

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

**Costas Douzinas**, *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe*, Cambridge: Polity, 2013. ISBN 9780745665436 (cloth); ISBN 9780745665443 (paper)

As these lines were being written Wolfgang Schäuble, the German Finance Minister, was about to visit Athens — and for this reason our city was under a complete lock-down: central metro stations were shut under police orders; and those of us who joined a demonstration against Schäuble's visit defied a protest ban that extended across much of the city centre, the airport, and all main thoroughfares connecting the two. At the symbolic level, perhaps nothing could cry *protectorate* more than the lock-down of a capital city in favour of the all-powerful visitor. And there is little that could show any more clearly how disparate the future of the territories of our continent might be: even if the future of Europe is common (the EU, its financial unitary façade, still is and might very well remain a single project) this does not by any means guarantee it will be either *unitary*, or *uniform*.

In other words, even if the entire structure stays common, no-one can tell what the future might hold — either for its specific territories, or for those of us living within them. Yet regardless of events' and livelihoods' eventual trajectory, the current economic, social and political crisis will have also acted as a moment of personal *crisis*: that is, a moment of judgement for all of us who have happened to be living in and/or focusing on the country (Greece) as positioned in the continent (Europe) at this time. In these crucial times — and amidst a sea of silence verging on complicity — Costas Douzinas stands among the handful of academics who have seen a duty to use both their position and analytical skills to convey the message of resistance to an international audience. For this, he cannot be commended enough.

*Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis* is a rich anthology of Douzinas' public thoughts and interventions throughout this period. In its opening pages, he describes a too familiar roller-coaster of emotions that has become a state-of-fluid-being for many of us in recent times. As historical time condenses itself to a previously unimaginable extent, cataclysmic events appear in an ever-frantic tempo, and by this point even overlap with one another, shifting from a consecutive series into a simultaneous spilling out, an oft-encountered blur. The revision for the English version of the book,

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

we are told in the prologue, took place in August 2012 — a mere 12 months after the Greek original and yet a period that was enough to see the author’s original feelings of anger and despair give way to anger and *hope* instead.

*Philosophy and Resistance* shows a remarkable quality in dealing with this emotional roller-coaster. As an “unintentional, unofficial representative of suffering Greece” (p.2) Douzinas has spent ample time both inside and outside the country, allowing him thus to dive in and jump out the surface of our present moment — in the process constructing a fascinating, interpretative mechanism for its comprehension. The book comprises a continuous exercise in this ‘in and out’ approach — a shift that is both chronological (between past, present, and a projected future) and one that lifts us from the tangible and concrete (lived experience) to its abstract projection: philosophy.

The book’s chapters are described by Douzinas himself as a “multiplicity of singularities” (p.7); at first glance, a seemingly heterogeneous collection of chapters and parts, an articulation and performance of the *multitude* itself. But the ostensible heterogeneity does not translate into fragmentation — quite the contrary. Even if each part and chapter can (and does) stand on its own, it is only when read in its entirety that *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis* will convey to its reader the entire range of emotions that have engulfed us throughout our prolonged historical moment (this is the value of Douzinas’ closeness to the events) and the importance of specific events in shaping our collective history (and here lies the value of his ability to partially read the events from a distance).

The book is divided into three main parts. The first deals with the moment of crisis itself. Here, Douzinas masterfully delves into sovereignty’s own incapacity to read what was then still an impending crisis (‘The Queen’s question’, pp.19-31), while a take on “the biopolitics of pleasure” (pp.32-48) explains the long trail that lead from neoliberalism’s “mandatory pleasure” all the way to the idea of “collective salvation” that austerity politics carries with it. Part one concludes with two essays: the penultimate (pp.49-63) on the notion of “social ethos” now under attack by the anomie that has besieged social life in the country — modernization and austerity distorting it further in the face of the cynicism and ultimate lack of solidarity of the elites. The final essay (pp.64-73) looks at

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

“the crisis as spectacle”, setting off from and then centred around the idea that the obnoxiousness of the elites in dealing with the aftermath of the crisis resembles the Lacanian ‘big Other’, which posits an “all-knowing centre of the symbolic order” (p.65), one that by extension and by default renders void any criticism against it.

The second part of the book (‘Philosophy’) opens with an attempt to illustrate how, despite the multiple and repeated announcement of its death as of late (in the post-1989 world) resistance will never quite go away, not in the existent system of order at least: for as long as *adikia* (injustice, but also disjointure, dislocation) exists it will be *dikaion*, right, to resist: ‘right’ not only in its strict legal meaning, as a “claim accepted or seeking admission to the law” (p.86) but also as “a will that wills what does not exist or what is prohibited” (*ibid.*). The sixth essay then picks up from the third, both focusing on *anomie*: a favourite of power, the term has been used time and time again through the long moment of crisis to discredit movements of resistance in the streets but also, later on, the attack against squatted social spaces, as ‘centres of anomie’ (see, for example, Dalakoglou 2013; Filippidis 2013). This double essay ranks, in my view, as a backbone for the entire collection: it turns the dominant conceptualisation of anomie on its head, showing how it is civil disobedience that has been labelled in this way by sovereignty — the same sovereignty that would seem to realise that it must, and that it will soon enough, exit the political stage. The next chapter, ‘Political Ontologies’ (pp.107-118), offers a concise review of the world of radical philosophy in our radical times; a homage to those thinkers who have realised the importance of taking a stance and have chosen to do so. And the section concludes with ‘People, Multitude, Crowd’ (pp.119-133), a genealogy of the notion of the *multitude* as conceived in contradistinction to the other main political philosophy camp, which has been organized around the idea of ‘the One’ — whether a God, a king, a sovereign, a people, or a nation. The essay’s concluding pages, drawing a parallel between history’s “fear of the crowd” on the one hand, and philosophy’s “fear of the multitude” on the other (pp.129-131), provide an ideal prelude to the third and final part of the book, dedicated to the moment when these fears on the part of the elites, of sovereignty, materialised: the moment when the crowds took to the streets.

Part three, ‘Resistance’, is a homage to the *Aganaktismenoi* movement centred around

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Syntagma Square in Athens; the Greek contribution to the movement that sprang up in much of the world throughout 2011<sup>1</sup>. Here, the first essay traces the history of recent resistance in Greece through three key moments: the uprising of December 2008; the hunger strike of 300 *sans papiers* immigrants in early 2011; and *Stasis Syntagma* itself. The word *statis* is chosen because of its dual meaning: both “the upright posture, standing tall and serene, holding your stance” (p.153) and also “sedition, revolt or insurrection, the opposite of stillness” (*ibid.*). And while *syntagma* in politics directly translates into ‘constitution’, in linguistics a “syntagmatic relationship arranges linguistic relationships sequentially” (*ibid.*) — one only has to think of the word *syntax*. It is a bringing together and re-arranging of a multitude, a multitude that quickly came to form a political expression in the same way that a 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstration had demanded a Syntagma (Constitution) from the country’s Bavarian king. The two concluding essays (‘Demos in the Square’, pp.155-175, and ‘Lessons of political strategy’, 176-197), attempt a much-needed soul-searching exercise among much of the radical Left and anarchist movement both in the country and beyond: they essentially grapple with the question of the legacy of the square’s movement in the struggles to come.

*Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis* is powerful proof of what may be potentially born out of the cross-fertilisation of theory and praxis, of an alternate close and distant viewpoint, allowing both for intimacy and perspective. Yet, if there is one critique to be levelled at the sober and penetrating analysis permeating the book, it would in fact be a geographical one: a critique, that is, concerning the unit of analysis in question. For Douzinas, as with many other intellectuals of the Left, the plight of Greece is important because it is a kind of preamble to the future of Europe *as a whole*. This reading assumes both a chronological linearity (Europe’s national territories falling prey to to the austerity vulture one after another) and also a geographical homogeneity: a certainty, in other words, that Europe comprises a somehow unified, unitary entity, that we Europeans are ‘all in this together’. For example: much time has been spent analysing the possible effects and consequences of a single country’s Eurozone exit (the now infamous GRexit scenario) or even an exit from the EU (which is the case with the GBexit). But once we look inside the Eurozone or the

---

<sup>1</sup>A thorough overview and analysis of the *Aganaktismenoi* is provided in Giovanopoulos and Mitropoulos (2011).

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

EU structure, it is as if we were staring at a black box: the idea of ‘Europe’ as a single and solid unit has prevailed so far. And yet, as the crisis sinks into a prevailing normality, it is precisely this idea of the European *unit* that begins to be challenged and questioned — an idea, after all, that is too close to the philosophical notion of ‘the One’ that Douzinas himself rightfully criticises.

In a recent interview, Giorgio Agamben (2013) explains how the European continent has historically seen an exceptional coexistence of cultures and life forms — yet one where this continent-wide *whole* “always left the particularities of the peoples intact”. This is no longer the case: there is *One* European project, *One* crisis, but the plight and hardship this causes is more geographically uneven than it has been for a long, long time. In its current form, the Europeanisation project strictly focuses on the financial (EU-driven) project that sees and will continue to see a growing disparity between North and South, between a centre and a periphery. How do we respond to this disparity? Taking up the gauntlet in calling this a war of the cardinal points might prove misguided; it would be much more rewarding for us to seek alliances in the new subjects and the common spatialities we now share.

Growing up in the city of Patras, around a decade and a half ago, friends and I would watch the enormous ships embarking to Italy in a glimmering hope that one day, we could *de-port* ourselves through them (the term, as Douzinas explains, means ‘to leave port’). After all these years, visiting the city I now watch the thousands from the Maghreb, from the Middle East, from Africa — the thousands hurtled into Europe carrying the exact same hope, to embark in the exact same ships; only of course their deportation is forced, violent, often deadly. Nevertheless, here lies the opportunity for a territorial affinity that can and eventually must permeate our cultural, social and historical divides: the birth of a new subaltern that can then cut right into and through Europe’s borders; fight against the forcefully unitary idea of fiscal-first, One Europe; begin to dream of the coming together of the repressed, old and new, into a multitude reflective and worthy of our continent’s multiplicities.

## References

# Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

- Agamben G (2013) The endless crisis as an instrument of power: In conversation with Giorgio Agamben. <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1318-the-endless-crisis-as-an-instrument-of-power-in-conversation-with-giorgio-agamben> (last accessed 25 July 2013)
- Dalakoglou D (2013) Neo-Nazism and neoliberalism: A few comments on violence in Athens at the time of crisis. *WorkingUSA* 16(2):283-292
- Filippidis C (2013) Etat de siège: Public space user manual. *Steppe Notes* 3 <http://crisis-scape.net/blog/item/99-etat-de-siege-public-space-user-manual-1-of-3> (last accessed 25 July 2013)
- Giovanopoulos C and Mitropoulos D (eds) (2011) *Democracy Under Construction: From the Streets to the Squares*. Athens: Asynechia

*Antonis Vradis*  
*Department of Geography and Environment*  
*London School of Economics and Political Science*  
*antonis@occupiedlondon.org*

*July 2013*