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-Saharans. 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 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 volontary[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 Méditerraneo 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 Ennemis 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:

[youtube id="fwo0NOnocaE"]

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-option, 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, Ciutadanos decreased. I think the voters of Ciutadanos 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 inmediate 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 Varoufakis's Diem25.

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 Μπρούμας (περιοδικό Βαβυλωνία)

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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)

[vimeo id="168491528"]

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 assembles. 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 de-politicized 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 loose 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

(Το 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:
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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 developementalist 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 contemporarily 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 unacountability, 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 examplary 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 commited 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].

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[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-roussopoulos

[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 Insignificancy (The Big Sleep). (2003). p.116.

Who Oppose Self-Management and Why?

Costas Haritakis
Translation: Marietta Simegiatou

The venture of the self-managed VIOME has come face to face not only with the enemies of self-management "by nature and by stance", i.e. the masters and the state, but also with the communist and anti-capitalist forces of the left, including the anarchist movement. Despite their differences, these forces seem to agree to the fact that within capitalism, self-management can be no other than a way of employees' "self-exploitation", a form of a "collective capitalist". Thus, let alone the fact that it has nothing to offer in the direction of social emancipation, self-management –what is worse– "releases" capitalism of its obligation to find jobs and nourish all workers. According to a different version of these views, although the "good intentions" of such ventures are acknowledged, they are doomed to merely manage their misery and ultimately reproduce capitalism, so long as there is no "central" change by conquering state power.

In this discussion that has many times taken the size of an open hostile polemic facing any effort of self-management, valuable theoretic slogans have been fished out of dusty libraries, mainly Marxist-Leninist ones, which attempt to "scientifically" prove the lack of a revolutionary character and/or the open counter-revolutionary character of these ventures. This attack has two pivotal aspects: a) self-management diverts workers from the key work of an "organised workers' movement", which is to insist on demands facing the state and the governments; and b) self-management negates or at least undermines the necessity of the role of a "working class party" that could per se "liberate" society through its struggle for the organisation of the order and the conquest of

power.

This short description evidently shows that this has nothing to do with mere political or theoretical differences, but with a whole cultural gap in the world vision that separates these views from the essence and spirit of self-management ventures. In fact, this contraction is very interesting as it lucidly and concisely expresses the difference between the defeated world of ideology and all kinds of "-isms" breathing hard to catch up with the new reality of (closed self-referential systems) on the one hand and the living and outward world of the action that strives here and now to disengage from the dominant relations and to self-institute on the other. In other words, this contradiction is placed between an old-type party-centric and state-focused politics that stems from above and a new-type politics emerging from the grassroots through anxieties, processes and struggles that concern the question "how we will live" and not just "under whom we will live".

Certainly, theoretic discourse has its history and reviewing it is important, today however old questions are raised on different terms and old answers, proven to be inadequate in the past, cannot claim their adequacy today… Either seen through the lens of the so-called "objective conditions" or through the lens of "subjective conditions" (a distinction that in the name of materialism has ended up in being a metaphysic one), all concepts of traditional ideologies have liquefied, blown by the double loss of a "subject" (working class, as we knew it) and an "object" (capitalism, as we knew it). Of course, both continue to exist, but now words do not exactly correspond to certain things. In addition to the dominant power re-sketching the map of their own domination's concepts and symbolism, the antagonistic anti-capitalist movement too redefines the concepts and means of emancipation using its own multi-fold practice.

Therefore, self-management as a living trend of today's ("grassroots") world does not need to claim its revolutionary

credentials based on the blood-shed pages of the Collected Works of any great teacher, or the heroism of unfulfilled efforts of the past. It is enough, it should be enough that self-management manages to involve today, right here right now, a whole set of subjects integrated in a potential plan for the reorganisation of life based on terms of autonomy, equality and freedom. What page in the writings of a thinker, which narrative of a certain age can claim to be more potent than the vibrating synchronised act to try to unhook from hetero-determination and heteronomy, domination, inequality and exploitation by those that for all revolutionaries allegedly represent the "chosen people" for the social liberation? This "act" comes after thinking; it contains both theoretic background and historic experience, yet does not create some kind of an "ideological identity". This is perhaps what strikes theoretic "commissars" as awkward, because they are used to first thinking in terms of "identity" revolving around of the question of "where you belong", instead of "what you do".

Instead, what we are doing is "more an example of transition, rather than a model of society, where we would gradually build up our practices and make decisions that distance us from our starting point within the system to move towards a world we want to live in" (Enric Duran – interview about CIC, the integrated cooperative in Cataluña, available online at www.x-pressed.org). Traditional ideologies would mainly focus on describing the principles and structures of the new society (in terms of articles of faith to the ideal society that will someday be attained), transition was left to the "auto pilot" of a state-controlled, guided revolutionary process. The "new human" (the cleaning lady in Lenin's "The State and Revolution", who could take charge of governance) would emerge after many ordeals and much toilsome education by the party and the state. Until then, the entire structure of the capitalist allocation of work and directorship would be necessary and unquestionable. Factory councils and self-

management were considered “disorganisation”, whereas state planning and single-person direction was “organisation”. Well, this “new human” never managed to emerge eventually as we all know today, because although they tried to take factories and lives in their hands, people have eventually succumbed to the educational function of the party and the state.

As shown by dramatic historic experience but mainly by today’s totalitarian capitalist conditions, the question raised in theory and practice to social emancipation movements is “how can one establish, in the intervals of servitude, the new time of liberation: not the insurrection of slaves, but the advent of a new sociability between individuals who already have, each on his own, thrown off the servile passions that are indefinitely reproduced by the rhythm of work hours?” (Jacques Ranciere – “The nights of labour: The workers’ dream in nineteenth century», cited in “Sisyphus and the Labour of Imagination”, Stevphen Shukaitis, https://www.rebelnet.gr). This would require the creation of “material foundations” to disengage our lives from the capital and the state. If we wish to move from the level of propaganda and academic/political lessons to the level of life, we must find or create a territory where we can take roots and evolve on our own independent means. We must be able to create solutions ourselves for ourselves, instead of just seeking solutions from the capital and the state, thereby perpetuating our dependency on the chains of exploitation and domination. Self-management can provide us the means for our survival on terms of dignity and freedom, establishing at the same time those solidarity and horizontal direct-democracy networks that will become the actual territory for social emancipation actions and the creation of our own commons.

Again, as Ranciere says, “the absence of the master from the time and space of productive work turns this exploited work into something more: not just a bargain promising the master a better return in exchange for the freedom of the workers’

movement but the formation of a type of worker's movement belonging to a different history than that of mastery". This is exactly the point: create our own history; or, in other words, our own self-education about …not being workers; not just being the other pole of capital, ready to die from suffocation as soon as our ties (or rather our bonds) are broken. For traditional ideology and workers' policy there are only masters and servants. Thus, workers opting for self-organisation cannot be classified any other way but as new masters. There is no space to allow workers move beyond this relationship, thus remove themselves from confirming the capital. This is the path that self-management attempts to open up, with immense difficulties and numerous contradictions. This is above all what its enemies cannot forgive…

Original source in Greek: https://www.babylonia.gr/2015/07/24/poioi-giati-exthreuontai-autodiaxeirisi/#sthash.ZYSbDcQ9.Jy0oXfOw.dpuf

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The Commons as paradigm beyond state and market

Yavor Tarinski

People called commons those parts of the environment for which customary law exacted specific forms of community respect. People called commons that part of the environment which lay beyond their own thresholds and outside of their own possessions, to which, however, they had recognized claims of usage, not to produce commodities but to provide for the subsistence of their households.

Ivan Illich [1]

Introduction

In their book *The Economic Order & Religion (1945)* Frank H. Knight and Thomas H. Merriam argue that *social life in a large group with thoroughgoing ownership in common is impossible*.[2] William F. Lloyd and later Garret Hardin, in the same spirit, promoted the neo-malthusian[3] term "Tragedy of the commons"[4] arguing that individuals acting independently and rationally according to their self-interest behave contrary to the best interests of the whole group by depleting some common-pool resource. Since then, the thesis that people are incapable of managing collectively, without control and supervision by institutions and authorities separated from the society, have succesfuly infiltrated the social imaginary.

Even for big sections of the Left the resource management in common is being viewed as utopian and therefore they prefer to leave it for the distant future, lingering instead today between variations of private and statist forms of property[5]. Thus is being maintained the dilemma private-state management of common-pool resources which leads to the marginalization of other alternative forms.

But great many voices, trying to break with this dipole, were always present and currently growing in numbers. For the autonomists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri this is a false dilemma. According to them[6] *the seemingly exclusive alternative between the private and the public corresponds to an equally pernicious political alternative between capitalism and socialism. It is often assumed that the only cure for the ills of capitalist society is public regulation and Keynesian and/or socialist economic management; and, conversely, socialist maladies are presumed to be treatable only by private property and capitalist control. Socialism and capitalism, however, even though they have at times been mingled together and at others occasioned bitter conflicts,*

are both regimes of property that excluded the common. The political project of instituting the common … cuts diagonally across these false alternatives.

The falsity of the dilemma state-private can also be seen from the symbiotic-like relationship between the two supposedly "alternatives". Author and activist David Bollier points at the historic partnership between the two[7]. According to him, the markets have benefited from state's provisioning of infrastructure and oversight of investment and market activity, as well as state's providing of free and discounted access to public forests, minerals, airwaves, research and other public resources. On the other hand, the state depends upon markets as a vital source of tax revenue and jobs for people – and as a way to avoid dealing with inequalities of wealth and social opportunity, two politically explosive challenges.

At first sight it seems like we are left without an real option, since the two "alternatives" we are being told "from above" that are possible, are pretty much leading to the same degree of enclosure as we saw earlier, from which beneficiaries are tiny elites. But during the last years the paradigm of the "commons" emerged from the grassroots as a powerful and practicle solution to the contemporary crisis and a step beyond the dominant dilemma. This alternative is emerging as a third way, since it goes beyond the state and the "free" market and has been tested in practice by communities from the past and the present.

The logic of the commons

The logic of the commons goes beyond the ontology of the nation-state and the "free" market. In a sense it presupposes that we live in a common world that can be shared by all of society without some bureaucratic or market mechanisms to enclose it. Thus, with no enclosure exercised by external managers (competing with society and between each other), the

resources stop being scarce since there is no more interest in their quick depletion. Ivan Illich notes that *when people spoke about commons, iriai, they designated an aspect of the environment that was limited, that was necessary for the community's survival, that was necessary for different groups in different ways, but which, in a strictly economic sense, was not perceived as scarce.*[8] The logic of the commons is ever evolving and rejects the bureaucratization of rights and essences, though it includes forms of communal self-control and individual self-limitation. Because of this it manages to synthesize the *social* with the *individual*.

The commons can be found all around the world in different forms: from indigenous communities resisting the cutting of rainforests and Indian farmers fighting GMO crops to open source software and movements for digital rights over the internet. Main characteristics that are being found in each one of them are the direct-democratic procedures of their management, the open design and manufacturing, accessibility, constant evolvement etc.

The commons have their roots deep in the antiquity but through constant renewal are exploding nowadays, adding to the indigenous communal agricultural practices new 'solidarity economic' forms as well as high-tech FabLabs, alternative currencies and many more. The absence of strict ideological frame enhances this constant evolvement.

The logic of the commons is deeply rooted in the experience of Ancient Athens. The greek-french philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis describes it as a period, during which a free public space appeared[9]. Castoriadis depicts it as *a political domain which 'belongs to all' (τα κοινα* – the commons in Greek*).* The 'public' ceased to be a 'private' affair – i.e. an affair of the king, the priests, the bureaucracy, the politicians, or/and the experts. Instead decisions on common affairs had to be made by the community.

The logic of the commons, according to the anthropologist Harry Walker[10], could also be found in the communities of Peruvian-Amazonia, for whom the most desirable goods were not viewed as rival goods in contrast with modern economics which assume that if goods are enjoyed by one person can't be enjoyed by another. The Peruvian-amazonian culture was focused on sharing, on the enjoyment of what can be shared rather than privately consumed.

The swiss villages are a classic example for sustainable commoning. Light on this is being shed by Elinor Ostrom and her field research in one of them[11]. In the swiss village in question local farmers tend private plots for crops but share a communal meadow for herd grazing. Ostrom discovered that in this case an eventual tragedy of the commons (hypothetical overgrazing) is being prevented by villagers reaching to a common agreement that one is allowed to graze as much cattle as they can take care for during the winter. And this practice dates back to 1517. Other practicle and sustainable examples of effective communal management of commons Ostrom discovered in the US, Guatemala, Kenya, Turkey, Nepal and elsewhere.

Elinor Ostrom visited Nepal in 1988 to research the many farmer-governed irrigation systems[12]. The management of these systems was done through annual assemblies between local farmers and informally on a regular basis. Thus agreements for using the system, its monitoring and sanctions for transgression were all done on grassroots level. Ostrom noticed that farmer-governed irrigation systems were more likely to produce not in favor of markets, but for the needs of local communities: they grow more rice and distribute water more equitably. She concluded that althou the systems in question vary in performance, few of them perform as poorly as the ones provided and managed by the state.

One of the brightest contemporary examples for reclaiming the commons is the Zapatista movement. It revolted in 1994 against the NAFTA agreement that was seeking the complete enclosure of

common-pool resources and goods, vital for the livelihood of indigenous communities. Through the Zapatista uprising the locals reclaimed back their land and resources, and successfully manage them through participatory system based on direct democracy for more than 20 years.

The digital commons, on the other hand, include wikis, such as Wikipedia, open licensing organizations, such as the Creative Commons and many others. The social movement researcher Mayo Fuster Morell defines them as "*information and knowledge resources that are collectively created and owned or shared between or among a community and that tend to be non-exclusivedible, that is, be (generally freely) available to third parties. Thus, they are oriented to favor use and reuse, rather than to exchange as a commodity. Additionally, the community of people building them can intervene in the governing of their interaction processes and of their shared resources.*" [13]

In other words, the logic of the commons is the strive towards inclusiveness and collective access to resources, knowledge and other sources of collective wealth, which necessarily requires the creation of anthropological type of socially active and devoted stewards of these commons. This means radical break with the dominant nowadays imaginary of economism, which views all human beings simply as rational materialists, always striving at maximizing their utilitarian self-interest. Instead it implies radical self-instituting of society which to allow its citizens directly to manage their own commons.

The commons as model for the future

A main characteristic shared between the different cases of commons is the grassroots interactivity. The broad acessability of such resources and their ownership being held in common by society, presupposes that their management is done by society itself. Thus a state involvement is

incompatible with such a broad popular self-management, since statist forms are implaying the establishment of bureaucratic managerial layers separated from society. That is, the commons go beyond (and often even detrimential to) the various projects for nationalization.

The same goes for the constant neoliberal efforts of enclosing what's still not privatized, against which during the last couple of years social movements across the globe rose up, and their alternative proposals included in one form or another a wide project of direct democracy. It inevitably includes every sphere of social life, and that goes for the commons as well.

A holistic alternative to the contemporary system, that incorporates the project of direct democracy and the commons, can be drawn from the writings of great libertarian theorists like Cornelius Castoriadis and Murray Bookchin. The proposals developed by the two thinkers offer indispensible glimps at how society can directly manage itself without and against external managerial mechanisms.

As we saw in the cases presented above, the commons require coordination between the commoners so eventual "tragedies" could be avoided. But for many, Knight and Merriam alike, this could possibly work only in small scale cases. This have led many leftists to support different forms of state bureaucracy instead, which to manage the commons in the name of society, as the lesser, but possible, evil.

In his writings Castoriadis repeatedly repudiated this hypothesis, claiming instead that large scale collective decision-making is possible with suitable set of tools and procedures. Rejecting the idea of one "correct" model, his ideas were heavily influenced by the experience of Ancient Athens. Drawing upon the Athenian *polis,* he claimed that direct citizen participation was possible in communities up to 40.000 people[14]. On this level communities can decide on matters that directly affect them on face-to-face meetings

(general assemblies). For other ones, that affect other communities as well, revocable, short term, delegates are being elected by the local assemblies, to join regional councils. Through such horizontal flow of collective power common agreements and legal frameworks could be drawn to regulate and control the usage of commons.

Similar is the proposal, made by Murray Bookchin. Also influenced by the ancient Athenian experience, he proposes the establishment of municipal face-to-face assemblies, connected together in democratic confederations, making the state apparatus obsolete. According to Bookchin, in such case *the control of the economy is not in the hands of the state, but under the custudy of "confederal councils", and thus, neither collectivized nor privatized, it is common.* [15]

Such a "nestednes" does not necessarily translate into hierarchy, as suggested by Elinor Ostrom and David Harvey. [16] At least if certain requirements are being met. As is the case in many of the practicle examples of direct democracy around the world, the role of the delegates is of vital importance, but often is being neglected. Thus their subordination to the assemblies (as main source of power) has to be asserted through various mechanisms, such as: short term mandates, rotation, choosing by lot etc. All of these mechanisms have been tested in different times and contexts and have proven to be effective antidote to oligarchization of the political system.

Through such networking and self-instituting can be done the establishment and direct control of commons by many communities that depend on them. Another element that could supplement the propositions, described above, is the so called "solidarity economy". Spreading as mushrooms, different collective entities in different forms are rapidly spreading across Europe and other crisis striken areas (like South America) allowing communities to directly manage their economic activities in their favour.

One such merging will allow society to collectively draw the set of rules which to regulate the usage of commons, while solidarity economic entities, such as cooperatives and collectives, will deal with commons's direct management. These entities are being managed direct democratically by the people working in them, who will be rewarded in dignified manner for their services by the attended communities. On the other hand, the public deliberative institutions should have mechanisms for supervision and control over the solidarity economic entities, responsible for the management of commons, in order to prevent them from enclosing them.

One example for such merging has occured in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz, where the water management is organized in the form of consumer cooperative[17]. It has been functioning for more than 20 years, and continues to enjoy reputation as one of the best-managed utilities in Latin America. It is being governed by a General Delegate Assembly, elected by the users. The assembly appoints senior management, over whom the users have veto rights, thus perpetuating stability. This model has drastically reduced corruption, making the water system working for the consumers.

The emergence of such a merger between the commons and the co-operative production of value, as Michel Bauwens and Vasilis Kostakis suggests[18], integrate externalities, practice economic democracy, produce commons for the common good, and socialize its knowledge. The circulation of the commons would be combined with the process of co-operative accumulation, on behalf of the commons and its contributors. In such a model the logic of free contribution and universal use for everyone would co-exist with a direct-democratic networking and co-operative mode of physical production, based on reciprocity.

Conclusion

The need of recreating the commons is an urgent one. With global instability still on the horizon and deepening, the

question of how we will share our common world is the thin line separating, on the one side, the dichotomous world of market barbarity and bureaucratic heteronomy, and on the other, a possible world, based on collective and individual autonomy. As Hannah Arendt suggests[19]:

The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible.

The paradigm of the commons, as part of the wider project of direct democracy, could play the role of the trick that manages to vanish the table, separating us, but simultaneously creating strong human relationships, based on solidarity and participation. And for this to happen, social movements and communities have to reclaim, through the establishment of networks and the strengthening of already existing ones, the public space and the commons, thus constituting coherent counterpower and creating real possibilities of instituting in practice new forms of social organization beyond state and market.

Notes:

[1] Ivan Illich. *Silence is a Commons*, first published in *CoEvolution Quarterly*, 1983
[2] Deirdre N. McCloskey. *The Bourgeois Virtues*, The University of Chicago Press, 2006. p. 465
[3] Malthusianism originates from Thomas Malthus, a

nineteenth-century clergyman, for whom the poor would always tend to use up their resources and remain in misery because of their fertility. (Derek Wall. *Economics After Capitalism,* Pluto Press, 2015. p.125)

[4] The concept was based upon an essay written in 1833 by Lloyd, the Victorian economist, on the effects of unregulated grazing on common land and made widely-known by an article written by Hardin in 1968.

[5] As Theodoros Karyotis demonstrates in his article *Chronicles of a Defeat Foretold*, published in ROAR magazine, Issue #0 (2015), pp 32-63

[6] Michael Hardt & Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth*, The Bleknap Press of Harvard University press, 2011. p. ix

[7] David Bollier & Silke Helfrich. *The Wealth of the Commons*, The Commons Strategy Group, 2012. In *Introduction: The Commons as a Transformative Vision*

[8] Ivan Illich. *Silence is a Commons*, first published in *CoEvolution Quarterly*, 1983

[9] Cornelius Castoriadis in "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy" *(1983), The Castoriadis Reader* (1997), Ed. David A. Curtis. p. 280

[10] https://bollier.org/blog/anthropologist-harry-walker-lessons-amazonian-commons

[11] https://www.onthecommons.org/magazine/elinor-ostroms-8-principles-managing-commmons

[12] Elinor Ostrom in Nobel Prize lecture *Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems* (2009)

[13] https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/digital-commons

[14] Cornelius Castoriadis in "Democracy and Relativism", 2013. p.41

[15] Cengiz Gunes and Welat Zeydanlioglu in "The Kurdish Question in Turkey", Routledge, 2014. p.191

[16] For example Ostrom in *Beyond Markets and States: Polycentric Governance of Complex Economic Systems* (2009) and

Harvey in *Rebel Cities* (2012. p.69)
[17] https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWSS/Resources/WN5cooperatives.pdf
[18] https://peerproduction.net/issues/issue-7-policies-for-the-commons/peer-reviewed-papers/towards-a-new-reconfiguration-among-the-state-civil-society-and-the-market/
[19] Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*, The University of Chicago, second edition, 1998, p.53.

Free Social Spaces: Small autonomous communities in the urban space

Grigoris Tsilimandos
Translation: Yavor Tarinski

Within the current context, the free social spaces can be the core cellular example of a small autonomous community. They offer great potential for the creation of new formations on the material basis of the reproduction of the social fabric, in the direction of a radical liberatory transformation. To enable such a community to be a point of reference and a hub of resistance and new ideas, certain conditions must be met.

First: There must be a territory, a place and a radius of action for the development of the community's operations. Free social spaces in fact meet these three requirements. Their territory can be occupied or rented. This is neither a question of value nor a contradiction, because what matters today is the liberating effect of the expropriation of

buildings (usually unused buildings) that establishes the conditions for the radical transformation of social relations dovetailed in them.

Second: The community must guarantee the stability of the means (structures) and its reproductive relations. In order the free social spaces to be able to reproduce as a community, they must overcome the political and cultural weight that has created them, not of course by strangling or eliminating it, but spreading it over the areas of production, availability of products and services, including labor relations arising through this activity.

Guaranteeing the stable reproduction of the community requires that free spaces embody structures of production and distribution of products/services. Depending on the size of the building, these structures may be located inside or outside or both inside and outside the confines of a building.

Labor relations, closely intertwined with horizontality, equality and solidarity can grow proportionally, synthetically and simultaneously, in three possible ways (combined or each separately):

a) payment with money;
b) product exchange;
c) donations.

Money can be in the form of alternative currency, time bank credits or euro. The fee should be between a minimum and a maximum threshold, the same for everybody each time. This is to assure that structures are not deprived of their key purpose on the one hand and to prevent money becoming the only incentive for participation in the community's structures on the other. The red line, beyond which accumulation begins that can dissolve the essence of the autonomous community, must be assessed and auto-regulated whenever necessary.

Free social spaces, as the place where community structures

meet, discuss and exist, have opened up new ways to address the matters that concern them. Their grouping together, on a horizontal and direct democratic basis, produces a comprehensive dialogue on many different issues and creates the terms and conditions for more comprehensive solutions than what we knew collectives could do so far. As these spaces fill with new structures, new projects are led to leaving the boundaries of the territory of the buildings, covering more needs and creating a larger context for networking and security. This does not mean that people participating in these structures will make more money, but that they will have broader and free access to goods and services.

Finally, the free social space as a community needs at least one product/service to start with and a respective structure. Could any kind of work/product/service be the basis for engagement in the structure in question, as long as the necessary conditions on labor equality, horizontality and solidarity are met? Certainly no. If it were so, what would prevent us from creating a structure for bouncers or one that would produce pesticides?

These start-up structures that will boost the community must respond to actual social needs, setting the limits between true and false, between what is socially beneficial and what is socially harmful. Some products can be directly integrated into the production plan for liberation and some require a transition plan (e.g. traditional seeds and toxic soil).

Therefore, if an autonomous community wishes to preserve its purpose, it must not address how the products will competitively penetrate the market, but how the community will respond to actual human needs. These have a name: back to basics, not as a form of punishment but as a choice to live an austere life in dignity, one that would be worth living.

Third: The structures of the community have to set the rules and terms for participation in its reproduction. Together with

the direct-democratic context, horizontality, equality, solidarity, rotation, and the participation of all in making the decisions and implementing them, the first and foremost question raised is who the one to make the decisions is. That is, who is a member to be more exact, a part of the structures (a term that would best express what we call a collective being), who is not a part of it or who ceases to be part of it. This cannot be formalized, considering that relationships in an autonomous community are not static but dynamic. At the same time, not anybody can be a part of the community. Free social spaces create a reality that the community relies on. In other words, the parts of the community can be no other that the ones who participate in the free social space. This, as we know, is reflected in the common obligations regarding the space, the activities, shifts, caretaking, in respecting the framework (racism, parties, sexism, theft, violence, etc.) and of course in the assemblies. Thus, free social spaces define the mark of who will be, who will not be and who is no longer a part of the community's structures.

Fourth: The autonomous community has to set the boundaries of its growth. Free social spaces must always take into account the boundaries of their growth or, as said in the beginning, the limits of their radius of action. The danger of strangling and restricting the structures is equal if not greater than the risk of its atrophy or lack of participation. The autonomous community has to be small in size in order to be able to function, which means that as its structures grow in terms of participation, the question arises regarding setting examples that will be reproduced. That is, the question of creating another small autonomous community in new territory with new or similar structures, especially with other people. The boundaries of the development of one free social space as a community are set by the space itself, summed up in two versions. Either too many participants are involved disproportionately in the structures for the production or supply of products, or there are disproportionately too many

users interested in the structure’s products. The first case entails the risk of the collapse of the structures and the second, the danger of concentration.

Fifth: The community must constantly create inside of it, but also primarily outside of it, federal networks of interdependence and reciprocity. Networking and federal relations make the role of the redundant and this is one of the main reasons for its existence. Otherwise, it will transform into an island, incarcerating the idea of the community, which sooner or later will shrink and die.

Considering that we are taking about structures for the reproduction of the community, networking can only entail specific products or services, to guarantee consistency, durability and stability. Federal relations among the structures cannot rely on abstract promises of friendship and solidarity. This is clearly seen in the structures that dealing with nutrition and offering products of the primary sector. Depending on the distance between free social spaces, networking can be expressed through specific structures and choices for their complementary interdependence and support, i.e. one can produce flour, the other – the bread.

This opens a new dimension of networking, which arises from the stages, the composition and the horizontality of the relations of the production and distribution of products. Major drive in this process is the food, from “the farm” to the table. The quality, price, mode of production, redistribution, the working relations that regulate the whole cycle of production and consumption of the product, the direct connection between producers and users, all these matters are at the heart of the community. It is an endeavor for liberation of land that starts from the field and ends in the free social spaces. Urban gardening can be one of the steps towards the connection of the occupied land with the urban fabric, to which usually the free social spaces belong. The same can be done on a larger scale, through cooperatives and

small producers, who are entering in this transition plan step-by-step, for the liberation of land from destroying the soil and the products in the name of increasing profit and maximizing performance in terms of money at the lowest possible cost, including state funding.

Sixth: Free social spaces as a community must intervene in the public sphere both as a hub of resistance and as a potential for exit. Therefore, there should be an organizational institution for the coordination and mutual support between structures of free social spaces. At the same time, as cells for radical social transformation, they can link their structures with the building and the neighborhood as core examples of cracks of subversion within the urban fabric, in which basic needs are being monopolized, corrupted and alienated by business chains.

Original source in Greek: https://www.babylonia.gr/2012/09/19/eleftheri-kinoniki-chori-mikres-aftonomes-kinotites-ston-astiko-isto/