

The Destructive Dimension of the Accumulation of Capital

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1. The fundamental concepts and the ideology of modernity arise in 18th century Europe, in the age of Enlightenment. The ideology of that age crystallizes around three fundamental principles which provide, until today, the foundations of the modern "worldview" (Weltanschauung).

- (i) The principle of the "natural" convergence of individual interest and the interest of the collective.

The quotation marks are used to call attention to the fact that this convergence is nothing but the expression of an anthropology which simply assumes this without establishing its reality through an examination of historical and social reality and without taking a closer look at what could be those private, possibly conflicting, interests as well as those collective interests in question (who defines them?). This principle was, in fact, intended to simultaneously legitimize the critique directed at the Ancien Regime (absolute monarchy and feudal order) and the recasting of society based on the so-called principles of Reason. Pushed to its extreme logical limits, this very *petitio principii* became synonymous with a "philosophy of universal harmony" which is caricaturized in the conventional (bourgeois) economy, described as "vulgar" by Marx. Let the individual interest be expressed freely - through political democracy and the deregulation of economic activity entrusted to the spontaneity of markets, and the permanent progress of society in its entirety will be guaranteed. The principle established a mark of equality between political democracy and the market activity of the economy. We know that the dominant discourse of our era repeats endlessly and ad nauseam that this is so without any further concern for establishing its reality or even its rationale.

But it is not so. On the contrary, there is conflict and no convergence between democracy and the market. The reason for that is quite simply that the economic system of the really existing modern world cannot be reduced to the concept of a "market economy", since it is a capitalist economy based on the private property of the means of production. However, private property is necessarily that of a minority excluding the others. Real society is, thus, not constituted as a sum of "individuals" but constructed, inter alia, from distinct social classes; their negation - quite fashionable - eliminates right away the necessary questioning: what are those individual interests? The *petitio principii*, according to which democracy and market are supposed to be naturally convergent, is itself based on the separation of the different domains of social life: that of the management of power, organized on the basis of democracy (the principles of the plurality of political expression, election as the mode of choosing governments, the so-called rule of law, etc.); that of the management of the economy, entrusted to private property, to competition and to the market in which it expresses itself. This separation is

considered to be "self-explanatory", even though all of history strongly denounces this claim and even though the mechanisms of economic life are always embedded in social relationships which, in turn, make the realities of political power clear - as understood by Marx and Polanyi; but what do history and reality matter. The legitimation of the modern system needs this conceptual separation.

The "natural" agreement between the results of democratic choices and those of the market has been real only inasmuch as democracy was poll-tax based, i.e., reserved only for citizen-proprietors, as it was in the mind of the majority of the philosophers of the Enlightenment and even more so in the reality of the bourgeois systems of the first generation (of the 19th century). Ever since workers' and popular struggles spread to the entire population ("national", males and, much later, females), the conflict appeared between motivations and available democratic choices, on one hand, and what the mechanisms of accumulation of capital generated and the markets, on the other hand. This conflict reminds one that, quite simply, the domains of the political and the economic cannot be separated.

(ii) The principle of convergence between short term and long term.

Here we have another *petitio principii* which expresses a strong belief in the idea of a guaranteed, mechanical, natural, endlessly possible Progress confounded with the belief in "universal harmony". The idea that, on the contrary, short and long term are often in conflict with each other and non-convergent, is not being discussed. Because discussing that would, in turn, risk renewed attention to the question of the nature of the interests which express themselves in the short term "in the market". But that is not necessary.

Here again vulgar economics avoids the problem right away by proclaiming the principle of the "discounting the future". "One now is worth more than two tomorrow", this popular proverb without great philosophical weight is being elevated to a supreme wisdom. Economics exploits that principle by adopting a positive rate of interest and by discounting, which reduces values which are situated in the future. This practice is hardly more than the ideal expression of the financial calculation of capital. There is a certain rationality in the latter, but it is limited in time; it is not a rationality in the full sense, but short-term rationality. The fact that its application could have irrational long-term effects, is not even subject to questioning. It is taken for granted that it cannot be so. I am here referring back to what I have written about this regarding the resulting inaptitude of the capitalist system to respond to the challenge of major ecological deterioration.

(iii) The double principle that humans have a vocation to dominate nature and that the riches which it offers to them are inexhaustible.

Reflections about humanity/nature relationships do certainly not begin with the philosophy of the Enlightenment. All imaginable statements concerning the contradiction between the idea that the human is an integral part of nature and the idea that he is distinct from it in various degrees have been advanced in the religions and in the

philosophical reflections of all times and all peoples. But it remains true that modern thought has tipped the balance in favour of a vision which - in its extreme expression which is dominant in general opinion and in practice, even though not necessarily among all thinkers of modernity, separates the human being, as subject of history, from nature, as object of human action.

The historical societies of the past have almost always been conscious of the fact that they had to preserve their environment and the natural resources on which their wealth depended, even if they did not always understand how to do that with sufficient efficiency. And when they accepted the irreversible destruction of certain agricultural lands, for example, that is generally because they knew that they could relocate to new lands. In a general way, the collective social management of the resources which nature offered to pre-modern societies guaranteed that the long term was taken into account, obviously with more or less success.

In contrast, capitalism generalizes the monetary calculation of short-term profitability and, thereby, ignores the collective social costs associated with the exhaustion of the resources exploited by it. The ideology of modernity legitimizes this waste with the thesis (actually a debatable hypothesis) that the progress of scientific knowledge and the technological inventions fostered by it neutralize the dangers associated with the exhaustion of natural resources in the long run. "One will always end up inventing the means for managing without." And, in fact, during about one and a half centuries since the industrial revolution, accelerated technological progress has recorded rhythms which were unknown before and which almost always made it possible to ignore the destruction of resources associated with the new industrial expansion. The optimistic slogan seemed to be effective. It seemed so, we know, but it will not stay so any longer. Without turning to the systematic pessimism of certain "ecological fundamentalists" or the a priori declared optimism of the "apostles of science", today one cannot ignore any longer the destructive effects on the scale of the entire planet of uncontrolled accumulation and the short-term calculation on which it rests.

2. The three fundamental principles of modernity referred to were not born out of a philosophical reflection which, after winning the battle of ideas, would have allowed, in turn, to install the system of capitalism. On the contrary, it was rather so that the practices which were progressively employed by emergent capitalism suggested their conceptualization and their assimilation into Reason and simultaneously defined the content of that Reason in their manner.

The origin and progression of these practices since at least the 16th century; their precursors in medieval European society are not our subject here. In any case, the ensemble of capitalist practices and the expressions of their legitimation crystallize in a short time span, namely, that of the philosophy of the Enlightenment (18th century), the bourgeois revolutions (of the United Provinces, England and France) and the first industrial revolution (end of 18th, beginning of 19th century).

The new system and the principles on which it rests allowed, in effect, a prodigious acceleration of the rhythms of history, measured in terms of economic growth as employed by the new profession of economists or otherwise. This acceleration and the evident advances associated with it - and not only material advances - constitute the underpinning of the optimism which characterizes the new dominant culture. Capitalism appeared very much like a system based on Reason par excellence. But this Reason - far from being relativized and refined (by making explicit the three axioms which define its content), is being formulated in absolute terms. Progress is henceforth thought to be guaranteed by "end"-less accumulation, since it is evident that one cannot want more than what the triumph of Reason can offer. The obstacles are called heterogeneity of human society, divided into states and nations, linguistic, religious and other communities, social classes. But all these obstacles are considered as vestiges of the past which are progressively erased by the very logic of capitalist expansion. Even Marx and Engels succumb, in the Communist Manifesto (1848), to the temptation of that optimism and seem to believe that the worldwide expansion of capitalism will increasingly wipe out these dimensions of the reality inherited from the past in order to prepare, on a planetary scale, the conditions of a socialist world revolution. Subsequently, in many of their writings, Marx and Engels correct this naivety of their youth to the point that one can read them as forerunners of the thesis of unequal development inherent in the global expansion of capitalism.

In any case, Marx has never been a victim of a one-sided view of accumulation. He was too much of a dialectician to not always associate movement and contradiction. Accumulation is both producing the acceleration of various kinds of progress (its positive side) and is, simultaneously, responsible for its destructive aspects which cannot be separated from the former and cannot even be fundamentally corrected without squarely leaving the specific logic of capitalism. In Capital, Marx expresses that contradiction in terms of surprising modernity by stating that accumulation is simultaneously destructive of the two sources of wealth - the human being (labour reduced to the status of merchandise) and nature (it also being treated as merchandise).

The one-sided "positive" view of accumulation is the peculiarity of the bourgeois ideology and not of the modern ideology in its full scope. The latter produces both the (dominant) bourgeois ideology and its opposite, the socialist ideology. Already the utopian socialists before Marx did not ignore the destructive dimension of capitalist expansion. But they express the protest of its victims through nostalgic hope for a return to earlier systems (this is the content of what Engels called "feudal socialism" - which continues to find modern expressions, notably among certain Greens), or through the claim that another, new society must and can be constructed on the basis of the moral values which capitalism eliminates (equality, human solidarity). Marx goes further precisely by associating the positive historical role of accumulation (for a time, not for eternity) and the worsening of its destructive dimensions.

The logic of the accumulation of capital, according to Marx, produces and cannot but produce an increasing social polarization -- wealth at one pole, misery at the other. As one knows, this inevitable and increasing immiserization is the most controversial of

Marx's theses and is generally, rejected not only by right-wing currents of thought, but also by those dominant on the left (in social democracy). It is argued that the historical facts are conclusive proof for the opposite, that is to say that accumulation always leads, in the end, to the improvement of the material conditions of all, bourgeois and proletarians, to state it simply. That may have appeared to be the case at the level of the societies of the capitalism of the center. However, for the level of the really existing capitalism which is globalized, massive polarization-immiserization constitutes the most glaring historical fact, to which I will return. The thesis of polarization - immiserization makes the man Marx the only thinker of modern times who looked straight at what is essential, namely, that destructive aspect of capital, which is operating on a gigantic scale and inevitable as long as one remains inside the logic of its movement.

In contrast, vulgar economics takes the specific one-sided view of the ideology of bourgeois Reason to its extreme. From that perspective, accumulation has only positive aspects. The negative phenomena whose reality cannot be denied - the crises and their consequences (unemployment, poverty, insecurity, marginalization), the underdevelopment of the peripheries of the world system - are being attributed either to specific causes outside the field of operation of the logic of the expansion of capital (demography, political errors in the management of the capitalist expansion, special cultural factors) or to the "imperfect" functioning of the markets. If they were perfect, it is argued, the markets would produce sustained and continued growth beneficial to all humans.

Here vulgar economics turns to a second mythology which makes it blind and renders it incapable of understanding that there is no "law" which governs a tendency for markets to approach a general equilibrium whatsoever. Marx is here again the only thinker of modern times who understood that capitalism is, by nature, an unstable system whose successive states can eventually be explained a posteriori, but that its direction of evolution can never be predicted. The economic "science" which undertakes to discover the "laws" which govern the functioning of "markets" (in fact, capitalist markets) is a false science, the science of a non-reality, of an imaginary world which has nothing in common with the really existing capitalism, historical capitalism.

"Pure" economics is the pseudo-theory of that imaginary world. In that pseudo-science, there is obviously no longer any destructive aspect associated with the functioning of capitalism, only accidents, temporary and limited, attributable to the imperfection of the concrete systems across which it spreads.

The not-less-pseudo-social philosophy which accompanies that pure economics of a non-existing system claims, in turn, all kinds of myths which crowd the dominant discourse. According to those views, the market generates also the conditions for political democracy, with market and democracy becoming the two inseparable faces of the same thing in this myth, as I said above. According to those views, progress which benefits all by definition, eliminates the reality of social classes and ends up producing that marvelous state of affairs in which "the individual has become the very subject of history" ... as several of the more reckless (for example, Fukuyama) dare to contend.

That illusory economic science sets out to discover the laws which govern the functioning of markets beginning with an examination of the behaviour of individuals (the "agent" of the economic decision). The method which is employed is of an appalling platitude: the individual compares the benefits which he can derive from a choice among several others which he can make, with the costs associated with that choice. The evidence of that rationality does not prove by itself the scientific character of the method and of the construction which the economists believe to be able to build upon that base. In fact, the method turns out to be completely sterile. Not only because it eliminates the difference of the status of the "agents" in question (capitalists - entrepreneurs, financiers, workers, rentiers, etc.) whose existence it accepts as a "natural fact", the significance of which is not discussed, even though this fact is a social one (i.e., historically determined and localized); also not because it eliminates any reflection worthy of this name about the collective behaviours of the competing social forces and of the state through which they act (its attempt to "reintegrate" those dimensions of reality is, as will be shown, also completely sterile); but more fundamentally, because the choices in question are guided by the expectations which each of those individuals have about the behaviours of the others. But the introduction of expectations nullifies the rigor of the reasoning, without which there is no science. Everything can be imagined - and its opposite, since the individuals can "guess" right or wrong about what the others are going to do. Economic science can no longer predict; it can only, in the best of cases, explain after the fact what happened, by attributing to individuals certain behaviours which lead to the observed development. Moreover, it must be recalled here that there is never only one single explanation of this kind: in the jungle of actions and interactions of individual choices a great number of plausible, different sequences are imaginable which could have led to the same result. Karl Popper who defined the scientific quality of theories by their famous "falsifiability", would have had to draw the normal conclusion that "pure" economics had sheltered itself from any risk of critique by appealing to the concept of expectation, which allows one to come up with as many causal explanations of an event as he wants. One is well protected!

The enormous literature produced by economists is certainly not homogenous. Nevertheless, and without too much simplification, we can distinguish two completely different groups. On the one hand, there are the studies of the so-called "political economy" which aim at explaining a given situation or development. These studies are, as always, debatable and of variable quality; but they all represent a very fundamental will to be realistic, i.e., to measure up to the diversity of the dimensions of social reality (social and political forces, ideologies, interests and strategies of capital and its adversaries, policies of the state, etc.). In other words, they place themselves in the camp of historical materialism, in its widest sense (and not strictly in its Marxist versions), and never use theories of "pure" economics, which are of no use to them. In contrast, the studies of so-called "pure" economics never say anything. These are merely cheap exercises with only one function, namely, to legitimize the strategies of dominant capital; these economists take good care not to make the full details of capital explicit, pretending not even to know of their very existence. In this setting, "game theory" - the most

advanced product of "pure" economics - is a mind game, indeed, which does not have the power to explain any reality whatsoever.

Marx is the only thinker of capitalism who has raised the truly important questions about the logic of that system (and identified its positive aspects as well as its destructive dimensions). Capital is not a "theory of the functioning of (capitalist) markets" which Marx might have proposed as a substitute for another one (namely, bourgeois economics). I do not ignore that certain economists of academic Marxism have placed themselves in the very terrain of conventional economics and have wanted to replace that with a "Marxian economics", which would explain the laws of the market better. Their failure - a little too quickly called a failure of "Marxism" - has the same causes as that of the vulgar economists. But the discussion of that subject goes beyond our present reflections. The subtitle - "Critique of the political economy" - indicates clearly that the intention was quite different. Marx sets out to show that capitalism is, by nature, an unstable system, exactly because its dynamics are the result of confrontations between contradictory interests and that the outcome of these confrontations (between capitalists and workers, between the different categories of capitalists, between each of them and their competitors, between the states, etc.) is not defined in advance. Scientific analysis of all that requires that one leaves the specific field defined by conventional (or "Marxist") economics in order to enter that infinitely wider field of historical materialism. Furthermore, Marx answers a second question which arises at this point: why does such a pseudo-science (vulgar economics) dominate the mind of modern times? The answer which he gives to that question is known, or should be: the generalization of market relations under capitalism turns the "economic agents" into alienated beings - namely, beings who view the respective markets as forces exterior to themselves which rule over them like forces of nature and who, because of that, become incapable of understanding those forces as what they are - the expression of social contradictions. Bourgeois economics sets out to analyze these "natural forces" (the markets) like physics studies nature. An impossible project because it ignores the essential: the market alienation without which there is neither capitalism, nor an "economic science of markets". Pseudo-science. Its attempt to explain the functioning of capitalism does not have more scientific force than that of those theologians of earlier systems who wanted to explain the history of their time by reading sacred texts, not seeing that it was their religious alienation which made such a vain exercise possible. Vulgar economics, although it is pseudo-scientific, constitutes nonetheless the most aggressive dimension of the bourgeois ideology. It has already conquered the entire terrain occupied by the market relations of capitalism by replacing the analysis of the contradictions of the system by specific "theories" of different markets - of commodities ("consumers choice"), of technologies (choice of investments), of work (labour market, i.e., reduction of the human being to the status of a provider of work, expression of his alienation), of finances (money and finance markets), etc. It proposes to extend its flat method (costs/benefits) to domains where the "market" obviously does not exist ("market failures", as the "theoreticians" of that extension of the method call it in a perfectly alienated language -- mostly Americans). The decision by the state, the political choices, are being "analyzed" in this fashion which right away eliminates the real dimensions of what the states, the political forces, etc. truly are. The imperialism of vulgar economism even takes it upon itself, now and then, to

"explain" the functioning of family relations with the circular and flat method of costs/benefits!

All that is only the expression of a delirious alienation, one that belongs to capitalism as a really existing, and not only imagined, system. The forward flight into attempts to take "expectations" into consideration, into game theory, into the hyper-formalism which results from that, are nothing other than the expression of that inability, or rejection, of seeing capitalism as what it is: a stage of the history of humanity which generates the fantastic acceleration of accumulation, the inherent instability of the mechanisms which govern it, and the growing destruction (of the human being through market alienation, of nature through the short-term rationality inherent in the competition which is part of it). One can only measure up to these destructive dimensions of capitalist accumulation if he engages in a fundamental critique of the system, which Marx did and which I have suggested above to revisit, starting from the discussion of the three basic principles of the ideology of capitalist modernity. These destructive dimensions are not the specific products of various causalities outside the field defined by conventional economics, which excluded them from the start.

3. Accumulation is not the process of creative destruction which Schumpeter imagines. That formulation lets one understand that the destruction is positive like the creation of which it is the other side. Marx's view which, on the contrary, sees in it the unfolding of a contradiction, is more valid.

The destruction produced by capitalist accumulation relates to all dimensions of human and social reality; it is, simultaneously, the destruction of the human being, of nature, and of peoples. Moreover, the magnitude of this destruction does not diminish as accumulation progresses, as the promises of the dominant ideological discourse contend; but, on the contrary, it increases and has, to date, become a serious threat to civilization. Capitalism has now left its ascending, positive historical phase, characterized by the predominance of the positive aspects of accumulation; it entered its dangerous phase of decadence, marked by the dramatic potential of its destructive effects.

(i) The triumph of the market alienation of capitalism and, particularly, the alienation of the worker, who is no longer a human being but a "factor of production", is the core of the fundamental contradiction of the system. Capital (also treated as a "factor of production") employs labour (in fact, exploits it, to be precise), say the economists. The formulation excludes right away the power of the social imagination which might invite a conception with reversed terms: a system in which the human beings (not reduced to their dimension of "sellers" of labour power) use capital (which, in terms of social relations, would become what it should be: an instrument of production).

Alienation is the antinomy of freedom. Modernity, I wrote elsewhere, is defined by the proclamation that humans, individually and collectively, make their history and are responsible for it. It moves societal imagination, the supreme expression of human freedom, to the foreground. But the really existing modernity to date is nothing but a

capitalist modernity. Here the specific contradiction of this system exercises all its limiting effects which void the concept of freedom of its emancipatory potential. The future is no longer made through the unfolding of a humanist project, as conscious as possible of its possibilities and problems. It is made by the blind forces which impose themselves like a blind force outside of humanity -- the "laws of the market". - There is no longer a future, in the sense of a prospect, but a destiny which, by definition, is unknown, as Pierre André Taguieff has written.

The separation between the domain managed by democracy (the political choices) and that dominated by so-called market forces (the economy) nullifies the inventive capacity which democracy potentially contains. Democracy becomes what I have described as "low-intensity democracy": you are free in your electoral choices, but your lot does not depend on the parliamentary majority which results from that; it depends on the vicissitudes of the "market". The exercise of democracy "is of no use". The democratic conquests of the popular classes (and later, women) have exploded that increasing contradiction between democracy and market, which can have only one of the following two outcomes: either the democracy subjects the market to the options it presents (and the first step in this direction is called regulation of markets), or, on the contrary, the market imposes its logic unilaterally and democracy is bound to regress, instead of progress. Low-intensity democracy, media-staged and manipulated, modern replacement of the census system, illustrates that regression already. The parallel which Guy Bois draws between the systemic crisis of contemporary capitalism and that of the medieval system finds its full power here. The developments which I pointed out some twenty years ago went in the same direction.

Contradiction erupts above all between the values advanced by the ideology of the Enlightenment: liberty and equality. For these values are contradictory and not "naturally" convergent. In real capitalism (and not in the imaginary one of "pure" economics), liberty becomes the liberty of the strongest, namely, of the bourgeoisie, constituted as a class which is perfectly conscious of its privileges and powers, as shown in the sociological study by Michel and Monique Pinçon. Given free rein, that liberty generates increasing inequality. The dominant ideology in its American form accepts (and legitimizes) the absolute dominance of this concept of freedom; and extols the virtues of the inequality produced by it. In the historical traditions of Europe, with the weight of its heritage prior to modern times, its struggles for equality and the development of powerful workers movements, the imbalances between the aspirations for freedom and for equality have been less marked to date. But that heritage is now severely threatened by the progression of the so-called liberal ideology of the American model.

(ii) The systematic destruction of the natural environment associated with the progress of accumulation is today the object of a multifaceted consciousness raising, which is symbolized both by the ecological debate and the political breakthrough of the "Greens". Obvious proof that this destruction has reached a level which cannot be ignored any longer. The resources of nature can no longer be declared to be a priori inexhaustible.

Without coming back to the theses and propositions advanced in this domain - which I make my own without difficulty, I would like here to call attention to two questions which are raised less often.

The first observation concerns the consequences of the extremist logic which makes the human being into an object of biological science, separable from nature of which he is a product (perhaps, superior). That logic authorizes the sorcerer's apprentices to conceive of the manipulation of genes, vegetables, animals and humans themselves. The question of ethics arises here, which cannot be ignored because it constitutes the very foundation of the values of freedom, equality, human solidarity, democracy, emancipation, and progress. Suppressing the requirements of that ethic, subordinating gene biology to the logic of the market constitutes, today, a major threat to civilization.

The second observation concerns the impossibility, in which society finds itself, of fighting all those destructive effects of accumulation without fighting against its fundamental principle, namely, market alienation and short-term rationality which accompanies it. Unfortunately, the dominant currents in the "Greens" political movements refuse to make that connection.

(iii) The third destructive dimension of accumulation - namely, concerning the threats which victimize entire peoples, requires a more comprehensive exposition, whereas the discourse of the dominant ideology covers this up, even its existence. Capitalism has always been globalized, since its origin, and its expansion produced an increasing polarization of wealth. While, at the moment of the industrial revolution, the difference of average productivities of the different world regions (covering 80 to 90 % of the population of the planet) did not exceed the ratio 1 to 2, this has become greater than a ratio of 1 to 60 scarcely two hundred years later. Being globalized, capitalism must be judged at long last by its results at that level, not at the level of countries artificially treated in isolation from each other. At that level capitalism has produced a relative (and even absolute) immiserization which proves the view of Marx more than right, insofar as the law of accumulation is very much the law of polarization and immiserization. However, that polarization did not unfold like the socialists of the 19th century imagined it, Marx included despite his reservations against the simplified scheme which the social democracy adopted without nuances. It did not "proletarize" all popular classes at the world level. The expansion of capitalism operated by other means, notably, subjecting labour to other forms of social exploitation, reintroducing slavery (in America), making alliances with the ruling classes of the old regimes in Asia and Africa which were transformed into transmission belts of the global domination of capital. The very existence of these diverse forms of capitalist exploitation should not have been surprising. It only proves that the social dynamic cannot be grasped by remaining on the limited terrain defined by economics, but requires that one moves himself to the much wider terrain of historical materialism.

The immiserization at the world level threatened the destruction of entire peoples, all those to whom the logic of globalized accumulation denied a "catching up", namely, the possibility of reproducing at home the standards and ways of living of the privileged

central regions of the system, whether we talk about Russia (which had attempted to make it under the pretentious cover of "socialism"), China, India and even Korea, all the other regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Bourgeois ideology simply refuses to be interested in these major facts. At best, one is content with observing that such polarization manifests itself in a massive waste of planetary resources, or else, in incurable misery. But one does not want to draw any conclusion which condemns the system in its entirety.

No doubt, the various kinds of modus operandi of polarization have themselves a history which shaped successive stages defined by specific forms of reproduction and deepening of the wealth/poverty gap. I can here only refer the reader to other writings about this subject.

The dominant discourse is preoccupied exactly with either the presentation of superficial economic interpretations of the evolution of polarization, in order to deny its inherent relationship with the law of accumulation (what has not been written about the "miracles" of capitalist development, always forgotten when they end in catastrophe as it happens - what embarrassment!); or by taking refuge in a culturalist and eurocentric reading of history, to which we will come back.

The choice of terms used in the dominant discourse is full of useful functions in order to give it an appearance of credibility. These terms are chosen in order to inspire, by their common sense, statements which free capitalism from any responsibility. Sometimes they are square lies, like the term "deregulation" which means, in fact, "secret and unilateral regulation by dominant capital". One speaks, as everybody knows, of "marginalization", "exclusion", referring to the individuals, social groups, sometimes entire countries and peoples "under the poverty line"! One wants to suggest that way that their misery results from the fact that they are not "integrated" into the capitalist system, that they are, perhaps, responsible for that situation (or, at least, bear a non-negligible part of the responsibility), and that, for that matter, the solution for their problems lies in a stronger integration into globalized capitalism.

The most glaring facts prove the contrary, as the works of Serge Cordelier and his co-authors show. Africa's extra regional trade as a proportion of its domestic product amounted to 46 % in 1990, as compared with 13 % each for Europe and North America, 15 % for Asia and 24 % for Latin America. The so-called marginalized Africa is, in fact, relatively more integrated in the world system than the other regions. The central regions are, for sure, no less integrated in spite of they appearing not to be so, due to their being more autocentered. They dominate the system of the total to which they belong as parts, to note. But what is not being said is that Africa occupies the most subordinate positions in that system and that its misery is inseparable from that status. That is nothing new. Vast regions of the continent had been integrated very early on into the mercantilist system which it provided with its working hand, through the slave trade. Periphery of the American periphery I have called that. Later it has been integrated as a "colony of exploitation", confined to provide primary agricultural products without dominant capital

having to invest the capital which was necessary for raising the level of productivity of its labour and maintaining the value of its basic potential. It matters little that Africa's exports have represented only a minute part of world trade yesterday and today. Capitalism is not a system which sets out to maximize production and productivity, but one which chooses the volumes and conditions of production which maximize the profit rate of capital. The terms of that integration of the continent into the system of the international division of labour weighed with a very heavy weight on the respective peoples. The so-called marginalized countries are, in fact, the superexploited and, therefore, impoverished countries, not countries located "at the margin" of the system. The history of capitalism is, from this point of view, one of a long series of destructions associated with its rise. In the mercantilist era, the regions where the system of slavery plantations dominated recorded the strongest growth rates of the era. The sugar of Santo Domingo represented, at one point in history, a volume of exports superior to that of England. An expert of the World Bank would have, without hesitation, spoken of the "miracle" of Santo Domingo (today Haiti!) or of the Brazilian Northeast ...

The countries which today make up the "fourth world" are, for large part, countries destroyed by the intensity of their integration in an earlier phase of the global expansion of capitalism. Bangladesh, for example, successor state of Bengal which was the jewel of British colonization in India. Others have been - or still are - peripheries of peripheries. For example, Burkina Faso which has supplied most of its active labour force to Côte d'Ivoire. If one had taken into consideration the two countries as, in fact, constituting a single region of the capitalist system of the epoch, the characteristic rates of the "Ivory miracle" would have had to be divided by two. Emigration impoverishes the regions which feed its flow and thus support the costs of bringing up youth who are lost at the moment when they become potentially active, as well as the costs of supporting the old after their return. These costs, much greater than the "money orders" sent to the families by the active emigrants, are almost always forgotten in the calculations of our economists. There are only few countries which are "poor" and non-integrated or little integrated in the global system. Perhaps, yesterday still the North Yemen or Afghanistan. Their integration which is underway to date, like that of others yesterday, produces nothing more than a "modernization of poverty" - the shantytowns taking on the landless peasants.

Such destruction is obviously not confined to the domains measured by economics. It is, by the force of things, destructive of cultures, know how, specific forms of social integration of the various civilizations. The theme of cultural destruction is almost fashionable today. But how could one go about discussing it? Most generally, by parting with a hypothesis which I call culturalist, in the sense that it attributes a major responsibility for that state of affairs to "cultural specificities".

Culturalism offers various facets which are very useful for the unfolding of various dimensions of the dominant ideological discourse. Dimensions which, far from permitting the formulation of a coherent thesis of the total, are completely contradictory, but offer, all separately, the advantage of freeing capitalism of all responsibility for the shaping of the modern world.

To begin with, there is the Eurocentric formulation with which purports to explain "the European exception", the only civilization which was bound to - and it alone - "invent modernity". The mythologies about the Greek ancestor, of the special role of Christianity, if it is not simply the "genes" of the various peoples, are endlessly repeated in Eurocentric debates. These prejudices have a tough skin. I submit as proof that they are considered as "self-explanatory", even in discourses which want to be today's critiques of "cultural globalization". Picking one at random from countless works recently published on the subject, I will refer here to that of Gérard Leclerc.

Eurocentrism makes it possible to attribute, in one swoop, to "cultural specificities" all the others, irrespective of how they may differ from each other in space and time, or of the responsibility immanent in their subordinate and dominated status in capitalist modernity. The implication of this hypothesis - namely, that the respective cultures constitute hard cores incapable of evolution, something that is contradicted by all of history, does not account for much, because that is merely a prejudice built up as scientific truth.

Culturalism allows one to also describe the ideology of capitalism as "Western" and thus to confuse the expansion of capitalism and its contended "Westernization". That description obscures the fact that, in the history of Europe, modernity has not been a continuity but a rupture and that its fundamental features -- market alienation, in particular - make only sense with reference to the logic of capitalism, not of a European tradition which does not exist more than any other. The confusion which brings with it that non-scientific description has, moreover, the advantage of giving the appearance of legitimacy to political postures which are contradictory but, nevertheless, quite useful for the dominance of capital. Based on that, one can, indeed, formulate thus: "if you want to develop yourself, make up for your backwardness, accept Westernization, renounce your traditions and your specificities". One can thus call upon the "Orientals" to accept Westernization, or on the Europeans to "Americanize" themselves. But one can, quite on the contrary, "defend the specific cultural values" of the ones or the others without questioning the economic logic of capitalism, which one separates from the cultural, since occidentalism is the peculiarity of the occidentals and has nothing to do with capitalism. That is what all sorts of culturalists propose, the defenders of "communalism", the ethnicists, the Islamists and others who set out to preserve the specific identities defined outside of time like "primordial" expressions, but accept economic capitalist globalization without batting an eyelid. Capitalist globalization generates the fragmentation. Founded on unequal development, this stage of modernity produces the objective bases which lead to a refusal of the universalism which it suggests but does not realize. Dominant capital, in turn, perfectly aware of the utility of the culturalist postures, does not only tolerate them but even, in the strategies which it puts in place, praises and encourages them. That the victims of the system adopt such postures - that is the case with the ethnicists and Islamists, for example, should not be surprising. That would not be the first time in history that the victims internalize the strategies of the forces which dominate them. "Inverted Eurocentrism" I have called that.

The culturalist postures constitute a serious handicap for any attempt to overcome the contradictions of capitalist modernity through the construction of a socialist modernity (which they call "post capitalist").

The polarization at the world level, immanent in capitalism, constitutes the principal contradiction of the system, i.e., the one through which the fundamental contradiction (market alienation) expresses itself with the most violent (destruction of entire peoples), the most visible and, thus, the most intolerable destructive effects. I insist on this point because nearly all the protests against the destruction brought by modernity - in the West at least, ignore the reality of this or, at best, touch on it at the margins of their expositions.

I observe that the major conflicts which, throughout the 20th century, have pitted powerful groups of active historical subjects against the strategies of dominant capital, have been motivated by the refusal to accept the *diktat* of the unequal development characteristic of globalized capitalism, whether these were revolutions which were meant to be socialist (Russia, China), which took place in societies of the periphery - not accidentally - or national liberation movements. Some say that these attempts having failed the test makes the horizon of capitalism unsurpassable, that it must be accepted and that one must be content with attempting to manage it as best possible now, as the post-modernists proclaim. That very abdication is an open call for the renunciation of modernity; and, with humans having abandoned the project of building their own future, it trades inventive social imagination for an unknown destiny. However, that destiny is known: the destruction which the pursuit of the logic of the system implies can only get worse and will, in the end, lead humanity into collective suicide. The failure of the first attempts to surpass the horizon of capitalism and its polarizing dimension constitutes actually only a moment of an unfinished history. This is not the place to analyze the complex developments which led to that failure, which I attempt to summarize in the following terms: the weight exercised by the requirements of "catching up" nourished the illusion that it was possible to surmount the effect of the principal contradiction of capitalism (polarization) without really resolving its fundamental contradiction (alienation and, behind it, the question of democracy). Because of that the respective experiences quickly reached their historical limits, were eroded and, finally, collapsed - not because they were socialist, but because they were not or very little socialist. It will be necessary to imagine other strategies for the future - what I call the "long transition from globalized capitalism to socialist universalism".

In the meantime, dominant capital deploys its own strategy, in line with the requirements of the maintenance of its privileges and its global control. The best synthesis concerning that strategy has, in my opinion, been presented by Susan George in her magnificent "Lugano Report". That "Report" is not a matter of cheap fiction; the author merely imagines the implicit strategy (and undoubtedly explicit for the leaders at the highest level of the scheme) which would necessarily produce the outcomes which the policies which are in place actually produce: increasing inequality and sweeping poverty, destruction of nature, degradation of democracy, communal breakdown, etc. The author demonstrates as well that the means to assure that the peoples do not understand what happens to them are conceived in a fairly systematic manner in order to be effective. The

cynicism which transpires from that reading is not the product of a manichean mind or of a view of history based on "conspiracy theory"; it corresponds perfectly to how the most powerful fraction of dominant capital - represented by the establishment of the United States which Susan George knows better than anyone - is in reality.

The Lugano Report revolves around a central idea which I would formulate, as follows: in the 21st century the principal contradiction of the system remains the same as the one which dominated the 20th century. The "problem of development", if one calls it that, renders the management of the system, which is globalized by dominant capital, impossible without the systematic, planned destruction of the surplus of human beings (in relation to the needs of capital) through which this problem is blown up. The fact that billions of human beings have become useless and dangerous for the survival of the system simply means that this system has become historically obsolete; the objective necessity of overcoming it is from now on an urgency. The genocide - the word is not too strong - of billions of human beings, who have the bad luck of being born in the ungovernable peripheries of the system, must be coldly envisaged through manipulation, wars (inter-"communal"), famine and disease. The "solidarity" of the countries of the triad (United States-Canada, Western and central Europe, Japan) and their collective submission under the requirements of the hegemonism of the United States find here - in the final analysis - their true meaning.

4. Reforms, even the boldest one can imagine, will not succeed in reducing the depth of destruction inflicted by accumulation achieved in the final stage of its historical course. One must dare to think of a social system founded on equality, solidarity, and a universalism organized on that basis at the planetary level, liberation from market alienation. A system for which I do not know any other name than socialism. That brutal demand does not exclude - but, on the contrary, calls for - open and deepened reflection about how patient action can enable people to embark on the road of a long historical transition to global socialism. The long transition in question can only be based on the principles and the practice of democracy in the strong sense of the word, namely, the - let's say, progressive - building of institutional frameworks which amplify the space of the management by citizens of economic, political, social and cultural life, permitting the liberated social imagination to conceive and propose effective strategies in stages. From this long-term perspective, coherent reform programs can effectively prepare a sequence of successive stages which progresses in the desired directions. Neither low-intensity democracy, that of the "passive consumers" replacing active citizens, neither the subordination of the exclusive logic of the markets respond to these demands. If one speaks of democracy in this sense - which excludes an hollow and fabricated "consensus", he speaks of plurality in the strong sense of the term.

That plurality does not constitute a handicap for the required transformation; on the contrary, it is the condition for it. Plurality - in the concepts for the diagnosis of the problems to be resolved; plurality - of scientific tools of analysis of reality. Plurality - in individual and collective motivations, without which large-scale action is not possible. For example, it matters little whether one arrives at the will to "transform the world" with

the tools produced by the thought of the Enlightenment and its Marxist critique or through reflection about the specific spiritual dimension of humans like that suggested by liberation theology. These are merely streams which converge toward the same grand river. Plurality - of historical subjects, many and of diverse status, whose convergence of struggles is the only guarantee of the effectiveness of the transition. For, the fragmentation of the social movements presently organized around single issues (environment, women, defense of particular communal interests, etc.), which is characteristic of times of crisis, opens a wide field for their eventual manipulation by dominant capital, and will only be progressively overcome by means of wide open democratic debates. Plurality - from the diversity of historical heritages, from images of different possible combinations between the requirements of universalism, on one hand, and the specific contributions of the different peoples, on the other.

Yet in all domains of these multi-faceted pluralities, what always counts is not diversity turning to the past (most commonly expressed in a convulsive and neurotic mode), but diversity looking to the future and, thus, innovative and really transformatory.

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the years 1928, 1938 and 1958, confirm the validity of the thesis which I am defending here. These data show also that the intensity of globalization, if one measures it as the world average of the interregional exchanges in GDP, has recorded only a modest progress in the last seventy-five years, from 15 % in 1928 to 16% in 1990. Beyond the myths, globalization appears to be primarily only the expression of the strategy of dominant capital, which occupies the space of what the authors of the work justly describe as "globalized archipelago". The question of knowing whether the capital of the transnationals - to date always in the role of national capital but operating in many nations - is in the process of becoming truly transnational, remains open, however.

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