

Conclusion

Repair as repopulating the devastated desert of our political and social imaginations

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Southern Europe in/as Crisis?

This volume deals in different ways with how people confront the stark aftermath of smashed cultural and economic dreams and their modes of livelihood. In assessing experiences of recuperation, it focuses in particular on the ways in which, as a consequence, different people articulate in thought or practice a series of distinct responses: responses through which we can witness 'how societies rebuild themselves' (as the Introduction here beautifully puts it). However, this begs the question, responses to what exactly? And what does it mean for a society to rebuild itself?

The collection foregrounds a particular set of issues affecting a place in a given temporal framing: the many and various crises unfolding across Portugal after the 2008 subprime mortgage financial



FIGURE CONC.1 *Grffiti found in the Feira da Ladra, Lisbon, paraphrasing Antoine Lavoisier's dictum: 'In nature, nothing is lost and nothing is created, everything is transformed'. Tomás Sánchez Criado, 2018.*

crisis, its ramifications ranging from increased unemployment to a growth in poverty, and a series of public administration spending cuts enforced by different, yet intermeshed, international economic bodies (described in the Introduction here, using the Troika epithet). As such, the volume widely contributes to a recent strand of anthropological work addressing the manifold crises of Southern Europe, whose similarities are usually addressed in terms of the implementation of austerity and spending cuts. But there are also specificities, which these chapters delve into, signalling the peculiarity of the Portuguese case with regards to, say, Greece and Spain (where the issues of a lack of democratic legitimacy of political decision-making and institutions were also brought to the fore to a larger extent).

These series of crises have rekindled the fear of 'going backwards', still very vivid in migration tropes from the 1960s–70s (like Armando Rodrigues de Sá, an icon in the history of German immigration),¹ as many had to leave the country, yet again. However, this assessment of 'backwardness' takes in a wider European genre of telling 'what the problem is': a particularly old Southern European one to be more specific, where 'modernity' and its alleged univocal drive towards 'progress' comes centre stage. In fact, for the most part of the last centuries, the European South has been a critical site, where different

concerns over 'what Europe is' have been debated. In a similar vein to the European East, Southern Europe has, indeed, been a commonplace trope of inward-looking and miniaturised forms of a slightly orientalising gaze: signalling what Europe should be leaving behind, whilst at the same time being a crucial hotspot for many emotional responses regarding what Europeans should always despise or melancholically remember.

In fact, the south of Europe was romanticised throughout the nineteenth century by different travellers – like Eugène Delacroix, in his trips across the Iberian Peninsula – as a site of manageable mystery, sensory pleasure and eroticism; a place of 'recalcitrant modernity' (cf. Delgado, Mendelson and Vázquez, 2007), populated by subjects with peculiarly quixotic and baroque manners, 'joyful' gypsies or plainly miserable peasants. Subjects whose darker skin tones – be it because of their role in trade routes, the more-or-less enforced imperial hybridisation, and the strong Muslim and Jew presence – became the object of late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century evolutionary and eugenic sciences (not only imported from abroad but also having many local expressions), suggesting race as an explanation for their kinship-based and corrupt forms of government or, in a context of colonial warfare, of the fall and weakness of their empires.

Besides, at a moment when a fast-spreading liberalism was trying to instill the clean straight line of progress in the continent and its colonies (also in many Southern European metropolises), governmental unruliness became not just an issue of the 'far away' but also of the 'near'. Indeed, the developmentalist drive of the 1960s and 1970s exploited this 'slight orientalism' in the ways in which tourism was branded and marketed, searching to attract Northern and Central European masses of workers to the newly designed resorts (Pack, 2006). Interestingly, this slight orientalism has also served later on to underpin the 'exceptionality of Europe' trope and its violent incarnation in the perceived threats of non-European migration: fierce – when not most of the time overly brutal – border and sea control, detention and containment or racialised police checks. Southern Europe as both leisure resort and boundary-maker of 'Fortress Europe'.

Southern Europe, hence, has been cast as a nearby place, conjuring images of the far away or, more precisely, a slightly far away nearby

place. This has also led to interesting experimentations with closeness: notably, many have seen a first expression of 'humanitarianism' in the famous reactions of leading humanists – like Voltaire or Kant – to the disastrous effects of Lisbon's earthquake in 1755, generating a particular technology of concernment (cosmopolitanism) addressing 'those humans who are like us' (Redfield, 2013: 42–5). It was also in the European South where, in the aftermath of the Second World War, and after the upsurge of different decolonising movements all over Asia and Africa, a series of British scholars, featuring Julian Pitt-Rivers, invented what might be considered the first 'anthropology at home' research programme, with a particular focus on peasant and pastoral Mediterranean societies.² In doing so, the European South became a kind of 'near North', used as a pivotal point to generate differentiations between and from different forms of Europeans. In the eyes of many, the modernising dream of the Common Market as an alleged fraternal and peaceful union, together with its infrastructural and joint economic aspirations, was a way to provide a modernising closure: one in which markets and social states would be mutually engineered to redistribute wealth and conditions of equality, in line with the fundamental redefinition of the continental post-war welfare arrangements. This, together with the hope inspired by Portuguese, Greek and Spanish democratic transitions after several decades of fascist rule, was seen to end their 'backwardness' and their perpetual status of being on the verge of 'going south'.³

However, in this process, the European South also became not just one of the many places where a profound re-foundation of global capitalism was taking shape, but also one searching to provide a rationale as to what it was bringing. For instance, the Italian filmmaker and public intellectual Pier Paolo Pasolini (1975), argued how 'consumerism' had developed from the 1960s into a force provoking 'anthropological mutations', that is, generating a new set of aspirations and actions with devastating consequences. They were, to his mind, the hallmark of a newer type of covert fascism. And, somewhat in connection with this, the Italian autonomous and post-Marxist thinkers have been engaging in the production of timely descriptions of the sources of our contemporary predicaments. A good summary of this might be found in Maurizio Lazzarato (2004, 2015), who has been addressing the 'cognitive' capitalism arising

since the 1970s as a revolutionary force capturing social creativity, as well as paying special attention to the newer forms of 'neoliberal' domination brought about by financialisation of life and the expansion of indebtedness.

Indeed, to many, the Common Market, and later the European Union, have been quintessential mechanisms for that economic transformation. One in which the developmental issue of Southern and Eastern Europe was addressed beyond explicitly racialised terms, yet forcefully reinstating a particularly modernist ontology of the social: a scalar one, which not only classifies actors in terms of a grid of the big and the small (macro and micro; the state and the people; society/group and the individual), but also creates concomitant orders of worth and causality with regards to what it might mean to take political action.⁴ In the case of the EU, this particular ontology has been operating through the compilation of comparative statistics and the configuration of different socioeconomic tools and indicators, addressing the descriptive 'strata' deemed important in the implementation of heavily standardised 'technological zones' and quintessential 'infrastructures' (Barry, 2001), such as enforced border controls, cohesion funds, free internal mobility and good exchange programmes to better articulate the internal market. Europe as a particular 'infrastructural poetics' (cf. Larkin, 2013).

Both this assessment of causal and linear economic progress, and this scalar understanding of the social, already frame what a crisis is and what response, then, might mean. Indeed, to some, it is this European aspiration to be 'advanced' and 'developed' that would need to be repaired in order to go beyond the alleged 'deficiencies' or 'lacks' of Southern European countries: a particular understanding of 'recuperation' as a univocal path towards 'neoliberal economic growth'. In this argument, austerity measures have been seen by some of these actors as generating 'incentives of regeneration'. However, and as all the contributors to this volume foreground, this particular dream and its particular ontology of the social is now going through a profound crisis (as the dispute with regards to the ways in which austerity measures were enforced and how this affected the EU project clearly show). In a critical review of some of the anthropological works around austerity in Southern Europe, Andrea Muehlebach states that: 'austerity policies have thus not only broken

stable work regimes, pensions, infrastructures, and the lives of impoverished Europeans, but the very idea of welfare as such' (2016: 363), now in crisis because of debt-repayment stress, and opening up Pandora's box for many neoreactionary and ethnicist movements to redevelop.

Crises, in fact, have a strange potential to unsettle our imaginaries of what we believe the issues under discussion are, and what addressing them might mean (as Mendes and Carmo in this volume well show, when addressing the particularly neoliberal specificities of the 'new urban lease regime' being implemented in Lisbon, and its contestation by social movements). Crises are difficult things to 'know' and 'react to' in themselves, as they most of the time appear to us in the form of a 'crack'. Cracks in buildings, as architect Eyal Weizman (2014) has very nicely described them, are phenomena displaying an extremely ambivalent ontology: when one sees a crack, it might mean both that structural damage is already complete or that it is just starting. Cracks are 'both a sensor and an agent' (ibid.: 16), both a potential probe into the causes or an effect of a particular structural failure, disputing or generating interesting puzzlements as to what causes them and what its effects might be. To put it in more poetic terms, and as F. Scott Fitzgerald discussed in his autobiographical account of life in the aftermath of the 1929 'crack', most of the time cracks are something 'that you don't feel until it's too late to do anything about it, until you realize with finality that in some regard you will never be as good a man [sic] again' (Fitzgerald, 2009: 69).

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As Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet noted: 'Questions are invented, like anything else. If you aren't allowed to invent your questions, with elements from all over the place, from never mind where, if people "pose" them to you, you haven't much to say. *The art of constructing a problem is very important: you invent a problem, a problem-position, before finding a solution*' (2007: 1, emphasis added). What is thus the

invented question and constructed problem by this research? Interestingly, this volume seeks to foreground 'repair' as a fundamental analytic to understand the different 'recuperation' strategies to these multiple cracks in Portuguese society. And there is, indeed, a wonderfully interesting conceptual potential engrained in this very term, and in the way it unfolds in the different articles: from the economic emphasis on 'resistance' and 'reciprocity' in the face of adversity – described in Pires' (this volume) chapter on Monte da Pedra – to the joyful and interstitial register that the reinvigoration of the *kizomba* dance (Jiménez, this volume) in different venues might be opening up new potential relations between people across racial, colonial and class divides.

Notably, the Portuguese verb *reparar* has a nuance that the English 'to repair' does not have: one that goes beyond 'to fix something that is broken or damaged' and 'to take action in order to improve a bad situation' (the two main definitions found in the *Macmillan English Dictionary*). *Reparar* also means 'to observe', 'to pay attention'. As I take it, paying attention to the different forms of repair brings forward an especially fertile repertoire for ethnographic descriptions. One that makes us pay close attention to what is being understood as the problem and the issues at stake, as well as the ways in which different responses are executed: the definitions of those 'bad situations' or 'what is broken and damaged' entailing different forms of 'taking action' – to return to the framing proposed in the introduction of this chapter.

In fact, in the Science Technology and Society Studies literature around maintenance and repair (see, Denis, Mongili and Pontille, 2016), focusing mostly on different types of urban infrastructures, several scholars have also pointed out that 'repair' cannot happen without extended sensory explorations in order to ascertain what the problem might be. This also involves a detailed attention to the ways in which different human and more-than-human actors and their complex joint ecologies behave to take care of broken worlds: an issue Nóvoa's contribution to this volume interestingly deals with when paying attention to the different ways in which discarded 'ugly fruit' are managed 'through the cracks in the system' by a series of zero-waste cooperatives. The descriptive repertoire around *reparar* that this anthology brings forward would thus help us shed light on

the distinct nuances that different groups, people and collectives might be bringing about, unsettling unified narratives around what might have happened and what to do with it.

Observing, paying attention to the forms of repair, hence, might be the best antidote to ready-made explanations of the 'what' and 'why', and any ready-made concepts or frameworks suggesting what should be done and how: an unsettled response to an unsettling condition, perhaps? Much in the same vein, although infrastructures are often said to become visible on breakdown – *pace* Susan L. Star (1999) – sometimes, to enunciate what this breakdown is about requires finding ways of 'exhibiting the accident, exposing what usually exposes us' (Virilio, 2000: 58). Good examples of this are the public art projects (always on the verge of being co-opted by institutional discourses) around urban regeneration described by Pussetti and Barros (this volume). I find this gesture particularly difficult to make, yet a very timely one, since it is precisely in a moment of crisis when what we think about the world is also thrown into a profound crisis. And moments of crises are also full of reflections regarding the appropriate 'speed' of thought to capture unsettling events that are very difficult to grasp (Duclos, Criado and Nguyen, 2017): ranging from suggestions to 'keep calm and X' or 'slow down' to appeals to plunge into the frenzy of 'urgent' matters and situations to fully understand what things are about.

In the Spanish case, with which I am more personally and ethnographically familiar, the modes of response to 'the crisis' usually took the shape of heterogeneous groups of variegated and sometimes unclear shapes: volatile forms of the social trying to understand what was happening to them and how to respond through digital activism, massive occupations of streets and squares, together with urban interventions and events. That is, most of these actions were about creating conditions for a collective articulation around different types of cracks, and therefore generating forms of reaction, be it 'resistance', 'coping', 'reacting' or 'forging new imaginaries'. I have been addressing these situations as forms of 'joint problem-making' (Criado and Estalella, 2018): that is, situations where people feel the need to collaboratively create new problematisations about a situation, through the craft and management of shared infrastructures, platforms and devices to learn by doing.

What is more, these forms of joint problem-making led to a vast number of concrete and disparate political struggles with variegated non-coherent topologies operating beyond a scalar ontology of the social (Law, 2004). Some were wishing to 'open it up', developing 'newer' and 'more horizontal' political platforms to run for municipal, regional and state elections; while others who were not assuming that it should be the state from which they should be seeking answers (for instance a collective like 'La PAH' (*La Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca*, the Platform of those Affected by Mortgages, which mobilised thousands of people in the country because of an issue affecting millions),⁵ managed to generate a state-wide form of intervention against evictions, legal counselling and psychological support by establishing a network topology (cf. Riles, 2001), with each node carrying as much information as the whole through the circulation of information, minutes, formats, etc. In sum, whilst some of these modes of joint problem-making ended up having at their core the idea of defending or 'healing' the 'sick' Spanish state (Kehr, 2014) – that is, recuperation as restoring the previously existing infrastructure and its ontology of the social – others sought to undertake an experimentation around alternative infrastructures to the welfare state and its failed promises of centralised wealth redistribution, social protection and futurity through pensions, that is, understanding recuperation as re-installation, giving an eventful meaning to those acts whereby societies rebuild themselves.

In the opening introduction, Francisco Martínez lucidly concludes by issuing a warning: recuperation can, indeed, happen without repair, in 'relationships and narratives that can be systemically co-opted' (this volume). Can this ethnographic repertoire around *reparar* help us not just to pay attention but also 'to repair' and hence transform and give further nuances to what 'recuperation' might mean? I believe that herein lies the fundamental contribution of this collection: in the juxtaposition of different modes of recuperation and variegated versions of repair practices, whereby an unsettlement of ready-made of scales is operated. The book, hence, opens up the plurality of ways in which 'societies could rebuild themselves', sometimes radically challenging their previous form.

In all these matters and struggles, maybe repair is acquiring a more hopeful meaning than just putting back to work or caring for broken

materials and relations: repair as a mode of reinventing what lives should be led, how we could be situating ourselves in the world, re-crafting what responsibility and agency or our capability to do with others might mean in the face of changing circumstances. Some years ago, in Lisbon, I was wondering out loud whether we could try to find a way out of the particular reading of 'the crisis' as displaying the problems of 'incomplete' or 'not fully developed' social states of the European South. In such a conversation, a Portuguese colleague, the geographer Eduardo Ascensão, suggested that I check a contribution by the renowned sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1995), introducing a special issue on Portugal's welfare system. This little piece was very refreshing. Not only was it written shortly after the Portuguese integration into the EU (and hence it addressed the new intra-European comparative dimension these events provoked), but it also put forward an intriguing conceptual distinction that went way further than the classic social-democratic readings that idealise the post-war UK, French, German and Scandinavian welfare models.

Social-democratic readings tend to foreground centralised state-market infrastructures of protection, whereby it is the role of the state to sustain citizens, even at the expense of kinship or other forms of caring sociality (e.g. religious organisations). Interestingly, and beyond a reading of 'lack' or 'incompleteness' in the Portuguese case (a particularly dramatic one according to others, in line with the broader tendency of other Southern European countries), de Sousa Santos distinguished the 'welfare-state' from what he called a 'welfare-society' (*Sociedade-Providência*):

I call welfare-society the networks of relationships of mutual knowledge, recognition and help based on kinship and neighborhood ties, through which small social groups exchange goods and services in a non-commoditized manner and with a logic of reciprocity similar to the gift relations studied by Marcel Mauss.

de SOUSA SANTOS, 1995: i, my translation

The importance attributed by de Sousa Santos to 'welfare-society' stands out with regards to the centrality attributed in Central and Northern European countries to the 'welfare-state', given that many forms of the social link are either erased, or decomposed and

recomposed by different institutions managing 'the social' (Rose, 1999) in an empowering quest beyond limiting and dependence-based ways, in which kinship and other forms of sociality operate. However, this centralised incarnation of the welfare state also has the subject of strong criticism by some who see this as a very violent system, either because of its expert-based centralisation, 'meeting infinite needs by fine means' (Foucault, 1990), or because of the ways in which it might be engineering in some of its citizens a 'shame of being dependent' on the state (Sennett, 2003). In fact, some have seen in the marketisation and outsourcing of care services a way to 'personalise' these caring needs.

However, and this is where de Sousa Santos' contribution became more interesting, he also stated: 'If it is necessary to reinvent the Welfare state, isn't it equally necessary to reinvent welfare-society?' (de Sousa Santos, 1995: v, my translation). A reinvention that, in his eyes, should try to go beyond 'social authoritarianism' practices lingering in the back of many of these countries with decades-long fascist dictatorships, like Portugal (or Spain, Italy and Greece, for that matter), where the traditional caring roles of women as angelic beings, and the filial obligations to care according to dated understandings of kinship, were enforced by the very state in partnership with Catholic organisations for decades. This particular concern around how to 'fabricate new ties', sometimes drawing innovatively from 'legacies', is particularly well described in the chapters by Lourenço, and Ferreira and Martínez in this volume.

In fact, maybe that is what is at stake in the particularly reparative practices and relations beyond scale, assembled in this anthology (dances, moneylending, the retrieval of ancient legacies, caring for discarded goods or engaging in different forms of urban activism): to dispute the actual definition of 'welfare'. In other words, to propose a reinvention of 'welfare society' that does not bear the mark of disaster, but of hope: a hope that in these particularly disastrous times of ours – when crises do not seem to have an end⁶ – they might be 'repopulating the devastated desert of our [social and political] imaginations' (Stengers, 2015: 132). Could this be, then, what Southern European responses to the crisis, and in particular Portuguese ones, might be bringing to the fore to tackle the challenges the European project is now facing? As I see it, the allegedly small has

never been more important to recasting our hopes, to repopulating our imaginations of the greater good, devastated by austerity and the path-dependency of neoliberal rule. Especially when everything seems lost, these modes repair show the hopeful character of how things might be created anew: not going back to 'what we were', but experimenting with modes of togetherness yet to be defined.

Notes

- 1 Rodrigues de Sá was a specialised worker of Vale de Madeiros (in the Aveiro region), who inadvertently became the 1-millionth guest worker (Gastarbeiter) in Germany in September 1964. For this, and much to his dismay, a committee of Portuguese and Spanish industrialists threw a reception on his arrival in Cologne. In 2004, an exhibition showing his reception and his trajectory later on was inaugurated in Cologne; available at: <https://www.iberer.angekommen.com/Mio/millionster.html> (accessed 3 June 2019).
- 2 For an account of the reception of the work of Pitt Rivers in Spain, and the polemics on its proto- or slightly colonial nuances of his accounts or the lack of interest in fostering debate with the local anthropologists, see, Narotzky (2005).
- 3 Amongst the many contributions to this debate, Gramsci's essay on *la questione meridionale* (the southern question) remains a case in point, precisely because of how it addresses the enforced and structural conditions of poverty concerning both the poor urban and countryside workers brought about by both feudalism and liberalism.
- 4 For an anthropological examination of this, please check Lebner (2017).
- 5 An in-depth account of it can be found in, *Sí se puede: Seven Days at PAH Barcelona*, a documentary directed by Pau Fus (2014), and featuring the current mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau; available with English subtitles at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caD17RKJfbc> (accessed 3 June 2019).
- 6 Even though recent public debate has tended to focus primarily on issues of public and private debt, the alleged forms of 'recuperation' after 'the crisis' have also gone together with (when not provoking) a series of hidden negative effects. Perhaps one of the most important being the impact of massive touristification, taken as the new engine of the Portuguese economy: an issue notably affecting Lisbon and Porto (in a very similar vein as other European cities like Barcelona, Madrid, Venice, Rome and Berlin), and having an impact because of

the polluting effects of cruise ships and other transportation means, the decay of other economic activities, or the rise in rents and real estate prices generating an alarming housing crisis. The 2017 documentary, *Terramotourism* (Earthquake Tourism), and a series of accompanying events, produced by the Left Hand Rotation collective, feature a series of interesting reflections on the case of Lisbon; available at: <https://vimeo.com/195599779> (accessed 3 June 2019).

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