Concepts of crisis: Institutions in crisis and European identity

Abstracts

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'Hellenistic Era: Affinities to the present political, economical and institutional crisis'

What happened during the last three decades of the 4th century in Athens, right after
Alexander's invasion and conquering of Greece and of all the known world?
How could specifically an Athenian citizen face and support this political change as a cultural event?
The consequences of this incident confirm the beginning of the Hellenistic period, which lead from the decline of the Greek supremacy to the sunshine of Roman Empire.
The political and social situation leaded finally to the transformation of the mentality of the citizen whose effort focuses on his own psychological as well as substantial survival as a human being.
From these crucial events a significant number of philosophers and schools arises, which intend to offer people the intellectual support to face the reality. In other words, political crisis functions as an intellectual laboratory as man, alone and unprotected, searches the way just to face danger and fear from a new point of view and by the discovery of an *art of life* (*τέχνη βίου*), offered to him through philosophy.
Philosophy influences to the man therapeutically by proving him that the cultivation of his intellect is the only way to live in dignity and to confront historical moments of social and political crisis.

Evert van der Zweerde, Radboud University, Nijmegen

'Populism and Democracy at a European Scale'

If around the middle of the 19th C, Karl Marx & Friedrich Engels famously wrote that the spectre of communism was roaming through Europe, in the beginning of the 21st C some would replace communism by populism, trading one spectre for another. Moderate political groupings such as liberals, social-democrats and Christian-democrats frequently switch from fear to relief whenever a populist party or candidate does or does not gain a majority. Very often, the "rise" of populism, esp. right-wing populism, is connected to the alleged crisis of democracy and/or to the democratic deficit of the European Union, implying that if that crisis could be overcome or the deficit repaired, populism would disappear. This received view has to be seriously questioned on several points. The paper will be organized around the following five questions & theses:
1. What's wrong with populism? The "negative" feelings associated with "populism" are typically European: the same does *not* hold for North or Latin America, for example [author: Ernesto Laclau].
2. Is "populism" necessarily "right-wing" or is there also "left-wing populism"? Populism can be both right-wing and left-wing, but there is a structural difference between the two [author: John Judis]
3. Why does "populism" return, from time to time, in European political history? Populism arguably is the *necessary* , partly compensatory, partly pathological, companion of representative (parliamentary) democracy [author: Pierre Rosanvallon].
4. Is the "rise of populism" a symptom of a crisis of democracy? Yes and no: it is a symptom of the "natural" and hence general crisis that is intrinsic to democracy as such (democracy always-also is democrisis), but it also is a symptom of the specific incapacity of governments to address society's problems in a neoliberal era.
5. Why is "populism-on-the-rise" a European problem? Because the European Union is a hybrid polity that lacks the capacity to address *European* socio-economic questions (poverty, unemployment, environment, refugee "crisis") at a European level in an acceptably democratic fashion.

Kostas Theologou, National Technical University of Athens

'The European identity and the European debt crisis'

The identity formation is a complicated process and a multi-parameter issue; it surely draws from all fields of the public sphere, i.e. political, economic, social, cultural etc. In my pursuit to interweave the political, the economical and the social, in this presentation I hold an almost plain claim that the crisis derives from a wider political design entailing economic measures that inflict even physical blows to the population, the societal parameter in this argument.

The societal parameter receives blows in at least two separate cornerstones of a specific culture: health and education.

Health sectors are fundamental for inspiring people with a sense of security, when it comes to medical treatment and hospital care, in case they need it. However these sectors accepted severe cuts and this is reflected to the feelings of fear and uncertainty created in an early and primary stage. Educational infrastructure and institutions are also shaken. A society experiencing fear for its own medical treatment expectancies can easier adapt to new lower standards in almost all other fields, e.g. education. Obviously, the value of life outranks the value of schooling; the fear of survival becomes a fundamental universal value and the downgrade of education comes natural, since it no longer consist a major priority. Hence, when education is debased one of the main mechanisms for national or supranational identity formation is vanished. This certainly affects the concrete features of a national identity.

In Greece, after 2008, public services in both Health and Education altered the value codes and general morality of the Greeks, driving them into a fast-track of uniformity with other Europeans, alien to the traditional and community spirit of a culture profoundly different than its Nordic and Occidental fellow-citizens. However, the issue of the Greek citizenship formation remains ambiguous, contested and contradicting.

Michael Wintle, University of Amsterdam

'Crisis, Recovery and European Identity in the twentieth century: the impact of regular crises on Europe's self-image'

This lecture will be about European identity in times of crisis. European identity has arguably existed since the time of the Renaissance, and on the whole that identity has been very positive: Europe thinks it is the best. Nonetheless, that Eurocentrism has sometimes wavered at certain points over the years, especially in the twentieth century.

What happens to Europe and its identity as a result of those frequent, even regular or cyclical, disastrous crises? Crises in Europe have regularly evoked temporary collapses of European self-esteem, but these crises appear to be self-repairing, so that in a surprisingly short time Eurocentrism returns as if nothing serious had ever occurred to tarnish its self-confidence. Several historical examples will serve, with special attention to the First World War and its aftermath as a case study. *Visual* self-images generated in Europe will be examined as an important source for this kind of cultural history. Finally, the precise mechanisms which Europeans have devised for pulling themselves out of those regular crises of culture will come under scrutiny: is it possible to construct a model of that process? What have been the mechanisms of memory suppression or displacement which have allowed Europe continually, regularly, to re-promote itself after crisis?