

Comparing “WE’s”. Community, Cosmopolitanism and Emancipation in a Global Context

SEMINAR

CENTRE FOR COMPARATIVE STUDIES

FACULTY OF LETTERS

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CALL FOR PAPERS

The “we”, the communitarian, has been central to the debates in the social sciences and the political field of the last decades. Drawing on widely heterogeneous perspectives, ranging from the “recovery” of communism (Žižek 2001; Žižek and Douzinas 2013), the emergence of anti-institutional forms of emancipation and community integration (Virno 2004; Negri and Hardt 2009), the valorization of dissensus and of oppositional models confronted to consensus and articulation (Rancière 2010) to the definition of the *agon* as a way of making democracy possible (Mouffe and Laclau 2001), we are witnessing an attempt to recover the communal and the common as a subject of analysis and historical change. To understand that process appears to be urgent and essential for two reasons: first, because it challenges the centrality of the subject, understood as an autonomous entity, as well as the restrictions of post-political individualism derived from the —post-modern— death of the subject. Secondly, because the recent phenomena of occupation and transformation of the public sphere offer the most adequate context to understand the logic linking participative dynamics, critical models of cosmopolitanism and interconnected processes of emancipation and protest.

This project arises from a simple idea: only through comparison can we approach social events linked to the “we”, to the public and the common. Only through a comparative, critical regard, attentive to the negotiations as well as to distancing elements, to commonalities — the solidarities and possibilities of common emancipative agendas, as well as to differences — the disconnections, the distinct causes and conflicts —, can we map the real impact of the processes of redefining the communal and the common, of putting into practice radical and alternative forms of citizenship, of asserting the necessity of emancipation within a panorama of general crisis.

Frequently presented either as spontaneous and “localised” phenomena, or as global-reaching networks, strongly linked to a

complex system of representations, identifications and platforms of communication and dialogue, new social movements offer a good possibility to test the possibilities of comparative studies within a global scenario. However, what would that “global” mean? In many occasions, the processes we are mentioning have been described as global currents, in which different initiatives and wills are connected around the interest of transforming and challenging the logic of spaces as heterogeneous as Madrid and Reykjavik, Tunisia and Greece, New York and Cairo. Several questions arise, nevertheless: are those movements sharing a “common enemy”? Is there any dynamic organising hierarchically those processes? Can the emancipation of some correspond to the oppression of others? Are these movements always free of the colonial pasts or post/neo-colonial presents?

The vision of the new social movements as “transcultural vectors of social change” (Castells 2012: 58) based on communication through social networks and internet and on a consciousness of the necessity of re-occupying the public sphere has to be confronted with the persistence of inequalities and hierarchies that differentiate and condition to a great extent those dynamics. Those are not only acting at the space of the origin and the production of those phenomena; they manifest themselves in their factuality, at the moment of their definition as event (Badiou 2010). We believe that comparative studies offers a privileged framework to confront the distance between the “experiential”, “spontaneous” moment in those movements and the corresponding representations, discourses and appropriations arising not only from political imaginaries, but also within the scope of everyday practices.

How can we compare processes based on “spontaneous” acting and responding to specific sociopolitical issues drawing on a “truly global” perspective? Would the adoption of such a perspective not assume the image of a unified, global capitalism working as a common antagonist? In what terms can we lay out the tension between the “we” articulating those processes and the particular, and in many cases contradictory, experiences of participation and engagement? (Bishop 2004, 2012; Kester 2011; Kwon 2004) Finally, the question of emancipation seems to be especially urgent in our times, when we commemorate the end of the Second World War and the beginning of decolonisation. Decolonisation initiatives served as the basis from which different models of citizenship, nation-building projects and trans/international alliances were articulated. Those processes, nevertheless, were not homogeneous, nor did they have the same impact on all the individuals and groups that took part in them. Different determinants survived from the colonial and imperial moments, permeating, modifying and conditioning the national and trans/international projects which emerged from those contexts. On the other hand, the geography of decolonial emancipative dynamics can be seen as setting up the basis for any global configuration of critical cosmopolitanism and citizenship. Would it be possible, then, to draw

any kind of line linking the political and creative utopias of the second half of the 20th century and those that inhabit our present moment? How can we measure the heritage of those “future pasts”? (Scott 2004) Is it useful to keep this perspective on the past when talking about processes that seem to be projected exclusively onto the future?

This seminar intends to establish a connection between both temporalities in the light of the global dimensions of the new forms of the “we”, which have to remain unintelligible without a total reformulation of communication and participation strongly attached to an unprecedented phenomenon of “emancipative translation”. Understanding that the crossing between the geography of the emancipative movements initiated in the 1940s and the landscape of current social manifestations can be traceable, yet not always in evident ways, this seminar arises from the belief that comparative studies holds a strong potential to produce an analysis of the links between emancipative dynamics and the common.

This seminar accepts themed panel proposals addressing the issues outlined above. Those should ideally integrate 3-4 members engaging a common topic and developing 15-20 minutes presentations.

Closed panel proposals (i.e. integrating 3-4 members) or themed sessions` call for papers should be sent to by **April 31st 2015**. A second deadline for abstracts concerning the call for papers will be open until **June 15th 2015**.

Proposals and abstracts should be sent to cgc@campus.ul.pt
Please use also this email address for any query concerning this event.

Proposals are accepted in English and Portuguese.

Seminar Fees:40 Euros

Seminar organisers:

Susana Araújo, Ph.D.

Carlos Garrido Castellano, Ph.D.

Manuela Ribeiro Sanches, Ph.D.