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Resisting the Disaster: Between Exhaustion and Creation[1]

 "Climate change poses the question of a human community, of a *we*; it points to a figure of universality that escapes our capacity to experience the world. This universality stems rather from the shared sense of a catastrophe. It calls for a global approach of politics, but without the myth of global identity, for, unlike the Hegelian universe, it cannot comprise particularities. We could temporarily refer to it as a 'negative universal history'".[2]

Thus ends a text of Dipesh Chakrabaty, responding the thesis of Nobel Prize in Chemistry winner Paul Crutzen.[3] In 2000, the latter proposed to consider that human-induced transformations of the planet and the climate since the industrial revolution constitute a new era, which he calls the "anthropocene", where humanity as a "species" has become a geophysical force. The consequence for human sciences would imply revising not only the separation between human and natural history but

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1 This paper is a revised translation of: Barbara Glowczewski, Résister au Désastre: Entre Épuisement et Création", in Barrbara Glowczewski and Alexandre Soucaille (eds.), *Désastres*, Paris, L'Herne, 2011, pp. 23-40. Notes and references have been updated and adapted to English publications.

2 Cp. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses", Critical Inquiry 35(2), 2009, pp. 197–222.
Available at: http://www.law.uvic.ca/demcon/2013%20readings/Chakrabarty%20-%20Climate%20of%20History.pdf [accessed December 2, 2015].

3 Cp. Ibid., p. 199; The famous author of *Provincializing Europe* here takes up the concept of negative universal history proposed by Antonio Y. Vasquez-Arroyo and specifies that: "As the crisis gathered momentum in the last few years, I realized that all my readings in theories of globalization, Marxist analysis of capital, subaltern studies, and postcolonial criticism over the last twenty-five years, while enormously useful in studying globalisation, had not really prepared me for making sense of this planetary conjuncture within which humanity finds itself today." Cp. Vasquez-Arroyo, "Universal History Disavowed: On Critical Theory and Postcolonialism", *Postcolonial Studies*, 11(4), 2008, pp. 451–473.

also the notions related to the classical problem of freedom. Similarly, the author of *The Gaïa Hypothesis* who, twenty years ago, called for the consideration of the earth as a self-regulated living organism, has now come to insist, in his latest book (Lovelock, 2009), on the responsibility of mankind and its economic choices in the future of the biosphere.[4]

These debates are stimulating all disciplines, but seem to forget that the human power of action (agency), even regarding geophysical phenomena, is not an invention of this century. Even though western history has thought mankind as a "prisoner of climate",[5] anthropology shows throughout the planet that the perceptions of the world according to which humans can act on the forces of nature seem to have existed since the beginning of time. A great number of traditional societies acknowledge, on the one hand, a set of obligations – such as rituals to make the rain come or ensure that volcanoes remain dormant – and, on the other hand, a set of prohibitions: if these protocols are not respected, and if the social rules that guarantee the supposed balance between everything that exists are transgressed, then various catastrophes could occur, such as droughts, floods, plagues or famine.

Now facing global alerts and calls for degrowth that invoke man's responsibility in natural, socio-economic and technical disasters, some media and governmental or non-governmental institutions are entangled in various political and financial processes that reduce humans to a status of victims of natural forces and uncontrollable fluxes (stock exchange, markets, conflicts, etc.) without conceding them any means to intervene in those situations themselves as creators of social alternatives. However, those survival responses exist everywhere, and the collective intelligence that leads to micro-social experiments is a wave of hope for the world.

Answers to the Victimising Trap of the Humanitarian World and its Mediatisation

Thinking today's human as responsible for the global climate and environmental disaster, and for the peril of extinction that threatens humanity invites to reflect on technical, political and economic

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4   Cp. James Lovelock, *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning*, New York NY, Basic Books, 2009; Having enhanced the value of the biosphere, Lovelock's hypothesis was criticised on the one hand for having served as an alibi for those considering that an active environmental policy is useless, and on the other hand for its
New Age pantheism, abusively assimilated to different forms of holism or connectionism of some indigenous peoples.

5   Fernand Braudel, *On History*, Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 1980 [1969], p. 31.

development with a collaborative "good use of slowness"[6] looking for "long circuits"[7] in order to grasp all forms of interaction and collective enunciation assemblages that emerge in situations of emergency and globalised capitalist acceleration.[8] In *The Machinic Unconscious* the psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari defined the notion of refrain (*ritournelle*) as a "sonorous marker of an assemblage of local desire".[9] After his works with Gilles Deleuze, he redeveloped in his last books the notion of existential refrains as it can be found in different forms of art and other semiotic and sensory mobilisations (rituals, tattoos, automatic behaviour, etc.), as a means to create new value systems.[10] "These territories of the refrain make use of new individual and collective productions that enable one to survive amid deterritorializing fluxes".[11] As an extension of Bateson's *Ecology of Mind*, Guattari articulated the refrains and the territories in a "schizoanalytic" cartography, and proposed linking three ecologies (environmental, mental and social) under the name of ecosophy.[12]

> "I conceive the ecosophical object as articulated in four dimensions: those of flux, machine, value and existential territory. […] That of machine is there to give a dimension of cybernetic retroaction, of autopoïesis, meaning an ontological self-affirmation, without falling into animist or vitalist myths, such as Lovelock and Margulis's Gaïa hypothesis; for it is precisely about linking the machines of the ecosystems of material fluxes to those of the ecosystems of semiotic fluxes. Therefore, I try to widen the notion of autopoïesis, without

6   Thanh Nghiem, *Des Abeilles et des Hommes. Passerelles pour un Monde Libre et Durable*, Paris, Bayard, 2010, p. 149; quoting Pierre Sansot, *Du Bon Usage de la Lenteur*, Paris, Payot & Rivages, 2000.

7   Bernard Stiegler, *What Makes Life Worth Living. On Pharmacology,* Cambridge, Malden MA, Polity Press, 2013 [2010], p. 25.

8   Cp. Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration, A New Theory of Modernity*, New York NY, Columbia University Press, 2010.

9   Anne Querrien, "Maps and Refrains of a Rainbow Panther", in Éric Alliez and Andrew Goffey (eds.), *The Guattari Effect*, London, New York NY, Continuum, 2011 [2008], pp. 84–98, p. 94; cp. Félix Guattari, *The Machinic Unconscious. Essays in Schizoanalysis*, Los Angeles MA, Semiotext(e), 2011 [1979]; In the English version, *ritournelle* has been translated by *refrain*, which is not the best choice: some prefer using the Italian *ritornello* (little return in Baroque music). In Guattari's further work ritournelle is also used in visual art and other fields of creativity.

10 Cp. Félix Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*. London, New York NY, Bloomsbury, 2013 [1989]; Cp. Ibid., *Chaosmosis: an Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, Bloomington IN, Indianapolis IN, Indiana University Press, 1995 [1992].

11 Querrien, p. 94; Guattari started from the *Vinteuil Sonata*, which awakens different perceptive and memory-based sensations in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*. On Guattari's relation to Anthropology and use of *ritournelle* for Indigenous Australians, see: Guattari and Glowczewski, "Warlpiri Dreaming Spaces 1983 & 1986", in Glowczewski, *Totemic Becomings. Cosmopolitics of the Dreaming*, Helsinki, São Paulo: n-1 publications, 2015 [1986], p. 43–72; Glowczewski, "Guattari and Anthropology", in Alliez and Goffey, pp. 99-111.

12 Cp. Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, London, 2000 [1989].

limiting it, like Varela does, solely to the living system, and I consider that there are proto-autopoïeses in all other systems: ethnological, social, etc."[13]

Guattari's ecosophical project should be understood in relation to the transforming individual and collective assemblages (*agencements*) matrix that he constructed in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, in which his concepts of dimension are distributed among four transversally and temporally interrelated poles: the economy of fluxes (libido, signifier, capital, labour) corresponds to the "actual real", the machinic phylums correspond to the "actual possible", the incorporeal value universes, to the "virtual possible" and the existential territories, to the "virtual real". The relation between the first two poles generates objective deterritorialisation processes while, between the other two, an enunciation (or subjective deterritorialisation) can emerge and allow the (re)creation of the virtual possible with new contents, a promise of new assemblages, against integrated global capitalism, among others. This model, commented by many thinkers since Guattari's death, is a very fruitful proposition in order to analyse the creative answers to the disasters of our world: ecosophy is at once an ethical, a political and an aesthetic paradigm.[14]

> "Guattari's discovery of Norwegian and German ecological writings, most notably Hans Jonas's *The Imperative Responsibility*, moderated his belief in a post-media era in which the miniaturisation and networking of informatics devices would permit the development of a new creativity."[15]

The lesson that can be drawn from the people, who in the most ancient traditions postulated the responsibility of human actions towards the rest of life, is that their ontologies and "existential territories" (as Guattari would say) are not necessarily contained in a system of divine dependency but rather in a transversal way of thinking the interaction between things.[16] Many societies, such as Indigenous Australians, Polynesians,

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13 Translated [http://1libertaire.free.fr/Guattari19.html] from Guattari, Qu'est-ce que l'Écosophie, Paris, Édition Lignes, 2014: According to the Chilean biologist, neurologist and philosopher Francisco Varela, autopoïesis is a model for the analysis of living systems that he developed with Humberto Maturana in order to oppose the notion of a black box in which the information enters and exits, with that of a system evolving in an autonomous way as it interacts with the environment: he sought to link action and knowledge together in the notion of enaction. On Lovelock, see note 2.

14 Cp. Ibid., *Schizoanalytical Cartographies*; Brian Holmes, "Guattari's Schizoanalytic Cartographies. Or the Pathic Core at the Heart of Cybernetics", 2009, https://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2009/02/27/guattaris-schizoanalytic-cartographies/ [accessed December 2, 2015].

15 Querrien, p. 93; cp. Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago IL, University of Chicago Press, 1985.

16 See examples from Indigenous Australians in Glowczewski, *Totemic Becomings*; and from Indigenous South Americans in Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "The Crystal Forest: Notes on the Ontology of Amazonian Spirits", *Inner Asia*, 9, 2007, pp. 13–33.

Native Americans or other groups who have lived for centuries in constant negotiations with the agency of the cosmic world – rain, wind, fire, tsunami, climate excess, etc. – do consider that any human action has an impact not only on the society but also on the forces of what the Western work considers as 'nature' as opposed to 'culture': for instance the breaking of a taboo – like colonisation destroying sacred sites for mining – can provoke people's sickness as well as a draught or a cyclone. Similarly any catastrophy is to be traced to human excess. It is an immanent dynamism where the reticularity of interactions (such as the connections between different aspect of living beings, the knowledge transmitted and updated through rituals) is simultaneously a source of links and ruptures, of solidarities and conflicts, of fusions and cleavages, of segmentations and alliances, of attractions and avoidance among people and other agents, animal, mineral, etc.

As in the relation of the Zoques indigenous group from the Chiapas with the Chichonal volcano, on the foothills of which they live,[17] the villagers of Bebekan in Java refused the aid of large humanitarian agencies that urged them to abandon their village. The latter had been completely destroyed by the seismic activity of the Merapi volcano in May 2006, following the tsunami that had struck their island two years before. The villagers called on to their responsibility should another earthquake and volcanic eruption occur, but thought it could be prevented if they kept on making offerings to the volcano and living at its base. They completely rebuilt their village using the systems inherited from collective solidarity (traditionally mobilised to irrigate the fields) as well as by inventing a new ways of working together. This collective work initiative has renewed the interest of the younger ones for a ritual movement of communication with spirits through ancestral trance techniques. What is at stake here is the recreation of a force of life, like a Phoenix rising from the ashes. The common experience of constant cohabitation with destruction and death brings each one back to its solitude as a survivor, but also to the possibility of a new collective assemblage implemented through a memory construction process that re-establishes a shared hope. The 2010 eruption of the volcano, which destroyed another village, taking many lives and displacing hundreds of people threatened by clouds of hot ash, recently brought up this question again. The writer Elisabeth Inandiak, who had accompanied Bebekan's experience since 2006, notes in the journal in which she keeps track of the Merapi disaster since October 2010, that the hundred walls erected on the volcano acted as a springboard for the ash clouds, thus aggravating the impact of the

17 Cp. Garcia-Acosta, "Historical Disaster Research", in Susanna M. Hoffman and Anthony Oliver-Smith (eds.), *Catastrophe and Culture. The Anthropology of Disaster*, Santa Fe NM, School of American Research Press, 2002, pp. 49–66.

catastrophe: another illustration of the need to think technologies in time with the fluxes of the earth and of men, who precisely seek the right way to behave towards the volcano.[18]

Another type of economic and artistic answer to the catastrophe is provided by the Brazilian city of Goiânia. In 1987, in a concrete cube in a wasteland street, scrap metal dealers found a cylinder emitting a blue glow. Even though they felt nauseous on the following day, they sheared it, thus liberating the source of the blue glow, and sold some of the pieces to other dealers. Many dwellers of the neighbourhood touched the glowing powder and even covered themselves in it, while children used it to mark the streets. A few days later, hundreds of people flooded into the hospital, their hands and bodies burning, for the powder was cesium 137, a highly radioactive substance, that had been used in the radiological equipment of a clinic that was abandoned two years before. But this diagnosis was not done immediately, but only after four deaths, including one child. The catastrophe, aggravated by this ignorance, triggered an extreme government response: the inhabitants were gathered in a stadium to sort the irradiated ones. 110.000 people were examined. The city, which was rapidly growing at the time, was temporarily removed from the list of tourist destinations thus sparking off countrywide panic. Eighty-five contaminated houses were destroyed, the population was evacuated and the area was cleaned up through the withdrawal of 3.500 m³ of waste that had been stored thirty kilometres away. Years later, the site was converted to a storage centre for radioactive waste. It was buried under knolls of grass, and a small museum was built to tell the story that traumatised a generation. In June 2006, the annual symposium of the Brazilian Association of Anthropology gathered some 4.000 Brazilian anthropologists in Goiânia, and organised a visit to the waste storage site, and to the neighbourhood where the disaster occurred, in which some survivors with huge deformed goitres held a banner to protest against the absence of compensation to the victims.[19] During the South American Biennale, held in 2005 in Porto Alegre, the internationally renowned artist Cirone Di Franco exposed an installation of hospital beds made of

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18 See the extracts of the journal about the 2010 eruption of the Merapi, which writer and journalist Elisabeth D. Inandiak sent to her friends via email: Elisabeth D. Inandiak, "Journal de l'Éruption du Volcan Merapi (26 Octobre 2010–12 Juin 2011)", in Glowczewski and Soucaille, pp. 41-60; Inandiak, "The actions of Java Bebekan Village Destroyed by the May 2006 Earthquake", in "Perception Anthropology" seminar (coordinated by Barbara Glowczewski and Alexandre Soucaille), Quai Branly Museum, March 28, 2007; and the interview of Inandiak by Elisabeth de Pablo, March 28, 2007 http://www.archivesaudiovisuelles.fr/949_3277_en/.

19 A Brazilian anthropologist has been studying the impact of that disaster including the non recognized contamination of the workers who cleaned the site and whose survivors, or their children, still suffer from serious diseases; cp. Telma Camargo da Silva, "La Catastrophe Radioactive de Goiânia au Brésil. Conflit sur l'Interprétation d'un Désastre, comment Vivre après", *Multitudes*, 58, 2015, pp. 161–166.

blue concrete, each one bearing the imprint of a body or of an object signifying the personality of the victims of radioactivity.[20] In those individual traces, he crystallised the collective memory of his city, which was reshaped by that disastrous event.

In France, similarly, Ariane Mnouchkine collected hundreds of stories from the refugees of Sangatte – Afghans, Chechens or Iraqis – looking to reconstruct their route throughout the world, into exile or often forced back home, in order to create a performance in 2004. *The Last Caravanserai* gathered around 200 scenes performed in various languages with subtitles projected on different elements of the set, and whose order and duration could change in each show.[21] The sequences on bureaucratic and technical treatment of the refugees were of remarkable acuteness and made that true mental torture perceptible. The show staged re-enactments of the interrogations performed on asylum-seekers stranded in the north of Australia by government employees of the south of the country via videoconference. The fact that the group of actors included refugees, who took part in the elaboration of various scenes and played more or less their own characters, put immediately into practice the hypothesis of redeeming creation in the face of disaster. The theatrical process almost became a therapeutic transfer for some of them.[22] The humanitarian morality and its technical and bureaucratic machine of emergency intervention tends to force the refugees into the constraining norms of aid, without a right to reciprocity or allowing the introduction of new rules by the refugees themselves, regardless of the fact that as a consequence of this, they may loose their humanity altogether, as social beings and actors of new communities. For some, humanitarian assistance has become a real "business" with an "inhuman" financial logic mostly directed to the media, who choose to cover one emergency instead of another; in order to generate the mobilisation of the public it needs passive victims and not humans trying to get back on their feet. Of course, there are journalists who defend field interventions and launch very useful alerts, but the risk that the good intentions of those ready to help could be misused for the benefit of a few, remains.

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20 The pigment *Prussian Blue* is used for decontamination.
21 Released on DVD in 2006.
22 About Sangatte see Henri Courau, *Ethnologie de la Forme-camp de Sangatte. De l'Exception à la Régulation*, Paris, Éditions des Archives Contemporaines, 2007; and its review by Jean-François Baré, *L'Homme*, 189, 2009, pp. 303–304, http://lhomme.revues.org/21239: "this book is filled with real compassion towards beings submitted by administrative apparatuses to the 'superfluousness' defined by Hannah Arendt, whom he cites several times; it is constantly moved by critical ethics towards their 'entrenchment in a logic of assistance', because, as specified by Courau, 'there are great interests in recognising more freedom for those new collectivities'." [translated by editors] Also see Coreau, "En Quête d'Asile", *Le Croquant*, 51/52, 2006, pp. 99–106, http://barthes.enssib.fr/TERRA/article665.html.

The anthropologist Jonathan Benthall has been criticising for twenty years the deforming power of the media regarding the priorities of humanitarian activities, and calls to the responsibility of anthropology to critically render disaster situations and the inner workings and power of humanitarian aid among civil society.[23] Regarding the criticism formulated by humanitarian actors themselves – victims, volunteers, employees or agency consultants – towards the media and the institutions that limit their range of action, anthropology, as a discipline looking to understand how humans behave in society, is now put to challenge to address various audiences (as a counterpoint to the media machine) with comparative analyses and translocal arguments that value the freedom or the agency of man when reduced, in diverse situations, to a status of victim with no right to speak or act.

NATURE AND CULTURE OF DISASTERS

Whether at first natural, social or technical, a disaster ends up involving all three levels, which continue interweaving historically. Slavery, which can be seen as a social disaster for the deported populations, has become a natural and technical disaster for continental Africans who have had to reinvent their economic survival while mourning those who were taken away. While the places from where these men and women left were deeply affected economically several times since colonisation, which first forced the displacement of those hunted by slave merchants and then provoked a series of conflicts, the places through which the deported passed, and those where their descendants eventually settled still carry the impression of the technical, natural and social transformations created by this new colonial labour system.[24] Such is the case of Gorée island which, for more than a century, was the embarking point to the Americas for more than 9 million future plantation workers, once their physical resistance had been drained in the narrow cells of the slave houses, often managed by the *signare*, the traders' African or Creole mistresses, whose brothers were in charge of human transport. Many would die there, as the guides of Gorée now explain to the African diasporas of the whole world who spend the day (rarely the night) visiting the houses that are now museums, in what is now a tourist destination. In some buildings, refurbished with international funding, specialised

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23 Cp. Jonathan Benthall, *Disasters, Relief and the Media*, Wantage, Sean Kingston Publishing, 2010 [1993].

24 Diouf, M., Entre l'Afrique et l'Inde, sur les questions coloniales et nationales. Écritures de l'histoire et recherches historiques, in M. Diouf, éd., *L'Historiographie indienne en débat. Colonialisme, nationalisme et sociétés postcoloniales*, Paris, Kartala, 1999, pp. 5–35. See also Mamadou Diouf & Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo (eds), *Rhythms of afro-Atlantic world: Rituals and Remembrances*, Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan press, 2010.

symposia are organised – about war in Africa, for example. The guides and the exhibitions show a history of colonisation that was rewritten by Africans, with remarkable critical distance and in sharp contrast with the hidden history of slave ancestors that surrounds the lives of some islands of the Caribbean or the Indian Ocean.[25] If Gorée, thanks to its recent commercialisation of colonial history, has become a seemingly prosperous island that hosts a competitive boarding school for Senegalese schoolgirls and the home of the famous Senegalese sculptor Ousmane Sow, it is also striking to see so many abandoned houses which their owners cannot afford to maintain anymore. Gorée also attracts women from Dakar who cross by boat everyday to welcome the tourists with armloads of jewellery for sale, next to the canvases exposed in the street by young artists from all over the country who survive precariously, squatting the bunkers connected by a network of tunnels dug under the cliffs. Oil paintings of repeated patterns, designs in coloured sands and sculptures made of used batteries, old cell phones or bottle caps: the art of recycling the waste that covers the beach has become a signature of the island.[26]

In Africa, novels, theatre and cinema have long been useful tools to change people's look on the world and propose acting on it differently. In 2009, *La Tempête* theatre in Vincennes received Serge Limbvani, trained in Brazzaville, who had rallied actors from various diasporas to stage *God's Bits of Wood*, a novel by Ousmane Sembène, a former Senegalese *Tirailleur* turned actor and film director. Through meticulous and dramatic ethnographic work, the book and the play tell the story of the railway workers' strike on the Dakar-Niger line in 1947-48, which for five month and ten days bonded starving families together, awakened a spirit of emancipation from colonisation[27] and modified traditional gender relations. A text for the preparation of the diplom *Baccalauréat*

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25 Cp. Françoise Vergès, *La Mémoire Enchaînée. Questions sur l'Esclavage*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2006; Vergès, "The African Slave Trade and Slavery. Blind Spots in French Thought", *Transversal*,   December,   2006.   Available   at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/1206/verges/en [accessed December 2, 2015]; see also the texts by Boubacar Joseph Ndiaye in "The House of Slaves", *Virtual Visit of Gorée Island*. Available at: http://webworld.unesco.org/goree/en/screens/25.shtml [accessed December 2, 2015].

26 Especially incarnated by Djibril Sagna, an artist from Casamance, who lives in Gorée in an abandoned building that he uses as a workshop, and who sometimes exposes in European art galleries.

27 Since 1902, Dakar was the capital the federation of French Western Africa: on the 25th of November 1958, the Sudanese republic gained autonomy within the French community. Created on the 4th of April 1959, the Federation of Mali comprises Senegal and French Sudan, but broke up on the 20th of August 1960 due to a disagreement between the leaders and the parties. Shortly after, two independent states were created, each one with its own capital: Dakar in the Republic of Senegal (presided by Léopold Senghor) and Bamako in the Republic of Mali (presided by Modibo Keïta).

(inherited from the French colonial system) published on Africa.web[28] explained that through their 70 km march from Thiès to Dakar, "the wives of the railway workers of the working-class town of Thiès led a very large mass-mobilisation to put pressure on the colonial administration and demand satisfaction of the worker's claims", such as raises, family subsidies, annual holidays, pensions and the right to conform their own union. After the shooting of the marching women, the strikers were granted part of their demands:

> "[T]heir fellowship with the machine was deep and strong; stronger than the barriers which separated them from their employers, stronger even than the barriers which until now had been insurmountable – the colour of their skin."[29]

After Mali and Senegal gained independence, the Bamako-Dakar line funded the tours of Malian and Senegalese musicians, thus becoming a platform to launch future stars on the world stage. Salif Keita and Mory Kanté first played in the mythical Rail Band in Bamako's rail station hotel and restaurant, which from 1970 blended the inspiration of the Mandinka *griots* with the electro-acoustic folk music. The railway was also used to trade food crops and handicraft between stations, and to access various services along the line, such as schools or clinics.[30] But at the beginning of the 2000s, the railway was privatised and 24 stations of 36 were shut down, leaving the railway workers unemployed, as well as many people who lived in the villages that had been created along the line. From one day to the other, the population was cut off from the world: with no decent road along the railway, the villagers were paralysed. By initiative of Tiécoura Traoré, the laid off trade union representative, COCIDIRAIL, the citizen collective for the integrated rail development and recovery, was established in 2003 and adopted the concept of marching from the 1947 strike. Once again, women were in the frontline, touring with a traveling theatre play that told the problems of the villages and invited people to mobilise. Tiécoura Traoré documented the tour on film and showed goods such as grain sieves piling up in the villages, for lack of access to markets.[31] Not only did this privatisation destroy their lifestyle, but it also turned out to be an economic and technological disaster for Mali, Senegal and the multinational company itself. Cutting stops on the line led to reduced railway maintenance and decay, even

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28 In 2015, this website does not exist anymore and the domain is for sale.

29 Ousmane Sembène, *God's Bits of Wood*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1995 [1960], p. 77.

30 Cp. Jérôme Lombard, "Croître ou Dépérir. Lieux Intégrés, Lieux Oubliés sur l'Axe Dakar-Mali", in Jean-Louis Chaléard et al. (eds.), *Le Chemin de Fer en Afrique*, Paris, Karthala, 2006, pp. 69–86.

31 This situation is also evoked in Abderrahman Sissako's film *Bamako* (2006), which humorously criticises the inefficiency and the abuses of the World Bank, and in which Tiécoura Traoré holds one of the main parts.

causing a deadly derailment. An audit by the Malian government confirmed the economic catastrophe, but corruption is pushing it ever deeper.[32] A historic lesson remains: the threat of destruction of a technological adaptation such as the railway, a communication factor and a catalyst for social bonds, triggers the emergence of other networks: villagers united in a collective, but also associations and unions in Europe supported the resistance, funded sustainable agriculture and popular education projects, invited spokesman Tiécoura Traoré to address the European Parliament and organised support protests throughout France.[33] In 2010, COCIDIRAIL established a solidarity network with various African and European trade unions.

All these examples show different creations in the midst of disaster, understood as a reinvention of forms to redefine one's position in a place or a network of places, a route, both individually and collectively, and generate connections with the outside world. Reviving the past as a cultural feature is an option that can be supported by the re-emergence of ancient sacred rituals generated by trance, like in the village of Bebekan, or by generating tourism around a historical heritage site, although a painful one, as done in Gorée. What is at stake here is to find the force of life that will spark a response to the deadly force of destruction that threatened the group. Alongside structured forms, conditions for reactivated or renewed potentialities emerge, thus creating a framework for artistic work and pushing the creativity of the younger generations, who will rebuild cultural heritage based on their own common experience. This experience can in turn become a new strong foundational myth for the group, especially while it is based on shared emotions, on the redemption of survival, or rather of revival, a rebirth that offers more than just survival to the risk of dying, a very real risk as many actually died during the events.

The warranty to live lies in the fact of not being the only one who escaped death: survivors gather, forming a "together" that will deploy into one or several communities or break up into family groups and

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32 The Declaration of the Citizen Collective for integrated rail development of April 24, 2009, criticised the management of the Transrail company: "COCIDIRAIL also denounces the whole so-called 'rescue plan' (including the discontinuation of the users' traffic management, a gift of 14 billion to Transrail, 376 layoffs (180 in Mali, 196 in Senegal), recapitalising the company up to 3,6 billion through investments of both countries, and a new revision of the concession agreement in order to force Mali and Senegal to start funding the heavy railway investments, which have so far been a responsibility of the company."

33 The Polish edition of *Le Monde Diplomatique* 4 (38) of April 2009 dedicated more than a page to this case (pp. 18–19): cp. Joanna Z. Kubiakowska "Zachodnia Afrykanska Bitwa o Szyny", ["The Battle of the Rail in West Africa"], in *Le Monde Diplomatique,* 4, 38, April, 2009, pp. 18–19. See also Traoré's interview [http://survie.org/billets-d-afrique/2007/160-juillet-aout-2007/article/interview-tiecoura-traore].

individual units, depending on the group's responses and interactions with all the others involved in the emergency. The response of those collective assemblages can break away from inherited culture, even more so considering the impossibility to keep on living the same way if the environment has been destroyed. However, it is within a reconstructed continuity that "culture" is redrawn as a new foundation of the survivors in a place, be it the place of the catastrophe or that where the refugees were displaced. But when the collective installation in the place of revival is hindered, the transmissions start crumbling down, culture is lost and, most of all, the collective life is threatened once again, notably in its ethical aspect. The power of action does not have a collective field of expression any longer: the existential territory erodes, there is no projection anymore, and no creation is possible. However, precisely when this exhaustion hits rock bottom, it becomes the source of a new hope. Weren't many beautiful French and Russian literary texts born in the midst of late 20th century melancholy? Didn't the suffering of the colonised, the deported and of the soldiers of so many wars generate countless novels and films in the southern hemisphere or among the diasporas of the 20th century? As for the abundance of science fiction novels and films produced since Orwell's *1984*, they invite young generations to think utopias for the future. If novelists and filmmakers can depict human resistance so well, they also make us face the current responsibility of the anthropological project: finding new ways of thinking those grounds where suffering and disasters constantly question the memory and the possibilities that would redeem human condition.

DISASTROUS COMBINATIONS: RACISM AND EXCLUSION

When hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005, the media and humanitarian treatments of the victims of the catastrophe were declined differently, based on both social and racial criteria. The poorest could not regain the city in a liveable way after its destruction and, for the most part, the black population was excluded. During the floods, a photo by the *Agence France-Presse* showed a fair-skinned man and a young woman walking with water up to their chests and carrying a bag of bread. The couple was described as "finding bread and soda from a local grocery store". Another photo by *Associated Press* showed a young black man in the same situation and was described as a "looting a grocery store".[34] Those two photos are circulating on the Internet and were posted by an

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34 Cp. Tania Ralli, "Who's a Looter? In Storm's Aftermath, Pictures Kick Up a Different Kind of Tempest", *The New York Times*, September 5, 2005. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/05/business/whos-a-looter-in-storms-aftermath-pictures-kick-up-a-different-kind-of-tempest.html.

aboriginal professor of the department of Aboriginal Studies of James Cook University in Australia: the sign of a new form of solidarity against colour-based discrimination as it equally affects the inhabitants of colonised countries of Africa or Asia and the descendants of slaves and deported workers dispersed throughout the three oceans, and even many indigenous populations that became minorities in the States that colonised them.[35]

During the year 2005, at the court of Townsville, Australia, I attended the investigation of a group of twenty Palm Island Aboriginal people accused of having encouraged a riot after the death of an Aboriginal man while he was held in custody, one hour after he was arrested for public drunkenness. I have to admit that not even my twenty-five years of work on rituals, myths and identity conflicts in other regions of Australia had prepared me for the disenchantment of the Indigenous people involved in those events. I was impressed by the capacity to withstand adversity shown by the inhabitants, who were either deported on the island or the descendants of the 3.000 Aboriginal people deported there between 1918 and the 1970s, from the respective lands of about forty different language groups who spread through the state of Queensland.[36] Indigenous Australians call their displaced populations "historical people". Their colonial anchoring in the deportation places is thereby distinguished from the ancestral heritage of the "traditional owners": even if both groups are opposed in land claims based on the priority of the principle of Native titles, part of their history is common nonetheless, as it is built on the same place of social belonging and life. Treated as non-humans during the colonisation of Australia by the British, Aboriginal people have suffered both a form of ethnocide and a form of apartheid: massacres, poisoning of their water supplies, deportation far away from their land, forced settlement in reservations, abduction of children of mixed descent (between 1905 and the 1970s, one child out of five was taken from its Aboriginal family, a phenomenon called *stolen generations*), or even the state-run confiscation of the wages that were paid by farmers or other employers (*stolen wages*). These decades of traumatising history have contributed to shape a disastrous situation that – in spite of the enthusiasm of the Land Rights Movement of the 1970s and the success

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35 The solidarity of Indigenous activists to denounce situations happening in other countries is not new: in 1938, William Cooper led a group of Aboriginal people of Footscray to the German consulate to protest against the destruction of Jewish homes and synagogues carried out on the 9th of November (the *Progromnacht)*: his Aboriginal descendants were invited to Israel for a ceremony to honor his memory.

36 Cp. Lise Garond, *"Il y a beaucoup d'Histoire ici": Histoire, Mémoire et Subjectivité chez les Habitants Aborigènes de Palm Island (Australie),* PhD Thesis (JCU Australie/EHESS France); Garond, "The meaningful difference of 'Aboriginal Dysfunction' and the Neoliberal 'Mainstream'" [http://etropic.jcu.edu.au/ET13-2/Garond.pdf], *etropic,* 13(2), 2014.

of Aboriginal art since that supported political and social justice claims[37] – has triggered despair in the face of discrimination, suicidal behaviours and rising anger against the constant political misunderstanding towards these societies that were organised without the existence of a State before the British colonisation.[38] However, the year 2010 ended with the creation of the first Aboriginal party (First Nations Party).

The recent evolution of Australian politics towards Aboriginal people has aggravated this catastrophic logic in various regions of the continent, notably in the Northern Territory, whose 73 Aboriginal communities were put under the 'intervention' of the federal government (Northern Territory Emergency Response) and a new centralized administrative system of city shires of the Northern Territory that suppressed their elected community councils. In September 2010, after a vendetta conflict opposing two groups in a desert community, an Australian colleague wrote to me: "Yuendumu has now established a disaster community managed by the Department of Education of the Northern Territory. We now see the next step of the intervention: the unleashed 'honesty' of the new relation of power between the Australian State and remote communities. The 'us and them' dichotomy is now at work. So far, the State has been treating the indigenous people like children by managing their income and destroying its tools of governance". Indeed, the elected Community Councils have been replaced by regional administrators, who decide on municipal and individual expenses. The Aboriginal people have received debit cards to access their wages and subsidies, but they can only use them to buy food in some shops and have to request an authorisation for any other expense, such as buying a bus or plane ticket for example. This measure was trying to ban alcohol consumption and card games. "Now the State wants to protect the Whites from the Blacks. Not only do the communities become segregated spaces, but also dangerous places for white people. We need a disaster management plan to protect the Whites from the Blacks". This ironic testimony of Peter Stewart, who has experienced the creative enthusiasm of the 1980s as administrator employed by the council of another desert community (and not imposed

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37 Cp. Chris Cunneen, "Framing the Crimes of Colonialism: Critical Images of Aboriginal Art and Law", in Keith J. Hayward and Mike Presdee (eds.), *Framing Crime. Cultural Criminology and the Image*, London, Routledge, 2010, pp. 115–137.

38 Cp. Glowczewski, *Guerriers Pour la Paix. La condition Politique des Aborigènes Vue de Palm Island*, Montpellier, Indigène Éditions, 2008; and updated translation: Glowczewski and Lex Wotton, *Warriors for Peace. The Political Condition of the Aboriginal People as Viewed from Palm Island,* 2010. Available at:
http://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/7286/2/7286_Glowczewski_2008_translation.pdf
[accessed December 2, 2015]; cp. Marc Abélès and Glowczewski, "Aborigènes: Anthropologie d'une Exigence de Justice", *Vacarme* 51, April 2010. Available at: http://www.vacarme.org/article1891.html [accessed December 2, 2015].

to the council), signals a dangerous turnaround in race relations. It is to be noted that about a hundred Warlpiri, alarmed by the scale of the local conflict and the security deployment, have chosen to leave Yuendumu temporarily for their relative's place in Adelaide (over a 1.000 kms south). But what shocked the media and the politicians was that Aboriginal people would dare leaving their community to "invade" the city, and not the State's incapacity to control local violence. This reaction illustrates the Australian malaise towards the Indigenous people who, as I have described for a long time, are perceived as "refugees from the inside"[39]

The debates generated by the subaltern and post-colonial studies[40] are increasingly positioning themselves on those indigenous issues (according to the definition of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, adopted on September 13, 2007, by the United Nations General Assembly[41]). They inherit a violent colonial past that has destroyed their natural, social and economic environment of survival, and which continues to stigmatise the victims by characterising them as "others". Those debates refer to the question of power and the capacity to act – in order to exist as citizens with common rights and specific rights, or in a process seeking autonomy or independence – of these groups who became minorities within the State. Whether among the Maori or other peoples from Oceania that have not gained independence, among Indians from North and South America, Moroccan Berbers, Touareg and Peuls in sub-Saharan States, nomadic peoples from Central Asia, everywhere indigenous leaders currently analyse their situations by proposing to "subalternise indigenous politics" and "indigenise subaltern politics".[42] On their land threatened by destruction through forestry and

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39 Glowczewski, "Survivre au Désastre. 'We Got to Move on' Disent les Aborigènes de Palm Island", *Multitudes*, 30, 2007, p. 58; cp. Glowczewski, "From Academic Heritage to Aboriginal Priorities: Anthropological Responsibilities", *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology Today: Critical Perspectives from Europe*, June 13, 2014, p. 18. Available at: http://actesbranly.revues.org/526. 2015 the Government of Western Australia and South Australia announced their intention to close many remote communities. A protest of support stormed across Australia and French scholars working in Australia supported it: cp. Martin Préaud and Glowczewski, "Aboriginal Communities Should Not Be Closed"*, The World Post, July 21*. Available at: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martin-preaud/australian-aboriginal-communities-should-not-be-closed_b_7161392.html [accessed December 2, 2015].

40 On the comments made about those debates in France, see the online archives of the review *Multitudes* [http://www.multitudes.net/] and those of *La Revue Internationale des Livres et des Idées* [http://revuedeslivres.blogspot.fr/].

41 With 143 participating states, including eleven abstentions (Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Colombia, Georgia, Kenya, Russia, Samoa and Ukraine) and four rejections: Australia and New Zealand (which accepted the Declaration one year later), Canada (which promised to ratify it in September 2010) and the United States. The 46 articles of the Declaration affect more than 370 million people worldwide [http://revuedeslivres.blogspot.fr/].
See also http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/fr/drip.html.

42 Cp. Marisol de la Cadena and Orin Starn, "Introduction", in Cadena and Starn (eds.), *Indigenous Experience Today*, Oxford, Berg, 2007, pp. 1–30.

mining as well as in their urban exodus, indigenous people are often confronted to social hierarchy structures that tend to dampen, and even strangle their voices within the Nation State that surrounds them. In the 1980s, that difficulty to make their voices heard at the national level encouraged some of them to contact international bodies and to widen their networks transnationally, often by recurring to their privileged relation to nature.[43]

The rejection of indigenous singularities and the mobilisation of transnational networks echoed the situation of the Roma and Gipsies, of which 900 settlements were dismantled in France in summer 2010. Can this also be considered a disaster? It can if it is included in the history of persecution through which – as with the Pogroms and the Shoah – Gipsies have been hunted down, from the concentration camps where they were tortured and gassed, to the abuses that many families experience today in Romania and elsewhere, both from non-Roma populations and Gipsy mafias. However, they have no right to asylum: as many are traditionally nomadic, their travels outside of their countries of origin are suspect. Some political leaders, the media and a portion of the public perceive them as parasites that should be sent home, as a security risk they should get rid of, even if that implies locking them up in dormitory towns and then in jail if they commit another offence on the way home.

The Right of Asylum and Refugee Rights is no clearer for people displaced from countries devastated by natural disasters. After the earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12, 2010, a journalist from *Le Monde* recalled that:

> "Considering the increasing numbers of disasters induced by climate change, IOM has suggested the creation of an international status for the victims of natural disasters, including earthquakes. In vain. The refugee status is reserved for victims of conflicts and persecutions, even if the High Commission for Refugees (HCR) acknowledges the need for an evolution of the mechanism, and provided support to Haiti. 'We provide equipment and our expertise in camp management and protection of displaced populations',

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43 Cp. Natacha Gagné et al. (eds), *Autochtones. Vues de France et du Québec*, Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Laval, 2009; Bastien Bosa and Èric Wittersheim (eds), *Luttes Autochtones, Trajectoires Postcoloniales (Amérique, Pacifique)*, Paris, Karthala, 2009; Glowczewski and Rosita Henry (eds), *The Challenge of Indigenous Peoples. Spectacle or Politics?*, Oxford, Bardwell Press, 2011 [2007]; see also Glowczewski et al. (eds.), *Les Sciences Humaines et Sociales dans le Pacifique Sud: Terrains, Questions et Méthodes*, Marseille, CREDO éditions, 2014.

explains its spokesperson, Melissa Fleming."[44]

The key words of the humanitarian "care" logic: manage and protect. In both cases, these concepts have become the weapons of an ideology of protectionist and interested assistance that is not new – it was at work in the colonial system, notably in the reservations imposed on indigenous peoples in order to displace them from their land – and consists in introducing donation as a non refundable debt. The logic of "assistancialism" that generates dependence through imposed aid, known by Australian Aborigines as "sit down money", is dehumanising. All the victims of disasters as well as any population increasingly perceived by States as fluxes of potential commodities are transformed into resources to "care and protect", and are no longer considered as citizens and singular beings acting in their own name. In return, populations become distrustful, and riots break out. An example of that happened last autumn in Haiti when, as the cholera epidemic affected the victims of the earthquake and the hurricane in the midst of electoral tensions, rumours were spread about water poisoning by a UN Peacekeeper and its involuntary propagation through the water system.[45]

POSSIBLE UNFOLDING

Éric Fassin wrote (in 2010) about France that:

> "The populations that represent a problem, in other words, that are constructed as 'problematic', are not so much foreigners any longer but rather those whose situation puts in

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44 Grégoire Allix, "Le Séisme Repose la Question du Statut des Réfugiés de l'Environnement", *Le Monde*, January 21, 2010. Available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/ameriques/article/2010/01/21/le-seisme-repose-la-question-du-statut-des-refugies-de-l-environnement_1294629_3222.html [accessed December 2, 2015]:
"During the violence caused by the exile of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the HCR had urged the international community to grant asylum to feeling Haitians. None of it has happened to this day. 'The situation does not require the HCR to adopt an official position, especially since Santo Domingo has opened its border for humanitarian reasons', considers Mrs Fleming. […] The United States have decided to grant a temporary protection status to Haitians present on their soil before January 12th, but warned that they would not receive any boat people. In Europe, granting a temporary protection status in order to receive refugees is a responsibility of the European Council. Granting it to the victims of the quake is not on the agenda. 'Each country should at least grant work permits to Haitians immigrants so that they can send money home', analyses Jemini Pandya. According to the World Bank, the diaspora transfers each year about 1,2 billion euros to Haiti." [translated by editors] See also the testimonies after the earthquake archived by *Etonnants Voyageurs* the international literature and film festival of Saint-Malo, see: http://www.etonnants-voyageurs.com/spip.php?rubrique318.

45 Estimate on November 24, 2010: 2.000 dead, 70.000 contaminated, according to the UN Coordinator in Haiti, Nigel Fisher. Cp. *Réseau Alternatif Haïtien d'Information*, *AlterPresse*, November 24, 2010. Available at: http://www.alterpresse.org/spip.php?article10290 [accessed December 2, 2015].

question the distribution between 'us' and 'them', supposedly just as simple as the name of the new French Ministry that puts immigration and national identity in opposition. […] The same goes for black people: some, coming from French overseas territory, have been French for many generations; others are children of the more recent waves of sub-Saharan migrants. The stigmatisation of black people is based on this double position, both internal and external."[46]

As mentioned above, this observation can be applied to many countries in the Americas, Oceania or the Indian Ocean. Together with the descendants of Melanesian or Asian populations used as indentured labour in Australia or the Mascarene Islands, voluntary migrants stigmatised due to the colour of their skin, the indigenous populations (whether black or not) who are native to colonised countries (Indigenous Australians, Amerindians, Kanaks or Tahitians) are also considered "external" to the nation that pretends to assimilate them while rejecting them.

The stigmatisation of the indigestible otherness rests on the fact that they are seen by some powers as not "manageable" by other means than security measures, which replaces the notion of foreigner in terms of national identity with that of "exterior" in supposedly racial terms. This shift towards a fantasied "nature" (skin colour, ethnic, religious or ideological history, etc.) of essentialised cultures (totally denying the history of colonisation, of the persecution of semi-nomadic peoples and Gipsies, but also of the biologising evolutionism of our disciplines, etc.) sends us back to the darkest times of the birth of criminology which, echoing the racial theses of the beginnings of anthropology, intended to define a typology of natural born criminals. The current tendency to criminalise all potential victims of racial or social segregation has been denounced by many researchers in anthropology and criminology.[47] This does not mean that crime is not present in all segments of the population, but rather that the exercise of justice is not the same for all, especially in liberal States, which hide their discriminatory practices behind the Declaration of Human Rights. Through the ever-faster substitution of

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46 Eric Fassin, "Pourquoi les Roms?",   *Mediapart,*   2010.   Available   at: https://blogs.mediapart.fr/eric-fassin/blog/120910/pourquoi-les-roms, [translated by editors].

47 Cp. Harry Blagg, *Crime, Aboriginality and the Decolonisaiton of Justice*, Sydney, Hawkins Press, 2008; Chris Cunneen, "Riot, Resistance and Moral Panic: Demonising the Colonial Order", in S. Ponyting et G. Morgan (eds.), *Outrageous, Moral Panics in Australia*, University of Tasmania, ACYS Publishing, 2007; Cunneen, "Framing the Crimes of Colonialism: Critical Images of Aboriginal Art and Law", in K. J. Hayward and M. Presdee (eds.), *Framing Crime. Cultural Criminology and the Image*, London: Routledge, 2010; David Garland, *The Culture of Control. Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

the social state by the penal state,[48] the State not only turns to humanitarian emergency NGOs and charity organisations for the provision of social care, but also strives to get rid of victims and excluded people by singling them out as potential criminals that should be jailed or sent away. In France, when the Roma were sent back to Romania after their camps were dismantled, European intellectuals including the French Étienne Balibar, Tzvetan Todorov, Michel Agier and Françoise Vergès, launched A Manifesto for Another Europe:

> "Let us oppose, together, the culture of emergency management based on obsessive surveillance, control and vilification of the strange and the different. Let us create, instead, a culture of solidarity and common purpose beyond our differences. Let us declare our repulsion for the unfair and unequal society that blames its own victims and casualties."[49]

In the current evolution of the world, it seems indispensable to interrogate the meaning of our disciplines in the light of social injustices and the global mechanisms that generate it, as well as of the responses generated by populations that endure them and by activists, intellectuals or not, who respond through manifestos. The traditional academic recommendation regarding the need for a scientific distance in order to remain "objective" in social sciences has opened curious filiation tracks in disciplines where the civic, and even political engagement, as well as the utopic spirit that prevailed at their beginning,[50] now seem to be frowned upon by many colleagues in France and elsewhere. As I here try to show that one cannot separate natural catastrophes from social disasters, emergency policies from long-term ones, knowledge of the present from historical memories, humanitarian responses from the agency of victims, I believe that anthropology is particularly called to engage in analyses that consider all those relations in a critical way in order to trigger local and global reflection towards new social alternatives.

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48 Cp. Loic Wacquant, *Punishing the Poor: The Neoliberal Government of Social Insecurity*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2009, pp. 113ff.

49 Ash Amin et al., "A   Manifesto   for   a   New   Europe", *The Guardian,* July 14, 2010.
Available at: http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jul/14/manifesto-new-europe-politics-hope [accessed December 2, 2015].

50 Cp. David Graber, *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, Chicago IL, Prickly Paradigm Press, 2004.