

Democracy, The Autonomous Struggle for Achieving Sustainability. By Ioannis Rigkos

The world is facing terrifying geopolitical transformations. People around the world come face to face with enormous geopolitical and physical changes at a pace that cannot be controlled by any institution or organization. As I argue, the question of how we are about to face these transformations is lying in the "heart" of our individual and sociopolitical constructions. And by that I mean that this question relates to how the socio-historical beings, (people), construct and institutionalize their individual and social imaginary. The purpose of this presentation is to bring awareness of how some of the basic concepts of the imaginary of modernity, such as the word "development", links and evolves with the way the hegemonic political ideology establishes the ways we perceive, internalize, produce and reproduce the socio-political realities in which we live within.

Development, A Term with a long History

The concept of development runs the entire spectrum of socio-political imaginary of modern and postmodern realities. From the left to the right, from the way Nazis and Communists understand the supposed "human nature", the hegemonic belief was that the human starts from an undeveloped point and through a linear process (humanity) is evolving the alleged "human nature". This has always been central to the political ideology of modernity and it has affected the ways that human establishes, produces and reproduces the socio-political structures that human beings live within.

As we reached the 1990s and moved into today, namely in 2016, the ecological and environmental necessity leads one section of society to intensify the struggle to raise public awareness on the significance of political change of the global capitalist paradigm towards policies friendly to the environment and humans. In dialectical level, this appears through the incorporation of the term viability and sustainability as a key element in the central concept of development. Thus, today we hear almost all official institutions talking about viable and sustainable development as a prerequisite

for the construction of a productive model that would allow humans to survive the suicidal voltage of a dogma, which has been constructed upon the faith of a continuous and linear "development" of social "evolution" which ultimately affects the whole mode of production. But we should not be fooled. Capitalism has shown a tremendous resilience and radicalism in the way that it reforms most of the social struggles and social movements by absorbing and transforming their radicalism. As I argue, capitalism works through the illusion and the satisfaction of the guilt of the individual consciousness in order to neutralize a radical change in the whole production process.

But what does viable and sustainable development mean? Viable and sustainable development means "a set of ideas, concepts and classifications that has come to dominate the environmental policy making" (Hajer 1995, 44). However, two different narratives of the discourse for sustainable development seem to share the broader picture of the hegemonic discourse and compete to determine the principles and define policies at national and supra-national levels. Firstly, "the socio-economic narrative argues that economic growth will achieve its social objectives, and secondly, the alternative claims that environmental priorities is the key. So there are two narratives in reflections of the general law, which both prioritize different social objectives "(Bingham 2010, 31) of capitalism and particularly they are both affected by the neoliberal dogma.

Capitalism and the Fraud of Viable and Sustainable Development Discourse

Professor Natasha Romanou argues that there are three major misconceptions about the production and reproduction of capitalist problems associated with eco-environmental destruction mainly in southern Europe. The first misconception, according to Romanou, who agrees with Castoriadis, is that "capitalism, based on the continuous development and competition, profit maximization, the unequal distribution of power, the accumulation of wealth by the oligarchy, the commercialization of public assets and resources, and voracious exploitation of the environment "(2014), is the reason why our societies continue to produce and reproduce the crisis that has spread to the collapse of the banking system nowadays.

Another misconception is based on the effects of the capitalist imaginary and the crisis over societies. Romanou notes that the debate and the answers that focus on economic impact alone, leaving aside very important aspects (wage cuts, unemployment, deteriorating conditions for the working class), regarded as external costs and are not included in the tools that companies use to measure the effectiveness and efficiency. "The same social crisis manifested in the growing and uncontrolled consumerism, which leads to over-exploitation of natural resources, but also as the competition for resources becomes fiercer which leads in appearance of ultra-nationalism and racism" (ibid). Thus, as she argues, "the political crisis reflects a democratic deficit within the growing dissatisfaction and resistance is growing as a consequent upon the abuse, police violence and state repression "(ibid).

The third misconception, as she points out, is the emergency ecology, "the frantic race to still extract more natural resources (oil, gas, gold and other precious metals) using more and more dangerous methods such as extracting oil from tar sands, the search for oil in the ocean, the natural gas drilling and the development of the method of fracking "(ibid). "The Massive land grabbing and resources privatization also lead to an increased environmental degradation. Above all, however, climate change is the outcome of an extreme increase of gas emissions into the atmosphere, where as it appears, through its effects, it is the ultimate triumph of capitalist greed over nature "(ibid) but also as I argue, over democracy.

Autonomy-Democracy as a Way Out

Today the left and the right in the political spectrum use the term viable and sustainable development in almost the entire range of their political agendas. Even the political powers outside of the parliamentary spectrum are self-trapped in the same discourse. Of course, as I argue, following the thought of Castoriadis, this is because in the whole spectrum of modernity, namely from fascism to communism, the idea of development had always played a central role in the socio-political dialectics. Therefore this means, according to Castoriadis, that neither Marxists nor communist regimes, never managed to actually offer an alternative to capitalism, neither if it is expressed through the dictatorship of capital, or the dictatorship of the proletariat. Even movements of post-modernity, such as the ones who believe in the idea of de-

growth, as I argue, they are located right in the middle of the same problem which dialectically, completely ignores the socio-historical context, beyond and outside of modernity.

There is a clear distinction in my way of thinking. This is the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous societies. This division is based on the fact that “autonomy can be expressed only when we create institutions which are internalized by individuals and so facilitate their integration into their individual autonomy and their effective citizen participation in all forms of explicit power existing in society” (Curtis 1997, 405). Autonomy means not only that the tradition can be questioned, but everything can be put into question (Gezerlis 2001, 472). Consequently, when Castoriadis refers to the imaginary institutions of society, he refers to the word institution in the broadest sense, where it influences and affects "all the tools, language skills, rules and values" (Castoriadis 2010, 46) which govern all social structures.

Castoriadis identifies the development of capitalism and of "democracy" in modernity, as the result of heteronomous development of society. For Castoriadis it is clear that modernity's idea of governance leads to a paramorphosis of the term "democracy" which for him, as for me, can best be described as liberal oligarchy. One of the key points of Castoriadis on the autonomy project, are the characteristics that may lead to it. He claims that mortality and the acceptance of it are vital elements to humans in order to create awareness for the construction of self-reflecting and self-limiting realities (2010, 213). Today, as Castoriadis argues, "we are witnessing the total domination of the capitalist imaginary: the centrality of the economic sphere, the unlimited, supposedly, rational development of production, and consumption, more or less programmed and manipulated leisure" (2010, 206). Moreover, he continues, "the development of techno-science, and the fact that scientists have nothing to say about the capitalist orientation, has created an environmental problem that became even more serious today" (2010, 198). As he argues, that instead, we need cautiousness. The exclusive presence of techno-bureaucracy (economic and scientific actors) is organically and structurally incapable of promoting cautiousness, since the very existence and driving force of it is only the illusion of unlimited expansion. So, we

need true democracy, setting the wider possible procedures for thought and discussion, with the participation of citizens as a whole (2010, 195).

Moreover, Castoriadis argues that viability, sustainability and autonomy are built upon the access to vital forms of information and forms of knowledge of the socio-historical and political subjects. A democratic society is an autonomous society and an autonomous society is above all a self-limited society (2010, 196).

So as Howard Zinn argues, we need an "introduction to a new kind of society, egalitarian, peaceful and equitable in which no law or president cannot give to people" (2002, 143). The expectation of the people all over the world, but also by society as a whole that by changing government they will solve their problems, does not begin nor ends in a small case but it is, as I argue, the fundamental political problem of the political in modernity and it is directly connected with the forms and our understanding of governmentality and representation. This is a problem deeply rooted inside the socio-historical and political subjects (people) of modernity. If a way is not to be found to express an alternative of autonomy and democracy at the same time, humanity will sooner or later experience in incalculable extent the fruits of heteronomy, because today capitalism has all the necessary means for the mass extermination of all the species of our planet in very short time.

The struggle for autonomy and democracy today can start from small resistance cores that societies can create by rebuilding democratic units that will gradually be imposed on small, sustainable, human scale and these formations should be able to interact in the context of solidarity, in terms of political autonomy and as I argue, following a string of thought of Alain Badiou, the politics of freedom and love.

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