Call for Papers of the Special Issue:

The new faces of Obscurantism in Western Societies

Edited by

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Although the West has often viewed itself as spearheading modernity and universal values through the vast movement of the *Enlightenment*, many of its peoples now seem to be turning their backs on the idea of progress as an antiquated 20th-centuries notion. Instead, this notion seems now to evoke a time when social and technical progress was associated with intellectual and even psychological fulfillment on the one hand, with equal opportunities for upward social mobility and integration of working classes and ethnic minorities on the other hand, with advancements in civic rights, democracy, and full citizenship finally.

What is most notable is the convergence, in Europe and the US, of phenomena as disparate as:
- **On the political level**, Brexit (Calhoun 2017) and the rise in power of populism and sovereignism (Anselmi 2017; Martinelli 2018; Langman 2020), the success of many national extreme right-wing parties, some of neo-Fascist and neo-Nazi inspiration (Crothers 2019; Mudde 2019). As Arjun Appadurai (2017) states: "*European liberal democracy is on the verge of a dangerous crisis. Democracy fatigue has arrived in Europe, and is visible from Sweden to Italy and from France to Hungary. In Europe too, elections are becoming ways to say 'no' to liberal democracy.*" Some ancient democracies are now turning into deeply divided democracies or even "illiberal democracies" (Runciman 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) led by strongmen or true autocrats;
- **On the level of national cohesion and the possibility of a renewed social pact**, the resurgence of anti-Semitism, the rise of Islamophobia, and the rejection of solidarity and hospitality towards migrants. Both increasingly integrated and more fragmented, our global world, which seemed so open just a short time ago, nowadays seems to be giving in to the temptation of identity politics and 'exclusionary nationalism' (Mounk, 2018: 199). A Manichean vision is emerging that separates 'them' (the Other, which includes all those who are different from us regardless of cultural distance) from 'us' (a local, ethnic, religious, or national shared identity). This division has become the discursive matrix that justifies hostility and violence (Bauman, 2016). This vision is linked to rewriting the national narrative within the Western frame and the invisibility of conflicting historical legacies (especially in illiberal democracy: Çakmak 2021; Bozarslan 2021). This can lead to the

upsurge of revisionism and negationism, particularly concerning the Shoah (Zimmerman 2000; Wieviorka 2018; Della Pergola and Staetsky 2020);

- **On a geopolitical level**, the reconsideration of the world order resulting from the Second World War, with its batch of multilateral institutions, which was based on the narrative of the search for peace. The unexpected return of war on European soil is tragic proof of the questioning of peace as the supreme value in the management of international relations;
- And last but not least, **on the level of values and beliefs**, the dismantling of a movement toward more freedom and liberty, cultural liberalism, and tolerance (Matonti, 2021) was strongly associated with the battle for the inclusion of minorities and the citizen's empowerment.

These four trends are reflected in strong divisions of public opinion, political affiliations, and electoral choices within Western societies. However, their extent and intensity may vary from one country to another. The rise of anti-Enlightenment thought is worrying (Bronner 2006, McMahon, 2002; Sternhell, 2009), and one may wonder whether we are witnessing a powerful swing of the pendulum in relation to the hopes embodied by the decolonization, civil rights, feminism, and pacifist movements of previous generations (Eisenstadt, 2003). The return/surge of anti-Enlightenment ideas has been accompanied by anger, resentment, and fears (Cicchelli and Mesure 2020; Cicchelli and Octobre 2022). Far from the optimistic predictions of Francis Fukuyama and of those who once believed they would witness the advent of a definitively open, free, and peaceful world after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the contemporary era is rather gloomy and seems to certain authors better described by the idea of uncertainty, and even a 'great regression' (Geiselberger, 2017). To describe this context, some authors have insisted on the change of temporal regime that has taken place in recent decades: whether they use the term "rétrovolutions" (Amselle, 2010) or "retrotopias" (Bauman 2017), they underscore that contemporary societies share a strong attraction to the past, either real or fantasized, and have exchanged faith in progress for nostalgia and dystopian fear. From this perspective, the solution to our collective fortunes and individual destinies alike entails returning to what came before.

Therefore, we propose to guest-edit a special issue of *Quaderni di sociologia* devoted to exploring a topic that is not alien to the spirit our *zeitgeist* and that we believe we can grasp with the idea of *new faces of obscurantism*. Indeed, our future, disdained because it is unpredictable, unreliable, and straight-up unmanageable, is now pilloried and classified as one of society's "liabilities." At the same time, the past is re-evaluated, rightly or wrongly, as a time when the choice was free, the action was fruitful, and hopes were not in vain. In short, it is as if the great narratives of the Enlightenment, modernity (especially illustrated by the *Trente Glorieuses*), and the post–World War II economic expansion, were no longer widely accepted. If the narrative of Enlightened modernity cannot be any more relevant in a context where the triumphal discourse of modernity has lost much of its potency - where disillusioned, anti-intellectual, and doom-saying attitudes drive public debate -, are we now living with a narrative made of the glorification of roots, the return of the nation and the revenge of religions (Martinelli 2005)? How should we tell the story of the contemporary world, which was promised the hopes, certainties, and optimism of a protective society and Welfare States committed to the socialization of risks but seems to receive the exact opposite? Will we experience a more unequal, more divided, more closed world? How to improve equality and education for everyone? How can these anti-Enlightenment tendencies be understood considering the strengthening of the progressive global fights against patriarchy, racism, and

Western hegemony, especially among young generations? How to craft a new type of citizenship that would allow for a more direct, just, inclusive, and effective democracy? What is the destiny of cosmopolitanism in this context?

These are examples of questions that could be addressed in this issue, but they do not constitute an exclusive list. We look forward to new research on various forms of new obscurantism appearing in Western societies. Papers that offer new empirical findings or explore new theoretical and methodological frontiers are particularly encouraged.

Timeline

Call for publication: **February 2023**

Submission of proposals (500 words maximum plus 5 keywords): 15[th,], **September 2023**

Notificarion to the authors: **October 15th, 2023**

First versions of the papers (8000 words maximum): **April 15th, 2024**

Notification of the peer review process: **June 15th, 2024**

Revised versions of the papers: **September 115th, 2024**

Notification of the final peer review process: **October 15th, 2024**

Submission of the manuscript to the Journal: **December 15th, 2024**

The abstracts (and 5 keywords) should be sent as e-mail attachments (Word Format) to: <u>vincenzo.cicchelli@ceped.org</u>; <u>sylvie.octobre@culture.gouv.fr</u>; <u>pendenza@unisa.it</u>