« Collective identity and transnational trade union solidarity: a South-South comparative analysis »

« Les identités collectives dans le processus de transnationalisation de l’action syndicale: une étude comparative Ghana-Chili »

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1. **ANALYTICAL TRACK**

1. **Collective identities are at the heart of trade unionism and renewal strategies** (Hyman 1994, 1997; Offe & Wiesenthal 1980)
   - Impact of *identity processes* neglected in comparative IR (Greer & Hauptmeier 2012; Kay 2011; Locke & Thelen 1995)
   - Field suffers from a conceptualisation of the role of actors in building identities (Frege, Heery & Turner 2004; Greer & Hauptmeier 2012)

2. **We contend that identity processes intervene prior to the emergence of new modes and levels of actions pursued by unions, e.g. transnational unionism** (Dufour & Hege 2011)
   - *Raw materiel of collective representation* (Hunt and Benford, 2012)
   - *Essential requirement* for overcoming collective action problems (Dufour-Poirier & Hennebert 2013; Poletta & Jasper 2001; Tattersall 2010; Whittall, Knudsen & Huijen 2009)
2. WORKING PROPOSITION

1. Our approach admits that transnational unionism depends on the local actor’s sense of group belonging *(strategic compass)* (Dufour & Hege 2011)
   - *We* (common understanding of the group; highlights the question of including a more or less wide array of potential partners) (Ion 2001; Melucci 1995)
   - *Them* (group of opponents: includes all those with whom the workers do not feel solidarity with) (Hyman 1994; Silver & Arrighi 2001)
   - *Issues* (agenda that unions wish to put forward) (Murray et al. 2010)

2. **We postulate that the affirmation of a We, in opposition to one or many opponents (Them), is what initially spurs transnational union action, marks out its objectives and its limits, and reveals its agenda (Issues)**
   - While not denying the impact of contextual constraints, we recognize the capacity of unions to seize opportunities of renewal based on their *identity markers* (Greer and Hauptmeier 2012; Kirton and Healy 2013)
3. RESEARCH METHOD

1. **Qualitative case study design** (Miles and Huberman 1994)
   - South-South comparative (*intra and inter-cases*) analyses

2. **Open semi-structured interviews in Chile (2004-2009) and Ghana (2007)**
   - **Chile**: 20 interviews conducted with workplace union reps (n=9), union reps from two national confederations (n=8) and two Global Union Federations (n=3) (Dufour-Poirier 2011)
   - **Ghana**: 22 interviews with national and regional union reps from one national confederation (n=5), workplace union reps (n=10), social activists (n=7) (NGO’s, Chamber of Mines and reps from a local mining community) (Adanhounme 2010)

3. **Data supplemented** by an analysis of various types of documentation (labor, corporate, public and other) and on-site observation in both countries
4. Chile: A transformative and coalition-building logic

**Institutional and Corporate Settings:**
- **Efficiency-driven economy** (GCR 2012-13) (33rd most-competitive country)
  - Shallow social depth of economic well-being (Sehnbruch 2006; Winn 2004)
  - Restrictive labour regulation
- **EuroMin (Chil)**: 4th largest copper refinery of the world in 2008
  - Unsteady profitability, increase use of outsourcing, limited ore supplies
  - Tense labour-management relations (fear of reprisals on the part of workers)
- **Low capacity to mobilise union members and assert its authority and credibility**
  - Relative isolation locally and nationally

**Identity:**
- **Transformative** aimed at building better-adapted repertoires of action through **transnational, then continental coalitions**
- We (Precariousness and Heterogeneousness of Working Conditions):
  1. **Cosmopolitan identity** *(phase 1)*: global working class, proletarian rhetoric
  2. **Continental** *(phase 2)*: restricted to Latin South
- **Them**: corporate figure as the opponent
- **Issues**: **transnational unionism** meant to
  1. Enhance bargaining leverage
  2. **Make up for the lack of credibility and efficiency**

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For the Chileans...

We have to prove our credibility to our members on a daily basis. (...) The company has always tried to undermine our credibility by conducting unspeakable action against us every day! (...) This is why we believe that acting at the international level is a challenge for us, but mostly an opportunity to find the resources and support that will strengthen us, as a union! (our trans.) (Phase 1)

I think that what the Canadian unions want is for us to attack EuroMin. I’m not saying that the company is behaving properly. But the way I see it is that the Canadians aren’t really concerned about the workers, but more about their own future, to make sure that EuroMin doesn’t leave their country. (...) If it was a real strategic alliance among workers, we would all set aside our interests and negotiate a unique collective agreement! (...) (our trans.) (Phase 2)
5. Ghana: An instrumental and capacity-building logic

**Institutional and Corporate Settings:**
- **Factor-driven economy** (GCR 2012-13)
  - Strong social partnership with unions, employers and gov (*Industrial Act of 1958*)
  - Economic reforms through neo-liberal structural adjustment programs as of 1983 (*Essuman-Johnson 2007, Hilson 2004*)
- **Ghana Miners Workers Union (GMWU):**
  - Modernisation of repertoires of action:
    - Recruiting from the informal sector
    - Increasing collaboration with mngmt
    - Adopting strategy of political neutrality (*Konings 2006*)
  - **African Branch of ICEM**: affiliation in 1995
    - Important leadership role through information sharing and networking

**Identity:**
- **Instrumental clan** opened the door to transnational trade union solidarity
- **We (Job Status, Category, Origin):**
  1. **Ethnic-based** (phase 1): community of interests framed with fellow workers in partnership with local employer
  2. **Nation-based** (phase 2): African and regional solidarity through ICEM
- **Them:**
  1. **Collaborative management-trade union strategic alliance** (phase 1)
  2. **Oppositional relationship** (phase 2)
- **Issues: trade union solidarity** meant to
  1. **Capacity building through workers’ empowerment locally** (phase 1) and **nationally** (phase 2)
For the Ghanaians...

If the management says one thing, which is not good, it is you, the union chairman, who have to polish it. If you don’t polish what the management tells you and you bring the same message to the workers, you know that it will bring problems. (Phase 1)

When we have problems or want some issues especially on our conditions of services, and we think we need information, we go to the closest mine and look at their question, and we can have information and compare with what we have. (…) When we face a problem, we also inform the national union and they should advise. (Phase 2)
6. Discussion

- **Identity Processes**: contingent and opportunistic representations that shaped transnational trade union solidarity (Greer and Hauptmeier 2012)
  - Shifts in institutional and structural arrangements fostered transformations
- **Developed practices consistent with self-understanding of union solidarity**
  - *Consciousness of going global or remaining local* shaped by the knowledge of the setting and the understanding they had of their *community of interests*
- **Dynamic social constructions** (Dufour and Hege 2011, Hyman 1994)
  - *No Global South* in terms of involvement (Dufour-Poirier and Hennebert 2013)
- **Chile: transformative logic from global to continental unionism**
  - Awareness of the need to act transnationally to counter union’s isolation and global capital by drawing on the body of workers worldwide (*community of fate*)
- **Ghana: opening of instrumental logic from local to national unionism**
  - Collective consciousness of transnational and regional union solidarity premised on the failure of the partnership with management

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