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THE RECEPTION OF L. GUMFLOWICZ IN ITALY

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1. Gumplowicz's Italian disciple, Franco Savorgnan

When Ludwig Gumplowicz retired from his chair at the Graz university, the official organ of the Italian sociological community, the "Rivista Italiana di Sociologia", dedicated him a short but intense farewell. Upon his death, two years later, a two-pages obituary was published. His contributions to sociology were extolled, his many works recalled, his Italian friends named, and his interest in Italian history and culture gratefully acknowledged: "because he loved liberty, he had great esteem for Italy and felt the Italian question always close to his heart" (RIS, Sept.-Dic. 1909, p. 789).

The alleged motivation already resents of the winds of nationalism that were mounting at the turn of the century and that in a few years would sweep the sociological community, as most other intellectual circles, in Italy as elsewhere, and flare in the Great War. Gumplowicz was made to appear as a supporter of Italian irredentism, i. e. the drive for the annexation of the Italian-speaking areas still belonging to the Hapsburg empire (Trento, Gorizia, Trieste). Earlier (1901) Gumplowicz' essay Los von Rom had been translated and reprinted with the tellingly misleading title Il trionfo di Roma (The Triumph of Rome). This interpretation seems due mainly to Franco Savorgnan (1879-1963), a Triestino who had studied law at the university of Graz. He became enthused by Gumplowicz's sociological theories, and at the age of 23 he translated into Italian his master's Die soziologische Staatsidee, as Il concetto sociologico dello stato (Bocca, Torino 1904). Since then Savorgnan became a regular contributor to the "Rivista Italiana di Sociologia" with articles and reviews, covering especially the sociological production in German language, and with frequent references to Gumplowicz's works. Like most young intellectuals of his time, place and social condition, Savorgnan was an ardent Italian patriot and an "irredentista"; but it is unlikely that these attitudes had been originated in Gumplowicz's teachings; rather, he may have used the latter to rationalize the former. Savorgnan kept a lively correspondence with Gumplowicz (still in the family's archives) and remained deeply attached to him throughout his life. He contributed a moving account of Gumplowicz's moral character and of his last painful

years, and his stoic suicide, in an introduction to the volume IV of the series edited by G. Salomon, Ludwig Gumplowicz Ausgewählte Werke, Innsbruck, 1928. And when, after an intermission of almost twenty-five years, and a brilliant career as a statistical and demographer, at the age of 69 he felt free to publish again on sociology, he did so in the name of his old Graz master: I primi elementi della sociologia gumplowicziana (First elements of Gumplowicz's sociology), in "Rivista Italiana di Demografia e Statistica", v.2, n.1/2, 1948.

2. Gumplowicz's works in early Italian sociological literature

In fact, by 1904 Gumplowicz had been a familiar name in Italian sociological circles for more than twenty years, and for reasons that had nothing to do with Italian nationalism and irredentism. His Rassenkampf had been favourably and extensively reviewed by I. Vanni in one of the main Italian philosophical journals, Rassegna Critica, already in 1883, while his Grundriss der Soziologie (1885) was immediately hailed by three long reviews by some of the leading Italian "positivist" scholars: N. Colajanni, Un sociologo pessimista, L. Gumplowicz (A pessimist sociologist, L.G.), in the "Rivista di filosofia scientifica", 1886; A. Roncali, Un sistema di sociologia (A sociological system), in "Giornale degli economisti", 1886; M. A. Vaccaro, Progresso e regresso" (1887; reprinted in his Saggi Critici, 1903). In the following years, Italian readers not familiar with the German language could read Gumplowicz's main original works in their French translation (La lutte des races, Guillaumin, Paris, 1892; Precis de sociologie, Giard et Briere, Paris 1896; Sociologie et politique, 1898; Aperçus sociologiques, Stork- Masson, Lyon-Paris 1900). In effect, Savorgnan's translation of a full book of Gumplowicz into Italian remained the only one for a very long time.

3. Gumplowicz in the "Rivista Italiana di Sociologia"

Throughout those years, however, Gumplowicz was a frequent guest author in the "Rivista Italiana di Sociologia". It is worth emphasizing that at the turn of the century the Italian sociological community was as numerous, active and productive as any other in the advanced countries, at a level well comparable with the sister communities in France, Germany, Russia, U.S., and Spain; and that its official journal was of first-class quality. Founded in 1897, it was an handsome bimonthly magazine of more than 200 pages. Every issue carried two or three major essays, often by foreign authors, a number of lesser articles, and a wide array of features, review essays, summaries, topical bibliographies, chronicles of various events of the international sociological community (congresses, schools, courses, etc.), debates, etc. One is impressed by the cosmopolitan spirit (in the issues before 1915!), the elevated style, the care for detail, the ordeliness and the timeliness. Books and articles are announced and commented within months from their appearance anywhere in the world. Indeed, great passion and competence must have gone into this enterprise, year after year. The competence may have been a common trait of the academic profession of the period; but the passion came from the semi- religious enthusiasm sociology had inherited from Comte. Clearly, turn-of-the-century Italian sociologist, steeped in the positivistic, scientific and reformist tradition, were seized by a high sense of social mission.

In the 1907 farewell note, the RIS editors saluted Gumplowicz as "one of our first collaborators". This was meant both in a temporal and moral sense. He had been given the honor of opening the first issue of the journal (Jan. 1897) with the essay L'origine delle società umane (the origin of human societies). In the following years, he contributed several other essays: La suggestione sociale (Social suggestion), Sept. 1900; Una legge sociologica della storia (A sociological law of history), Jul.-Aug. 1901; Le origini storiche dei serbi e dei croati (the historical origins of Serbs and Croats), Jul.-Aug. 1902; La sociologia di Gustaf Ratzenhofer (The sociology of G.R.), May.-Aug. 1905; La concezione naturalistica dell'universo e la sociologia (The naturalist view of the universe and sociology), Jan.-Feb. 1907; La sociologia e il suo compito (Sociology and its task) May-June 1908. In the May-June issue of 1913 an article appeared posthumously, Per la psicologia della storiografia (towards a psychology of historiography).

Several of Gumplowicz's books and essays were amply reviewed in the RIS: Sociologie et politique (March 1898); Soziologische Geschichtsauffassung; Geschichte der Staatstheorien, Jan.-Feb. 1905; Staat und Menschheit, Nov.-Dec. 1907; Soziale massenerscheinungen, May-Aug. 1909. Some of these reviews were authored by F. Savorgnan.

Finally, extensive references to his works are common in other authors' articles appearing in the early issues of RIS: for instance, in M.A. Vaccaro, La legge ultima dell'evoluzione sociale (the ultimate law of social evolution) Nov. 1897; G. Sergi, I dati antropologici in sociologia (anthropological data in sociology), Jan. 1898; G. Mondaini, La filosofia della storia quale sociologia, May 1898. In the following years, they become almost standard.

The group of sociologists working for the Rivista Italiana di Sociologia was not the only one active in Italy at the turn of the century. The two main other names are Wilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, known as the leaders of the "elitist school" for their concentration on the phenomenon of power, domination and conflict. Curiously, Pareto never cites Gumplowicz, while often referring to the work of the other famous Austrian "conflict theorist", Ratzenhofer; while Mosca often does so, but seems to be familiar only with the Rassenkampf, and in a rather uncritical way. He treats Gumplowicz merely as an exponent of the racist- biologicistic school, completely overlooking Gumplowicz's later clarifications on the essentially socio-cultural, political and even "methodological" nature of his concept of "race".

Gumplowicz was of course well aware of his standing in the Italian sociological community and reciprocated with admiring comments; for instance in his Geschichte der Staatstheorien (Wagner, Innsbruck 1905) where he cites in particular A.M. Vaccaro.

4. Reasons of Gumplowicz's popularity in early Italian sociology

Judging from his presence in the RIS, the rank of Gumplowicz among the sources of inspiration for Italian sociologists of the period is absolutely first-class. It comes right after the "founding fathers", Comte and Spencer, and, among the contemporaries, is considered at the same level as Durkheim. Among the sociologist writing in the German language he outclasses in fame and appreciation authors like Simmel, Tönnies, Schaffle and Ratzenhofer; not to speak of Max Weber, who is almost unknown to the Italian sociologists of the time.

The main reason of this immediate popularity seems to lay, in the fact that Gumplowicz' was the first compact, coherent and clear statement of sociology as a science, well demarcated both from "parent" philosophical disciplines (ethics, philosophy of law, state theory, etc.) and from the natural sciences that at the time were trying to appropriate the human realm (biology, psychology, physical anthropology, etc.). He did away with all the moralizing and biologizing still prominent in the founding fathers' muddled great tomes and clearly defined social reality as "sui generis", stressed the primacy of the social interaction ("groups") over the individual, and laid out the rules and goals of sociological method; and this he did more than a decade and a generation ahead of Durkheim. He is generally considered the first to put the term sociology in the title of German-language books, and thus is considered the "first German sociologist". Given the high prestige enjoyed by German culture (science as well as philosophy) in Italian academic circles, he acted as a guarantee of the seriousness and quality of the sociological endeavour. Italian would-be sociologists needed a prestigious testimonial, and Gumplowicz became their first one.

Italian sociologists however did not share all of Gumplowicz's substantive theories; their reception was not uncritical. What troubled them most were the pessimistic implications of Gumplowicz's view of power and domination as the ultimate basis of social life, the violent origins of the state, law and morals, and of history as the history of conflicts between social group ("Races"). If that is true, there is little place for the faith in moral progress and in the social functions of sociological analysis. Sociology risks to turn into the dismal science of human folly, violence and evil. To early Italian would-be sociologist, this was hard to swallow, because precisely the faith in moral progress through scientific analysis of social reality was their motivating force. Other motives for the continuing popularity of Gumplowicz in turn-of-the-century Italian sociology may be hypothesized.

One has been mentioned at the beginning: the functionality of the theory of the Rassenkampf to the swelling tide of nationalism and bellicosity mounting in Italy, as elsewhere, at the turn of the century. Gumplowicz's theory issued from the same general cultural mood that at about the same time expressed the theories of social darwinism, Nietzschean will-to-power, Bergson elan vital and evolution creatrice, marxian class struggle and revolution, and several other philosophies stressing the role of energy, violence and action in human affairs and history. It would be ridiculous to single it out as the ideological legitimization of the ethnic and national conflicts that were pressure-cooking in the European cauldron of the time; but certainly helped to consider them normal and unavoidable.

A third hypothesis concerns the affinity of Gumplowicz's "power and conflict" theory with a deep-seated strand of Italian political thought, epitomized by Machiavelli. It is perhaps not perchance that the best-known Italian original contributions to sociology, that of Pareto and of Mosca, also revolved about the same issues.

A fourth alleged motive, that of Gumplowicz's particular sympathy for Italians and his interest in the "Italian Question", rests basically on the RIS (and hence probably Savorgnan's) statement. A thorough screening of Gumplowicz's works and of his correspondence, especially with Italian colleagues, could easily shed light on the matter. What can be said for sure is that, traditionally,

Italian patriots in the XIX century saw many analogies between the plight of the two countries, both partly under Austrian heel, and that it is not difficult to assume that Italian sociologists, among whom hostility to the Double Monarchy was mounting, would feel some special sympathy for someone they would perceive as an the old fighter for Poland's freedom exiled in Graz.

A fourth motive deserves some attention. A disproportionate share of the early Italian positivist sociologists were Jew (among the most prominent, A. Loria, J. Luzzatto, S. Sighele). So was Savorgnan himself. Some degree of "ethnic" solidarity may have contributed to Gumplowicz's standing among Italian colleagues.

It may be mentioned at this point that many of them seem also to have been free-masons; this may help explain the sense of quasi-religious mission many of them displayed in their promotion of sociology as a way to social reform. Although the school has long since disappeared, it has left a curious legacy: to this day, in Italy, several local chapters (Lodges) of free-masonry are disguised under the name of "Institute of sociological studies".

5. The dissolution of the Italian sociological school

Gumplowicz's popularity in Italian sociology disappeared with the dissolution of the group that had created it. This event deserves some attention.

Turn-of-the-century Italian sociology seemed well poised for a brilliant career. It was a well-known and respected subject of public debate; some leading university professors in economics, political science, philosophy, and law veered toward it. Some free-lance intellectuals enjoyed wide popularity as authors of more or less sociological books. In 1910 the Italian Sociological Society was formally established.

Fifteen years later, however, Italian sociology had totally disappeared from the scene. When sociology was born again in Italy, after 1945, it was literally at gunpoint of the Anglo-american liberation army; basically it was the American sociological tradition that was imported wholesale, and drew the interest of a new generation of scholars. The earlier domestic one was shunned as provincial and forgotten; in spite of some lame attempts of the members of the one academic milieu in which the survivors of the school (Gini, Boldrini, Maroi, Savorgnan himself) had taken refuge, the Faculty for Demography and Statistics at the University of Rome. With the early positivistic sociological school, also the influence of Gumplowicz was forgotten. To post-war Italian sociologists, he was now just one of the many quaint old European authors perfunctorily summarised in the American histories of sociological theories.

The reasons for the debacle of the turn-of-the-century Italian sociology are still unclear, and a matter for debate. The two main reasons traditionally invoked are, 1) the advent of Fascism and the ensuing totalitarian suppression of all free rational discourse, especially in socio-political matters; 2) the "cultural dictatorship" exerted in Italy, independently from Fascism (and basically against it), by the idealistic philosopher Benedetto Croce, an outspoken foe of positivism in

general and of sociology in particular. Both seem wanting. Fascism had nothing in principle against sociology; in fact, many elements of so-called Fascist doctrine (or at least of Mussolini's cultural baggage) were drawn from earlier sociologists; Pareto and Mosca, though critical of the Fascist implementation of the "elitist" theory, were highly regarded, their works appeared in "basic bibliographies" of Fascist "culture", and Michels was actively promoted. The corporatist doctrine, as is well known, had also been studied and promoted by sociologists like Durkheim. It seems that the Fascist regime's later aversion to sociology is due to the influence of the number 2 in idealist-spiritualist philosophy, Croce's once close friend and then bitter competitor, Giovanni Gentile. While Croce headed the intellectual opposition to the regime, Gentile became its intellectual mentors. Thus it was the combination of idealist philosophy and fascist regime that blocked the development of sociology in Italy, mainly by keeping it out of the university system. Croce and Gentile provided that sociology be not recognized as a legitimate academic and scientific subject-matter. Its practitioners, as already mentioned, had to seek refuge and cover in other disciplines (mainly statistics and demography).

While this is indisputable, it does not solve the problem; because by the time of the fascist-idealistic repression, the Italian sociological school had already effectively disbanded. The main general cause of this seems to be the loss of faith in the possibility of promoting progress via social science. As we have seen, Italian sociologists - like most of their colleagues in all advanced countries - firmly believed in their mission as high priests of the "positive" era based on the scientific approach to social and political, in opposition both to reactionary conservatism (into which they usually threw Christianity) and to revolutionary socialism and utopian anarchism. They represented the reformist, progressive ethos of the lay middle classes. But their God failed. First, the extension of political rights and suffrage to the masses was clearly resulting in the increasing dominance of precisely their foes - the Catholic and the socialist parties. Their political elbow room shrunk dramatically. Secondly, they allowed themselves to be swayed by the nationalist frenzy which resulted in the European self-destruction, 1914-8. Patriotism had always been a basic component of the world view of the social class and political-cultural milieu to which turn-of-the-century Italian sociologists belonged; but in the earlier period, this coexisted with a genuine cosmopolitanism; love and primary responsibility for one's nation wouldn't conflict with notions of world brotherhood of nations, and/or the prospect of an eventual emergence of a global society. In the second half of their parable, patriotism was clearly turning into nationalism; ethnic and national relations, specially in Central Europe, found increasing place among the sociologist's interests; and as we have seen, the "Italian question" came to mean Italy's claims for "a place in the sun" (the ill-fated colonial adventures in the Horn of Africa and Libya) and especially the "capping of national unity", with the seizure of the Italian-speaking fringes of the Habsburg empire. In the immediately pre-war period, the tone of the RIS becomes distinctively pitched towards "anti-austrianism". During the war, the RIS was mobilized - as any other intellectual and material energy, all over Europe - in the war and propaganda effort. Most of the articles dealt rhetorically, sometimes violently, with the evils of the enemies and the virtues of the allies. Clearly, nothing is left of the old faith in moral progress and in social salvation through science, reason and reform. According to one of the best contemporary students of the period, G. Sola, the Italian positivist sociological school dissolved because of internal exhaustion, much more than because of external enemies.

6. A rebirth of Italian sociologists' interest in Gumplowicz?

In 1975 Gumplowicz' contribution to sociology, and in particular to the sociology of law, were reassessed by a young Italian sociologist, Valerio Pocar (Diritto e conflitto sociale nel pensiero di Ludwig Gumplowicz (Law and social conflict in the thought of L.G.), "Sociologia del Diritto", v. 2, n. 1, 1975). A few years later Pocar also translated and edited Gumplowicz's Grundrisse, as Compendio di sociologia (Unicoopli, Milano 1981). Pocar, based in Milan, comes from the very same border area from which also Savorgnan originated (Gorizia, 40 km from Trieste). This points to the peculiar importance of border areas, of mixed ethnic and national make-up, as places of contact and mediation between cultures; and in particular of the old Austrian "Kustenland" as a bridge between the Italian and German culture areas. However, this episode of Italian interest in Gumplowicz seems to have failed to launch a sustained revival.