

the fascinating aspects of new communication technology, maybe does not represent much more than just a higher degree of a not so essentially different structure.

Clash of Identities

We cannot deny new complexities and new shapes of the social, political, economic and cultural realities, and for that matter, even less the extent to which contemporary social sciences are able to reflect and even to intervene within such context. Yet at the same time, it seems that the scope of such interventions is rather limited as it has always been. A widespread consensus that we happen to live in the time of profound changes, which evades our conceptual apparatus, actually indicates the problems of understanding the confusing movements of parallel-unsynchronised transitions. It seems that the functioning of institutions, which so far seemed so proper, are all of sudden on the verge of becoming obsolete. Descriptions of the contemporary situation and suggestions of concepts and solutions are increasingly vague and controversial. We could find hundreds of examples of the discourse of uncertainty, such as this:

On what basis should common norms of today be founded? It is unthinkable to present such norms as a system a priori; they can only emerge gradually from a renewed questioning on what good life is and what life in community (vivre-ensemble) is. We can only indicate a certain number of parameters. Hence, we might think that such norms should affect a syntheses between the tradition (and its validating of the particular identities) and the modernity (and its validating of the universal); and not only within each political structure, but on the world scale (Bonny, 1995: p. 24).

Statements such as this are inscribed into the global antagonisms of today. On one hand there is the global market (with its powerful financial organisations, multinational corporations, etc.) accompanied by the mediating and by and large problematic international associations and organisations. On the other hand, there are regions and individual nations marked by their own cultural profiles, which are forced to adapt, to change, and to restructure their economies – albeit with often immense social consequences. Any transparent formula of a reconciliation of this central global antagonism, apart from the rhetoric of universal economic competition, democracy and human rights, is in the best-case scenario still in the making.