

national politics? How are riots, rebellions and revolutions enacted? And so on. In this way, we can take the asymmetries of power and participatory processes as a historical problem to be connected to the two macro-processes represented by the development of states (and the systems of States) and the expansion of the capitalist system of production. As Tilly points out (1981, 46), state and capitalism provide the framework for a historically rooted analysis of collective action and of the ways by which individuals act together in pursuit of shared interests. «Instead of the eternal behavior of crowds, we study the particular forms of action that people use to advance claims or register grievances. Instead of laws of social movements, we study the emergence of the social movement as a political phenomenon. Instead of power in general, we study the modalities of power within a certain mode of production» (ibid.). In particular, the two macro-processes influence the direction of change by acting on three fundamental components of collective action: the “interests” for which individuals decide to act collectively, their “capacity” to act in defense of those interests, and the “opportunity” to advance or defend those interests through the development of coordinated collective action.

4. Historical comparison as a sociological instrument

Antonio Gramsci’s historical sociology cannot disregard the use of comparison as a privileged instrument of knowledge. As above mentioned, he is interested in understanding the reason why, in Italy, a revolution on the Soviet or Jacobin model is impossible. His interpretation, the result of a careful comparative analysis, can be ascribed to the role of intellectuals and to the structure of civil society.

Gramsci distinguishes between organic and traditional intellectuals. The first are those whose origins coincide with those of the social group they wish to represent. They are defined according to the functions conferred on them by the social group from which they originate in economic and political, as well as cultural and ideological spheres. Organic intellectuals represent a function of the interests of a class, but also an instrument of social transformation. Traditional intellectuals, on the other hand, seem to be the expression of an uninterrupted historical continuity. Their *raison d’être* is based on the autonomy of their past and on the need to reproduce their caste-like position in contemporary society. What really defines traditional

intellectuals is the dialectically negative response to new social groups. Their autonomy is in direct opposition to the progressive aspirations of emerging social forces. At this point, for Gramsci, the central issue becomes a comparative analysis of intellectual blocs within concrete historical blocs, as were those emerged in European societies. In particular, his focus is on the bourgeois hegemonic capacity in France, Italy, England and Germany.

In France, the central element of the struggle of the bourgeoisie against the landed aristocracy is represented by the contrast in terms of superstructure between bourgeois organic intellectuals and the Church. In that context, a progressive bourgeoisie was able to erode the feudal economic and institutional structures, giving rise to a capitalist mode of production. Such a structural process would not have happened if it had not been accompanied by an ideological movement opposing those traditional intellectuals who had found in the ecclesiastical institutions their strongest allies. The tactics of the bourgeoisie were meant to get rid of traditional intellectuals and, at the same time, to assimilate them. In this way, the French bourgeoisie were able to build a new historical bloc impermeable to repeated attempts at restoration.

In Italy, instead, the bourgeoisie began to form around the eighteenth century, that is the era of medieval municipalities and city-states. Although they tried on various occasions to displace the political domination of the aristocracy, they were never able to transcend their corporate stage to become the hegemonic social group. The bourgeoisie failed in the attempt to create their own organic intellectuals capable of addressing the power of the Church as well as traditional intellectuals. The failure of the Italian bourgeoisie led to the formation of small states ruled by the old aristocracy, thus blocking for several years the process of modernization. The same process of the Italian Risorgimento, which would take place almost a century after the French Revolution, would be led by moderates able to exert a strong power of attraction also towards democratic intellectuals close to the Action Party. The Italian middle class has always remained an elite and therefore it has never sought the consent of the masses which, according to Gramsci, constitute the only possibility to ensure a real process of social transformation.

In England, middle class patterns of development differs from the French and the Italian cases. Here the bourgeois revolution was accomplished

through a fusion of old and new hegemonic groups. The old aristocracy retained certain formal privileges, becoming the intellectual stratum of the new bourgeoisie. In this context, the new staff of the ruling bourgeoisie was also formed by elements of the old feudal classes who participated in the process of building new forms of economic power in the industrial and financial world. Thus, what made the dialectic between progressive and traditional intellectuals possible? Gramsci suggests a line of research. At the economic-corporate level, the English bourgeoisie created a stratum of organic intellectuals who tried to exorcise their own weakness by incorporating the old landed aristocracy within State administration.

The industrial development in Germany has some aspects that are similar to the English pattern. Here, too, the middle class emerged from an almost feudal social context by using the dynamics of fusion between old and new hegemonic groups achieved through a clear division of roles. The German bourgeoisie assumed the role of industrial and economic direction, leaving the role of intellectual and political direction to the old Junker aristocracy. Like in England, the bourgeoisie was not able to produce an organic intellectual class that would be strong enough to assume a hegemonic role by itself.

According to Gramsci, the French, English and German cases are three models of bourgeois revolution carried out in the strategic conflict between traditional and organic intellectuals. He contrasts these cases with the failure of the Italian bourgeoisie focusing mainly on the comparison between Jacobin France and the Italian Risorgimento.

All the problems inherent in the connection of the different currents in the Italian Risorgimento may be ascribed, for Gramsci, to the fundamental fact that the moderates represented a relatively homogeneous social group, so their political leadership underwent limited fluctuations, while the Action Party didn't support any historically determined social group, so that the oscillations of its ruling class were eventually shaped by the interests of the moderates. In fact the supremacy of a social group can manifest itself in two ways: either in the form of «domination», or in the form of «intellectual and moral direction». A social group tends to “dominate” the opposing groups and seeks to wipe them out through military force, while it tends to “lead” similar or allied groups. A social group, however, must be able to exercise leadership even before winning governmental power. After gain-

ing power, that group becomes dominant, but it must also be able to maintain its ruling position.

The political history of the moderates during the Italian Risorgimento proves the truth of this assumption. They were the ruling class well before being the dominant class and this allowed them to rise to power by exerting hegemonic force with no need for excessive material force. In this sense, the Risorgimento in Italy was organized in the form of a «revolution without revolution», that is a «passive revolution» (1977c, PN19, 87-88).

The moderates were able to establish their hegemony by adopting “liberal” means, that is, through individual initiative at a molecular level, thus without a party program developed according to a plan that precedes action and organizational practice. The field of the moderates was made up of intellectuals who had already well developed their organicity to the social groups of which they were the expression. They were intellectuals, politicians and business managers and, at the same time, big farmers, entrepreneurs and industrialists. Given these conditions, they exercised a great «spontaneous» power of attraction on the whole body of intellectuals of any rank. From this context, Gramsci claims, emerges the methodological consistency of a criterion for historical-political research: «There is no independent class of intellectuals but each social group has its own class of intellectuals or tends to form it; but the intellectuals of the progressive class, in the given conditions, exercise such a power of attraction that ultimately they end up making subaltern the intellectuals of other social groups, and then by creating a system of solidarity with all the intellectuals through psychological (vanity, etc.) and often caste-like ties (legal-technical, corporate, etc.)» (1977c PN19 88-89).

This is accomplished in an almost spontaneous way when a social group assumes the features of a progressive class which enables the entire society to advance. When this social group ceases to fulfill its function, the entire ideological bloc that supports it tends to crumble, and spontaneity can be replaced by direct or indirect coercion, that is, through real police action or military coups.

In the context of the Risorgimento, the Action Party, because of its articulation was unable to exert such a power of attraction, therefore, it was itself subjected to attractions and influences, so much so that it was hesitant about accepting in its program some crucial popular demands, as such as

the agrarian reform. The Action Party, steeped as it was in the rhetoric tradition typical of a certain Italian literature, tended to confuse the cultural unity existing in the peninsula – limited, however, to a very thin stratum of the population mainly polluted by Vatican cosmopolitanism - with the territorial and political unity of the popular masses which were unconnected to that cultural tradition. For this reason, in Italy, the political action of the Actionists never reached the efficiency levels attained, for example, by the Jacobins in France. They fought in order to create a link between cities and countryside, and their defeat at some point in the historical development was due to the fact that they clashed with the demands of the Parisian working class, yet their long rhetoric tradition would continue in the modality practiced by Napoleon and, in a certain sense, by Herriot's and Daladier's radical-socialists.

The different interpretations of the Jacobin experience are not right on target. The very term “Jacobinism” has come to assume two meanings: the first, historically characterized, is that of a political party which sees the development of French life in a specific way and is based on a particular program; a party which performs its action through an energetic and resolute method derived from the occasionally fanatical belief in the soundness of that program (and that method). Hence the notion that a “Jacobin” is an energetic, determined and fanatical political man, confident in the miraculous virtues of his ideas. In this view, the sectarian element prevails on the awareness of a movement that succeeded in giving voice to the major demands of the popular masses connecting them with the element of national politics.

Actually, the Action Party, according to Gramsci, in order to really assume the character of a progressive group, should have been “Jacobin”, not only in its external form of temperament, but also in its economic and social contents. In this way, the connection of the rural classes - which in Italy was realized by a reactionary bloc formed by clerical-legitimists intellectual classes - could also lead to the formation of a new liberal and national political force. But in order to do so, the Actionists should have accepted the basic demands of peasants by appealing to them and to the intellectuals of the lower strata of society.

The Jacobins conquered their function of ruling party through a strenuous fight. They imposed themselves on the French bourgeoisie leading them towards advanced positions. They exploited the situation by creating irre-

versible facts, «by hunting out the middle-class kick in the pants». The “Third state” was in fact the less homogeneous. It was made up of a disintegrated intellectual elite and an economically advanced but politically moderate social group. At first, its political action was limited to claims regarding corporate interests. Therefore, the forerunners of the Revolution were moderate reformers. In a relatively short time, however, a new elite came into existence that tended to see the bourgeoisie as a group exerting hegemony over all the popular forces. This was the result of a selection process that took place through the action of two factors: the resistance of traditional social forces and the international threat, two elements that without the vigorous and determined action of the Jacobins would have crushed the Third state.

The Jacobins opposed any intermediate halt in the revolutionary process, by physically eliminating not only elements of the old society but also moderate revolutionaries, who had by this time become reactionary. Therefore, on the one hand, the Jacobins represented the only revolutionary ruling party to represent the aspirations of the immediate (and corporate) French bourgeois interests; on the other hand, they represented the revolutionary movement as a complete historical development, since they encompassed also the future needs «of all national groups that had to be assimilated to the existing fundamental group».

They were without doubt as convinced of the validity of the rhetoric formula «freedom, equality and fraternity» as popular masses were. «The language of the Jacobins, their ideology, their methods of action perfectly reflected the needs of the time» even though today they might seem too “frenetic”. Their first need was to destroy enemy forces or reduce them to impotence in order to prevent the emergence of counter-revolutionary forces. Secondly, they posed the problem of enlarging middle class cadres by placing them at the head of the national forces, thus creating a political-military relationship favorable for the revolution, and by limiting liability in areas where enemy forces could recruit their own army. Rural France was brought to accept the hegemony of Paris, realizing that the old regime had to form a bloc with the most advanced forces of the Third state, marginalizing the Girondins who represented the soul of moderation. Even if at one point the Jacobins forced their hand too much, they did it in the very sense of historical development. They not only organized the bourgeoisie but

made them the dominant and, at the same time, the ruling class, able to express a thoroughly bourgeois state.

The real problem of the Jacobins is that, until the end, they remained on a purely bourgeois ground, even when historical conditions were ripe for a further leap in quality. They refused to recognize the right of coalition to workers, continuing to enforce the Chapelier law. In this way, they broke the urban bloc of Paris and their assault forces were dispersed, bringing with them a feeling of disillusionment and disappointment. «In fact the Revolution had found the wider class limits. The politics of alliances and of the permanent revolution had ended by asking new questions that could not be resolved then, it had unleashed elemental forces that only a military dictatorship would be able to contain» (1977c, PN19, 104-107).

The reasons why a Jacobin party never emerged in Italy are to be found in the socio-economic fabric, that is, in the historical weakness of the bourgeoisie in the Peninsula. The result was that the supporters of the Italian Risorgimento were never able to arouse the enthusiasm of the masses and, for that reason, they did not fulfill any of the planned objectives. They obtained just «the miserable political life since the 70s to 900, the elementary and endemic rebellion of the working classes, the crude and stunted existence of a skeptical and idle ruling class (ibid., 117).

Tilly is very interested also in the dynamics of contention in France, as well as in the rest of Europe, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and devotes to the topic countless publications through which he perfects his theory of collective action that is now so well known to scholars of political sociology and social movements that it does not need further discussion (among the most illuminating texts, we should recall, Tilly 1964, 1978; Shorter, Tilly 1974; C. Tilly, L. Tilly and R. Tilly 1975). We are interested in the methodological approach that begins with Tilly's criticism of the dominant sociological paradigms to claim the need for social theories rooted in time and space and monitored by a constant recourse to historical comparison.

Having identified the eight postulates that tend to distort the sociological reading of historical and social processes, we must understand how they can be uprooted. On this point, Tilly proposes two approaches, a direct and an indirect approach. In the first case, it is necessary to "fight" the postulates on their own ground by observing the same logic that led to the de-

velopment of certain statements about the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence, or about the differentiation process as a master frame of social change. We must then compare them with actual historical cases trying to identify alternative readings. In the second case, which is closely connected to the first, it is necessary to look for forms of generalization that are rooted in historical processes. In this sense, we do not need to pursue universal statements, more or less confirmed by a variety of instances occurring in different places and at different times; rather, we need to connect a set of specific cases and variables to different periods and contexts, linking together similar cases, being always aware of their space and time limits. It is at this point that historical comparison becomes crucial to describe and explain structural dynamics and large processes.

The analysis of structures and processes is conducted, according to the systematization provided by Tilly, at four historical levels: 1) at a «world-historical level», the researcher's task is to identify the specific properties of an era, contextualize and fix them in the flow of human history. At this level, for example, we can find the different patterns of social evolution, the rise and fall of empires, the development and entrenchment of specific production patterns; 2) at a «world-systemic level», the researcher's task is to discern connections and changes in the most important part of a broad set of interrelated social structures; 3) at a «macro-historical level», the researcher must give an account of structures and processes also mentioning their alternative forms in graphic form; and 4) at a «micro-historical level», the researcher's task is to trace the connections of individuals and groups with such structures and processes, in the hope of being able to explain their impact on social life (Tilly 1984, 60-61).

Structures and processes are deemed relevant, therefore, depending on the level of analysis. At a world-historical level, the structures on which the attention of the researcher is focused are those generally ascribable to the category of world-system, while the relevant processes are related to the transformation and the historical sequence of systems understood in their entirety. At this level, any discourse on the processes of urbanization, industrialization and state-building would be inappropriate, as it would occur at a lower level than the wholeness of the world system. If a researcher chooses to operate at this level, any comparison, if necessary, should be based on a comparison between world systems and, as Tilly states, «My eyes falter and my legs shake on this great plan» (ibid., 63).

At a historical systemic level, the dimension of world system continues to have its importance even if, in this case, the scholar focuses on those world-system components that are based on networks of coercion and/or exchange. In the first case, the focus is mostly on the dimension of the nation state understood as a more or less centralized, differentiated and autonomous organization that has the capacity to control the means of coercion within a limited geographical area. In the second case, the researcher focuses on the patterns of production at a national or regional level, in particular, on the set of relationships between geographically segregated and interdependent individuals and groups that have certain factors of production. In this case, the most important processes are those related to the dynamics of production, distribution and subordination. The comparison is here intended to establish similarities and differences between networks of coercion and exchange, as well as between processes of subordination, production and distribution. At this level, Tilly points out, any attempt at generalization is dangerous, controversial and difficult to verify.

With the macro-historical level, according to Tilly, «we enter the ground of history as historians ordinarily treat it» (ibid.). Within a given world system, we can certainly build states, modes of production, army associations, enterprises, networks, by gradually giving body to our unit of analysis. At this level, processes such as proletarianization, accumulation of capital, urbanization, state-building, bureaucratization are suitable for our analysis. In this case, the comparative measure is based on a comparison between these units, through which structural and procedural uniformity, variations and combinations can be identified. Their systematic study in specific macro-systems fully falls within the logic of a historically rooted analysis that should be taken as the foundation of our cognitive activity.

This should not lead us to underestimate the dimension of micro-history. When we analyze the impact of structures and processes on individuals and groups, we will necessarily draw a connection between personal experience and historical process. In this case, the frames of reference concern the relationships between individuals and social groups while processes are related to the transformation of the relations between individuals connected to those structural dynamics. If the researcher works at a micro level, any distinction between interactions and relationships will lose some of its meaning. Comparisons between systems of relationship and their transformation take shape and consistency in the close link between those systems of rela-

relationship and structural and procedural dimensions. In other words, the relationship between capitalists and workers makes sense only within the broader historical process of proletarianization and concentration of capital. Charles Tilly, among the four levels of analysis, prefers to dwell on the comparisons conducted at the macro-historical level and particularly on that borderland which is realized in the connection between macro- and micro-historical dimensions.

Our objective is to identify a comparative approach able to account for the structures and processes that take place within a specific world system, so as to produce some limited – i.e., historically determined – generalizations. Since we aim to identify some regularity in such historical structures and processes, we do not need to analyze a large number of statistically treated instances. Comparative analysis of socio-historical processes and structures is most fruitful when we focus on a limited number of instances and «that is not because of the intrinsically greater value of small numbers, but because large numbers give an illusory sense of security» (Tilly 1984, 77). In the analysis of a small number of instances, the researcher has the opportunity to focus on the historical circumstances and the specific characteristics of each case, in order to identify some common features needed for comparison.

Even if we abandon society as our unit of analysis, it does not mean that we must abandon also the dimension of nation state; what we need is an awareness that our points of reference are a territorial area and a population controlled by the state institutional system and not a thing apart, as stated in the first pernicious postulate. Of course, researchers have some alternatives, meaning that, instead of the State, they can select different units of analysis, such as entire blocs of international powers, cities or city networks, regional modes of production, social classes, and so on. What is important for researchers is to have a clear idea of the objects of their analysis, before they produce any theoretical proposition.

Tilly distinguishes between different ways of comparing big structures and processes by classifying the different propositions one can potentially draw through comparative analysis. To do so, he combines two dimensions of comparison: one based on the «sharing of all instances» and one that is based on a «multiplicity of forms». The first dimension refers to those accounts that emerge from a comparison ranging from the analysis of a single event – aimed at highlighting the specific features of the case itself – to the

analysis of more instances – intended to bring out the characteristics of all the cases considered. The second dimension refers to those accounts that emerge from a comparison ranging from single – when all cases of a phenomenon have common properties – to multiple – when there are different forms of a phenomenon. By combining the two dimensions, four possible approaches to comparison emerge: «individualizing», «universalizing», «variation-finding», and «encompassing» comparisons. Individualizing comparisons are those that treat each case as essentially unique by minimizing the significance of any property in common with other cases. Purely universalizing comparisons, in turn, are based on the identification of common properties in all cases. On the other hand, we have those types of comparisons that are based on the search for possible variations (variation-finding) and, in particular, on the belief that we can establish a principle of change in the nature or intensity of a phenomenon starting from a systematic analysis of the differences between a number of instances. Encompassing comparisons are instead based on the analysis of different instances in different places within the same macro-system. The purpose of this form of comparison is to explain the characteristics of each case in the light of an evolving relationship with the system as a whole.

5. Contentious politics and democratic process

At the end of our comparative study, we can suggest some reflections on the thoughts of our two authors. Within the scope of this work, we have to leave out the specific studies conducted by Gramsci and Tilly, to concentrate our attention on their approaches and in particular on those aspects where we can find significant evidence of connection. We have seen that both authors assume an analogous starting point in their criticism of mechanistic and evolutionistic sociology in order to support the need for an analysis of social phenomena understood in their specific historicity. Both authors regard contentious politics as the central dimension in the process of historical development and, therefore, as a vital element of sociological interest.

Tilly's intellectual agenda is absolutely historical. His main objective is to understand how collective action evolved in Europe under the influence of major structural changes such as the processes of industrialization, urbanization and, in particular, the two macro-processes represented by the devel-