FROM THE CREDIBILITY CRISIS OF FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS TO THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE GROUP: AN ECOSYSTEMIC APPROACH

Francisco Entrena, University of Granada, Spain

ABSTRACT

The concept of ecosystem is used here as a paradigm for analyzing the current problems of credibility suffered by large bureaucratic, political or managerial organizations. The process of social globalization and the crisis of the postmodern era form the context of these problems. Collective uncertainty and pessimism at this time have increased, especially since the collapse of the balance of power between East and West at the end of the Cold War and in the present welfare state crisis. In these circumstances, an existential environment emerges in which social bonds are also in crisis. In response to the individual absorption brought about by formal organizations, there is now a trend towards the re-emergence of fundamentalisms or social movements of a strong community or group nature.

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

The evolution of modern societies has brought with it the gradual establishment of certain social, economic or political organizational models in accordance with those put forward by Weber in his ideal typology of bureaucracy. But this process has not always functioned smoothly. Many large present-day organizations are far from providing an objective institutional-normative framework for the development of equality of opportunity and the freedom of the individual. It would seem that individual liberty has never been so restricted as it is within the complex organizational structures which span all aspects of society. The ends and the means for obtaining them are usually beyond the control of most people involved in these organizations. This would seem to be the reason for the spread of non-participatory attitudes and the individual's absorption with self.

Over the last few decades, sociological theory has highlighted the importance of the individual, the microsocial and the intersubjective (as in sociological neoconstitutionalism, rational choice theory, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology), in contrast to other perspectives which have pointed out the objective determinants of collective behaviour on a macrosocial scale (as exemplified by marxism and functionalism). This emphasis on subjectivity was a reaction to the excessive determinism of society and the schematism frequently present in macrosocial theories. These usually worked on the premise that people are almost totally conditioned by the social structures of which they form part.[1]

The tendency towards assertion of privacy in modern societies is a reaction to that determinism, a search for a space for oneself and one's personal fulfilment. Individualism has become a culture in itself, a way of perceiving the world which implies a specific way of understanding society, others and all humankind. Individualism has come to have supreme value in the modern world, and it is directly connected to the core of classical Liberalism, freedom of conscience and choice (Béjar 1990). But this re-emergence of privacy and individual self-absorption has brought about such fragmentation of society that we are now seeing a tendency towards retribalization and the re-emergence of the group.

Group and formal organization are here conceived as different ways of social articulation. In accordance with classical sociological typologies as constructed by Toënnies or Cooley, group is based on "community" or primary bonds. In contrast to it formal organizations develop through the typical secondary links of the "association". This second class of social bindings is usually dominant in large-scale rational-instrumental means-ends organizations of a bureaucratic, political or managerial nature. However, large organizations could not operate without community relations and the latter frequently develop inside the former. In fact, relations of community and association are ordinarily intermingled in everyday social life.

The above-mentioned tendency towards the re-emergence of the group is illustrated in the proliferation of social movements and other autonomous groups and in phenomena such as fundamentalisms. These are conceived in the present text as forms of collective articulation which intend to emphasize primary group relations and whose social action could be understood as a search for identity and autonomy outside of controls of large-scale organizations. A basic question is, why does this search so often fail? It is difficult to answer this question satisfactorily, but, in general, it is due to the following:

1) The re-emergence of groups is very often promoted by the organizations themselves or happens within them. In this respect, the nature, rationality, internal structuring and operation of large organizations is today undergoing significant qualitative transformations. According to Giddens (1991), all the signs are that these organizations are becoming more flexible and less hierarchical, and giving more and more leeway to informal groups. But, in many cases, it would seem that organizations become more flexible in order to wield control over the people involved in them more effectively. A well-known example of how large organizations utilize primary bonds to their own profit is the human relations movement. This stresses the importance of social relations in organizations and considers that informal relations and sentiments within the group determine individual work behaviour. But, its real purpose is to understand workers and managers as human beings with social and emotional needs in order to improve their productive efficiency and involvement in the organization's objectives.

2) With regard to fundamentalisms, although these seem to strengthen the sense of group identity in their members, in reality they are often extremely conservative, rigidly organized and subjected to a strict leadership. They usually have their own parties or movements, but sometimes operate through other organizations. So, for example, in the United States, fundamentalists have used and indeed taken over political parties in their own interests. One could affirm, therefore, that the autonomy and group relations offered by these movements or expected by people involved in them fail ahead of time.

3) From the very moment in which they triumph and need to become institutionalized as a new sociopolitical order, whether they be fundamentalisms or other social movements, a gradual process of bureaucratization and neglect of grassroots group and community aspirations of their initial followers tends to be experienced. So, the new order usually forgets those who contributed so much to its revolutionary or electoral victory, and may even become their oppressor. Before the First World War, Robert Michels spoke of a very similar process in his well-known "iron law of oligarchy". According to this author, the equalitarian primary appearing groups tend unavoidably to become oligarchic and bureaucratic as they mature as social movements.

To sum up, then, the failure of movements which favor the re-emergence of the group in their aspirations of autonomy is to a large extent due to the fact that they seldom flourish independently of big organizations and when they do, they tend to be controlled by them or even become bureaucratic organizations in themselves. Undoubtedly, this general answer is not enough to explain the complex causes of such recurrent failure, which are specific to each case. Allow me to leave a more in-depth study of this topic for another time, as the aim of the present article is to shape a framework which may enhance our understanding of the social and existential context in which the current re-emergence of the group is being seen.

The purpose of this text is not to make an explicit analysis of formal organizations or of the credibility crisis of their legitimizing rationality. This crisis is merely considered as the starting point for the study of the ecosystemic context in which the re-emergence of the group occurs. To this end, the author shall rethink the elements of ecosystem concept put forward by Duncan (1959). These elements are: *population, environment, technology and organization*.

ON THE CONCEPTS OF ECOSYSTEM, FORMAL ORGANIZATION AND CRISIS

Duncan's notion of ecosystem had serious functionalist and determinist shortcomings for the individual action that posterior theoretical developments have overcome, for example, the systems theory by authors such as Luhmann (1990). According to this, modern society is characterised by its continuing functional differentiation into "autopietic subsystems", which operate self-referentially in accordance with their own codes.[2] But again, this article does not intend to consider this question or other recent theoretical contributions to system theory (i.e. Giddens or Archer).

Also, since the author does not agree with Duncan's view, the purpose here is not at all to try to revive his paradigm, but only to reread each one of four elements referred to by him. The reinterpretation of them constitutes a suitable strategy for the aim of this paper in making a global and structured analytical framework on which to describe the characteristics of modern and postmodern ecosystemic contexts (both understood as existential environments of population on a world scale) in which the emergence and crisis of formal

organizations legitimizing rationality respectively has occurred.

The author conceives the ecosystem as a complex structured whole in which its four components are dialectically interrelated. It is only possible to consider each element separately at an analytical level, for in reality they work together simultaneously and inextricably. This may be conceptualized as the collective action by people (a *population*) which tends to shape a particular environment (an existential global context on both a natural and social level). To this end, this population lays down rules of conduct and organizational ties which condition or are conditioned by this environment and the development of a specific *technology*. In other words, a population must always survive within an *environment* with certain particular natural characteristics. In its relationship with its environment, the population adopts certain characteristic ways of *organizing* itself (that is to say, economic-productive and institutional practices, as well as symbolic-legitimizing strategies which attempt to explain and/or justify them). These kinds of organization in turn are closely linked to a certain level of technological development. Each ecosystem is a kind of existential environment, a framework of social interaction, generation and reproduction of the collective identity.

For Robert K. Merton (1970), a formal organization implies a rationally-constituted social structure with clearly-defined norms and procedures, which are functionally related to the objectives of the organization itself. Rather than "organization", Salvador Giner and Manuel Pérez Yruela prefer the term "corporation". For them, this is

> every institution formed within a society by persons or coalitions in order to serve certain more or less explicit objectives through regulating the conduct of its members according to rules of internal hierarchy, imperative co-ordination and norms of efficient behaviour, as well as differential norms of access to, sharing out of, participation in and exclusion from the scarce commodities whose control is being pursued. (1979)

Formal organizations, then, are those which formally operate in accordance with a means-ends instrumental rationality. To understand what is meant by this, we must distinguish between an "ends" rationality and a "means"

rationality, which is also called "instrumental reason" or "functional reason". In principle it would seem that instrumental reason is a "knowing how" rather than a "knowing that" (Ferrater Mora 1988). In other words, it is what Max Weber (1979) described as a rationality of social action which works towards ends: a rationality determined by expectations of how objects of the outside world and other people will behave, and using these expectations as "conditions" or "means" towards the achievement of ones' own rationally-considered and pursued ends. It is therefore a type of rationality whose formal logic is an instrumental means of structuring, organizing, planning and institutionalizing social action in order to find the most efficient way of "knowing how" to achieve certain ends. This rationality constitutes the logic of legitimation (justification and/or explanation) of certain strategies which work towards the planning or rational organization of human activity with the intention of achieving certain ends. This paradigm of rationality which has spread virtually worldwide is the fundamental premise of social action inherent in modern formal organizations.

Finally, for the ecosystemic viewpoint, it is convenient to take "crisis" to mean one of man's relationships with his environment, brought about by his inability (or the group's or social organization's) to keep up a certain behaviour pattern any longer (Nisbet 1975). What follows, then, is an attempt to explain the present credibility crisis of formal organizations by means of an analysis of the transformations undergone in the relationship between these organizations and their environment as a consequence of the transition between modernity and postmodernity (Turner 1990).

MODERN ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND THE MEANS-ENDS RATIONALITY OF FORMAL ORGANIZATIONS

The above-mentioned "ecosystem" concept is useful in the overall understanding of the socio-historical context of the transition from the traditional rural world to modern society. So, the relatively limited *technology* of rural societies contributes to the establishment of a collective identity which implies a conscience of adaptation to the limits demanded by the *environment* and a certain feeling of permanence. This same ecosystemic conditioning, which is in large part responsible for the rural *population's* withdrawal into itself and its rejection of socio-economic change, also

explains its confusion or opposition to ways of *organization*, whose development implies legitimable social action types as described in Weber's paradigm of means-ends formal-instrumental rationality. Most modern managerial or political organizations are based on this paradigm. These forms of social behaviour imply the carrying out of certain actions which together may be called *active instrumental strategies, and they work towards the planning, transformation, domination and regulation of the natural and social environment.*

At the same time as the western world was undergoing industrialization and modernization, the conditions which brought about this rationality and forms of social action also came into being. This occurred within an ecosystemic context of continuous scientific and *technological* progress which often gave rise to almost limitless expectations of man's capacity to transform his natural and social *environment.* In this way a vision emerged of the human *population* as the centre of the universe and the architect of history. It is this anthropocentric idea, established at the same time as the development of the existential context of modernity, which built up man's confidence in his capacity to transform the world. This idea is closely linked to the dream of the builders of modernity which attempted to "rationalize the world", free it of the bonds of "obscurantism" and tradition, and make human relations more just and transparent. To this end, one of the fundamental challenges of the architects of modernity was to adapt social reality to political or scientific programmes organized and legitimized on enlightened reason. This challenge is a common denominator in, for example, subversive or revolutionary hegelian-marxist thought and in the more or less integrating reforming perspectives of such pioneers in sociology as Comte or Spencer. To "rationalize the world" meant the explanation, enlightenment and regulation of human relations, which would thereby be freed of every alienation (Marx), of the ancestral religious vestiges of a defeated "theological state", and of coercive or mechanical social bonds. All in all, from the sociological viewpoint, this shows the strengthening of reason as an instrument of analysis, regulation, control and transformation of social reality.

The advent of anthropocentrism goes hand in hand with the gradual establishment of a rationalization determining and determined by technological advances which came about at the same time. In contrast to the restraints man had encountered until then, he now felt a stronger confidence in his powers of manipulating the world around him. The aim of this mentality was to propose the rational articulation of strategies and projects (instrumental means) which would enable people to participate in the transformation and control of their physical, economic, political and social environment. The state, political parties, the marxist-leninist "Revolutionary Party" and other forms of bureaucracy are different kinds of formal means-ends organizations which attempt to become instruments in the bringing to fruition the rationalization of the project undertaken by modernity.

Bureaucratic, managerial or political typologies of *organization*, therefore, may be considered as instrumental strategies to adapt and transform the social and natural environment. They were created with the aim of fulfilling the expectations of the modern scientific, political or revolutionary conscience, which in turn aimed to achieve the anthropocentric ideal of enlightened thought. The idea of progress, one of most significant of these expectations, has fuelled such phenomena as the Industrial Revolution, the colonizations of the nineteenth century, revolutionary struggles or the theories and processes of modernization after the Second World War.

Formal means-ends organizations are, then, a particularly significant example of building strategies adopted by this modern manipulating mentality, which in some cases was applied to regulate society, and in others to transform it, as well as to put an end to the limitations of the socio-natural order with the aim of moulding it to the wants of humankind, who feels it is at the centre of the universe.

Formal organizations are so-called because the means-ends rationality which sustains them is normally only a paradigm of their formal legitimation and their guiding principles. According to Mayntz (1987), the idea of the capacity of the organization to carry out ends consists almost always of a post factum judgement, and only a small part is an experience attained step by step. Normally, unforeseen consequences crop up, in such a way that events constantly occur which have not been planned or wished for, and which in most cases even the directors or members have not anticipated.

In practice, then, the behaviour and procedures of these organizations, while in

accordance with a particular formal rationality, never adjust to it completely. Following P. M. Blau (1979), if all the relationships between members of organizations and their activities were totally predetermined by formal procedures, there would be no problem worthy of analysis, for it would be enough to examine their programmes and official manuals to know everything you want about them. Indeed, social interaction and the activities of the organization never correspond closely to their official norms, if only because all the norms are not mutually compatible.

So, regardless of the formal rationality which guides or legitimizes their ends and determines the instrumental means for achieving them, organizations have never fulfilled their formal principles (Giddens 1991). Informal behaviour is always to be found within them and their day-to-day working and the relations between their members have unforeseen consequences. This dichotomy between their formal principles and how they really work has tended to become more pronounced in the postmodern era of rapid social changes and legitimacy crisis in which advanced industrial societies are immersed. As the gap widens between the formal and the real, organizations lose their credibility and their legitimizing principles enter into crisis too.

SOCIOECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION AND THE CRISIS OF POSTMODERNITY

Is there a crisis and social decline of a globalized postmodern society or a new stage of modernity as a result of its critical tradition and reflexive processes of modernization? For Niklas Luhmann, postmodernity is a misconception. In a similar way, some recent thinkers state that squabbling modernists and postmodernists are being overtaken by a third conceptual vehicle: reflexive modernization (Beck, Giddens, Lash 1994). This is not another theory of decline, but of "reinvention of politics". From its point of view, the present worldwide situation is not a crisis, but rather the victory of capitalism giving rise to new social forms. Like these authors, my personal opinion is that the basic macro-functions of modern societies are not severely impaired. In any case, these societies are better understood if they are conceived not only as "new social forms of capitalism". In this regard, both postmodernity theories and globalization perspectives offer suitable, well-known paradigms which characterize the uncertain,

unpredictable and unbalanced situation of such societies, immersed as they are in deep, hitherto unseen transformation and in crises of legitimacy and identity.

In today's societies there is an increasing globalization of problems. These and their solutions are becoming more and more linked to the unpredictable dynamics of globalized society. Globalization has become a very popular term in the nineties. It refers to the fact that all the processes undergone by people are to be found in the context of a single world society, a "global society" (Albrow 1990). However, this is not the first time globalization has happened. It could be stated that we have had a global socio-economic system since Columbus discovered America or, from a less Euro-centered viewpoint, since the explorations and commerce of the Chinese in the X century. Later, the Spanish and Portuguese conquest and colonization of South America and the British and French ones of North America are examples of the gradual expansion of the social, institutional and economic western paradigm all over the world, that is to say, globalization. Globalization was also the various colonizations carried out during the nineteenth and early twentieth century by a handful of European powers who extended their dominance to encompass virtually the entire African continent, together with large areas of Asia, Latin America and Pacific Ocean.

The decolonization process which occurred after the Second World War saw the birth of many new independent countries and with it many expectations for their economic and sociopolitical development. Modernization theories offered the sociological framework on which to explain or promote such development. As is well known, many imperial powers retained economic dominance over their former colonies and in practice modernization theories were often a way of imposing socioeconomic policies on newly-independent countries which would still benefit the former metropoli. In this way, such theories helped to legitimize a new kind of colonialism: so-called neocolonialism. This is, in fact, a tacit continuation of the colonization and globalization processes initiated almost five centuries ago that meant the gradual expansion of the western socio-economic and political model across the world.

All this and the slow pace of socio-economic development in most developing countries triggered a wave of radical theorising

from theirs point of view. In contrast to the confidence and the optimism of modernization's foci, these new theories about "underdevelopment" or "dependency" held a pessimistic view. This pessimism was closely related to the feeling of powerlessness of those living in the peripheral areas of the world system, for they were fully aware that they could not control the plethora of socio-economic and external decision-making processes which was conditioning their role as dependent societies. This served to perpetuate their socio-economic structure, which in turn hindered their development. While these critical theories about modernization burgeoned, many people living at the heart of the worldwide system enjoyed economic growth, the Welfare State and the comparatively stable labor situation of advanced industrial societies after the Second World War.

One of the basic differences between the past globalization-colonization and the present one is that as a consequence of the latter, people's sense of powerlessness before the socio-economic processes controlling their daily lives has increased to such an extent that it is even affecting many people at the worldwide system's centre. In a world that is becoming less and less structured, the social status of these people is increasingly threatened as socio-economic processes get more and more out of hand. In its previous stages, globalization was fundamentally a process of internationalization or diffusion across the world of western political, economic and socio-cultural patterns. In contrast, today we are witnessing a growing transnationalization of economic, political and cultural flows that develop and exert their influence more intensely than ever before on a global scale, and they are profoundly affecting the very core of the worldwide system.

All this is evidence that globalization is not "globaloney". At the economic level, increasing present-day globalization could be understood as a new type of production. This includes the movement of capital and products and, in a more restricted sense, of human beings who provide labor. Globalization brings with it the development of production/distribution systems beyond local, regional or national levels (Friedland 1994). It is undeniable that economic globalization is often an excuse for legitimizing socio-economic deregulation policies which play havoc with the daily lives of many people or local environments, for in reality they serve the interests of Transnational

Corporations (TNCs). It is also true that the majority of the world's population do not enjoy the global circulation of goods and services. So, for instance, many people have neither cash nor credit to buy anything other than a Coke and a bag of Cheetos, examples of "global" products. Yet even these people are feeling the consequences of certain economic policies originating in globalization from above which increasingly concentrates power in the hands of a few powerful TNCs at their expense. Therefore, globalization is to a great extent responsible for the social exclusion suffered by the population in the South or "developing world", as well as by an increasing number of people in the North or "developed" world.

In contrast, as part of a slowly emerging "globalization-from-below", diverse social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are seeking alternatives to serve the interests of the powerless and marginalised. Unfortunately, such alternatives are still insufficient to counteract the negative consequences of "globalization-from-above". Consequently, while a minority perceive themselves as protagonists and beneficiaries of globalization, for the majority it means a growing sense of powerlessness in the face of external processes which undermine the bases of their existential security: life style, income and work stability.

Permanent unemployment is bringing with it growing social exclusion and a proliferation of precarious occupations, as well as an increase in uncertainty and inequality. This is happening while the classic "fordist" productive system (that is to say, the elaboration of homogeneous products on a massive scale) is being replaced by a new model that, among other things, puts the emphasis on quality, specialization, organizational flexibility, socio-economic deregulation and competitiveness (postfordism). At the present time, this new model is becoming more and more wound into to the "competitiveness requirements" of the TNCs and its supposed organizational flexibility is actually a strategy for using fewer people to play more roles, thereby eliminating labor. In consequence, far from encountering a more hospitable environment for primary group relations and personal fulfilment, people in these flattened organizations find themselves valued primarily as a productive labor force.

Globalization is also evidenced in the realm of politics. At this time, the social unit which serves as a point of reference to many

phenomena of development and structural changes is no longer particular states, but humanity divided into states (Elias 1990). These phenomena and structural changes cannot be diagnosed or satisfactorily explained by sociology if they are not approached within a global framework. We are coming to a time when groups of states, not just individual ones, that is to say humanity as a whole, will make up the determining social unit, the model of what we understand by society, and therefore, the cornerstone of many scientific studies. Humanity is immersed in a process of integration on a massive scale. We are witnessing the transition towards ever bigger and more complex organizations.

In the existential global environment in which this is happening, there has been rapid growth of many national and transnational organizations, institutions, and movements, which has meant that societies have become more permeable and more open to outside influences (Robertson 1993). This gradual extension worldwide of economic, political and social forces is concomitant with loss of sovereignty and autonomy on the part of individual states.

The international order, and with it the role of the nation-state, is changing. Even though a complex pattern of global interconnections was noticed some time ago, recently there has been a much greater internationalization of domestic affairs and a burgeoning of decision-making processes in international contexts. It is indeed true that transnational and international relations have weakened the sovereignty of modern states. In the light of this, the meaning and the place of democracy have to be reconsidered in relation to different local, regional and global structures and processes which have become interdependent. We can recognize three fundamental consequences of globalization. First, global interconnection creates meshes of political decisions and interlinked results among states and their citizens, which affect the nature and dynamics of national political systems themselves. Second, the interconnection between economic, political, legal and military aspects, among others, is altering the sovereignty of the state from above (Held 1991). Third, the state is being eroded from below by regional and local nationalisms or because many communities and regions are attempting to find more advantageous roles for themselves in their relationship with the global society. Sometimes

states even curtail their own sovereignty. For example, in the United States more than 30 per cent of social welfare is channelled through the private sector (Rein 1996), that is to say, three or four times the European figure. Although the motives behind this privatization of American social policy are undoubtedly many and varied, it would be appear that they are a symptom of the victory of business interests and a sign of the weakness of organized labor and of the left in general. It is without doubt closely related to the putting into practice of the postfordist principles of "competitiveness" and "deregulation" proclaimed by the trumpeters of globalization. In fact, as Coleman's discussion shows, the U.S. federal system is constitutionally acting in accordance with these very principles when it disperses power among states. As a result, states are constantly vying with each other to get corporations to establish employment in their territory. This demonstrates how the decentralized appendages of global TNCs become local as they disperse and operate within a specific territory, but actually their control and strategies are in consonance with decisions made at extra-local level (Bonanno, Bradley 1994).

At the planetary level, globalization is giving rise to increased North-South inequalities and the growing impoverishment of many people, as well as a high level of social mobility and instability which bring about very rapid changes. Where is the object of power to whom we can relate in today's world of political and economical globalization, loss of autonomy of the state and transnationalization of capital whose rapid ebbs and flows are ever more difficult to see and control? This acceleration in economic transactions in the wake of neo-liberalism is correlated to the dizzy social and cultural mobility inherent in postmodernity. And one of its consequences is the difficulty in regulating and controlling a society undergoing such rapid and unforeseeable changes.

Society has never been really that perfectly constructed, unified and articulated spider's web which was often present in the great theoretical models put forward by the classical social thinkers of the nineteenth century.[3] Nor has the framework or the operation in real terms of social organizations ever completely corresponded to their formal legitimizing logic. However, when societies were more static than now and there were clearer points of reference for the building of social aspirations and the construction of the collective identity,

it was also easier to propose theories regarding the origins and the destiny of change and the history.

Postmodern pessimism, collective uncertainty and job insecurity as a consequence of globalization processes have become more ingrained especially since the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the de facto conversion of China, capitalism is for the first time in history an economic system which encompasses the whole globe. On the other hand, we have seen the dismantling of the balance of world power which was sustained by a fear of "certain mutual destruction" between the two great power blocks. In its wake there has emerged a period of crumbling of the old order, of "democratization" of nuclear, biological, or chemical weaponry with no guarantee of control over them (Robertson 1993). This period is more dangerous and less easy to control and predict than the Cold War itself. The collapse of so-called "real socialism" has not brought about socio-historical circumstances to favour the position of the liberal-capitalist system as the only possible and feasible alternative. The demise of this "real socialism" has also contributed to deepening the credibility crisis of formal organizations, for it has revealed the oppression, corruption and inefficiency of certain regimes which, according to their propaganda, were devoted to using bureaucracy, the "Communist Party" and the state (paradigms of rational-instrumental organizations) as instruments for the "revolutionary" transformation of society.

The crisis which has arisen after the disappearance of the "monopoly of legitimate violence" and coercion in what was the USSR and Eastern Europe, has impeded the harmony and liberty expected by many when the Berlin Wall fell. It has also given rise to a volatile present and an uncertain future. This situation is already generating conflicts between groups of differing ideologies, who are attempting to take advantage of these circumstances (Luchen 1992). For Marvin Harris (1993), the state is "mafioso" in origin; indeed the collapse of "real socialism" has favored the appearance of mafias, the fragmentation of the state and its authority, the emergence of socio-political and ethnic groups who are disputing different portions of power amongst themselves.

The fulfilment of the dream of enlightened reason gave rise to the spread and consolidation of formal bureaucratic organizations in their liberal-capitalist and state-socialist forms. In both cases, bureaucracy not only meant an organizing strategy or institutional tool with which to regulate and control society more efficiently, but also it often manifested itself as a complex and barely-controllable instrument of power and as a reification of the original modern enlightened project which, far from contributing to its liberating ideal, became an apparatus of oppression or social obstruction.

These are some of the reasons why in so many advanced Western industrialized countries there has been a growing loss of confidence in the bureaucratic machinery of the so-called welfare state. The fact of the matter is surely that these countries are undergoing a transition from welfare to "workfare" societies. Mainstream political parties also appear to be losing support, while scepticism towards these and large formal bureaucratic organizations in general seems to be on the increase. Two decades ago Jürgen Habermas (1975) pointed out the legitimation problems of advanced capitalist societies, in which competing managers make their decisions according to maxims directed towards material gain, replacing action guided by values with action ruled by interest. In today's complex world, society's demands on the state are ever increasing. Governments find they must provide many services which private companies are reluctant to undertake as they are not profitable. And the more social tasks the state takes on, the more resistance there is on the part of individuals and private companies to pay taxes to finance them. Governments are hard pushed to deal with these contradictory demands. And pressure on many governments has risen in the last few years as the services they provide are continually expanding.

But it is not enough to suggest solutions to this crisis of the welfare state only in terms of cuts in spending or constant economic growth. In this regard, Niklas Luhman (1981) recommends a concept of welfare state which would demand the incorporation of the whole population into the services offered by the different functional systems of society as well as their consequent political inclusion.

The tendency towards exclusion of different social sectors is one of the principal causes of the crisis of legitimacy of modern state and/or bureaucratic organizations in some advanced industrial societies. The capacity of political parties in power to sustain social services is being depleted. This has meant a partial

withdrawal of support and general disillusionment with politicians, which are two of the main causes of today's "crisis of legitimation".

THE RE-EMERGENCE OF THE GROUP

The processes of globalization and the uncertainty of postmodernity form the existential environment of the present credibility crisis of large formal organizations and the subsequent re-emergence of the group. In the face of "gesellschaft" and secondary bonds which are characteristic of these organizations, attitudes are now tending to reaffirm community forms of solidarity ("gemeinschaft"). This can be seen in the claim made by populations for autonomous social environments, with regard to the state or national or transnational organizations, in which to build their own identity. These are types of collective interaction in which primary or group relations predominate, leaning towards affectivity, auto-orientation, specificity or particularism which Parsons (1976) has seen as gradually abandoned for the sake of the growing universalism of modern societies. As Robertson (1993), in his work on globalization, strongly emphasizes, we are now seeing the "universalism of particularism". The return to the group, to the nearest local community or nationalism, in short, to the primary forms of sociability, leads us to question a lineal and schematic vision of progress shown by some classical nineteenth century sociological authors. This perspective is also shared by figures of contemporary sociological thought such as Parsons (1976) himself, who, in accordance with his own typology of pattern variables, postulates that the tendency of societies towards modernization is reflected in the path from individualism to universalism.

What are the ecosystemic conditions which are giving rise to this situation? One fundamental cause is undoubtedly the gradual loss of legitimacy of large political, bureaucratic, party or managerial organizations and the subsequent tendency towards the weakening of formal bonds characteristic of "gesellschaft". Behind the loss of confidence in large organizations and political systems, together with their operational and credibility problems, specific reasons exist in each country or society, but in general we must look towards the rapid processes of transformation of present-day societies immersed as they are in post-modernity. This constitutes an existential global environment which, according to the concept of ecosystem adopted in this paper, gives rise to the following circumstances:

A) The diverse and contradictory interests which are present in large corporations, as well as their tendency towards oligarchy, all of which has hindered social control by their members. This, together with their lack of transparency, discourages the general *population* from identifying with them and from using them as vehicles to fulfil their demands and aspirations.

B) The "colonization" and restraints to which the instrumental means-ends rationality "system" of these organizations, ruled above all by *technical* imperatives, subject the experiential whole of the "world of life".[4] In this way, technification has pervaded social ways of life, work, and material and spiritual production. As Umberto Cerroni (1973) points out, the prevalence of science and technology today has reached such a point that almost all non-scientific control has been eliminated, even political control on behalf of the population which is one of the mainstays of democracy. The strict use of science for material gain and the ruthless exploitation of nature are causing a disintegration of man's identity, whose consequences have not been fully taken into account. The notion of "risk society" could be very suitable to conceptualize the unpredictable situation of today's unseen side-effects of industrial production into foci of global ecological crises (Beck 1992). These are transformed from environmental problems to profound institutional and organizational crises of the industrial societies of our days.

C) The strengthening of the means-ends instrumental rationality behind formal organizations has not brought about the utopia of progress which inspired the beginnings and development of the large organizations of the modern era, but the disenchantment and uncertainty of postmodernity. The sense of history has been lost and people have chosen to live in the present.[5] At the present time, the formal-instrumental means-ends rationality of organizations (typified by classical thinkers of sociology as characteristic of modern societies), if not in crisis, is at least being questioned. Most people do not have at their disposal any effective way of controlling the instrumental means which constitute these organizations. As far as the ends are concerned, unintentional effects of people's action are produced, especially in very complex organizations, which cause the widening of the chasm

between formal aims and actual results.

D) The existential postmodern *environment* in which people are experiencing a gradual loss of confidence in the means-ends instrumental rationality of formal organizations, whose crisis of credibility is arousing more and more criticism regarding the anthropocentrism which legitimized their creation. This has been one of the ways of materialization of that manipulating attitude inherent in modernity whose objective was to control the natural and/ or social environment, to transform it, and to subject it completely to the human will.

The growing sense of the importance of conservation of the environment is gradually undermining this anthropocentrism which was upheld by the belief that mankind was capable of boundless socio-economic growth. While this belief has been the substratum of the relatively high economic-productive levels of today, we are now aware that we need to limit this growth if we do not wish to destroy our environment. Today's ecological perspective implies returning, to a certain extent at least, to the original collective conscience of a traditional society living within the limits demanded by its natural surroundings. In the modern era, faith in means-ends instrumental rationality legitimized the systems and operations of formal organizations. These were the instruments and the expressions of collective aims to achieve progress or realize utopian or revolutionary projects. They were constructed in accordance with the collective identification with what Lyotard has called "great stories", which are sacred or dogmatic in character and which guided the course of the expectations of transformations in both the traditional world and modern enlightened society.[6]

Today's postmodern global existential environment nurtures uncertainty and pessimism as far as the realization of these expectations is concerned. These circumstances have given rise to the strengthening of social attitudes which tend to favour the inhibition of any form of commitment (political, ethical or otherwise), and collective disenchantment with the formal principles at the heart of large organizations. In this context, we may observe a growing tendency towards flexibility within these organizations, with informal and/or group relations coming to the fore.

This reassertion of the group is implying a reaction against individualistic absorption, a slow re-emergence of the idea of the need for bonds of solidarity with others, parallel to the awareness that it is imperative to restrict development so as to exploit the natural environment only within sustainable limits. This strengthening of the group is not exclusive to formal organizations but is also becoming more and more evident in the maelstrom of postmodernity. Feminist, pacifist and ecological movements, NGOs, neighbourhood associations and "urban tribes" (Maffesoli 1990), so characteristic of advanced industrial societies are all manifestations of this re-emergence of the group. They are all attempts to preserve a range of affective bonds and communicative structures inherent in the "world of life".[7] They are new forms of collective solidarity in the face of individualistic isolationism brought about in many people by barely-controllable large organizations. In this way people's identity finds channels to become stronger through the reinforcement of affective relations and primary bonds of group solidarity, and also because these new group relationships provide occasions in which people can have utopian-charismatic experiences.

For Robertson, the "universalism of particularism" is a way of understanding the rise of primordially-based social movements as a global phenomenon. Social movements are not usually rigidly structured nor do they offer clear alternatives of power. They are generally spontaneous and more or less autonomous in contrast to what happens in fundamentalisms. Fundamentalism is a polysemic word and what it means in each case would have to be specified. It was hardly used outside the USA as recently as the late seventies and only then on a limited scale. With the Iranian revolution lead by Ayatollah Jomeini it was adopted around the globe by people and movements of very different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. According to Lechner, in a generic sense, fundamentalism could be understood as a

> value-oriented, antimodern, dedifferentiating form of collective action - a sociocultural movement aimed at reorganizing all spheres of life in terms of a particular set of absolute values. (quoted in Robertson 1993)

But, although this definition includes the expression "anti-modern", surely fundamentalism is not *simply* antimodern. The fact is that fundamentalist leaders across the world usually employ modern methods of mobilization and even attempt to attract potential converts

by appealing to distinctively "modern" diagnoses of the disenchantments of modernity.

Both these strategies of mobilization and the uncertainties and socioeconomic insecurities of today's globalized society may partly explain the expansion of fundamentalisms. The study of so complex a topic, however, does not fall within the scope of this article. The central question of the present work is: why are so many people involved in fundamentalist movements? The author is aware that broad generalisations are not enough to answer this question. It could be that, to a great extent, people become fundamentalists because these movements offer them the chance to feel a common group identity. However, this feeling is often an illusion, as the reemergence of the group is more apparent than real in those movements, for they usually show a marked conservatism, a rigid structure and a strong/despotic? leadership. This "mimac" of primary group relations is possibly one of the key motivations at grassroots level in some fundamentalisms, such as the Iranian revolution before its triumph and proclamation of the Islamic Republic in 1979 or the extremist factions of the Palestinian liberation movement.

Frequently fundamentalisms are fuelled by religious or spiritual leanings, but we could also mention political fundamentalisms. At a religious as well as a political level, they usually nurture narrow-mindedness and fanaticism in their followers, offering a simplified view of present problems and their solutions, while apparently "being in possession of the truth" and able to overcome postmodern individualist loneliness and relativist uncertainty which beleaguer vital certainty. Above all, religious fundamentalisms promise to remake the whole world as well as bestow collective assurance regarding a whole range of basic values, feelings and beliefs.

Fundamentalism is a religious way of being that manifests itself as a strategy by which beleaguered believers attempt to preserve their distinctive identity as a people or group. Feeling this identity to be at risk, fundamentalists fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past...Fundamentalists...seek to remake the world. (Marty, Appleby 1992)

Translated by Jean Stephenson

NOTES

[1] A particularly extreme view is that of Peter Blau (1977), famous for his outstanding contributions to the study of formal organizations and who defined himself as a "structural determinist". In any case, any sociology which only highlighted the intersubjective dimension of a sociological phenomenon, would be doomed to come to a dead end. Excessive emphasis on the individual or the microsocial could deny the possibility of existence of sociology as a science, which, not forgetting the specificity and singularity of any social manifestation, must aspire above all to explain the social dimension of any act or behaviour, even when this is carried out by individuals.

[2] For Richard Münch (1993), in the positive sense, Luhmann's theory can be understood as having rescued the individual from the centre of communicative rationality. A society without a centre is a really pluralistic society of checks and balances with the highest possible degree of freedom for everybody.

[3] As Bell (1977) has pointed out, the conception of society as a fabric (and, in literary hallucinations, as a spider's web) was fundamental in the nineteenth century imagination. Or, in the most abstract philosophical spirit, as elaborated by Hegel, every culture, every 'period' of history and, correspondingly, every society was a structurally interwoven whole, unified by some internal principle. For Hegel, it was the *Geist*, or interior spirit. For Marx, it was the mode of production which determined all social relations.

[4] Here "colonization", "world of life" and "system" are to be understood in Habermas's sense (Habermas 1987).

[5] To live the present only in the present, without depending on the past or the future, is the loss of the sense of historic continuity (...) Today we live for ourselves without thought for our traditions or our posterity (Lipovetski 1990).

[6] According to this author, "great stories" are narratives which are told in all cultures and serve to provide a coherent and integrated vision of different aspects of reality. They have, therefore, many functions such as giving cohesion to the group, legitimizing values and projects, or making norms which regulate society acceptable. In this sense, they may be considered "great stories" or "metastories", for example, the idea of the progressive emancipation of human reason, so characteristic of modernity or the concept of liberty which took root in this period (Lyotard 1987).

[7] As Bernstein (1991) points out, we can focus on the study of new social movements from the theoretical-communicative perspective: for example, ecology, anti-nuclear, feminist and liberation movements,

even neoconservative movements which are so prevalent today. They may be considered as defensive reactions to protect the integrity of communicative structures of the vital world against intrusions and distortions imposed on it by processes of systematic rationalization.

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