

**I. THE AUTOCRATIC STATE VERSUS THE CHALLENGE POSED BY MODERNITY**

Aristotle said that man (today, one would say the human being) is a political animal. In other words, the society is the place of options for political status targeted before all the rules and principles governing its management. The political identification of the nature of challenges facing societies at each moment of their history, and that of the options offered to them, is therefore an inevitable precondition for any analysis of the reality. It is understood that, behind each of the possible options are real class interests and those of social groups and nations of which the contradictions constitute the foundation.

The dominant discourse in vogue evokes an attempt to use the language of so-called “rational”, and therefore necessarily “consensual” options concerning social “management”, in analysing political conflicts and social struggles. Thus, post-modernism has substituted for the clear language of social struggles that of the discourse on social “movements”. There is nothing neutral in any way about this use of terms because the phenomenon presupposes that society is already reconciled with itself and that the “movements” in question transmit an inexorable movement -- implicitly to the best of the worlds. The explosion of what is referred to as decentralised initiatives of civil society organisations – women’s movements, ecologist movements, all kinds of so-called non-governmental organisations – appears to be the expression of this qualitative change in “post-modern” political life.

Along with the strong comeback of the brutal capital dictatorship, vis-à-vis momentarily weakened adversaries, this discourse loses every day a little more of the transient credibility accorded to it. The reason is that, far from bringing about a peaceful consensus, the imbalance in favour of capital stimulates more social struggles, the condition for any change in the balance of power that can reorient the societal movement towards enhanced justice, democracy and efficiency.

These struggles are not deployed in a political and economic vacuum. They develop in, and at least partially, against the double powers of the managing State and against the globalised economic liberalism that defines the framework for options of both the dominant capital and the State at its service.

Hence, it is initially a question of making a critical review of practices of the State in question, and then analysing the forms of organisation of political and social struggles, their strategic visions (or their absence).

There is no democratic State in the Arab world. There are only autocratic States. This is certainly a harsh judgement, but it is essentially correct, even if we later on try to identify the flaws whereby the political and social struggles can initiate the transformation of this reality.

This general autocracy certainly assumes diverse forms. It would not be difficult to cite well-known names corresponding to the identification of each of these forms of the common autocracy. The plight of Arab peoples appears or appeared to depend in some cases on the mood of a General who proved to be an assassin by nature, a junior police officer specialised in torture, or a king who built perpetually dark dungeons, a chief of a tribal pyramid or a religious extremist. In a less negative case, the Arab State was sometimes ruled by an enlightened despot, in the true sense of the term, or by an easy-going heir, and therefore relatively tolerant. Lebanon partly shares the common feature of the Arab States even if it appears as an exception, as elections are held there regularly and the Presidents are actually changed every four years. For one thing, if it is true that the premise that “the elections are not devoid of a certain interest” is meaningful, it is only so because, in fact, the political authorities that follow one another are so much alike that their difference is negligible.

Although autocratic, the Arab political regimes have not always been or are not always denied legitimacy by their own societies. According to Hashem Sharaby, State power has always been synonymous with personal power as opposed to the power of the law defining the modern State. This Weber-like descriptive analysis is worth qualifying since the personal (or personalised) powers in question are legitimate only insofar as they are proclaimed as being respectful of the tradition (and especially of the religious Shariah) and are perceived as such. From a more in-depth perspective, it is the relationship Sharaby establishes between autocracy and the “patriarchal” nature of the system of social values. The term “patriarchy” is understood here to be more than what is ascribed to the popularised commonplace term of “male chauvinism” (asserting and practising the marginalisation of women in society). The patriarchy in question is a system that upholds the duty of obedience at all levels: while school and home education put down the slightest critical attempt and sacralisation of hierarchies in the family system (subordinating women and children of course), in the business sector (subordinating the employee to the employer), in public service (absolute submission to the senior in rank), absolute prohibition of religious interpretation, etc.

This observation – which appears indisputable to me – links up with the conclusions that I have drawn from the definition of modernity, which I proposed, and from the challenge it constitutes.

Modernity is based on the principle that human beings create their history individually and collectively and that, to that effect, they have the right to innovate and to disregard tradition. Proclaiming this principle meant breaking with the fundamental principle that governed all the pre-modern societies, including of course that of Feudal and Christian Europe. Modernity was born with this proclamation. It had nothing to do with rebirth; it was simply a question of birth. The qualification of Renaissance that Europeans themselves gave to history in that era of history is therefore misleading. It is the result of an ideological construction purporting that the Greek-Roman Antiquity was acquainted with the principle of modernity, which was veiled in the “Middle Ages” (between the old modernity and the new modernity) by religious obscurantism. It was the mythical perception of Antiquity that in turn paved the way for Eurocentrism, whereby Europe claims to go back to its past, “to return to its sources” (hence, the Renaissance), whereas in fact, it is engineering a break with its own history.

The European Renaissance was the product of an internal social process, the solution found to contradictions peculiar to the then Europe through the invention of capitalism. On the other hand, what the Arabs by imitation referred to as their Renaissance – the Nahda of the 19th Century – was not so. It was the reaction to an external shock. The Europe that modernity had rendered powerful and triumphant had ambiguous effect on the Arab world through attraction (admiration) and repulsion (through the arrogance of its conquest). The Arab Renaissance takes its qualifying term literally. It is assumed that, if the Arabs “returned” to their sources, as the Europeans would have done (that is what they themselves say), they would regain their greatness, even if debased for some time. The Nahda does not know the nature of the modernity that enhances Europe’s power.

This is not the place to refer to different aspects and moments marking Nahda’s deployment. I will just state briefly that Nahda does not forge the necessary break with tradition that defines modernity. Nahda does not recognise the meaning of secularism, in other words, separation between religion and politics, the condition to ensure that politics serves as the field for free innovation, and for that matter, for democracy in the modern sense. Nahda thinks it can substitute for secularism an interpretation of religion purged of its obscurantist drifts. At any rate, to date, Arab societies are not adequately equipped to understand that secularism is not a “specific” characteristic of the western world but rather a requirement for modernity. Nahda does not realise the meaning of democracy, which should be understood as the right to break with tradition. It therefore remains prisoner of the concepts of autocratic State; it hopes and prays for a “just” despot (al moustabid al adel) – even if not “enlightened” and the nuance is significant. Nahda does not understand that modernity also promotes women’s aspiration to their freedom, thereby exercising their right to innovate and break with tradition. Eventually, Nahda reduces modernity to the immediate aspect of what it produces: technical progress. This voluntarily over-simplified presentation does not mean that its author is not aware of the contradictions expressed in Nahda, nor that certain avant-garde thinkers were aware of the real

challenges posed by modernity, like Kassem Amin and the importance of women's emancipation, Ali Abdel Razek and secularism, and Kawakibi and the challenge posed by democracy. However, none of these breakthroughs had any effects; on the contrary, the Arab society reacted by refusing to follow the paths indicated. Nahda is therefore not the time marking the birth of modernity in the Arab world but rather the period of its abortion.

Since the Arab States have not yet embraced modernity, whereas they bear the bunt of the daily challenge, Arabs still accept to a large extent these principles of autocratic power, which maintains its legitimacy or loses it in fields other than its non-recognition of the principle of democracy. If it is able to resist imperialist aggression – or to give that impression --, if it is able to promote a visible improvement of the material living conditions of many, if not all, the autocratic power enjoys guaranteed popularity even if it now appears as an enlightened despotic power. It is also because Arab societies have not embraced modernity that the latter's brutal pompous refusal presented as the sole ideological theme placed at the centre of the Islamic project can find a favourable echo as powerful as it is known to be (cf. Political Islam later on).

Beyond this non-modernity principle, the autocratic power therefore owes its legitimacy to tradition. In some cases, this could refer to a tradition of national and religious monarchy like that of Morocco (in which case the specific feature consists in the fact that no Moroccan political party questions the eloquent motto of this monarchy – Allah, The Nation, The King) or of a tribal monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula. But there is another form of tradition – the one inherited from the Ottoman Empire dominant in the territory between Algeria and Iraq, and therefore influencing the largest segment of the Arab world – which I describe as the tradition of “Mameluke power”.

What is it about? It is about a complex system that associated the personalised power of warlords (relatively structured and centralised, or otherwise scattered), businessmen and men of religion. I emphasise men, since women are obviously not allowed to assume any responsibilities. The three dimensions of this organisation are not merely juxtaposed; they are actually merged into a single reality of power.

The Mamelukes are men of war who owe their legitimacy to a certain concept of Islam that places emphasis on the opposite of Dar El Islam (Muslim world – a community governed by the rules of peaceful management) / Dar El Harb (an extra-Muslim world, the place for the pursuit of Jihad, “Holy War”). It is not by chance that this military concept of political management was fabricated by the conquering Seldjoukide Turks and the Ottomans, who called themselves “Ghazi” – conquerors and colonisers of Byzantine Anatolia. It is not by chance that the Mamelukes' system was built from the era of Salah El Dine, liberator of the lands occupied until then by the Crusaders. Populist powers and contemporary nationalists always mention the name of Salah El Dine with respectful admiration without ever considering or making any allusion to the ravages of the system from which it originated. At the end of the Crusades, the Arab world (which became Turkish-Arab) entered into a military feudalisation and isolation process reflecting a decline that put an end to the brilliant civilisation of the early centuries of the Caliphate while Europe was beginning to discard feudalism and preparing to embark on the invention of modernity and move on to conquer the world.

In compensation for this service as protectors of Islam, the Mamelukes gave the men of religion monopoly in the interpretation of dogmas, of justice rendered in the name of Islam and in the moral civilisation of the society. Relegated to its purely traditional social dimension – respect for rites being the sole important consideration – religion is absolutely subjugated by the autocratic power of men of war.

Economic life is then subject to the mood of the military-political authority. Whenever possible, the peasantry is directly subjected to the whims of this ruling class and private property is jeopardised (the related principle being indisputably sacralised by the fundamental texts of Islam). The proceeds of trade are no less tapped.

The Mameluke ruling class naturally aspired to the dispersion of its autocratic power. Formally responsible to the Sultan-Caliph, the Mamelukes took advantage of the long distance then separating them from the capital (Istanbul) to personally exercise full powers within the radius of the land under their control. In areas with an age-old tradition of State centralisation, such as Egypt, there have been successive attempts to discipline the whole military corps. It is not by chance that Mohamed Ali established his centralised authority by massacring the Mamalukes, but only to re-establishing a military–real estate aristocracy under his personal authority from that time onwards. The Beys of Tunis tried to do likewise on a more modest scale. The Deys of Algiers never succeeded in doing so. The Ottoman Sultanate did so in turn, thereby integrating its Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian provinces of Anatolia and its Arab provinces of historic Syria and Iraq under an authority “modernised” that way.

Just modernisation? Or just a modernised autocracy? Enlightened despotism? Or just despotism? The fluctuations and variants are situated in this range, which does not usher in anything making it possible to go beyond.

Certainly, the typical autocratic model of Mameluke had to reckon with the numerous and diverse realities that always defined the real limits. Peasant communities that took refuge in their fortified mountains (Kabylis, Maronites, Druzeans, Alaouites, etc.), Sufi brotherhoods almost everywhere and tribes obliged the dominant authorities to reach a compromise with and tolerate the rebellious groups. The contrast in Morocco between Maghzen and Bled Siba is of a similar nature.

Have the forms in which power was exercised in the Arab world changed so much to justify the assertion that those described here belong to a distant past? The autocratic State and the related forms of political management certainly exist to date, as will be seen later. However, they are beset with a profound crisis that has already curtailed their legitimacy, as they were increasingly incapable of meeting the challenges posed by modernity. Some of the testimonies in this regard are the emergence of political Islam, overlapping political conflicts as well as the resumption of social struggles.

## **II. POLITICAL ISLAM**

The fatal error lies in thinking that the emergence of mass political movements identified with Islam is the inevitable outcome of the rise of culturally and politically backward people who cannot understand any language other than that of their quasi-atavistic obscurantism. Unfortunately, such an error is not only widely circulated by the dominant simplifying media; it is also echoed in the pseudo-scientific discourses on eurocentrism and awkward “orientalism”. Such views are based on the biased assumption that only the West can invent modernity, thereby confining Muslims in an immutable “tradition” that makes them incapable of apprehending the significance of the necessary change.

Muslims and Islam have a history, just like those of the other regions of the world. It is a history fraught with diverse interpretations concerning linkages between reason and faith, a history of mutual transformation and adaptation of both society and its religion. However, the reality of this history is denied not only by eurocentric discourses but also by the contemporary movements associated with Islam. In fact, the two entities have the same cultural bias whereby the “specific” features ascribed to the different careers of their own peoples and religions are allegedly intangible, infinite and trans-historical. To the Western world’s eurocentrism, contemporary Political Islam solely opposes an inverted eurocentrism.

The emergence of movements claiming to be Islamic is actually expressive of a violent revolt against the destructive effects of the really existent capitalism and against its attendant unaccomplished, truncated and deceptive modernity. It is an expression of an absolutely legitimate revolt against a system that has nothing to offer to the peoples concerned.

The discourse of the Islam proposed as an alternative to the capitalist modernity (to which the modern experiences of the historical socialisms are clearly assimilated), is political by nature, and by no means

theological. The “fundamentalist” attributes often ascribed to Islam by no means correspond to this discourse, which, moreover, does not even allude to Islam, except in the case of certain contemporary Muslim intellectuals who are referred to in such terms in western opinion more than in theirs.

The proposed Islam is in this case the adversary of every liberation theology. Political Islam advocates submission and not emancipation. It was only Mahmoud Taha of Sudan who attempted to emphasise the element of emancipation in his interpretation of Islam. Sentenced to death and executed by the authorities of Khartoum, Taha was not acknowledged by any “radical” or “moderate” Islamic group, and neither was he defended by any of the intellectuals identifying themselves with “Islamic Renaissance” or even by those who are merely willing to “dialogue” with such movements.

The heralds of the said “Islamic Renaissance” are not interested in theology and they never make any reference to the classical texts concerning theology. Hence, what they understand by Islam appears to be solely a conventional and social version of religion limited to the formal and integral respect for ritual practice. The Islam in question would define a community to which one belongs by inheritance, like ethnicity instead of a strong and intimate personal conviction. It is solely a question of asserting a “collective identity” and nothing more. That is the reason why the term “Political Islam” is certainly more appropriate to qualify all these movements in the Arab countries.

Modern political Islam had been invented by the orientalists in the service of the British authority in India before being adopted intact by Mawdudi of Pakistan. It consisted in “proving” that Muslim believers are not allowed to live in a State that is itself not Islamic – anticipating the partition of India -- because Islam would ignore the possibility of separation between State and Religion. The orientalists in question failed to observe that the English of the 13th Century would not have conceived of their survival either without Christianity!

Abul Ala Al Mawdudi therefore took up the theme stipulating that power comes from God alone (wilaya al faqih), thus repudiating the concept of citizens having the right to make laws, the State being solely entrusted with enforcement of the law defined once and for all (The Shariah). Joseph de Maistre had already written similar things accusing the Revolution of inventing modern democracy and individual emancipation.

Refuting the concept of emancipatory modernity, Political Islam disapproves of the very principle of democracy – the right of society to build its own future through its freedom to legislate. The Shura principle is not the Islamic form of democracy, as claimed by Political Islam, for it is hampered by the ban on innovation (ibda), and accepts, if need be, only that of interpretation of the tradition (ijtihad). The Shura is only one of the multiple forms of the consultation found in all pre-modern and pre-democratic societies. Of course, interpretation has sometimes been the vehicle for real changes imposed by new demands. However, the fact remains that by virtue of its own principle – denial of the right to break with the past – interpretation leads into deadlock the modern fight for social change and democracy. The parallel claimed between the Islamic parties – radical or moderate, since all of them adhere to the same “anti-modernist” principles in the name of the so-called specificity of Islam – and Christian-Democrat parties of modern Europe is therefore not valid, strictly speaking, even though American media and diplomatic circles continue to make allusion to the said parallel so as to legitimise their support of possibly “Islamist” regimes. Christian-Democracy is an element of modernity of which it upholds the fundamental concept of creative democracy as the essential aspect of the concept of secularism. Political Islam refuses modernity and proclaims this fact without being able to understand its significance.

Hence, the proposed Islam does not deserve at all to be qualified as “modern” and the supporting arguments advanced in this regard by friends of “dialogue” are extremely platitudinous: they range from the use of cassettes by its propagandists to the observation that these agents are recruited from among the “educated” classes – engineers for instance! Moreover, these movements’ discourse solely reflects Wahabite Islam, which rejects all that the interaction between historical Islam and Greek philosophy had produced in its epoch, as it merely turned over the unimaginative writings of Ibn

Taymiya, the most reactionary of the theologians of the Middle Ages. Although some of his heralds qualify this interpretation as “a return to the sources”, it is actually a mere reference to the notions that prevailed two hundred years ago, notions of a society whose development has been stalled for several centuries.

The contemporary Political Islam is not the outcome of a reaction to the so-called abuses of secularism, as often purported, unfortunately. It is because no Muslim society of modern times – except in the former Soviet Union – has ever been truly secular, let alone appalled at the daring innovations of any atheistic and aggressive power. The semi-modern State of Kemal’s Turkey, Nasser’s Egypt, Baathist Syria and Iraq merely subjugated the men of religion (as it often happened in former times) to impose on them concepts solely aimed at legitimising its political options. The beginnings of a secular idea existed only in certain critical intellectual circles. The secular idea did not have much impact on the State, which sometimes retreated in this respect when obsessed with its nationalist project, thereby causing a break with the policy adopted by the Wafd since 1919, as testified by the disturbing evolution inaugurated even at the time of Nasser. The reason for this drift is perhaps quite obvious: whereas the democracy of the said regimes was rejected, a substitute was found in the so-called homogeneous community, with its danger obviously extending to the declining democracy of the contemporary Western world itself.

Political Islam intends to perfect an evolution already well established in the countries concerned and aimed at restoring a plainly conservative theocratic order associated with a political power of the “Mameluke” type. The reference to this military caste that ruled up to two centuries ago, placed itself above all laws (by pretending to know no law other than the “Shariah”), monopolised profits from the national economy and accepted to play a subsidiary role in the capitalist globalisation of that era – for the sake of “realism” – instantly crosses the mind of anyone who observes the declined post-nationalist regimes of the region as well as the new so-called Islamic regimes, their twin brothers.

From this fundamental point of view, there is no difference between the so-called “radical” movements of Political Islam and those that wanted to appear “moderate” because the aims of both entities are identical.

The case of Iran itself is not an exception to the general rule, despite the confusions that contributed to its success: the concomitance between the rapid development of the Islamist movement and the struggle waged against the Shah who was socially reactionary and politically pro-American. Firstly, the extremely eccentric behaviour of the theocratic ruling power was compensated by its anti-imperialist positions, from which it derived its legitimacy that echoed its powerful popularity beyond the borders of Iran. Gradually, however, the regime showed that it was incapable of meeting the challenge posed by an innovative socio-economic development. The dictatorship of turbaned men of religion, who took over from that of the “Caps” (military and technocrats), as they are referred to in Iran, resulted in a fantastic degradation of the country’s economic machinery. Iran, which boasted about “doing the same as Korea”, now ranks among the group of “Fourth World” countries. The indifference of the ruling power’s hard wing to social problems facing the country’s working classes was the basic cause of its take-over by those who described themselves as “reformers” with a project that could certainly attenuate the rigours of the theocratic dictator, but without renouncing, for all that, its principle enshrined in the Constitution (“wilaya al faqih”), which constituted the basis of the monopoly of a power that was therefore gradually induced to give up its “anti-imperialist” postures and integrate the commonplace compradore world of capitalism of the peripheries. The system of Political Islam in Iran has reached deadlock. The political and social struggles in which the Iranian people have now been plunged might one day lead to the rejection of the very principle of “wilaya al faqih”, which places the college of the men of religion above all institutions of the political and civil society. That is the condition for their success.

Political Islam is in fact nothing other than an adaptation to the subordinate status of the compradore capitalism. Its so-called “moderate” form therefore probably constitutes the principal danger threatening the peoples concerned since the violence of the “radicals” only serves to destabilise the

State to allow for the installation of a new compradore power. The constant support offered by the pro-American diplomacies of the Triad countries towards finding this “solution” to the problem is absolutely consistent with their desire to impose the globalised liberal order in the service of the dominant capital.

The two discourses of the globalised liberal capitalism and Political Islam do not conflict; they are rather complementary. The ideology of American “communitarianisms” being popularised by current fashion overshadows the conscience and social struggles and substitutes for them, so-called collective “identities” that ignore them. This ideology is therefore perfectly manipulated in the strategy of capital domination because it transfers the struggle from the arena of real social contradictions to the imaginary world that is said to be cultural, trans-historical and absolute, whereas Political Islam is precisely a communitarianism”.

The diplomacies of the G7 powers, and particularly that of the United States, know what they do in choosing to support Political Islam. They have done so in Afghanistan by describing its Islamists as “freedom fighters” (!) against the horrible dictatorship of communism, which was in fact an enlightened, modernist, national and populist despotism that had the audacity to open schools for girls! They continue to do so from Egypt to Algeria. They know that the power of Political Islam has the virtue – to them – of making the peoples concerned helpless and consequently ensuring their compradorisation without difficulty.

Given its inherent cynicism, the American Establishment knows how to take a second advantage of Political Islam. The “drifts” of the regimes that it inspires – the Taliban for instance – who are not drifts in any way but actually come within the logic of their programmes, can be exploited whenever imperialism finds it expedient to intervene brutally, if necessary. The “savagery” attributed to the peoples who are the first victims of Political Islam is likely to encourage “islamophobia” and that facilitates the acceptance of the perspective of a “global apartheid”-- the logical and necessary outcome of an ever-polarising capitalist expansion.

The sole political movements using the label of Islam, which are categorically condemned by the G7 powers, are those involved in anti-imperialist struggles – under the objective circumstances at the local level: Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. It is not a matter of chance.

### **III CULTURALISM IS NOT THE RESPONSE TO THE DESTRUCTIVE DIMENSION OF THE ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL**

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, 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 19<sup>th</sup> century imagined it, Marx included despite his reservations against the simplified scheme which the social democracy adopted without nuances. It did not "proletarianize" 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 squarely 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 aut centered. 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 the shy 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> century the principal contradiction of the system remains the same as the one which dominated the 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

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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