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Geographies of Trust

JOUNI HÄKLI

Introduction

Trust is a long-term key word in social theory, if less so in human geography. Its winding conceptual trajectory crosses almost all social scientific disciplines from political science and political economy to sociology to nursing, with partly differing times of prominence in each. Early treatment of trust as a part of responsible government can be found in the *Second Treatise of Government* by John Locke (1690/1980) for whom it was essential that officials do not act “contrary to trust” (Parry 1976, 131). The significance of trust as a social condition was noticed in the early 18th century by the father of modern economics, Adam Smith, for whom it represents a link between the calculative commercial society and the broader civil society, within which the former was embedded (Porta 1998, 110). Since Locke and Smith numerous classic texts and scholarly works have traced the foundation and functioning of social trust (e.g. Tocqueville 1835/2000; Mill 1848/2006).

Because of its philosophical nature, the concept of trust has received the most theoretical attention at times when anti-positivistic scholarship has gained a foothold in human and social sciences. This holds true especially for sociology, where interest in trust coincides with the rise of the Germanic tradition of culturally sensitive sociological analysis in the classic scholarship by Georg Simmel (1858-1918) Werner Sombart (1863-1941) and Max Weber (1864-1920). Also the latest upsurge of scholarship on trust has gained momentum from the cultural and linguistic turns in social research.

With roots wide and deep in Western thought, it may be difficult to trace the different geographical modalities that pertain to the concept of trust. This difficulty is reflected in the scarce amount of theoretical discussion that exists on the matter even within human geographical scholarship on trust (e.g. Hudson 1998; Mohan and Mohan 2002). While some attempts to conceptualize the spatial ramifications of social trust exist, there are very few works that seek to explore the geographical assumptions that inform theories of trust. Convinced that implicit geographies of trust can be teased out with a closer examination of the intellectual and empirical contexts of the theories of trust, I set out here to explore this understudied field.

My aims are threefold. First, I seek to show that the concept of trust is not the innocent analytical tool it is often taken to be, especially in empirically oriented research, but part and parcel of the discursive constitution of the phenomena that these studies strive to describe and explain. Second, I aim to

make visible some of the spatial assumptions that work in the background of analytical thought on trust, arguing that these are not merely floating geographical imaginations, but fundamental systems of signification that influence our perception of social processes, the shape and nature of political communities, and the constitution of trust relationships. Third, along with authors such as Livingstone (1995) and Lorimer (2003), I argue that place matters in the production of knowledge, and that particular geographical contexts of research may give rise to thought patterns that universalize the particular by transferring interpretative schemes from one context to another without due attention paid to the geography of the process (Häkli 2003; Sidaway 2008).

There are at least three relevant geographies of trust that may be helpful in the critical re-examination of the significance of the concept for human geography and other social sciences. First, there is a *paradoxical* geography of trust, by which I mean the fact that through centuries of classic texts in Western political philosophy, economy and sociology the concept of trust has infiltrated the very processes of democratic government and state formation which constitute the political framework of modern societies. Through the loops of such 'double hermeneutic' reproduction, the geography of trust has become almost generic to Western modernity. The term 'double hermeneutics' is used by Anthony Giddens (1976) in reference to the observation that when scientific concepts become generally accepted as means of making sense of the society, they not only reflect but also construct social practices. Likewise trust not only describes but also construes social practices. Second, I argue that a *hidden* geography of trust can be exposed by pointing out the spatial assumptions that concern the form and function of the political or cultural communities in which trust is empirically or theoretically analyzed. Third, I want to expose the manner in which a *reified* geography of trust has emerged through more than five decades of empirically based research that has produced an extensive literature assuming that a certain kind of relationship exists between (Southern) Italian civic culture and political trust.

I begin this chapter by tracing the conceptual roots of trust and thereby seek to show the generic nature of the concept in the Western political modernity. I then focus more on the hidden geographical dimensions of theories of trust and finally explore the manner in which geography of trust has been reified mainly in the context of American political science scholarship on Italy. I conclude by discussing contemporary challenges for the analysis of social trust and propose some avenues for approaching the question in future research.

Why trust matters: The geographical paradox of trust

Much of the recent interest on trust can be attributed to the burgeoning research on social capital since the early 1990s. The concept has been vital especially in those strands that follow James Coleman's (1988) and Robert Putnam's (1993; 2000) thought, where trust is seen as a resource pertinent to collectives. It is, however, possible to trace a Western political philosophical discussion of the role of trust in civil society that extends back much further. In this discussion *civil society* has emerged as an important mediating field of social relationships and action between the individual or family and the state. It is this linkage that has

been assumed to exist between trust, civil society and national economy, which serves as the first of our three avenues for approximating the geographies of trust.

In contrast with Thomas Hobbes (1651/2006) and Adam Ferguson (1767/1980), for whom civil society was more or less the polity itself, a line of political philosophical thinking from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1821/1991) to John Stuart Mill (1848/2006) to Antonio Gramsci (1929-35/1988) up to the present day (Rawls 1971; Etzioni 1993) has sought an understanding of civil society in terms of general moral bonds formed between social actors (Porta 1998). These bonds are seen to provide the preconditions for a self-regulating community that exists between individuals, which is, nevertheless, distinct from their roles as citizens of the nation-state (Seligman 1992, 6).

Trust figures into this fundamental theory of 'civilized society' as the indispensable glue that holds the civil society together (Parry 1976, 129). Based on mutuality and communality between moral human beings, trust exists as the social and cultural mechanism that balances between unselfish emotions and rational evaluation, and thus enables private and public interests to coexist (Porta 1998, 110). However, as aptly shown by the complex philosophical discourse on the relationship between trust and civil society, this relation is far from being unproblematic. Ambiguity exists, for instance, on whether a high degree of social trust, and particularly the ensuing consensus among the political elites, is always a precondition for, or conducive to, good government. Also the question of trust-based cooperation as a benevolent condition in all circumstances remains a contested topic (Parry 1976, 130; Gambetta 2000, 214).

Nevertheless, most theoretical accounts of social trust converge on the principle that a trustful civil society is likely to be better than a distrustful one. At the interpersonal level, trust among the citizenry may foster cooperation and beneficial competition necessary for a viable and innovative civil society. At the macro level, social trust is seen as an important factor in nurturing social cohesion, strengthening democratic governance and improving the efficiency of public administration (e.g. Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1993). Simply put, trust is considered essential for the functioning of democratic societies for three reasons. First, the mutual communication required in processes of democratic deliberation occurs best where citizens trust each other (Seligman 1992). Second, trust enables citizens to associate together so as to achieve objectives that they cannot reach individually (Gambetta 2000). Third, a trustful political atmosphere prevents disputes from escalating into social conflicts that would be difficult and costly to resolve (Sztompka 1996).

The importance given to interpersonal and social trust for the functioning of democratic societies explains why the term has become one of the key words in comparative political science and political sociology (Levi and Stoker 2000). It is precisely the fear of fading social trust, and the consequent dissolution of the moral basis of Western political communities, that has given rise to the recent "call for a return to civil society" (Seligman 1992, 11). This call, also implicit in much of the theorization of social capital, stresses the need to reassert a sense of shared communality that is constantly threatened by a growing self-interested individualism (Seligman 1992, 7).

At stake in the latter concern is not only the moral sustainability of Western polities but also the conditions for their economic development. As a key element

in the development of effective, low-cost enforcement of contracts, trust is seen to foster efficiency in economic transactions of various kinds. Hence, according to Kenneth Arrow (1972, 357), “it can be plausibly argued that much of the economic backwardness in the world can be explained by the lack of mutual confidence.” Echoing Arrow’s conviction, Douglas North points to a similar causality in developing countries, arguing that a lack of social trust is, “the most important source of both historical stagnation and contemporary underdevelopment in the Third World” (North 1990, 54).

The conceptual intermingling between trust, civil society and national economy is well captured in the following excerpt from the classic *Principles of Political Economy* by John Stuart Mill (1848/2006, 131-132):

Conjoint action is possible just in proportion as human beings can rely on each other. There are countries in Europe, of first-rate industrial capabilities, where the most serious impediment to conducting business concerns on a large scale, is the rarity of persons who are supposed fit to be trusted with the receipt and expenditure of large sums of money.

Extrapolated onto the scale of broader society, interpersonal trust and the social cohesion that it reflects are seen to affect positively both economic performance and the quality of public government. With higher trust, economic transactions become more efficient, as there is less need to invest time, effort and money in establishing written contracts or other kinds of guarantees for business transactions. Instead the business parties can trust that their interests will not be violated by each other (Knack and Keefer 1997). The quality of public government, again, is enhanced by the more acknowledged sense of citizenship and the lively political participation that characterize high-trust societies. Checked by active citizens, politicians and bureaucrats are less prone to the sort of dishonesty that hinders the quality of policy making and lowers the efficiency of service provision in more corrupt public governments. Moreover, trust among the citizenry facilitates collective activity that aims at expressing preferences and exercising demands on government (Gambetta 1988; Tavits 2006).

A veritable magic circle seems to be at work in the relationships between trust, economic performance and good government. In a much cited article, Knack and Keefer (1997, 1252-1253) go on to list at least eight beneficial consequences of high degree of trust in society. With reference to scholars such as Coleman (1988), Galor and Zeira (1993) and Putnam (1993), they argue that, first of all, individuals in high-trust societies spend less on efforts to protect themselves against unlawful violations of their property rights or exploitation in economic transactions. Second, entrepreneurs have more time to devote to innovation in new products or processes as they do not need to invest in monitoring their partners’ behavior. Third, businesses and governments are less dependent on formal institutions to enforce agreements. Fourth, politicians and bureaucrats are perceived as more trustworthy, making their policy pronouncements more credible. Fifth, this credibility allows individuals to make longer term investment decisions and technological choices when they know what to expect from the government and legislation. Sixth, by improving access to credit for the poor, trust fosters their enrollment in secondary education. Seventh, individuals may enjoy better performance of government institutions, including publicly provided education. Eighth, specialized education becomes more valuable to individuals

when hiring decisions are influenced more by educational credentials than by the attributed status of applicants, such as through blood ties or personal contacts (Knack and Keefer 1997, 1252-1253).

Importantly, and paradoxically, the beneficial consequences of trust for both the economy and the government are rooted in a particular kind of *civil society*: one composed of certain kinds of (non)political subjects. In a critical essay on "Neo-Tocquevillian social theory," Michael Shapiro (1997) points out that the contemporary neo-liberal discourses on politics tend to point to the past as a model of civic life, thus turning a blind eye on today's multiple forms, modalities and spaces of politics. In neglecting the present forces of social and political containment and resistance, as well as the different spatialities through which they take place, Putnam (1993; 1995) and his followers come to assume that today's civil society should still resemble the ideals depicted in Alexis de Tocqueville's treatment of the American democracy, as well as in the legacy of Western liberal political philosophy and praxis that his work helped to shape (Shapiro 1997; Miztal 2001, 373; Cannone in this volume).

From this follow three key observations concerning the ways in which the relationship between the concept of trust and geography turns paradoxical. First, the Putnamian interpretation of trust as a key component of a vibrant civil society derives largely from a nineteenth century discourse that "assumes a unitary social order from which citizen action is provoked, and restricts political action to influence on governmental decision makers" (Shapiro 1997). While clearly resonant with much of contemporary neo-liberal politics and policy making, this understanding is based on a defunct concept of what counts as political and how politics is practiced in civil society (Miztal 2001). Second, being rooted in a political philosophical discourse that has presented itself as the global model, the idea of trust as the glue that holds the civil society together also reproduces an antiquated understanding of the spatiality of politics. In Shapiro's (1997) words,

a focus that treats the nation as a whole and presumes the existence of a unitary national society constitutes an aggressive non-recognition of the variety of incommensurate social spaces constitutive of the 'society' and the variety of different kinds of political enactment within different social venues.

The third paradoxical aspect in the geographies of trust expands on the previous two. The importance of social and interpersonal trust for national economic and governmental performance is prompted by a particular Neo-Tocquevillian ideal of civil society that, in itself, is deeply rooted in the Western liberal political philosophy and replicated in the institutional politics of most Western countries. Owing to this, the concept derives much of its intellectual thrust and explanatory power from its position in the very apparatus through which Western political communities are accustomed to make sense of their conditions of existence, successes and failures.

Herein lies the double-hermeneutical moment of trust: the concept is constitutive of the phenomena it appears only to describe. Such an uncritically accepted hermeneutical circle becomes problematic at latest when ideals of civil society and democracy are forcefully imposed into contexts where their Western *modus operandi* is not found. The 'democratization of Iraq' is a case in point. What for many commentators appears as a "nascent civil society" in Iraq (e.g.

Rahimi 2008), may also be understood in terms of a long tradition of contestation between religious and political authorities, eschewing what the majority of the Western world holds as the key ideas of 'people' (*demos*) holding 'power' (*kratia*). The failure to see the "cultural specificity of civil society" (Schwartz 2003, 2) accounts for many problems that Western countries have encountered in dealing with the non-Western political world.

The contemporary concept of civil society arises out of a specific historical experience of modernization in the West, but it does not remain a unique aspect of Western society as it can also be found in other cultural contexts. Bellin (1995, 121), for example, points out that the term "has entered the discourse of the Arab world and become a central concept in current Arab debate over the direction of politics in the region." However, what remains obscured by this almost self-evident relevance is the fact that it is painfully difficult to specify where the analytical edge of the concept lies, and whether trust is actually a cause or consequence of the social and political phenomena it is taken to account for (e.g. Welch et al. 2005). Coupled with the assumption that the geographical shape of modern societies can be adequately defined by nation-state territories, the generic position of trust has acquired a hidden geographical dimension that nevertheless informs much concrete theoretical and empirical analysis of trust as a social phenomenon. It is this geography of trust that we shall next turn to.

Taking space for granted: The hidden geographies of trust

The philosophical and theoretical complexity pertaining to the concept of trust has not rendered concrete analyses and empirical investigations unfeasible. On the contrary, the recent upsurge in research on social capital has also given a boost to empirical studies seeking to chart the degree to which people trust, for example, politicians, the government, societal institutions, foreigners and each other. As a result, an extensive literature has emerged providing evidence of the degree of social trust varying from place to place. Typically these studies are based on analyses of data that has been collected experimentally by means of questionnaires or structured interviews inquiring about the degree to which the respondents say they are willing to trust various targets (e.g. nationalities, ethnic groups, professions, officials, neighborhoods, etc.) (e.g. Rahn et al. 2003). An increasing number of studies are using survey data collected through representative samples assessing the climate of trust that exists in specific societies or communities (e.g. Delhey and Newton 2003). Most empirical studies have made use of data collected on an individual level and then aggregated for the purpose of analysis to the level of community, locality, region or nation (Welch et al. 2005).

While the use of experimental and survey data has been criticized by some scholars on account of measurement errors (e.g. Miller and Mitamura 2003), or the poor validity of data caused by sampling errors or response bias (e.g. Knack 2000), it has been pointed out by others that the results nevertheless seem to correspond well with outcomes that can be expected on the basis of other data on the social groups and communities in question (e.g. Glaeser et al. 2000; Delhey and Newton 2003; Rahn et al. 2003). Hence an extensive literature now exists indicating differences in the amount of social trust that appear between nations,

within regions of one country or between communities in one sub-state region or locally (see, e.g., Robinson and Jackson 2001; Delhey 2007).

Comparative data from cross-national survey projects have yielded results according to which the level of social trust is higher in certain regions of the world, such as Scandinavia, and lower in other regions, such as Latin America (e.g. Knack and Keefer 1997; Inglehart 1990; c.f. Siisiäinen in this volume). Empirical analyses have detected spatial differences at the sub-state level as well. Putnam's (1993) much cited study comparing northern and southern regions in Italy is a case in point. He later extended the analysis to the United States, with results indicating a pattern where Southern states show lower levels of social trust than the states in the Upper Midwest or in the Northeast (Putnam 2000).

While reflecting concern with geographical variation in the amount of interpersonal or social trust, there are major problems in this literature in terms of the manner in which trust is assumed to relate to space. The language of empirical analysis makes the geographies of trust appear quantifiable, showing the 'degree' or 'amount' of trust that exists within an aggregated data set representing a smaller or larger territory. A neighborhood's, region's or nation's degree of trust may, thus, be read off from survey data measuring trust directly, or alternatively through variables such as 'associational activity' or 'value distance' used as shorthand for the existence social trust (e.g. Delhey 2007).

Methodological critique aside (see, e.g., Healy 2002), this approach to geography hides much more than it reveals. Territorial 'still images' that portray the social world in neatly demarcated geographical parcels, each characterized by differential levels or degrees of trust, end up misrepresenting the spatial dynamism of social processes and political landscapes. In a manner typical of quantitative analysis applying spatially aggregated variables, the key problem in these empirical studies derives from the representation of space as a fixed container for 'the social' – in this case social trust. Assessment of the relationship between trust and space is limited to regional or national differences in dependent or independent variables that are assumed to correlate with the measured amount of trust in a particular way. In other words, space is ultimately seen as local, regional or national level differences in social variables that are assumed to explain differences in the degree of social trust. As space, thus, merely 'contains' the social, the more dynamic and complex geographical ramifications of trust are never brought to the foreground, conceptualized or analyzed.

The lack of any serious concern with the geography of trust has been noted by Welch et al. (2005, 468) who write that:

Although the research to date has yielded a substantial body of findings about how individuals develop a sense of trust in those with whom they interact, and how trust affects other aspects of individuals' behavior, the research literature reveals comparatively little about the forces that shape trust, and are influenced by it, in group, organizational, and community settings.

They point out that one question especially deserving of researchers' attention is the 'radius of trust' issue first discussed by Fukuyama (1995) and Wuthnow (1998). Both authors argue that for Americans the radius of trust has progressively shrunk since the Second World War so that most Americans restrict their trust primarily to kin or friendship networks (Welch et al. 2005, 469). Yet, instead of attempting to account for the scalar retraction of the radius of trust,

Welch et al. (2005) content themselves with pointing to “the scale of human communities” as a potential source of explanation concerning “conflicts that might derive from increasing diversity and the changing demographic composition of a community” with possible effects “on the functioning of civil society and local institutions” (ibid., 469).

While issuing a notable invitation for further research, Welch et al. nevertheless fail to indicate where we could start looking for significant inroads into the geographies of trust. Indicative of the reasons for this omission, they conclude that the unanswered questions, “all lead to situating trust within the broader contexts of community and society,” but then elude the question of how the society or community *should* be conceived of in geographical terms (Welch et al. 2005, 470). The theoretical direction they point to then is the taken-for-granted idea of ‘society’ as a socio-spatial unit defined by nation-state boundaries. Needless to say perhaps, this direction is but a dead-end street, a *cul-de-sac* of the mainstream modern social theory (see Häkli 2001).

The problem of hidden geographies of trust discussed above is intimately related to the implicit statism of modern social science thinking. The latter refers to the dominance of the state-territorial conception of ‘society’ in social science discourses, which have typically failed to address the question of what ‘society’ is in geographical terms (Agnew 1994; Taylor 1996; Häkli 2001). Unsurprisingly, this insensitivity to geographical assumptions about society is also present in literature dealing with the development of civil society in the 19th-century Europe (e.g. Ehrenberg 1999). While an increasing reflexivity has emerged regarding the role of the state in the constitution of civil society, the geographical contexts through which the process is approached – cities, sub-state regions, nations or societies – are typically addressed in terms of a country defined and demarcated by the nation-state territory. This is what Taylor (1996, 1920) calls the ‘embedded statism’ of social scientific research.

Thus it is possible to talk about a *hidden geographical agenda* in the study of trust as a key aspect of civil society, where the common assumption still is that the state territory adequately describes the spatiality of this ‘society’. Even analyses that evince differing degrees of ‘civility’ between different parts of a country fall into this ‘territorial trap’ (Agnew 1994). For example, in arguing that the Southern Italian civil society is less supportive of efficient government than that of Northern Italy, Putnam (1993) operates on the assumption that the totality of the Italian nation-state forms a relevant societal context for comparison. Hence, what is ‘outside’ of Italy has little or nothing to do with the issue addressed purely in terms of the dominant geographical imagination of ‘society’.

The consequences of this hidden agenda include ‘nationalization’ of the study of trust; the indistinct use of the terms nation, country and society; and the dominance of the country scale at the expense of more place-specific or transnational analyses of social trust (c.f. Agnew 1993, 254; Wallerstein et al. 1996; Taylor 1996). Moreover, as discussed in the previous section dealing with the paradoxical geography of trust, the consequences of a state-centered concept of society can not be reduced to social theoretical discourse alone. Attention should also be paid to the myriad governmental practices that have produced and reproduced the nation-state as the dominant scale for representing the social world and framing issues of political importance (Häkli 2001). This social reality

eventually came to be taken as a given not only in political philosophy and mainstream social research but also in numerous other spheres of social life, including governmental practices and the politics of 'domestic' non-governmental organizations and civic associations. This marked the consolidation of the double hermeneutic circle, linking together the importance of trust for political and economic viability of a 'society', and a nation-state as its territorial container. Seligman (1992, 10-11) sees this as one of the paradoxes of modern society: social trust is represented by the universalization of citizenship as the foundation of moral agency in the public arena secured by the State.

It is this co-construction of the civil society and the 'state-society' that causes the *search* for the geographies of trust to remind us of a dog chasing its tail. Because of the hidden statism in the understanding of civil society, norms of social trust are already framed in country terms deeply embedded in the politics of modern governmental and non-governmental institutions. This embeddedness is based on a shared geographical imagination through which the social world is enacted: the conception of space as a container for social relations, and 'society' as a territorially confined unit defined by the national state.

Little wonder then that even though social trust has been viewed as a phenomenon pertaining to communities of various sizes and compositions, the spatial ramifications of trust remain a neglected topic. Empirical studies have come to take administrative regions as their starting point, due to availability of statistical data or the set up of experimental sampling. This holds true also for country-level analyses as well as cross-country comparisons: the state territorial conception of civil society, defined by national boundaries, is largely taken for granted (see also Brewer et al. 2004).

The persistence of hidden geographies of trust is particularly intriguing in studies where political spatial units make little sense in understanding the phenomena in question. Environmental issues are a case in point. But even International Relations research on *international* trust is typically based on representative national samples, thus operating on the basis of a state-centered concept of society (e.g. Brewer et al. 2005; Tennberg 2007). However, challenges to 'nationalized' understanding of trust have started to arise on the basis of recent geopolitical changes, such as transnational networking and new forms of cross-border governance, both of which have foregrounded emergent new forms of political space that evade the traditional communities of morality, politics, involvement and participation (e.g. Kramsch and Hooper 2004).

Indeed, the contemporary interdependent world with local and transnational processes intertwining and interacting, is calling into question identities, practices and discourses that were constructed in the context of the modern state-centered world (Castells 1997; Ley 2004; Staeheli 2008). New geographical imaginations about society as networks, flows and fluid spaces have started to emerge, undermining the domination of the Euclidean conception of space as container, and giving rise to spatial conceptions and identities that differ from those of the previous generations (Mol and Law 1994; Law 2002; Häkli 2008). People engage in trusting relationships in the context of local and global interconnectedness that is further reinforced by geographical imaginations produced and reproduced through "contentious politics" (Leitner et al. 2008) as well as by mobility, migration, the media and consumer culture (Blunt 2007).

These new identities and conceptions are negotiated in the flux of everyday life, but also in the context of state-based institutions and non-governmental organizations and activities. Hence, the enactment of social trust is a contested field where the modern state-centered view of the world meets emerging new identities, discourses and practices connected to, e.g., transnational environmental concerns, multiculturalism or 'cosmopolitics' (Cheah and Robbins 1998; Pickles 2003). New configurations of civic consent and political participation – new geographies of trust – are being negotiated in the background of processes whereby different partly overlapping and partly differentiated 'civil societies' are simultaneously emerging.

The challenge of recognizing and unraveling the taken-for-granted geographies of trust is yet to be fully addressed. This volume is an attempt to pinpoint and explore some of the issues involved and take tentative steps toward understanding the complexity of the relationships between geography and the contested notions of civil society, trust and social capital. But in order to reach our first approximation of the given 'geographies of trust' we must still deal with the third reduction of geography in the analysis of social trust: the reification of space as the embodiment of 'trust culture'.

What makes society 'civil': The geographical reification of trust

Attempts to explain governmental and economic performance by social and cultural means have a long history in social thought. A body of knowledge that began as a ruminative discussion of political philosophy in works by authors such as Thomas Hobbes (1651/2006) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1835/2000) was taken to a different level in the groundbreaking analysis of Western political and economic development by Max Weber (1905/1985). His sociological mode of thinking has encouraged generations of scholars to study the role of civic culture and social life in the function of political and governmental institutions.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s this interest reappeared forcefully in the context of sociologically oriented political science as practiced by James Coleman (1988), and Robert Putnam (1993). While Coleman carried out his empirical work with a focus mainly on the United States, Putnam's study showcased Italy as an emblematic case for analyzing the cultural embeddedness of political and governmental phenomena. Putnam, however, was not the first to take an analytical look at Italian civic culture. His work was preceded by more than four decades of political science experimentation using Italy as a geographical laboratory for testing theories and developing argumentation concerning political cultures, and later, geographies of (dis)trust.

The origins of this interest in the political life of Italy may be attributed to the country's peculiar political history and many internal divisions. It is also possible to speculate, however, about more personal reasons for this interest, tracing back to Charles Edward Merriam, an influential American political scientist who served as the American high commissioner of public information in Italy during the First World War. In the words of Gabriel Almond (1996, 1) Merriam was the "head of American propaganda efforts in Italy where he dealt with the lagging morale of that country in its conduct of the war ... trying to prevent Italy from going the way of Russia." This experience gave rise to

Merriam's thought concerning the central role of what he termed 'civic education' in fostering civic solidarity. He developed a clear sense that the problem of nation-building stood at the heart of political democratization, and that various techniques of controlled dissemination of ideas and manipulation of popular symbols might be used effectively in the process (Oren 2000, 98).

Significantly, after the war Charles Merriam returned to the United States and took over the Political Science Department of University of Chicago, giving rise to a pioneering behavioral strand in political science (Almond 2004). Among the dozens of PhD's that this unit trained were such comparative politics scholars as Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba and Lucian Pye, all of whom contributed to the placement of Italian society under a political scientific looking glass. Merriam's own research resulted in a volume called *The Making of Citizens* that sought to perform a comparative analysis of civic cohesion and civic training systems in France, Germany, England, Italy, Soviet Russia, Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, and the United States (Merriam 1931). At least partly inspired by the differing performances of the countries involved in World War I, it nevertheless failed to develop an overarching theory and was relatively soon forgotten (Almond 1996). However, it may well be Merriam's personal experience in Italy during the First World War that spurred the extensive American scholarly interest in that country's political culture in the decades that followed.

The idea of civic associations as a key factor in local development was first addressed by political scientist Edward Banfield (1958) in his study *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society*, focusing on the political life of a small community in southern Italy. The study sought to explain the community's relative underdevelopment by going back to "amoral familism", i.e. a dominant ethos favoring the maximizing of short-term material advantage for the nuclear family instead of furthering the interests of the group or community (Banfield 1958, 85).

In spite of an initially controversial reception, this book it has served as an inspiration for much subsequent work, including the much cited research *Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* by Almond and Verba (1963) – an attempt to discern the key determinants of political equilibrium in properly functioning democracies. They found that interpersonal trust plays a central role in the formation of secondary associations, which in turn, are essential for democratic participation. Moreover, they concluded that:

[...] our own data will tend to support Banfield's claim that the Italian political culture contains unusually strong parochial, alienative subject, and alienative participant components [... evidencing a] widespread mood of rejection that affects the attitudes of the great majority of Italians toward their political system in all its aspects (Almond and Verba 1963, 38).

Hence, the study showed that the level of interpersonal trust was relatively low among Italian respondents, indicting a prevailing condition of distrust in the country. Moreover, they argued that "each kind of polity – traditional, authoritarian and democratic – has one form of culture that is congruent with its structure" (Almond and Verba 1963, 33). Thus there had once been established cultural patterns which possessed considerable autonomy and could influence subsequent political and economic development.

Echoing these observations, Joseph La Palombara (1965) interpreted statistics showing high degrees of dissatisfaction with the government in Italy to

be an indication of widespread political alienation. He argued that one reason for this lay in the rigid system of social stratification in Italy. Low social mobility has formed class-based social barriers which, over several centuries, have become institutionalized, with an impact on Italian political culture that La Palombara (1965, 315) describes as follows:

[...] the stratification system aids and abets notions of extreme class conflict, contributes to a sense of futility that spills over into men's attitudes toward and evaluation of the political system, and helps to perpetuate patterns of leadership in the legislature and bureaucracy that are direct causes of disdain and hostility toward the political system.

La Palombara (1965) comes to the distressing conclusion that in the Italian society mistrust is so pervasive that it prevents any of the co-operative undertakings necessary for civilized existence.

Since the mid-1960s a broad Anglophone literature has emerged on the Italian political system (e.g. Hennessy 1969; Graziano 1973; Morlino 1984; Woods 1992). Yet, in terms of impact on scientific discussions concerning the relationships between trust, civil society and political culture, Robert Putnam's (1993) study *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* stands out as a landmark. More than three decades after the classic text by Edward Banfield, Putnam and his associates Robert Leonardi and Raffaella Nanetti argued that democracies work better when supported by a long-standing tradition of civic engagement with public affairs (see Cannone in this volume).

The basic idea is that when individuals act together in local associations and other informal contexts, they create generalized trust as a by-product, thus generally improving the 'civiness' of the civil society. This is assumed to form an important public resource that influences not only the citizen's quality of life but also economic development, political cooperation and governmental performance. Using various indicators of policy implementation, Putnam showed that Northern Italian regions perform better than Southern regions, and found that these observations correlated with data on distrust and dissatisfaction reflecting the differing degrees of 'civility' in Italian regions (Putnam 1993, 63-83).

Putnam's study has been criticized for several omissions and weaknesses, including failure to distinguish between policy activism and administrative efficiency as aspects of government performance, and a myopic account of Italian political history (Sabetti 2002; Tavits 2006). Moreover, his conception of civil society has been found too voluntaristic and devoid of conflict, or in the words of Mouritzen (2003, 664), "pacific, functionalist and self-propelling [growing] spontaneously where there is civic soil...". Thus, in vesting the idea of civil society with civic virtues such as trust, sense of duty, solidarity and public-spiritedness, Putnam comes to neglect the existence and value of conflict. In so doing he diverts from those conflictual aspects of civil society that may spur or constitute civility by teaching citizens to accept confrontation and compromise as the cement of the political condition (cf. Edwards and Foley 1998; Mouritzen 2003; Cannone in this volume).

The legacy of research into Italian political culture, as represented in the above studies, shares more than the idea of Italy as political culture characterized by some degree of alienation. Above all, it shows a strong tendency of relating trust to geography in a very particular way. Scholarly interest in the political

development of Italian society, partly set in motion by American geopolitical concerns after the World War I, was progressively built up on the basis of an idea of *territorially* confined political culture which, instead of illuminating the ways in which space is involved in political processes, merely ended up reifying it.

Reification as defined by Gordon Marshall (1998) in the *Dictionary of Sociology* refers to:

The error of regarding an abstraction as a material thing, and attributing causal powers to it – in other words the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. An example would be treating a model or ideal type as if it were a description of a real individual or society.

In the case of representing Italy the abstraction vested with misplaced concreteness is political culture conceived of as a territorial geography of trust. Starting with Merriam (1931), and probably before, research on the Italian civil society has related political culture to space in territorial terms, seeking to attain convenient shorthand for enduring national or sub-state regional differences in what Fukuyama (1995) has termed “trust culture”. The constitution of these trust relationships is then conceptualized in terms of virtuous civic spaces defined as arenas of face-to-face interactions, such as voluntary associations (Foley and Edwards 1999).

While simplifying the overwhelming complexity of the social world for analytical purposes, this moment of reification comes at a price. It imposes social clarity, cultural transparency and spatial distinction upon socio-cultural processes and settings that are characterized by historical and scalar complexity. By foregrounding civil society as a regional entity defined by the nation-state ‘Italy’, or a sub-state spatial unit ‘Southern Italy’, this strand of comparative politics has ended up in a theoretical cul-de-sac where the dynamism of civil society as a social process and contested accomplishment is overshadowed by the idea of relatively stable and clear-cut geography of trust.

The reified geography of Italian (dis)trust has not only produced moribund political theory, but it has also shifted attention away from key questions, such as, “What is the civil in civil society?” (Mouritzen 2003, 650). By representing civil society as a homogeneous field of social space glued together by generalized trust, the analysis has rendered invisible vital aspects in the multi-scalar constitution of civic engagement that could better be grasped in terms of relational or fluid spatiality. These include manifold active or emerging social movements that challenge established forms of political participation by engaging people in civic activism that escapes any pre-set territorial arenas (e.g. Edelman 2001; Leitner et al. 2008). This significant area of civic activism in itself underscores the fact that there exists no coherent civil society that could be isolated from class and interest-group differentiation and then thought of, in Putnamian manner, as disinterested towards contemporary socio-economic hierarchies and power geometries (Shapiro 1997; Mouritzen 2003).

Ramifications of the geographical reification of trust run wider than just simplified accounts of the multifaceted political cultures in Italy. The understanding of civil society as a territorially circumscribed cradle for civility, where “feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another” (Tocqueville 1835/2000 cited in Putnam 1993, 90), makes the concept fundamentally apolitical

by associating it with civilized manners. However, as Mouritzen (2003, 664) aptly points out, civil societies are created and may be lost.

We should certainly reflect on the concept at a time when globalization and localization challenge the format of nation states. Such forces require us to concentrate on the cool, political and conflict-accepting character of civil society [...] And we need ways to maintain broad political identities which treat nations as neither 'functioning' systems nor vessels of culture. Putnam's intervention is a symptom of the fact that civil societies are fragile accomplishments.

Instead of reifying trust as a spatially circumscribed resource for the common good, we should seek theoretical inroads into understanding the specifically situated historical organization of social and political space that provides people with uneven opportunities to enact and practice their civic engagements. We should re-think trust as an aspect of pervasive and differentiated civic engagement that arises, not through virtuous behavior, but in connection with the multi-scalar and complex politics of everyday life.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored ways in which geography has figured into attempts in the social sciences to understand and conceptualize trust-related phenomena. This exploration led to the unveiling of three distinct, yet interrelated, geographies of trust: paradoxical, hidden and reified. What these geographies have in common is their taken for granted nature, that is, received understanding concerning space as the container of 'the social,' coupled with assumptions about the manner in which trust is related to spatiality. It is these implicit geographical aspects of trust that I have sought to unravel in this chapter.

My first take on the geographies of trust led me to suggest that any attempt to locate or pinpoint trust in modern societies is somewhat *paradoxical* because the concept is part of the very means by which modern polities have been constituted and by which we make sense of these same societies. Trust is deeply embedded in more than two centuries of modern political philosophy, underlying democratic institutions and civil society, informing both the ways in which governmental institutions function in relation to the 'sphere' of civil society and the ways in which their achievements are assessed. It is precisely the latter aspiration that has given rise to the flood of empirical studies charting the amount or degree of trust that people are willing to invest either in their political institutions or the citizens of their neighboring countries (e.g., World Value Surveys).

While apparently paying attention to the explicit geographical variation in trust-related phenomena, this research interest has, in reality, worked to *hide* rather than illuminate the geographies of trust. Even though social trust has been viewed as a phenomenon pertaining to communities of various sizes and compositions, empirical studies have taken administrative regions as their starting point, thus assuming that space is best understood as the container of differential amounts of trust. The state territorial conception of civil society, defined by international boundaries, is predominantly taken for granted also in country-level analyses and international cross-country comparisons. The spatial assumptions that prevail in empirical studies of trust have not been adequately addressed in this

research strand, and therefore, what seems an assessment of geographical variation merely works to conceal the spatial complexity pertaining to social trust.

I termed the third taken-for-granted spatiality of trust a *reified* geography. The term refers to the manner in which some geographical settings have been made showcase examples and emblematic cases of (dis)trust. I illustrated this reification by discussing the long legacy of reductionist uses of 'Italian society', and particularly its North/South division, in arguing for a particular Tocqueville-inspired understanding of the relationship between trust, civil society and economic or governmental performance. Arguing against the appealing simplicity of this theoretical model, I share the critical concern according to which such a reductionist reading of Italian society is highly problematic (Cannone in this volume).

In this article I have not been able to go much beyond a tentative exploration of the three given geographies of trust, but I have discussed some aspects of the development of contemporary societies that further undermine the relevance of paradoxical, hidden and reified understandings of geographies of trust. I argue that the dominance of the nation-state as the frame for political change and cultural signification is being eroded by the growing interdependence with local and transnational processes intertwining and interacting. Along with authors such as Shapiro (1997) and Mouritzen (2003), I maintain that this development is gradually calling into question identities, practices and discourses that were constructed in the context of the modern state-centered world order. Evidencing this, new geographical configurations and imaginations about society as networks, flows and fluid spaces have started to emerge, calling into question "the lazy certainties of the geometrical intuitions" (Bachelard 1994, 220). Consequently, social trust is now being enacted in the context of new figurations of contentious politics embedded in geographies of trust that defy simple measurable Euclidean spatiality.

To grasp these challenging geographical configurations of trust it is necessary to re-think the notion of civil society. In this chapter I have argued that civil society should not be conceived of as 'being' as much as 'becoming'. In other words, civil society should not be understood as a circumscribed entity that can be socio-spatially isolated from the market and the state for analytical purposes. Rather it is best understood as a multi-layered and multi-scalar social *accomplishment* that relates to different spatialities in highly complex ways. In terms of topological spatialities discussed by Mol and Law (1994) and Law (2002), we can conceive of civil society and the relationships of trust it involves as co-constituted through different interconnected yet unconformable spatialities, such as scaled, regional, networked and fluid spaces (Leitner et al. 2008; Jessop et al. 2008). These spatial types are not to be understood as mutually exclusive ontologies, but rather as abstractions deriving from different modalities that pertain to various kinds of institutional and individual action, including the agency of the "more-than-human world" (Whatmore 2006, 602).

Indeed, if we take seriously the idea of civil society as a site of political contention rather than an oasis of civic consent, as I think we should, then we must strive to trace its 'becoming' in all possible political encounters between agents, locales, institutions, objects and events – whatever shape and content these may take. It is these "multivalent and co-implicated spatialities of contentious

politics” that Leitner et al. (2008, 158) propose as the challenging object for the study of contentious politics that “challenges dominant systems of authority, in order to promote and enact alternative imaginaries.” This formulation clearly parallels the idea of civil society presented here, even though their use of the concept points to a regrettably categorical understanding of civil society as distinguishable from “the state” and “the market” (Leitner et al. 2008, 157). To push forward the analysis of the geographies of trust it is imperative to open up the concept of civil society and explore its co-constitution with hegemony-challenging contentious politics. It is equally crucial to ask what role, if any, relationships of individual and social trust play in these processes, and how the agents of contentious politics tactically perform and strategically bend different unconformable, yet interrelated spatialities.

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