fundamental work, when he claims

---

[13] It is not important if this measure is really harmful but if subject X believes it is.

[14] The issue is broader than this example shows and it reflects the belief that there are no free acts in society and every gesture is convergent with individuals' interest (see, for instance, the famous problem of the gift).

that "[e]xamples of pure value-rational orientation would be the actions of persons who, regardless of possible cost to themselves, act to put into practice their convictions of what seems to them to be required by duty, honour, the pursuit of beauty, a religious call, personal loyalty, or the importance of some 'cause,' not matter in what it consists" (Weber 1978 [1922]:25). The German author rightly notices that this kind of acts are rare but they can be important, so they cannot be omitted when we attempt to explain social phenomena.

It is also in the pages of *Economy and Society* that Weber teaches us that social action can be assessed in four ways: a) rationally, through finality [*zweckrational*]; b) rationally, through values [*wertrational*]; c) affectionally [*affectuel*], emotions, passions, and feelings; and d) traditionally [*traditionell*], through customs rooted in the social world. In this way, Weber tries to soften the idea of rational determinants of social phenomena – which are obviously actualized through individual actions – introducing two types of rationality – instrumental and axiological – and then two types of non-rational actions or behaviours – generated by affective states or traditions.

A broad debate about the place and the role of these factors in determining social phenomena became possible. We can discern even from Weber's original text that methodological individualists privilege (instrumental) rational explanations instead of non-rational ones. Despite several interesting theoretical developments, the attempts of several sociologists – Boudon included – to bring the two types of rationality highlighted by Weber at the same level did not have a broader echo, probably because of the stronger influence of the economics explanatory model. Even when researchers acknowledge the fact that the individual is not always selfish, that she has a limited access to information and imperfect calculation capacities, for explanatory purposes they still use an abstract image of a social person who meets these conditions. In Popper's words, they use the "zero method," trying to explain macro phenomena by summing this type of abstract behaviours. Only when it fails – like in voting behaviour for instance[15] – the researcher adopts axiological rationality and even non-rational traits of individual actions.

Methodological individualism and rational choice theory

Our discussion confirms that methodological individualism takes many forms, even in the case of its practitioners, who theoretically use the same notion and participate at the same paradigmatic brotherhood. I will leave the more subtle differences between these authors to a more laborious and specialized study in the field. I confine myself to Raymond Boudon's (2003, 2007) attempt to

---

[15] To use the paradigm of instrumental rationality in order to explain why people vote proved to be almost impossible (see Boudon, 1999).

make a classification of these perspectives that have the individual at the centre of social phenomena's explanation and to realize a hierarchy of these perspectives according to their level of generality.

The French sociologist begins with several fundamental postulates, starting from the assumption that whoever adopts one of these theses, will automatically adopt all those preceding it in this hierarchy. Since Boudon mixes ontological and methodological utterances, I will clean up his scheme by bringing the whole discussion in the domain of explanation and by leaving the discussion over the nature of things out. This is important especially for the first postulate. Boudon reduces the first postulate to the idea that social phenomena are the product of human actions, which is an expression of sociological common sense. He adds to this the idea that it is only human individuals who have opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and aims, while collective entities have not. Although almost all social researchers would agree with these statements, they go beyond a simple epistemological stance. Thus, I will present the most interesting six of Boudon's postulates, which will be then translated in the methodological realm.

P1. *The postulate of individualism.* Any social phenomenon, no matter how general, can and must be explained starting from the actions, decisions, and behaviours of individuals who participate to its realization.

P2. *The postulate of comprehension.* Any individual act can be, at least in principle, understood.[16] The comprehension of individual actions is an essential moment in the explanation of social phenomena.

P3. *The postulate of rationality (in a broad sense).* In explaining social phenomena, we assume that individual acts have a rational ground, which may be or may not be clear in the actor's mind.

P4. *The postulate of consequentialism (instrumentalism).* The rationality of individual acts must be searched for in the consequences of these acts, as the individual subject perceives at a given moment. This means that although the subject cannot foresee all the consequences of her actions, for explanatory purposes it is necessary and sufficient to know what she perceives as consequential when she engages herself in that action.

P5. *The postulate of selfishness.* Individuals follow exclusively their own interests, regardless the consequences of their acts upon others.

P6. *The postulate of maximization.* Individuals choose the best option available, the one that optimizes the advantages/disadvantages ratio. A concession is made, acknowledging the fact that this choice is determined by the actor's limited capacities, so the "optimal" selection is restricted to a range of possibilities the subject can imagine and evaluate.

---

[16] I use the expression "individual acts" to avoid the repetition of long chains of terms like opinions, attitudes, beliefs, goals, decisions, and behaviours.

We will follow the French sociologist's idea that satisfying these postulates in a cumulative manner defines the range of modalities through which social phenomena are to be explained, starting from the elementary entities participating to their constitution – the human individuals. The role of the first postulate is to delimitate methodological individualism from holism. Since the idea that sociological explanation must descend to the individual level is its only requirement, methodological individualism can be conceived as the most general formulation in this conceptual family. For instance, if we observe a statistical relation that tells us that high school graduates from lower social classes attend university level courses less than their colleagues from higher social classes even when we control for their performance, we have two possibilities to explain this phenomenon. The first choice is to remain at the macro level and consider social origin as a causal element, thus stating that social origin influences educational trajectory in the above-mentioned sense. The second choice is to go to the individual level and analyze why youngsters from lower social classes do not choose to continue their education in the same proportion as their colleagues who have a higher class social background, even when they reach the same scholarly success (measured in grades, for instance).

If we take a step further from the postulate P1 to the postulate P2, we place ourselves in the Weberian tradition of comprehensive sociology. Following through the previous example, this means to see individuals as human beings whose behaviours and aspirational universes are comprehensible. In brief, individuals are seen as people and not like material external entities that can be manipulated without their knowledge. The distinction Boudon makes between the two ways to look at social actors is very thin, as theoretically one can adopt only the first postulate, without appealing to comprehension. In practice, probably all who reclaim themselves from methodological individualism assume a form of explanation based on the understanding of individual acts.

The third postulate gets us to what Boudon calls "the general rational model." The new explanatory paradigm will include the assumption that people always act rationally. Consequently, explanation must get to the reasons that stand behind human acts. To Boudon, the first three postulates seem sufficiently general and adequately circumscribed to make them the privileged foundation for social sciences. Without rationality in its various forms – including what Boudon calls "cognitive rationality" – our methodological instruments do not have enough explanatory power; adding assumptions would make our methodological instruments too specific and limit their applications.

Boudon's efforts in the last part of his life were centred around the attempt to support the consistency of his argument that individualist explanations are founded on the assumption that people act rationally in the broad sense of the term, thus the researcher must search for the reasons of individuals' acts.

Cognitive rationality, for example, is invoked when the researcher needs to explain that people believe in something that was proven false or that did not produce any scientific evidence. The French sociologist claims that the researcher needs to analyze the context in which the actors live and to find the rationality of what they believe in terms of "strong reasons" [*raisons fortes*] or "grounded reasons" [*bonnes raisons*] and not by appealing to obscure factors like "false consciousness" or "primitive mentality."

Individual actions are always based on what people believe. People believe something will occur, they believe that something causes something else, they believe they will need to pay a certain amount of money for a certain commodity, or they believe that going to a certain school will give them an advantage in the future. Accordingly, cognitive rationality is the broadest notion and tends to incorporate all the others into a "general theory of rationality," used by Boudon to unify the discussion about various forms of rationality, to erase the boundaries between them, and to surpass the difficulties provoked by the two separate Weberian forms of rationality.

It is clear that although instrumental rationality helps us to explain certain social phenomenal by descending to individuals' preferences, it would not tell us why the individual prefer what they prefer. We run into even deeper problems with the notion of axiological rationality. On one hand, explaining a social phenomenon by saying that the individuals act in conformity with certain values is equivalent with saying that the existence of these values in society generates the social phenomena, thus falling into a holistic kind of explanation. On the other hand, adhering to a certain value system at a given moment must be explained in itself. The purpose of Boudon's general theory of rationality is precisely to go beyond these obstacles by considering that the researcher's task is to search for the *bonnes raisons* behind people's assessment of something as good or bad, by which he tries to explain not only the beliefs transmitted through common knowledge, but also scientific theories. This is made possible by the fact that between the two types of knowledge there is clear continuity, and not a fracture.

His concept of rationality did not manage to become dominant and was criticized from many directions. This diluted notion of *rational* is denounced both in general terms – by those who think that Boudon's conceptual expansion loses the essence of rationality – and in specific ones – by those who support the importance of individual irrational factors (on a Freudian line), by those who assign centrality to the embodiment of social factors (along the line of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*), or by those supporters of methodological individualism who adopt a more rigorous model of *homo sociologicus* as rational entity. The debate is, of course, more complex than I have presented it and remains open.

Let us add now the fourth postulate, which suggests the researcher to search for the rationality of human actions in their consequences. Boudon believes that this axiom constitutes the foundation of certain version of functionalism. Together with the fifth postulate, on selfishness, Boudon articulates a form of diffuse utilitarianism. The sixth postulate represents the idea that individuals try to maximize their "gains" by calculating the ratio between advantages and disadvantages of every option. This is Boudon's understanding of "rational choice," but there are many other definitions in use for this notion, which was born as a crucial part of the endeavour to account for economic facts but crossed the boundaries of all social sciences and, during the last decades, came to be considered by many the only consistent general theory in our field. The limits of this theory will be also addressed in this article but not before assessing Boudon's definition in comparison with others', especially with economists' proposal.

First, as it appears from Boudon's synthesis, methodological individualism is a paradigmatic position, a principle, and an attitude regarding the explanation of social phenomena. It takes many distinct forms, including all varieties of rational choice theory. For me, the definition of methodological individualism must contain the first two postulates and individualist explanations must embrace Weberian comprehension. If we looked at the individuals as physical entities, our explanation would be reduced either to the finding of those lines of thinking and acting that are defined by exterior social forces (not unlike the holist model), or to vague and tautological statements according to which a social phenomenon is produced by the interaction of the individuals, without penetrating the reasons behind the acts of the people who engage in that interaction.

The third postulate of rationality states that "individual actions that are of interest for social sciences are primordially caused by the motives in social actors' minds" (Boudon 2007: 76) and is the Achilles' heel of the French sociologist's construction. It is easy to understand why this loose formulation of rationality was often criticized. In the economists' original definitions of rational choice, rationality was defined in its strictest instrumental sense. A narrow interpretation of rationality makes Boudon's third postulate to include *all* the following ones (P4, P5, and P6). It is not hard to see that instrumental rationality targets the consequences of individual acts, that the individuals follow their aims in a selfish manner – without taking into account how their actions affects the others – and that they try to get the best results. Moreover, this understanding of what is optimal – and quantifiable in the older versions of the theory – most often targets monetary gains.

Conceived in this way, rational choice theory has the great quality of being specific enough to allow empirical testing when applied to economic phenomena. In the Popperian language, it is falsifiable. However, in this form, it

loses its general character, because it simply cannot explain everything. This was the starting point of the critiques against this strong version of rationality (Boudon's P3-P6 and the expression of cost/ benefits in monetary terms). The fact that at least six Nobel laureates for economy (Friedrich Hayek, Gunnar Myrdal, Herbert Simon, Ronald Coase, Amartya Sen şi David Kahneman) criticized the narrow concept of rationality testifies for the major importance of these discussions.

Following these critiques, the economists tried to nuance the concept, changing rational choice theory in important ways. One of the solutions was to relax certain conditions, like Boudon's sixth postulate – that people do not have complete information, the capacity to assess the consequences of their acts, or the availability to search for the optimal solution, being satisfied with an acceptable one. As Hodgson (2012) shows, another trend in the 1990s was to give up the idea of maximizing gains and to introduce the notion of "utility" instead of the concept of "payoff." For the maximization of the utility function the concept of "preferences" was launched in order to explain the choice of one out of the many possible courses of action.

Once these conditions are weakened, the theoretical model becomes sufficiently broad to be imported in social sciences and to invade them. One of the fundamental books that contributed to the introduction of rational choice theory in sociology was James Coleman's *Foundations of Social Theory* (1990). Garry Becker's works represent well-known attempts to find concrete applications of rational choice theory in social life and to expand the field of application of an economic model to broader social phenomena. His efforts were rewarded with the Nobel Prize in economy. It needs to be emphasized that even if we relax the conditions of rational choice theory, we are still firmly on the ground of instrumental rationality. Thus, the utilitarian paradigm would explain human action through the fact that individuals search for those actions that produce favourable consequences and will extent this logic of action from economic to other social phenomena.

The attraction of rational choice theory for sociologists, political scientists, and other researchers of social world is undeniable. It contributed to a "disenchantment" of social life through a firmer grounding of individual interests. As someone rightly observed, it is always fascinating to discover that whenever one thinks something is happening because of people's intentions, feelings, and noble actions, it is actually the result of petty and selfish calculations produced by individuals who follow only their own interest, without any regard for the consequences of their acts on other people's lives. Nonetheless, the main argument for rational choice theory is the same that lies at the foundation of individualism, namely the fact that when we go to the individual level and we start from the assumption of rationality, the explanation becomes more clear,

more complete, more convincing than when we invoke causal relations between macro social phenomena. Simply stating a relationship between supraindividual entities does not make the mechanism that allows one to have an effect on the other visible. Coleman (1986) emphasizes exactly the two above-mentioned aspects: first, that only by turning towards individual actions one can get to fully explain macrosocial aspects (as an institution or a process) and second, that only by assuming that individuals are rational one can exercise her comprehensive capacity and decide that other explanatory elements are redundant.

In the economists' circles, the most important critiques are related to the attempts to relax the content of the "rationality" concept. The most relevant one is discussed by Hodgson (2012), who considers that replacing the thesis of profit maximization – quantifiable in its monetary form – with the maximization of marginal utility, rational choice theory loses precisely the quality of allowing its empirical applications to be falsified. In passing, we must note that utility maximization came to be also linked with behavioural economists and to their formulations of rationality as "behaviour coherence." Essentially, Hodgson's argument is that the adjusted theory became unfalsifiable and invulnerable to any empirical attack. Thus, "because utility is unobservable, all kinds of behaviour can be 'explained' in terms of the idea, without fear of refutation" and "no evidence can possibly refute the theory that agents are maximizing some hidden or unknown variable (such as utility)" (Hodgson, 2012: 97). Furthermore, "a key problem with utility maximization is that it is so general that it can explain anything; consequently its explanatory power in specific instances is dramatically diminished. Its explanatory success is an illusion. Close inspection of its proclaimed achievements reveal that the results always depend on additional assumptions" (Hodgson, 2012: 98). It is true that unfalsifiable theories are not necessarily wrong, but their value decrease if they cannot be confronted with empirical evidences. An even harsher critique suggests that the explanations produced by rational choice theory are tautological: the individual chooses option x because it ranks first in her order of preferences; option x ranks first because it was chosen.

When transferred to the social sciences, the idea of maximization or optimization becomes even more problematic because behaviours and consequences of human action are more difficult to quantify. Things do not change radically even if we relax the conditions of the theory and we contend ourselves with acceptable but not optimal solutions. On the contrary, the loose character of the conditions, together with an increased difficulty to quantify the results, constitute serious arguments for those who claim that this kind of theories are too general. Trying to explain everything, they end up explaining nothing.

The possibility of going beyond instrumental rationality requires a stepping out of economic thinking, and lately even economists started to share ideas about giving up the "selfishness" postulate and to acknowledge the fact that the actor can be altruistic in certain situations, defined by specific social contexts and

cultural spaces. A well-known example is the game of the ultimatum, often referred to in economics. Actor A receives a sum of money from the game organizer, let's say 100 Euros, and she has to share it with actor B. The condition of the game is that A would propose any formula for sharing the money. If B does not accept it, neither of them gets any money. The two individuals do not know each other and there is no possibility to repeat the game. The equilibrium solution is that the second player would agree with any sum that is different from zero, otherwise she would not get anything. Thus, player A would propose the most unequal share: 99 Euros for A, and one Euro for B. In reality, experiments and surveys showed that people who play the role of A do not act according to the equilibrium solution. Varying with social and cultural contexts, the proportion of the sum offered to B is between 30 and 50 percent. There are many reasons for explaining this outcome: A's altruism, A's high sense of justice acquired through education within that society, A's evaluation of B's sense of equity and pride, and so on. The moral of the exercise is straightforward. The model of *homo economicus* does not work even in simple and easily quantifiable matters. Moreover, explaining the variation of the average solution chosen in various contexts by people with different social attributes becomes a very interesting aim. Consequently, the *homo economicus* model simply cannot function in sociology.

According to this logic, Boudon's solution to abandon rational choice theory in favour of a general theory of rationality is an ingenious one. Since simply adding axiological rationality to the mix does not solve the problem, Boudon decides to dissolve all other forms of rationality in cognitive rationality. Although the French sociologist also invokes the game of the ultimatum as example for a situation that cannot be explained by rational choice theory, he offers no explanation to the fact that in most societies, the average solution to the game is 60 to 40. I guess his answer would be that we need to look for the motives behind the typical individual's belief that this split is a good (correct, equitable, acceptable) choice.

In conclusion, we can accept that rational choice theory is a particular case of methodological individualism, one that adds supplemental conditions that are not linked – at least theoretically – with the idea of explaining social phenomena through looking at individuals. However, there is a movement toward superposing the two concepts. On the one hand, we see that from a top-down perspective, the postulate of comprehension and the postulate of rationality are often added to the first postulate of methodological individualism. On the other hand, by relaxing the conditions of the initial formulation of rational choice theory, the model goes from a particular to a more general form, getting closer to methodological individualism. Boudon's general theory of rationality is one of the possible meeting points for the two movements: the one that aims to confer more consistency to methodological individualism and the one that strives to give more space for the applications of rational choice theory.

Beyond the antinomy

The solution to the problems discussed here is not a simple one. Even if those supporting one or another epistemological choice want to leave the impression that their discourse is impeccable, in reality the issue cannot be solved simply by adopting one perspective or by privileging its arguments. The complexity of the debate comes from the fact that the methodological positioning on the individualism-holism axis is correlated with other visions present in the scientific or in the ideological field – both on the political dimension (left-right) and on the economic one. These influences bring foreign elements into debate, but the unintended consequence of the involvement of extramethodological aspects only strengthens the convictions of the supporters. I will not develop these connections further.

I do not join Bourdieu in his opinion that the debate itself is sterile, eliminating with a stroke all the discussions surrounding the numerous antinomies found in the methodological literature for the simple reason that they are artificial perspectives involving professors and researchers with the purpose of capturing students' and readers' interest. The long history of the debate and its roots in our knowledge system compels us to try to understand how these antinomies could be overcome. Before going further, I turn to Bourdieu to understand how he sees the relationship between individual and collective, because his well-known ideas could be useful in articulating a reasonable solution to our problem.

Bourdieu's reaction against individualism – especially against its rationalist form as professed by the supporters of methodological individualism and rational choice theory – is vehement. He accuses them that they take out people from their social context and transform them in abstract individuals enhanced with forms of rationality that are not to be found in any concrete situation, a mirror-like image of the scientists' projection about themselves. I reproduce a longer quote, as it synthesizes most clearly Bourdieu's position:

> The actor, as it construes him or her, is nothing other than the imaginary projection of the knowing subject (*sujet connaissant* into the acting subject (*sujet agissant*), a sort of monster with the head of the thinker thinking his practice in reflexive and logical fashion mounted on the body of a man of action engaged in action. RAT recognizes nothing but the 'rational responses' to potential or actual opportunities of an agent who is both indeterminate and interchangeable. Its 'imaginary anthropology' seeks to found action, whether 'economic' or not, on the intentional choice of an actor who is himself or herself economically and socially uconditioned. This narrow, economistic conception of the 'rationality' of practices ignores the individual and collective *history* of agents through which

the structures of preference that inhabit them are constituted in a complex temporal dialectic with the objective structures that produced them and which they tend to reproduce" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 123).

Bourdieu's human being is not the absolutely free actor whose behaviour depends only upon the intention of reaching a certain goal, but the individual who, most of the time, acts without being aware of a clear objective, being caught in the dialectical game of *habitus* and field. "The theory of action that I propose (with the notion of habitus) amounts to saying that most human actions have as a basis something quite different from intention, that is, acquired dispositions which make it so that an action can and should be interpreted as *oriented toward one objective or another* without anyone being able to claim that that objective was a conscious design" (Bourdieu, 1998: 97-98, emphasis in original). Or, in a different place: "To speak of habitus is to assert that the individual, and even the personal, the subjective, is social, collective. Habitus is a socialized subjectivity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 126). At the same time, the idea developed by Boudon that social phenomena can be deciphered as the product of the interaction between individuals as actors who rationally follow their goals is also rejected. Bourdieu's statements, with often references to Marx, are not only trenchant, but also telling for a vision of the social that relegates individual activities to a secondary place, both ontologically, and epistemologically.

Bourdieu also harshly criticizes mechanicist holist conceptions which make the agent into a simple pawn of social structures, or, more specifically, of the forces that define the logic of each field and of the social factors incorporated in *habitus* as generative principle for individual and collective behaviours, ideas, or tastes. Neither the structure of the field, nor *habitus* can determine automatically the actions of social agents. People build lines of actions within the practice of everyday life (i.e. strategies) and these lines are not automatically generated by the encounter between *habitus* and a concrete state of the field, but only "objectively oriented" by this encounter. Rationality as the calculation of optimization is not involved in the elaboration of these strategies; Bourdieu's actor is not a rational one, but a *reasonable* one, capable of evaluating her chances in a given situation and not to venture in situations with no escape. This is precisely because:

People are not fools; they are much less bizarre or deluded than we would spontaneously believe precisely because they have internalized, through a protracted and multisided process of conditioning, the objective chances they face. They know how to 'read' the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made (by opposition to everything that the expression 'this is not for the likes of us' designates), through

practical anticipations that grasp, at the very surface of the present, what unquestionably imposes itself as that which 'has' to be done or said (and which will retrospectively appear as the 'only' thing to do or say) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 130).

It is important to emphasize Bourdieu's effort to highlight at the same time the role of macrosocial factors and of the individual ones. The macrosocial factors represent the materialization of the structure of the field which generates the lines of force determining both the relationships between agents on the dominating-dominated axis, and the emergence of *habitus* through various instances of socialization. The individual ones are important because it is the agent who makes this social assemblage function, contributing to its actualization, maintenance, and change. It is clear that when the history that generates the social is left out and we place ourselves strictly in the methodological realm attempting explanations of social phenomena and processes as social sciences of the present, the holistic component of Bourdieu's thinking is prevalent.

Leaving aside the caricaturization of some of the methodological individualism's and rational choice's representatives, some of Bourdieu's critiques are correct. For instance, although the accusation that the individualists do not see people in the social context where they were formed and act is exaggerated, it is true that understanding social actors exclusively by looking at her rational actions (with an utilitarian tint) is too simplistic. At the limit, it prevents us from articulating an image of *homo sociologicus* that would be efficient in explaining the social. With all his merits, Bourdieu is not very convincing when he states that the issue of the relationship between the individual and the collective is a false problem, or when he claims that his theory of the social offers a better solution to our epistemological conondrum – if we accept this conondrum to be real

I do not pretend to be able to offer a solution to the issues discussed here, but I believe that we need to specify things a little bit better. To clarify the problem to a certain extent, we need to start from remarking that if everything in society is the result of human action – which is true – it is always possible to include the individual in the explanation of social events, facts, phenomena, and processes. Nevertheless, the relevance of this operation is very different from case to case, sometimes being simply none.

Individualism is best supported when it focuses on explaining individual acts (not as they appear at concrete individuals but, for instance, as they are typical for certain social categories) or on grasping the causes of collective phenomena as the result of present encounters of social actors (like on the economic market) as these interactions can have unintended consequences which are interesting to explain. However, many macro phenomena do not have an individual correspondent. Of course, these phenomena are not solid or material (poverty, inequality of chances, mortality are not palpable entities) which makes

them difficult to imagine beyond the individuals who participate in their realization. The question is if we can postulate the existence of effective causal relations between these entities (Zahle, 2003). For instance, can we ask if poverty causes / favours criminality? If the answer is affirmative, "the holist could try to argue that social theories containing social predicates are irreducible, since social predicates are needed to refer to causally effective supervenient social entities" (Zahle, 2003: 95). In these cases, it seems that one could easily get rid of individuals and their intentionality or rationality. In other words, explanatory theories centred around social predicates of collective entities can be built.

This kind of positions is rarely supported by scientific research practice. Maybe the most illustrious sociologist who theorizes a holistic approach, but deviates from it when explaining concrete cases, is Émile Durkheim. Many interpreters of his work noticed that in his *Suicide* – which was meant to be the exemplary application of the *Rules of sociological method* – when he needs to illuminate the differences between the suicide rates by religious denomination, the sociologist is not satisfied to observe the relationship of influence or dependency but descends to individuals. Thus, the relationship between the two macrosocial factors is explained – synthetically and simplified – through the different situations of the individuals in Catholic communities, who are protected against the suicide risk, compared to those in Protestant ones.

Another interesting case is foregrounded by Emmanuel Todd in his monumental work *The Origin of Family Systems* (2011). He notices that in the rural areas of most countries that were exposed to a communist endogenous revolution (Russia, China, Yugoslavia, Vietnam) a specific form of family can be found. He calls it "communitarian," a family organized around the father's authority dominating over a household where all married sons live in conditions of equality. These characteristics – paternal authority and brothers' equality – are necessary values to the development of a communist ideology that prefigures any propaganda revolutionary activity. Postulating this kind of relationship does not prevent us to ask how this influence penetrates at the level of individuals. More concretely, it is clear that if communist ideology is more influent in a certain society, it is also because it finds a more fertile soil at individual level but this condition is produced by another factor – the family system, in this case.

Both examples are telling for the way scholars try to enforce the universality of the individualist explanatory model. However, neither Todd's approach nor Durkheim's is individualist, because a simple reference to individuals does not qualifies it as such. Let's remember that the individuals invoked both by rational choice theory and by Boudon's general rationality are autonomous human beings who have conscious aims and act according to an instrumental or cognitive rationality. These two cases are very different. Holism does not completely eliminate individuals from the explanatory game, but it confers them a completely different role. This is the fundamental difference between the two

orientations and the root of the solution for our problem. In certain situations, emphasizing the role of the individual is justified and the comprehension of the meaning of her actions is necessary for understanding social phenomena. In other cases, the recourse to the individual is an ordinary operation, related only to the simple observation that a relationship between two social phenomena cannot be conceived outside the individuals who participate in them.

A big problem with supporting individualist positions is the one related to the choice of the objectives or of the goals the individuals decide to act upon. The critique can be one of principle, coming from the fact that aims themselves need to be explained in causal terms, which means that the explanatory model will be reduced to a standard causal one. If we concede that individual aims must be explained, then we also need to find the factors that stand behind them, and our task becomes too complicated. Aspects which define the essence of "human nature" like survival through basic necessities or "selfishness" understood as the prevalence of one's own interest can be summoned to account for individuals' choices. Nevertheless, a consensus over these generally human characteristics, independent of any social context has never been reached. Even if these elements exist, they cannot clarify the reasons for our everyday choices, which are most of the time socially determined.

The individualists' objection to this kind of arguments is the following: when we invoke causes we deal not with simple cause-effect relations, but with causal chains, which makes our explanations always incomplete, and always in need of an infinite regression. Consequently, it is necessary to stop somewhere, and this cut is made when the grounds of an event or of a phenomenon are obvious and do not need additional explanations. In the same way, individualist explanations based on intentionality have the character of evidence and individuals' aims, intentions, and choices appear to be taken for granted and not to require causal grounding. This is clearer in economics, when it is postulated that *homo economicus* will prefer the cheapest merchandise, *ceteris paribus*. Sociologists make the same mistake by taking for granted things like people's preference for comfort – better food, warmer clothes, more comfortable homes, less strenuous jobs –, for getting goods or advantages without contributing to their production, or for not subjecting themselves to less powerful regulation forms.

However, sometimes things are different. As we have seen, even in an apparently simple situation like the ultimatum game, the individual A's option to offer B a much higher sum than the acceptable minimum – let's say 40 Euros instead of one Euro – is not obvious and needs an explanation. This is even more stringent in more complex situations. As Boudon acknowledged in his *Effets pervers et ordre social* (1977), since the nature of preferences is one of the main criteria for the classifications of the individualist paradigms, they cannot be left unexplained. This statement holds at least for individuals' non-ordinary preferences. Explaining individual preferences means to shed light upon the structural and

cultural factors that determine people – or certain social categories of people – to prefer one thing over another. It would be naïve to think that the social intervenes only in these cases. Even when we take an interest in ordinary preferences, human actions have to be understood in their social context. Social phenomena as outcomes of individual actions with underlying ordinary motives cannot be accounted for unless the rules of the game in which the actors take part are known. A prisoner's dilemma actor cannot adopt a specific strategy without knowing the rules according to which she can be convicted. The rules of the social game are always institutionalized or objectified social forms, which constitute the frame for the social agents' actions.

The relevance of individualist explanations also depends on the characteristics of the social systems. As we have seen, societies differ according to the degree of individual autonomy. Where the prescriptions of thinking and behaviour are excessively constraining, individualist explanations are less relevant because, at the limit, in these societies, most individuals act according to the societal rules. These rules not only force people do things in a certain way, but also convince them to accept the constraints as something natural and necessary. As a demographer, I always considered individualist explanations to be more relevant for modern societies than for any previous historical configuration. Although the possibility of understanding other types of social fabric through the use of individualist thinking must not be *a priori* excluded, it is in modern societies that the application of the paradigm makes more sense, as for instance in explaining fertility in terms of costs-benefits ratio.

Another thorny problem is the notion of rationality assumed by individualist paradigms. As we have seen, in most cases, the supporters of methodological individualism postulate the fact that individuals act rationally (in the sense of instrumental rationality) and based on the abstract model of *homo economicus*. Normally, this would not be a problem, since fundamental concepts in science are always abstractions – like Galileo's material point moving under the action of a constant force. However, in our case, we must address the problem of utility of this ontological model for our comprehension of social life. The price to be paid for expanding the domain of our explanation was the loss of rigour in the basic definition of rationality and, consequentially, the loss of consistency in our explanatory attempts. Even in mechanics the laws of Galileo and Newton are not applied without problems. In the real world, a body cannot preserve its uniform motion by itself, as the theory would claim. To describe the real movement, we do not abandon the law, but take into account the other factors that modify the uniformity of movement – in this case, gravity and friction. In our case, we should determine the factors that can be theoretically explained and add those elements that modify the expected results, which are macrosocial factors par excellence. If there are still unexplained reality zones that are suitable for an analysis based on

individuals, we need to appeal to Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* and take into account non-rational behaviour. If our endeavour needs to go down to individuals, we need to evaluate the functioning of the rationality model for that concrete context. Only in case of a failure we then move to other falsifiable explanatory mechanisms.[17]

Individualism atomizes society not only because it does not take into account the social conditions of action, but also because it considers individual actions as equally important. The individual appears as a generic one, an entity within a mass of similar entities. Nevertheless, society is structured around hierarchies and people's actions are not equivalent if their authors are placed in different social positions. Society is neither a mass of similar individuals, nor a multitude of relations and interactions between similar individuals, like phenomenologists see it, but a status system. Thus, the impact of an individual action must be evaluated according to the placement of the actor in this system of positions. While it is true that institutions or social rules are constructed in time through the actions of all those who form the demographic base of the society, it is also clear that the actions of those who hold power – political or of other kind – are decisive. Even more so for personalities who become social reformers.

In conclusion, explaining social phenomena, and not the acts of a concrete individual, requires: 1) the description of the contexts of their production; 2) the comprehension of the motives behind the actions of the individuals who participate in them; 3) the construction of specific systems of relations between social phenomena, such as causality, dependency, influence, and so on. Comprehension, as Weber said, means to observe the fact that these relations are not of the same type as material causal relations, which are specific to the physical realm. They are more complex, and their materialization requires people's involvement. Sometimes, this involvement is straightforward and does not need to be invoked; other times, it is so hard to pin, that we simply shortcut our reasoning and we tie the entrances directly to the exits, without opening the "black box" to search for the mechanism that mediates between those relationships. In other situations, we need to start from hypotheses related to how actors set and follow their objectives in order to understand typical individual actions. Thus, social explanation always combines individualist and holist dimensions, but in different proportions, according to the nature of the event, phenomenon, or process we want to account for.

(*Translated from Romanian by Alina-Sandra Cucu*)

---

[17] My position is inspired by Quine-Davidson's „principle of charity" according to which our interpretation of others' behaviour is based on the hypothesis that they act rationally.

REFERENCES

Berger, P.L. (1963). *Invitaton to Sociology. A Humanistic Perspective*. New York: Anchor Books-Doubleday.

Berger, P.L., and Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.

Birnbaum, P. and Leca, J. (1986). *Sur l'individualisme*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques.

Boudon, R. (1973). *L'inégalité des chances*. Paris: Armand Colin.

----------(1977). *Effets pervers et ordre social*. Paris: PUF.

----------(1986). Individualisme et holisme dans les sciences socials. In P.Birbaum and J. Leca (eds.): *Sur l'individualisme*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques.

----------(1990). *Texte sociologice alese* [*Selected Sociological Texts*]. Edited by Traian Rotariu and Ioan Aluaş, Bucharest: Humanitas.

----------(1999). La «rationalité axiologique»: Une notion essentielle pour l'analyse des phénomènes normatifs. *Sociologie et sociétés*, 31(1):103-117.

----------(2002). Théorie du choix rationnel ou individualisme méthodologique?. *Sociologie et sociétés*, 34(1):9-34.

----------(2003a). *Raison, bonnes raisons*. Paris: PUF.

----------(2003b). La conversion de Coleman à la théorie du choix rationnel: impressions et conjectures. *Revue française de sociologie*, 44(2):389-398.

----------(2007). *Essais sur la théorie générale de la rationalité*. Paris: PUF.

Bourdieu, P. and Wacquant, L. (1992). *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. Stanford: University of California Press.

Coleman, J. (1990). *Foundations of Social Theory*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University.

----------(1986). *Individual Interests and Collective Action: Selected Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dupui, J.P. (2004). Vers l'unité des sciences sociales autour de l'individualism méthodologique complexe. *Revue du MAUSS*, 24: 310-328.

Flahaut, F. (2003). *Le paradoxe de Robinson. Capitalisme et société*. Paris: Descartes&Cie.

Elias, N. (1991 [1939]). *La société des individus*. Paris: Fayard.

Elster, J. (1986). Marxime et individualisme méthodologique. In P. Birnbaum and J. Leca (eds.): *Sur l'individualisme*. Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques, pp. 60-76.

Hodgson, G.M. (2012). On the Limits of Rational Choice Theory. *Economic Thought,* 1: 94-108.

Laurent, A. (1994). *L'individualisme méthodologique*. Paris: PUF.

Rotariu, T. (1980). *Şcoala şi mobilitatea socială în ţările capitaliste dezvoltate* [*School and Social Mobility in the Developed Capitalist Countries*]. Bucharest: Editura ştiinţifică şi enciclopedică.

Rotariu, T. (1985). Concepţia acţionalistă a lui Raymond Boudon [The Actionalist Conception of Raymond Boudon]. *Viitorul Social*, September- October, 1985.

Simon, H. (1991). Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning. *Organization Science,* 2(1): 125–134

Todd, E. (2011). *L'origine des sistèmes familiaux*. Paris: Gallimard.

Weber, M. (1978 [1922]). *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Zahle, J. (2003). The Individualism-Holism Debate on Intertheoretic Reduction and the Argument from Multiple Realization. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 33(1): 77-99.

Critical Reviews

Editorial Note:

This section provides reviews and critical reflections upon recent evolutions in social research, with focus on changing societies and current dilemmas.

THE PROMISE OF AN ANARCHIST ANTHROPOLOGY: THE THREE BURIALS OF THE ANARCHIST PROJECT

NATALIA BUIER[1]

ABSTRACT. In this article I discuss David Graeber's proposition of an anarchist anthropology. I focus on three key issues: Graeber's understanding of ethnography and its role within the politics of anthropology, his reading of the anarchist tradition, and his involvement with the Occupy Wall Street movement as a concrete example of the limitations of the political project of an anarchist anthropology. The argument of the article is that rather than broadening the debate on political alternatives, Graeber's representation of the discipline of anthropology, together with his partial reading of the anarchist tradition, run counter to a political and analytic focus that centralizes the notions of class and exploitation. Graeber's "small a anarchism" together with his uncritical disciplinary positioning eclipse the richness of the anarchist tradition in favour of a model of knowledge production which, at heart, remains an unreformed practice of academic domination.

Keywords: ethnography, anarchism, academic praxis, Occupy Wall Street

> *"Such claims are, to use an appropriately earthly metaphor, bullshit."*
> (Graeber, 2007: 95)

A revolutionary spectre has been haunting the halls of anthropology departments at elite universities: the promise of an anarchist anthropology. By now common currency among anthropology students, the association of the terms anarchism and anthropology has gained unexpected popularity as David Graeber was fashioned into a leading voice of Occupy Wall Street. The term has insinuated itself into discussions about the relationship between anthropology and political praxis to the point where the affinity between anthropology and anarchism is closer to being assumed rather than questioned. If almost 20 years ago we were being warned that anthropology's disdain for addressing non-academic audiences explains part of its own marginality (Shore 1996), it now

---

[1] *Doctoral candidate, Central European University Budapest, e-mail: buier_natalia@ceu-budapest.edu.*

appears that the discipline has recovered much of the impetus to project itself outward. And although the labour markets might still be unmoved in the face of a graduate degree in anthropology, more and more the eyes of the radical students shine as their lips utter the word "anthropology".

In what follows[2] I will explore the proposition of an anarchist anthropology across David Graeber's work, in an attempt to understand what the proposition means in methodological and epistemological terms, and the kind of political possibilities an anarchist anthropology opens. This article engages the proposition of an anarchist anthropology as articulated in Graeber's work. While the topic itself is certainly broader, this text is based on the assumption that the major figure in the current discussion about an anarchist anthropology is David Graeber, and that most of the questions regarding the problems of the theory and practice of a contemporary anarchist anthropology are traceable to his influence. Through this discussion I also aim to question the political agenda of an emerging politics of self-representation, in which the anthropologist has finally abandoned her shame, and has, instead, proudly taken up the label of the discipline and its supposedly unique advantages, perhaps as news of David Graeber having been named one of the most influential global thinkers of the moment reaches her[3].

My intention is to question the supposed affinity between anarchism and anthropology and identify the very partial readings of both the anthropological and the anarchist tradition this is supported by. A recent review of *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* identifies Graeber's engagement with anthropology as a counterweight to the kind of flirtation with anarchism symptomatic for James Scott's work (Schulze, 2013). While the review does justice to that which is certainly less apparent in this article, namely the contribution Graeber's writing has made to contemporary debates about the theory of value and to a broadening of the mode of production debate, what I take to be the main point of contention is the claim that although lacking a serious treatment of class, the proposition of an anarchist anthropology in Graeber's formulation is compatible with a view that centralizes it. In the words of the reviewer, Graeber makes it clear that "anarchism is a serious and complex challenge to capitalism and hierarchy with particular theoretical claims." (Schulze, 2013:138).

A different interpretation, but equally important for the discussion on the relationship between academic practice and revolutionary strategy, is offered by those who question the viability of Graeber's political agenda and use it as an entry point for critique of the *Occupy Wall Street* movement (see Neveling, 2013). This article takes seriously the warnings within such a reading, but my intention is to also look at the way in which Graeber's representation of OWS has been

---

[3] *http://www.foreignpolicy.com/2013_global_thinkers/public/graeber* (Accessed: 01.05.2014).

substituted for the movement at large, and interpret this phenomenon as unstable, contested process, rather than a given reality. My argument here is placed in a dialogue with these opposite positions. Addressing the supposed political possibilities of an anarchist anthropology, I argue that rather than opening up the discussion about the anarchist tradition and political dilemmas regarding the production of knowledge as reflected in the history of ethnography, Graeber's reading greatly distorts the richness of anarchist praxis and obscures the tensions between anthropology and the anarchist tradition. In contrast to those who substitute critique of OWS with critique of Graeber's representation of it, I argue that his reading of OWS speaks only to a particular moment within the development of the movement and does not do justice to the range of debates and dilemmas that have marked the movement. If it has managed to inscribe itself as the hegemonic interpretation, that in itself is something to be understood and challenged within our political and academic practice, and must be seen as a question to be addressed within the broader conversation about the contemporary politics of self-representation in critical anthropology.

A note on imaginary warfare

The most generous reading of any text appears to me to be that which takes as criteria for its evaluation the criteria established by the work itself. One such criterion, repeatedly rearing its head from the work of Graeber, would be that of judging a work by the degree to which it puts itself in the service of the democratization of academic practice. We should write as if we were able or at least would like to leave "the academic ghetto" (Graeber, 2007: 10). This call is based on a diagnostic that saturates Graeber's work: "Vanguardist, even sectarian, attitudes have become so deeply ingrained in academic radicalism it's hard to say what it would mean to think outside them" (Graeber, 2007: 301). We are, however, invited to believe that we could imagine academic practice or theory refashioned in a way that would make it resemble anarchist decision making processes more.

Whenever I find myself objecting to that which might appear as the form of Graeber's writing my political concerns are usually met with my interlocutors' dismissal of that which appears as an excessive, and unnecessary preoccupation with style, which, presumably, is nothing but the shell of otherwise respectable content. However, I do believe that attention to the way Graeber presents his arguments is a very serious dimension of the debate about the potential of an anarchist anthropology. His writing is permeated by the air of being at war with the academia. Many of his claims are meant to appear, in the logic of his writing, as daring statements in an otherwise ossified, intolerant academic landscape. Most likely the best known anthropologist of the moment seems to be constantly busy trying to convince us of the courage of challenging hegemony from the margins of the academia.

Moving beyond the question of who has access to the use of the word 'bullshit' and whether David Graeber has turned AK Press into his own HBO, this raises essential dilemmas about knowledge production practices. The way Graeber constructs his antagonists reflects more than the occasional fall back upon straw man fallacies that temporarily get one out of trouble. It reflects the privilege of academic seniority: writing in authoritative voice half a page summaries of the entire history of poststructuralism (2001: 26-7) or statements that most often would have an undergraduate sociology student fail a more rigorous introductory state theory course - "In a way it's kind of amazing that such a theoretical literature doesn't already exist" (Graeber, 2004: 68) are now the weapons of an academic revolution.

The production of pseudo-antagonists is not just decorum in otherwise good writing. The Graeberian trick, namely the constant effort at constructing his own interventions as novel interventions in a battle against liberal hegemony, is not merely unpleasant, but otherwise benign form. Becoming the hero in a story dominated by villains is as much internal to his anthropological practice as the selection of fieldwork locations. It results in a loosely told story of the perversion of mainstream social sciences and an excessively forgiving and distorted history of anthropology. It influences source selection. If one looks at Graeber's eclectic use of sources, to take but an example, it will immediately be revealed as not simply the result of a lack of a systematic overview of distinct academic problematics, but as precisely the kind of idiosyncratic assemblage required to tell the story of an unlikely battle. The kind of story that makes Graeber appear lonelier than he is, the kind of story that illuminates cunning anti-intellectualism as an academic strategy. It is ultimately the same logic that unfolds in Graeber's making of the self project and his construction of the history of anthropology. One in which the systemic logic and the functioning of a field is obscured by histories written through the reassembling of individual voices. This, as I will try to show in the following section, has particularly troubling consequences for the way we understand the limits and possibilities of ethnographic practice.

The reason I find all this relevant is that, far from democratizing academic practice, it appears to me to be a conventional formula for reproducing the inequalities of academic production in the guise of oppositional practice and theory building. But, as said, I will treat Graeber's proposition as an honest one, and believe that we could all potentially enjoy or that at least we are hypothetically entitled to the advantages of writing in the voice of an angry senior scholar. Perhaps a commentary on the use of the word bullshit is where graduate students begin to smuggle in their right to write like David Graeber.

Ethnography – wither vanguardism? (The First Burial)

As I have tried to suggest in the previous section that which might appear as mere questioning of the textual form is actually something very different from textual fetishism. It is an attempt to open, through looking at the construction of

the objects of a polemic, questions pertaining to the politics of knowledge production. Turning to Graeber's understanding of ethnography allows us to observe the way the form of an argument is indissolubly related to an author's systematic refusal to critically engage the history of anthropology and his preference for the naturalization of the objects of anthropology.

For Graeber, anthropology is, at its origin, an attempt at the systematic investigation of cultural difference. A preoccupation with difference and alternatives is inscribed in the very constitution of it as a discipline. And its defining methodological instrument, ethnography, should be the model for refashioning social theory, or, in his words, "such a project would actually have to have two aspects, or moments, if you like: one ethnographic, one utopian, suspended in a constant dialogue." (2004: 12). Let us try to better understand the ethnographic moment. What constitutes the privileged terrain of ethnography, if anything? Some sort of correspondence between ethnography and anarchism is postulated in Graeber's work over and over again, and it appears to be mostly related to the necessity of finding an instrument for decoding the hidden logic of practice:

> If anarchism is not an attempt to put a certain sort of theoretical vision into practice, but is instead a constant mutual exchange between inspirational visions, anti-authoritarian attitudes, and egalitarian practices, it's easy to see how ethnography could become such an appropriate tool for its analysis. This is precisely what ethnography is supposed to do: tease out the implicit logic in a way of life, along with its related myths and rituals, to grasp the sense of a set of practices. (Graeber, 2009: 222)

Let us further follow the potential convergence between ethnography and anarchism as we try to understand what ethnographical practice is about:

> When one carries out an ethnography, one observes what people do, and then tries to tease out the hidden symbolic, moral, or pragmatic logics that underlie their actions; one tries to get at the way people's habits and actions make sense in ways that they are not themselves completely aware of. One obvious role for a radical intellectual is to do precisely that: to look at those who are creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be the larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities – as gifts. (Graeber, 2004:12)

The text is quite straightforward, but for one, most likely, deliberate slippage. It does not take a very attentive reader to notice that Graeber conveniently lets slip an undergraduate student error, that in which the sheer idea of the gift is supposed to evoke a superior logic of exchange, or at least one of superior morality. Supposedly the theory of the gift should help us break precisely such logic, something no doubt well understood by Graeber, except when such underspecification serves his agenda. The reader should now supposedly move

on, with the impetus of having been offered some sort of a political alternative. In reality, all he has acquired is the theoretically erroneous and the politically disingenuous language of gift giving, revealing an all too familiar academic trick: the suggestion of analytic power behind increasingly elusive language, increasingly out of check for the non-specialized reader.

But other than the suspiciously convenient slippage, the text is quite straightforward. Anthropology, and anthropologists, represent instruments in a process of unravelling a world riddled with possibilities (ethnography, we are led to believe, is a powerful instrument in the fight against the hegemony of economistic models of social reality). To do so, ethnographers *observe* a space of already existing possibilities and decode hidden meanings, those which the protagonists are not fully aware of. Essentially *distance* seems to be the prerequisite for the ethnographic moment, and the ethnographer appears as the one who must inscribe the meaning of the local, or the contextual, into a broader reading: "larger implications". Essentially, the ethnographic method is a function of distance and of looking at that which is unknown, or alien, by an observer who can carry out an act of detachment and subsequently return his interpretation to the initial context of observation. This is a specialized observer, the ethnographer – anthropologist, whose field of expertise has been crowned as the queen of sciences:

> There's more to it, though. In many ways, anthropology seems a discipline terrified of its own potential. It is, for example, the only discipline in a position to make generalizations about humanity as a whole – since it is the only discipline that actually takes all of humanity into account, and is familiar with all the anomalous cases. (Graeber, 2004: 97)

That this synchronic, cleansed account of ethnography and its engagement with anthropology can be the basis for the supposedly radical project of an anarchist anthropology is at the very least impressive through the mystification of the history of anthropology that it is built upon. That ethnography's preoccupation with diversity and participant observation in the Malinowskian paradigm is a methodological revolution that was intimately linked both to the demands of the 20th century nation state and the ideological reproduction of the British empire is common knowledge among those ever so slightly interested in the history of the discipline. Yet, almost no such scrutiny finds its place in Graeber's work. Rather, the interest in diversity has been now placed at the mythical origins of the discipline in something that can be hardly seen as anything else than a distinctly chauvinist act of asserting the merits of his discipline. Such anthropological chauvinism is only matched by Graeber's preference for pitting this cleansed history of anthropology against a generic mainstream and the overall alienated social sciences: from cardboard Marxists

(the diversity of the tradition only seems to serve Graeber when he must justify his own foraging into the theory of value) to evil economists, the academia seems to be lost terrain.

As the history of anthropology confirms over and over again, overcoming ethnocentrism is not a guarantee for breaking the power asymmetries which characterize the ethnographic model of knowledge production. In the words of an anthropologist concerned with the investigation of the history of ethnography through the lens of the politics of knowledge production, "(...) if theory belongs to the things we do in the real world we must take a further step: Theory has no place unless it has time. In the real world *theory happens*. And that is the reason why critique that targets only the place that is claimed for theory falls shorts of its aims." (Fabian, 2001: 5). This is to say that any critical ethnographic endeavour that claims itself as anthropological must include a conversation with the history of the discipline and the power relations which are embedded in the selection of its objects of inquiry. If we ask what are the conditions of possibility of ethnographic knowledge and how has the practice of ethnography been articulated in the history of anthropology we are bound to reach results that are very different from the unmeasured appraisal of anthropology's potential for opening up a discussion about alternatives.

The discipline's concern is not merely a given, and assuming that "making generalizations about humanity as a whole" is the timeless prerogative of anthropology obscures the origins of the anthropological project of the systematic investigation of cultural difference. It does not merely obscure its roots in the European Enlightenment and Romantic tradition and the contradictions emerging with different lineages, which would immediately alert us to the need of seeing how historically similar preoccupations have marked other disciplines, but it mostly obscures the contentious history of ethnography as a certain model of knowledge production. In Graeber's case this seems to have a particular affinity with his preference for looking at the history of anthropology as if it would consist merely of the sum total of its individual practitioners (among whom he has a taste for handpicking the supposedly progressive), rather than a field of practice structured by power relations.[4] Of course, the anthropologists' engagement with ethnography has resulted in a salutary pervasive preoccupation with the

---

[4] I am grateful to Dan Cîrjan for his most useful and entertaining comments on Graeber's writing style. In his most generous reading, Graeber's attempt at a general inventory of 'progressive alternatives' might constitute an elaborate stylistic commentary on the pre-Malinowksian anthropologist's data generating practices and writing habits, as well as the discipline's questionable attempt at formalizing everyday observation practices. Upon further reflection we seem to converge with regard to the unlikelihood of such an interpretation. Nonetheless, I find very important the warning that Graeber's writing is dominated by the aggregation of disparate anthropological examples, united not in an effort at abstraction on the basis of the concrete, but rather by the overall impulse of generalization across cases. A basic empiricist practice, the critique of which is all too familiar.

mediation of knowledge through experience. Certainly, formalizing participant observation marked a turning point in the engagement with the empirical and has had lasting political consequences. But for most of its history ethnography has maintained intact "the assumption of a hierarchical relationship between knower and known, or more exactly between knowing knowledge and known knowledge" (Fabian, 2001: 25). The systematic study of the non-Western world, often as it might have claimed for itself an unsettling of ethnocentrism, has for most of its existence been predicated on a model of knowledge in which *externality,* manifested in the distance of the observer from the observed, is the fundamental condition of knowledge production. And it appears that indeed, in Graeber's view the ethnographic investigation is initiated "simply by turning our gaze on objects that are given." (Fabian, 2001: 25), be those non-state political entities or consensus oriented communities.

The well meaning reader of Graeber's work would here say that such systematic reflection is absent from his work because it is implicit in his ethnographic investigation. Is that so, though? First, if we look at the role he assigns to the "radical intellectual" we can again certify that this is merely a rhetorical twist: the offering back to the community of the gift of the "interpreted reality" does not in any way alter the classical model of subordinating the investigated reality (in this case the investigated community, to make matters worse) to the investigator. The language of the vanguard has returned in the language of gift giving. What used to be known as the historically advanced faction returns as the condescendingly advanced faction, in a typical slippery employment of language meant to create the illusion of the act of gift giving somehow eluding the asymmetry between the anthropologist and the communities he turns upon. Aside from metaphorical language, the evidence for a qualitative break between the times of "nineteenth-century caricature of the anthropologist as a gazing explorer-hero adventuring amidst the 'gazed upon'" (Shore, 1996:4) and today's benevolent anthropologists bestowing gifts upon the movements that have elevated him to popularity seems to be lacking. And there is no reason the attentive reader should be fooled by elusive language. Neither is there good reason for not asking: "who's gifting who?"

The systematic investigation of alternative social arrangements has now been naturalized as the preoccupation of anthropology and has completely overshadowed the task of disrupting the narrative of anthropology's benevolent concern for diversity. Nonetheless, asking fundamental epistemological questions about the relationship between the knowing subject and the object of analysis appears to be ever more pressing in the case of ethnographic work that has systematically walked the contentious line between activism, ethnographic investigation and academic interest. But that of course is not distinctly convenient for a project the purpose of which is to crown anthropology as the queen of sciences. If we look at why it is that anthropology has arrived at "making generalizations about humanity as a whole", how it has arrived there and

what power arrangements underline anthropology's systematic preoccupation with the non-Western, non-capitalist, non-statist political forms of organization its political potential might, all of a sudden, appear less effortlessly progressive. Now some of this might sound banal to the reader accustomed to the critique of anthropology, but the necessity to bring back the discussion to this level rises out of the notorious absence of a critical engagement with the history of ethnography in Graeber's work.

If we take seriously the assumption that ethnographic practice must question its conditions of possibility, its flirtation with anarchist practice already appears confusing, since historically most strands of anarchist practice have been hostile to knowledge production models that are rooted in the function of the distance between the observer and the observed, and have sought the instruments to overcome the unevenness which permeates knowledge production practices. Historically, revolutionary anarchism (I use revolutionary anarchism to designate the political thought and practice the objective of which is the establishment of libertarian communism) has had at its core a preoccupation with emancipation, and the belief that this is unattainable in the absence of popular education and a general concern for radical pedagogy. But that the plea for anthropologists to come bestow upon us the symbolic meaning of our anarchist practice did not emerge closer to the colonial roots of anthropology is not exactly surprising. That is because most of the anarchist models for knowledge production and education are essentially also ways of challenging the division of labour. They are more often than not rooted in the assumption that together with the socialization of the means of production and the abolition of the division of labour what we need is a socialization of our critical instruments and methods, and that those who are affected by events should be able to produce the critical assessment that needs to accompany our political practice.

That is to say that the attempt to overcome the distance between the observed and the analyst is inscribed in the anarchist tradition. This is why the athenaeum, the popular school, the collectively authored pamphlet and instrumental anonymity are the easily recognizable terrain of anarchist knowledge production. Because they are statements about the need to take seriously the task of socializing our critical instruments, about not locating the instruments of analysis in the body of an external observer, but in a set of critical tools which should be made available as broadly as possible, and which ideally should account for the social character of knowledge production. This is a far cry from the belief that the discipline of anthropology is a complete inventory of "anomalous cases", the tool kit of the anthropologist in the business of gift giving. And it is also why if one looks at some of the contemporary political movements that claim for themselves some anarchist roots she would more often than not be surprised by the amount of critical reflection about the movement that has emerged from

within the movement. This is also the case with Occupy Wall Street, a movement within which a constant preoccupation for producing critical accounts from within is easily attestable, a case to which I will return later.

A clarification is necessary: this is not an argument that tries to do away with the reality of currently unevenly distributed resources for producing critical accounts. It is clear that the distance from necessity that many academics enjoy can be put in the service of perfecting our critical instruments, since most people who actually take part in political movements do not enjoy the privilege of paid reflection time. Neither it is an argument about the necessity to turn all those united by a political project into analysts of the movement. The brightest of our post-revolutionary horizons should still leave room for some people to devote themselves to writing and others to carpentry. But it is an argument about how historically anarchist practice has been at odds with assuming that analysis should rely on an external observer or that it is a function of distance, that it has been a medium for the socialization of and reflection about instruments of critical analysis, that it does not stand (and hopefully will not stand) in a comfortable relationship with traditional forms of authorship, and that essentially it has been historically suspicious of the model of knowledge production that is at the core of Graeber's understanding of the ethnographic-anthropological tandem.

Anarchism or praxis as political form (The Second Burial)

> *"Conversation is a domain particularly disposed to communism"*
> (Graeber 2011: 97)

Having briefly sketched some sources of tension between anarchist practice and the ethnographic model of knowledge production, I will further look at the proposition of an anarchist anthropology by trying to delineate Graeber's understanding of anarchism. The origin of the proposition of an anarchist anthropology derives ultimately from a particular reading of the anarchist tradition. In trying to sum up the difference between anarchism and other forms of revolutionary thinking on the left, Graeber returns across his work to a version of this formulation: "1)Marxism has tended to be a theoretical or analytical discourse about revolutionary strategy. 2) Anarchism has tended to be an ethical discourse about revolutionary practice"(2007: 304). In this reading, anarchism is essentially about the compatibility of means and ends in political practice, about prefigurative politics and about "prioritizing an ethic of organization and of practice over a focus on strategies for seizing power" (2007: 322). So if anarchism is essentially about an ethic of organization, the next step is to understand what kind of ethic of organization this is. And it is here that over and over, anarchism is, in Graeber's reading, a matter of the *form* of politics.

> Unlike Marxist parties, which have always tended to demand ideological conformity combined with top-down, usually highly authoritarian, decision-making structures, anarchist-inspired revolutionary 'networks' and 'convergences' employ decision-making processes which assume that no ideological uniformity can and should be possible. Rather, these forms become ways of managing a diversity, even incommensurability, which is seen as a value in itself. The assumption is that this can be managed through a spirit of reasonableness and mutual compromise that emerges from commitment to shared projects of action. That is, anarchist-inspired groups tend to studiously avoid political arguments about the definition of reality, and assume that decision-making structures should concentrate instead on immediate questions of action in the present, on maintaining egalitarian process in doing so, and making these forms of process the main model of (or, better perhaps, elementary, germ-like template for) their vision for a just society. (Graeber, 2007: 323)

So, once again, anarchism is about the decision-making *process*, about the incommensurability of difference, and is essentially present-oriented. Again, it appears to be about the *form* of politics, and the belief that a certain form of politics carries within it the germ of a future society.

On the question of ideology, and the lack thereof, Graeber also provides what appears to be the common place reading of a NY Times columnist, except the twist is now on celebration, rather than on the mourning of the lack of a unitary course of action in contemporary anarchist-inspired politics:

> What I am saying, then, is that it is precisely what most outside observers take to be the foolishness and naiveté of the movement (their apparent lack of a coherent ideology) has turned out to be a token of their most sophisticated accomplishment and contribution to revolutionary theory. It was not that the new movements lack ideology. As I have argued in the past, these new forms of organization, which presume and are ways of articulating a diversity of perspectives, *are* its ideology. (Graeber, 2007: 323)

And, quite obviously, this leads to imagining a social reality in which a plurality of free floating communities, of whatever sorts, internally organized upon horizontal bases, we assume, miraculously bring about an anarchist future:

> There is a way out, which is to accept that anarchist forms of organization would not look anything like a state […] Perhaps all they would have in common is that none would involve anyone showing up with weapons and telling everyone else to shut up and do what they were told. […] make currently existing forms of power seem stupid and beside the point; that in turn would mean that there are endless examples of viable anarchism: pretty much any form of organization would count as one, so long as it was not imposed by some higher authority, from a Klezmer band to the international postal service. (Graeber, 2004: 40)

A fundamental understanding of anarchist politics and its political project as the old age liberal definition of "freedom from", except that instead of the empowered individual we now have a sum of collectivities which appear to be nothing but the individual writ large: individual units (although not individuals), which are brought together in a negative relation rather than the affirmation of a political project the ethical foundation of which is justice. That in the real world the international postal service might have freely decided not to hire women and that it might have built its offices in the centre of the city while the Klezmer band is still surviving at the margins of the town while figuring out how to replace some of its broken instruments (after having ordered new ones which the international postal service refuses to deliver on account of the workers not wanting to go to a shitty part of town) appears to be a problem that has miraculously not tainted our make believe anarchist "society" (though to still talk about society when all we are facing are independent units that turn inwards upon the object of their activity, without apparently any kind of question about systemic inequality or any concern for coordinating human activity in what resembles a political project strikes me as somehow improper).

Now, when Graeber allegedly says "As for being a liberal, this one always makes me smile. If people really wanted to prove I was a liberal they might point to some liberal position I've taken, you know? If I actually were a liberal, they wouldn't be very hard to find"[5], he is right. The clues to this are indeed not very hard to find. Far from trying to merely throw around the word "liberal" as if it was a self-understood political execution, there is something deeply meaningful in identifying the affinity between Graeber's understanding of anarchism and liberalism, because it allows us to see why a certain reading of anarchism might have opened up itself to a wave of criticism that sees it as void of political alternatives. When Graeber identifies anarchism with the management of diversity under horizontal, anti-authoritarian decision making processes, he is essentially subordinating anarchist politics to the form of anarchist practice. Naturally, his argument throughout his work is not that there is a hierarchy between the form (or the means) and our political goals, but that they are indissoluble, and more importantly, the present form is essentially prefigurative, it carries within it the germ of transformation. But at this level of confrontation this is mere rhetoric. The way we can actually see whether in practice Graeber's view of understanding of anarchism reproduces the liberal subordination of political goals to the form of politics, at the cost of the political goal of justice disappearing in a first world bacchanalia of diversity, is by seeing how his own analytical categories allow the reading of contemporary political situations. And

---

for this I will turn in the last part of the article to Graeber's involvement with and analysis of Occupy Wall Street, which I believe is the medium for testing the limits of Graeber's presentation of the anarchist tradition.

Before I do so I would like to sketch in a nutshell that which it seems to me is the main danger in the way Graeber sets up the conversation about anarchism. In his concession that anarchism is at heart an "ideology of the diversity of ideologies", Graeber does not fight the erroneous mainstream representations of anarchism, he reproduces the terms of the conversation as set up by the critics of anarchism. Except now the focus is on celebration rather than mourning. In this, what he essentially does is to substitute his own provisional, particular reading of a moment in the contemporary history of anarchism for that which is the infinitely richer history of twentieth century anarchism. Contemporary North American anarchist practice, as reflected in the Occupy movement, and as understood through Graeber's reading has now become the face of anarchism. David Graeber, the ethnographer, has gone on a colonial mission of substituting the rich history of the anarchist tradition for his locally derived template. It is the same subordination of anarchist practice to a particular vision of anarchism as an ideology of the form of political process that allows him to see anarchism where others would see mere state retrenchment; it is the same vision that allows him to see Occupy Wall Street as the one true revolutionary movement sweeping through our global politics.

Combined with a deeply ahistorical vision of the ethnographic model, this results in a vision of anarchism constructed out of the building blocks of its critics. The conversation about anarchism is essentially reduced to the struggle against hierarchy and a concern with the formal aspects of the political process. Ethnography is summoned to provide the proof of the existence of the alternative, as it turns our attention to consensus oriented communities, issues of authority and non-state forms of political organization. Anarchism, having internalized the ethnographic lesson, can then project, through the borrowing of a political form, a future society. It is certainly true that the anarchist tradition has had at its core a preoccupation with the congruence of political ends and means. But historically revolutionary anarchism has been built upon the need to *affirm* a political project built around the acknowledgment of class struggle, the quest for the emancipation from wage labour and the fight against exploitation. This political quest, in the anarchist tradition, has been tied to the belief in revolutionary change being conditioned by popular emancipation and bottom-up organization models. But historically it does not rest on a belief in the incommensurability of difference. Quite the contrary, the principles of autonomy and self-organization have been historically safeguarded not by a politics of democratic compromise, but by one of *affinity*. And the perpetual slippage which Graeber cultivates between explicitly anarchist politics and consensus oriented decision-making processes in non-state political organizations appears to do little to clarify this.

Equally, while interested in the historical dialogue about alternatives to capitalism and fundamentally concerned with unsettling ethnocentric perspectives, the anarchist tradition (again, used here to include those explicitly rallying under the anarchist flag) has not simply relied on cataloguing non-state forms of political organization. That is because historically the great challenge for anarchism has not been to prove that alternatives to the nation state are possible (a reality which is certainly better understood by historians than by anthropologists, as much as Graeber would like to have us believe otherwise). Probably the most important historical challenge of the anarchist tradition has been to prove that political forms *superior* to state-organization are possible.

Now this is not about asking whether Graeber and his community of followers are entitled to calling themselves anarchists or not. It is about understanding that the way he sets up the conversation, regardless of what he calls himself, is pernicious. And that is because it obscures the much more serious, historically profound ways in which the question of diversity and political process has been debated within the anarchist tradition; because it obscures the profound contribution anarchist praxis has had to questions of power, political process and decision-making structures and essentially reproduces the problematic terms in which mainstream criticism of anarchism is most often formulated. The change of emphasis does not change the fact that the discussion is set up on the terrain of the mainstream critics of anarchism: anarchism as devoid of an affirmative political project, as unconcerned with demands and assuming that the fight against exploitation can be merely subordinated to that against hierarchy.

Understanding Occupy Wall Street – Where the authoritarian chicken comes home to roost (The Third Burial)

I will now move on to discussing the way in which some of the propositions behind the project of an anarchist anthropology are reflected in Graeber's analysis and involvement with the Occupy movement. That Graeber became the poster child of Occupy Wall Street is by now old news. That so often he was assimilated to the informal leader of a movement which he represented as the pinnacle of horizontalist experimentation appears to be more than the side product of a media which was unable to understand something alien to its mainstream political models. The most well meaning reader of the "The Democracy Project" (2013) will find it, I believe, very difficult not to find the author distinctly disingenuous in his refutation of the claims of leadership attributed to him. Graeber refutes only to affirm. Of course, he warns us that in most accounts his "own importance has been vastly overstated" (2013:4) to then remind us immediately that his role was "that of a bridge between camps" (2013:4). Luckily, his aim is not that "of setting the historical record straight" (2013:4), so we guess the world will just have to live with the accidental error of

having him assimilated to the central figure of the Occupy Wall Street movement. It is true that we are all inclined to wonder why that would not be the case, since in the first chapter of the book he recounts how He came up with the idea of the 99%. Now this is not to doubt that the actual email exchange in which he suggests using the 99% label occurred. But this is very much reflective of how Graeber's refutation of academic vanguardism is nothing but a surface scratch in an intellectual practice that otherwise reproduces the worst of academic habits. A fully honest account would have probably been "Well, I had heard of this previous '98%' campaign but then I remembered Stiglitz talks about the 99% and thought that sounds better, so I sent this email in which I suggested this thing that probably a million other people were thinking of at the time, and since I was already known as Graeber, leading anthropologist, people happened to pick up the idea." But this, indeed, is not about the minutiae of the historical record. This is to ask why is it that the idea of the 99%, one which strikes most people as a fairly evident interpretation that happened to have been in the air, needs crediting. Why is it that rather than letting it float as a signifier the origin of which is most likely collective, the interpretation of which is within reach of most of the participants, and the critique of which is abundant, we are confronted with a very clear paternity: David Graeber, is, after all, the one behind the idea of the 99%. This is academese at its worst: it is the enclosure of symbolic commons for the purpose of advancing one's reputation.

The reason I find this relevant is not simply because someone needs to point out another unsurprising instance of academic hypocrisy, but because I believe this needs to be recounted so as to finally shift the focus in a question we have been asking. This question has mostly been "Isn't it surprising that a well known academic wrote a book about Occupy?". But if we take our commitment to prefigurative political processes seriously, if we extend it to practices of knowledge production, then the real question we must ask is "Isn't it completely expected that the one who ended up *writing* an analysis of Occupy is a well known academic?". Which is to say the question is not how come he wrote it, but why is it that he wrote it to begin with. Why is it that in a movement which essentially claimed itself, and has certainly been described by Graeber as a revolution in political practice and as a victory of horizontal experimentation, one of the most pervasive forms of symbolic subordination in anything that resembles progressive politics has been reproduced: the academic speaks on behalf of the movement.

I would like to again qualify this doubt by saying that this is not an excuse for academics not sharing their analytical resources or for ignoring the conditions which might produce better accounts of events or analysis of phenomena. And certainly, in an uneven world, academics, more often than not, have the privilege of accessing resources that can improve our critical accounts and we should strategically employ these resources in our movements. But our goal should not

be to imagine how we can tame the academic beast so as to every now and then stop pretending it knows everything. Our goal should be to fight for the democratization of access to critical resources and break the link between authoritative accounts and academic affiliation. This is notoriously difficult, as the unevenness of access to the resources needed for producing critical accounts is very much a reality: more often than not workers on strike don't have the time to write ethnographic diaries, unemployed students don't get grants for writing books about Occupy. But there are certainly developments that point more in that direction than the platform of an anarchist anthropology does. Occupy Wall Street is an excellent illustration of this. Within the movement there was from the very beginning an effort to reflect on it and open up a critical space through the efforts of organizers and participants, rather than externalizing the critical tasks. *Tidal* and *The Occupied Wall Street Journal* were the medium for much of this reflection, and similar attempts across the movement can be immediately identified even by the occasional observer. It seems to me the argument that we were in critical need of an academic writing another history of Occupy Wall Street can hardly be made. Of course, this could be made if indeed the analysis would be revealed as a genuine contribution to serious reflection about the movement. But the argument for an account of Occupy Wall Street by David Graeber, in the form in which has chosen to do it, is mostly his fame. After all, most organizers did not sit down at the end of the day to write a memoir of their experience of "living at the fulcrum of such historical convergence" (2013: 4). Which brings me to that which I believe is the best illustration of the kind of analysis Graeber's confusing (and most of the times conveniently slippery and ambiguous proposition) of an anarchist anthropology fails in. If throughout the rest of his work the reader is always inclined to assume that perhaps his categories of analysis could slip this or that way, that it is unclear how much Graeber actually endorses a version of anarchism that claims for itself an affirmative process of building a just society, we can test our doubts in his vision about Occupy:

> The remarkable thing is that the closer the insurrectionary wave spread to the center of power, to the 'heart of the world's financial empire' as our Chinese friends put it, the more radical the claims became. The Arab revolts included every sort of people, from Marxist trade unionists to conservative theologians, but at their core was a classically liberal demand for a secular, constitutional republic that allowed for free elections and respected human rights. The occupiers in Greece, Spain, Israel were more often than not studiously anti-ideological – though some were more radical than others (anarchists played a particularly central role in Athens, for example). They insisted that they were focusing on very specific issues of corruption and government accountability, and thus appealed to perspectives across the political spectrum. It was in the United States that we saw a movement kicked off by revolutionaries that began by posing a direct challenge to the very nature of the economic system. (Graeber, 2013:108)

And in case one might be inclined to believe this is some freak accident in otherwise respectable analysis, one can read further to learn how it is only under the structural determinations of capitalism perceived as an internal menace, only in the United States, that is, that such revolutionary change could have occurred to begin with[6].

Now this, indeed, makes us smile, since we went looking for proof that Graeber is a liberal and what we came across was a monumental load of bullshit. The anthropological project has now travelled full circle and returned to its colonial origins: the ethnographer has vanished into his armchair of reputation as he spurts the most vulgar deformations about social movements across the world; things truly worthy of attention ultimately happen at the heart of empire; people at the margins of the empire are lagging behind on the timeline of the revolution since structural conditions do not allow them to fully grasp the logic of global capitalism; and, most importantly, we learn that Occupy Wall Street is the only contemporary political movement (except for two or three of Graeber's Greek friends) that has struck capitalism at its core: somewhere on the statistical point between the 1% and the 99%, we assume. That most readers confronted with this account of Occupy Wall Street probably feel like liberals smiling in front of their daily update from *The Onion* is certainly less surprising than the fact that the empty shell of the revolution has radically altered the world without us ever having noticed.

These conclusions do not appear to be an accident in an intellectual career. Rather, it appears to me, they represent the culmination of the assumptions behind the proposition of an anarchist anthropology; assumptions now taken to their logical conclusion: the organizational forms of direct democracy can produce revolutionary outcomes on their own, anarchist politics can dispense with the content of politics and our politics can now do away with the urgency of affirming a political *project* since its form essentially warrants its success; questions of class and its relationship to the ownership of the means of production, emancipation from wage labour and the fight against exploitation vanish in the rhetoric of the 99%. And we learn all this from the famous academic who just happens to be the bridge between OWS and the world at large. The proposition of an anarchist anthropology gives us a fairly good estimate of the limits of Graeber's "eggshell theory of revolution". We could have probably estimated them without having Graeber test them in his analysis of Occupy Wall Street.

---

[6] In part, this is simply because Americans really had no one else to blame. An Egyptian, a Tunisian, a Spaniard, a Greek can all see the political and economic arrangements under which they live – whether U.S.-supported dictatorships, or governments completely subordinate to reign of finance capital and free market orthodoxy – as something that's been imposed on them by outside forces, and which therefore could, conceivably, be shrugged off without a radical transformation of society itself. Americans have no such luxury. We did this to ourselves (Graeber, 2013: 109).

Is there hope in this grim landscape of ubiquitous power and paralyzing contradictions? Where does the anarchist reader go, once he finds himself dissatisfied with the evaluation of Mondragon as a successful case of workers' self-management (Graeber 2004: 39) and seems unwilling to concede that OWS has already carried out the anarchist revolution? That ethnography can be put in the service of anarchism, and that when critically employed it can be turned into a meaningful political act is proven by the analysis in *Translating Anarchy* (Bray 2013). The analysis strikes me as the perfect counterweight to Graeber's analysis of OWS. The reader will find, I believe, the conclusions to be not only significantly different but infinitely more insightful when it comes to the relationship between the anarchist tradition and OWS. While acknowledging the political openings OWS has created and standing in solidarity with the movement, the author of *Translating Anarchy* helps us understand the way in which the particular historical moment represented by OWS is a partial reflection of the richness of the anarchist political tradition, as both praxis and theoretical reflection. This, I believe, is made possible by a very different starting point: rather than labouring in the service of the hegemonic pretensions of the project of an anarchist anthropology, the author sets out to critically employ analytic instruments he has acquired within a privileged academic space. In this, the conversation becomes not a flirtation with the history of the imperial pretensions of anthropology, but a political gesture bringing us one step closer to the socialization of the instruments of critique.

REFERENCES

Bray, M. (2013). *Translating Anarchy. The Anarchism of Occupy Wall Street.* Winchester Washington: Zero Books.

Fabian, J. (2001). *Anthropology with an Attitude. Critical Essays.* Stanford: California University Press.

Graeber, David (2001). *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams.* New York: Palgrave.

----------(2004). *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology.* Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.

---------(2007). *Possibilities.* Oakland: AK Press.

---------(2009). *Direct Action: An Ethnography.* Oakland: AK Press.

---------(2011). *Debt: The First 5000 years.* New York: Melville House.

---------(2013). *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement.* New York: Spiegel & Grau.

Neveling, P. (2013). Introduction part B: Marxism, anthropology, global capitalism. Unpublished conference paper, IUAES Conference, Manchester University. Panel on *Capitalism and Global anthropology: Marxism resurgent*, 7-8 August 2013.

Schulze, F. (2013). Flirting with anarchism: Class, state, and anthropology. *Focaal*, 66: 133-138.

Shore, C. (1996). Anthropology's identity crisis: The politics of public image. *Anthropology Today*, 12(2): 2-5.

Romanian Sociology Today

Editorial Note:

This is a special section dedicated to research articles from the field of Romanian sociology.

PLAINTIFFS, HISTORIANS AND PENSIONERS INSIDE THE ARCHIVES - SCARING UP SOME NOTIONS FOR A CRITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

MIHAI-DAN CÎRJAN[1]

ABSTRACT. This essay tries to sketch some possible avenues for a critical historiography through an inquiry into the status of archival documents, the main (re)source for historical narratives. Drawing on the Romanian post-socialist context, it focuses on the various ways in which archival documents are engaged and deployed in local political struggles. These struggles evince novel forms of employing archival records, different from both professional constraints and the public debates over the national past which have characterised the post-socialist period. Moreover, these ways of dealing with archival records represent local, institutionally-embedded historiographical operations which may bear significant social consequences. The main contention of this essay is that the historian's methodological toolkit should be reconstructed through a constant dialogue with these historiographical operations while paying attention to the manner in which social actors frame their social critiques in these everyday struggles. By switching the attention to the archives as an institution, the second part of the essay makes the case for a historical anthropology of bureaucratic practices that may help aid historians and marginalized social groups in engaging in debates over the status of the archives. This may help in undermining the monopoly that archivists and state institutions have over archival records.

Keywords: post-socialism, critical historiography, records continuum, anthropology of bureaucracy

The postsocialist state and its citizens as everyday historians[2]

On the 19th of October 2013 the Tribunal of Arad, Romania, upheld and reconfirmed a previous decision taken by the Ineu Tribunal according to which a surface of 8,742 hectares of land, which included parts of the Nadăş village as well

---

[1] *Doctoral candidate, Central European University Budapest, e-mail: cirjan_mihai-dan@ceu-budapest.edu*

[2] This essay is merely a footnoted transcript of the conversations I had with Agnė Rimkutė, Adrian Grama and Sanda Cîrjan.

as most of its adjacent plots of land, should be returned to the legal heirs of Elena Grosz, i.e. the Colţeu family. This was the final decision after a trial which had lasted for eight years, a period during which both sides, the representatives of the villagers and those of the Colţeu family, had tried to bulwark their arguments both within the courtroom and outside of it. Thus, both sides had tried to support their claims using documents gleaned from various bureaucratic institutions, including archival documentation ranging from the end of the 19th century to the 1945 rural reform. Within a small but active "public sphere", archival documents used inside the courtroom navigated away from the confines of the legal space and entered public debate, cited and used by internet sites and local newspapers. Events and narratives which seemingly might only consume the minds of narrowly specialized rural historians were included, through the help of the archives, within the moral grammars enacted by the two conflicting sides. The language of proof and evidence, that had once connected law and history only to set them apart soon after (Ginzburg, 1999), reunited the two disciplines once again in the disputes and trials of the postsocialist period.

For the Romanian context, one of the central elements which configured the structure of these disputes and the framework of these trials, was the property restitution process. Seen as a form of transitional justice, an attempt to right the wrongs done by the socialist Romanian state, or as part of a general process of de-communization, the restitution legislation was devised in an attempt to return to their previous owners the properties nationalized after 1945 by the Romanian socialist state. Ever since 1989, this has been one of the main postsocialist political debates and not without reason, since the process has had important effects on reconfiguring the post-1989 Romanian property regime. According to the two most important pieces of legislation, the restoration of property rights is based on the "restitution in kind" principle, meaning that the state should try to return, whenever possible, the same lands and buildings which had been requisitioned by the socialist state.[3] As a result of this legislation, state institutions as well as citizens are constrained to resort to a complex type of historical work in which archives, cadastral survey and other documents are daily employed in judicial debates over property rights. The state and its citizens, suddenly transformed into specialists of interwar property laws, are constantly trying to re-enact and re-establish a property regime which needs to be reconstituted, according to the legal principles, as accurately as possible. As it was also the case with the Romanian decollectivization (Verdery, 2003), the restitution process in Romania is based on a quaint social experiment of historical reconstruction, an awkward process in which state institutions and individual citizens are immersed in a collective historiographical enterprise to reconfigure and recreate a long-gone property regime. However, despite being constantly

---

[3] I am referring to Law 10/2001 and the recent Law 165/2013.

present in the newspapers, in brief metro conversations or discussed on TV, this gigantic collective historical undertaking has largely remained invisible to Romanian historians.

One of the reasons is that, as most social sciences, the history of my[4] discipline has been marked by the relentless attempt to delimit the type of knowledge produced by professional historians from that of laypersons, the social science from the *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1977). For legitimization purposes, following the Rankian tradition, barriers had to be raised between various historical interpretations and the entrenched scholarly field of historical studies, between thousands of historiographical practices that social actors enact daily and the rules and prescriptions of academic enunciation. To this purpose, signs of professional distinction organize the rules which govern the creation of scholarly texts: references, citations, inter-textual markers which make an article or a book part of an epistemic community, stressing this appurtenance through procedural rules of graphic inscription (Bastide, Courtial, and Callon, 1989; Latour, 2002). Besides these rules, an important part to play role in "setting apart" scholarly historical knowledge belongs to is played by the space and the ways of behaving within that space: the archives and the handling of archival material (textual interpretation, archival science, etc.)

Like any professional culture, the historians' is marked by hundreds of typified social interactions centred around the archives which form and shape the historians' habitus: expressions like "doing the archives", stories of archival encounters, the "gossips" about specific documents or literature, the sharing or withholding of administrative secrets regarding certain fonts, etc. Apart from the rules of knowledge inscription present in articles and other published works, this type of professional culture[5] establishes in itself a certain type of relationship with the archive as an institution. This relationship is heavily loaded with epistemological presupposition about the role of evidence and proof or the usage of these archival objects in the final product: a scholarly article. What is excluded from this perspective, however, are the hundreds of non-scholars with which the historian shares her study desk in the archives: lawyers, Sunday historians, prosecutors, architects, citizens involved in juridical debates, former workers trying to obtain their pension rights. More than mere repositories of sources material to be processed by the professional scholars, current Romanian archives provide instruments in judicial and administrative debates fraught with political conflict.

---

[4] "Being ironic, then, is the opposite of being serious or earnest"(Eyal, Szelényi, and Townsley, 2003).

[5] To draw a far-fetched but useful comparison (see Ginzburg, 1989), I am referring to the studies of police culture such as Manning (2010), since they provide a very complex analysis of the relationship between everyday professional interactions and the structuring of information in police bureaucratic practices. To a certain extent gossips about the archives manage to do exactly that.

As it has been constantly remarked, historical production is a multi-sited process within which academic historians, despite their cultural capital and epistemic pre-eminence, can hardly be regarded as having the last word (Trouillot, 1995). For the past thirty years, however, the traditional venues for non-scholarly historiographical practices have been the educational system and *les lieux de memoire,* while recent Romanian scholarship has switched the attention to governmental truth commissions and towards a post-socialist public discourse driven by class politics (Kalb and Poenaru, 2011). However, most of these discussions focus on debates taking place within "public" arenas, on public discourses, making it difficult to understand the processes through which these publics and these collectives have been assembled and took shape (Boltanski and Thévenot, 1991; Blokker and Brighenti, 2011).[6] My claim is that specific historiographical operations take place not only within the public sphere or in the academic field, but also in particular sites, more or less institutionalized, which are immersed in everyday debates in which problems such as access to resources, gentrification, housing, marginalization, dispossession are daily intertwined with interpretations of the past. Such is the case of the judicial system and, more precisely, of the restitution lawsuits.

In what follows I use the term "historiographical operation"[7] to denote a complex social practice through which, on the one hand, interpretations about the past are produced by actors within various social contexts, regardless of whether they are part of a scholarly community and regardless whether their type of knowledge is acknowledged by the academia. Moreover, these interpretations address past events which are "matters of concern", namely they are already part of public disputes within specific communities or social groups. This legislation comprises historical interpretations of "the Romanian past" that are constantly reproduced, re-affirmed and re-confirmed in every restitution trial. Through their institutionalization in the current Romanian legislation and their usage in the judicial practice these historical interpretations are re-enacted and legitimized on a daily basis.[8] Constant references to "historical events" such as the Land Reform of 1922, the colonization policies of the Romanian state, the post-war land reform,

---

[6] Part of this problem is the fact that it is difficult to assess the actual impact of such debate on various social groups.

[7] My usage is rooted in Michel de Certeau's definition of "the historiographical operation", namely the entire set of social institutions and procedures that define historiographical production, transforming (archival) objects into narratives (De Certeau, 1988: 57). The underpinning claim of this paper is that historiographical operations are not confined to scholarly production, but are daily enacted by social actors in various social milieus.

[8] To draw a comparison, this enactment of historical interpretations and the politics which it presumes is very much similar to Thevenot's analysis of investments in forms: the usage of forms and their circulation enacts on a daily basis the presuppositions on which there are built (Thévenot, 1984).

make out of these debates complex discursive spaces in which evaluations and interpretations of past events are constantly present: to use a hackneyed metaphor this is "lived history", constantly re-enacted through material objects, the documents, which "the past" has left behind, a textual dross which directly affects the livelihoods of thousands of people, their access or lack of access to resources. In a debate over the arable land which had been sold to an American company, the peasants of Hînțeşti came to fight the tractors and the private security forces with two weapons: pitchforks and papers, i.e. the property titles granted to them through the 1921 Land Reform. The main contention of the present essay is that the historian's methodological toolkit should be reconstructed by reconsidering the nature of this archival material which, as we see, can make it be used both in the footnote of an article and, effectively or not, out in the fields fighting (private) security forces.

There are two spheres of contention in which the Romanian archives play a decisive role. One of them is the political debate about pensions and welfare benefits: local archives currently face hundreds of requests coming from people fighting for their pension rights. [9] Posed in the context of a post-socialist state in a permanent financial crisis, the use of such documents raises important questions regarding the generational troubles of a post-welfare state as well as issues concerning the evaluation and devaluation of labour in post-socialism (Inglot, 2008; Kideckel, 2008). The other important debate which opens up the archival space to scenes of political contention and strife is the issue of property rights and property restitution. In trying to pin-point some possible ways of handling the archives while paying attention to one's desk mates, I will focus on this later conflict hoping to glean some insights into the possibilities of a critical historiography. [10]

The rest of the paper is designed as follows: the first part will try to map out the role played by various historiographical operations within the current debate on property restitution, trying to see how the historian's professional narratives may contribute to this debate. Thus, I will try to pin-point some of the wagers of the restitution process, followed by a discussion on the role of archival documents in securing and stabilizing the current property regime and the forms of social exclusion which it has produced. In the last paragraphs of this part I will allow myself to dwell on some vaguely sketched ideas on how a critical historian

---

[9] I would like to thank Adrian Grama for sharing his insights on this matter.

[10] In talking about a critical historiography, this essay makes use of the theatrical trick of over-emphasis (Brecht, 1970) which enables it to stage the illusory persona, the schematic mask of a non-identified Romanian "historian" and which triggers at the same time its occasional tongue-in-cheek manifesto rhetoric. Just like in Brecht, however, the mask and the overemphasis are just part of an experiment which might enable us to spot some possibilities and some alternatives for progressive history writing. Outside of the experiment, the non-identified Romanian "historian" is a male Roma graduate student from Pitesti, Romania.

should position herself within this context. If the first part of the paper will focus on the uses and abuses of archival documents, the second will shift the focus towards the bureaucratic procedures that create what we might call an archival document, towards its genealogy. I will claim that one needs to politicize these bureaucratic procedures that make up the pre-history of the record, the archival continuum, by being engaged in the legislative and procedural debates that make up the social life of the archival record.

Historiographical operations outside the academia

Property rights vs. housing rights or how to make people disappear

The Nadăş lawsuit briefly presented here should be envisaged as part of a global transformation in property relations triggered by the collapse of state socialism and marked by the continuous integration of goods and land within market mechanisms (Hann, 1998; Verdery, 2003). By mid-2000s, almost 80% of all trials in Romania concerned property rights (F. Zerilli, 2005). To a certain extent, this is an example of an overarching process of judicialization of political and social conflicts in the post-socialist era: conflicts over social inequalities, access to resources, the relationship between labour, capital and the state are couched in the juridical language of law vs. lawlessness, rule of law vs. corrupt practices and illegalities (Borneman, 1997) The Romanian restitution and especially the conflicts that emerged after 2001 evince exactly these traits which make the legislative apparatus a privileged site of social conflict and which render discussions about corruption and the rule of law essential for present day Romania.

Adopted in a speedy manner by a Social-Democrat government eager to abide by the EU recommendation regarding property regulations, the Law 10/2001 emphasised the right of former owners to obtain their property according to the restitution in nature principle or, in case this would prove impossible, to obtain a financial compensation from the Romanian state. Within this legislative framework, the State was supposed to serve as a guarantor of property rights and their proper circulation. It was still unclear, however, how and from what funds the Romanian state could afford paying the compensations or what the lot of tenants living in nationalized houses would be. The law represented an important shift in Romanian policies regarding property rights and housing; until then, the Romanian state had tried to avoid a radical restitution legislation, being more inclined to favour the present tenants of nationalized buildings (Chelcea, 2003). Before 1995, former tenants were able to buy some of the nationalized buildings on a symbolic price, at the expense of the pre-communist elites and their inheritors. Most of the remaining tenants were either part of social groups who could not even afford catching this windfall

prearranged by the state, or, on the contrary, members of the economic and political elite able to take advantage of the blurry legislative environment regarding nationalized buildings.

Both the 1990s measures as well as EU influenced 2001 Law, however, tried to provide a legal environment that would prioritize home ownership and secure, transferable property rights. In this sense, through their support of home-ownership at the expense of more nuanced approaches, the two types of legislation did not differ very much: the problem was whom these policies favoured, the tenants as in the 1990s legislation or the former owners as in 2001. The issue was complicated by the heterogeneous social background of the tenants, which in turn depended on the nature of the nationalized patrimony. Bluntly put, two categories of buildings formed the stock of nationalized housing units (Chelcea, 2000): first, those located in valuable residential areas and which had been rented out by members of the economic and the political elite. Second, those that state socialist authorities recognized as social housing, buildings whose main tenants were part of underprivileged social groups. Most of the buildings belonging to this second category had been scheduled for demolition in late socialism and their tenants were usually unskilled workers, oftentimes identifying themselves as Roma or Gypsies. Added to this was the fact that the first type of housing units continued to be rented out in the post-socialist period to middle-class or upward mobile members of the society, increasing the gap between the two categories (Chelcea, 2003). As the position of these underprivileged groups worsened in the transition period and their marginal character became racialized, the quarters in which they lived came to be increasingly perceived as Roma ghettos (Vincze and Rat, 2013).

The 2013 legislation further radicalized the 2001 support for secure private property as a solution to the housing issue, while trying to solve some of the flaws of the previous legislation. Part of the problem was the incapacity of the Romanian state to solve the numerous restitution requests while trying to avoid a gigantic financial crisis of the central budget. Pressures from the European Court of Human Rights, where some of the owners had filed their complaints, were paralleled by numerous press articles documenting corruption practices occurring in various restitution cases. Little by little, it became known that most of those that became the owners of the nationalized buildings were neither the former proprietors, nor their inheritors, but third parties that acted as their representatives, usually important law firms whose expertise could ease the restitution process. What has been called the "restitution mafia" started to make the headlines, while the prime-minister himself warned against "restitution mobster," and "property peddlers" that took advantage of old owners, pressuring them to sell their rights at under-valued prices (*Gândul, 12 April 2013*). Cases of local authorities, political figures or important law firms becoming important

players on the real estate market were present not only in the press but also in the politicians' discourses. At the same time, the press gave exclusive coverage to the "Gypsy mafia" in Timişoara which was seen as controlling the city's real-estate market (*Opinia Timişoarei: 6 November 2013*).

One of the effects of this corruption discourse was that it managed to blur the differences between poor and rich tenants, seeing both as perverse phenomenon of an over-sized state (Stan, 2006). The heterogeneous character of tenants' living in nationalized buildings usually failed to be noticed in public discourse (Zerilli, 2006): both marginalised, socially vulnerable groups as well as the social and political elites were seen as belonging to the same category of state-relying citizens, either incapable of integrating themselves on the market or, on the contrary, too shrewd to do this. Cases of high important political figures living in the nationalized houses of the interwar elites, articles about high-profile members of the communist party enjoying the luxury of interwar villas started to make the headlines of important newspapers. The sensationalism of these stories pushed the situation of the poor tenants further into the background. Little by little, the tenants' legitimizing discourse, which emphasised the right to proper housing, was delegitimized: the housing problem of disenfranchised social groups was lost in the din of the corruption debate. The fight for housing rights started to be seen as one of ways of encouraging state-dependency, while hindering the establishment of secure property rights. What was lost in this perspective was exactly the heterogeneous character of those that made claims for proper housing.

The focus on the "restitution mafia" and on its abuses of the property restitution did not bring into the limelight the tenants' lot, their focus on the right to proper housing, nor a criticism of the restitution in kind principles that the 2001 law exemplified. On the contrary, the 2013 Restitution Law made no reference to the tenants, their housing rights or the possibilities of providing alternative social housing; suddenly they were absent from the legislative act. In a country where the home ownership rate (96.6%) along with the overcrowding rate (are the highest in the EU and where tenants represent less than 4 % of the population (*Eurostat 2012*),[11] they simply disappeared from public discussion, along with the debate on housing rights which came to be seen as a dangerous relict of the socialist past. At the same time, an increase number of forced evictions coupled with racialized urban policies started to appear, following on the footsteps of the accelerated gentrification processes in important urban centre (Vincze and Rat, 2013): poor Roma families, moved in nationalized houses by the racial policies of the Socialist Republic, are now struggling with postsocialist racial policies bent on undoing the effects of nationalization.

---

[11] Regarding the overcrowding rate, in 2012 for the first time Romania managed to reach an average of 1 room per person, the lowest in the EU (the European average of 1.6 room/person) *http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ilc_lvho02&lang=en,* (Accessed: 17.05.2014).

Archival documents within the neoliberal property infrastructure and their interwar pre-history

It is not just the legislative apparatus that creates or undoes property rights, however. The legislative system within which these social conflicts are unfurling, should be seen as merely one of the elements of a complex infra-structure that organizes the current Romanian property regime along with its exclusionary practices. It is something which the local neoliberal representatives are very much aware of. As some of them mention (Aligică and Dabu, 2003; Boudreaux and Aligică, 2007), one should be wary that private property rights need to be constantly consolidated, providing a certain closure to disputes and debates. To a certain extent, property rights, like other judicial facts (Latour, 2002), presuppose a complex incessant labour of stabilization and consolidation.[12] For this purpose, one needs complex juridical systems but also a material infrastructure, administrative apparatuses, bureaucratic networks that may render private property "transportable," "transactable" and, in the end, "marketable". Consequently, neoliberal private property should be seen as an on-going process which implies a diverse panoply of juridical and administrative instruments, a complex infra-structural assemblage, what Aligică and Boudreaux call "property technologies:" through them property rights can be established and acknowledged by various administrative authorities, transferred from person to person, inherited, transacted, exchanged.[13]

Archival documents, especially through their role in the restitution process, are part of this complex system through which the neoliberalisation of property relations is established and rendered judicially valid. The stabilisation of a property title and its acknowledgement by the law depends on the way in which archival documents are used to legitimize and to support specific claims to property restitutions within a trial. Through their legal status as state administrative documents, archival records serve as the material substructure on which claims for restitution are made, the paperwork realm which stabilizes and which renders property relations inheritable and marketable.

At the same time, however, the way in which the usage of archival documents is framed within current Romanian legislation presupposes a specific mode of interpreting Romanian history, it enacts a particular type of

---

[12]Giving voice to the neoliberal doctrinaires: "Seen from this perspective, one of the common fallacies in the strategies of creating or reforming property rights is to think exclusively in terms of end-states and neglect thinking in terms of processes [...] The rules and incentives that give substance to property-rights systems depend on institutional and technological means of defining, monitoring and enforcing them." (Aligică and Boudreaux, 2007)

[13]To a certain extent, I follow here Collier's idea that one should focus on the minute infrastructural assemblages that make up technologies of power, unscrewing the Big Leviathan (Collier, 2012).

historiographical operation. The judicial logic of property restitution contains evaluative interpretations and assessments of modern Romanian history, especially of the interwar period and the state socialist era. These interpretations and the way in which they present these periods are daily re-enacted within the court and, as the Nadăș villagers showed, the usage of archival documents and the ways in which they function within these debates are essential. For the historian, the usage of these documents within the current restitutions legislation provides an alternative model of using archival material, an alternative way of processing archival documents which listens to different rules than those of the academic field.

It greatly differs from common scholarly practice in so much as it presupposes and establishes a direct continuity between the property regime of the interwar period and the post-socialism one. Historical distance between the two periods is bracketed off, understood in simple chronological terms: within this continuum, the judicial notion of "property" as well as the practices which surround and establish it, gain the nuances of an ahistorical object. The way in which archival documents are employed and used in current restitution lawsuits or in the press add up to a narrative of continuity which blurs out the differences which might have existed between the property regimes of the interwar period and that of today. Within this historical continuum, what is conspicuously missing are the forty one years of state socialism, understood more as a state of exception, as a quaint intermediary space when this continuity was cut off and perversely altered. In this way, the historiographical operation achieved within the restitution legislation obliterates the complex set of property practices on which the state socialist regime actually depended (Rosen, 2010).[14]

However, most of these documents may have a different story to tell, a story which, far from rendering private property a stable, marketable judicial fact, is a story of social conflict and strife. All of these trite archival documents were created in a period when discussions about property rights and their relationship with the market were a constant issue of contention; a period in which various social groups tried to provide interpretations of what property is and what role it should play in Romanian society. The property regime of the interwar period was a fluctuating reality, open to contestation and change and very much different from the way in which the current Romanian legislation interprets it throughout the restitution process: a haven of liberal legality, embedded in a type of capitalism bulwarked by the sanctity of private property.

---

[14] Judicially, one of the strange effects of the restitution process is that it the complex organization of what made up the "socialist law" and "socialist legality", especially the understudied problem of state socialist forms of property, is erased and put under the blanket term of "state property".

Throughout the period and coming from various political positions (liberals, peasantists, social-democrats, fascists), new models of conceiving the notion of property were proposed: as the liberal Alexandru Costin mentioned in one of the debates regarding the 1923 Constitution, the classical liberal idea of property as "sacred and inviolable" should be left aside, making room for a definition of private property that takes into consideration its social function (Costin, 1923). Two important conflicts changed the liberal consensus on private property which had characterized pre-war Romania: the housing problem of the post-1918 Romanian state and the Great Depression problem of peasant debts. Both of them had refashioned the liberal idea of private property and the importance it had for in the marketization of goods and the definition of value.

A result of the post-war debacle, the Romanian housing crisis had prodded the authorities into launching a set of measures which affected both market mechanisms and the object of marketization, liberal private property (Cherneş, 1925; Conduratu and Perieteanu, 1924). On the one hand, tenants were assigned to various housing units through administrative decisions, regardless of the will of the private owner. At the same time, the government tried to reframe the real-estate market in order to respond to the social pressures of the post-war period in an attempt to regulate the sharp conflict between tenants and owners. This would be one of the main social conflicts throughout the interwar period.

The debates broached by the post-war housing issue were continued with the onset of the debt crisis of the Romanian peasantry during the Great Depression. Various projects of debt cancelling were proposed throughout the period: legally, the main bone of contention was the effect on the banks' right to private property, since the liabilities of peasant households were part of the banks' assets, part of their *portofolio* (Radovici, 1932). Representatives of the financial establishment as well as the main economic press waged a fierce war against the moratoria projects which aimed at "forgiving" part of the peasants' debts: these projects were seen as undermining the stability of the democratic regime by encroaching on the banks' right to private property. After a conflict lasting for several years, in 1934 the state finally decided a 50 % moratorium on all private debts, as well as various payment-by-instalments schemes for the rest of the sum. The legislation passed in the aftermath of these social conflicts brought about within the judicial field a new type of political rationality. Following Fracois Ewald, one might claim that the decision to cancel 50 % of all private debts listened to a logic which greatly differed from a liberal concept of responsibility and the individualising effects which this notion comprised (Ewald, 1986). This 1934 decision presumed a different type of social agency, created in the aftermath of the discovery of the "social" (Steinmetz, 1993) and which socialized the notion of legal responsibility (Ewald, 1986).

The juridical practices and experiences that were enacted by this type of legislation were ways of reorganizing and re-problematizing the relationship between public and private, as well as attempts to question individualizing technologies embedded within the liberal rationality of the judicial system. In this sense, through its effects on private property, these social conflicts were manners of re-thinking the relationship between community and self. Very different from the liberal governmentality of pre-war Romania, they redefined private property as a social relation organized and regulated through state institutions. Consequently, more than a simple discussion within the public sphere, these debates influenced the manner in which the social practices which sustain and enact the notion of private property were carried on at the level of day to day juridical practices.

Most of the archival documents which are part of the administrative infra-structure underpinning the current private property regime, including those used in restitution trials, are the material offshoot of this rather turbulent history. Nevertheless, these struggles for defining the judicial system's handling of property relations and the social practices surrounding it are deleted from current debates on property restitutions. And, more importantly, they are deleted from the politics of the past, the historiographical operations enacted every day in the courtroom through the restitution legislation. In this sense, one may argue that, within the political rationality which governs the current Romanian property regime, these archival documents are de-contextualized and, as any decontextualization, this implies an act of violence which silences a history of struggle and conflict, projecting upon it the categories of modern neoliberal private property. Used within a complex administrative infrastructure which secures marketable property rights, archival documents are enacting an innocuous perspective on Romanian history, rearranging history in the categories of today's neoliberal consensus.

I would like to argue, however, that the usage of these archival documents within the current judicial practices should pose the historian a question which is not that of truth or accuracy. Namely, the problem is not that of whether the current property legislation and its politics of history have failed in describing the interwar context or in taking into account its fluctuating, conflicting nature, the social struggles that moulded it[15]. Framing the problem in these terms might very easily downplay the double violence which is daily inflicted through the judicial process by reducing it to a problem of factual truth. The epistemic violence done by silencing historical struggles is doubled on a daily basis by the violence of policies addressing social, all too concrete violence inflicted on the marginalized groups. Affected by gentrification, faced with increasingly racialized urban

---

[15] "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin, 1968: 255).

policies and forceful evacuations spawned by the restitution process, these groups see their claims for housing rights constantly delegitimised by the current neoliberal discourse and the juridical practices which it has engendered.[16] The construction of invisibility that the anti-corruption campaign has enforced and the delegitimation of tenants' housing rights has been strangely interwoven with a historical amnesia regarding Romanian property practices which can hardly be considered innocent.

Consequently, the problem is not necessarily one of (factual) truth. In as much as the archives are efficient tools in the infra-structural assemblage which sustains the current property regime, the issue is of rendering these tools ineffective by efficiently blocking their usage, of making them useless within these complex assemblages of power. To a certain extent, the task of a critical historiography, faced with the constant usage of archival documents in violent acts of dispossession and marginalization, is of rendering epistemically invalid those historiographical operations which sustain the current property regime. One way of doing this is by employing this archival material within alternative historiographical operations that may propose competing interpretation; these interpretation should invalidate the histories enacted in the restitution process as well as in the general neoliberal discourse on the Romanian past. An example of such an alternative historical enterprise would be a history of Romanian property relations in the interwar period that could convey both the class struggle that fashioned the interwar property regime and the alternative to a liberal political rationality grounded on marketable private property. Consequently, the task is of using these archival documents as instruments in creating a historical programme that should act as a contender to the current historical presuppositions of neoliberal discourse.

More importantly, these alternative historical interpretations should be devised in order to be employed by marginalized social actors as legitimising tools for their social claims within circumscribed daily disputes and political struggles. For those involved in daily social clashes in which historical arguments are used in downplaying their rights and demands for redistribution and recognition, or where an entire legislation is based on silencing social struggles, the task of a critical historiography would be that of proposing viable narratives which could act as small but useful elements of a more capacious and a more forceful social critique. In this sense, critical historiography could act as an ancillary discourse, whose products could be used, employed in the daily social critiques formulated by underprivileged groups. This entails a constant attention to the way in which social actors use historiographical operations in building up

---

[16] An example of such a delegitimising work is the article written by Lavinia Stan (Stan, 2006) in which the housing problem is considered a simple administrative issue, without taking into consideration its effects on marginalized social groups, especially on the Roma communities.

critiques of domination in the course of everyday life or, on the contrary, in legitimizing domination and exclusion. This adds up to the self-evident idea that a critical history of the past cannot start without a critical sociology of the present, of the way in which actors use historical narratives within today's social struggles, of the specific historiographical operations which they employ.[17]

It is because of these daily historiographical operations that I see the work of a critical historiography as being in a constant dialogue not only with the inter-textual space of the historiographical field, with the "historical literature" as such, or with the way in which historical production is deployed within "public discourse". Contesting various narratives employed by hegemonic groups within this theoretically complex space of the "public sphere" should also make way for other types of critique: critiques grappling with the manner in which these narratives are used and enacted in day to day practices. These practices might take place within institutionalised or non-institutionalised spaces such as the court-room or within the specific political temporalities of the pension system. At the same time, a critical historiography should open to criticism the manner in which these narratives are built, the complex epistemic operations through which archival material is transformed into "histories" or "stories" that legitimize or contest the *status quo*. To this purpose, a constant engagement with the day-to-day historiographical operations in various social contexts, and the ways in which non-historians use them, is necessary.

This would presuppose a project which would make historiographical production listen to both the constraints of the academic field and to the circulation and "transportability" constraints. By "transportability" I mean ways of making these products are translatable into various social contexts and, thus, useful in different social struggles. Practically speaking this comprises problems of narrative genre, issues related to journals circulation, blog platforms, newspapers and other media infrastructure, the possibility of opening the historians' community to interactions with other social groups (artists, activists, local communities). These should be seen as important methodological concerns and not just something pertaining to the enchanted but intimately despised field of "popular history". I don't see the idea of a public history (modelled on Burawoy's concept of public sociology)[18] very useful in this context since, again, the problem is not interpretative accessibility, which would presuppose a paternalist view on those

---

[17] Hence, this article's focus on property disputes.

[18] My refusal of Burawoy's concept springs from the same arguments summarized by (Feagin, Elias, and Mueller, 2009): there is little discussion in Burawoy about the specific types of "publics" which a public sociology should address, and there is little attention paid to the power-relations involved in the knowledge production process and the ideologically different traditions of sociology. "Despite challenges to mainstream sociology in the 1960s and the increasing presence of women, people of color, and the less economically privileged in sociology, how widespread, enduring, and effectual have the changes in mainstream sociology actually been?" (Feagin, Elias, and Mueller, 2009: 74).

who might need these alternative historical narratives. The problem is not that of addressing the non-scholarly public, but of actually finding institutional and non-institutional means to make historiographical production available to well-defined publics engaged in various debates and struggles. Unfortunately, too much of the present critical discourse tends to presume the existence of public which may be taunted into political action, whose passivity can be surpassed at some point. Sociologically, however, this might be inaccurate: publics do not simply exist, they are assembled around certain matters of concerns such as property disputes or labour rights. As activists know too well, there is a gigantic labour involved in creating publics, an addressee for one's discourse. The existence of an "outside the academic field" does not make this "outside" a public. Such an enterprise, however, would have to be in a constant dialogue with the types of historiographical operations which are enacted daily in various social contexts, by both hegemonic groups and marginalized populations. More importantly, it would have to take these actors and the local epistemic constructions they use in dealing with the past seriously, as valid ways of operating with the past within the present: plaintiffs, historians and pensioners should find a common space in which they could talk about the archives and the way in which they use it in everyday life or scholarly debates.[19]

Archives and the restrained gestures of violence

The same month when the resolution for the Nadăş trial was taken, another decision concerning property restitution was made, this time by the Romanian Supreme Court. In a lawsuit in which the Catholic Order of Canons Regular of Prémontré, reclaimed parts of the spa resort of Băile Herculane, the Supreme Court considered the claimant's arguments ungrounded and refused the property restitution. The judicial proceedings had been based on an extensive use of archival sources: most of the arguments of the claimants revolved around the State's illegal and allegedly forceful nationalization of the buildings. Similarly to the Nadăş lawsuit, the juridical debate unfolded into a public debate, as the local and the national press tried to cover the topic and, elegantly or not, to take sides in the conflict. Archival texts once again floated off into the public sphere and obscure names of the interwar period, such as that of Onisifor Ghibu, re-emerged in the press and during the hearings as important actors in this post-socialist tribulation. Ever since 2007, the legal representative of the Order had accused the

---

[19] This critical position resembles the third type of critique identified by Boltanski: it is a critique which takes seriously the capacity of the social actors to formulate everyday critiques of domination and exploitation. Thus its operations try to delve into these everyday critiques of domination (the Nadăş villagers' critical stance) and enter into a dialogue with them, eventually offering them tools of legitimation or various strategic propositions. This presupposes a non-hierarchical dialogue with the people developing these everyday critiques.

National Archives of withholding access to important pieces of evidence, pillorying the policies of the institution and comparing them with those of its communist predecessor. In this dispute, archival documents appeared not only as pieces of evidence, as textual material constantly employed in the post-socialist redefinitions of justice, but as a scarce good, whose worth can make them liable to monopoly attempts. Not just the textual heralds of truth, archival documents could be forged, could be hidden, could be manipulated, could be withheld from the public: they were deeply immersed in politics and, following a well-known post-socialist pattern of solving social conflicts, the claimant required their "de-politicization".

In a similar type of discourse, in 2012 the Romanian governing party proposed the de-politicization of the Constitutional Court and of the judicial system in general (*Adevărul:* September 2012*).* The opposition full-heartedly supported the initiative, while accusing, nevertheless, the governing party of the hypocrisy of its endeavours. Similarly, in 2006 the Romanian archivists required the de-politicization of the archival institutions, strangely echoing The Prémontré Order's parallel concerns (*Ziarul Prahova:* September 2006. These repetitive requests for "de-politicization" and the constant references to a standard of neutrality have been, ever since the first years of post-socialism, a constant refrain within local Romanian debates. Along with the more structural effects of property disputes which I tried to pin-point in the first part and the problem of pension rights, it is one of the elements which connect the archives with the judicial system. The relationship is not, however, a surrealist chance encounter, the haphazard result of the post-socialist Romanian legislation or of the Romanian public discourse and its keenness on promoting "de-politicization". Until the French revolution, which announced the current system of national archives as sites and repository of national memory, the archives' main function was of a judicial character (Cook, 1997; Delsalle, 1998; Rumschöttel, 2001). Afterwards, the development of the archives, as an institution and as a set of practices, has remained closely connected to the modern system of judicial rationality. Archival practices, and by extension, historiography, have borrowed profusely from judicial notions such as accuracy, evidence and, again, accountability: *le respect des fonds,* the concept of provenance, the idea of archival impartiality in establishing the fonds, etc. (Rumschottel, 2001).

The problem of archival appraisal, posed in the 1950s (Schellenberg, 1956)[20] and, more aggressively, post-custodial developments have questioned some of these tenets, stressing the situated-ness of archival practice. Concepts such

---

[20] The issue of archival appraisal, now a common toolkit in archival practice, has opened nevertheless an important discussion about the criteria by which archival material should be evaluated and the role of archival practices within the modern welfare state.

as "the records continuum" have allowed peeping into the intricate relationship between archives and creators, i.e. the complex modern bureaucracies which produced most of the material usually preserved by the national archives (Upward, 2005). In a consensus that ironically enough state socialist archivist already shared,[21] the creation, appraisal and the archival processing of fonds is no longer regarded as a neutral impartial routine. These decisions are framed and embedded in particular organizational cultures that determine both the form of the records and the specific epistemic practices through which these records and documents are created and circulate. This is true not only for the creator's specific bureaucratic culture and the technologies it develops, epistemic technologies which are at the same time technologies of power (Stoler, 2009) but also for the archives as an institution and as a mode of exercising power (Schwartz and Cook, 2002). The long process that starts with the creator's handling of the records, the assessment of a "current" institutional archive [*arhiva curentă*] and supposedly ends when the fonds are opened to the national public, is a route along which thousands of scattered decisions and indecisions contribute to the creation of a record, an archival fact which will then be processed by the historian. Or, again, by the lawyer pleading in a restitution process. In what has been called the records' continuum (McKemmish, 2001) a chain of epistemic and evaluative operations is exercised upon records from the moment of their creation to their becoming part of an institutionalized archive, of "national memory". In what follows I will allow myself the liberty to arbitrarily cut this continuous process into two parts: first, I will focus on the bureaucratic practices and contexts which created the modern archival material making a case for the necessity of a historical anthropology of bureaucracy. This might enable scholars and non-scholars to deal with archival documents in the daily disputes of post-socialism. Second, I will hark back to the moment where we started: the archival practices *per se* which make out of a record a historical document.

A guide into the archives: making the case for a historical anthropology of bureaucratic practices

As in most post-socialist countries, the Romanian discussion about the archives has been under the long shadow of the *Securitate* files debate. Haunted by the over-present idea of an over-present generalized phenomenon of Secret Police collaboration, the debate has tended to re-enforce some the judicial notions of accountability and accuracy along with their liberal epistemics. The notion of collaboration has turned the archives and historiography into what they had been

---

[21] By seeing in the archives an instrument of the working classes, socialist archival practices have greatly challenged the classical tenets of impartiality as found in Jenkinson or in the Dutch Manual.

before the *Annales* School: the great national courtroom of history (Ginzburg, 1999). This has precluded a full-fledged analysis of the *Securitate* archives as archives, i.e. a collection of documents forming a complex bureaucratic mechanism which was at the same time a technology of control. A certain fascination with the knowledge employed by the socialist state has turned the public debate about the archives into rituals of guilt and expiation (Eyal, Szelenyi and Townsley, 1999). This logic constrained the debaters to extensively borrow on the epistemic presuppositions of the *Securitate* files themselves. Exactly as in the Securitate *dossiers* and their technologies of individuation, a post-socialist partiality for accountability as a central ethical and judicial practice transformed the issue of the *Securitate* files into a problem of the individual and her misdemeanours, of the individual and her moral decisions. It was only recently that the problem of the Secret Police archives in Eastern Europe have received a more nuanced attention, which emphasizes the technologies of power and the knowledge practices employed by them; Verdery, 2014)

However, still seeing the secret police as the fundamental expression of state power, these studies have remained entrenched in a strange fascination with their object of study. Most of the recent contributions have failed to contextualize the practices of the secret police within the general development of post-war state practices, to see how the *Securitate,* this complex power technology, was actually embedded within the multifaceted information processing machine which the modern state is (Agar, 2003). I think that this incapacity to relate the secret police to other types of state agencies has confined the topic to the provincial realm of "state socialist studies" and thus of Cold War historiography, blocking any possibilities to delve into the genealogies of what has been called the "police" or the "machine state" (Handelman, 2004; Agar, 2003; Richards, 1993). At the same time these works have failed to insert the problem within a global context, stalling comparisons with the Western security agencies or the colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Fascinated by the sight of direct power, the focus on the secret police archives has tended to obliterate the banal but, nevertheless, far-reaching ways in which state as well as private bureaucracies work: from the welfare bureaucracies established in the 1930s to the complex managerial techniques of present day neoliberalism. More than the secret police files, banal administrative documents have actively participated not only in the modern technologies of governing the social (Collier, 2011; Rose, 1996), but also in the daily fashioning of subjectivities and modes of self-understanding: the administrative *doppelganger*, the mixture of biography and auto-biography (Bourdieu, 1986) that institutions create for us. Practices of individuation (Handelman, 2004) as well as technologies of organizing the social are spread along various types of bureaucracies and along various sites of power and knowledge production; which might mean that, despite the

fascinating allure that the secret police might have, one should see it as part of a complex bureaucratic infrastructure which characterizes modern forms of exercising power. Unlike what we have learned from James C. Scott, the state does not see through one set of eyes and it does not project merely one vision, be it modernist or not. As banal as it may sound, Romanian welfare institutions of the interwar period worked according to a different logic than the Romanian police: the traces that they left us, although focusing on the same subject, offer not only a different interpretation but enact different epistemics and, through the categories they use, different ontologies of the social (Hacking, 2002). As a consequence of this we may encounter conflicts, contentions, moments of rupture, which sometimes opened opportunities for emancipatory projects. In the end, the *Securitate* files belong to the gigantic mound of paperwork that the Romanian modern state and its bureaucracies have produced. Seeing in the National Archives as the institution which hosts and handles this mound of records, historians, pensioners and plaintiffs are forced to retrace the functions which these documents had within their contexts, the intricate modalities through which they were used as technologies of power within modern Romanian bureaucracies.

Consequently, delving into the organization of the paper mound hosted by the National Archives means tracing out and describing models of exercising power. This includes the epistemic presupposition on which these ways of governing were based and the various "shifting historical ontologies" which they enacted (Hacking, 2002). Most of the fonds in the Romanian National Archives are complex structures of graphic inscriptions that comprise various modes and genres of bureaucratic observations. The gathering of information, the various methods of processing this information, the formation and training of the people involved in these processes,[22] the way in which this scribal labour was conceptualized over the modern period are things which have shaped the archival material that both historians and non-historians deal with. The paperwork which is left to analyse has a complex history and examining it presupposes unearthing the genealogy of power technologies which characterise Romanian modern society (Kafka, 2009).[23]

Studying these repositories and their files would mean building up, step by step, a historical anthropology of the bureaucratic practices[24] used in shaping Romanian social life and which, in the end, produced the primary sources that we now use. In as much as it employs private or state archives, any historical enterprise implies such an anthropology of modern bureaucracies as long as it

---

[22] For an analysis of the technologies of training and the models of personhood involved in creating the bureaucratic subject, see (Gardey, 2001).

[23] The best example of such a history of graphical inscriptions as used within the workings of modern bureaucracies is probably (Gardey, 2008).

[24] For a discussion of bureaucracy within the anthropological field see (Hoag, 2011; but also Hull 2012; Feldman, 2008; Handelman, 2004 and, again, the impressive work of Delphine Gardey).

pays attention to the archival material both as archiving *practice* and as material *products*. An attention to this paperwork mould when building our historical narratives might produce a collective decentred history of bureaucratic observations. This history would act as a catalogue of power and knowledge practices which have spawned the paperwork which historians and non-historians use in their historiographical operations. Consequently, rather than proposing a unitary project that would gather researchers in a concentrated effort of studying state and private bureaucracies, my proposition is that any historical study using archival work could integrate into such a decentred invisible project. What is important for this is to pay attention to the material infrastructure used in its epistemic operations, to the archives as bureaucratic technologies.

Critical historiography could have at least two important benefits from this type of historical enterprise which pays attention to the materiality of the archival records and their imbrication in complex processes of control and knowledge production. First, following the hackneyed but respectable tradition of state socialist archives, it would provide a useful "Guide into the Archives": an inventory of scribal, archival practices which state and private institutions used. However, unlike the sketchy but useful state socialist guides, it could integrate this work within a larger theoretical framework describing bureaucratic practices of power, control and knowledge production. This would be an essential instrument in the turbulences of current post-socialist disputations in which archival material and historical narratives are daily employed in legitimising exclusion and marginalisation. Second, this type of attention to the archival material would enable researchers to actively engage in the debates about the archives, to participate in discussions on how the archives are constituted and what are its underlying principles in nowadays Romania. This would erode the state archivists' monopoly on records and enable more democratic discussions about the archives. It would prod historians and citizens to actively engage in the second stage of the records continuum to which I shall now return as an epilogue.

Making the paper trail visible

Throughout their circulation from the moment of creation, documents are sifted through particular processes of categorization, evaluation, description, which are imbued with epistemic and political presuppositions (Cook and Schwartz, 2002; Schwartz, 2007). For the researcher, these processes are visible in the carefully staged "neutrality" of the inventory descriptions that simultaneously enable and constrain her research. The idea of records continuum, proposed by Australian archivists, is important in tracing this long chain of epistemic and political operations which structure the archive and, in this way, the possible direction of any historical undertaking (McKemmish, 2001).

For the current post-socialist historiography, I think it is important to render visible this obscure chain, to make the decisions of public creators and public archivists open to scrutiny and public intervention. First and foremost because once the ideas of accuracy and archival accountability, concepts of judicial decent, have been de-centred, it should become clear that the archives are not just the space of "national memory". As I have tried to point out, they are an institution immersed within a conflictual social fabric and, thus, opened to various claims and demands, coming from conflicting social groups. These claims are and should be seen as political in nature. Contrary to the patrimonial principles underpinning the current archival legislation, one should push forward for an institutional framework that can recognize the political nature of the archives, rather than asking for their innocuous de-politicization. After 1989, democratising the archives has meant first and foremost democratising the access to archives, merely the end point of a long chain of minute but politically crucial set of archival decisions.

I think that this is definitely not satisfactory and it might be high time to propose a democratic notion of the archives that would recognize the minute and significant epistemic manoeuvres that decide what archives are to be kept, the way in which they are kept, whom they are manoeuvred by, and the access to these documents. This should entail a reframing of the role of the National Archives within the current post-socialist regime. A historical anthropology of Romanian bureaucracy would be an important element in this endeavour in as much as it would help in bridging the gulf, the disciplinary barriers raised between historiography and archival science. These barriers separate archivists from historians, but also create a gulf between them and other archives-users who see their questioning of archival practices being annulled: the misguided but essential questions raised by the *Prémontré* order were immediately dismissed by the Romanian archivists.[25] A historical anthropology of bureaucratic practices would allow researchers and non-scholars to engage in the process which frames the role and the political function of the national archives. To a certain extent, such a project would permit the development of an intermediary epistemic space that would invalidate the archivists' claims to epistemic pre-eminence and thus, the state's control over the archives, while allowing a dialogue between archive-users and the institution.

More importantly, however, democratising the archives should entail an attempt to make various social groups, among whom researches are a simple minority, take part in the debate about the archives. Democratising would mean permitting and encouraging users to get involved in the complex legislative and

---

[25] See *Revista 22*, 03.07.2011, *http://www.revista22.ro/articol-10707_2.html* (Accessed: 02.05.2014).

bureaucratic measures that affect the social life of the records and, thus, contribute to the post-socialist historical consensus. Currently, the access to archives is restricted not so much through direct interdictions but by making this long chain of political decisions of the records' continuum invisible: there is no discussion over the methodological principles which structure the work of the public archives, over what archives should be included in the "Public National Patrimony,"[26] or the priorities which determine its inventorying efforts[27]. At least as importantly there is no discussion over the budget allotted to the National Archives.[28] The adoption of a new archival law of 2013 (the same year as the new restitution law) which greatly affects the status of entire corpuses of state and private documents passed unnoticed not only for the public, but also within the historians' professional journals. No debate over the new legislation was present in these historical publications, although this law directly impacted upon the main instrument of the craft, the archival record.

It is because of these circumstances that scholars, archivists and non-scholars should open up a political discussion about the role of the archives which should go beyond innocuous claims for open access. This discussion would focus on the role played by the archives within specific post-socialist disputes which are struggles for resources and recognition. Trying to make visible the set of political decisions and indecisions of the records' continuum, this should also comprise a humble type of social activism which is immersed in the seemingly technical but essential battles of archival legislation, budgetary debates, and methodological prescriptions. Focusing on the trite and probably not that exciting life of paperwork and documents, this is a task which might prove, however, essential for a critical historiography. Simply because histories of struggle and emancipatory alternatives are erased not only in the clamour of the anti-communist public discourse, but also through small bureaucratic gestures that all too often remain unheard, unseen, unrecorded.

---

[26] Regarding the National Patrimony, see Law 138/2013 which modified the previous archival legislation, Law 16/1996.

[27] Since only inventoried fonds are made public, the way in which these processing priorities are set greatly affects the access to the archives.

[28] As one may expect the budget allotted to the archives affects the capacity to process the fonds; consequently, despite the fact that institutions may have handed in their archives to the National Archives, these documents are not made public since they are not processed yet. To the best of my knowledge there is no public list of the institutional archives which are in the custody of the National Archives but await for their processing.

REFERENCES

Agar, J. (2003). *The Government Machine: A Revolutionary History of the Computer.* Cambridge: MIT Press Cambridge.

Aligică, P.D. and Dabu, A. (2003). Land Reform and Agricultural Reform Policies in Romania's Transition to the Market Economy. *Eastern European Economics,* 41 (5): 49–69.

Bastide, F., Courtial, J. P. and Callon, M. (1989). The Use of Review Articles in the Analysis of a Research Area. *Scientometrics,* 15(5-6): 535–62.

Benjamin, W. (1968). "Theses on the Philosophy of History". *Illuminations.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: 253-265.

Blokker, P. and Brighenti, A. (2011). An Interview with Laurent Thévenot: On Engagement, Critique, Commonality, and Power. *European Journal of Social Theory,* 14(3): 383–400.

Boltanski, L. and Thévenot, L. (1991). *De La Justification: Les Économies de La Grandeur.* NRF Essais, Paris: Gallimard.

Borneman, J. (1997). *Settling Accounts: Violence, Justice, and Accountabilityin Postsocialist Europe.* Princeton Studies in Culture/power/history. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Boudreaux, K. C. and Aligică, P.D. (2007). *Paths to Property: Approaches to Institutional Change in International Development.* Institute of Economic Affairs.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice.* Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

——— (1986). L'illusion Biographique. *Actes de La Recherche En Sciences Sociales,* 62 (1): 69–72.

Brecht, B. and Tailleur, J. (1970). *Petit Organon Pour Le Théâtre, 1948; Additifs Au Petit Organon, 1954.* Paris: l'Arche.

Chelcea, L. (2000). Marginal Groups in Central Places: Gentrification, Property Rights and Post-Socialist Primitive Accumulation. *Sociologie Românească,* Vol. 3-4: 51–68.

——— (2003). Ancestors, Domestic Groups, and the Socialist State: Housing Nationalization and Restitution in Romania. *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 45(04): 714–40.

Chernes, I. (1925). *Legea Chiriilor din 24 Martie 1924.* Bucuresti: Socec.

Collier, S.J. (2012). Neoliberalism as Big Leviathan, Or...? A Response to Wacquant and Hilgers. *Social Anthropology,* 20(2): 186–95.

Cook, T. (1997). What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift. *Archivaria,* 1(43): 17-64.

Conduratu, G. and Perieteanu, G. (1924). *Noul cod al inchirierilor [The new code of house renting].* Bucuresti: Curierul Judiciar.

Costin, A. (1923). Conceptiile actuale ale proprietatii si constitutia [Current conceptions on property and the Constitution]. *Noua Constitutie a Romaniei si Noile Constitutii Europene [The New Romanian Constitution and New European Constitutions].* Bucuresti: Institutul Social Roman.

De Certeau, M. (1988). The Historiographical Operation. In M. de Certeau (ed.): *The Writing of History*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 56–113.

Delsalle, P. (1998). *Une Histoire de L'archivistique*. Paris: PUQ.

Ewald, F. (1986). *L'état providence*. Paris: Grasset.

Eyal, G., Szelényi, I. and Townsley, E. (2003). On Irony: An Invitation to Neoclassical Sociology. *Thesis Eleven,* 73(1): 5.

Feagin, J., Elias, S. and Mueller, J. (2009). Social Justice and Critical Public Sociology. In V. Jeffries (ed.): *Handbook* of *Public Sociology*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. *71*–88.

Gardey, D. (2001). *La Dactylographe et L'expéditionnaire: Histoire Des Employés de Bureau, 1890-1930*. Histoire et Société. Modernités. Paris: Belin.

——— (2008). *Écrire, Calculer, Classer: Comment Une Révolution de Papier a Transformé Les Sociétés Contemporaines (1800-1940)*. Textes À L'appui. Série Anthropologie Des Sciences et Des Techniques. Paris: Découverte.

Ginzburg, C. (1989). *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ginzburg, C. and Shugaar, A. (1999). *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes on a Late-Twentienth-Century Miscarriage of Justice*. London: Verso.

Glaeser, A. (2011). *Political Epistemics: The Secret Police, the Opposition, and the End of East German Socialism*. Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Hacking, I. (2002). *Historical Ontology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Handelman, D. (2004). *Nationalism and the Israeli State: Bureaucratic Logic Inpublic Events*. Oxford: Berg.

Hann, C.M. (1998). *Property Relations: Renewing the Anthropological Tradition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hoag, C. (2011). Assembling Partial Perspectives: Thoughts on the Anthropology of Bureaucracy. *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review,* 34(1): 81–94.

Hull, M. S. (2012). Documents and Bureaucracy. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 41: 251–67.

Inglot, T. (2008). *Welfare States in East Central Europe, 1919-2004*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Kafka, B. (2009). Paperwork: The State of the Discipline. *Book History,* 12(1): 340–53.

Kalb, D. and Poenaru, F. (2011). The Politics of Memory. *Studia UBB Sociologia*, 56(2): 3–6.

Kideckel, D. (2008). *Getting by in Postsocialist Romania: Labor, the Body, and Working-Class Culture*. Bloomington: University Press.

Latour, B. (2002). *La Fabrique Du Droit: Une Ethnologie Du Conseil d'Etat*. Armillaire. Paris: La Découverte.

Manning, P.K. (2010). *Policing Contingencies*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McKemmish, S. (2001). Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice. *Archival Science,* 1(4): 333–59.

Radovici, S. (1932). *Legea pentru asanarea datoriilor. Comentata si Adnotata.[The Law on the Cancellation of Debts. Commented and Updated]*. Bucuresti: Curierul Judiciar.

Richards, T. (1993). *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*. London: Verso.

Rose, N. (1996). Governing 'advanced' Liberal Democracies. In A.Gupta (ed.): *The Anthropology of the State: A Reader*, London: Blackwell, pp. 144–62.

Rosen, M.S. (2010). Surviving Property: Resistance against Urban Housing Nationalization during the Transition to Communism (Romania, 1950–1965). *Studies in Law, Politics, and Society,* 51: 29–65.

Rumschöttel, H. (2001). The Development of Archival Science as a Scholarly Discipline. *Archival Science,* 1(2): 143–55.

Schellenberg, T.R. (1956). *The Appraisal of Modern Public Records*. 8. US Govt. Print. Off.

Schwartz, J.M. and Cook, T. (2002). Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory. *Archival Science,* 2(1-2): 1–19.

Stan, L. (2006). The Roof over Our Heads: Property Restitution in Romania. *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 22(2): 180–205.

Steinmetz, G. (1993). *Regulating the Social: The Welfare State and Local Politics in Imperial Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Stoler, A. L. (2009). *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Thévenot, L. (1984). Rules and Implements: Investment in Forms. *Social Science Information,* 23(1): 1–45.

Trouillot, M.-R. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Verdery, K. (1994). The Elasticity of Land: Problems of Property Restitution in Transylvania. *Slavic Review,* 53(4): 10-71.

——— (2003). *The Vanishing Hectare: Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

——— (2014). *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police*. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Upward F. (2005). The records continuum. In S.McKemmish, M.Piggott, B.Reed, F. Upward (eds.): *Archives: recordkeeping in society.* Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Wagga, pp. 197-222.

Vincze, E. and Rat, C. (2013). Spatialization and Racialization of Social Exclusion. The Social and the Cultural Formation of 'Gypsy Ghettos' in Romania in a European Contex. *Studia UBB Sociologia*, 58(2): 5–21.

Zerilli, F. (2005). Corruption, Property Restitution and Romanianness. *Corruption: Anthropological Perspectives.* London: Pluto, pp. 83–102.

Zerilli, F. M. (2006). Sentiments And/as Property Rights: Restitution and Conflict in Post-Socialist Romania. In M.Svasek (ed.): *Postsocialism: Politics and Emotions in Central and Eastern Europe*, New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 74–94.

THE AUTHORS OF THIS ISSUE

Natalia Buier is a doctoral candidate at the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department of the Central European University, Budapest. Her disciplinary focus includes the anthropology of labour, historical memory and state theory. She is currently conducting research in Spain, studying worker organization in the post-Francoist railways.

Mihai-Dan Cîrjan is a doctoral candidate at the History Department of the Central European University, Budapest. His main research areas lie at the intersection between social history, anthropology of finance and sociology of knowledge, being particularly interested in the relationship between peasant economies and financial markets and the anthropology of debt and credit. He is currently working on the interwar post-Depression reforms of the Romanian financial system: more precisely, on the impact they had in redefining the regulatory role of state institutions but also local practices of debt and credit relations.

Michel Dubois is a senior research fellow at the Groupe d'Etude des Méthodes de l'Analyse Sociologique de la Sorbonne – GEMASS (French National Research Center, Paris Sorbonne University). He received his PhD in 1997 and habilitated in 2008 at the Sorbonne. He is teaching and publishing mainly on issues of sociology of science and technology, epistemology and methodology of social research, sociological history and theory. His most recent publications address issues at the crossroads between sociology and biomedical research. He is a member of the French National Research Committee and member of the editorial boards of *Archives européennes de sociologie/European Journal of Sociology* and *French Sociological Review*.

Jacques Lautman is Professor Emeritus at University Paris-Descartes and University Aix-Marseille and former Scientific Director of Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) Paris. Together with Alain Darbel, he created *Série Données Sociales* within the French National Institute of Statistics (INSEE) and coordinated its first deliveries (1973-1975). At CNRS, he conducted together with Henri Mendras the research program *Observations of localized social and cultural change* (1977-1983). His contributions cover a broad range of topics: the sociology of organizations,

patrimonial and housing policies, social change, the politics of social research. His most recent studies concern macrosociology and epistemology. Since 1984, he has been acting as managing director of the trilingual journal *Archives européennes de sociologie/ European Journal of Sociology.*

Traian Rotariu is Professor Emeritus at the Sociology Department of the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca, and director of the Centre for Population Studies within the same university. He earned his PhD in 1977 with a dissertation on social mobility under the supervision of the late Raymon Boudon at the University Rene Descartes Paris-V (Sorbonne). He was one of the founders of sociological education in Cluj after 1989, dean of the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work (2001-2007), and since 2007 editor-in-chief of the *Romanian Journal of Population Studies.* His most important publications are in the fields of social research methods, statistics, demography, and social stratification and mobility.

CONTENTS