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The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx.

Some remarks

1 The Italian perception of Marx's studies on precapitalistic societies

The discovery of the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oeconomie* in the 1950's and in particular of their section entitled "Formen, die der kapitalistische Produktion vorhergehen" provoked a far-reaching debate in Italy, that involved essentially historians of the ancient world in an evaluation of both the significance of these notebooks in marxian thought and of the applicability of Marx's categories to historic research on the ancient world.

The Italian translation of the *Grundrisse* in 1968-1970 was then a further stimulus to this discussion.

In *Marxismo e società antica*, for example, the problem of understanding the space that precapitalistic societies would occupy in a marxian reading of history was raised, it having been assumed beforehand that this reading was a pancapitalistic one.¹ Here the relationship between the political and economical was reexamined as was the possibility of integrating marxian analysis with Finley's and Polanyi's research and therefore by implication with Max Weber's. The editor begins by opposing a selection of Polanyi's and Finley's publications, in whom the marxian theory on precapitalistic societies has been enriched by some weberian categories, to a set of Italian and non-Italian researcher's essays; in these essays, in anthesis to the former, the sort of sociological-anthropological-structural *koinè* as the editor calls it with which marxian analysis of the ancient world could have been enriched, was shattered (intellectual father of this fusion was Lukács in his *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* this *koinè*, those researchers say, seems quite unable to clarify the dynamics of historical transformations).

But even this last group of historians raises the need to rethink marxian intellectual theory on the Greek and Roman world in the light of the "Formen".

In February 1978 in *Analisi marxista e società antiche* a group of ancient world historians after four years of collaboration established the premises of an interdisciplinary rereading of marxian notions of social-economic formation and mode of production.²

After all, a text like that of "Formen", states Aldo Schiavone, involves precisely the historian because of the scope with which it allows for a construction of a specific dimension of history mainly as a result of its economic and political theory.³ Furthermore the discovery and publication of the *Grundrisse* rekindles an interest in a reading of marxian conceptions of history which are free from the vice of a unilinear evolutionism; in some Italian researchers we can find in fact the underlining of the co-existence in marxian thought of two dif-

¹ *Marxismo e società antica*, edited by Mario Vegetti, Feltrinelli, Milan 1977.

² *Analisi marxista e società antiche*, edited by Luigi Capogrossi, Andrea Giardina, Aldo Schiavone, Editori Riuniti-Istituto Gramsci, Rome 1978.

³ Aldo Schiavone, "Per una rilettura delle 'Formen': teoria della storia, dominio del valore diluso e funzione dell'ideologia", in *Analisi marxista e società antiche*, Editori Riuniti-Istituto Gramsci, Rome 1978, pp. 75-106.

ferent histories, between whom Marx didn't allow any relation of contiguity; that is the history of the rise of capital and contemporary history. A history of discontinuities and not of ascending progressions therefore. But if the discovery of the *Grundrisse* and in particular of the paragraph entitled "Formen, die der kapitalistische Produktion vorhergehen" led Italian historians to rethink interpretations of the II International of marxian thought, by contrast others looked to it for the re-establishment of the line of continuity, that the "Formen" seemed to have obliterate.

It is a debate ultimately characterized by conflicting opinions even though, undoubtedly, some solutions had been reached by compromise.

There are on the one hand those who state, as does Vincenzo Di Benedetto in *Filologia e marxismo. Contro le mistificazioni*, the radical non-homogeneity of the "Formen" when compared to the fragmentary remarks on the ancient world expressed in *Kapital*.⁴ Di Benedetto, later on, sets apart the "Formen" text from the rest of marxian thought. Here ancient communities are seen as still lacking the elements of disgregation which Marx will demonstrate present in the roman world in *Kapital* and he doesn't describe the complicated web of clashing interests and segmentations, that the later work would reveal. Probably, sustains Di Benedetto, Marx intended to look in the "Formen" for those items that would identify the ancient greek and roman communities with precapitalistic societies.⁵

In the *Ethnological Notebooks* by contrast this researcher demonstrates Marx's 'modernistic' reading of the ancient world: the rift can be healed.

On the other side of the fence we find Gianni Sofri, who even before the publication of Di Benedetto's work was in sharp conflict with him in an inquiry over the significance of the painstaking attention given to *Grundrisse* by Italian researchers in the second half of the seventies.⁶ Sofri underlines and upholds the co-existence of 'different' Marxes, even leaving the chronological arrangement of his writings out of consideration. There is a Marx, who attempts to establish the general rules of historical development and a Marx, who analytically studies the role of capital in history and the features which distinguish it from precapitalistic societies. This last one is a Marx who is projected by an exclusive reading of his notebooks. The debate's core however emerges as the possibility of establishing either a relation of continuity or of rupture between the marxian analysis of the ancient world, present in *Kapital* and that of the "Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen". Therefore another ambiguity must be rectified: why in *Kapital* is the slave mode of production endogenous in the roman world, while in the "Formen" it becomes a factor of dissolution?

In *Analisi marxista e società antiche* the slave mode of production is characterized as a 'mode of transition' between ancient society and other socio-economic formations.⁷ The uncertainty and obscurity with which Marx analyses it in *Kapital* and the "Formen" would be the result of its transitional nature. Having outlined the debate, I would like to examine the question in the light of a reading of the *Ethnological Notebooks* and starting from the conviction that the "Formen" and the *Ethnological Notebooks* show a whole series of common features, that cannot be overlooked.

⁴ Vincenzo Di Benedetto, Alessandro Lami, *Filologia e marxismo, Contro le mistificazioni*, Liguori, Naples 1980, pp. 25-48.

⁵ The *Ethnological Notebooks* of Karl Marx, edited by Lawrence Krader, Van Gorcum, Assen 1972.

⁶ *Marxismo, mondo antico e terzo mondo*, edited by Enrico Flores, Liguori, Naples 1979, pp. 180-185.

⁷ *op. cit.*, pp. 107-145.

2. *The Ethnological Notebooks*

In the notebooks written between 1881-1883 Marx expresses an anthropological concern present from his very early years of intense intellectual activity, manifest when in preparing a *Geschichte der Kunst und der Religionen* in 1841 he took notes from Charles de Brosses's work entitled *Du culte des dieux fétiches*.⁸ It is an interest that is evident in the Ethnological Notebooks through the care with which Marx takes notes from Morgan's *Ancient Society* on the various and entangled degrees of collateral relationships, on the nomenclature used to refer to it, the classes of kinship according to the different systems, the turanic or ganowanian systems of consanguinity as demonstrated by the Seneca-Iroquois with their relative and unreadable terminology of kinship, we also find a lot of underlinings in his notes on the funeral ceremonies of the *fratria*-chiefs and on the rite of convocation of the council of *gentes*, the so-called ceremony of the *calumet*.⁹

The work of interpreting *The Notebooks* and in particular of the part dedicated to Morgan's *Ancient Society*, even if hard and achieved essentially *e silentio*, reveals some interesting points on whether the marxian thought expresses or refutes unilinear evolutionism, an important aspect of the debate surrounding marxian thought which reopened in Italy in the seventies. It is easy then to see that, in these quotes from Morgan, while on the one hand Marx notes the concentration and the spread of the tribes of american Indians from the centers of natural bounty to the surrounding areas, on the other hand he takes notice of an opposite phenomenon. The Aztecs, in fact, even if they had occupied the best situation in the valley, settled on a territory of dry earth surrounded by marshes. Therefore natural endowments are not always and everywhere catalysts. In fact technology allows man to break his ties with the earth and thus mechanical engineering helped this people.¹⁰

Still in the light of different developments in evolutionary grades we note the dichotomy between Morgan's remark, underlined by Marx, on the Messageti who, having arrived at a certain degree of sophistication in the techniques of smelting, couldn't have remained at the stage of the promiscuous group¹¹, then these notes on the old Britons, who "seem to have been savages in their brains, while wearing the art apparel of more advanced tribes", which Marx describes as relatively common.¹²

Then with regard to the cultivation of cereals preceding, according to Morgan, the migration from the grassy plains to the woodlands in Asia and Europe, destined to be included in the life style of our asiatic ancestors, Marx puts Morgan's reservation regarding the Celts in brackets.¹³

Thus he picks out similar phenomena which however have distinctive features and as a far from passive reader he writes notes in the margins, modifies, inserts. Furthermore the unsustainable presence in Morgan's thought (who in fact far from conceiving of a radical parallelism sometimes reveals himself a supporter of diffusionism) of an orthodox evolutionism attracts Marx's attention; he underlines the diffusion occurring in underdeveloped tribes of the discoveries and inventions of the more advanced.¹⁴

⁸ MEGA² IV/1, Berlin 1976.

⁹ op. cit., pp. 97-241.

¹⁰ op. cit., pp. 156-160; 188.

¹¹ op. cit., p. 110.

¹² op. cit., p. 118.

¹³ op. cit., p. 132.

¹⁴ op. cit., p. 129.

Orthodox evolutionism must, to be consistent, have the power to demonstrate a causality that is always identical, progressions through the same reproductive mechanisms. But certainly it wasn't so for Morgan who declared in *System of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family*: "If it is assumed then that the Turanian and Ganowanian [terminologies] ... were created independently in Asia and in America, would each by imperative necessity have passed through the same experience, have developed the same sequence of customs and institutions, and, as a final result, have produced the same identical system of relationship? The statement of the proposition seems to work its refutation on the grounds of its excessive improbability ... If the two families commenced on separate continents in a state of promiscuous intercourse it would be a little less than a miracle if both should develop the same ultimate system of relationship."¹⁵

And in the same line of thought it is particularly interesting to note that, while according to Morgan the formation of monogamic family brings with it its own strong autonomy, a renunciation of community life in a big collective house, Marx remarks on the persistence of cohabitation of already monogamic families. This is the case of the Southern Slavs and the Russian peasants before and after the emancipation of the serfs (an event that on the contrary could have helped to develop the entrepreneur's abilities and the autonomy of the individual).¹⁶ What can we conclude then if, having underlined Morgan's words "Communism in living seems to have been originated in the necessities of the consanguine family, to have been continued in the punaluan, and transmitted to the syndyasmian under d. American aborigenes, with whom it remained a practice down to the epoch of their discovery", Marx intervenes expressing his perplexity about the way of life of the Southern Slavs and the Russians?¹⁷

These are comments that clash with characteristics of an evolutionary concept of history for which the 'different', 'the other' in as much as they are 'simple steps of an evolutionary stair' are relegated to a remote past; in Marx's notes they seem to become the other side of our 'distant present'. Thus in the same light in regard to the General Indian Tribes Council where the sachem voted by tribe and every tribe could oppose itself to the other, Marx cites the case of Poland where, the establishment of the 'liberum veto' in 1652, fixed the principle of unanimity in the Diet's decisions.¹⁸

There is an explanation of this attitude: in a letter to Engels, dated 25 March 1868, Marx having expressed some reflections on George Ludwig von Maurer's work, underlines, to his merit, the dissolution of a sort of 'judicial blindness' in consequence of which researchers like paleontologists see in the oldest phenomena the reflection of the present; they discover themselves since the first dawnings of a people 'egalitarian to a degree'. The discovery, made by Maurer, of the persistence of communal-soil management types in Germany until recently along with the discovery of the remains of the old clan subdivisions in northern and western Ireland led the late Marx less to develop a strict evolutionist pattern, in which the primitive features of the present are stressed, than to conceive, on the contrary, of the idea of alternative histories.¹⁹

¹⁵ Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*, Routledge, London 1969, p. 178.

¹⁶ op. cit., p. 116.

¹⁷ op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁸ op. cit., p. 166.

¹⁹ Karl Marx, *Friedrich Engels Opere*, vol. XLIII, Editori Riuniti, Rome 1975, pp. 57-59; Karl Marx, *Friedrich Engels Opere*, vol. XLIII, cit., p. 517.

The researches achieved by Morgan among the Iroquois helped Marx to understand some peculiar uses spread among some nations of Europe. In strict connection with this view of history, that breaks with the strict evolutionism of positivist thought, stands another interesting text of these years.

On the 8 December 1882 Engels writes to Marx, expressing his amazement over the profound similarities between the American Redskins and the Germans of Tacitus, although they had fundamentally different modes of production: "Die Ähnlichkeit ist in der Tat um so überraschender, als die Produktionsweise so grundverschieden - hier Fischer und Jäger ohne Viehzucht und Ackerbau, dort Wanderviehzucht übergehend in Ackerbau."²⁰ Far from building a strict priority of stages, Marx restores heuristic qualities to Morgan's ethnic periods. Already in the "Einleitung" to *Grundrisse*, in fact, he criticized that misunderstood Robinson Crusoe, invented and embellished by the philosophers according to their philosophical categories. All this is fruit of 'judicial blindness', though Marx doesn't regard himself immune as having read Maurer, and only then, he remembers what his father told him about the ancient German system, surviving in Hunsrück, his country, until a short time before.²¹

What can we make of a Marx that, tenacious critic of the *homo oeconomicus* built by the English economists, sustained in a pancecapitalistic perspective an almost teleological view of history?

Therefore as much as the evolutionary view of history is a fruit of ideological mystification which makes the 'savage' a forerunner of the modern capitalist, so also is it the fruit of a misunderstanding of *Kapital* to conceive it as the "théorie historico-philosophique de la marche générale fatalement imposée à tous les peuples, quelles que soient les circonstances historique où ils se trouvent placés, pour arriver en dernier lieu à cette formation économique, qui assure avec le plus grand essor des pouvoirs productifs du travail social le développement le plus intégral de chaque producteur individuel."²²

In this way the free peasants whose land was expropriated in ancient Rome to increase the big landed properties and the great monetary capitals, didn't become an army of wage-earners: "donc des événements d'une analogie frappante, mais se passant dans des milieux historiques différents, amenèrent des résultats tout-à-fait disparates."²³

In analogy with this kind of historical reading in a later text, in his letter to Vera Zasulich' to be exact, the idea that socialism could assert itself through other ways and not necessarily through the passage through capitalism finds expression.

In the preliminary sketches to the letter, in fact, Marx examines not only the factors of disintegration of the Russian rural community but also the vital elements, that could assure its survival.²⁴

The fact that Marx doesn't characterize historical causality as being always identical strikes the author of a recent published book, entitled *Marx on classical antiquity*. Padelis Lekas notices a fruitful discrepancy, that he doesn't intend to resolve, between the programmatic statements expressed in 1859 in the "Vorrede" to *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* and the analysis of the *Grundrisse*.²⁵ How can one not be surprised at seeing that in the

²⁰ MEW, Bd. 35, Berlin 1967, p. 125.

²¹ Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels Opere, vol. XLIII, Editori Riuniti, Rome 1975, p. 58.

²² MEGA² I/25, Berlin 1985, p. 116.

²³ op. cit., p. 117.

²⁴ MEGA² I/25, Berlin 1985, pp. 219-230.

²⁵ Padelis Lekas, *Marx on classical antiquity*, Wheatsheaf Books, Sussex 1988.

"Formen" the asiatic world is not presented at all as a developing society, but as the 'dead cape' of evolution, while in the 1859 "Vorrede" Marx expressed a general rule of historic movement distinguished by the contradiction between the endless trend to increase the productive forces and the limits imposed by productive relations which have become obsolete? What should one say about the lacking evolution of the Far East that Marx, in a 1853 article entitled "The British Rule in India", thought had its only possibility of change in the english import of capitalism?

With regard to the endogenous features of historic evolution as outlined in the 1859 "Vorrede" what can one conclude from colonization in Greece, perceived as by Marx as a solution for the problem of demographic increase that endangered the principle of citizenship, associated with the distribution of lots of land? This phenomenon of demographic increase in classical Greece didn't bring with it an increase of productive forces. It was on the contrary a political problem worked out with political means. Furthermore, says Lekas, the scanty productivity of servile work itself and the fact, noted by Marx, that the rich roman didn't canalize his wealth into investments, but often dissipated it through civil and religious feasts and in the building of public edifices in support of his political candidature, the growing cost of slaves after augustean peace are all factors characterizing, under Marx's eyes, an ancient world which is not at all on the road towards a progressive increase of productive forces. It isn't right then to try to describe the marxian historico-evolutionary thought of this period in terms of an ascendant line and it's more proper to use a well branched-out treeshaped structure.

The problem therefore remains of how to conciliate a thought that tries to build a general theory of history with a Marx who by contrast outlines discreet qualities. I think nevertheless that the idea to analyse the distinctive features of each historic movement, to gather from every history some recurrent phenomena, without fixing them into rules remained till the end an unresolved tension in Marx's thought. This is an hypothesis maintained with the support of a recent study that 'under the title' "Bachofen e l'Origine della famiglia di Engels" 'conceals' some very interesting hypothesis about the connection between the "Formen" and the *Ethnological Notebooks*.²⁶ Probably it is precisely with these notebooks, says Alfonso Iacono, that Marx tried to resolve a question already implicitly lying in the "Formen" and expressed in this way: "nicht die Einheit der lebenden und thätigen Menschen mit den natürlichen, unorganischen Bedingungen ihres Stoffwechsels mit der Natur, und daher ihre Aneignung der Natur - bedarf der Erklärung oder ist Resultat eines historischen Processes, sondern die Trennung zwischen diesen unorganischen Bedingungen des menschlichen Daseins und diesem thätigen Dasein, eine Trennung, wie sie vollstaendig erst gesaetzt ist im Verhaeltniss von Lohnarbeit und Capital." But later, without hasarding a deeper analysis, Marx supplies a generic explanation of the dissolution of the various types of community: "Der Zweck aller dieser Gemeinwesen ist Erhaltung; d.h. Reproduction der Individuen, die es bilden, als Eigenthümer, d.h. in derselben objektiven Existenzweise, die zugleich das Verhalten der Glieder zu einander und daher die Gemeinde selbst bildet. Diese Reproduction ist aber zugleich nothwendig Neuproduction und Destruction der alten Form."²⁷ It is an explanation contained within the idea of the development of productive forces. But

²⁶ Alfonso Iacono, Bachofen e l'Origine della famiglia di Engels, in "Annali della Scuola normale superiore di Pisa" series III, vol. XVIII, 2, Pisa 1988.

²⁷ MEGA² II/1.2, Berlin 1981, p. 393; p. 397.

how can a presupposed form (such as the different community types) have the cause of its dissolution outside the disintegration of its presuppositions?

3. 'Familia'

A series of notes from Morgan seems to show how Marx himself was going to attempt to find a solution to the question formulated above precisely in the sense of the dissolution of presuppositions, of the basic and constitutional features of the precapitalistic societies. My reading of the *Ethnological Notebooks* seems to corroborate then further on Alfonso Iacono's hypothesis.

In fact how else could one explain the repeated criticisms of George Grote's *History of Greece*?

In *History of Greece* the author placed the ground of fratricide, gentes and tribes in the oikos, that is to say, in the family nucleus.

George Grote, Georg Barthold Niebhuhr, Theodor Mommsen and Connop Thirlwall, all repeatedly charged by Marx as being "alle von klassischer Schülergelehrsamkeit", conceived the patriarchal family as the nucleus around which the whole society formed itself in the Greek and Roman systems.²⁸ But in Grote an autonomy of the familiar nucleus against the kinship is not the result, rather, the latter is diminished in favour of the former. Therefore the author explains the gentilitarian bond, like a "Schulgelehrter Philister", as a link in itself that extends "by an artificial analogy" familiar ties and receives its *raison d'être* from a fabulous belief in a mythical founder hero.²⁹

They are ideas, says Marx, Grote "abschmeckt" abundantly.³⁰ Therefore Marx criticizes here the historiography used before by him, he relativises its conceptual patterns basing himself on the discoveries made by Morgan working in the field.

It seems correct to explain the angry statement in this sense: "Alle älteren Burschen - darunter Sie Henry Maine - nehmen Hebrew u. Latin types (patriarchal family) an as producing the earliest organised society ... damit hängt zusammen the hypothesis of human degradation to explain the existence of barbarians and savages."³¹ Marx denies the idea of gentilitarian kinship as a fictitious mean of filiation from a far and not longer traceable ancestor and it is possible to connect some significant notes about the gentilitarian nomenclature with this. It is Morgan who relates how the names of subgentes, fruit of a hypertrophic gens, are personal and regarded as eponymous of their many ancestors. Since the names of the original gentes are nevertheless often names of objects or animals, Marx believed this to be a symptom that personal names could take the place of original names "... ohne dass dieser Change ... anything mit hero worship (als Urahnen) zu tun hätte."³²

So from the first pages of Morgan's excerpts he brands as was fashion the idea of the patriarchal family in its Latin and Jewish form as the element distinguishing primitive society.³³

Therefore "the gens, as it appeared in the later period of barbarism, was understood, but erroneously supposed to be subsequent in point of time to the monogamian family."³⁴

²⁸ The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx, op. cit., p. 200.

²⁹ op. cit., p. 201.

³⁰ op. cit., p. 199.

³¹ op. cit., p. 126.

³² op. cit., p. 182.

³³ op. cit., p. 119.

³⁴ op. cit., p. 119.

So in the same fashion as Grote, Niebhuhr and Julius Pollux too, provincial and idealist erudites, says Marx, conceived of the gens as a merely fictitious creation.³⁵

Marx thunders: "Weil d. Verkettung der Geschlechter, namentlich mit Anbruch d. Monogamie, in d. Ferne gerückt u. d. past reality in mythological Phantasiebild reflectirt erscheint, hence schlossen u. schliessen Philister-Biedermän<n>er, dass d. Phantasiegen<e>alogie wirkliche gentes schuf!"³⁶ The defence of the gens as an element pervading and ruling the whole society, in particular of the gens as a lineage and not as a fictitious creation, simple filiation of family bonds connects with what Morgan affirms; structural differences between gens that, says Morgan, arose from a promiscuous group and survived unchanged in spite of the family's variations, and the family itself place the two institutions on different levels.³⁷ Therefore faced with the idea of the family as an integral nucleus inside roman and greek societies, Marx like Morgan and perhaps more resolutely, emphasizes characteristics which conflict with the gens (which developed after the family), so he enters into conflict with writers such as Niebhuhr which he used extensively and esteemed in the "Formen".

In Morgan's excerpts then Marx seemed to dwell less upon functional elements of the ancient world than upon those factors that would cause its decline as a community. Perhaps he tried to understand how the essential traits of 'primitive' and precapitalistic societies, as described by the ethnologists contemporary with Marx, (that is the smashing up of the social stratification through the egalitarian principles of the clan and the community's supremacy over every other instance) could produce a free individualism of the single member, an atomism of the familiar nucleus and therefore a paternalistic State. This seems to be the main marxian interest. But the precapitalistic communities didn't disintegrate, as Marx's notes suggest, not so much in the course of reproduction, as much as because they expressed those hidden internal contradictions. Then Marx transposed the third part of Morgan's work entitled "Growth of the Idea of Family" and, after shortly noticing the development of the arts of subsistence (first part of the work) proceeded to take careful notes from it. In Morgan's *Ancient Society* the family and the systems of consanguinity follow an independent logic of development that Marx underlines and shows many times. Here a dynamics is described which is active in the family. The systems of consanguinity instead resemble the progress accomplished by the family a long time before and they change fundamentally only when the family radically changes. The family then, far from identifying itself with the constituent principles of the gens, becomes an element that dissolves the latter. The family and the gens are in themselves already two non-homogeneous elements: the former in fact doesn't enter wholly in the latter: lineage and marriage are different types of relationship. Moreover, while in the gentiliac group you find the equality of parts and the rule establishing the return of properties in its bosom, the patriarchal family already distinguishes itself as an atom founded upon authority and hierarchy. The patriarchal family causes, as Marx himself underlined, "the incorporation of numbers in servile and dependent relations, before that time unknown".³⁸ A later long remark by Marx upon Fourier suggests the same. This utopian socialist, writes Marx, connected the beginning of civilization with the affirmation of the monogamic family and landed property, so that "die moderne Familie enthält

³⁵ op. cit., p.202.

³⁶ op. cit., p.202.

³⁷ op. cit., p.199.

³⁸ op. cit., p.119.

im Keim nicht nur servitus (Skaverei) sondern auch Leibeigenschaft ... Sie enthält in Miniatur alle d. Antagonismen in sich, die spaeter breit entwickeln in d. Gesellsctf u. ihrem Staat."

From the notebook's first pages Marx highlighted the conflicting factors that are the heart of transition in precapitalistic societies. "In fact die monogamische family unterstellt, um selbstaendig isolated existence zu können, überall a domestic class, die ursprünglich überall direct slaves."³⁹ Where reciprocal help, the guarantee of survival was agreed upon and included a collective allotment of social duties subordinating relations took their place when the family stated itself. These subordinating relations tended to the same end of the gentilital group and the family couldn't survive without them. Therefore the peculiarities of the family damaged, eroded slowly the egalitarian and democratic principles of the gentilital group as described by Morgan. Gens and family, despite their co-existence, aren't not integrable factors; Marx transcribes these words from Morgan: "In the organization of gentile society, the gens is primary, forming both the basis u. unit d. system; d. family auch primary u. älter als d. gens; the consanguine u. punaluan families having pre-existed in time; but <the family> is not a member of the organic series."⁴⁰ Morgan means here organic series as a series constituted by gens, fratria and tribe. It is important to notice here how Marx didn't make so many comments in the part of Morgan work entitled "Growth of the Idea of Property" as in section Morgan devotes to comparative history of the family. We can find there too numerous undelinings, but seldom a complete intervention.

The primary role of the family asserting as a Motor of change and the dissolution of mutual ties that this provokes seems to be confirmed by Marx later on with this comment: "D. Aeusserung v. Plutarch, dass 'd. Niedrigen u. Armen bereitwillig der Aufforderung der Theseus folgten' u. der von ihm citirte Ausspruch d. Aristoteles, dass Theseus 'sich zum Volk hinneigte' scheinen aber trotz Morgan darauf hinzuweisen, dass d. chiefs d. gentes etc dch Reichtum etc bereits in Interessenconflict mit der Masse der gentes gerathen, *was unvermeidlich bei Privateigenthum in Häuser, lands, Herden verbunden mit monogamische Familie.*"⁴¹ [my underlining] Morgan's greater attention in Ancient Society to the evolution of systems of relationship, to their endogenous mechanisms of development as regards the role that property assumed by degrees didn't leave Marx indifferent. In fact while on one hand Morgan delineates exactly the slow alterations of descents in connection with modifications of principles of kinship, on the other he describes development more quantitative than qualitative. In precapitalistic societies as described by Morgan the allotment of wealth and soil seems to depend on the role which kinship plays, that is on the characteristics of the system of descent. Morgan delineated them with great accuracy; a care for detail that he didn't use when describing the history of property.

We can only guess at whether this is the result of a lacking overdetermination by Morgan of the various lines of development of the 'ideas of human brain'.

Autorin: Dottoressa Paola Foraboschi, Università Statale di Milano.

³⁹ op. cit., p.120.

⁴⁰ op. cit., p.200.

⁴¹ op. cit., p.210.