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OLD AND NEW CONTRADICTIONS OF CAPITALISM: GEOGRAPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

1. *Capitalism and geographical research* – The capitalistic system now fully coincides with the World System (Wallerstein, 1978).

With the exception of Popular China, which does have a capitalistic economy, and Cuba, where the Castro regime and the planned economy are at their end, only North Korea is a symbol of an anti-capitalist system, through an authoritarian power, that is very different from the forms of collectivist social-economy.

Beyond the States which, officially or not, make resistance to the free market logics, capitalism is winning everywhere. This is self-evident for the absence of oppositions to its principles and praxes, which are widely adopted, because recognized and perceived as elements that bring positive consequences.

The «End of History» (Fukuyama, 1992) was written in this perspective: in that book the world homogenization to the free market economies was targeted as the *file rouge* of the world's destiny.

In my opinion, as soon as capitalism triumphs, it will start to decline, as it occurred in other political systems. Its capabilities to reproduce and to expand itself will be replaced by another system, which may display the same features of capitalism (nowadays quiescent or recessive), which we cannot foresee now.

In other words, I argue that the actual political, social, economic, productive, exchange and geographical system (Harvey, 1998) can resist for longer time, thanks to its auto-corrective and resilient capabilities. The actual system is going to be substituted with another one which will better answer ~~to~~ the human needs.

This occasion, organized by Angelo Turco, is a good chance for the Italian geographers for a fruitful debate on these topics, starting from two recent works which contributed to the international debate. The scientific community has the chance to start a new progression of knowledge, in order to give useful answers on the world transformations thus recognizing and leading the processes of the new geographies.

The two volumes (resulting from the above-mentioned debates) were written by Thomas Piketty (2014) and by David Harvey (2014): the first one is about capitalism during the current century and the

second one is about the contradictions of capitalism, intended as elements of crisis and eventual collapse. Indeed, the books represent two very useful platforms for the reflections on the recent, deep and enduring crisis of the society founded on the capital, which made evident the elements of its malfunctioning.

On these issues geography has good arguments to offer a specific point of view, because of its general heuristic characteristics, its methodologies of analysis, its ability to study the complex processes and the relations occurring on the geographical spaces which produce territories.

Angelo Turco has already experienced these kinds of reflections: I clearly remember his successful contribution, with Adalberto Vallega and other scholars, to a productive season of disciplinary renewal focused on the regional scale. That approach made the Italian geography a point of reference for other international «schools», and it contributed to open new spaces of very useful interdisciplinary and intergenerational dialogue.

2 – The contradictions of capital and the spatial issue. – The present occasion is very relevant and it implies a great labor, because of the above-mentioned wide scenario that implies both a great openness to other disciplines and an international connection, as the bibliography at the end of the Harvey's book testifies.

Moreover, the recent national framework of the Italian geographers requires a higher level of analysis, which is an essential condition to regain academic positions and not to lose positions in the cultural field.

For geographers, and the Italian ones in particular, contributing to the debate on the contradictions of the capital should be simple. Harvey targets seven main contradictions that may be termed as the “capital contradictions” of the capital and of the socio-spatial structure in which they are historically included.

Not rather than a process of research from our discipline, a deep rethinking should be proposed in the light of the recent fast evolutions (somehow a revolution) of the researches already carried out in order to verify the assumptions and the obtained results.

The geographical research has already outlined the contradictory results of the basic capitalistic dynamics and the spatial dimensions at its base.

A wide consideration has been given to the processes of territorial accumulation, which is the origin of the regional imbalances, hierarchies and subordinations of spaces. Some theories have been proposed about the relations between center and periphery, and about the globalized aspects of the dialectic links between the economic-territorial development and underdevelopment and between rich and poor countries (Reynaud, 1984).

Even if those were not well studied by geographers, similar aspects were studied in the migration research field, as useful elements to the territorial reproduction of capital, because generated by the spaces of reserve of the labor force (Tinacci, 1990).

Similarly, an important field of study was about the territorial “assimilation” of the capital in the form of infrastructures or more in general of the fixed social capital. This demonstrates the results of the territorialization processes, of the territorial production made for the reduction of the contradiction between capitalistic process and the capital as a stock.

Last, but not least, we have to remember the first contradiction created by the capital, when it gives to the trade value a primary and an effective function instead of both the exchange value and the concurrency: the dialectic origins and consequences of the geographical spaces considered as a good were deeply studied by geography, even if not considering the solutions to these problems (Di Sopra, 1975).

On all these issues, as written before, I will focus my attention later, in order to give coherent order and more research value.

Furthermore, it would be very useful – or necessary – to devote specific attention to Harvey’s thoughts concerning the contradictions of capitalism and the relations between private ownership, commons and the public policies, not considered before by the geographers.

The “convergent” rediscovery of the commons, from different points of view and from geography, is giving new shape to this “category” of research, which has not been valued before. It was like a wreck of social and territorial issues, obsolete and reduced to the rank of an object the object of study of the historians (Turco, 2014).

As I will better explain later, the focus on commons may be the focal point on which: 1) the legitimacy and credibility of the public policies and the primacy of politics over economy can be constructed or reconstructed; 2) the sharp contradiction between the phases of production and realization – as described by Harvey – can be reduced; 3) an extensive program that includes new (or renewed) contradictions of the capital and of its concrete consequences can be planned.

3 – The capital and the geographies of social and landscape changes. – The most part of a research on the emerging contradictions has not been carried out yet. It should focus its attention on the divergence, nowadays evident and the quality of life and the level of social wealth, between the strong growth of the productions and the systemic production because of the technologies, and the common wealth and the labor division, with its productive advantages.

The activated dialectic processes have deep consequences on the regression of the contained spaces of social marginality, with the rise of new geographies of poverty that have a direct impact on the urban

and suburban fabrics. Secondly, a great mass of production is often realized thanks to technology with increasing environmental damages, because of taking *from* nature and spilling *onto* nature.

The geographical scales play a key role in these processes, with comparative consequences the levels of the new poorness, of the territories used by technology and of the used environmental heritage. In this regard, some other perspectives rise mostly concerning environmental issues, that can link in a unique framework the new geography of the job and of the migration flows, as the recent encyclical by Pope Francis (2015) well outlined.

The Italian geographers should contribute to the construction of a frame of analysis on the relations between territory and work, because that is a crucial issue in the Italian spaces, both from a qualitative and a quantitative point of view and for the worst conditions of labor that recently emerged. The complexity of the migration flows that directly regard Italy should be mentioned; adequate levels of analysis, interpretation and actions are still missing. Furthermore, the capitalistic contradictory evolutions hit the labor in the humanities fields of study.

This type of geographical research should consider even the social reproduction and its territorial consequences, in the current condition of capitalistic organization of the World-society. The analysis on the earning, social and territorial divergences should naturally emerge, because of the falling of the myth of the convergence as a progressive process and because of the rising of divergence as a rule.

The theoretical passages and the more and more accurate analyses made by social geography (Cerreti, Dumont, Tabusi, 2012) may be well integrated with the economic and political geography, mostly on above-mentioned issues and on the evolution of one of the most interesting contradictions of the capital: competition and monopolies, spatial concentration and centrifugal tendencies.

These are the main topics of the capital, as a reference of the consumer and productive organization. As far as the monopolistic control, the democratic freedoms and the decisional autocracies, the territorial concentration and distribution, the Harvey's opinion is that they are all necessary for the reproduction of the capital. All these topics should be the object of a deep geographic research, in order to give a clearer idea of the World capitalistic organization.

The landscape, and its changes because of capital and capitalism, may be another key point of the geographical research: the landscape production shows the dialectic relations between the concentration and desertification places (Società Geografica Italiana, 2009).

That is a central point, and not only from a disciplinary perspective. The recent evolution of the capital indeed shows how wrong was the idea of the landscape as a neutral object of the production of capital, which is focused on the building of structures for its own existence and vitality. Basically, in that interpretation the capital would be unlinked to the landscapes and to the spaces of identity.

With this purpose, the construction of the landscape would be the only answer to profits and incomes, without considering any other secondary subjects able to produce spaces.

While in the peripheries the profit becomes landscape because of the triumphant capital (with strong consequences on the environmental and human needs), in the city centers, it creates specific forms of urban landscape, born from the good practices stemming from capitalism itself.

4 – An indestructible primacy?. – A celebration of the capital's primacy is happening, as well as a process of THE world's homologation to it, through the control of spaces that are useful to its maintenance and development, the production of territories as its expressions and finally through landscapes as its images.

In this way, the capital is rising onto the world, as the son of modernity with its own consequences. It seems to intensify the bipolar syndrome that emerges on the one hand when the capital facilitates its intrinsic freedom, on the other hand when it needs to strengthen the praxis of control. The consequence is the annulment of the utopian dream of a better world which was at its base (Stiglitz, 2011).

At the same time, the capital cannot renounce to its primacy, otherwise it would decrease. The qualitative and quantitative growth represents the natural development of the capital. It cannot reach the asymptote, because the process of accumulation and the consequent bulimia are the intrinsic steps of its evolution. Without considering the real limits of the accumulation process through the financial and "virtual" economy, well exposed by Harvey, we have to consider the finiteness and the complexity of the real economy; the antinomy between capitalistic development and sustainable development; and the irreducible contradiction born from the international action starting from the last generation (Tinacci, 2014).

Furthermore, we should analyze the relation between capital and environment, which capitalism considers as a good to be privatized, capitalized, merchandized and exchanged. Even if the environmental crisis sometimes is yet to come thanks to strategic actions that transform the crisis into economic opportunities, the finiteness of the capital and the complexity of the environment persist. An intrinsic antinomy to the "ecologic functionalist system, mechanized and technocratic" as a consequence of the capital, remains as well (Tinacci, 2013).

More generally, the complexity of our world remains the same, as much as the aspiration of eliminating any risk for individuals and humanity.

Geography can offer its contribution by analysing that complexity, starting from its disciplinary roots, in search for utopia for a new humanism and for a better world, through new ways.

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