VIEWPOINT

Sedentary and migrant peoples: The sketch of a paradigm[1]

Orazio Maria Gnerre[2]

Abstract

Often, during the modern age, the idea of the people was linked to the sedentariness of life on a specific territory, and there is no doubt that the essence of an environment, that is its morphology, its endowments in terms of resources constitute a strong influence on the culture of a human community. Nonetheless, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was often forgotten that many peoples developed within large human movements, just as for some cultures the transience of the environment of birth is a central element of their tradition. This article aims to give a partial and non-exhaustive vision of how stability and transience can both form the vision of the world of a people or of a cultural tradition, and to propose a draft of integration of these two perspectives within an institutional point of view.

Keywords: Sedentary peoples; Migrant peoples; Territoriality; Cultural heritage
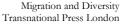
Introduction

With this article, we intend to discuss the issue of the question of popular identities with respect to the migratory phenomenon. These identities, in fact, are simultaneously threatened or strengthened by the need for displacement, whether this need derives from economics, war or environmental catastrophes. The relationship between identity and migration is a two-way, ambiguous relationship, and cannot be simplistically reduced to a linear scheme. In other words, it must be interpreted according to a model that understands its complexity, starting from explicit ideas and conceptualizations. It is very important to address this discourse due to the primary role that the phenomenon of human migration is playing within that structure that Immanuel Wallerstein called the "world-system"[3].

In this paper we will proceed from the assumption, also recognized by the large international organizations, according to which popular, ethnic and national cultures are a wealth that deepens the essential potential of the human being. Far from necessarily being an ontologically conflictual factor, they consist of a wealth of knowledge that cannot be ordered according to

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[1] This article is based on my speech at "The Migration Conference 2022" held in Rabat from 7th to 10th September.
[2] Orazio Maria Gnerre, University of Perugia, Italy.
[3] Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2011.

a hierarchy, but to be known, studied and (as far as possible) lived in order to fully understand human experience in its essential communitarian form.

2. (From and to) the institutional recognition of cultural heritage

The most striking example of recognition of this principle by international institutions is certainly that of UNESCO. In fact, its founding act (1972) showed how the disappearance or deterioration of a part of the cultural heritage of peoples would have produced a decrease in the knowledge and general cultural wealth of all humanity, understanding the profound relational value between culturally differentiated human groups: "deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural or natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all the nations of the world[4]".

In this sense, it is clear that it is very important to try – within a paradigm of multilevel collaboration between components and representatives of peoples, state forms and international organizations – to preserve this wealth of differences, take care of its memory and preserve its intangible heritage of narratives, myths, languages and collective consciousness.

The importance of multilevel collaboration is one of the reasons why UNESCO was born, given the limits imposed by the policies of sovereign political units to preserve (in this case) the material heritage, which in any case falls within the broader discourse on the cultural heritage we are facing. In fact, in the same convention it is written:

"[The] protection of this heritage at the national level often remains incomplete because of the scale of the resources which it requires and of the insufficient economic, scientific, and technological resources of the country where the property to be protected is situated"[5].

It should also be added that this "subsidiary" mechanism for sovereign states is already envisaged by UNESCO, for the benefit of the preservation of their cultural heritage, which (as already mentioned) also has a universal value, according to this principle: "granting of collective assistance […], although not taking the place of action by the State concerned, [but serving] as an efficient complement thereto[6]".

The comparison developed with UNESCO, in addition to serving us to demonstrate the existence within the political sphere of the international community of this time-honored and commonly accepted principle, is useful for understanding the functioning and models that could be adopted in this sense in the comparisons of the intangible elements of the cultural heritage, where there are already specific regulations for the material ones.

This certainly gives rise to the problem of developing this direct relationship between material goods considered to be the inheritance of all humanity, and cultures, narratives, ways of life. As Janet Blake rightly notes, the question of cultural heritage referred to in UNESCO documents is certainly problematic from many points of view, and especially the legal ones[7], but it can be easily resolved if its genesis is understood in the so-called "cultural rights":

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[4] UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, on *UNESCO World Heritage Convention website*: https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/
[5] *Ibidem.*
[6] *Ibidem.*
[7] Janet Blake, *On Defining the Cultural Heritage*, on *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 49 no. 1 y. 2008, pp. 61-85.

"Understanding the importance of a sense of cultural identity to us all as individuals, a group, or humankind and the role of cultural heritage in its construction helps us to understand the nature of cultural heritage itself. Generally speaking, the justification for protecting cultural heritage has always been assumed in cultural heritage law as a given which needs little further elaboration."[8]

UNESCO itself has recognized since its founding convention of 1972 that some socio-political upheavals jeopardize the material elements of the cultural heritage of peoples: "in view of the magnitude and gravity of the new dangers threatening them, it is incumbent on the international community as a whole to participate in the protection of the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value, by the granting of collective assistance[9]".

Once again, this principle should be extended to the intangible aspects. To do this, however, the issue of human migration should be seriously considered, which are also events of shocking importance within an international political framework increasingly marked by critical events.

To do this, however, it would be appropriate to carry out a cognitive revolution in various aspects of the common sense relating to the conception of international affairs and of the guiding values of the current world political-economic organization. That is because there are notoriously a whole series of centripetal forces that threaten cultural wealth, in a more or less explicit way[10].

However, the problem does not arise only in phenomena such as migration, which, as we have said, actually has contrasting elements with respect to the solidification of collective identities. There are also very strong cultural factors within contemporary societies that pose serious problems to diversified ways of life as well as to the preservation of cultural heritage.

In this sense, contemporary sociology and anthropology have spread widely in the analysis of these phenomena, which have frequently bent time and space to homogenizing formulas. An example is the interesting conceptualization of "non-places" by Marc Augé[11], referring to spaces not culturalized except by the dominant culture of the contemporary society, which however claims to be more than trans-national or supra-national, a-national. As Augé understands, these spaces of anti-culturality (or of unified culturality) are proposed as places of transit[12], therefore they are linked to a non-rooted perspective of life. This would seem to go against our later reasoning, but it is not so, since there are different ways of "passing" or "passing through" spaces, and this has to do, in our opinion, with the symbolization of the spaces themselves. and with the meaning that adds value to the act of passage. It is evident that in Augé's reasoning one of the key elements of the encounter in these (non)places of passage, which indeed constitutes the founding element of "supermodernity", is the question of consumption[13]. Consumption of goods, of course, but also the consumption of space and time.

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[8] *Ivi*, p. 77.
[9] UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, on *UNESCO World Heritage Convention website*: https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/
[10] As we have seen, this is also confirmed in the founding convention of UNESCO (*Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, on *UNESCO World Heritage Convention website*: https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/).
[11] Marc Augé, *Non-places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Verso, London / New York 1995.
[12] *Ivi*, pp. 106-107.
[13] *Ivi*, p. 106.

This type of reasoning could be extended (and has actually been extended) to an almost infinite number of phenomena that suffer from the possibility of culturalization. One of the aspects of greatest interest in this sense should be for mass culture in its entirety.

This level, however, is, as we have already said, widely known, and it is not difficult to understand it for those who share this type of socio-cultural sensitivity. Although this phenomenon is often defined as a product of historically uncontainable phenomena such as globalization, the interrelation of markets or cultural exchanges, it is quite evident that it is a vector for the promotion of a few geographically and philosophically well defined cultural forms. This does not clearly exclude the influence of the techno-infrastructural factor and the increased interpersonal connections on a global scale, but these, like any other instrumental factors, are elements that can take one direction or another depending on their politicization.

3. Is it sedentary lifestyle that make a people?

It becomes important to rethink in all respects the characteristics with which we are usually used to thinking of a people. The most complex level to understand is that of the substantial nature of the essence of a people, and what are the factors that can describe and circumscribe it correctly.

It is important to reiterate that this paper absolutely does not want to put a final word on the question, but rather to outline a problem and indicate some paths to follow. In our opinion, the question is still open and should be investigated in scientific terms. Here we are first of all interested in presenting a line of thought and a very general interpretative scheme. It only anticipates some problematizations that should be taken into consideration in the face of a serious commitment to the preservation and conservation of the cultural heritage of peoples.

Nonetheless, it is important, in many ways, to get out of some conceptual shallows that have been produced in this sense by certain historical-political experiences, which to define solely Western would be short-sighted. We cannot get involved in this sense in the historiographical research on who really invented the nation-state and if forms of state similar to the modern one existed even before the European Middle Ages outside the western borders. It is only worth thinking of these categories as borrowed also outside the borders of the West, within long historical-political processes that have seen, moreover, the formation of national liberation movements in the so-called "Third World".

First of all, to proceed with our reasoning, what we intend to write about is the element of influence of territoriality on the cognitive universe, and therefore on the fundamental characteristics, of a people. The question we should ask ourselves is: "are all peoples sedentary?", or, in other words: "is permanentity what makes a group of people a people?". The answer, which could be believed to be negative, given the premises of our reasoning, in reality is not so obvious, and the observation of reality places us in front of the fact according to which there are many different formulas for the relationship between peoples and territoriality.

This may not seem strange or sound new to an anthropologist or ethnologist, but it becomes of great importance if it is rediscovered within political practice and modern social life. It has been rightly written that "anthropology, with its focus on people in groups, has had a pivotal role in the development of the modern interdisciplinary study of forced migration. Both before and after the birth of 'refugee' studies, anthropology's contribution to this new field

has been and continues to be the prioritizing of the views of the uprooted, the displaced, and the dispossessed. Its emphasis on phenomenological and ethnographic field methods gives voice and agency to refugees, exiles, and otheer forced migrants[14]".

Obviously the point is not only this (however very important), but also the comparison with the historically and geographically determined realities of peoples and human groups who live according to models of relationship with the territory very different from those we can imagine today. This is because the "anthropology might be seen in global terms as the West's attempt at coming to terms with its 'other'[15]".

The question of peoples and their territoriality / territorialization is however of ancient date[16]. It was certainly filtered by the psychology of an era oriented to certain political-economic and social issues[17].

But not only did the first and pure ethnography deal with the question, there is another disciplinary point of view to consider: the problem of the territoriality of a people and its influence on its culture is a theme that was posed also by the great nineteenth-century "geophilosophers", as for example Ernst Kapp and Friedrich Ratzel. We use the term "geophilosophy" to represent this disciplinary encounter between political geography, the history of civilization, and even ethnology. The difference between "pure" ethnology and this type of approach certainly lies in the greater dynamism of the latter, given by the political element and the study of civilizations in their diachronic evolution.

This problem clearly arose from a certain type of Hegelian reflection[18], which glimpsed the relationship between labour and territorial elements, in the concept expressed as "nature"[19].

This has led to the understanding of the relationship between the geographical environment and the history of work and technical development, as two intertwined realities. We can see this clearly in Ernst Kapp's thinking[20]. Taken to its extreme consequences, this thought will generate the discourse on the bipartition of human social experience into structural and superstructural elements of Karl Marx[21], who will in effect imagine the planetary territorialization of a people-world.

For the Hegelian geographers (or "geophilosophers") of the nineteenth century there was a sort of deterministic relationship between man and the living environment[22]. In the specific case of Ernst Kapp, this type of relationship even had a diachronic development in the cycles

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[14] Dawn Chatty, *Anthropology and Forced Migrations*, in Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long and Nando Sigona [edited by], *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration* Studies, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014 [digital version].

[15] Christopher Johnson, *Lévi-Strauss and the Place of Anthropology*, in *Paragraph*, vol. 13 no. 3 y. 1990, p. 229.

[16] Renato Rosaldo, *Ideology, Place, and People without Culture*, in *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 3 no. 1 y. 1988, p. 80.

[17] Noel B. Salazar, *Towards an Anthropology of Cultural Mobilities*, in *Crossing: Journal of Migration and Culture*, vol. 1 no. 1 y. 2010, p. 54.

[18] Orazio Maria Gnerre, *The Mediterranean thalactic civilization in the thought of Ernst Kapp and Carl Schmitt*, in *Przegląd Geopolityczny*, vol. 39 y. 2022, pp. 162-169.

[19] Paul Ashton, *Hegel & Labour. Talk at "Legacy of Hegel" Seminar, University of Melbourne, 5th February 1999*, on Marxist Internet Archive: https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/txt/ashton.htm

[20] Ernst Kapp, *Philosophische oder vergleichende allgemeine Erdkunde als wissenschaftliche Darstellung der Erdverhältnisse und des Menschenlebens*, George Westermann, Braunschweig 1845.

[21] Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, International Publisher, New York 1970.

[22] It must be said that the question of the determinism of this type of Germanic approach is however much debated. We never deny the strong impact that the questions we would call "structural" have in social facts according to these authors, but we discover more and more new elements that add "vitality" to the picture. Cf. Maan Barua, *Ratzel's Biogepgraphy: A More-than-Human Encounter*, in *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 61 y. 2018, pp. 102-108.

of approach of human populations to water, and of the use of water connection lines. Carl Schmitt wrote of this concept:

"He distinguish[ed] three stages of development, three acts of a great drama. The history of the world [began] for him with the potamia, that is with the fluvial culture of the East in the Mesopotamian territory of the Euphrates and Tigris, and in that of the Nile, in the Eastern empires of the Assyrians, Babylonians and Egyptians. This was followed by the so-called Talactic age of a culture of the inland seas and the Mediterranean basin, to which Greek and Roman antiquity and the Mediterranean Middle Ages belong. With the discovery of America and the circumnavigation of the earth, the last and supreme stage is reached, the step of oceanic culture, whose subjects are the Germanic peoples."[23]

This was based on the idea that the territory formed the character of the peoples, but specifically because the morphology of the territory itself had a strong impact on the working and production methods of the people who lived there. In any case, there was always the process of rationality of history that operated on every level, from the chronological to the territorial to that of the *volkgeist*. This type of approach interests us for two reasons: the first is that according to which each people lives in relationship with a defined territory, with its specific characteristics that influence its psychology; the second (developed in a nutshell by Carl Schmitt[24]) is that according to which the way of taking advantage of geographical spaces also shapes the psychology of peoples, but it implies a *decision*[25].

The deterministic element, however, favored, in the history of the last few centuries, a rather rigid interpretation of the relationship between territory and peoples. This obviously was also linked to the birth of that specific historical-political formation which was the national state. Geographical determinism has been one of the strongest elements in support of the legitimacy of nation states. It explained the nature of the boundaries of a state entity and, through the morphology of the territory, described the history of the peoples who then made up the modern nation as guided by these determinants.

The genesis of the nation-state, it has rightly been noted, dates back to the Middle Ages and to the unitarian processes of French, as well as Spanish, monarchical politics. These unitarian processes, together with the military element of establishing permanent armies and modernizing weapons that went hand in hand, was what the famous italian political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli called "the modern things"[26].

These two states centralized, through the principle of nationality, all political power against both internal autonomist forces and against those of external, imperial (in the case of France) or ecclesiastical control. However, it was with modernity that that process took place – well described in some illuminating pages of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who speaks of it especially in relation to the constitution of Polish statehood[27] – for which the delimitation of the political borders of the nation also had to correspond to the homogeneity of culture contained by those borders.

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[23] Carl Schmitt, *Terra e mare. Una riflessione sulla storia del mondo*, Adelphi, Milan 2002, p. 25 [translated from Italian].
[24] Carl Schmitt, *Terra e mare. Una riflessione sulla storia del mondo*, Adelphi, Milan 2002.
[25] *Ivi*, pp. 93-98.
[26] Giorgio Inglese, *Per Machiavelli. L'arte dello stato, la cognizione delle storie*, Carocci, Rome 2006, p. 12. Francesco Bausi, *Machiavelli*, Salerno Editrice, Rome 2005, p. 104.
[27] Zygmunt Bauman, *Intervista sull'identità*, Laterza, Bari 2003, pp. 15-16.

This process obviously led to the discovery (certainly often truthful) of common traits among the territorially scattered populations of a nation (for example, the peninsularity of all the Italian people), but also to the more or less deliberate exclusion of the differences due to the regional locality of belonging. This is because, beyond mere determinism, the environment undoubtedly has a certain influence on the human being, even if the latter can try to overcome it or "conquer" it in various ways. For Bauman this process was obviously characterized in the sense of the imposition of a single language and the *national adjective*, where however, borrowing the principle of influence of geographic morphology on psychology, this also leads to the negation of this very important aspect. However, there remains the problem, undoubtedly of a political nature, of who decides which territorial morphological element to link to in order to describe and circumscribe the political-social unit of reference.

Finally, modernity has manifested more or less consciously the rejection of all those forms of popular life that still existed in non-sedentary ways. Even without delving into the intricacies of the ethno-anthropological discipline, it is easy for us to say that the multiplicity and differences of world peoples has led to a contextually always different relationship with territoriality.

This should not be surprising: we know very well the examples of peoples who experience seasonal cycles of displacement, often for purposes related to pastoralism and other types of farming in general, sometimes hunting; there are cases of peoples who have suffered from diasporas, due to national and political tragedies; finally, there is the case of peoples who had within their own culture the possibility of transmigration or foundation of colonies (for the latter case we can think for example of the culture of ancient Greece and the foundation of cities in southern Italy, the so-called *Magna Grecia*, one of which is for example Naples).

By doing this we can certainly determine at least these three characteristic forms of popular cultures that essentially relate to transmigration of various kinds. This already constitutes the outline of an interpretative paradigm.

We have previously talked about Carl Schmitt: in his important text *Land und Meer* (*Land and Sea*)[28], the German jurist and political theorist, here in the role of the geophilosopher, proposes a non-diachronic vision of the same relationship between man and geographical spaces by Ernst Kapp. Moreover, deepening a famous Hegelian assumption[29], he assumes that the two elements that the human being has been able to cross in past history, the land and the sea, have a strong influence on the psychology and on the ways of working and even managing the power of human being. This type of approach overcomes and breaks the deterministic barrier because, in the exemplary case of England, he expressed the idea according to which this nation has decided which element to be devoted to, and from which element to be trained psychologically and professionally[30]. An equally indicative image is that of the Republic of Venice, which according to Schmitt did not wanted to be either a civilization dedicated only to maritime trade or only to land administration, but a third option[31].

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[28] Carl Schmitt, *Terra e mare. Una riflessione sulla storia del mondo*, Adelphi, Milan 2002.
[29] *Ivi*, p. 18. Cf. Orazio Maria Gnerre, *Prima che il mondo fosse. Alle radici del decisionismo novecentesco*, Mimesis, Milan 2018, pp. 26-27, footnote 13.
[30] Carl Schmitt, *Terra e mare. Una riflessione sulla storia del mondo*, Adelphi, Milan 2002, pp. 93-98.
[31] *Ivi*, pp. 22-28.

This element of the option, of the choice, of the *decision[32]*, is fundamental, because it brings us back to the importance of considering and evaluating how much the psyche of a people itself selects the elements by which it wants to be influenced, in a relationship for which there is however a pre-existing environment with which it approaches and which contains a limited set of possibilities in the area of resources and environments.

Some peoples, like England according to Schmitt, choose to travel. Of course, according to Schmitt, England's option is completely different from any other, and this is due to the preference of maritime flows for every key element of the territory. The voyage of England also did not displace its people in its entirety and maintain a center on its island, rather it expanded the country's naval and trading routes. It is therefore very different from the type of dislocation we wrote about earlier. This obviously had very important implications in historical and political terms.

But also for the other models we have written about there are fixed hinges and points of relief located in the space with which they orient themselves. These can be places of cyclical return, for those who move seasonally; they can also be places of historical memory, for those who have undergone diasporas or have left their lands of origin in a great transmigration. In this case these starting elements are mythologized within the historical or legendary narration, they become real places of spiritual fullness, but they are not necessarily places to return to or from which one feels alienated, as in the case of the Normans who spread to southern Europe who did not manifested the need to return to the primeval place from which the expansion of their people began.

Ratzel wrote, in his theory of *Lebensraum* (a term which later became sadly famous for having been used quite freely by the Nazis during their expansion to the East)[33] that "every movement is a mastering of space[34]". This principle must not follow the idea of conquest or taking possession, which was also practiced in ancient history, but rather another principle: that according to which even peoples who move, in various ways (today it is assumed peacefully) and for various reasons, are anchored to a symbolization of space that guarantees points of support that allow a non-superficial hermeneutics of life, typical of the collective narratives to which we have previously referred. This symbolization and culturization of space is, moreover, the substantial opposite of Augé's principle of non-place.

4. Conclusions

Here we have a few key points on which to build, possibly in the future, a discourse. All this can be summarized in the importance of preserving cultural differences against a homologating paradigm but beyond the deterministic assumption according to which peoples live only in a sedentary form. It is necessary to consider how each culture experiences spaces in a completely different way, and the world is inserted within a completely autonomous interpretative grid.

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[32] *Ivi*, p. 28.

[33] Certainly the questions raised by Ratzel and his theories are not without ambiguous elements, strongly imbued with positivism with all the limitations that this entails. It was however written that "the deployment of Ratzelian ideas generates important ethical concerns, particularly in light of their twentieth-century reception [, altohough] more recently scholars have pointed out that his contributions to cultural geography, though unnoticed, bear striking similarities to contemporary discussions about mobility, materiality and relational space" [Maan Barua, *Ratzel's Biogepgraphy: A More-than-Human Encounter*, in *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 61 y. 2018, p. 7].

[34] Cf. Friedrich Ratzel, *Lebensraum: A Biogeographical Study* [*1901*], in *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 61 y. 2018, pp. 59-80.

This approach to reasoning should lead us to conceptualize new solutions resulting from a paradigm shift and a change of perspective. Reasoning on political entities constituted in modernity as differentiated from local or moving popular cultures, for example, does not necessarily mean separating the history of the working classes or other politically active classes or of the masses in their entirety from the historical movement of national liberation or unification or creation. In this sense, therefore, conceiving different ways of relating with respect to geography and territoriality, different ways of *mastering of space* through movement, different interpretative possibilities of the relationship between human groups and the world, allows us to further deepen the communitarian nature of human being.

All of this clearly poses immense problems, which it is impossible to solve here. The point here is solely to think in this direction, to understand which paths can be followed at the level of state and supranational policies.

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