

Pirates and Hobos: Radical Politics on the Margins of Society

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“Though you are a sneaking puppy, and so are all those who will submit to be governed by laws which rich men have made for their own security; for the cowardly whelps have not the courage otherwise to defend what they get by knavery; but damn ye altogether: damn them for a pack of crafty rascals, and you, who serve them, for a parcel of hen-hearted numbskulls.”
Captain Samuel “Black Sam” Bellamy[\[1\]](#)

“Long-haired preachers come out every night, Try to tell you what’s wrong and what’s right; But when asked how ‘bout something to eat they will answer with voices so sweet: You will eat, bye and bye, in that glorious land above the sky; Work and pray, live on hay, you’ll get pie in the sky when you die.”
Joe Hill[\[2\]](#)

Although the bigger part of human history has went under conditions of hierarchy, authority and heteronomy, germs of autonomy and politics “from below” were always present in every historic moment, each time with different dynamic, according to the specific socio-historic context. In the crackings of the system, where the dominant institutions of authority were on the retreat or have lost significant level of their social legitimization, appeared the possibility for the emergence of radical politics, allowing for the different experience and organization of everyday life and human relations. It is important to note that although such cracks provide fruitful ground for radical thinking and acting, by no means are they enough by themselves for such to emerge.

Today we can think of many such cases: the most famous amongst whom are the Zapatistas and the Kurdish liberation movement. **Both of these social groups have experienced explicit exclusion from the welfare functions of the state and subjected only to the exploitative and repressive ones.** Thus, a complete de-legitimization of the dominant system sediment among the local population, which together with the cooperative local traditions, allowed the liberation of radical imaginary.

Two significant cases of the past could be viewed in this line of thought: the **pirates** and the **hobos**. Both of these social groups found themselves excluded from the hegemonic order of their times, becoming superfluous and thus hunted and repressed. This condition of theirs however provided fertile ground for the emergence of radically different political culture, based on direct democracy and commoning.

Pirates

17th and 18th century was a period in which piracy was flourishing, leaving to the future generations rich legacy of literature and experiences. The pirates were, in their bigger part, people with no means to survive “legally”, runaway slaves, political fugitives, naval deserters etc. Various reasons provided fertile ground for the pirate lifestyle to develop among these “marginal” segments of society. An important role played the Caribbean islands, where the most significant pirate activity took place. This area was highly uncharted at that time, offering a power vacuum, with many unclaimed and uninhabited islands, making it extremely difficult for policing by any navy of that period. Thus it provided innumerable hiding places, caves, coves, unknown paths etc. to everyone that wanted to avoid monarchic control. Simultaneously the Caribbean islands were located on the trade route between South America on the one hand, and Spain and Portugal on the other, i.e. a route through which significant treasures were transferred.

Unlike the discipline of merchant and military vessels, pirates, although certainly no saints, were most often organized in an anti-authoritarian manner. Pirate crews were deciding the rules under which they would sail the seas in assemblies in which each member had to agree and sign them.[\[3\]](#)

Often these rules were highly egalitarian, viewing the achieved booty, as well as the provisions, as **commons**. Highly exemplary for this are the articles of Bartholomew Robert's crews, according to which every member had a vote in the common affairs, equal share of the fresh provisions and liquors at any time and could use them as he wished, unless the whole crew voted retrenchment because of scarcity[\[4\]](#). Similar egalitarian characteristics were shared among other crews as well, like the one of John Gow.[\[5\]](#)

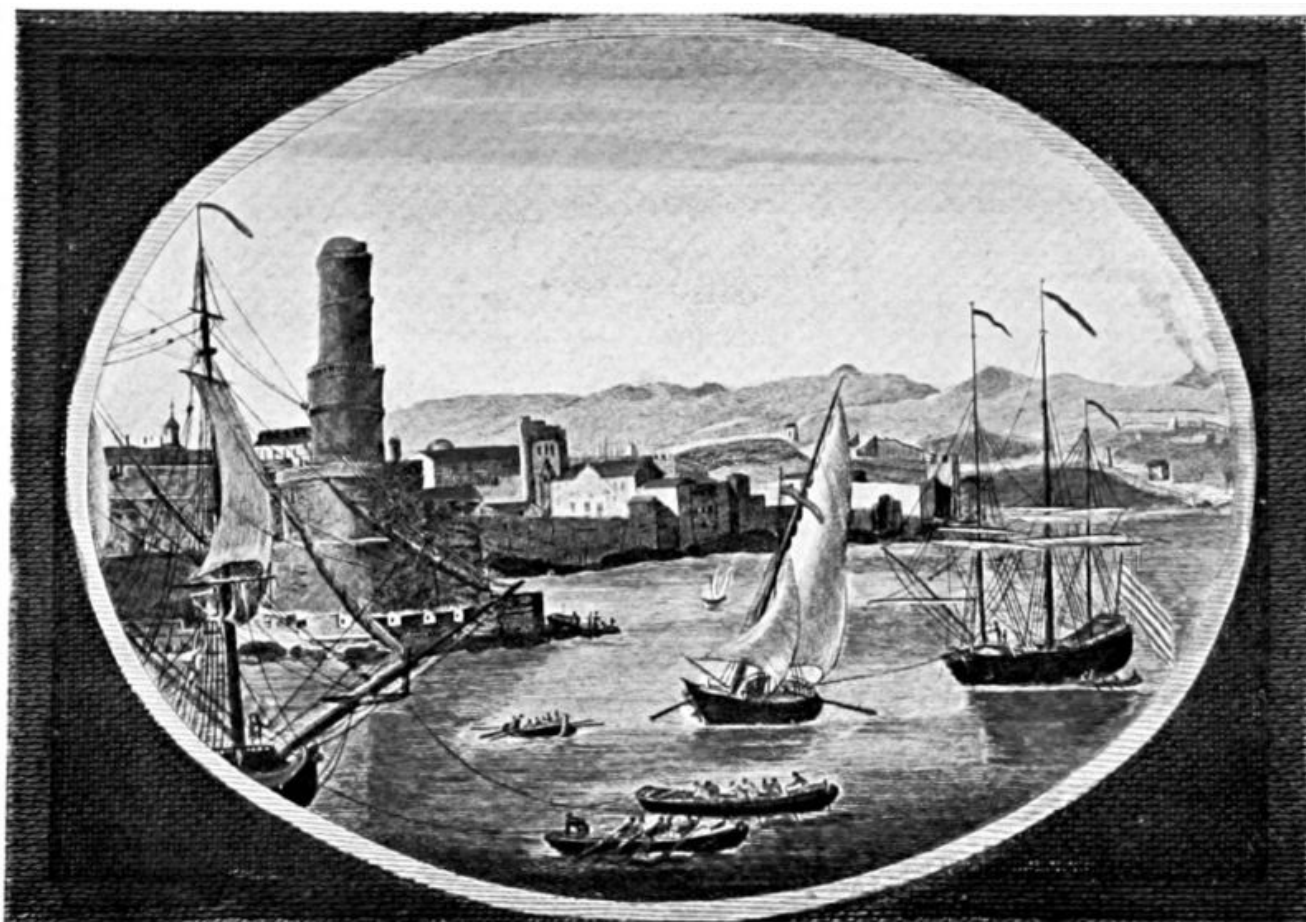


Illustration of the Pirate city "Port Royal"

These libertarian tendencies among the pirates didn't remain unnoticed by the monarchic authorities. The Dutch governor of

Mauritius, impressed by the democratic character of a pirate crew he met, noted that **“every man had as much say as the captain and each man carried his own weapons in his blanket.”**[\[6\]](#)

Their egalitarian character was strengthened even further by the forms of solidarity such crews practiced. Often pirates had rules, based on mutual aid that enacted that injured shipmates, unable to fight, would still receive their share. Articles by both the Bartholomew Robert’s crew[\[7\]](#) and that of George Lowther’s[\[8\]](#) offer testimony for that, even characterizing their stock and provisions as public.

Often, claims about the anti-authoritarian tendencies among pirates are being met with skepticism because of the fact that most tales and myths that bear witness about them speak about adventures of brave captains leading their mates. But this was not necessarily the case. Except of the ship rules on which all the crew had to agree, the captains were also often elected and could be revoked at any time if the shipmates decided that they abuse the authority, nested in this position.[\[9\]](#) The captain had to keep track of the condition of the ship and the course it was taking, as well as to command in the heat of battle. For everything else the whole ship’s crew had to assemble and decide.

The attitude pirates had towards slavery differed, but many didn’t participate in the slave trade. There were many ex-slaves on pirate ships, seeking freedom far away from the authorities. In fact among the pirate crews the proportion of blacks was much higher than the one among merchant or naval ones.[\[10\]](#)

Somewhat similar was the case of the women. In the period when piracy flourished it was difficult for a woman to legally enter a vessel. There are many tales of women dressing as men so that they could enter and travel with a ship. Many saw in piracy a way to rebel against the imposed gender roles,

although women still were minority amount pirates.[\[11\]](#) Some female pirates created quite a name for themselves like Mary Read and Anne Bonny.

Although each pirate crew was sailing the seas separately, there were many cases in which several of them have joined forces like in 1695, when the ships of Captain Avery, Faro, Want, Maze, Tew and Wake all met up for a combined raid on the annual Muslim pilgrim fleet to Mecca.[\[12\]](#) It is indicative for the connection pirates shared from the way the original buccaneers called themselves – “Brethren of the coast”.[\[13\]](#) Pirate crews were continually returning to various “free ports” where they were meeting with each other as well as with black market merchants with whom they traded. Pirates recognized each other and didn’t attack one another. **This interconnectedness between the various pirate cells and the evidences for the existence of a unique pirate language are both signs for the emergence of a distinct culture.**

One of the most famous pirate settlements was Libertatia. It was founded by Captain Mission and his crew in northern Madagascar in 18th century.[\[14\]](#) The founders of Libertatia renounced their nationalities and called themselves Liberi instead. They created their own language, consisted of colorful mixture of English, French, Portuguese, Dutch, Madagascan and other African languages. The land was held in common; while treasures acquired at sea were carried into common treasury and decisions were taken collectively by all settlers. There are disputes whether Libertatia was something more than just a myth, but the very fact that such a vision appeared indicates the radically democratic and egalitarian tendencies among the pirates.

The decline of piracy began in the beginning of 18th century, when new measures were introduced to counter the many pirate crews sailing the seas. Rewards were given to anyone that would fight the pirates. A new law, approved in 1700, allowed the execution of pirates wherever they could be found, while

before that they had to be transported back to London, where to be trialed.[\[15\]](#) And for the case of trials a new special court was introduced to deal exclusively with piracy, consisted mainly of naval officers.[\[16\]](#)

Hobos

The second half of 19th century, during the so called *Long Depression*, saw the rise of the so called hobos in the US – unemployed homeless people (sometimes voluntarily abandoning their homes in search for work). Unlike the colorful amalgam of the pirates, the hobos were predominantly white and male, although exceptions were not missing.[\[17\]](#) **What characterized their lifestyle was the way they viewed the widespread American railroad network. For the hobos this was a commons which they were using to travel, without paying a ticket, all across the country in search for work.**

Unlike other ‘migratory’ groups inside the US of that time (like Mexican, Chinese and Europeans), hobos used to travel individually. But like the pirates, they kept close ties with other fellow travelers through free camps they called “**jungles**”[\[18\]](#). These encampments were located at close proximity across the railroad, near spots where trains had to stop for one reason or another (like changing crews, wagon composition etc.). The jungles were shelters, since they offered relative safety for hobos to clean themselves, eat, sleep, share information and socialize. Because of the hobo’s nomadic lifestyle, most often these camps were having temporal character, and the ones with continuous existence had their congregation changing often.

Like the pirate ships and free ports, a basic characteristic of the hobo jungles was their democratic and egalitarian character.[\[19\]](#) The inhabitants collectively forged the rules by which they themselves had to co-exist, while sharing food, utensils, blankets etc. All had to follow whether the rules were successfully enforced and had to participate in the

defense of the camp in case of an attack by police, mercenary thugs or far-right groups like the American Legionnaires[20].



A Hobo Jungle

Vital part of these democracies was the institution of the jungle committees whose main task was the prescription of punishments as well as taking care of the everyday troubles in the camp.[21] Their members and chairman were voted between the inhabitants of these camps. Often the punishments they prescribed were viewed as too severe by the community, with the latter to offer alternative solutions.

During their existence and interaction with each other, hobos developed their own slang and system of signs.[22] While individually travelling, most of them were leaving signs on walls for other fellow travelers as whether one place was safe to hang around, whether there was a fascist threat nearby (to which hobos often fell victim), available jobs etc. Thus hobos

corresponded with each other and outside their jungles.

Basic characteristic of the hobos was the way they viewed the railroads – as a commons. Hundreds of thousands of them crossed the country annually, with their “jungles” dotting the rail map. Their effort at *re-communalizing* train transport and land was most often unconscious, driven by sheer need. **However, many hobos were highly political, among whom the majority sympathized or was affiliated with the Industrial Workers of the World.**[\[23\]](#)

The huge presence of hobos on national level didn't remain unnoticed for long. Their effort at re-commonization confronted them with one of the most developed industries of that time, spreading on 254,037 miles in 1916.[\[24\]](#) The hobo jungles on the other hand challenged the ongoing land concessions and enclosures. Thus a complexity of several factors led to the decline of hobos.

In the beginning of the 20th century a wave of brutal repressions began, with “shoot-on-sight” attitude being adopted by the railroad security. To confront their numerous “enemy” they joined forces with the police and the far-right, who viewed the hobo lifestyle as degenerate. Thus the number of “trespassers” shot rose dramatically – 2,553 were killed in 1919 and 2,166 in 1920.[\[25\]](#) This wave of repression spread to other political groups that challenged the established norms – among whom the IWW becoming object of physical elimination of valuable cadres by the authorities. The 1930s was the last decade during which the hobos had significant presence around the US, due to the Great Depression.[\[26\]](#)

Parallely with this, a new era of transportation was unfolding over the continent – this of automobiles, buses and trucks. This deeply privatized way of transport completely changed the conditions that were once favorable for the rise of the hobo culture. In a world where highways were to replace railroads as a main means for travel there was place for scarce

hitchhiking, but not for a mass commoning movement.

Also a stereotype emerged presenting the hobos as lazy and illiterate parasites on society who have been stripped of any decency, because they no longer were restrained by “home” and “family”.[\[27\]](#) This narrative helped “normalize” the violence that the state waged against them. The image of the hobo as degenerate, as self-destructive as well as socially corrosive has been since then reproduced through movies, literature, music etc.

Reshaping everyday life

Although the pirates and hobos remained in history, spaces for radical politics could be found and today. And while Zapatistas and Kurds are developing their autonomies in distant from us lands, similar patterns could also be found in our own backyard. With the unfolding of the multidimensional crisis of the last decade there are many cracks in the system in which radical politics could potentially be cultivated.

This does not mean that we should engage in a search for one revolutionary subject that can lead us towards “brighter future”, but that we can find many such subjects all around us and that we can transform our everyday reality into laboratory for direct democracy and commoning.

It should once again be made clear that the exclusion from the welfare functions of the dominant system is not necessary precondition for the emergence of democratic and egalitarian projects. From the history we know of societies that in such cases have turned towards fascistic and authoritarian forms, while others, immersed into luxurious consumerism, have given birth to participatory and ecological tendencies. Thus what makes a really important precondition for such radical political projects to flourish is the liberation of the imaginary, something that was encouraged through the adventurous lifestyle of both pirates and hobos. What we

should strive at is making the experience of everyday life more interactive by involving each member of society into the shaping of our common future.

Notes:

[1] Captain Samuel "Black Sam" Bellamy quoted by [Captain Charles Johnson](#) in [A General History of the Pyrates](#) (1724)

[2] Joe Hill, famous hobo and IWW activist, in *The Preacher and the Slave* (1911)

[3]

<https://mentalfloss.com/article/23673/democracy-high-seas-how-pirates-rocked-vote>

[4] A specific Pirate Code of Conduct was agreed by Bartholomew Roberts' in the Shipboard Articles of 1721 <https://sites.google.com/site/thepiraterepublic/the-constitution-of-the-pirate-republic>

[5] <https://www.exclassics.com/newgate/ng182.htm>

[6] <https://www.eco-action.org/dod/no8/pirate.html>

[7] <https://beej.us/bartart.html>

[8]

<https://owlcation.com/humanities/Captain-George-Lowthers-Pirate-Code-Articles>

[9] John Ward: *Barbary Pirate*, The History Press 2010, p.42

[10]

<https://thepirateempire.blogspot.gr/2016/01/black-pirates.html>

[11] https://www.pantherbay.com/bio_womenpirates.php

[12] E. T. Fox: *King of the Pirates: The Swashbuckling Life of Henry Every*, Tempus Publishing 2008

[13] Peter Kemp and Christopher Lloyd: *Brethren of the Coast: The British and French Buccaneers of the South Sea*, St. Martin's Press 1960

[14] Rediker, Marcus: *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age*, Beacon Press 2004

[15] John Raithby: *Statutes of the Realm: volume 7: 1695-1701*, Great British Record Commission 1820, pp590-94

[16] Max Boot: *Pirates, Then and Now* in "Foreign Affairs"

vol. 88/4 2009, pp94–107

[17] See the movie *Riding the Rails* (1997), written and directed by Lexy Lovell and Michael Uys.

[18]

<https://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma01/White/hobo/thejungle.html>

[19] Todd Depastino: *Citizen Hobo*, University of Chicago Press 2005, pp81-85

[20] Benedict Giomo: *The Homeless of Ironweed*, University of Iowa Press 1996, p.82

[21] George Caffentzis: *In letters of Blood and Fire*, PM Press 2013, p.92

[22] <https://www.cyberhobo.com/signs/hobosigns.html>

[23] <https://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/143783.html>

[24] William Greenleaf: *American Economic Development Since 1860*, University of South Carolina Press 1968, p.79

[25] Nels Anderson: *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man*, University of Chicago Press 1923, pp 161-62

[26] William A. Darity, Jr: *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2nd Edition*, Macmillan Reference 2008, p.494

[27] Charles Elmer Fox: *Tales of an American Hobo*, University of Iowa Press 1989, p.xvii

If There Is to Be a Democratic Europe | Cornelius Castoriadis

This rare interview with Cornelius Castoriadis was made by the ACTA Foundation (Fundació per a les idees i les arts) and appeared for first time in the book "Europes: Els Intellectuals i la Qüestió Europea" (1993), pp. 343-48. It was translated in English, edited and contributed freely and

anonymously in internet as a public service on March 2011.

Cornelius Castoriadis

Before answering the questions posed by ACTA, it seems to me to be indispensable to elucidate three themes that order or should order all political reflections on present-day Europe. Within the limits allowed, this can be done only in a brief, therefore dogmatic, way.

A. Almost all human societies have always been instituted in heteronomy or, what is the same thing, the closure of signification. The institution of society (the law in the most general sense of the term) is posited there as intangible, since originating in a source that transcends the living society: God, gods, founding heroes, the ancestors-but also, as a modern version, the laws of Nature, of Reason, and of History. At the same time, the magma of social imaginary significations, which through its institution holds society together and creates a world for itself, is closed there: it furnishes an answer to all the questions that can be posed within its framework but cannot itself be called into question. And individuals are raised and educated there through these laws and these significations in such a way that challenging one or the other is, for those individuals, unthinkable-psychically and intellectually almost impossible.

In known history, this state of affairs has been truly ruptured only in Europe, and this has happened twice: first in ancient Greece and then in Western Europe. It is only in those two societies that one observes the birth, and the re-birth [*renaissance*], of democratic political activity as a challenge to established institutions under the aegis of the question "*What is just?*" of philosophy as a calling into question of the inherited significations under the aegis of the question "*What is true?*" and, finally and especially, the conjunction and mutual fertilization of these two activities, even if it has almost always remained indirect. It is in those two

societies that the project of individual and collective autonomy is born, each being inconceivable without the other.

In this sense, Europe has ceased for a long time to be a geographical or ethnic entity. The word *Europe* connotes the state of a society in which people and communities are free in their thinking and in the positing of their laws and are capable of limiting themselves on their own [*s'auto-limiter*] in and through this freedom.

B. Yet the project of autonomy has been broken down in Europe and in the whole "Western" zone of the world-for several decades. Europe has also been the society that has given birth to capitalism, a demented but efficient project of unlimited expansion of pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery to be exercised over nature and human beings. Contestation of capitalism and, more generally, of an institution of society characterized by the domination and exploitation of some by others, was broached by the workers' movement, but such contestation was confiscated by Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism so as to culminate in the most monstrous forms of totalitarianism, which is also a European creation. The collapse of Communist totalitarianism in the countries of Eastern Europe, which has deceptively appeared as a triumph and justification of capitalism, reinforces for the time being the apathy and privatization of populations, which are already, as a function of the degeneration of the workers' movement, settled into a life of consumerism and televisual stupefaction.

Contemporary Western Europe, like all of the West, is characterized by the waning of political and social conflict, the decomposition of political society which has been fragmented into lobbies and dominated by bureaucratized parties, the spread of irresponsibility, the accelerated destruction of Nature, of cities, and of a human *ethos*, generalized conformism, the disappearance of the imagination and of cultural and political creativity, the reign in all domains of ephemeral fashions, intellectual fast foods, and

universal rubbish. Behind the facade of "democratic" institutions, which are so only in name, European societies are liberal-oligarchic societies in which the ruling strata prove themselves increasingly incapable of managing their own system in their own well-understood interest.

C. The constitution of the European Economic Community was undertaken, and remains dominated up till now, by political and administrative bureaucracies lacking any popular participation. So long as that is the case, the "Europe" that will result the reform will be a mere agglomeration of national capitalist societies overshadowed by politico-bureaucratic machinery, even further removed from peoples, that will become even more ponderous and irresponsible than it is today. **Only the emergence of a large democratic and radical popular movement that would also challenge the existing structures in particular States would be able to give another content to "European construction" and make it into a democratic federation of really (*effectivement*) self-governed political units.** My answers below to the questions posed are formulated under the hypothesis -as impossible as it might seem today- that such a movement will exist and will be victorious. Outside that hypothesis, the issue is, in my view, only of sociological interest and not of a political interest.

If the process toward European integration is reinforced and strengthened, toward what pattern of integration should it head? What should be the predominant dimensions (cultural, political, economic, social...)?

What should be the fundamental units of political representation? The current States? The nations, with or without the State? Cultural communities? Regions?

If there is to be a democratic Europe, it can be founded only on self-government. With the dimensions of the social and political units of modern times, and in particular with a Europe of 350 million inhabitants, self-government requires

the greatest possible decentralization and the institution of grassroots political units on a scale where direct democracy could actually function in an effective way. Direct democracy does not signify democracy conducted by polling or over the telephone lines of television stations, as the recent perversion of the term in France tries to make it mean, but, rather, the participation of all citizens in the making of all important decisions, and implementation of those decisions, as well as the treatment of current affairs by committees of popularly elected delegates who can always be recalled. The possibility of recalling delegates dissolves the false alternative between "representative democracy"-where "representatives" in fact dispossess of all power those whom they "represent"-and "imperative mandates"-where the delegates could be replaced by vote-counting machines.

The size of these grassroots political units should be of the order of, at most, 100,000 inhabitants (the dimension of an average city, a Paris ward, or an agricultural region of around twenty villages). Twenty or thirty of these units would be grouped together in second-level units (pretty much the size of present-day regions in Spain, Italy, or France). Those units could, in turn, be grouped together in "national" units, so long as the "Nation" retains its relevance, which would ultimately be united within a **European Federation**. At all those levels, the principle of direct democracy would have to reign: all decisions principally affecting populations at a certain level would have to be made by direct vote of the interested populations, after information {is circulated} and after deliberation. So, for example, the federal laws would have to be adopted by federal referendum. And at all levels, the committees of popularly elected delegates who can be recalled at any time would have only subsidiary powers pertaining to the execution of popularly-made decisions and to current affairs. At all levels, the ruling maxim should be no execution of decisions without participation in the making of decisions.

It is clear that if a popular movement sufficiently powerful and radical to impose a democratic European Federation were to develop, it would create much richer and much newer forms of political coexistence and cooperation than those I am trying to outline here. This outline is to be taken only as an illustration of one possible concrete manifestation of democratic principles.

It is also clear that, contrary to what is happening now, the political dimension will have to be the central dimension of any effort at European integration. Without that dimension, "Europe" will be, at best, only a zone of economic unification leaving the instituted structures intact. Finally, it is also obvious that such a political change will not be able to take place unless it swiftly embraces the other dimensions of the institution of society: the economy, social solidarity, education, culture, and so on.

Do you think that there is a European culture? To put it in other terms, does the cultural diversity existing in today's Europe advance Europeanization or hinder it?

The unity of European culture since the Middle Ages is beyond doubt. But there has also been for centuries, as one knows, a development of national (or regional) cultures, going hand in hand with the triumph of vernacular languages over Latin and the establishment of more or less "national" States. That has not prevented this developing diversity from being a tremendous source of mutual enrichment as early as at least the fourteenth century (to go no further back than Petrarch), and it has remained so, despite the rivalries, wars, and monstrosities perpetrated by some on others that have, up till now, caused only brief eclipses. On the level of philosophy and the sciences, there is but one European culture (even if, in philosophy, there is something like "national styles"). On the level of literature and the arts, one would have to assume that the reader is illiterate if one were to indulge in making an (in fact impossible) list of the cross-fertilizations

without which no national culture in Europe would be what it is, and perhaps wouldn't even exist. Just two points seem to me to merit particular emphasis.

The mutual fertilization of which I spoke is neither a sum of "influences" passively undergone nor an agricultural product of the European soil, nor the mechanical result of spatial proximity. Such proximity is but one external condition, which is in no way sufficient. Cross-fertilization has resulted basically from the active opening up of each culture and of each individual creative person to the other cultures and the other works produced in this zone, from a permanent awakening to beauty and truth created elsewhere. This opening is the key characteristic of European culture, and it goes far beyond the each time given spatial and temporal borders, as is shown at once by Europe's unique relationship to its (Greek, Roman, medieval) past, which, through its continuous creative reinterpretation starting in the Renaissance has remained ever present, and by its also unique relationship with its spatially outer world. Of all the great civilizations known in human history, European civilization -and this is so already since Herodotus- is the sole one that has almost constantly (save for the interruption of the Christian High Middle Ages) shown a passionate interest in the existence and the creations of others. In contrast to the other great civilizations - India, China, Japan, Islam- it has been the sole one not to have closed upon itself and the sole one of which it might be said that it has really wished that nothing that is human remain foreign to it. It is in this respect that one recognizes, beyond the very content of its political and philosophical creations, its universalist character.

On the other hand, it is clear that the development of Nation-States has gone hand in hand with a cultural closure at the level that depended on the State, that of general education, a level whose importance is decisive in any case and especially so because it is indirectly but powerfully orders peoples'

political future. In each country, such education is centered almost exclusively around the country's culture and, more particularly, its "national" literature. It is characteristic, and distressing, that one can at present complete one's secondary-school and even university education in France (and I believe that the situation is basically identical in all European countries, not to mention the other ones) without having read a single line of Cervantes, Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Kafka, or Dostoyevsky (whose names one will have, at best, simply come across in history classes). As for the Greek and Latin classics, there is no point in even talking about them. It is almost a tautology to say that a culture can exist only by being rooted in a living language and that the privileged vehicle of this language is literature. But it is absurd to proceed as if knowledge of this literature had to be accompanied by the exclusion of all the other ones (and the same thing could be said for the great extra-European works).

In conclusion, the cultural diversity of present-day Europe could stand in the way of the development of a European identity only if, unfaithful to the very spirit of European civilization, one continued to close educational curricula to everything that is not "national."

Will national communities without a State -as is the case with Catalonia, but many others as well- become diluted, or will they be reaffirmed within a process of unification? What would the desirable evolution be, and in what ways could they participate in unification?

No one can respond to this question of whether stateless national communities (or even ones with a State) are going to be diluted or reaffirmed within a process of unification. But a democratic Federation, like the one whose features were sketched out a bit above, would most certainly involve a huge amount of facilitation, for these communities, to help them get organized with all the autonomy they would wish within the Federation. That said, the question of the desirable evolution

of the existing national entities (with or without a State) brings up an inextricable knot of antinomies. The principle of individual and collective autonomy implies that every community that so desires in full knowledge of the relevant facts is to be able to organize itself in accordance with the political form it wishes to have (therefore also the Nation-State). But in another connection, this same political project of autonomy, which is addressed to every human being and every human collectivity, implies, through the universalism that is consubstantial with it, going beyond the imaginary of the Nation-State and reabsorbing the Nation into a vaster community that, ultimately, encompasses humanity in its entirety.

At the same time, in effectively actual historical reality, the imaginary of the Nation and of the Nation-State is far from receding and even seems, as is shown by the recent events in Eastern Europe but also all across the globe, to be reviving and reinforcing itself as the sole refuge for individuals who are atomized by contemporary capitalist society and disoriented by the collapse of the significations and values that characterize that society. Finally, we do not know, and we cannot even conceive, of a culture without roots in a concrete language that would be a living, everyday language and not just a commercial or administrative *lingua franca*. The Hellenization of the eastern Mediterranean that began with Alexander, the Latinization of the western Mediterranean under Roman rule, and the Arabization of Islamized peoples after the seventh century offer some examples. (And the Swiss counterexample is not really a counterexample since, while Switzerland has politically been able to safeguard its unity for many centuries, culturally its three main parts have always been turned toward and nourished by the surrounding German, French, and Italian cultures.)

While English (or rather Anglo-American) is increasingly playing at the present time the role of the aforesaid *lingua*

franca, it seems difficult to envisage an “anglicization” of Europe and impossible to accept the disappearance, as cultural languages, of such beautiful, rich and history-laden languages as are practically all the European languages extant today. While waiting for history to do its work, whose orientation and whose effects it would be childish to want to lay down or even to foresee, I would be a supporter of a solution that, still from the perspective of a democratic Europe, would frankly adopt as *lingua franca* of the European Federation, rather than some artificial language, a living one (and English seems, for several reasons, the best placed to play this role), whereas particular cultural linguistic communities would continue to develop.

Yet one could not conclude these few reflections without underscoring -on the occasion, as a matter of fact, of this last question- the importance of a major obstacle in the path of a European Federation: the tremendous persistence of the imaginary of the Nation-State, which makes it seem that the peoples already constituted in States are in no way inclined to abandon “national sovereignty,” while the other ones are especially preoccupied with the idea of achieving an “independent” state form, whatever its cost and whatever its content.

So long as that is the way things are, “Europe” will be reduced to a bureaucratic structure somehow or other heading up and overseeing the national States, and it will be futile to speak of “European integration”.

Source: <https://www.notbored.org/PSRTI.pdf>

Refugees : Human mobility between past and present (part 2)

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Part 1 available [here](#).

Patterns of coexistence

One of the major problems with the influx of refugees and migrants is therefore that of their legal integration (what status to grant: foreign resident or citizen?), and of their social condition: what financial protection, what formation, what job opportunities?

The openness of the community to the Other, whether an “absolute stranger”, whose background is unfamiliar, or a “relative stranger”, who comes from a place with preexisting ties and agreements, according to the distinction by Jacques Derrida, has had a long history. Works of literature since the *Odyssey* and Greek tragedies like *Oedipus at Colonus* have continuously wrestled with the issue, presenting a broad typology of the various possible choices (assimilation, ghettoization, exclusion, and discrimination). Legal categories also expressed these possibilities, ranking different kinds of foreigners and migrants and distinguishing them from the locals, thus showing the place assigned to them in language.

Unlike contemporary societies, national and territorial, where the word « foreign » always takes the same meaning (referring back to the non-national), the notion of the foreigner was uncertain in previous societies, where there were various forms of foreignness. The meaning varies according to the

political systems, and even within the same society, it could vary from one era to another. In other words, the status of the Other was constantly being defined and redefined. Moreover, the foreigner was not necessarily the one who came from elsewhere,, but one whose origin was unknown – bastards, for example – or he who had no social networks and therefore no authority – like the *miserabiles* of Italian cities in the early modern period[1].

However, the central question raised in all societies is with whom to share common space and common goods. The response may have to do with the political structures: community size, degree of centralization, cultural unity, administrative development ... but also with circumstantial conditions: like famines, religious, political, economical crises, wars – that is to say, the actual state of a society.

This last point seems essential. Let us return to our example about the Goths who in 376 CE knocked on the doors of the Roman Empire, with women and children, seeking asylum under pressure from the Huns. They were very similar to the Syrians fleeing Daech and Assad, and the Somalis fleeing Dadaab. But the Roman Emperor hesitated before accepting, and then the Roman officials were so disorganized, corrupt, ineffective that the Goths revolted: the war broke and Rome experienced a bitter defeat.

The example deserves reflection: Rome before this episode extensively practiced the integration, forced or voluntary, of foreign peoples. But in 376, that policy no longer worked. And one reason is that the Empire itself was fragile and disorganized, and that it was more and more closed, beginning a century earlier a process of reification of Romaness and of defining Roman identity against that of others, whether Persians, Manicheans, or heretics, etc.

Isn't it what is happening now similar? European identity is reified, it closes, and rejects the Other ... In the media and

all public places, it is all about “the crisis of migrants” but the crisis concerns also the host societies.

The security measures and the widespread panic is reflected in language (invasion, crisis, hotspots). It is also found in the spectacular images and the exaggerated figures, and in the increasing role of Frontex (the European agency for the regulation and supervision borders). Likewise, this finds expression in the haggling over migrants between England and France, which resulted in setting up the Camp of Calais, and between Europe and Turkey, and with Morocco, and previously with Libya. So too does the construction of walls. All these procedures have shown the inability of national governments and the European Union to plan and organize the movement of people, even though the High Commissioner of the Refugees gave early and repeated warnings when between 2011 and 2014 Turkey and Lebanon absorbed massive numbers.

Economic arguments in support of limiting entry to refugees also testify to the precarious state of the Europeans, and finds expression in the slogans often used by populist parties such as “our boat is full” even if it is the migrants who are shipwrecked. Or, as former

French minister Rocard used to say, “we cannot accommodate all the misery of the world.”. Words like “saturation’ and “density” are so familiar to those who remember the Evian Conference in July 1938 organized by Roosevelt to address the problem of Jewish refugees, of German and Austrian origin. At that conference which brought together 32 countries (9 European and 20 Latin American), representatives were incapable of taking any concrete decision, arguing over quotas [\[21\]](#).

The economic threat expressed by quotas is indeed not an objective phenomenon and the figures are disputed: it is necessary in these arguments to distinguish fantasies and fears from reality. It is clear that mass immigration can only

be resolved if *everyone* is concerned – for example if every member of the European Union participate; and that Asylum policies do not entail just the philosophical question of sharing, but they also reflect the immediate interests of societies. The Roman Empire (until the third century) and the Ottoman Empire, both non-ethnic states, some Italian cities like Livorno in the 15th-16th century, and the Netherlands and Germany in the 17th derived great economic profits from the welcoming of migrants. Some used them to cultivate fallow lands, to defend border areas, and to serve in the military as deportees worked for all the dominant powers across history. Other countries benefited from a transfer of knowledge and wealth. In return, host countries provided stability to these people in the form of citizenship or protected status.

Yet the cost of this policy was sometimes enormous, particularly in demographic terms. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, in October 1685, which made Catholicism the only official religion of France, around 200,000 French Protestants fled to Switzerland, the United Provinces, to the British Island and to Protestant Germany[\[3\]](#). Geneva tripled its population in the 1680s; and to take a final example 34 million immigrants reached the United States between 1810 and 1921[\[4\]](#)!

Of course, there were always voices that opposed the arrival of so many migrants and still others who recalled a tradition of integration. In fact, the reception of migrants has a great deal to do with the imaginary, that is to say, with the self-image of a society and its vision of the world, its ideals, and its values. About the possible settlement of the Goths in Thrace before the war, Greek rhetorician Themistius argued: “Philanthropy triumphs over destruction[...] It is said that already the barbarians transform their iron spades and sickles, and they cultivate the fields. So soon we will see the Scythians not be called barbarians but Romans. Soon we will see such companions, living in our community, to our

table, in military expeditions and contribute to tax.”[\[5\]](#) Themistius expresses in fact three ideas: the superiority of solidarity over closure, the usefulness of migrants; and the possibility of making foreigners into fellow citizens sharing duties and privileges.

Living together shapes culture as much as it is shaped by it.

Today anxiety towards migrants reflects a crisis of identity of the host societies, their fear of losing their values, their civilization. But can we integrate only those who are similar to us? We must get out of the terms in which the immigration debates enclose us, the choice between basing our attitude not on culture but on “ sharing the common”[\[6\]](#) or defending our fixed identity[\[7\]](#). The first position too easily forgets the importance of culture, language, history; the second reifies identity. Let’s accept the changes that come from mobility like those that come from technology transfers, and defend the values that we consider universal – the status of women, the protection of children, to name but these. These values will actually be strengthened and defended by integrating migrants, who are, once again, not invaders or colonizers, but exiles fleeing barbarism.

Now is Europe changing today?

There is always a plurality of competing discourses. Along with the discourse on national identities, there has existed throughout history a “European principle of circulation,”[\[8\]](#) which re-emerged from time to time. This discourse was articulated during the Enlightenment, when European societies conceived of the movement of people and goods as a necessary exchange, and again in the nineteenth century when Europe welcomed revolutionaries expelled from their countries while labor migration developed on a larger scale across the Atlantic[\[9\]](#). But these movements were supported by civil society. However, in the late nineteenth, and especially during the First World War, liberal migration policies were

rejected, and the States seized upon the issue of migration[\[10\]](#). From then on and throughout the twentieth century, the principle of nationality has permanently removed all cosmopolitan ideas, even as the number of migrants increased. The European Union has only reproduced the same national idea on a large scale, while disempowering member states.

The current situation is thus a continuation of the challenging facing European construction with on one side a free trade area and on the other border closures. It is a continuation of the great reversal that I mentioned at the beginning of this article, which led to the crushing of the human. It is also a continuation of the history of a Europe that has never really accepted otherness.

It is not enough to say that the new security discourse only helps to hide the profound responsibility of European states in the crisis of the Middle East and in the rise of extremist groups within populations born in Europe. We do not need guilt to practice inclusion.

Rather, we should develop an alternative discourse to Neoliberalism, a project of a democratic society that enables citizen action. When citizens are in control of their destiny, when they feel capable of shaping their world, they are not afraid of the Other, and they even recognize the courage of those fleeing persecution, as Harry Truman said in 1952[\[11\]](#). It is a lesson that can be drawn from the actual action of citizens who help and interact with migrants in opposition to the law.

Besides “the moral imperative to save lives” and to preserve the integrity of the bodies and of the minds of human beings, it seems better, as François Crépeau suggested, to organize mobility than resist it. It is better to open legal channels for migration and facilitate the movement of people in order to create fluidity, which was so successful in ancient times.

The choice before us is twofold: either close borders and create mafias and violence, revolt and dehumanization; or bring protection and co-responsibility, negotiation and above all dialogue. In my view, this last choice is the only way to retain in our globalized societies a sense of our own humanity.

NOTES:

[1] Simona Cerutti, *Étrangers. Étude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime*, Paris, Bayard, 2012.

[2] And creating the "Comité intergouvernemental pour les réfugiés" (CIR). See Greg Robinson « Le Projet M de Franklin D. Roosevelt : construire un monde meilleur grâce à la science... des races », in *Critique internationale* 2/2005 (n° 27), p. 65-82.

[3] Philippe Joutard, "Réseaux huguenots et espaces européens", in *Revue de Synthèse. Circulation et cosmopolitisme en Europe*, dir. H.Asséo, 2002, tome 123, p.111-129: p. 111.

[4] Hans Magnus Enzenberger, *Die Grosse Wanderung*, Francfort, 1992, p. 26.

[5] *Oration XVI.211-212*

[6] Jay Walljasper, *All That We Share. A Field Guide to the Commons*, December 2010 (<https://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/6687/all%20that%20we%20share.pdf?sequence=1>)

[7] Garrett Hardin, *The Immigration Dilemma. Avoiding the Tragedy of the Commons*, Washington, DC, 1995

[8] Daniel Roche, "Voyages, Mobilité, Lumières", in *Revue de Synthèse. Circulation et cosmopolitisme en Europe*, dir. H.Asséo, 2002, tome 123, p. 17-36: p.19.

[9] Dick Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact. World Migrations in the Second Millenium*, Duke University Press, 2002, p.277 ff.

[10] Karl Bade, *Europa in Bewegung: Migration vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Munchen, 2000, p. 292ff.

[\[11\]](#) Against the *Immigration and Nationality Act* (Mac Carran-Walter Act) which aimed at limiting the European immigration, Truman said: « we do not need to be protected against immigrants from these countries ; on the contrary we want to stretch out a helping hand, to save those who have managed to flee from Europe, to succor those who were brave enough to escape from barbarism ». The same Truman had send bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki seven years before.

The text is transcribed version of Claudia Moatti's speech during [B-fest 5](#) in Athens, Greece.

Video from the same speech:

Refugees : Human mobility

between past and present (part 1)

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This is not the first time in history that we speak of a “crisis of migrants” and that as in Europe, Turkey, Malaysia, the US, Kenya and Thailand, that is to say all around the world, we’re trying to expel or return them to their countries of origin, or to ship them to other countries. In the 19th century, between 1832 and 1851, France, who generously hosted political exiles, began to speak of a “refugee problem” and in 1852, it ended the long French tradition of hospitality by closing borders, and deporting immigrants to the United States, Britain, Belgium, and Switzerland.

It is not the first time in Europe that we consider expelling less fortunate immigrants: England, the most open countries to immigration and asylum until the twentieth century, although less by humanitarianism than by economical interest, issued in 1905 the Alien Act to prevent the entry of proletarian masses, who were often Jewish.

Yet all that was nothing compared to the million of refugees in the 20th century, who took to the roads and seas following the intervention of states, during and after the two World Wars, after decolonization, and after the fall of the « Iron Curtain ». Understandably, some have called it a “century of refugees” [\[1\]](#).

It is why, upon the arrival of thousands of refugees who now cross the Mediterranean –in 2015, over one million have passed through Greece and they are again at the gates of Europe– one is struck by the apparent amnesia of our contemporaries, unless this is a kind of repression of the traumatic

experiences of the second World war: the deportations, the concentration camps, and the many ships that were refused asylum like the Saint Louis in 1939, which left Hamburg for Cuba, then for Florida, and was refused entrance in these countries, and had to return to Europe, where 900 Jews ended mostly in refugee camps in Belgium and the Netherlands; or the Struma which in December 1941 left Costanza in Romania for Palestine and, arriving in Istanbul, was sent back to the Black Sea where it was sunk; only one of the 800 Jews on it survived.

But, who among today's analysts refers to the past to better analyze the present, to make sure the mistakes of the past are not repeated? Those hostile to migrants tend to forget that modern nations were formed by massive migrations, while others forget the negative aspects of communitarianism^[2]. However, since the 1990s, the image of the "Great barbarian Invasions" of the Roman Empire, and the "hordes" of the Middle Ages, is a regular feature of speeches of those fearing the flood of Eastern Europeans and Turks, Syrians, Afghans or sub-Saharan. In fact, the European Union closed its borders and adopted many discriminatory measures, returning the refugees to their country of entry in Europe (according to the Dublin Regulation III) or asked other countries to filter them.

In our world which is deemed to be increasingly mobile and interconnected, globalization has made the circulation of capital and goods more fluid than ever. However, borders are closed with barbed wire. Such measures increase the anxiety and concern about the movement of people, regular or irregular. In a world that has enshrined freedom of movement in the Universal Declaration of 1948, a tension exists between the recognition of this right, and practices that deny it in effect.

It must be said that the concept of freedom of movement is elastic: it was deployed in the history of both goods and people, capital and knowledge; and it was used to justify

slavery as well as the abolition of slavery; trade or cosmopolitanism as well as colonization and the appropriation of space by the dominant States. As the German sociologist Alfred Schutz put it: Freedom of movement is, "the figure of all mobilities" ; and its ambiguity explains why it has become today one of the factors of inequality in the world.

In order to think about these tensions and paradoxes, it is important to have a long-term perspective. This is not necessarily to look for past models but rather to understand changes and ruptures and avoid the fantasies, while remaining aware of the absolute specificity of our time and of the big reversal we have been witnessing since the second part of the twentieth century.

In 1945, in fact, after the great Catastrophe, women and men of all countries wanted to build a new world based on humanistic values, respect for others, and protection of the individual. The Universal declaration of rights, which was the basis for the expansion of international institutions placed the human being at the heart of all their concerns. This was a major break from previous periods. Never before in the history of mankind was such an «institutionalization» of the defense of human beings experienced or even thought. Yet, these statements have been ignored in fact and the opposite became the norm. As Miguel Abensour said, the idea of emancipation, a 19th century idea revived after the Second World War, has turned into the harshest exploitation of men. Today, what we could call the "great reversal" is clearly visible, illustrated by the growing number of persecuted people in the world: over 51 million according to UNHCR figures. Who can forget the permanent camps of refugees, such as those of the Palestinians in Jordan, or the Somalis in Kenya or the great number of new camps created in the last few years? We fear these confined migrants so much that we do not even consider the majority of them as "manpower." Neoliberalism, which imagines everything, including human beings, as "capital",

which feeds on crisis, and conceives competition as a value and the firm as a model, is not for nothing in the degradation of the human person.

This is why the past is more necessary than ever to any reflection on the current situation because we might find in it, as Castoriadis would say, a « germ » capable of inspiring new forms of coexistence. In order to trace a few strands of a long history of human mobility, I begin with a few comments about mobility in general, then I examine past mass migrations. After that, it becomes possible to contextualize the precariousness and insecurity of migrants and explore the notions of hospitality and coexistence. I will conclude by raising a question that is central to these discussions: has Europe changed?

Migration and Human Mobility between past and present

It is now recognized that mobility is a constant in human history. Since prehistoric times, mankind has moved, and it is in motion that it has diversified and progressed. Sedentarianism appears late in the Neolithic agricultural revolution between 15,000 and 5,000 BCE. Since then, there was a constant tension between the ideal of sedentarianism and that of mobility, between xenophobia and openness. But even if the idea of “the people” has most often referred back to a homogeneous and stable whole, which is the foundation of the legitimacy of the state, as opposed to the mobile and disorganized multitude, mobility and sedentarianism have coexisted in practice, including in territorial states that have tried to settle mobile groups.

Mobility in all its forms has thus structured pre-modern societies. It can be defined as a social process that begins with the fact of leaving one’s family and ends in a transnational process^[3], as a factor of transformation of societies (through knowledge, culture, or wealth transfers) but also of identity: migrants forge links between different

parts of the world, accumulating multiple identities, or just switching cultures[4]. The figure of « the man in motion » has even expressed the human condition itself and, in ancient legends, the legislator, the one who gave stability and identity to a country, was always described as a man coming from elsewhere[5] 5 . Moreover, apart from a few people who claimed to be autochthonous, the myths of foundations tell stories of immigration or of mixture of peoples (for example synoecisms), thus reflecting the experience of ethnic diversity found all around the Mediterranean. The distance is huge between these conceptions and practices, and our world, where the Other, as a whole, as a mass, is considered as a danger.

Migration, a sociological or demographic analytical category, is a particular form of mobility. It refers to the fact of leaving the place where one lives with the intention of settling elsewhere. The term originally contains no specific connotation, except the idea of an uprooting experience, nor does it correspond to any specific status. In fact, in antiquity, the Middle Ages, and in early modern times, the concept does not exist. Rather, there were many terms that applied to situations of mobility. This shows that pacific population flows were not an object of consideration, or of norms[6].

Today, the terms mobility and migration are too weak to account for the violence of our world. The existing word is somewhat more eloquent: “migrant”, a recent term, refers to people who probably are too undesirable to even be called “immigrants”, too persecuted to deserve the status of “emigrants”; as for “refugee” it is a legal status recognized only half a century ago, by the Geneva Convention of 1951 (we will return to this text later).

If mobility was a structural phenomenon of pre-modern societies, were people free to move? Although fluid, these societies were actually very regulated. But what characterized

them is first that they did not seek to control their territory as such, or the flow of people, but only certain categories of persons, according to various logics (fiscal control, military issues, health problems)[7]. Second, they were more concerned by emigration than by immigration, since the demographic wealth was at the heart of their conception of power (this was the case in ancient societies, in the France of Louis XIV or in England of the 18th century for example).

Since the formation of Nation-States, primarily in Europe after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, constraints on mobility got higher and its modalities changed. In the legal world of modern States in which sovereignty is circumscribed by the territory and is exercised through it, one receives the right to move freely within the state territory of which he is a national, while the state cannot in principle forbid him from remaining there, leaving or returning there. However, the state may prohibit its territory to a foreigner, who is uniquely defined as "non-national". And it is clear that European integration with the Shengen Agreements has only pushed to the limits of Europe the same logic and the same constraints. In this context, while the right to emigrate has been recognized by the Universal Declaration of 1948, the right to immigrate which is under the sovereignty of states is not; or at least not for everyone. Today, in fact, the wealthy, the businessmen have no borders. And the difference across the world grows between them and all those who are denied this right, so that one could speak of *global apartheid*. A very different situation from the past.

Following the same logic, Nations-States imposed passports, border controls, and sophisticated identification techniques. They also sought to suppress minorities, absorb or expell them, initiating in the twentieth century a process of 'unmixing of peoples'[8] and of ethnicization of citizenship, which put on the roads millions of people: more than 1 Million Greeks came from Turkey and around 500 000 Turkish Muslims

left Greece after the breakup of the Ottoman empire! To which must be added the return of thousands of settlers to the mainland after decolonization (1 million French from Algeria after the end of the war in 1962) and the departure of many minorities from their country as a result of the transformation of previous colonies into Nation-States: the Ghanaians leaving Nigeria, Senegalese leaving Ghana, or the Indians East Africa, etc.

Mass migrations

These kinds of mass migrations that are so characteristic of the twentieth century, are not a recent phenomenon, however. They are found in all periods of history and in all forms of mobility: in home-community migrations like rural exoduses and internal deportations; in colonization movements; and in cross-community migrations, forced –or voluntary[\[9\]](#). Think of the millions of captives and slaves deported all along the centuries or of European expansion into the new world, which caused what Aristide Zolberg called “the revolution of departures.”[\[10\]](#)

Forced mass migrations, like those we see today, that is to say movements of hundreds or thousands of people, including both men, women and children, fleeing or displaced under threats whether political, military, economic, or climatic, also existed in ancient times. The Gothic tribes fled the Huns in the fourth century CE and sought asylum from the Romans. Jews and Moors were forced to flee Spain from the end of the fifteenth century; Huguenots fled France during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and especially after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685); in 1830-32, Algerian Kabyles (and others) fled French colonialism to Syria then under Ottoman rule; and in the 20th century, million people deported to be killed – among which the Armenians by the Turks or the Jews and Gypsies by the Nazis and their collaborators in Europe. In the twentieth century, only the Iron Curtain during the Cold War limited migration, while removing a fundamental

right, the right to emigrate.

The idea and image of a mass dehumanizes migrants; we must instead individualize them to understand the extent of the phenomenon and reveal the human experience beyond the mass. We must realize that each of them, whether poor or wealthy, is primarily a man who cannot go home without putting his life in danger. Migration, which probably carries with it hope for change, is in this sense first of all precarious and insecure.

Precariousness of the migrant: from safety to security

Precariousness and insecurity have always characterized the life of the migrant on the roads and seas, in host countries, or even in the place of origin.

Precariousness is primarily the risk of losing one's liberty and property and, for example, being imprisoned or interned if one belongs to a country at war against the place where one resides. This practice, in use since ancient times was officially abolished at the beginning of the early modern times, but regularly practiced by all the following periods, for example in the USA in 1941 against the Japanese who were detained while their property was confiscated[\[11\]](#); in France, at the beginning of the Second World War against the Germans refugees, mainly Jews, as reported by Lion Feuchtwanger in his narration: *The devil in France. My Encounter with him in the summer 1940* (published in 1941).

Precariousness comes also from not speaking the language of the host country, not knowing the local laws, not knowing one's fate; risking to be arbitrarily expelled, or being under the power of smugglers. Over the 16th-17th centuries in the Dutch, French and English Caribbean or in the southern colonies in North America, European migrants pledged to perform labor to a ship captain or a trader traveling with them. These contracts, and thus the migrants themselves, called *indentured servants*, were at their arrival auctioned

off to the highest bidding employers for a period that could vary from three to ten years – a kind of temporary servitude that is well known in the world today. Another kind of smugglers, who made migrants into commodities, was the *redemptioners* who, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, offered migrants to finance their trip by working for them once arrived^[12]. Today, smugglers are more explicit: Muslims expelled from Thailand to Burma were captured at the border by traffickers who made them pay dearly for their passage to predominantly Muslim Malaysia; Syrians leaving Turkey enrich in the same way smugglers who sell at a very high price the improbable crossing, while so many female migrants are enrolled involuntarily in prostitution.

To combat this insecurity, two responses have been provided across history: ensuring the *safety* of migrants, or ensuring the *security* of the host societies. *Safety* was ensured through preferential agreements between states, through judicial protection, through forms of public hospitality, and sometimes more pragmatically through bilateral agreements on labor exchange (for mercenaries or workers). Efforts to protect migrants were also the expression of moral values or social ties: associations indeed played a role in the reception of migrants, in information sharing, judicial protection. But what underlines these practices is an ethics of hospitality –which resolved the question of trust, perhaps the most fundamental issue for all migrants and host societies.

When the security of the state is privileged, which occurs mainly in centralized and territorialised states (the late Roman Empire, the French absolute monarchy, for example), there is no question of trust and no question of hospitality. Suspicion prevails because migrants are seen as intruders, who disturb the community, who can take over the work of others and disrupt the social order. Asylum seekers arouse suspicion because their claims could be fraudulent. As a result, discriminatory measures multiply and the definition of asylum

rights gets restricted, as it has been the case since the 80s. In this context, camps and walls also multiply even if they are expensive to build and maintain (over 15 million Euros given by Europe to Bulgaria according to an article in *Le Monde*). Let's notice their absence in pre-modern times, except during wars or crises (epidemics for example gave birth to sanitary cordons in early modern times).

This logic, and this distrust, ultimately create more than suspicion. They lead to the criminalization of migrants (whether they are accused of being swindlers, drug traffickers or terrorists). Again, the past provides us with examples, but this phenomenon is primarily a feature of our time. Not only are migrants sidelined but they are confined in camps. Following the haggling between the EU and Turkey, migrants arriving in Greece, including children, were arrested and interned because they infringed on the agreement. Recently, the UN general rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, François Crépeau, denounced this agreement and this detention, declaring them illegal.

The effect of policies privileging security is threefold: within states, hyper security has an impact on the freedoms of citizens; outside and inside. they promote the parallel economy, and finally produce among migrants a defiance against and non-compliance to the laws and authorities of the host country. Distrust of societies towards migrants produces distrust and violence among migrants who feel that the law is not fair, that the host country is dysfunctional, and that hiding, being a clandestine, is the best choice. There is in the security centered policies a tendency towards escalation that is simply difficult to control.

The status of "refugee" itself illustrates this hesitation throughout history between trust and distrust, between safety and security. In pre-modern times, asylum was primarily a place where a fugitive found an absolute protection (a temple, later a church). It was also a privilege given to foreigners

by a city that accepted to protect them from seizure of their goods or of their bodies. The same idea lies in the notion of *hospitium*, in latin, which refers to private or public hospitality and protection. In the most ancient periods, also, exile was considered not as a punishment, but as a refuge from civil or physical threat, including from a judicial punishment (this is what was offered to Socrates by his followers before his judgment but he refused, preferring to die in his city). In these two notions of exile and asylum, the logic was primary based on the point of view of the fugitive and the goal was his protection, his safety.

In opposition, the modern concept of refugee is defined from the perspective of the state, the place of origin (which no longer protects its citizens) and the host country ... The UN Refugee Agency defines "an asylum-seeker as someone who says he or she is a refugee, but whose claim has not yet been definitively evaluated". The history of this status must be placed again in the context of the development of the nation-state[13]: it starts after the First World War in 1922 when the Nansen passport was created for all stateless persons.

Followed the Geneva Convention of 28 July 1951 which defined asylum for the Eastern European refugees; and then, the Protocol of 1967, which broadened the protection to "those persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion ". "Those persecuted": the notion of persecution unifies refugee status although it did not integrate the victims of civil wars and dictatorships[14], but in practice, each person, individually, has to prove that he is being persecuted –refugees have a legal status, but they do not form a social group capable of acting collectively, they can only be the objects of decision and speech ; second, only national states are responsible for the interpretation of texts and individual situations[15]. From the 1970-80s, while the line between the different types of migrants (economic migrants and political refugees) was

being blurred, the interpretation of texts became narrower, showing that states sought to protect themselves from refugees, especially when they came from the Third World. While Europeans opened the doors of their countries when they needed manpower, now that migrants want to come in, they do not accept them anymore. This evolution does not only concern Europe. In fact, in this regard, the difference between the South and the North is vanishing[16].

NOTES:

[1] C.D Wingenroth, « Das Jahrhundert der Flüchtlinge », *Aussenpolitik*, 10, n.8, S: 409-499, quoted by K. Bade. *Europa in Bewegung: Migration vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Munchen, 2000.

[2] H.M. Enzenberger, *Die Grosse Wanderung*, Francfort, 1992.

[3] Dick Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact. World Migrations in the Second Millenium*, London 2002, p.8 ff.

[4] This is an important point : when does a stranger stop being a stranger ? According to Alfred Schultz (The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology, *American Journal of Sociology*, Volume 49, Issue 6 (May, 1944), 499-507), the stranger is always a stranger in an host country until he is normalized ; on the contrary, for Georg Simmel, the stranger remains always a potential wanderer (*Bridge and Door. Theory, Culture and Society*, 1994).

[5] Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner*, Princeton, 2001.

[6] For example, Claudia Moatti, 'Immigration and cosmopolitanization', in P. Erdkamp (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome*. Cambridge, 2013, 77-92.

[7] On these issues, see Claudia Moatti and Wolfgang Kaiser, "Mobilità umana e circolazione culturale nel Mediterraneo dall'età classica all'età moderna", Introduction to *Migrazioni*, a cura di P.Corti et M.Sanfilippo, Einaudi, Torino, 2009, p. 5-20.

[8] Rogers Brubaker, "Aftermaths of Empire and the **Unmixing of**

Peoples: Historical and Comparative Perspectives", *Nationalism reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge, 1996, 148-178

[9] On these three kinds of migrations, see Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History*, London, 2nd ed. 2013, p.4-6.

[10] Aristide Zolberg, "La révolution des départs", in N. Green and F. Weil, *Citoyenneté et émigration*, Paris, 2006, p.37 ff.

[11] According to the *Alien Enemies Act* voted in 1798 and still in use, the President had the right to detain or deport male citizens of a hostile nation, above the age of 14, during the time of war. On this episode

[12] On these historical kinds of smugglers, see Karl Bade, *Europa in Bewegung: Migration vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, Munchen, 2000, part II., chapter 2.

[13] Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *Le droit d'émigrer*, 2016.

[14] As noticed by Dick Hoerder, *Cultural in Contact. World Migrations in the Second Millenium*, Duke University Press, 2002, p. 515.

[15] On these issues, see Gérard Noiriel, *Etat, nation et immigration. Vers une histoire du pouvoir*, Paris, 2001, p.278-287.

[16] Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *Le droit d'émigrer*, 2016, p.32.

The text is transcribed version of Claudia Moatti's speech during [B-fest 5](#) in Athens, Greece.

Part 2 available [here](#).

Video from the same speech:

Interview with Dilar Dirik on Rojava (audio)

A rare interview with Dilar Dirik, taken by Ivaylo Stefanov for Babylonia Magazine during the 5th edition of the international festival B-Fest (May 2016).

Dirik analyzes the relations in Rojava between the grassroots structures (communes and councils) and the local political parties, comparing the Kurdish democratic autonomy with Catalonia of 36-39 and the contemporary communities of the Zapatistas.

She also attempts to shed some light on the ongoing conflicts in the southern parts of Turkey, focusing on the situation in Bakur, the place where democratic autonomy first took roots amongst the Kurdish population.

Correspondence from the Horizontal Movements of Spain: Interview with Jeza Goudi

Interview with Social Activist Jeza Goudi

Interview: Antonis Broumas

The 15M movement has been a turning point for social movements in Spain. Which were the conditions of social counter-power in the country until then and what changed after 15M?

Sometimes we talk about a kind of “climate”, a certain atmosphere. At the times when the 15M movement erupted, people were really disappointed with the traditional political parties and trade unions. In the post-Franco Spanish republic, much of the “transition to democracy” narrative was aimed to de-politicize people, summarized in a “vote every four years, that is democracy” logic about politics. Corruption, lack of opportunities for the youth, the feeling of powerlessness and, in fact, all the consequences of the limitations of the “transition to democracy” narrative, in addition to the looming economic crisis, made the 15M movement possible. At the same time, the international context of the *Arab Springs* played a role, maybe not so much in terms of political content, but in terms of movement structures and forms. On top of that, the violence used against people camping peacefully in Madrid during the first night of 15M was a wake-up call for the populace to occupy the rest of the country’s squares. But the turning point, at least for me, was the narrative that people jointly constructed during the days of the movement. It

was not an angry narrative or a complicated “class struggle” analysis. Instead, it was very direct: “They don’t represent us and we are not objects in the hands of politicians and bankers”. Such a narrative introduced emotions in politics. It was a narrative constructed by common people, which other people could understand, share and complement. This attributed to the movement a feeling of a work in progress, in which everyone could participate. There were only questions, instead of final answers, as is characteristic of the traditional movements. And of course, social networks helped as a tool to spread, share and build this whole new narrative.

Identity politics and factionism have fragmented grassroots movements in Europe for decades. How do Spanish movements cope with these pathologies and how do different parts of the movements coordinate, network together and / or even confederate?

As per your question, it seems you have a conception of the “social movements” as a fragmented entity. It is easier to think about the movements as something more organic: groups of people who organize to do some things, usually practical stuff, i.e. a project, a campaign for or against something, and always with a communications’ team in charge of explaining what they are doing to the rest of the “social movements” and society. In this grassroots way of organizing, if other people agree or believe they can be helpful, they just join. Then, when important political events arise, activists may join forces to create a space to coordinate for a demonstration or a specific campaign, for instance against the gag law. Usually, those spaces, as per our experience, never last as much as some would like, but they rise and fall in relation to the specific objective that generated them. When the objective is gone, they can still be there as long as they are useful. When they aren’t anymore, they die. When there is need for the pursuit of other objectives, they are built again. In the last 5 years, I’ve seen lots of spaces like these being created and

then disappear. All of them had different characteristics, which is very interesting, depending on the objective and the people who actually was giving live to them.

It is not that factionism does not happen, but when something is important, activists in the Spanish movements work somehow together. Some say we use hacker ethics, don't waste the others' time and understand what a fork is: the possibility of having two projects instead of one. Why getting angry to a team because you don't like their strategy or because you know they are going to fail? I would claim the right to be wrong and experiment by myself. And getting angry with someone because you don't share the same strategy means at the end a strong form of paternalism: you know what is right and wrong for everyone, you know what is better for the others. We agree for instance to fight against the gag law. Yet, the strategies of different teams of activists were different, because the concerns of each team were different. We agreed in some actions, but some might focus on legal issues, others would prepare the ground for coordination, others made communication campaigns, acts of disobedience and all different kinds of actions. The whole project even had different approaches in Barcelona and in Madrid, due to divergent political conditions in these two cities.

The first thing to observe in Spanish movements is their strong emphasis on the construction of "poder popular", i.e. autonomous power from below embodied in socialized institutions of self management and self governance. Can you describe the state of "poder popular", its gravity for social counter-power and its potential?

I will speak about Barcelona, because the movements are not homogeneous throughout Spain. In Barcelona, associationism has a centuries' old history and is part of the city's social tissue. By taking different shapes, from working class' direct forms of struggle, to neighborhoods organizing the neighborhoods' festivals and cultural activities, such as the

“balls de bastons”, associationism has been the natural way of urban socialization. Therefore, we could claim that we are used to construct autonomous citizens’ projects and develop activities around them. In the case of social centers, as Can Batlló or La Base, some of them are really open to the neighborhood, especially after 15M, and they have become meeting places for the neighbors. This has a lot of potential, especially in a city under the constant menace of gentrification, since such places have the capacity to organize the resistance. In addition, these modes of associationism change the mentality of people. What takes place in these movement structures is directly opposing to the dominant worldview imposed by capitalism, i.e. individualism. Feminization, in the sense of taking care of each other physically and mentally, plays a central role in such spaces.

But the housing movement is as well “popular power”, a kind of institution built from the grassroots, winning its legitimacy by doing, becoming reliable on day to day struggle and through communication to the wider public. A lot of campaigns and working teams actually work as a popular institution, where people go to get help and solve their problems (and some join, of course).

Spanish social movements usually hit the news in an indirect way, when electoral forces, such as Podemos, Barcelona en Comu and the CUP, which are supposed to represent them, succeed in the ballots. Which is the most appropriate correlation between non-representative movements and representative leftist forces according to your understanding and experience?

It is true that in certain political parties or organizations there are people who come from the social struggles. And, of course, some others don’t. Hence, some took popular anger and the claims of the people as basis to build a political force and enter in the various levels of government. But they are not representing social movements, because we come from the main point of “no-one represents us” and because you cannot

expect that the plurality of the movements can be represented through a political electoral force. This became obvious in the squares, where we could not even attain consensus on “de minimis” political declarations of the movement. Even though the media, especially international media, try to simplify the relation between the 15M and Podemos by claiming that “Podemos is 15M”, yet they are totally wrong, since a great deal of the strength of the movements has not been converged at Podemos and there is no consensus among activists that “we are all going to penetrate the institutions”. Such an approach is only shared in a part of the movements, which considers that grassroots movements have a “ceiling” in their capacity to achieve change. If we are talking about forks, this is a big one and we don’t know if there will be a reunion of the branches again.

Yet, now it looks like the ones who achieved a certain power in government start to realize that there is also a “crystal ceiling” of the change that can be achieved through state institutions. In fact, they experience that state bureaucracy is not the machine for the success of the left, that when you somehow attain the power of a state institution, still the public servants, such as the police or the administration staff, remain the same people. And, moreover, left electoral forces don’t control the mass media, which the right uses to damage the credibility and the change proposals of the former. Finally, even though *Barcelona en Comu* claimed during their electoral campaign that they were in need of the people to keep to the streets and mark their autonomous political expression, it now seems that they aren’t all that happy, when we demonstrate or organize to defend, for instance, the street sellers. The answer is usually “you don’t understand the whole complexity”. Paternalism. How did it happened? Well from my point of view, as power relations are the main problem, gaining political power cannot be the solution: power will change you faster than you change it. What can social movements can do about electoral forces of the left? Utilizing

them as tools has the potential menace of co-optation, as happens with Podemos much more than others like Barcelona en Comú.

What are your views about the results in the recent national elections in Spain? What is the strategy that autonomous movements should adopt?

Looks it was not a good idea for Podemos to go together with Izquierda Unida. Why? Probably a lot of IU voters were there because the IU speech is more radical (No nato, and economy policies for instance). Some of them might not vote for the “new social democracy” of Podemos. In addition, Podemos made an effort to get the voters of the PSOE instead of the abstentionist. This didn't work. And the abstention grew, which is always good news for the right. In general, becoming the “new social democracy” is not a good idea. The failure of the negotiations and Pablo Iglesias insisting on lending a hand to PSOE was probably not a good thing for getting people to vote and to mobilize participation in the elections. As for the result, the right-wing Popular Party increased its power, Ciudadanos decreased. I think the voters of Ciudadanos went back to the PP, in order to guarantee “stability”. Brexit for sure played a role in the dissemination of fear among voters. Furthermore, many activists abstained, as they felt disappointed from the last time they voted in the municipal elections for the “municipalities of the change”. Recently, in a conference Pablo Iglesias said that it is stupid to think that things change on the streets and he claimed that things change only through institutions. And that the “blitz war” of Podemos against the institutions is over and they are going to the trenches.

“Social movements” do not sit together in one room and decide an strategy. I think that there are different teams, assemblies, working groups and campaigns and each one of them have, of course, autonomy to decide what strategy they will follow. Some will, as they do now, collaborate with the

institutions in order to implement some measures when the objectives of both coincide, as they are doing at the municipal level. Some will, as they do now, contest the measures of the new government if they feel them unfair or insufficient or to be attacking them. Some others, autonomous projects and initiatives, will be doing exactly the same whoever governs, building "*poder popular*".

Social antagonism takes place at the transnational level. Yet, social movements have until now failed to develop effective modes of struggle across and beyond borders and challenge the dominance of capital. Which are in your view the ways to change that and consolidate our collective counter-power at the pan-European level?

I don't know if something like this is even possible. Our concerns in the south, let's say Greece and Spain, are different from the concerns of movements in Germany. And as much as we think that the roots of all these are the same, i.e. the construction of the EU as a neoliberal-implementing machine (and in the end of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism, knowing that one cannot exist without the other), our strategies and immediate struggles are by now far too different. From my personal point of view, all the international meetings I have attended helped to understand the movements of other countries but failed to implement the decisions taken. Yet, it is worth to try. Maybe, the understanding of our unity in diversity can create something different, which probably we haven't yet imagined. In conclusion, we need a trial and error strategy for our transnational coordination to get closer to a success. Probably it is not going to be something like "united" and doing the same (every time someone says "we must unite", a kitten dies) but attacking the monster from different angles, depending on our position and our skills. I don't have a specific idea on how it would look like, but for sure it won't be a pan-european movement triggered from the top, just like

Ομιλία του Julian Assange B-FEST 5 | Julian Assange on B-Fest 5

Ο Julian Assange στο 5ο B-Fest | 28/5/2016.

Παρακάτω η ομιλία του με θέμα: **Wikileaks, TTIP & Ψηφιακά Δικαιώματα/ IoT**

Ομιλητής: Julian Assange (Wikileaks, μέσω ζωντανής τηλεδιάσκεψης)

Συντονιστές: Chris Spannos (New Internationalist Mag, teleSUR English), Αντώνης Μπούμας (περιοδικό Βαβυλωνία)

Julian Assange on B-Fest 5 | Athens | 28/5/2016.

His speech on: **Wikileaks, TTIP & Digital Rights / IoT**

Speaker: Julian Assange (Wikileaks, via live conferencing)

Moderators: Chris Spannos (New Internationalist Mag, teleSUR English), Antonis Broumas (Babylonia magazine)

Reflections on Castoriadis and Bookchin

Yavor Tarinski

The primary threat to nature and people today comes from centralizing and monopolizing power and control.

Vandana Shiva[\[1\]](#)

Nowadays constantly we are being told “from above” that we don’t have a choice but to conform to the status quo. The dominant power institutions are doing everything they can to convince us that the solution to our social and environmental problems is going to be found in the very same policies that have created them in the first place. The T.I.N.A. narrative continues to dominate the mainstream discourse and the widespread consumerist culture, in combination with the long-lasting representative crisis, is infecting people’s imaginary

with cynicism, general conformism and apathy.

But germs of other ways of thinking and living are trying to break their way through the passivity of present day logic. New significations that are going beyond the contemporary bureaucratic capitalist discourse, offering new sets of reasons and values, which to navigate societal life away from the destructiveness of constant economic growth and cynical apathy.

With popular dissatisfaction of the present order of things on the rise we can distinguish two significations that offer radical break with the present normality:

On the one hand, there is growing interest in political participation and direct democracy. Nowadays it is becoming almost unthinkable to think of popular unrest outside of the general frame of democracy: first, the demands almost always revolve around more citizen involvement in one form or another; second, the way of organizing popular struggle for a long time have overpassed the centralism of the traditional political organizations, insisting instead on self-organization and collaboration.

On the other hand, ecology is emerging as major concern and as an answer to the contemporary growth-based politico-economic model that is responsible for the creation of tangible environmental crisis and rapidly unfolding climate change. It is being expressed in the form of popular struggles against capitalist extractivist projects, harmful to the environment, human health, as well as to local autonomy. It also takes the form of resistance to consumerist culture, both of whom boost innovative new theories like de-growth.

Amongst the diverse spectrum of thinkers that nowadays are developing these new significations we can distinguish Cornelius Castoriadis and Murray Bookchin as two of the most influential. Both emerged from the Left and through their

thought, as well as activist practices, managed to overpass the ideological dogmas and to develop their own political projects, incorporating and advancing further direct democracy and ecology. It's not surprising that they collaborated in the journal *Society & Nature*, and later in its successor *Democracy & Nature*, until 1996, when a bitter conflict between the two emerged[2].

Nowadays their legacy is being carried on by social movements and struggles that place these two significations at the heart of their political activities. Castoriadis's thought was revitalized with the popular uprisings across Europe of the last years and especially with the so called "Movement of the Squares" (also known as The Indignados), that was driven not by "pure" ideologies but by passion for political action and critical thinking, while Bookchin's project is being partially implemented in practice by the kurdish liberation movement in the heart of the Middle East (most notably in [Rojava](#)), influencing it to such a degree that it completely abandoned its marxist-leninist orientation.

It must be noted that the target of the present text is not the development of a deep comparative analysis between the works of both of them, but instead an effort at underlying two elements of their thought that are especially actual for our current context and are charged with huge potential for change.

Direct Democracy

Both Castoriadis and Bookchin saw great liberatory potential in direct democracy and placed it at the heart of their political projects. They devoted great part of their writings on that matter, developing this notion beyond the frames set by traditional ideologies. In stark difference with authoritarian views, mistrusting society and thus calling to its subjection to hierarchical, extra-social mechanisms, on the one hand, and on the other, with such views that reject

every form of laws and institutions, the two thinkers proposed the establishment of structures and institutions that will allow direct public interaction, while maintaining social cohesion through horizontal flow of power.

According to Castoriadis, the majority of human societies were established on the basis of heteronomy, which he describes as a situation in which the society's rules are being set by some extra-social source (such as the party, god, historic necessity etc.). The institutions of the heteronomous societies are conceived as given/self-evident and thus, unquestionable, i.e. incompatible with popular interaction. For him the organizational structure of the modern western world, while usually characterized as "democracy", is actually a liberal oligarchy, with some liberties for the people, but the general management of social life is being situated in the hands of tiny elites (Castoriadis. 1989).

For Castoriadis democracy is an essential element of the social and individual autonomy (the people to set their own rules and institutions), which is the opposite of heteronomy. What he called project of autonomy entailed direct-democratic self-instituting by the society, consisted of conscious citizens, who realize that they draw their own destiny and not some extra-social force, either natural or metaphysical (Castoriadis. 1992). I.e. in the hands of society lies the highest power that is: to give itself the laws and institutions under which it lives.

Castoriadis derives his understanding of democracy from the classical meaning of the term, originating from Ancient Athens (demos/people and kratos/power). Thus on the basis of this he denotes the today's liberal regimes as non-democratic, since they are based on the election of representatives and not on direct citizen participation. According to him democracy can be only direct, thus incompatible with bureaucracy, expertism, economic inequality and other features of our modern political system (Castoriadis. 1989).

On more concrete level he suggested the establishment of territorial units with population of up to 100.000 people, which to self-manage themselves through general assemblies. For coordination between different such units he proposed the establishment of councils and committees to whom the local decision-making bodies to send revocable short-term delegates (Castoriadis. 2013, pp.42-43). Thus the power remains in the hands of the demos, while allowing non-statist coordination on larger scale.

For Bookchin too, the characterization of the today's system as a democracy was a mistake, an oxymoron. He reminds us that two centuries ago the term democracy was depicted by rulers as "mob rule", a prelude to chaos, while nowadays is being used to mask one representative regime, which in its essence is republican oligarchy since a tiny clique of chosen few rules over the powerless many (Bookchin. 1996).

Bookchin, like Castoriadis, based his understanding of democracy on the experience of the ancient Athenian politia. That is one of the reasons he placed so much attention on the role of the city (Bookchin. 1964). He describes how with the rise of what he called statecraft, the active citizens, deeply and morally committed to their cities, were replaced by subjected to parliamentarian rule passive consumers, whose free time is spent shopping in retail stores and mega malls.

After many years of involvement in different political movements, Bookchin developed his own political project, called Communalism. Based on direct democracy, it revolves extensively around the question of power, rejecting escapist and lifestyle practices. Communalism focuses instead on a center of power, that could potentially be subjected to the will of the people – the municipal council – through which to create and coordinate local assemblies. He emphasized on the antagonistic character, towards the state apparatus, that these institutions have and the possibility of them to become the exclusive sources of power in their villages, towns and

cities. The democratized municipalities, Bookchin suggested, would confederate with each other by sending revocable delegates to popular assemblies and confederal councils, thus challenging the need of centralized statist power. This concrete model Bookchin called libertarian municipalism (Bookchin. 1996), which have influenced to a big degree Abdullah Öcalan and the Kurdish struggle for social liberation.

A distinguishing feature of Bookchin's vision of direct democracy in his communalism was the element of majority voting, which he considered it as the only equitable way for a large number of people to make decisions (Bookchin. 2002). According to him consensus, in which a single person can veto every decision, presents a danger for society to be dismantled. However, according to him, all members of society possess knowledge and memory, and thus the social collectivity does not have interest in depriving "minorities" of their rights. For him the views of a minority are potential source of new insights and nascent truths, which are great sources of creativity and progress for society as a whole.

Ecology

Ecology played major role in the thought of the two big philosophers. Both of them however viewed it in stark contrast from most of the environmentalists of their time (and of today as well). Unlike the widespread understanding of nature as a commodity, as something separated from society, Castoriadis and Bookchin viewed it in direct link with social life, relationships and values, thus incorporating it in their political projects.

Castoriadis argues that ecology is, in its essence, a political matter. It is about political choices for setting certain limits and goals in the relationship between humanity and nature (Castoriadis. 1993). It has nothing to do with science, since the latter is about exploring possibilities and

giving answers to specific questions and not about self-limitation. However, Castoriadis urges for mobilizing science's resources for exploring nature and our impact on it, but he remains firm that the choice that will be made in the end will be in its essence a political one.

Therefore the solutions that should be given to every ecological crisis should be political. Castoriadis remains critical of the green parties and the parliamentary system in general, since through the electoral processes it strives at "liberating" the people from politics, giving it instead solely in the hands of professional "representatives". As a result of this the people are left to view nature in depoliticized manner, only as a commodity, because of which many contemporary ecological movements deal almost exclusively with questions about the environment, disconcerned with social and political matters.

Following this line of thought it comes as no surprise that Castoriadis remains critical towards the rear occasions when big green movements and parties are coming up with proposals of political nature for resolving the environmental crisis (Castoriadis. 1981). This is so, because most of the time, although their political proposals revolve around more popular participation – for example green parties that have come up with proposals for sortition and rotation of their M.P.'s, more referendums etc. – they are still embedded in the contemporary parliamentary regime. Being advocate of direct democracy, Castoriadis believes, that single elements of it, being embedded in the representative system, will lose their meaning.

Similarly to him, Bookchin also links the ecological sphere with the social one and politics in general. For him nearly all of the present ecological problems result from problems deeply rooted in the social order – because of which he spoke about social ecology (Bookchin. 1993). Ecological crises couldn't be neither understood nor much less resolved if not

linked to society, since economic, cultural, gender and other conflicts in it were the source of serious ecological dislocations.

Bookchin, like Castoriadis, strongly disagreed with environmentalists who looked to disconnect ecology from politics and society, identifying it instead with preservation of wildlife, wilderness or malthusian deep ecology etc (Bookchin. 1988). He insisted on the impact on nature that our capitalist hierarchical society is causing (with its large scale, profit-driven, extractivist projects), thus making it clear that unless we resolve our social problems we cannot save the planet.

For Murray Bookchin the hierarchical mentality and economic inequality that have permeated society today are the main sources of the very idea that man should dominate over nature. Thus the ecological struggle cannot hope for any success unless it integrates itself into a holistic political project that challenges the very source of the present environmental and social crisis, that is, to challenge hierarchy and inequality (Bookchin. 1993).

Conclusion

Despite the differences and disagreements between them, Castoriadis and Bookchin shared a lot in common – especially the way they viewed direct democracy and ecology. Their contributions in these fields provided very fertile soil for further theoretical and practical advance. It is not by chance that in a period in which the questions of democracy and ecology are attracting growing attention, we listen ever more often about the two of them.

These concepts are proving to be of great interest for increasing number of people in an age of continuous deprivation of rights, fierce substitution of the *citizen* by the *consumer*, growing economic inequalities and devastation of

the natural world. Direct democracy and ecology contain the germs of another possible world. They seem as two of the best significations that the grassroots have managed to create and articulate as potential substitute to the rotting ones of hierarchy and commodification which dominate and destroy our world today.

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[1] Stephen Spencer, Race and Ethnicity: Culture, Identity, and Representation (2014). Routledge p.204

[2] https://www.democracynature.org/vol3/biehl_bookchin.htm

Η ελληνική μετάφραση του κειμένου δημοσιεύεται στο [Ουλαλούμ](#).

The limits of syndicalism and the institution of popular assemblies

Grigoris Tsilimantos

Translation: Yavor Tarinski

(To κείμενο στα ελληνικά [εδώ](#))

Syndicalism as a product of the class struggle and as organizational structure of workers came to manage or to reverse labor relations, developed in conditions of competition within the workplaces. The primary grassroots organization of the workers, explicitly emphasizing on the working conditions and remuneration, gave birth to many expectations throughout all of society, insofar as and to the extent that, together with farmers, they formed the vast majority of the population.

But because capitalism based itself on the new subject of exploitation -the worker- it transferred him to its locomotive, enslaved and leader simultaneously, in a direction that, as was demonstrated, had neither logic nor boundaries and barriers. And wherever all these were appearing, they were not spared neither blood nor terror.

However capitalism didn't rely on brute force but on its ability to incorporate and assimilate its own cracks. The brute force did not show its strength but instead its weakness to integration and assimilation. Behind the curtain of violence is hidden its own imaginary that have loaded two ideological weights on the backs of the workers:

The first weight was the ideology of messianism, with all the religious characteristics and "laws", historic and economic, and what they entailed. The main mentor of this messianism was

Marx and Marxism which replaced metaphysics of religion with earthly scientific "truth" of communism.

The second weight and more durable, since the first one nowadays has went bankrupt, was and still is the ideology of economy. That is, how through it capitalism somehow discovered the *BEING* of human relationships and human history. The organization of production and the produced product themselves formed values as physical ends of the realization of this *BEING*. What this means can be seen in the manuscripts of Marx from '45 where he briefly concludes that the workers, and thus revolutionaries, should not waste time for thinking of better organization of production because this has been discovered by capitalism itself.

The practical realization of this thesis was done by Lenin, who introduced fordism and the production chain in the factories of his newly established dictatorship.

Apart from Marx and the Marxists, what is being situated as a central objective of the class struggle of the workers is the issue of ownership of the means of production and of produced wealth. However the growth of the productive forces was the only way as for capitalism so as for the worker. Let's not forget the often repeated position of Bakunin who agreed completely with the economic program of Marx but disagreed with his political one. It was the epoch when scientific discoveries and industrial development – the early stage of technoscience – seemed to be the main pillars for the passage from the era of scarcity into the times of abundance. Clothing, communication, transportation, diet with new products along with mechanization were major pillars of capitalist growth and its first wide spread campaign.

In that moment, the revolutionary aspect of syndicalism directly raised the issue of control and ownership of factories and land and the produced wealth to which capitalists predatory aspired.

All uprisings and revolutions led to the gates of the factory. From inside the boss was defending himself and from outside the worker was trying to take it over. The last revolution before the 50s, the Spanish one, having as a battering ram the anarcho-syndicalism, was the final one about labor claims for self-management of production on behalf of the entire society.

After the war, capitalism was faced with the necessity to fix the huge damages that he himself had caused signing a new social contract with real increases, social security, pensions, collective agreements, etc., looking for other ways to address labor demands. What it couldn't do inside the working place it did outside of it. I.e. whatever it couldn't achieve with machines in order to reduce the power of the labor force, it did achieve through trade, opening new cycles and jobs to meet the technical needs that capitalism itself created. The worker transforms into a consumer and the intensity of services that is involved with the disposal of goods increases.

The consumer frenzy has three essential consequences. Firstly, it is the integration of the entire population into the logic of the commodity which creates ephemeral and alternate lifestyles. The peculiarity of this logic is that the product ceases to support the needs of human and the human is called upon to support the needs of the commodities. Secondly, it is the over-exploitation of natural resources for the needs of a supposed growth, achieved at huge ecological disasters, energy wastage and accumulation of improbable amounts of garbage. That's why today we don't know what to do with the melting of ice caps and the ozone hole, that's why landfills flood, areas around energy plants turn into deserts and water resources are depleted at an exponential rate. If we add the destruction of agriculture and food nightmare that followed, the picture becomes even more apocalyptic. Thirdly, it is the growing individualization, as necessary and sufficient condition for the proliferation of commodities that in an individual level

led to personal nests of things, most of them useless and in a collective level led to a widespread corporatization, degradation of social solidarity and in the workplace to a stagnation of the solidarity of workers between each other.

To say just that responsible for all this, as far as it is concerned, is the sold out bureaucratic leadership of the trade union movement, is a banality, an aphorism without to perceive the great upheavals of the last fifty years.

The two versions of syndicalism (reformist-revolutionary) are based on the same two basic pillars that have to do with the participation of the workers in the production process and in the final product. The reformists negotiate for the minimum, thus reproducing exploitation, while the revolutionaries want everything for everyone, abolishing exploitation.

What both of these tendencies couldn't understand, and especially the second one, was the fact that the problems within the workplace were being transferred, even stronger, out of it. In other words they couldn't understand that the problem was not just the working conditions, remuneration, participation and seizure of the means of production, but the problem became, more and more intensively, the work itself, the product of which had enormous social consequences.

Whoever insists on syndicalism must answer to two key questions. What means for the workers to take control of the factories and what means expropriation of the produced wealth? Today we don't have to do with this. The production and the final product face a strong questioning. The harshest criticism against capitalism does not come from inside the workplace but outside of it, from citizen movements that are not based on work but on the basis of its dubious or destructive consequences. The very "growth" is under criticism along with barricades. The produced wealth is increasingly becoming a produced junk and its corresponding industrial units are not anymore a breath of air for their areas but

suffocating stench. So what kind of self-management can be done in fertilizer factories, in combustion plants at landfills, in gold mines in Chalkidiki, in the Acheloos gigantic dam, in nuclear power plants or in coal plants? What kind of wealth are the products of agricultural and livestock production that must be appropriated when food scandals succeed one another? Today the production units and their products are not possessions and usable objects but social consultation objects for their usefulness. And when the decision is negative, there are two commonly and permanently absentees: the bosses and the workers. Is it by chance that in all the movements against the results of work the unions are absent? Or is it by chance that the Movement of the Squares didn't want the presence of the syndicates at all? For what was happening with the recycling in Tagarades (region south of Thessaloniki, Greece) so many years, the employees of OTA knew better than anyone else, but the protests came out from residents of the surrounding areas, including the collected information, gathered outside the workplace, not through it.

Today the questioning of syndicalism follows the same path, not with the questioning of its obsolescent bureaucrats, but by something much deeper, with the questioning of labor itself. Now is required its redefinition not as a worker-employer relationship, but as an overall social relationship. If the produced wealth is social then the questions can't be posed nor solved by anyone else except from society itself.

Syndicalism today cannot be the engine of social transformation, not only because it's dominated by reformism, bureaucracy, corruption and attachment to "positions", but because it cannot respond and solve on its own, the big issues raised by work and the product itself. For example, in the health, all trade unionists, radical or not, agree for more hospitals, more doctors and nurses for better health services. But especially in the western world the already existing hospitals will appear too many if the quality of food and

environment change. This requires a radical change in agriculture, radical change in transportation and radical change in the installation of industrial units. This means transition towards real prevention rather than regular check-ups and diets. We will answer the question of health either as society or we will syndicalize its spiral circle.

The Movement of the Squares paved the road for great social deliberation, which without direct democracy would be just a distasteful repetition of the syndicalist, party and parliamentary farce. We can cross it if we decide to walk it.

Source:

<http://www.babylonia.gr/2011/10/22/ta-oria-tou-sindikalismou-ke-o-thesmos-ton-laikon-sinelefseon/#sthash.P4AAF9rH.dpuf>

Democratic Energy and Climate Change

Thoughts on the book "This changes everything" by Naomi Klein

Yavor Tarinski

Today, man is still, or more than ever, man's enemy, not only because he continues as much as ever to give himself over to massacres of his fellow kind, but also because he is sawing off the branch on which he is sitting: the environment.

Cornelius Castoriadis[\[1\]](#)

Climate change, caused by human activity, is forcing itself to the center of public debates. And that shouldn't surprise us since the crisis it's about to cause is of much bigger magnitude than any other economic or refugee crisis we have

experienced by now. If such a crisis occurs it is possible that it will change the face of the planet entirely, possibly making it uninhabitable for humans as well as for most animal species. This gives new strength and importance to the debate about how we will continue the development of our societies, without endangering our very existence.

The carbon emissions being released into the atmosphere as a result of burning fossil fuels are amongst the main factors responsible for global warming. And the fact that the energy of our highly technological societies is being delivered mainly through these non-renewable and polluting resources raises further questions about what could replace them and what would it take for such a change to occur.

In her book *This Changes Everything* Naomi Klein investigates in depth these urgent questions. She demonstrates the limitations and disadvantages of centralized energy sources such as nuclear energy and natural gases, both embedded in the contemporary corporatist, top-down model. She argues for transition towards localized, democratically managed renewables that will prioritize human and environmental needs before profits and autocratic interests – i.e. they will be turned into commons. The proposal of commons-based system beyond the dogma of constant economic growth is being shared by a growing number of thinkers, social movements and communities (see also: [The Commons as paradigm beyond state and market](#)).

Business, state and ecologic crisis

However for such a transition to be initiated we can't rely on the business community, as Klein demonstrates at length in *This Changes Everything*, reviewing the fruitless, often even harmful to the ecologic cause, collaborations between the big green organizations and the corporate sector [2]. No private company will dedicate its resources to a developmentalist model that prioritize human lives and nature before profits.

By design these entities are based on growth through profiteering and expanding markets by all means necessary. For example, even when they do engage with renewables they use them in the frames of the capitalist growth doctrine, creating environmentally harmful and community excluding but highly profitable in capitalist terms, gigantic, centralized solar or wind parks etc. Furthermore, the energy sector, she notes, is temporarily constrained from turning to renewables on larger scale because of the exponential growth it is currently enjoying amidst the shale gas boom[\[3\]](#).

The state, on the other hand, is traditionally seen as the sole alternative to the private sector, thus a potential ally against the polluting multinationals. But statist entities have proven to tend towards centralization, bureaucracy and unaccountability, and thus disconnected from local needs and experiences. These very states are deeply embedded in the growth based extractivist imaginary of capitalist globalization, as Naomi Klein points out, state-owned companies, ranging from Scandinavian 'social democracies' to 'pink tide' governments, like the one of Ecuador[\[4\]](#), that wreck nature by extracting resources to trade in global markets[\[5\]](#). The top-down socialist states of the past, with their five-year plans, were equally destructive of nature, as well as remote from the societies whom they were supposedly 'developing'. This is ever more evident from today's China, whose Communist Party is easily and eagerly adjusting its policies to the extractivist agenda, sacrificing even the air its subjects breathe in the name of economic growth.

Instead, a new approach is needed for such a crisis to be tackled efficiently. It cannot be resolved by mere reforms – as we saw, the capitalist economic model and the statist top-down decision-making processes are essentially predisposed towards enforcing, not preventing the ecologic crisis. This poses the need of a holistic systemic alternative, compelling us to think outside the dominant institutions and come up with

new ones that already exist in the margins of society.

Towards a new energy paradigm

One such proposal is the creation of democratically managed utilities, like energy cooperatives or commons, that are managed by the communities that use them. Such a model strives at local sustainability and satisfaction of human needs (reflected by its participatory character) instead at profiteering and growth. This will enable communities to have control over their energy sources, in contrast with other ones managed privately or by the state, thus directing them away from dirty fossil fuels and towards much needed renewables. Naomi Klein notes that such types of commons-based renewables can be cheaper than dirtier alternatives. One of the reasons is they can be a source of income for their communities when unused power is being fed back to the grid[\[6\]](#).

Decentralization and communal participation are of great importance for the successful acceptance of renewables by society. Klein speaks[\[7\]](#) of many reasons why communities would rebel against large-scale, privately or state owned ones – from the noise of densely positioned wind turbines to the threat of inflicting damage to wild life and ecosystems posed by gigantic solar parks. In contrast, communally owned, locally based renewables are hugely accepted by local residents due to their smaller, human and environmentally friendly scale, the energetic autarchy they provide for their communities, revenues from selling back to the grid and so on.

Germany's energy sector has long been exemplary for the establishment of many such utilities[\[8\]](#). Nearly half of its renewable energy is coming from such sources in the hands of farmers and citizen groups. Amongst them are many energy cooperatives, which amount close to a staggering nine hundred. These utilities play a dual role: simultaneously they produce clean power and generate revenue for their communities by selling back to the grid.

Germany's predecessor in this field however is Denmark[\[9\]](#). In the 1970s and 1980s, more than 40% of the country's electricity was coming from renewables – mostly wind. And roughly 85% of them were owned by farmers and cooperatives. As in Germany, Denmark's most committed actors to sustainable energy were not statist entities or privately owned companies but local communities. In the last few years many multinationals have entered the energy sector of the country, creating difficulties for the communal renewable utilities.

Transitional strategy

As we observed above we can't overcome the ecologic crisis through the private sector and the nation-state. Dimitrios Roussopoulos, coming from the tradition of social ecology, emphasises firmly that the overcoming of the ecological crisis can be done in a stateless and directly-democratic manner[\[10\]](#). In a way Naomi Klein's thought intersects this logic by emphasizing the potential grassroots social movements and communities have to resist and initiate bottom-up solutions to the climate crisis[\[11\]](#).

History shows us that the main enforcer of emancipatory social changes was not artificial managerial mechanisms like the nation-states but society itself. The abolition of slavery, the introduction of universal suffrage rights, the eight hour work day and many more were all product of struggles waged and won by social movements over governments and authorities. The environmental cause is no different; however, as Klein and Roussopoulos also suggest, it has to be understood as part of a wider emancipatory struggle in order to overcome the weaknesses that it currently suffers from, such as the messianism it often embraces, the neglecting of other causes and the elitist attitude it sometimes has.

One way to approach these and many more weaknesses is for the ecological movements to be radically democratized. Thus professional "negotiators" will be replaced by assemblies of

rank-and-file activists and concerned citizens, creating healthy human relationships and linking these movements with society – i.e. emphasizing the public squares rather than the luxurious corporate or government offices and dimming the separation between “activists” and “ordinary people”. With no top-down “professional” leadership to collaborate with political and economic elites, the messianism and elitism couldn’t easily find fertile soil to grow. And since the environmental matters are interlinked, the social movements that deal with them should have an intertwined character. This would imply the establishment of networks of groups, each leading its fight, but collaborating on a global level with other ones.

The interaction of the ecological movements with other social movements is of crucial importance. One of the reasons is that all spheres of human life are interconnected, and this includes humanity’s relationship with nature. As we have seen above capitalist economics, mixed with top-down bureaucracy, influences our health as well as that of the planet and so on. Thus anti-capitalists, ecologists and direct democracy movements should all collaborate with one another, transfusing from one struggle into another.

Such collaboration could prove very fertile especially for the ecological movements. For example the growing number of municipal platforms participating in local elections, like the recently established in Spain *Network of Cities for the Common Good*[\[12\]](#), could provide friendlier environment for communally owned and managed renewable co-ops. The *Olympia for All* municipal platform in Olympia, Washington (USA), for instance, has made environmental commitments in its platform[\[13\]](#), showing an ecologically friendly face. In a globalized system, hostile towards grassroots initiatives, as we saw from the Denmark’s experience where the liberalization of the market gave hard a time to energy co-ops, the radicalization of municipalities could provide much needed breathing space for

collaborative experiments.

Conclusion

The climate crisis is quickly unfolding and we hear about it more all the time from scientists, journalists and even Hollywood blockbusters. We see its signs in the form of natural disasters that appear with greater frequency and destructiveness. But the dominant institutions are unable to tackle it successfully. It's not without reason to suggest that it is not because of lack of political will, but a consequence of the growth-based top-down politico-economic system which nowadays squeezes all of the Earth. The resistance takes a global shape: activists from the US, experienced in the anti-shale gas struggle, share their experience with Canadian communities resisting fracking, who on their part share their know-how with French movements struggling against shale gas extraction and so on[\[14\]](#), leading to some major victories in the form of bans on fracking in municipalities across Canada and USA and in all of France.

However, for the effective tackling of the climate crisis, a more holistic approach is needed. This struggle has to be integrated into a political, direct-democratic project, one that goes beyond "ecology" alone. Otherwise, as Cornelius Castoriadis warns us, a focus on ecology alone can potentially give rise to neo-fascist, messianic ideologies and the establishment of authoritarian regimes, who then impose draconian restrictions on a panic-stricken and apathetic population[\[15\]](#).

[\[1\]](#) Castoriadis, Cornelius. *The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep)*. (2003). p.122

[\[2\]](#) Klein, Naomi. Magical Thinking. In *This Changes Everything*

(pp. 191-290). Penguin Books 2015

[3] Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything*. Penguin Books 2015. p130

[4] See also:
<https://www.ecuadorreview.com/e-news-ecuador/international-press/tudayme-a-village-convicted-to-disappear/>

[5] Ibid, pp.176-182

[6] Ibid, p.133

[7] Ibid, p.132

[8] Ibid, p.131

[9] Ibid, p.131

[10]

<https://new-compass.net/articles/interview-dimitri-rousopoulos>

[11] Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything*. Penguin Books 2015. p.459

[12]

<https://roarmag.org/magazine/anti-capitalist-politics-21st-century/>

[13] <https://olympiaforall.org/index.php/platform/>

[14] Klein, Naomi. *This Changes Everything*. Penguin Books 2015. pp.303-304

[15] Castoriadis, Cornelius. *The Rising Tide of Insignificance (The Big Sleep)*. (2003). p.116.