The Crisis is normal life. How Anthropology faces the Crisis

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(Contributions by: Lorenzo Bordonaro, Micol Brazzabeni, Maria Cardeira da Silva, José Manuel Cavaleiro, Jean-Yves Durand, João Leal, José Mapril, Emília Margarida Marques, Humberto Martins, Chiara Pussetti, Marta Rosales, Cristina Santinho, Miguel Vale de Almeida)

Próximo NexT Future / Future

Abstract

In the debates taking place about the Crisis, the political and economic argument frequently dissolves into the moral argument. At the same time, anthropology has been confronted with what seems to be a new terrain, 'globalisation', sometimes afforded a more celebratory approach, sometimes a more critical one. In this text, we defend the idea that it is necessary to think about the Crisis ethnographically: looking at the *subjects where they in fact are and not where they are supposed to be*. Furthermore, in relation to the Crisis, *we must look at the subjects as they in fact are and not as they should be*. We distinguish between crisis-process and crisis-event, examining cases of what we have called 'critical people' (the migrant, the refugee, the asylee, those who stay behind, the gypsies, the poor, the workers/consumers, amongst others). At the moment when the Crisis is declared, only ethnographies make it possible to shed light on the way in which it does or does not affect people in substantially new and different ways. The declaration of the Crisis obscures other smaller crises, their causes and their everyday personalised expressions. For the 'critical people', the crisis is *normal life*.

>   Almost every day, and certainly every week, I see groups of men huddled together in what are almost always white vans. They also almost always stop at that petrol station close to Mirandela, on the infamous IP4. Sometimes, the number of men climbing out of those VITO Mercedes (or are they OPEL?) vans seems endless. I also almost always see them passing by me at full speed; they're almost always on their way to Spain … they go and then come back at weekends. Today, there seem to be less people passing. It looks like they've stayed behind; it doesn't matter which direction they're heading in; curiously, in this geography of the journey back and forth, it really seems as if the direction doesn't matter. What matters is that I see less of them nowadays. Is this good? Is it bad? Is it the crisis? I see them coming and going. I see myself coming and going.

An approach: the apocalypse, the millennium

At a time of gloomy omens, recurrent pandemics, imminent natural catastrophes, the epiphany of new saviours of the world, the discourse of the "world crisis" seems to have acquired the characteristic of an apocalyptic and millennial mainframe narrative in the perception of recent history. What is exhibited is a historical sensitivity marked by the possibility of imminent catastrophes, but also of cosmic redemption, spiritual transformation, and the inauguration of a new world order. The difficulties being experienced by the markets are presented as symptoms of moral errors that call for a new justice and a spiritual revolution. Ten years ago, at a time when the international community was announcing the Millennium Goals, the anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff were pointing out "the distinctly pragmatic qualities of the messianic, millennial capitalism of the moment: a capitalism that presents itself as a gospel of salvation; a capitalism that, if rightly harnessed, is invested with the capacity wholly to transform the universe of the marginalized and disempowered" (2000: p. 292). This argument might now be turned upside down, pointing towards the millennial qualities of the "crisis of capitalism". In the debates about the Crisis, the political and economic argument frequently dissolves into the moral argument: a "punishment" for our having ignored the moral imperatives that should regulate our actions, a sign of the violation of the natural and ethical rules[1]. The criticism of the management of political

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[1] Various religious authorities have intervened in the forefront of the debates about the crisis. The patriarch of Venice recently highlighted the moral question that lies behind the crisis, calling upon the governors to build links between 'good' and 'just' people from the bottom up. Pope Benedict XVI has stated that "Those

economy by advanced industrial societies disappears in favour of a scatology of religious origins that points to the negative characteristics of the human being as the primary cause of the unequal distribution of power.

Anthropology faced with the terrain of the Crisis

In the last two decades, anthropology has been confronted with an apparently new "terrain", a new space-time, commonly referred to as "globalisation". Two different forms of approach can be identified: one that tends to be celebratory, while the other tends to be critical. On the one hand, phenomena such as hybridisation, the localised or global agency, are seen as sources of intergroup equality; on the other hand, attention has to be paid to ethnocide, to cultures that are surrounded or under siege, to social inequalities. The same situation applies to a correlated phenomenon of globalisation, that of transnationality. In this field, it would seem that we neglect questions such as that of the terrains that are to be found outside the realm of transnationality, the run-down inner cities, shanty towns, or even such questions as the right to "assimilation". In this process, anthropologists seem to lose their capacity to report on the practices and meanings of people in social life, practices and meanings to which the anthropologist gains access through processes that are marked by intersubjectivity. We must therefore think ethnographically: *look at the subjects where they in fact are and not where they are supposed to be*. The discourse of transnationalism may serve as a class-based discourse that divides the networks of social relations into segments, just as globalisation can function as a system that produces illegal subjects, in a state of limbo as regards their citizenship, as is the case with some immigrant groups in Portugal. The Crisis that is presented to us in the media-based and political discourses may not perhaps be "yet another crisis", typical of the cyclical nature of the capitalist political-economic system or the cyclical or counter-cyclical ways in which modernity is perceived and experienced. It is a crisis that reveals the more specific processes of the financialisation of capital, of increasing virtuality, of the distancing of the State from the

who build on the visible things that can be touched, such as success, a career or money, are building on sand," going on to say that "with the collapse of the large banks we can now see that this money disappears, that it is nothing, that these things are second-order realities" and that "only the Word (of God) is solid, and that it is the true reality on which we must build the foundations of our own life." The Dalai Lama has also stated that the global economic collapse is the result of a moral crisis: "people are becoming selfish and materialistic, and this has led to a slowing down of the economy". Some economists, but also Muslim *ulema* and *sheikhs* seem to take this moralisation of the Crisis even further: adhering to the universal salvational mainframe, they convert it into a civilisational criticism, while at the same time proposing the "Islamic financial system" as an alternative. The Crisis appears here to be moralised (in keeping with a moral that seems universal: social justice for humanity), but at the same time culturalised (Islam provides better civilisational/legal artefacts for the pursuit of such justice). In more radical cases, the Crisis serves as an argument and an opportunity for fundamentalist proposals of Islam as a new universalism.

management of the *res publica*, of collective representations, and the ever greater interconnectivity of economic, political and cultural processes. It is a crisis that is drawing symbolically closer to similarly contemporary ideas about Pandemics[2]. To a certain extent, the Crisis confirms the already announced crises, thus fulfilling a role that legitimises certain policies and confirms the need for these.

Just think about the practices of relocating production, laying workers off, transferring costs to the State, the business opportunities characterised by the notions of discount or low-cost. These are economic strategies that probably would not be possible without an appropriate discursive and symbolic environment. Is it possible that processes of this dimension and scale may or may not be perceived as being everyday affairs and be made accessible through ethnographic intersubjectivity? In parallel to this, the crisis can be seen as a constant crisis (Vigh, 2008), or, in other words, as a process and not as an event. This perspective derives from anthropological experience in contexts that are commonly designated as belonging to the third world, where the occurrence of a Crisis with a capital C may represent an exotic object. The most underprivileged certainly end up suffering even more with crises-events. In the specific case of marginalised populations and groups, such as refugees, the Crisis can be conceived as a place from where there is never any return, but which does, however, make it possible to engage in a certain recreation at the margins, after experiencing biographical crises that are more traumatic than any pre-announced structural crisis. In parallel to the crisis-process to be found in some third-world contexts, to the margins of globalisation represented by migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, or even to the "new poverty" resulting from the Crisis, poverty itself still continues to exist in the first world. While there are some who have discovered poverty for the first time as a result of unemployment, as well as others who see their expectations of upward social mobility thwarted by the situation, there are yet others who live in a permanent and timeless crisis, beyond the economic conjuncture, and who have been drawn there through the passage of Fordism to the so-called advanced economies, through the new international division of labour, and through the knowledge industry. According to

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[2] Without wishing to exaggerate, it is fair to say that this is the aids, the bird flu, the swine fever, of the globalised world resulting from the triumph of capitalist modernity. The Crisis must be related with its chronicity, and analogies can be drawn with other apparently distant areas, such as vaccination. Health is, in fact, an area where the lack of definition of the boundaries between crisis and chronicity is particularly evident. Diseases are generally seen as states of crisis, whether they affect individuals or, in the case of epidemics, entire populations. And institutions do, in fact, tend to respond to these crises by providing answers that tend to stress the exceptional nature of abnormal moments. Such responses are frequently in potential contradiction with fundamental rights or, at least, tend to limit autonomy and individual free will: they define rules and demands that are as exceptional as (supposedly) are the situations that they are designed to solve, imposing practices that may be questioned and disputed in relation to either the principle or the form of their implementation (such as mass vaccination). As far as the vaccination against HPV is concerned, it was the very attempt to use immune biotechniques to solve a health problem with a relatively low incidence, and consequently one that was until then largely unknown to the general public, that gave rise to a crisis.

Wacquant (2007: pp. 168-170), until now poverty in the West was circumscribed and could be combated. Now, it is more easily reproduced, disconnected from business cycles and segregated, representing an "advanced marginality" rather than the frequently mentioned "new poverty". The concentration and stigmatisation of these realities seem to contradict the fluidity of the symbolic models associated both with globalisation and with transnationality. The Neighbourhood, for example, has become the ideological and symbolic place of this new stage, joining together mechanisms of government and representation in which technicians can participate, along with security forces, the media, identity-building movements based on migrations, old and new poverties.

Looking at things from where people are and not from where they ought to be is therefore a motto for an ethnography and an anthropology that is more critical in relation to the simple and simplistic dichotomy that seems to have become established between the celebratory ways of seeing contemporary global capitalism and modernity and the critical approach based on transposing to a global scale some of the old premises of political economy that are applicable to national economies and relations between states.

The same posture may be applied to the idea of a Crisis, to the distinction between crisis-process and crisis-event or between contexts in which the crisis is always an event and others in which it can be understood as a permanent feature. But it is also crucial to "look at things anew": the apparently same spaces and the same continuities and the same people are reconfigured in the light of the particular phase of globalisation and the Crisis. While, for vast segments of the world population, life has always been a state of crisis, the new political economy in which we live calls for us to observe people and groups whose living conditions are themselves specific to the processes of crises and to the Crisis of the system: permanent poverties, emerging poverties, old and new migrants, those who have been subjected to some form of intervention, refugees and exiles, recoverers of traditions, people who are segregated, "contaminated" and "disturbed". *The crisis is normal life*, not as a platitude or an affirmation of the critical nature of human experience. The crisis is normal life in the sense in which, before and after the declaration of the Crisis, frictions are created that are typical of and peculiar to this contemporaneity, and in which, once again, the margins shed light on the centre (Pina Cabral, 1996).

Critical people: the migrant, the refugee, the asylee.

For vast segments of the world's population, the crisis isn't something fleeting and temporary, but it is instead a condition of their life and, as such, their anxieties, desires and strategies call for them to "take their chances" elsewhere. For example, the young people from the intermediate classes, urbanised and with high educational levels,

in Bangladesh, seek to find in the *bidesh* (Bengali for "abroad") the opportunities that they do not manage to have by remaining in their countries. This process is supported by the State itself, through programmes designed to provide incentives for emigration that are seen by many actors as a possible solution for Bangladesh. Their remittances are regarded as sources of wealth and the foreign currency that is indispensable for the "modernisation" of society. Amongst some political forces, emigration is even considered to be equivalent to jute – the country's main source of wealth until the late 1970s. In fact, a historical glance over the relationship between migrations and economic crises shows how it was exactly like this in the past, and obviously serves as an indicator of how it may be in the present. See, for example, the process described by James Ferguson (1999, 2006) in which the world copper crisis transformed Zambia from a nation with prospects for a prosperous future, where wealth and "modernity" would supposedly reach every citizen, into a bankrupt nation in which uncertainty has become widespread and is regarded as a condition of everyday life.

It is frequently thought that the new immigrants represent the sector that is most affected by the Crisis – in comparison with the native workers of the host countries – being generally younger, unskilled, frequently illegal and employed in the worst hit sectors, such as civil construction and the manufacturing industry. It should be added that most of the immigrants that are without official papers and documents cannot resort to legal support, and, at best, can only count on the precarious and occasional support of the welfare networks. Generally, the immigrant is seen as a social responsibility, a burden, someone who is vulnerable, in need, an object of pity – rarely as an economic resource. It is in his "non-existence" that we find the original "sin" of the immigrant: he is guilty of a latent transgression, of violating a frontier, of remaining in a country without permission, of abusively occupying someone else's job, of unfair competition, as well as consuming resources and services to which only the native inhabitants should have access. The current crisis coincided with a proliferation of anti-immigration campaigns, from the strike at the oil refineries in the United Kingdom, to more serious demonstrations such as the assassination of Singh, an Indian immigrant burned alive in Nettuno (Rome) by five young lads who wanted to "clean up the city", or the racially-motivated murder of Chehari Behari Diouf, a citizen of Senegalese origin, who had been resident in Italy for twenty years. Many countries have made their restrictions on immigration even more severe. Perhaps the most relevant example is the Italian one, where Berlusconi publicly committed himself to "eliminating the fears of national citizens and guaranteeing their safety", announcing new measures against illegal immigration, in order to "make it easier to expel those who have no papers and to confiscate the property of those who have been stealing from Italians". The crime of being an illegal immigrant can lead to a prison term of up to four years.

In the face of such phenomena, what one notices, however, is a certain adaptability in immigrants' imaginations and a search for new ways of sustaining themselves. There is a return to many of the "traditional" techniques and strategies ,

feeding what the Comaroffs have called "occult economies" (1999), or, in other words, the use of magical means to face up to the lack of material resources and to overcome adverse situations. An imaginary that is common to the whole of West Africa maintains that individual success is linked to a pact with spirits that are certainly morally ambiguous[3]. Instead of considering these practices as a "return to traditional certainties", it is more appropriate to consider them as contemporary techniques that allow people who live in a diasporic context to face up to the uncertainties of contemporaneity, the global crises and the political changes, through a language that is familiar to them (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993: pp. 15-16).

The crises may in fact be global in their origin, but they are experienced at the local and individual level. Significantly, the occult economies use languages of contemporaneity: in the words that are used, in the symbolism, in the goods involved, in the type of business that is stipulated, in the wording of contracts. In other words, these practices place the local and the global – considered here as analytical concepts and not as empirical realities – in a dialectical game, being presented as a possible recourse for altering the state of things.

Also amongst the refugees and asylum seekers, survivors of what we may describe as a *trauma*, it is also possible to find a surprising amount of creativity. Determined not to have to accept that their initial flight was wasted, they find alternative resources to the Crisis on the margins that are generated by the socio-political system itself: in the undeclared jobs that help them to meet their urgent everyday expenses, in the occasional and disguised financial transfers that are made (through the Western Union) by family members who have "conquered the real Europe" beyond the Portuguese border, in the recreation of alternative families and affections to replace the ones that they have lost at their place of origin, in the reinvention of religious practices that were previously undervalued and that now give them resilience and help them to find a meaning and direction in their life. It is this knowledge, inspiration and experience in overcoming resistances that is wasted in the institutional ins and outs into which the Crisis has become projected and which could be enhanced and reincorporated into a new system that is less reliant on the production of laws that have no pragmatic use in the field for those who are excluded from the system. It is also at these same margins that they reinvent their identity.

Critical people: those who stay behind

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[3] A classic example of this is the increased popularity – even amongst immigrants – of the cult of the entity Mamy Wata, which has spread across the whole of the west coast of Africa (and has been confirmed by various ethnic groups), always with the aim of obtaining economic improvements. In the context of the Cameroons, for example, the link between the changes in the intensity of this belief and the practice of these types of occult economies, together with the economic, social and political changes that they imply for the country, has been demonstrated by many anthropologists.

The celebration of mobility casts a cloud over the life and crises of the vast majority of those who are left behind: those who do not reach the refugee camps and die in the battlefields, those who are not rehoused, those who do not emigrate and remain dependent – or not – on remittances, or those who simply stay behind, observing and/or welcoming the mobility of others in work or leisure. In this joyous context of mobility, tourism has been seen as the ultimate representation of the "capitalist myth of us all getting rich together" (MacCannell, 1992: pp. 28-29). Investment in tourism has been encouraged by various international organisations, given the perfect conjugation of its developmentist virtues, in keeping with the new recipes of sustainability and the Millennium Goals. Throughout the "pleasure peripheries" (Turner and Ash, 1975) of former empires, many tourist spots have exhibited themselves as idyllic places for the exchange of knowledge and mutual help. This moralisation of tourism (Butcher, 2003) has stimulated the development of a converging, if not coinciding, traffic (solidarity tourism, *favela* hotels) of tourists and development agents[4].

In the eloquent speeches that have accompanied the merchandising of these places and flows, stimulated by international programmes such as UNESCO's *Slave Route*, the asymmetries that were created by an earlier and "strange form of globalisation" are highlighted and the principle of Debt and Reparation is made clearer: the (now somewhat fragile) economic exuberance of western capitalism is due to the enforced exile of millions of Africans. But the descendants of the slaves who, centuries later, are now "returning" as tourists and/or aid workers do not carry in their genes the social and economic contingencies or cultural vestiges of their African destinations of return. The Crisis affects the residents of these destinations, which are vitally dependent on international industries (air carriers, travel agencies, the hotel and catering industry), on transcontinental consumption and exogenous cultural motivations and tendencies. It makes it possible for local unease to boil down to the *common evil*, which is universal and impersonalised. The Crisis is deepening, and therefore facilitating the denomination of local crises, absorbing them. However, it does cloud their reasons and everyday personalised expressions, which are socially stratified, complex and played out

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[4] This salvational movement of capitalism has been accompanied by a growing humanitarianism (neo-assistentialism) geared towards applying the sustainability of development proposals that, in previous decades, had already heralded the millennial echoes (Ferguson 1997) that would later find their resonance in globalisation. Meanwhile, culture was discovered and promoted as *the* universal resource. In the absence of any other, the material and (later) the immaterial heritage and ethnicity became valuable and ubiquitous goods for combating poverty. Culture entered into the low-cost, welfare market. In their anxiety to capitalise on this development, complex pasts of conflict-ridden cultural encounters were frivolously transformed into *multi-culturalism* (an even more valuable resource), in order to more easily open the doors of walled historic centres and citadels to tourism and gentrification. The subsequent social confusion that arises from this is frequently overlooked.

politically, embodied by cultural features that have not travelled and have taken root and settled there, in that place.

The universalisation and standardisation of the discourse of the Crisis run the risk of reproducing the language and the panaceas of Development (the "evil twin" of Anthropology; Ferguson 1997) and NGOisation: its solution is more technical (financial), moral and international than political and local. Ethnography, by contextualising, locating, and positioning in frameworks of interpersonal relations, frequently hinders cosmopolitan claims (Mosse, 2007). Yet, at this time of Crisis, only the ethnographies of the places can shed light on the way in which it affects people, and their own crises, in different parts of the world. And only that substance can ultimately inform pertinent mediations. Otherwise, the Crisis and the discourse of the Crisis will be limited to perpetuating "the autonomic impulse of millennial capitalism […] decontextualisation, distancing from the place and from its socio-moral pressures" (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2005: p. 182).

Two complementary examples

The gypsies

We have seen that there are groups of people who are permanently outside the social order and who are only episodically outside the crisis. What perspective do the groups of gypsy families in Portugal offer about their "being in crisis" and the ways in which this is experienced, managed, represented and incorporated, considering in particular their strategies, tactics and forms of resilience? What does the Crisis mean for this group of people and what do the institutions that "look after" them think that the Crisis is for them? The Social Integration Income represents the rhetorical discourse that is most widely used and ritualised by both parties to describe the Crisis and, simultaneously, reinforce the social system itself and tighten the net of the institutional and socio-economic system. Putting down roots in the place is one of the strategies used by gypsy families to make the context of their life and experience known, explorable and safe. Faced with a "crisis context", the institution responds by presenting a conjunctural, but at the same time global, scenario, one that is imminent, lasting and impersonal, in which the subsidy is announced not as a measure of lifelong support, but instead as a social measure offering a "way out" of the Crisis, since the Social Integration Income will end or will be heavily reduced, all the more so in this present economic conjuncture. The longer the Crisis lasts, the more quickly and the more cruelly the subsidy will end, leaving its beneficiaries without economic resources, but also without citizenship and social "aptitude". Finding themselves confronted with the declaration of the Crisis, the gypsy families comment on the "event" – the crisis that everyone is

talking about – and confirm its most concrete and palpable effects – the fall in the value of the subsidy or, in some cases, the actual suppression of this subsidy.

The poor

In Portugal, the concentration of families rehoused in monofunctional and socially segregated areas is an old situation and has its origins in plans and projects that, in some cases, were conceived before the revolution of 25 April. However, the great rehousing programmes of the 1990s not only failed to correct previous errors, but in some cases actually made them worse, despite the fact that better informed technical analyses strongly advised against their implementation. In the Lisbon Metropolitan Area alone there are currently half a dozen neighbourhoods and residential districts with larger populations than are to be found in many of the cities that form the national urban fabric. Ill repute is an old stain on poor neighbourhoods where people have been rehoused en masse. In the 1980s, various run-down residential areas and neighbourhoods of rehoused people were called by the names of "Cambodia" and "Vietnam", names that at that time pointed towards either a real or supposed threat of violence and potential danger. Recent events, such as the disturbances that took place in the neighbourhoods of Quinta da Fonte and Terraços da Ponte/Quinta do Mocho (Loures), in the summer of 2008, and the neighbourhoods of Bela Vista (Setúbal) and Quinta da Princesa (Seixal), in May and August of this year, should lead us to reflect on the possibility that we are witnessing a new stage in the stigmatisation of poverty, in keeping with processes that make use of territorial agglomeration to heap upon entire populations the negative identities formed on the basis of their residential areas. Such processes of labelling and stigmatisation have a clearly territorial basis and are the fruit of the converging activities of institutions and outside agents that, through their direct intervention or the public discourses that they produce from a distance, end up creating or reinforcing the run-down images of these places and collectively vilifying the populations, condemning them as a result of their economic incompetence or their ethnic and racial origins.

Critical people: The worker (and the consumer)

As explained by a promoter of the most expensive apartments in the country, the anguish of the Crisis opens up opportunities: "In a certain way, the crisis has helped, because at this time what exists is a fear of badly designed projects that offer no guarantees. This project makes it possible for many people who are worried about the investment of capital to have a means for its application that is guaranteed, exclusive and desirable." But, at the opposite extreme of the range of goods and services, the

Crisis also represents an opportunity, leading to an increase in sales: the low-cost segment of the market is one that is expanding in all areas of business, ranging from food distribution to beauty services. At the level of society, compensating for the weak and/or decreasing purchasing power through the provision of low-cost goods and services corresponds to the most complete and definitive return of Fordism. This was based on the consubstantiation of producers and consumers: the subjects of mass production and mass consumption were the same. Once the economy was globalised and production relocated, that identity was broken: much of what western workers consume is now produced outside the Western world – and distributed via low-cost means – and much of what they produce is goods or services, "of high added value", to which they do not themselves have access. But this low-cost world is not limited to making it possible for real wages to be reduced: it actively favours this procedure (Collins, 2006). Not only because the wages of those who work in that segment tend to suffer the "crushing pressure of costs" which is characteristic to it, but also because selling to poor people is evidently all the more profitable the more poor people there are. While low costs are a condition for the subversion of Fordism, the subversion of Fordism is equally a condition for low costs. The Crisis favours them both, deepens them, makes them more firmly rooted. Consumption, the forms that it takes, therefore has a tight-knit, diversified and complex relationship with the crisis. While it is true that some of the most underprivileged, especially if they are structurally situated outside the labour market, end up not suffering even more from the present conjuncture, it is equally true that, as in many cases of lay-offs, for example, the sharp fall of a monthly income from an already scanty 670 euros to 450 euros represents a powerful impact. In a situation of unemployment, factory workers in a rural and semi-urban environment reduced even further their already limited consumption pattern (Frade, 2003). The same study observed urban middle-class subjects, who revealed much greater difficulty in making this adaptation, and, at the same time, showed a greater propensity for resorting to credit, frequently resulting in insolvency. Thus, while the crisis of the former is solved – or eternalised – in private, in their renouncing consumption and in the buffer provided by the silent welfare society, the crisis of the second group is immediately much louder, attracting attention and mobilising resources due to a public "problem", that of over-indebtedness. In the same way, when middle-class subjects find themselves in a situation of financial rupture and mobilise other means of provision (Warde, 1992) than the market (for example, the food bank) to obtain goods that are associated with their basic needs, and thereby protecting their other consumption, they reveal their capacity for activating, in the face of the crisis, mechanisms designed for the transfer of value. Perhaps a little further down in the income scale, the "mileuristas" (those earning a thousand euros a month or less) and their crisis are far more visible than the one that seriously afflicts the much more numerous "quinhenteuristas" (those earning 500 euros a month or less). Different social and cultural capitals therefore provide different ways of dealing with the impact of the crisis on consumption.

A fresh approach: the Crisis, the crises

We have defended the idea that in the debates on the Crisis, the political and economic argument frequently dissolves into the moral argument. At the same time, we have pointed out that, over the last two decades, anthropology has been confronted with what seems to be a new terrain, "globalisation". In the approach to this phenomenon, we have identified two different ways of approaching the question: one that is more celebratory and one that is more critical, although both of them can be said to be problematic. In view of this situation, we defend the idea that it is necessary to think about the crisis ethnographically: looking at the *subjects where they in fact are and not where they are supposed to be*. The same attitude should be adopted in relation to the idea of the Crisis, *we must look at the subjects as they in fact are and not as they should be*. In this way, we can distinguish between crisis-process and crisis-event. It is the "critical people", those at the margins, that shed light on the centre (the migrant, the refugee, the asylee, those who stay behind, the gypsies, the poor, the workers/consumers, amongst others) that we need to see both where and how they are in relation to globalisation and the crisis. It is true that, by contextualising and locating people in frameworks of interpersonal relations, ethnography can hinder cosmopolitan demands. But, at the moment when the Crisis is declared, only ethnographies make it possible to shed light on the way in which it does or does not affect people in substantially new and different ways. The declaration of the Crisis obscures crises, their causes and their everyday personalised expressions. For the 'critical people', the crisis is normal life.

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